VALENTIN LOUIS GEORGES EUGENE **MARCEL PROUST**
IN THE SEARCH OF LOST TIME (THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE THINGS PAST)
Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff

BOOK I
THE WAY BY SWANN'S
PART I
Swann in Love

TO BELONG TO the "little set," the "little circle," the "little clan" attached to the Verdurins, one condition was sufficient but necessary: You had to abide tacitly by a Credo one of whose articles was that the young pianist patronized by Mme. Verdurin that year, of whom she would say: "It ought to be against the law to be able to play Wagner like that!," "was miles above" both Planté[1] and Rubinstein[2] and that Dr. Cottard was a better diagnostician than Potain.[3] Any "new recruit" who could not be persuaded by the Verdurins that the soirées given by people who did not come to the Verdurins' house were as tiresome as rain was immediately excluded. Because the women were more rebellious in this respect than the men when it came to setting aside their curiosity about society, their desire to find out for themselves how amusing the other salons might be, and because the Verdurins felt that this spirit of investigation and this demon of frivolity could in fact be fatally contagious to the orthodoxy of the little church, they had been led to expel one after another all the "faithful" of the female sex.

Apart from the doctor's young wife, they were reduced almost exclusively that year (even though Mme. Verdurin herself was virtuous and from a respectable bourgeois family, an extremely rich and entirely obscure one with which she had by degrees and of her own accord ceased to have any contact) to a person almost of the demimonde, Mme. de Crécy, whom Mme. Verdurin called by her first name, Odette, and declared to be "a love," and to the pianist's aunt, who must once have been employed as a caretaker; both of them being women ignorant of the world whom, in their naïveté, it had been so easy to delude into believing that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes were obliged to pay certain poor wretches in order to have any guest at their dinners, that if you had offered to get them invitations to the homes of these two great ladies, the former concierge and the cocotte would disdainfully have refused.

The Verdurins did not invite you to dinner: you had, at their house, a "place set for you." For the soirée there was no program. The young pianist would play, but only if "he fancied," because they did not force anyone and, as M. Verdurin said: "Anything for our friends. Here's to friendship!" If the pianist wanted to play the ride from *The Valkyrie* or the prelude from *Tristan*,[4] Mme. Verdurin would protest, not because she did not like that music, but on the contrary because it made too strong an impression on her. "Then you want me to have one of my migraines? You know perfectly well the same thing happens every time he plays that. I can count on it! Tomorrow when I try to get up—that's it, not possible!" If he did not play, people would chat and one of the friends, most often their favorite painter at the time, would "spin," as M. Verdurin said, "a damn funny tale that would make 'em all shriek with laughter," especially Mme. Verdurin, for such was her habit of taking literally the figurative expressions for the emotions she was feeling that Dr. Cottard (a young novice at the time) would one day have to set her jaw after she dislocated it from laughing too much.

Evening clothes were forbidden because one was "among friends" and also so as not to look like the "bores" whom they avoided like the plague and invited only to the larger soirées, given as rarely as possible and only if it might amuse the painter or help to promote the musician. The rest of the time, they were content to play charades, have supper in fancy dress, but only among themselves, not mixing any strangers in with the little "clan."

But as the "pals" had assumed more of a place in Mme. Verdurin's life, the "bores," the "pariahs" were anything that kept the friends away from her, anything that now and then kept them from being free, whether it was the mother of one, the profession of another, the country house or the bad health of a third. If Dr. Cottard thought he ought to leave just after he got up from the table in order to return to a patient who was dangerously ill, "Who knows," Mme. Verdurin would say to him, "he might be better off if you don't go disturbing him again this evening; without you, he'll have a good night; tomorrow morning early you'll go there and find him quite recovered." At the beginning of December, she would be sick at the thought that the faithful would "let them down" on Christmas Day and the first of January. The pianist's aunt insisted that he come to dinner with the family that day at her mother's home:

"You seem to think your mother might die," Mme. Verdurin exclaimed harshly, "if you don't have dinner with her on New Year's Day the way they do in the *provinces*!"

Her worries revived during Holy Week:

"Doctor, since you're such a scholar and freethinker, may I assume you will be coming on Good Friday just as you would on any other day?" she said confidently to Cottard the first year, as if she were sure what the answer would be. But she trembled as she waited for him to utter it, because if he did not come, she might find herself alone.

"I will come on Good Friday . . . to say good-bye to you, because we're going to be spending the Easter holiday in Auvergne."

"In Auvergne? You'll be eaten alive by fleas and vermin! Much good may it do you!"

And after a silence:

"If only you had told us, we would have tried to organize something; we could have made the trip together in comfort."

Likewise, if one of the "faithful" had a friend or if one of the ladies had a beau who might make them "desert" occasionally, the Verdurins, who were not afraid of a woman having a lover provided she had him at their house, loved him in their midst, and did not prefer his company to theirs, would say: "Well, bring your friend along!" And they would engage him on trial, to see if he was capable of having no secrets from Mme. Verdurin, if he was worthy of being enrolled in the "little clan." If he was not, the "regular" who had introduced him would be taken aside and helped to break with his friend or his mistress. In the opposite case, the "newcomer" would in his turn become one of the faithful. And so when, that year, the demimondaine told M. Verdurin she had made the acquaintance of a charming man, M. Swann, and insinuated that he would be very pleased to be received at their home, M. Verdurin transmitted the request to his wife then and there. (He never formed an opinion until she had formed hers, his particular role being to carry out her wishes, along with those of the faithful, with great and resourceful ingenuity.)

"My dear, Mme. de Crécy has something to ask you. She would like to introduce one of her friends to you, a M. Swann. What do you think?"

"Well, now, who could refuse anything to a little angel like that? Quiet, no one asked your opinion. I tell you you're an angel."

"Well, if you say so," answered Odette in a mincing tone, and she added: "You know I'm not *fishing for compliments.*"[5]

"All right! Bring your friend, if he's nice."

Of course the "little clan" had no connection to the society in which Swann moved, and true men of fashion would have felt there was little point in enjoying, as he did, an exceptional position only to end up with an introduction to the Verdurins. But Swann was so fond of women that once he had come to know more or less all the women in aristocratic circles and they had nothing more to teach him, he had ceased to regard those naturalization papers, almost a patent of nobility, which the Faubourg Saint-Germain had bestowed upon him, except as a sort of negotiable bond, a letter of credit with no value in itself but which allowed him to improvise a status for himself in some little provincial hole or obscure circle of Paris where the daughter of a squire or clerk had struck him as pretty. For at such times desire or love would revive in him a feeling of vanity from which he was now quite free in his everyday life (although it was doubtless this feeling that had originally pointed him toward the career as man of fashion in which he had wasted his intellectual gifts in frivolous pleasures and allowed his erudition in matters of art to be used to advise society ladies what pictures to buy and how to decorate their houses), and which made him want to shine, in the eyes of any unknown woman with whom he was infatuated, with an elegance which the name Swann in itself did not imply. He wanted this most especially if the unknown woman was

in humble circumstances. Just as it is not by another man of intelligence that an intelligent man will be afraid of being thought stupid, so it is not by a great lord but by a country bumpkin that a man of fashion will be afraid of seeing his elegance go unappreciated. Three-quarters of the expenditure of wit and the lies told out of vanity that have been squandered since the world began by people who in doing so merely diminish themselves have been squandered on inferiors. And though Swann was unaffected and casual with a duchess, he trembled at being scorned by a chamber-maid, and posed in front of her.

He was not like so many people who from laziness or a resigned sense of the obligation created by social grandeur to remain moored to a certain shore, abstain from the pleasures real life offers them outside the high-society position in which they live billeted and encamped until their death, contenting themselves in the end with describing as pleasures, for lack of any better, once they have managed to become used to them, the mediocre amusements or bearable tedium it contains. Swann did not try to convince himself that the women with whom he spent his time were pretty, but to spend his time with women he already knew were pretty. And these were often women of a rather vulgar beauty, for the physical qualities that he looked for without realizing it were the direct opposite of those he admired in the women sculpted or painted by his favorite masters. Depth of expression, melancholy, would freeze his senses, which were, however, immediately aroused by flesh that was healthy, plump, and pink.

If when travelling he met a family whom it would have been more stylish not to seek to cultivate, but in which one woman presented herself to his eyes adorned with a charm he had never experienced before, to "stand on his dignity" and cheat the desire she had awoken in him, to substitute a different pleasure for the pleasure he might have experienced with her, by writing to a former mistress to come and join him, would have seemed to him as cowardly an abdication before life, as stupid a renunciation of a new happiness as if instead of touring the countryside, he had shut himself up in his room and looked at pictures of Paris. He did not enclose himself in the edifice of his relationships, but had transformed that edifice, in order to be able to raise it again effortlessly on site wherever he found a woman who pleased him, into one of those collapsible tents of the kind explorers carry with them. As for what was not transportable or exchangeable for a new pleasure, he would have given it away for nothing, however enviable it might appear to others. How often had his credit with a duchess, built up from the desire she had been accumulating over the years to do something kind for him without having found the occasion, been spent all at once by his sending her an indiscreet message asking for a recommendation by telegraph that would put him in touch, immediately, with one of her stewards whose daughter he had noticed in the country, just as a starving man would barter a diamond for a piece of bread! He had even, after the fact, been amused by it, for there existed in him, compensated for by uncommon refinements, a certain boorishness. Then, too, he belonged to that category of intelligent men who have lived idle lives and who seek a consolation and perhaps an excuse in the idea that this idleness offers their intelligence objects just as worthy of interest as art or scholarship could offer, that "Life" contains situations more interesting, more novelistic than any novel. So he declared, at least, and easily convinced even the sharpest of his society friends, in particular the Baron de Charlus, whom he liked to entertain with tales of the racy adventures he had had, such as when he had met a woman on the railway train and afterward taken her back home with him, and then discovered that she was the sister of a monarch who at that time held in his hands all the mingled threads of European politics, thus finding he was kept abreast of them in a most agreeable way, or when, through a complex play of circumstances, the choice about to be made by the conclave[6] was going to determine whether or not he succeeded in sleeping with somebody's cook.

And it was not only the brilliant phalanx of virtuous dowagers, generals, and academicians with whom he was particularly close, whom Swann compelled with such cynicism to serve him as go-betweens. All his friends were used to receiving periodic letters from him in which a word of recommendation or introduction was asked of them with a diplomatic skill that, persisting as it did through his successive love affairs and different pretexts, revealed, more than moments of awkwardness would have done, a permanent trait in his character and an unvarying quest. I often asked to hear, many years later when I began to take an interest in his character because of the resemblances it offered to my own in completely different respects, how when he wrote to my grandfather (who was not my grandfather yet, for it was about the time of my birth that Swann's great love affair began, and it interrupted these habits for a long time), the latter, recognizing his friend's handwriting on the envelope, would exclaim: "It's Swann, about to ask for something: on guard!" And either from mistrust, or from the unconsciously diabolical spirit that incites us to offer a thing only to the people who do not want it, my grandparents would issue a blunt refusal to the most easily satisfied requests he addressed to them, as for instance to introduce him to a girl who dined at the house every Sunday, and whom they were obliged, each time Swann mentioned it to them again, to pretend they were no longer seeing, whereas all week long they would wonder who in the world they could invite with her, often finding no one in the end, because they would not ask the one who would have been so happy to come.

Sometimes a certain couple, friends of my grandparents who until then had complained of never seeing Swann, would announce to them with satisfaction and perhaps a little desire to arouse their envy that he had become as charming as could be, that he was never out of their house. My grandfather did not want to cloud their pleasure but would look at my grandmother and hum:

> What is then this mystery?
> I cannot understand.[7]

or:

> Fleeting vision . . .[8]

or:

> In these affairs
> 'Tis better to be blind.[9]

A few months later, if my grandfather asked Swann's new friend: "And Swann—do you still see as much of him as ever?" the face of the man he was talking to would grow long: "Never mention his name to me again!" "But I thought you were so close . . ." For several months he had, for instance, been intimate friends with cousins of my grandmother, dining almost every day at their house. Suddenly, and without letting them know, he stopped coming. They thought he was ill, and my grandmother's cousin was about to send word asking for news of him, when in the pantry she found a letter from him left inadvertently in the cook's account book. In it he told the woman he was leaving Paris, that he would not be able to continue seeing her. She was his mistress, and when he broke it off with her, she was the only one he thought he needed to tell.

But when his mistress of the moment was a woman of rank or at least one whose background was not too humble or her situation too irregular for him to arrange for her to be received in society, then for her he would return to it, but only to the particular orbit in which she moved or into which he had drawn her. "No use depending on Swann for this evening," they would say. "Don't you remember? It's his American's night at the Opera." He would see to it that she was invited to the particularly exclusive salons where he was a constant guest, where he had his weekly dinners, his poker; every evening, after a slight crimp was added to the brush cut of his red hair, tempering with some gentleness the vivacity of his green eyes, he would choose a flower for his buttonhole and go off to join his mistress at dinner at the home of one or another of the women of his circle; and then, thinking of the admiration and affection which the fashionable people for whom he was the be-all and end-all and whom he was going to see there would lavish on him in the presence of the woman he loved, he would once again find some charm in this worldly life to which he had become indifferent but whose substance, penetrated and warmly colored by a flame that had been insinuated into it and flickered there, seemed to him precious and beautiful as soon as he had incorporated into it a new love.

But, while each of these love affairs, or each of these flirtations, had been the more or less complete fulfillment of a dream inspired by the sight of a face or body that Swann had spontaneously, without making any effort to do so, found charming, on the contrary when he was introduced to Odette de Crécy one day at the theater by an old friend of his, who had spoken of her as an entrancing woman with whom he might perhaps have some success, but making her out to be more difficult than she really was in order to appear to have done him a bigger favor by introducing her to him, she had seemed to Swann not without beauty, certainly, but of a type of beauty that left him indifferent, that aroused no desire in him, even caused him a sort of physical repulsion, one of those women such as everyone has his own, different for each, who are the opposite of the kind our senses crave. Her profile was too pronounced for his taste, her skin too delicate, her cheekbones too prominent, her features too pinched. Her eyes were lovely, but so large they bent under their own mass, exhausted the rest of her face, and always

gave her a look of being in ill health or ill humor. Sometime after this introduction at the theater she had written to ask if she could see his collections, which interested her so, "she, an ignoramus with a taste for pretty things," saying that it seemed to her she would understand him better when she had seen him in "his home,"[10] where she imagined him to be "so comfortable with his tea and his books," though she had not hidden her surprise that he should live in that part of town, which must be so dreary and "which was so un-*smart* for a man who was so very smart himself." And after he had allowed her to come, as she left she had told him how sorry she was to have spent such a short time in a house that she had been so glad to enter, speaking of him as though he meant something more to her than the other people she knew, and seeming to establish between their two persons a sort of romantic bond that had made him smile. But at the age, already a little disillusioned, which Swann was approaching, at which one knows how to content oneself with being in love for the pleasure of it without requiring too much reciprocity, this closeness of two hearts, if it is no longer, as it was in one's earliest youth, the goal toward which love necessarily tends, still remains linked to it by an association of ideas so strong that it may become the cause of love, if it occurs first. At an earlier time one dreamed of possessing the heart of the woman with whom one was in love; later, to feel that one possesses a woman's heart may be enough to make one fall in love with her. And so, at an age when it would seem, since what one seeks most of all in love is subjective pleasure, that the enjoyment of a woman's beauty should play the largest part in it, love may come into being—love of the most physical kind—without there having been, underlying it, any previous desire. At this time of life, one has already been wounded many times by love; it no longer evolves solely in accordance with its own unknown and inevitable laws, before our astonished and passive heart. We come to its aid, we distort it with memory, with suggestion. Recognizing one of its symptoms, we recall and revive the others. Since we know its song, engraved in us in its entirety, we do not need a woman to repeat the beginning of it—filled with the admiration that beauty inspires—in order to find out what comes after. And if she begins in the middle—where the two hearts come together, where it sings of living only for each other—we are accustomed enough to this music to join our partner right away in the passage where she is waiting for us.

Odette de Crécy came to see Swann again, then visited him more and more often; and certainly each visit renewed the disappointment he felt at finding himself once again in the presence of that face whose details he had somewhat forgotten in the meantime and which he had not recalled as being either so expressive or, despite her youth, so faded; he felt sorry, as she talked to him, that her considerable beauty was not the type he would spontaneously have preferred. Odette's face seemed thinner and sharper, in fact, because her forehead and the upper part of her cheeks, those smoother and flatter surfaces, were covered by the masses of hair which women wore at that time drawn forward in fringes, lifted in "switches," spread in stray locks down along the ears; and as for her body, which was admirably formed, it was difficult to discern its continuity (because of the fashions of the period, and even though she was one of the best-dressed women in Paris), because her blouse, jutting out as though over an imaginary paunch and ending abruptly in a point, below which the balloon of the double skirts swelled out, made a woman look as though she were composed of different parts poorly fitted inside one another; because the flounces, the flutes, the vest followed so independently, according to the whimsy of their design or the consistency of their material, the line that led to the knots, the puffs of lace, the perpendicular fringes of jet, or that directed them along the corset, but were in no way attached to the living person, who, depending on whether the architecture of these frills and furbelows approached too closely or moved too far away from her own, was either encased or lost in them.

But when Odette had left, Swann would smile, thinking of how she had told him the time would drag until he allowed her to come again; he would recall the worried, shy air with which she had begged him once that it should not be too long, and the expression in her eyes at that moment, fastened on him in anxious entreaty, which made her look so touching under the bouquet of artificial pansies fastened to the front of her round white straw hat with its black velvet ribbons. "And you," she had said, "wouldn't you come to my house just once for tea?" He had pleaded unfinished work, a study—in reality abandoned years before—of Vermeer of Delft.[11] "I realize I can't do anything, pitiful little me, compared with all you great scholars," she had answered. "I would be like the frog in front of the Areopagus.[12] And yet I would so love to educate myself, to be informed, to know things. How amusing it must be to bury your nose in old papers!" she had added with the self-satisfaction a stylish woman adopts to assert that she is happiest abandoning herself with no fear of getting dirty to some messy job, like doing a little cooking "with her own hands in the dough." "You're going to make fun of me, but that painter who keeps you from seeing me—" (she meant Vermeer) "I've never heard of him; is he still alive? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so that I could imagine what it is you like, so that I could have some idea what's behind that great forehead that works so hard, inside that mind that I always sense is so busy with its thoughts, so that I could say to myself: There, this is what he's thinking about. What a joy it would be, to share in your work!" He apologized for his fear of new friendships, for what he had called, out of politeness, his fear of being unhappy. "You're afraid of affection? How odd; that's all I ever look for, I would give my life to find it," she had said in a voice so natural, so convinced, that he had been moved. "Some woman must have hurt you. And you think all other women are like her. She must not have understood you; you're such an unusual person. That's what I liked about you right away, I really felt you weren't like anyone else." "And you too," he had said to her, "I know very well what women are like, you must be busy with a great many things, you must not have much time." "Me! I never have anything to do! I'm always free, I will always be free for you. At any hour of the day or night that might be convenient for you to see me, send for me and I'll be only too happy to come immediately. Will you do it? Do you know what would be nice—if you could obtain an introduction to Mme. Verdurin; I go to her house every evening. Just imagine if we met there and I thought it was partly because of me that you were there!"

And as he recalled their conversations this way, as he thought of her this way when he was alone, he was no doubt merely turning over her image among those of many other women in his romantic daydreams; but if, due to some circumstance (or even perhaps not due to it, since a circumstance that presents itself at the moment when a state of mind, latent until then, comes out into the open may possibly not have influenced it in any way) the image of Odette de Crécy came to absorb all these daydreams, if these daydreams were no longer separable from the memory of her, then the imperfection of her body would no longer have any importance, nor would the fact that it might be, more or less than some other body, to Swann's taste, since, now that it had become the body of the woman he loved, it would be the only one capable of filling him with joy and torment.

As it happened, my grandfather had known—which was more than could be said of any of their current friends—the family of these Verdurins. But he had lost all contact with "young Verdurin," as he called him, whom he regarded, somewhat approximately, as having fallen—even while holding on to his many millions—among bohemians and riffraff. One day, he received a letter from Swann asking him if he could put him in touch with the Verdurins: "On guard! On guard!" my grandfather had exclaimed. "This doesn't surprise me at all; it's just where Swann was bound to end up. A nice group they are! In the first place, I can't do what he asks, because I don't know the gentleman in question anymore. And secondly, there must be a woman in it somewhere, and I never get mixed up in such affairs. Well, well! We shall have a rather amusing time of it if Swann falls in with the young Verdurins."

And after my grandfather returned a negative answer, it was Odette herself who had taken Swann to the Verdurins'.

The Verdurins had had to dinner, on the day Swann made his first appearance there, Dr. and Mme. Cottard, the young pianist and his aunt, and the painter who was in their favor at the time, and these were joined during the evening by several other faithful regulars.

Dr. Cottard was never quite certain of the tone in which he ought to answer someone, whether the person addressing him wanted to make a joke or was serious. And just in case, he would add to each of his facial expressions the offer of a conditional and tentative smile whose expectant shrewdness would exculpate him from the reproach of naïveté, if the remark that had been made to him was found to have been facetious. But since, so as to respond to the opposite hypothesis, he did not dare allow that smile to declare itself distinctly on his face, one saw an uncertainty perpetually floating upon it in which could be read the question he did not dare ask: "Are you saying this in earnest?" He was no more sure how he ought to behave in the street, and even in life generally, than in a drawing room, and he could be seen greeting passersby, carriages, and any minor event that occurred with the same ironic smile that removed all impropriety from his attitude in advance, since he was proving that if the attitude was not a fashionable one he was well aware of it and that if he had adopted it, it was as a joke.

On all points, however, where a direct question seemed to him permissible, the doctor did not fail to endeavor to reduce the field of his doubts and complete his education.

And so, acting on the advice given him by a foresightful mother when he left her province, he never let pass either an expression or a proper name that was unknown to him, without trying to acquire documentation about it.

In the case of expressions, he was insatiable for enlightenment, because, sometimes assuming they had a more precise meaning than they had, he wanted to know exactly what was meant by those he heard used most often: the bloom of youth, blue blood, a fast life, the hour of reckoning, to be a prince of refinement,

to give carte blanche, to be nonplussed, etc., and in which specific cases he in his turn could introduce them into his conversation. If there were none, he would substitute puns he had learned. As for new names of people mentioned in his presence, he contented himself merely with repeating them in a questioning tone that he thought sufficient to procure him explanations without his appearing to ask for them.

Since he completely lacked the critical faculty which he thought he exercised on everything, that refinement of politeness which consists in declaring to a person to whom you are doing a favor, without however expecting to be believed, that you are in fact indebted to him, was a waste of effort with the doctor, who took everything literally. Whatever Mme. Verdurin's blindness with respect to him, she had in the end, while continuing to find him very subtle, been annoyed to see that, when she invited him to share a box near the stage for a performance by Sarah Bernhardt, saying to him, to be especially gracious: "It was too kind of you to come, Doctor, especially since I'm sure you've already heard Sarah Bernhardt many times, and we may also be too close to the stage," Dr. Cottard, who had entered the box with a smile that was waiting to become more pronounced or to disappear as soon as some authoritative person informed him as to the quality of the entertainment, answered her: "It's true that we're much too close and one begins to tire of Sarah Bernhardt. But you expressed a desire that I should come. And your desire is my command. I am only too happy to do you this small service. Is there anything one would not do in order to please you, you're so good!" And he added: "Sarah Bernhardt—she is in fact the Golden Voice, isn't she? And they often write that she sets the stage on fire. That's an odd expression, isn't it?" in hope of commentaries which were not forthcoming.

"You know," Mme. Verdurin had said to her husband, "I believe we're steering the wrong course when we belittle our gifts to the doctor out of modesty. He's a man of science, out of touch with the practical side of life, he has no idea of the value of things and relies on what we tell him." "I hadn't dared say anything to you, but I had noticed," answered M. Verdurin. And the following New Year's Day, instead of sending Dr. Cottard a three-thousand-franc ruby, remarking that it was only a trifle, M. Verdurin paid three hundred francs for an artificial stone, implying that it would be hard to find one as beautiful.

When Mme. Verdurin had announced that they would be having M. Swann at the soirée, "Swann?" the doctor had exclaimed in a tone of voice made rough by surprise, for the slightest piece of news always caught him more off guard than anyone else, though this was a man who believed he was perpetually prepared for anything. And seeing that no one answered him, "Swann? Who's this Swann?" he roared, filled with an anxiety that suddenly abated when Mme. Verdurin said: "Why, the friend Odette told us about." "Ah, good, good! That's all right then," answered the doctor, pacified. As for the painter, he was delighted by the introduction of Swann to Mme. Verdurin's, because he assumed Swann was in love with Odette and he liked to encourage love affairs. "There's nothing I enjoy more than arranging a marriage," he confided in Dr. Cottard's ear. "I've already managed a good many, even between women!"

By telling the Verdurins that Swann was very "*smart*," Odette had awoken in them the fear that he would be a "bore." However, he made an excellent impression, of which, without their knowing it, his association with fashionable society was one of the indirect causes. He had, in fact, over men who have never mixed in high society, even intelligent men, one of the superior qualities of those who have had some experience of it, which is that they no longer transfigure it out of the desire or the horror it inspires in their imagination, considering it unimportant. Their friendliness, disassociated from all snobbishness and from a fear of seeming too friendly, thus quite independent, has that ease, that grace characteristic of the motions of people whose supple limbs perform exactly what they want, without any indiscreet or awkward participation of the rest of the body. The simple elementary gymnastics of a man of the world extending his hand with good grace to the unknown young man who is being introduced to him, and bowing with reserve to the ambassador to whom he is being introduced, had in the end passed, without his being aware of it, into Swann's whole social attitude, so that toward people of a social circle inferior to his, like the Verdurins and their friends, he instinctively displayed a marked attention, permitted himself to make advances, from which, according to them, a bore would have refrained. He had a moment of coldness only with Cottard: seeing the doctor wink at him and smile ambiguously before they had spoken to each other (a dumb show that Cottard called "wait-and-see"), Swann thought the doctor probably recognized him from a previous encounter in some house of pleasure, even though he himself went to such places very seldom, having never inhabited the world of dissipation. Finding the allusion in bad taste, especially in the presence of Odette, who might receive a poor impression of him from it, he assumed an icy manner. But when he learned that the lady standing near him was Mme. Cottard, he thought that such a young husband would not have tried to allude to amusements of that sort in front of his wife; and he ceased to give the doctor's knowing look the meaning he had feared. The painter immediately invited Swann to come to his studio with Odette; Swann thought he was nice. "Perhaps he'll favor you more than he has me," said Mme. Verdurin in a tone of mock resentment, "perhaps he'll show you Cottard's portrait" (she had commissioned it from the painter). "Make sure, 'Monsieur' Biche," she reminded the painter, whom it was a sacred joke to address as Monsieur, "to capture that nice look in his eye, that subtle, amusing little way he has of glancing at you. As you know, what I want most of all is his smile; what I asked you for was a portrait of his smile." And since the phrase seemed to her noteworthy, she repeated it very loudly to make sure a number of guests heard it, and even, using some vague pretext, summoned a few of them over to her first. Swann asked to be introduced to everyone, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, Saniette, whose shyness, simplicity, and good nature had lost him all the esteem he had won by his skill as an archivist, his substantial fortune, and the distinguished family he came from. When he talked, there was a sort of mushy sound to his pronunciation that was charming because one sensed that it betrayed not so much an impediment in his speech as a quality of his soul, a sort of vestige of early childhood innocence that he had never lost. Each consonant he could not pronounce appeared to be another instance of a hardness of which he was incapable. In asking to be introduced to M. Saniette, Swann appeared to Mme. Verdurin to be reversing roles (to the degree that in response, she said, insisting on the difference: "Monsieur Swann, would you have the goodness to allow me to introduce to you our friend Saniette"), but aroused in Saniette a warm feeling of congeniality which the Verdurins, however, never revealed to Swann, for Saniette irritated them a little, and they were not anxious to make friends for him. But, on the other hand, Swann touched them infinitely by believing he ought to ask immediately to be introduced to the pianist's aunt. She was in a black dress, as always, because she thought one always looked nice in black and that it was most distinguished, and her face was extremely red, as it always was after she had just eaten. She bowed to Swann with respect, but straightened with majesty. Because she had no education and was afraid of making mistakes in grammar, she deliberately pronounced things in a garbled way, thinking that if she made a blunder it would be fogged over by such indefiniteness that no one would be able to make it out with any certainty, so that her conversation was reduced to an indistinct hawking, from which emerged now and then the few vocables of which she felt confident. Swann thought he could poke a little fun at her when he was talking to M. Verdurin, but the latter was offended.

"She's such an excellent woman," he answered. "I grant you she's not brilliant; but I assure you she can be most agreeable when you talk to her on your own." "I don't doubt it," Swann hastened to concede. "I meant to say she did not seem to me 'eminent,' " he added, isolating the adjective, "and really that's rather a compliment!" "Well, now," said M. Verdurin, "this will surprise you: she writes charmingly. You've never heard her nephew? He's wonderful, isn't he, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something, Monsieur Swann?" "Why, it would be a joy . . ." Swann was beginning to answer, when the doctor interrupted him with a mocking look. In fact, having acquired the notion that in conversation, to be emphatic, to employ formal expressions was old-fashioned, as soon as he heard a solemn word used seriously, as the word *joy* had just been used, he thought the person who haduttered it had just been guilty of pomposity. And if, in addition, the word happened to occur in what he called an old cliché, however current it might be in other respects, the doctor would assume that the sentence that had been begun was ridiculous and would finish it ironically using the platitude he seemed to be accusing the speaker of having wanted to deploy, although the latter had never thought of it.

"A joy forever!" he cried mischievously, raising his arms for emphasis.

M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

"What are those good people laughing about! You don't seem to be having such a bad time over there in your corner," cried Mme. Verdurin. "I hope you don't think I'm enjoying myself here in disgrace all alone," she added in a tone of childish chagrin.

Mme. Verdurin was sitting on a high Swedish chair of waxed pine, which she had been given by a violinist from that country and which she had kept, though it looked rather like a stool and was at odds with the beautiful old furniture that she had, but she insisted on keeping in evidence the gifts which the faithful regulars were in the habit of giving her from time to time, so that the givers would have the pleasure of spotting them when they came. And so she tried to persuade them to give her nothing but flowers and sweets, which are at least perishable; but she was not successful, and her home contained a collection of foot warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers, and urns, in an accumulation of useless, repetitive, and incongruous offerings.

From this elevated spot she took energetic part in the conversation of the faithful and revelled in their practical jokes, but after the accident involving her jaw, she no longer took pains to explode in true laughter and performed instead a conventionalized pantomime that signified, without fatigue or risk for her, that she

was laughing to the point of tears. At the mildest remark fired off by a regular against a bore or against a former regular who had been flung back into the camp of the bores—and to the greatest despair of M. Verdurin, who for a long time had had pretensions of being as affable as his wife, but who, when laughing in earnest, would soon get out of breath and so had been outdistanced and defeated by this ruse of incessant and fictive hilarity—she would utter a little cry, entirely close her birdlike eyes, which were slightly dimmed by leucoma, and abruptly, as if she had only just had time to avoid some indecent spectacle or avert a fatal blow, plunging her face in her hands, which covered it and allowed nothing of it to be seen, would appear to be doing her best to suppress, to annihilate a fit of laughter which, had she given way to it, would have caused her to faint. So, dazed by the gaiety of the faithful, drunk with good-fellowship, scandal-mongering, and approbation, Mme. Verdurin, poised on her perch, like a bird whose seedcake has been soaked in warm wine, sobbed with affability.

Meanwhile, M. Verdurin, after asking Swann's permission to light his pipe ("we don't stand on ceremony here, we're among friends"), begged the young musician to sit down at the piano.

"Now don't bother him, he didn't come here to be tormented," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin, "I won't have him tormented!"

"But why on earth should it bother him?" said M. Verdurin. "Perhaps M. Swann doesn't know the Sonata in F-sharp which we've discovered. He'll play the piano arrangement for us."

"Oh, no, no, not my sonata!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "I don't want to be made to weep till I get a cold in my head and neuralgia in my face, like the last time. Thanks for your offer, but I don't intend to repeat that performance. You're so kind, all of you; it's easy to see you're not the ones who'll be spending the next week in bed!"

This little scene, which was reenacted each time the pianist prepared to play, enchanted her friends as much as if it had been brand-new, because it was proof of the *"Patronne's"* [13] charming originality and sensitivity to music. Those who were near her signaled to those farther away who were smoking or playing cards to come closer, that something was happening, saying to them, as they do in the Reichstag[14] at interesting moments: "Listen, listen." And the next day they would tell those who had not been able to be there how sorry they were, reporting that the scene had been even more entertaining than usual.

"Well, all right then," said M. Verdurin. "He'll just play the andante."

"Just the andante! What are you saying!" exclaimed Mme. Verdurin. "It's precisely the andante that completely paralyzes me. Listen to the *Patron*! He's really marvelous! It's as if he said: In the Ninth we'll just hear the finale, or in *The Meistersingers*[15] we'll just hear the overture."

The doctor, however, urged Mme. Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he thought the troubling effects the music had on her were feigned—he recognized certain neurasthenic symptoms in them—but from a habit which many doctors have, of immediately relaxing the severity of their prescriptions when something is involved that seems much more important to them, like some social gathering at which they are present and in which the person they are advising for once to forget his dyspepsia or his grippe is an essential factor.

"You won't become ill this time, you'll see," he told her, trying to hypnotize her with his eyes. "And if you do, we'll look after you."

"Really and truly?" answered Mme. Verdurin, as if the hope of such a favor left her no alternative but to capitulate. Perhaps also, because she said she would be ill, there were times when she did not recall that it was a lie and took on the character of an ill person. For invalids, tired of always having to make the rarity of their attacks dependent on their prudence, like to indulge in the belief that they can with impunity do all of the things that give them pleasure and usually hurt them, as long as they put themselves in the hands of a powerful person who, without their having to take any pains, with a word or a pill will put them back on their feet.

Odette had gone to sit on a tapestry-covered couch near the piano:

"You know I have my own little spot," she said to Mme. Verdurin.

The latter, seeing Swann on a chair, made him get up:

"You're not very comfortable there: now go and sit next to Odette. You'll make room for M. Swann there, won't you, Odette?"

"What a pretty Beauvais," said Swann before he sat down, trying to be pleasant.

"Oh, I'm glad you appreciate my couch," answered Mme. Verdurin. "And let me tell you, if you think you're ever going to see another one as beautiful, you may abandon the idea at once. They never did anything else like it. The little chairs are marvels too. You can look at them in a moment. Each bronze is an emblem that corresponds to the little subject on the chair; you know, you'll have a great deal to entertain you if you want to look at them. I can promise you a good time. Even the little friezes around the edges—look at that, look at the little vine against the red background in the Bear and the Grapes. Isn't it well drawn? What do you say? I think they really knew how to draw! Doesn't that vine make your mouth water? My husband claims I don't like the fruit you get from it, because I don't eat as many as he does. The fact is, actually, I'm more of a glutton than any of you, but I don't need to put them in my mouth because I enjoy them with my eyes. What are you all laughing about, now? Ask the doctor, he'll tell you—for me those grapes are a regular purgative. Other people take the cure at Fontainebleau, I take my little Beauvais cure. But, Monsieur Swann, you won't go away without feeling the little bronzes on the backs! Isn't the patina soft? No, no—with your whole hand: feel them properly."

"Ah, if Madame Verdurin begins fondling the bronzes, we won't hear any music tonight," said the painter.

"You be quiet. You're a rascal. In fact," she said, turning to Swann, "we women are forbidden to do things far less voluptuous than this. But no flesh can compare to it! When M. Verdurin did me the honor of being jealous of me—come now, be polite at least, don't say you never were . . ."

"But I said absolutely nothing. Doctor, be my witness: did I say anything?"

Swann was feeling the bronzes to be polite and did not dare stop right away.

"Come, you can caress them later; now you're the one who's going to be caressed. Your ears are going to be caressed; you'll like that, I think; here's the dear young man who'll be doing it."

Now after the pianist had played, Swann was even friendlier to him than to the others who were present. This is why:

The year before, at a soiree, he had heard a piece of music performed on the piano and violin. At first, he had experienced only the physical quality of the sounds secreted by the instruments. And it had been a keen pleasure when, below the little line of the violin, slender, unyielding, compact, and commanding, he had seen the mass of the piano part all at once struggling to rise in a liquid swell, multiform, undivided, smooth, and colliding like the purple tumult of the waves when the moonlight charms them and lowers their pitch by half a tone. But at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish an outline clearly, or give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly charmed, he had tried to gather up and hold on to the phrase or harmony—he himself did not know which—that was passing by him and that had opened his soul so much wider, the way the smells of certain roses circulating in the damp evening air have the property of dilating our nostrils. Maybe it was because of his ignorance of music that he had been capable of receiving so confused an impression, the kind of impression that is, however, perhaps the only one which is purely musical, immaterial, entirely original, irreducible to any other order of impression. An impression of this kind is, for an instant, so to speak, *sine materia*. No doubt the notes we hear then tend already, depending on their loudness and their quantity, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us sensations of breadth, tenuousness, stability, whimsy. But the notes vanish before these sensations are sufficiently formed in us not to be submerged by those already excited by the succeeding or even simultaneous notes. And this impression would continue to envelop with its liquidity and its "mellowness" the motifs that at times emerge from it, barely discernible, immediately to dive under and disappear, known only by the particular pleasure they give, impossible to describe, to recall, to name, ineffable—if memory, like a laborer working to put down lasting foundations in the midst of the waves, by fabricating for us facsimiles of these fleeting phrases, did not allow us to compare them to those that follow them and to differentiate them. And so, scarcely had the delicious sensation which Swann had felt died away than his memory at once furnished him with a transcription that was summary and temporary but at which he could glance while the piece continued, so that already, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer impossible to grasp. He could picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical groupings, its notation, its expressive value; he had before him this thing which is no longer pure music, which is drawing, architecture, thought, and which allows us to recall the music. This time he had clearly distinguished one phrase rising for a few moments above the waves of sound. It had immediately proposed to him particular sensual pleasures which he had never imagined before hearing it, which he felt could be introduced to him by nothing else, and he had experienced for it something like an unfamiliar love.

With a slow rhythm it led him first here, then there, then elsewhere, toward a happiness that was noble, unintelligible, and precise. And then suddenly, having reached a point from which he was preparing to follow it, after an instant's pause, abruptly it changed direction, and with a new movement, quicker, slighter, more melancholy, incessant, and sweet, it carried him off with it toward unfamiliar vistas. Then it disappeared. He wished passionately to see it a third time. And it did indeed reappear but without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a sensual pleasure that was less profound. But once he was back at home he needed it, he was like a man into whose life a woman he has glimpsed for only a moment as she passed by has introduced the image of a new sort of a beauty that increases the value of his own sensibility, without his even knowing if he will ever see this woman again whom he loves already and of whom he knows nothing, not even her name.

It even seemed, for a moment, that this love for a phrase of music would have to open in Swann the possibility of a sort of rejuvenation. He had for so long given up directing his life toward an ideal goal and limited it to the pursuit of everyday satisfactions that he believed, without ever saying so formally to himself, that this would not change as long as he lived; much worse, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideas, he had ceased to believe in their reality, though without being able to deny it altogether. Thus he had acquired the habit of taking refuge in unimportant thoughts that allowed him to ignore the fundamental essence of things. Just as he did not ask himself if it would have been better for him not to go into society, but on the other hand knew quite certainly that if he had accepted an invitation he ought to go and that if he did not pay a call afterward he must at least leave cards, so in his conversation he endeavored never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about things, but to furnish material details that had some sort of value in themselves and allowed him not to show his real capacities. He was extremely precise when it came to the recipe for a dish, the date of a painter's birth or death, the nomenclature of his works. Now and then, despite everything, he went so far as to utter a judgment on a work, on someone's interpretation of life, but he would then give his remarks an ironic tone, as if he did not entirely subscribe to what he was saying. Now, like certain confirmed invalids in whom, suddenly, a country they have arrived in, a different diet, sometimes a spontaneous and mysterious organic development seem to bring on such a regression of their ailment that they begin to envisage the unhoped-for possibility of belatedly starting a completely different life, Swann found within himself, in the recollection of the phrase he had heard, in certain sonatas he asked people to play for him, to see if he would not discover it in them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe and to which, as if the music had had a sort of sympathetic influence on the moral dryness from which he suffered, he felt in himself once again the desire and almost the strength to devote his life. But, since he had not succeeded in finding out who had composed the work he had heard, he had not been able to acquire it for himself and had ended by forgetting it. True, during the week he had encountered several people who had been with him at that party and he had asked them about it; but many had arrived after the music or left before; some were indeed there while it was performed but had gone into the other drawing room to talk, and others, who had stayed to listen, had heard no more of it than had the first group. As for the master and mistress of the house, they knew it was a recent work which the musicians whom they had hired had asked to play; since the latter had gone off on a tour, Swann could not find out anything more. He had many friends who were musicians, but though he recalled the special and inexpressible pleasure the phrase had given him, and saw before his eyes the shapes it outlined, he was not able to sing it for them. Then he stopped thinking about it.

Now, scarcely a few minutes after the young pianist had begun playing at Mme. Verdurin's, suddenly, after a high note held for a long time through two measures, he saw it approaching, escaping from under that prolonged sonority stretched like a curtain of sound hiding the mystery of its incubation, he recognized it, secret, murmuring, and, divided, the airy and redolent phrase that he loved. And it was so particular, it had a charm so individual, which no other charm could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had encountered in a friend's drawing room a person whom he had admired in the street and despaired of ever finding again. In the end, diligent, purposeful, it receded through the ramifications of its perfume, leaving on Swann's face the reflection of its smile. But now he could ask the name of his stranger (they told him it was the andante from the Sonata for Piano and Violin by Vinteuil), he possessed it, he could have it in his house as often as he liked, try to learn its language and its secret.

And so when the pianist had finished, Swann went up to him to express a gratitude whose warmth was very pleasing to Mme. Verdurin.

"He's a charmer, isn't he?" she said to Swann. "You might say he knows a thing or two about that sonata, the little devil. You didn't know the piano could achieve such things. It's everything—except a piano! My word! I'm startled by it every time; I think I'm hearing an orchestra. Though it's even more beautiful than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bowed, and with a smile, stressing the words as if he were making a witty remark:

"You're very generous to me," he said.

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband: "Come, give him some orangeade, he certainly deserves it," Swann was describing to Odette how he had been in love with that little phrase. When Mme. Verdurin, nearby, said: "Well now, it seems to me someone is saying sweet things to you, Odette," she answered: "Yes, very sweet," and Swann found her simplicity delightful. Meanwhile, he was asking for information about Vinteuil, about his work, about the period of his life in which he had composed this sonata, about what the little phrase could have meant to him, this was what he would have liked most of all to know.

But all these people who professed to admire that musician (when Swann had said that his sonata was truly beautiful, Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed: "I should say it's beautiful! But one simply doesn't admit that one does not know Vinteuil's sonata, one is not allowed not to know it," and the painter had added: "Ah, yes! It's a work of genius, isn't it? It may not be what you would call 'obvious' or 'popular,' is it? But it makes a very great impression on us artists"), these people seemed never to have asked themselves these questions, for they were incapable of answering them.

Even in answer to one or two particular remarks that Swann made about his favorite phrase, Mme. Verdurin said:

"Well now, that's funny, I never paid any attention. I'll tell you, I don't very much enjoy nitpicking or discussing fine points; we don't waste our time splitting hairs here, it's not that kind of a house," while Dr. Cottard watched her with blissful admiration and scholarly zeal as she frolicked in this billow of stock expressions. He and Mme. Cottard, however, with a kind of good sense which is also possessed by certain people from humble backgrounds, carefully refrained from offering an opinion or feigning admiration for a sort of music which they confessed to each other, once they were back home, they did not understand any more than the painting of "Monsieur Biche." Since, of the charm, the grace, the forms of nature, the public knows only what it has absorbed from the clichés of an art slowly assimilated, and since an original artist begins by rejecting these clichés, M. and Mme. Cottard, being in this sense typical of the public, found neither in Vinteuil's sonata, nor in the painter's portraits, what for them created the harmony of music and the beauty of painting. It seemed to them when the pianist played the sonata that he was randomly attaching to the piano notes that were not in fact connected to the forms they were used to, and that the painter was randomly hurling colors onto his canvases. When they were able to recognize a form in these canvases, they found it heavy and vulgarized (that is, lacking the elegance of the school of painting through which they viewed all living creatures, even in the street), and lacking truth, as if Monsieur Biche did not know how a shoulder was constructed or that women do not have lavender hair.

However, when the regulars had dispersed, the doctor felt this was a favorable opportunity, and while Mme. Verdurin was saying a last word about Vinteuil's sonata, like a beginning swimmer who throws himself into the water in order to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people to see him, he exclaimed with sudden determination:

"Now, this is what one calls a musician *di primo cartello*!"[16]

Swann learned only that the recent appearance of Vinteuil's sonata had caused quite a stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but was entirely unknown to the larger public.

"I know someone quite well named Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the piano teacher who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps it's him," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann answered, laughing. "If you had ever spent just a minute or two with him, you wouldn't ask."

"Then, to ask the question is to answer it?" said the doctor.

"But he could be a relative," Swann went on. "That would be rather sad, but the fact is, a man of genius can be cousin to an old fool. If this is so, I confess I would submit to any kind of torture to get the old fool to introduce me to the composer of that sonata: starting with the torture of associating with the old fool, which would be frightful."

The painter knew that Vinteuil was very ill at the moment and that Dr. Potain was afraid he would not be able to save him.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "Are there people who still go to Potain?"

"Ah, Madame Verdurin!" said Cottard, in a tone of witty repartee. "You forget that you're talking about one of my colleagues, I should say one of my teachers."

The painter had heard that Vinteuil was threatened with mental illness. And he declared that one could perceive it in certain passages of his sonata. Swann did not find this comment absurd, but it bothered him; for since a pure work of music contains none of the logical relationships whose alteration in language reveals madness, madness recognized in a sonata seemed to him something as mysterious as the madness of a bitch, the madness of a horse, though these can indeed be observed.

"Don't upset me with talk about your 'teachers.' You know ten times as much as he does," Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a person who has the courage of her convictions and stoutly holds her own against those who are not of the same opinion. "At least you don't kill your patients!"

"But Madame, he belongs to the Academy,"[17] replied the doctor ironically. "If a patient would rather die by the hand of one of the princes of science . . . It's much more stylish to be able to say: 'I'm being treated by Potain.'"

"Ah! It's more stylish?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there's such a thing as style in illness now? I wasn't aware of that . . . How funny you are!" she exclaimed suddenly, dropping her face in her hands. "And I was such a silly fool, talking about it seriously without seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to force a laugh over such a trifle, he contented himself with drawing on his pipe, musing sadly that he would never be able to rival his wife in a contest of amiability.

"You know, we like your friend very much," said Mme. Verdurin to Odette when the latter was wishing her a good night. "He's so unaffected, he's so charming; if all the friends you think of introducing to us are like him, you may certainly bring them."

M. Verdurin pointed out that Swann had not, however, appreciated the pianist's aunt.

"The man felt a little out of his element," answered Mme. Verdurin. "Now you wouldn't expect him to have caught the tone of the house already, the very first time, like Cottard, who has been one of our little clan for years. The first time doesn't count; it was useful for breaking the ice. Odette, it's agreed that he'll meet us tomorrow at the Châtelet. Will you pick him up?"

"No, he doesn't want me to."

"Ah! Whatever you like, then. As long as he doesn't go and abandon us at the last minute!"

To Mme. Verdurin's great surprise, he never abandoned them. He went to meet them wherever they were, sometimes in restaurants in the outlying districts where no one went much yet, because it was not the season, more often to the theater, which Mme. Verdurin liked very much; and because one day, at her house, she said in his presence that on evenings when there were premieres, or galas, a pass would have been very useful to them, that it had inconvenienced them very much not to have one the day of Gambetta's funeral,[18] Swann, who never talked about his distinguished connections, but only about those which were not very highly esteemed, which he thought it indelicate to conceal, and among which he had, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, fallen into the habit of including his relations with the official world, answered:

"I promise to take care of it, you'll have it in time for the revival of *Les Danicheff*.[19] As it happens, I'm having lunch with the prefect of police tomorrow at the Élysée Palace."

"What? At the Élysée Palace?" shouted Dr. Cottard in a thunderous voice.

"Yes, at M. Grévy's,"[20] answered Swann, a little embarrassed by the effect his remark had produced.

And the painter said to the doctor as a joke:

"Do you have these attacks very often?"

Generally, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: "Oh, I see, that's all right then," and not show a trace more of emotion. But this time, Swann's last words, instead of procuring him the usual peace of mind, raised to a fever pitch his astonishment that a man with whom he had dined, who had no official position, no celebrity of any sort, would hobnob with the Head of State.

"What do you mean, M. Grévy? You know M. Grévy?" he said to Swann with the stupid and incredulous look of a policeman on guard at the palace who is asked by a stranger to see the President of the Republic, and who, realizing from these words "what sort of person he is dealing with," as the newspapers say, assures the poor lunatic that he will be received immediately and leads him to the special infirmary of the central police station.

"I know him slightly, we have friends in common." (He did not dare say that one of them was the Prince of Wales.) "Actually, he entertains a good deal, and I assure you these lunches aren't in the least amusing, they're also very simple, there are never more than eight at table," answered Swann, trying to expunge what had seemed to be too dazzling, in the doctor's eyes, about his relations with the President of the Republic.

Immediately Cottard, trusting in the truth of what Swann had said, adopted the opinion, concerning the value of an invitation to M. Grévy's, that it was not a very desirable thing and could be picked up anywhere. From then on, he was no longer surprised that Swann, or anyone else, should visit the Élysée Palace, and he was even a little sorry for him because he had to go to lunches which Swann himself admitted were boring.

"Oh, I see, that's quite all right then," he said in the tone of a customs inspector who, though suspicious a moment before, after hearing your explanations stamps your passport and lets you go through without opening your bags.

"Oh, I believe you, I'm sure those lunches must not be very amusing, and it's good of you to go to them," said Mme. Verdurin, who saw the President of the Republic as a bore to be especially dreaded because he had at his disposal various means of seduction and compulsion which, if employed upon the faithful, would be quite capable of making them desert her. "Apparently he's as deaf as a doorpost and eats with his fingers."

"In that case, certainly it must not be much fun to go there," said the doctor with a touch of commiseration; and, recalling that eight was the number of guests at table: "Are these intimate lunches?" he asked sharply with a linguist's zeal more than a snoop's curiosity.

But the prestige of the President of the Republic in the eyes of the doctor ended by prevailing over both Swann's modesty and Mme. Verdurin's animosity, and at each dinner Cottard would ask with interest: "Will we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He's on personal terms with M. Grévy. Is he in fact what one would call a *gentleman*?"[21] He even went so far as to present him with an invitation card for the dentistry exhibition.

"This will admit you, along with anyone you might like to bring with you, but they won't let dogs in. You understand, I tell you this because some friends of mine didn't know and kicked themselves for it afterward."

As for M. Verdurin, he noticed the bad effect produced on his wife by the discovery that Swann had influential friends whom he had never mentioned.

If they had not arranged a party somewhere, it was at the Verdurins' that Swann would join the little clan, but he came only in the evening, and almost never agreed to have dinner there despite Odette's earnest requests.

"I could even have dinner alone with you, if you would like that better," she would tell him.

"And what about Mme. Verdurin?"

"Oh, that would be easy enough. I would simply tell her my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it."

"You're very sweet."

But Swann said to himself that if he showed Odette (by agreeing only to meet her after dinner) that there were other pleasures he preferred to the pleasure of being with her, a long time would pass before her appetite for him was surfeited. And, too, since he infinitely preferred to Odette's kind of beauty the beauty of a little working girl as fresh and plump as a rose with whom he was smitten, he chose to spend the beginning of the evening with her, being sure of seeing Odette afterward. It was for the same reasons that he never agreed to have Odette pick him up on her way to the Verdurins'. The little working girl would wait for him near his house at a corner known to his coachman Rémi, she would get in beside Swann and stay there in his arms until the moment the carriage drew up in front of the Verdurins'. When he came in, as Mme. Verdurin, pointing to some roses he had sent that morning, said to him: "You deserve a scolding" and showed him a spot next to Odette, the pianist would play for the two of them the little phrase by Vinteuil that was like the anthem of their love. He would begin with the

sustained violin tremolos that are heard alone for a few measures, occupying the entire foreground, then all of a sudden they seemed to move away and, as in those paintings by Pieter de Hooch,[22] which assume greater depth because of the narrow frame of a half-open door, away in the distance, in a different color, in the velvet of an interposed light, the little phrase would appear, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It rippled past, simple and immortal, distributing here and there the gifts of its grace, with the same ineffable smile; but Swann thought he could now distinguish within it some disenchantment. It seemed to realize how futile this happiness was to which it showed the way. In its light grace, there was something finished about it, like the detachment that follows regret. But this hardly mattered to him; he considered the phrase less in itself—in what it could express to a musician who was unaware of his existence or of Odette's when he composed it, and to all those who would hear it in the centuries to come—than as a token, a memory of his love which, even for the Verdurins, even for the young pianist, would remind them of Odette and him at the same time, would join them together; so much so that when Odette, capriciously, had begged him to, he had given up the idea of having some pianist play him the entire sonata, of which he knew as yet only this passage. "Why would you need the rest?" she said to him. "This is *our* piece." And in fact, pained by the thought that, at the moment when it passed so close and yet infinitely far away, though it was addressed to them it did not know them, he was almost sorry it had any meaning, any intrinsic and unalterable beauty, alien to them, just as in the jewels given to us, or even the letters written to us by a woman we love, we resent the water of the gem and the words of the language, because they are not created exclusively from the essence of a passing love affair and a particular person.

It often happened that he had lingered so late with the young working girl before going to the Verdurins' that after the little phrase had been played by the pianist, Swann would notice that it would soon be time for Odette to go home. He would drive her back as far as the door of her little house in the rue La Pérouse behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps because of this, in order not to demand all her favors, that he sacrificed the less necessary pleasure of seeing her earlier, of arriving at the Verdurins' with her, to the exercise of this right to leave together which she recognized as his and to which he attached a greater value, since, because of it, he had the impression that no one else saw her, no one else came between them, stopped her from being with him still, after he left her.

And so she would go back in Swann's carriage; one night, when she had just stepped down from it and he was saying he would see her tomorrow, she rushed to pick a last chrysanthemum from the little garden in front of the house and gave it to him before he went off. He held it pressed against his lips on the way home, and when after a few days the flower withered, he locked it with great care in his secretary desk.

But he never went into her house. Only twice, he had gone there in the afternoon to participate in that operation which was of such capital importance for her: "having tea." The isolation and emptiness of the short streets (almost all of them lined with small contiguous private houses, whose monotony would suddenly be interrupted by some sinister street stall, the historic sign and sordid vestige of a time when these districts were still in bad repute), the snow lingering in the garden and on the trees, the slovenliness of the season, the proximity of nature, lent something more mysterious to the warmth, the flowers that he had found when he went in.

Leaving to the left, on the raised ground floor, Odette's bedroom, which looked out on a little parallel street in the back, a straight staircase between walls painted a dark color and hung with Oriental cloths, strings of Turkish beads, and a large Japanese lantern suspended from a slender silk cord (but which, so as not to deprive visitors of the latest comforts of Western civilization, was lit with gas) led up to the drawing room and the morning room. These were preceded by a narrow vestibule whose wall, checkered by a garden trellis, but a gilded one, was lined down its entire length by a rectangular box in which bloomed, as in a greenhouse, a row of those fat chrysanthemums which were still rare at that time, yet nothing like the ones that horticulturalists later succeeded in obtaining. Swann was irritated by the fashion that had favored them since the previous year, but he had taken pleasure, this time, in seeing the half-light of the room striped with pink, orange, and white by the fragrant rays of those ephemeral stars which light up on gray days. Odette had received him in a morning gown of pink silk, her neck and arms bare. She had had him sit next to her in one of the many mysterious alcoves that were contrived in the bays of the drawing room, protected by immense palm trees contained in china cachepots, or by screens festooned with photographs, bows of ribbon, and fans. She had said to him: "You aren't comfortable like that, wait, I'll fix you up," and with the conceited little laugh she would have given at some invention of her own, had settled behind Swann's head, and under his feet, cushions of Japanese silk which she kneaded as if she were lavish with these riches and careless of their value. But when the valet came bringing one after another the many lamps which, nearly all enclosed in large Chinese vases, burned singly or in pairs, all on different pieces of furniture as though on altars, and which had summoned back to the already almost nocturnal twilight of that late afternoon in winter a more lasting sunset, rosier and more human—perhaps making some lover stop and daydream in the street before the mystery of the presence that was at once disclosed and concealed by the glowing panes—she had watched the servant severely from the corner of her eye to see whether he was setting them down properly in their consecrated places. She thought that if even one were put where it should not be, the overall effect of her drawing room would be ruined, and her portrait, placed on a sloping stand draped in plush, would be poorly lit. And so she fervently followed the movements of the ungainly man and reprimanded him sharply when he went too close to two flower stands which she took care to clean herself for fear they would be damaged and which she now went over to examine to see if he had chipped them. She thought all her Chinese knickknacks had "amusing" shapes, as did the orchids, the cattleyas[23] especially, which were, along with the chrysanthemums, her favorite flowers, because they had the great merit of not resembling flowers, but of being made of silk, or satin. "This one looks as though it were cut from the lining of my coat," she said to Swann, showing him an orchid, with a suggestion of respect for this very "chic" flower, for this elegant and unexpected sister which nature had given her, so far removed from her on the scale of living creatures and yet so refined, more deserving than many women of being given a place in her drawing room. As she showed him, first, chimeras with tongues of fire decorating a vase or embroidered on a screen, then the corollas of a bouquet of orchids, then a dromedary of silver inlaid with niello with eyes encrusted with rubies that stood on the mantelpiece next to a jade toad, she affected, first, fear of the wickedness, or laughter at the oddity, of the monsters, then blushes at the indecency of the flowers and then an irresistible desire to go and kiss the dromedary and the toad, which she called "dears." And these affectations contrasted with the sincerity of certain of her devotions, notably to Our Lady of Laghet,[24] who had once, when she lived in Nice, cured her of a fatal illness, and whose gold medal she always wore, attributing to it unlimited powers. Odette made Swann "her" tea, asking him: "Lemon or cream?" and when he answered "Cream," said to him laughing: "A cloud!" And when he found it good: "You see I know what you like." This tea, in fact, seemed as precious a thing to Swann as it did to her, and love has such need to find for itself a justification, a guarantee that it will last, in pleasures which in fact would not be pleasures without it and which end when it ends, that when he left her at seven o'clock to go home and dress, during the whole trip that he made in his coupé, unable to contain the joy which the afternoon had given him, he kept repeating to himself: "How nice it would be to have a little woman like that in whose home one could always find that rare thing, a good cup of tea." An hour later, he received a note from Odette and immediately recognized the large handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an appearance of discipline on ill-formed letters that would perhaps have signified, to less prejudiced eyes, an untidiness of mind, an insufficient education, a lack of frankness and resolution. Swann had forgotten his cigarette case at Odette's. "If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you have it back."

A second visit he made to her was perhaps more important. Going to her house that day, as always when he was to see her, he pictured her to himself beforehand; and his need, if he was to find her face pretty, to limit what he imagined of her cheeks only to her fresh, pink cheekbones since the rest was so often yellow, languid, sometimes marked with little red specks, distressed him, as it seemed to prove that the ideal is inaccessible and happiness mediocre. He had brought her an engraving that she wanted to see. She was a little unwell; she received him in a mauve crepe de chine dressing gown, pulling the richly embroidered material over her chest like a cloak. Standing next to him, allowing her hair, which she had undone, to flow down her cheeks, bending one leg somewhat in the position of a dancer so that without getting tired she could lean over the engraving, which she looked at, inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in a fresco in the Sistine Chapel.[25] Swann had always had this peculiar penchant for amusing himself by rediscovering in the paintings of the masters not only the general characteristics of the real world that surrounds us, but what seems on the contrary the least susceptible to generalization, the individual features of the faces we know: for instance, in the material of a bust of the Doge Loredano by Antonio Rizzo,[26] the jut of the cheekbones, the slant of the eyebrows, altogether the very evident resemblance to his coachman Rémi; under the colors of a Ghirlandaio,[27] M. de Palancy's nose; in a portrait by Tintoretto,[28] the invasion of the cheek's fat by the first implanted hairs of the side-whiskers, the break in the nose, the penetration of the gaze, the congestion of the eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always continued to feel a touch of remorse that he had limited his life to worldly relationships, to conversation, he believed he could find a sort of indulgent

pardon granted him by the great artists, in the fact that they too had contemplated with pleasure, introduced into their work, faces like these which give it a singular certificate of reality and of truth to life, a modern flavor; perhaps, also, he had allowed himself to be so caught up in the frivolity of the society people that he felt the need to look into an old work of art for these anticipated and rejuvenating allusions to current proper names. Perhaps, on the other hand, he still had enough of an artist's nature so that these individual characteristics gave him pleasure by assuming a more general meaning as soon as he saw them extirpated, emancipated, in the resemblance between an older portrait and an original which it did not represent. Whatever the case, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions that he had been receiving for some time, and even though this abundance had come to him more with his love of music, had enriched even his delight in painting, he now found a deeper pleasure—and this was to exert a permanent influence on Swann—in Odette's resemblance to Zipporah as painted by Sandro di Mariano, whom people call more often by his popular nickname of Botticelli, since that name evokes, not the painter's true work, but the idea of it that is vulgarized, banal, and false. He no longer appraised Odette's face according to the finer or poorer quality of her cheeks and the purely flesh-colored softness he supposed he must find when he touched them with his lips if he ever dared to kiss her, but as a skein of subtle and beautiful lines that his eyes reeled off, following their winding curve, joining the cadence of her nape to the effusion of her hair and the flexion of her eyelids, as in a portrait of her in which her type became intelligible and clear.

He looked at her; a fragment of the fresco appeared in her face and in her body, and from then on he would always try to find it in her again, whether he was with Odette or was only thinking of her, and even though he probably valued the Florentine masterpiece only because he found it again in her, nevertheless that resemblance conferred a certain beauty on her too, made her more precious. Swann reproached himself for having misunderstood the value of a creature who would have appeared captivating to the great Sandro, and he felt happy that his pleasure in seeing Odette could be justified by his own aesthetic culture. He told himself that, in associating the thought of Odette with his dreams of happiness, he had not been resigning himself to a second best as imperfect as he had believed until now, since she satisfied his most refined artistic tastes. He forgot that this did not make Odette any more the sort of woman he desired, since in fact his desire had always been oriented in a direction opposite to his aesthetic tastes. The words "Florentine painting" did Swann a great service. They allowed him, like a title, to bring the image of Odette into a world of dreams to which it had not had access until now and where it was steeped in nobility. And, while the simple view he had had of this woman in the flesh, by perpetually renewing his doubts about the quality of her face, her body, her whole beauty, had weakened his love, these doubts were vanquished, that love confirmed when he had instead, for a foundation, the principles of an unquestionable aesthetic; while the kiss and the possession that would seem natural and ordinary if they had been granted him by damaged flesh, coming as they did to crown the adoration of a museum piece appeared to him necessarily supernatural and delicious.

And when he was tempted to regret the fact that for months now he had done nothing but see Odette, he said to himself that it was reasonable to give a good deal of his time to an inestimable masterpiece, cast just this once in a different and particularly savory material, in a most rare exemplar that he contemplated sometimes with the humility, spirituality, and disinterestedness of an artist, and sometimes with the pride, egotism, and sensuality of a collector.

He placed on his worktable, as if it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro's daughter. He admired the large eyes, the delicate face, which allowed one to imagine the imperfect skin, the marvelous curls of the hair along the tired cheeks, and adapting what he had found aesthetically beautiful up to then to the idea of a living woman, he translated it into physical attractions which he rejoiced to find united in a creature whom he could possess. The vague feeling of sympathy that draws us toward a masterpiece as we look at it became, now that he knew the fleshly original of Jethro's daughter, a desire that henceforth compensated for the desire that Odette's body had not at first inspired in him. When he had looked at that Botticelli for a long time, he would think of his own Botticelli, whom he found even more beautiful, and, bringing the photograph of Zipporah close to him, he would believe he was clasping Odette against his heart.

And yet he strained his ingenuity not only to prevent Odette from becoming tired of him, but also, sometimes, to prevent himself from becoming tired of her; feeling that, ever since Odette had had every opportunity to see him, she did not seem to have much to say to him, he was afraid that the rather banal, monotonous, and more or less permanently predetermined manner she now had when they were together would end by killing the romantic hope he had that one day she would declare her passion, a hope which alone had made him fall in love and stay in love. And in order to work a little transformation in Odette's quite invariable attitude of mind, which he was afraid would make him grow tired of her, he would suddenly write her a letter full of feigned disappointment and simulated anger that he would send round to her before dinner. He knew that she would be dismayed, and would answer him, and he hoped that in the contraction of her soul caused by her fear of losing him, words would spring forth that she had never yet said to him—and in fact it was by doing this that he had obtained the most tender letters she had yet written to him, including one, which she had sent round to him at noon from La Maison Dorée[29] (it was the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, held for the flood victims of Murcia)[30] that began with these words: "My dearest, my hand is trembling so badly I can hardly write," and that he had kept in the same drawer as the dry chrysanthemum flower. Or, if she had not had time to write to him, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come up to him quickly, saying, "I have to talk to you," and he would gaze curiously at what he saw in her face and her words that she had until then kept hidden from him, of all that was in her heart.

Even as he approached the Verdurins', when he saw the large lamp-lit windows whose shutters were never closed, he was moved as he thought of the charming creature he was going to see in full bloom in their golden light. Now and then the figures of the guests stood out in silhouette, slender and black, screening the lamps, like those little pictures intercalated at intervals around a translucent lampshade whose other panels are plain light. He would try to distinguish Odette's silhouette. Then, as soon as he arrived, without his realizing it, his eyes would shine with such joy that M. Verdurin would say to the painter: "I think it's getting warm." And for Swann, Odette's presence did indeed add something to this house which none of the others in which he was entertained possessed: a sort of sensory apparatus, a nervous system ramifying through all the rooms and causing constant excitations in his heart.

And so the simple functioning of that social organism, the little "clan," automatically arranged daily meetings with Odette for Swann and allowed him to feign an indifference to seeing her, or even a desire not to see her, which did not make him run any great risks, since, whatever he wrote to her during the day, he would necessarily see her that evening and take her home.

But once when, having glumly contemplated that inevitable ride home together, he had taken his young working girl all the way to the Bois in order to delay the moment of going to the Verdurins', he arrived at their house so late that Odette, thinking he would not be coming, had already left. When he saw that she was no longer in the drawing room, Swann felt a pain in his heart; he trembled at being deprived of a pleasure that he was now measuring for the first time, having had until then that certainty of finding it when he wanted it which in the case of all pleasures diminishes for us, or even prevents us from perceiving at all, their greatness.

"Did you notice the look on his face when he saw she wasn't here?" said M. Verdurin to his wife. "I think one may say he's smitten!"

"The look on his face?" asked Dr. Cottard violently, since, having gone out briefly to see a patient and returned to pick up his wife, he did not know whom they were discussing.

"What, you didn't meet the most handsome of all Swanns at the front door . . ."

"No. M. Swann was here?"

"Oh, just for a moment. We had a very agitated, a very nervous Swann. You see, Odette had already left."

"You mean she and he are thick as thieves? She has given him the key to her city?" asked the doctor, cautiously testing the meaning of the expressions.

"No, no, there's absolutely nothing going on, and just between us, I think she's making a great mistake and behaving like a real idiot, which she is, in fact."

"Tut, tut, tut," said M. Verdurin. "What do you know about it, how do you know there's nothing going on? We haven't gone there to see for ourselves, have we?"

"She would have told me," retorted Mme. Verdurin proudly. "I tell you she lets me know about all her little affairs! As she hasn't anyone just now, I told her she ought to sleep with him. She claims she can't, she says she was certainly rather infatuated with him at first, but that he's shy with her, which makes her shy with him, and then anyway she doesn't love him that way, he's some sort of ideal for her, she's afraid of taking the bloom off the feeling she has for him, what do I know? Yet it would be just what she needs."

"Allow me to disagree with you," said M. Verdurin. "I'm not overly fond of the gentleman's manner; I think he's affected."

Mme. Verdurin froze, assumed an inert expression as if she had turned into a statue, a fiction that allowed it to be assumed that she had not heard that intolerable word *affected,* which seemed to imply that one could "be affected" with them, therefore that one was "better than them."

"Anyway, if there's nothing going on, I don't think it's because the gentleman thinks she's *virtuous,*" M. Verdurin said ironically. "And after all, one can't say anything, since he seems to think she's intelligent. I don't know if you heard what he was declaiming to her the other evening about Vinteuil's sonata; I love Odette with all my heart, but to construct aesthetic theories for her benefit, you'd really have to be quite an imbecile!"

"Now, don't say bad things about Odette," said Mme. Verdurin, playing the child. "She's so charming."

"But she can still be charming. We aren't saying bad things about her, we're saying she's not a saint, she's not a genius. In fact," he said to the painter, "are you really so anxious for her to be virtuous? Who knows—perhaps she would be far less charming."

On the landing Swann had been approached by the butler, who was not there when he arrived and had been instructed by Odette—but this was already an hour before—to tell him, in case he should still come, that she would probably go and have some chocolate at Prévost's[31] before returning home. Swann left for Prévost's, but at every step of the way his carriage was stopped by other carriages or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles that he would gladly have knocked down if the policeman and his report would not have delayed him even more than the passage of a pedestrian. He counted the time he was taking, and added a few seconds to all the minutes to be sure of not having made them too short, which would have allowed him to think the chance was greater than it really was that he would arrive early enough and still find Odette. And at one point, like a man in a fever who has just been sleeping and who becomes aware of the absurdity of the dreams he has been contemplating without clearly distinguishing himself from them, Swann suddenly perceived how alien to himself were the thoughts he had been revolving since the moment he had been told at the Verdurins' that Odette had already left, how new the pain he was suffering in his heart, but noted it only as though he had just woken up. What? All this agitation because he would not see Odette till tomorrow, exactly what he had wanted, an hour ago, when he arrived at Mme. Verdurin's! He was obliged to acknowledge that in this same carriage which was taking him to Prévost's he himself was no longer the same, and that he was no longer alone, that a new person was there with him, attached to him, amalgamated to him, one from whom he might not be able to free himself, whom he was going to have to treat with circumspection, like a master or an illness. And yet for a moment now, since he had felt a new person had been added to him in this way, his life had seemed to him more interesting. He hardly said to himself that this possible meeting at Prévost's, however (the expectation of which so disordered, so denuded the moments preceding it that he could no longer find a single idea, a single memory within which he could rest his mind), would probably, if it took place, be like the others, not much of anything. As on every other evening, once he was with Odette, casting on her changing face a furtive glance which he would immediately turn away for fear that she would see in it his mounting desire and no longer believe in his disinterest, he would cease to be able to think about her, too occupied with finding pretexts that would permit him not to leave her right away and to make certain, without seeming to care about it, that he would see her again the next day at the Verdurins': that is, to prolong for the moment and to renew for yet one more day the disappointment and torment that came to him from the pointless presence of this woman whom he saw so regularly without daring to take her in his arms.

She was not at Prévost's; he wanted to look in every restaurant along the boulevards. In order to gain time, while he visited some he sent into the others his coachman Rémi (the Doge Loredano by Rizzo), for whom he then waited—having found nothing himself—at a place he had specified to him. The carriage did not return and Swann pictured to himself the approaching moment, as both the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady is here," and the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady was not in any of the cafés." And so he saw the end of the evening before him, one single outcome and yet an alternative as well, preceded either by a meeting with Odette which would put an end to his agony, or by a forced renunciation of finding her this evening, an acceptance of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman came back, but at the moment he stopped in front of Swann, Swann did not say to him: "Did you find the lady?" but: "Remind me, tomorrow, to order more wood; I think our supply must be almost exhausted." Perhaps he had told himself that if Rémi had found Odette in some café where she was waiting for him, the end of the ill-fated evening would already be canceled out by the fulfillment, which was just beginning, of the blissful end of the evening and that he did not need to rush to seize a happiness that was already captured and held in a safe place, that would not be able to break free. But it was also from the force of inertia; there was in his soul that lack of suppleness which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, at the moment when they need to avoid a collision, to snatch a flame away from their clothing, to perform some other urgent motion, instead take their time, begin by remaining for a second in their original position, as though to find in it their springboard, their source of momentum. And no doubt, if the coachman had interrupted him by saying: "The lady is there," he would have answered: "Oh yes, of course, the errand I sent you on! Well, well! Is that so?" and would have gone on talking to him about supplies of wood in order to hide the emotion he felt and allow himself time to separate from his uneasiness and give himself up to his happiness.

But the coachman came back to tell him he had not found her anywhere, and added his opinion, old servant that he was:

"I think that all Monsieur can do now is go home."

But the indifference that Swann had no trouble feigning as long as Rémi could do nothing further to change the answer he had brought back fell from him, when he saw Rémi attempt to make him give up hope and abandon his search:

"No, not at all," he cried, "we must find the lady; it's terribly important. She would be extremely annoyed—it's a business matter—she would be extremely offended if she didn't see me."

"I don't see how the lady could be offended," answered Rémi, "since she's the one who left without waiting for Monsieur, and since she said she would go to Prévost's and then she wasn't there."

Lights were beginning to go out all around him. Under the trees on the boulevards, in a mysterious darkness, fewer people wandered past, barely recognizable. Now and then the shadow of a woman coming up to him, murmuring a word in his ear, asking him to take her home, would make Swann start. He brushed anxiously against all those dim bodies as if, among the phantoms of the dead, in the kingdom of darkness, he were searching for Eurydice.

Of all the modes by which love is brought into being, of all the agents which disseminate the holy evil, surely one of the most efficacious is this great gust of agitation which now and then sweeps over us. Then our fate is sealed, and the person whose company we enjoy at the time is the one we will love. It is not even necessary for us to have liked him better than anyone else up to then, or even as much. What is necessary is that our predilection for him should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled when—at a moment like this, when we do not have him with us—the quest for the pleasures that his charm gave us is suddenly replaced in us by an anxious need whose object is this person himself, an absurd need which the laws of this world make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to cure—the senseless and painful need to possess him.

Swann asked to be driven to the last remaining restaurants; it was only the hypothesis of happiness he had been able to envisage calmly; now he no longer hid his agitation, the value he placed on this meeting; and he promised a reward to his coachman if they were successful, as though, by inspiring him with a desire to succeed that would be added to his own, he could make Odette appear, even if she had already gone home to bed, in a restaurant on the boulevard. He pushed on as far as La Maison Dorée, went into Tortoni's[32] twice and, still without having seen her, had just come out of the Café Anglais[33] again, walking fast with a wild look on his face back to his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the boulevard des Italiens, when he bumped into a woman coming in the opposite direction: it was Odette; later, she explained that she had not found a seat at Prévost's and so had gone to have supper at La Maison Dorée in an alcove where he had not noticed her, and she was on her way back to her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she recoiled in fear. And he himself had run all over Paris not because he thought it was possible to find her, but because it was too hard for him to give up the search. But the joy which his reason had continued to believe was beyond realization that night only seemed even more real now; for since he had not collaborated with it by foreseeing its probabilities, it remained external to him; he did not need to reach into his mind to furnish it with truth, the truth emanated from it, was projected by it toward him, that truth whose radiance dispelled like a dream the isolation he had so dreaded, that truth on which he now based, on which he now rested, without thinking, his happy reverie. In the same way, a traveler arriving at the Mediterranean shore on a day of fine weather, no longer certain that the lands he has just left behind really exist, allows his vision to be dazzled, rather than looking at them himself, by the rays of light emitted in his direction by the luminous, resistant azure of the waters.

He stepped up with her into the carriage that she had waiting there, and told his own to follow.

She was holding a bunch of cattleyas in her hand and Swann saw, under her lace scarf, that she had flowers of the same orchid in her hair, fastened to a plume of swan feathers. She was dressed, under her mantilla, in a flood of black velvet caught up on one side to reveal in a wide triangle the hem of a skirt of white faille and showing a yoke, also of white faille, at the opening of a low-necked bodice tucked with more cattleyas. She had barely recovered from the fright Swann had given her when some obstacle made the horse shy. They were roughly jolted, she cried out and began trembling all over, breathless.

"It's all right," he said, "don't be afraid."

And he put his arm around her shoulder, supporting her against himself; then he said:

"Now don't talk to me, just answer with a sign so you don't get even more out of breath. It won't bother you, will it, if I straighten the flowers in your bodice? They were knocked out of place when the carriage lurched. I'm afraid you may lose them, I'll push them in a little."

She was not used to seeing a man make such a fuss over her, and said, smiling:

"No, not at all. I don't mind in the least."

But he, intimidated by her answer, and perhaps also so as to appear to have been sincere when he had used that excuse, or even beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed:

"No, no! Don't talk, you'll get out of breath again, you can answer me perfectly well with a gesture, I'll understand. Tell me sincerely, this doesn't bother you? You see, there's a little . . . I think there's some pollen sprinkled on you; will you let me wipe it off with my hand? I'm not doing it too quickly, I'm not being too rough? Am I tickling you a little, maybe? I don't want to touch the velvet of your dress, I'm afraid I might crush it. But look, it really was necessary to fasten them, they would have fallen; and this way, by pushing them in a little myself . . . Seriously; I'm not annoying you? And what if I just take a little sniff to see if they really have no fragrance? I've never smelled them. May I? Tell the truth."

Smiling, she shrugged her shoulders a little, as though to say "You're quite mad; you can see very well that I like it."

He ran his other hand up along Odette's cheek; she gazed at him steadily, with the grave and languid look of the women by the Florentine master whom he had discovered she resembled; protruding to the edges of her lids, her shining eyes, wide and thin, like theirs, seemed about to well out like two tears. She bent her neck as you see them all do, in the pagan scenes as well as in the religious pictures. And in a position which was no doubt habitual for her, which she knew was appropriate to moments like this and which she took care not to forget to adopt, she seemed to require all her strength to hold her face back, as though an invisible force were drawing it toward Swann. And it was Swann who, before she let her face fall, as though despite herself, onto his lips, held it back for an instant, at a certain distance, between his two hands. He had wanted to give his mind time to catch up, to recognize the dream it had caressed for so long and to be present at its realization, like a relative summoned to witness the success of a child she has loved very much. Perhaps Swann was also fastening upon this face of an Odette he had not yet possessed, an Odette he had not yet even kissed, this face he was seeing for the last time, the gaze with which, on the day of our departure, we hope to carry away with us a landscape we are about to leave forever.

But he was so timid with her that, having ended by possessing her that night, after beginning by arranging her cattleyas, either from dread of offending her, or from fear of appearing in retrospect to have lied, or from a lack of audacity in formulating a greater demand than this one (which he could renew since it had not angered Odette the first time), in the days following he made use of the same pretext. If she had cattleyas tucked in her blouse, he would say: "It's a pity, this evening the cattleyas don't need to be straightened, they haven't been jostled the way they were the other evening; it seems to me, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if these have more fragrance than the others?" Or, if she had none: "Oh! No cattleyas tonight, no way for me to indulge in a little rearranging." So that, for some time, the order he had followed the first night, when he began by touching Odette's throat with his fingers and lips, was not changed, and his caresses still began this way each time; and much later, when the rearrangement (or the ritual simulacrum of rearrangements) of the cattleyas had long since been abandoned, the metaphor "make cattleya," having become a simple phrase they used without thinking about it when they wanted to signify the act of physical possession—in which, in fact, one possesses nothing—lived on in their language, commemorating it, after that forgotten custom. And perhaps this individual way of saying "make love" did not mean exactly the same thing as its synonyms. Even if one is tired of women, even if one believes that the possession of the most various women is always the same and familiar beforehand, this possession becomes a new pleasure if it involves women difficult enough—or believed to be so by us—so that we have to make it happen as a result of some episode in our relationship that is unforeseen, as had been for Swann, the first time, the rearranging of the cattleyas. He tremulously hoped, that night (but Odette, he told himself, if she was fooled by his ruse, would not be able to guess as much), that the possession of this woman was what would emerge from among their broad mauve petals; and the pleasure he felt already and that Odette was perhaps tolerating, he thought, only because she had not recognized it, seemed to him, because of that—as it might seem to the first man who tasted it among the flowers of earthly paradise—a pleasure that had not existed until then, that he was seeking to create, a pleasure—signaled by the special name he gave it—entirely individual and new.

Now, every evening, when he took her home, he had to go in, and often she came back out in a dressing gown and led him to his carriage, kissed him within view of the coachman, saying: "What difference does it make to me, what other people think of me?" On evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins' (which happened sometimes now that he had another way of seeing her), on the increasingly rare evenings when he went into society, she would ask him to come to see her on his way home, whatever the hour. It was spring, a clear and icy spring. Coming out of a party, he would get into his victoria, spread a rug over his legs, tell the friends who were going off at the same time and who had asked him to join them that he could not, that he was not going in the same direction, and the coachman would leave at a fast trot knowing where to go. They would be amazed, and, in fact, Swann was no longer the same. No one ever received a letter from him now asking for an introduction to some woman. He no longer paid any attention to women, avoided going to places where one might meet them. In a restaurant, in the country, his attitude was the opposite of the one by which, just recently, he could be recognized and which had seemed to have been his always. To such an extent does a passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character that replaces our other character and eliminates the signs, invariable until then, by which it was expressed! Now, however, what was invariable was that, wherever Swann might be, he did not fail to go to meet Odette. The path that separated him from her was the one he inevitably traveled as though it were the slope itself, rapid and irresistible, of his life. In truth, when he had stayed out late, he would often have preferred to go directly home without making that long trip, and not see her until the next day; but the very fact of taking the trouble to go to her house at an unusual hour, of guessing that the friends who were leaving him were saying to themselves: "He is tied hand and foot, some woman must be insisting that he go to her whatever the hour," made him feel he was leading the life of men known to be having a love affair and in whom the sacrifice they are making of their sleep and their other interests to a dream of sensuous pleasure produces an inner charm. Then again, without his realizing it, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not somewhere else with other people, that he would not return without seeing her, neutralized the anguish, forgotten but always ready to be reawakened, which he had felt the night when Odette was not at the Verdurins', and of which the present assuagement was so sweet that it could be named happiness. Perhaps it was to this anguish that he owed the importance which Odette had now assumed for him. Other people usually leave us so indifferent that when we have invested in one of them such possibilities of causing us pain and joy, that person seems to belong to another universe, is surrounded with poetry, turns our life into a sort of expanse of emotion in which that person will be more or less close to us. Swann could not ask himself without anxiety what Odette would mean to him in the years to come. Now and then, as he saw, from his victoria, on those lovely cold nights, the shining moon spreading its brightness between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, bright and tinged with pink like the moon's, which, one day, had appeared in the forefront of his mind and, since then, had cast on the world the mysterious light in which he saw it. If he arrived after the hour when Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing at the gate of the little garden he would first go into the street onto which looked out, on the ground floor, between the windows, all alike but dark, of the contiguous houses, the only one illuminated, the window of her room. He would rap at the pane, and she, alerted, would answer and go and wait for him on the other side, at the front door. He would find several of her favorite pieces open on the piano: the "Valse des Roses" or "Pauvre Fou" by Tagliafico[34] (which should, according to her wishes, which she had put into writing, be performed at her funeral); he would ask her to play instead the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata, even though Odette played very badly, but the loveliest vision of a work of art that remains with us is often the one that transcended the wrong notes coaxed by unskillful fingers from an out-of-tune piano. For Swann the little phrase continued to be associated with the love he felt for Odette. He was aware that this love was something that did not correspond to anything external, anything verifiable by others besides him; he realized that Odette's qualities did not justify his attaching so much value to the time he spent with her. And often, when Swann's positive intelligence alone prevailed, he wanted to stop sacrificing so many intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But as soon as he heard it, the little phrase had the power to open up within him the space it

needed, the proportions of Swann's soul were changed by it; a margin was reserved in him for a bliss that also did not correspond to any external object, and yet, instead of being purely individual, like the enjoyment of that love, assumed for Swann a reality superior to that of concrete things. The little phrase incited in him this thirst for an unfamiliar delight, but it did not give him anything precise to assuage it. So that those parts of Swann's soul from which the little phrase had erased any concern for material interests, any considerations that were human and valid for all people, it left vacant and blank, and in them he was free to write Odette's name. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem somewhat limited and disappointing, the little phrase came along to add to it, to amalgamate with it its mysterious essence. From the sight of Swann's face as he listened to the phrase, one would have said he was absorbing an anesthetic that allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, and which was soon to create in him a true need, did indeed resemble, at those moments, the pleasure he would have found in testing fragrances, in entering into contact with a world for which we are not made, which seems formless to us because our eyes do not perceive it, meaningless because it evades our understanding, which we can attain only through a single sense. What great repose, what mysterious renewal for Swann—for him whose eyes, though refined lovers of painting, whose mind, though a shrewd observer of manners, bore forever the indelible trace of the aridity of his life—to feel himself transformed into a creature strange to humanity, blind, without logical faculties, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimerical creature perceiving the world only through his hearing. And since he still searched the little phrase for a meaning to which his intellect could not descend, what strange drunkenness he felt, as he divested his innermost soul of all the help of reason and forced it to pass alone through the sieve, through the dark filter of sound! He began to become aware of all that was painful, perhaps even secretly unappeased in the depths of the sweetness of that phrase, but it could not hurt him. What did it matter if it told him love was fragile, his own love was so strong! He toyed with the sadness it diffused, he felt it pass over him, but in a caress that only deepened and sweetened his sense of his own happiness. He made Odette play it ten times, twenty times, demanding that while she did so she should not stop kissing him. Each kiss summons another. Ah, in those first days of our love, kisses come so naturally! So closely, in their profusion, do they crowd together; and it would be as hard for us to count the kisses we give each other in an hour as the flowers of a field in the month of May. Then she would make as if to stop, saying: "How can you expect me to play if you hold on to me? I can't do everything at once. Now decide what you want—should I play the piano or play with you?," he would become annoyed, she would burst out laughing, and her laughter would change and descend on him in a rain of kisses. Or she would look at him with a sullen expression, once again he would see before him a face worthy of figuring in Botticelli's *Life of Moses,* he would place her in it, he would give her neck the necessary inclination; and when he had well and truly painted her in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, the idea that she had nevertheless remained here, by the piano, in the present moment, ready to be kissed and possessed, the idea of her materiality and her life would intoxicate him with such force that, his eyes distracted, his jaw tensed as though to devour her, he would swoop down upon that Botticelli virgin and begin pinching her cheeks. Then, once he had left her, not without going back in to kiss her again because he had forgotten to carry away in his memory some detail of her fragrance or her features, while he was returning home in his victoria, he would bless Odette for allowing him these daily visits, which he felt could not give her very great joy, but which, by saving him from becoming jealous—by relieving him of the occasion for suffering again from the disease that had broken out in him on the evening when he had not found her at the Verdurins'—would help him to arrive, without having any more of those crises of which the first had been so painful and must remain the only one, at the end of this singular period of his life, these hours that were almost enchanted, like those in which he crossed Paris in the light of the moon. And noticing, during his return, that the star had now moved in relation to him and was almost at the edge of the horizon, feeling that his love, too, was obeying immutable and natural laws, he asked himself whether this period he had entered would last much longer, whether, soon, his thoughts would no longer see the dear face except as occupying a distant and diminished place, and nearly ceasing to radiate any charm. For Swann did find charm in things, now that he was in love, just as during the period when, as an adolescent, he had thought he was an artist; but this was no longer the same charm; Odette alone conferred it on them. He felt the inspirations of his youth, which had been dissipated by a frivolous life, reawakening in him, but they all bore the reflection, the mark of a particular being; and, in the long hours which he now found a delicate pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescing soul, little by little he became himself again, but possessed by another.

He went to her house only in the evening, and he knew nothing about how she spent her time during the day, any more than about her past, so much so that he lacked even that initial bit of information which, by allowing us to imagine for ourselves what we do not know, makes us want to know it. Thus, he did not ask himself what she might be doing, nor what sort of life she had had. He merely smiled sometimes at the thought that a few years before, when he did not know her, someone had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been she, as being a courtesan, a kept woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed, since he had spent very little time in their company, the willful, fundamentally perverse character with which they were for so long endowed by the imaginations of certain novelists. He would tell himself that often if one simply believes the opposite of the reputation the world has formed one will judge a person accurately, when he contrasted the character of such a woman with that of Odette, good, naive, enamored of idealism, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, after he begged her one day, so that he could have dinner alone with her, to write to the Verdurins telling them that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face-to-face with Mme. Verdurin, who was asking her if she felt better, blush, stammer, and reveal on her face despite herself what an affliction, what a torment it was for her to lie, and, while in her answer she multiplied the invented details of her alleged indisposition the day before, appear to be asking forgiveness, by her supplicating looks and her sorrowful voice, for the falseness of her words.

On certain days, however, though they were rare, she came to his home in the afternoon, interrupting his daydreams or the study of Vermeer he had resumed lately. His servant would come to tell him that Mme. de Crécy was in his morning room. He would go off to find her there, and when he opened the door, as soon as she saw Swann, a smile would come and settle in Odette's rosy face, changing the shape of her mouth, the look in her eyes, the modeling of her cheeks. Once he was alone, he would see that smile again, he would see the one she had given him the day before, another with which she had greeted him on a different occasion, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage, when he had asked if it annoyed her that he was straightening her cattleyas; and Odette's life during the rest of the time, since he knew nothing about it, appeared to him, with its neutral and colorless background, similar to those sheets of studies by Watteau[35] in which one sees here and there, in every space, from every angle, drawn in three colors on buff paper, innumerable smiles. But sometimes, in a corner of that life which Swann saw as completely empty, even if his mind told him it was not, because he could not imagine it, some friend, who, suspecting they loved each other, had not dared to tell him anything about her except what was insignificant, would describe to him Odette's form, which he had seen, that very morning, going up the rue Abbatucci[36] on foot in a "visiting cloak" trimmed with skunk, under a "Rembrandt-style" hat, and with a bouquet of violets in her bodice. This simple sketch was greatly disturbing to Swann because it suddenly made him see that Odette had a life which did not belong entirely to him; he wanted to know whom she had been trying to please with that outfit, which he did not know she possessed; he would promise himself to ask her where she had been going, at that moment, as if in the whole of his mistress's colorless life—almost inexistent, because it was invisible to him—there had been only one thing apart from all those smiles directed at him: her walking under a Rembrandt-style hat, with a bunch of violets in her bodice.

Except when he asked her for the little phrase by Vinteuil instead of "The Waltz of the Roses," Swann did not try to make her play things he liked or, any more in music than in literature, to correct her bad taste. He fully realized that she was not intelligent. When she told him she would like it so much if he would tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would immediately become familiar with heroic and romantic couplets like those by the Vicomte de Borelli,[37] but even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked if he had ever suffered because of a woman, if it was a woman who had inspired him, and when Swann admitted to her that no one knew anything about that, she lost interest in the painter. She often said: "I do believe, of course, that poetry—well, that there would be nothing more beautiful if it was true, if poets really believed everything they said. But quite often, those people are the most calculating of all. I know something about it, because a friend of mine was in love with a poet of sorts. In his poetry all he talked about was love, the sky, the stars. Oh, she was fooled all right! He did her out of more than three hundred thousand francs." If Swann then tried to teach her what artistic beauty was, how one should admire poetry or painting, after a moment she would stop listening, saying: "Yes . . . I didn't imagine it was like that." And he would sense that she was feeling such disappointment that he would prefer to lie, telling her that what he had said was nothing, that it was the least important part, that he did not have the time to go into things more deeply, that there was something else. But she would say to him sharply: "Something else? What? . . . Say it, then," but he would not say it, knowing it would seem feeble to her and different from what she was hoping for, less sensational and less touching, and fearing that, disillusioned by art, she would at the same time be disillusioned by love.

And in fact she found Swann intellectually inferior to what she would have imagined. “You’re always so reserved. I can’t make you out.” She would marvel more at his indifference to money, his kindness to everyone, his refinement. And it often happens, in fact, to greater men than Swann, to a scientist or an artist, when he is not misunderstood by those around him, that the feeling on their part which proves that the superiority of his intelligence has compelled their recognition is not their admiration for his ideas, since these are beyond them, but their respect for his goodness. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by Swann’s position in society, but she did not want him to try to secure invitations for her. Perhaps she felt that he might not be successful, or was even afraid that merely by talking about her he would prompt revelations that she dreaded. In any case, she had made him promise never to utter her name. The reason she did not want to go into society, she had told him, was a quarrel she had once had with a friend who, to avenge herself, had then said bad things about her. Swann objected: “But not everyone knew your friend.” “Well, yes, but these things get around. The world is cruel.” Swann did not understand this story, but on the other hand he knew that such precepts—“The world is cruel,” “A slanderous remark spreads like a drop of oil”—were generally held to be true; there must be cases to which they applied. Was Odette’s one of them? He wondered about this, but not for long, because he, too, was subject to the mental torpor that had burdened his father whenever he posed himself a difficult problem. Besides, this world which so frightened Odette did not, perhaps, inspire any great desire in her, because it was too far removed from the one she knew for her to picture it quite clearly. However, while she had remained in certain respects truly simple (for example she had kept as her friend a solitary little seamstress, whose steep, dark, and foul-smelling stair she climbed almost every day), she thirsted after fashion, but did not conceive of it as the fashionable people did. For them, fashion is a thing that emanates from a small number of individuals who project it to a considerable distance—more and more faintly the farther one is from the center of their closest associations—through the circle of their friends or the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of register. Society people hold this register in their memory, they have an erudition about such matters, from which they have derived a sort of taste, a sort of discernment, so that if Swann, for example, read in a newspaper the names of the people who were at a dinner, he could immediately, without having to call upon his knowledge of the world, tell the exact degree of stylishness of that dinner, the way a literary person, simply by reading a sentence, can judge exactly the quality of its author. But Odette was one of those people (extremely numerous, whatever the fashionable world may think, and the likes of which exist in every class of society) who do not share these notions, who imagine a stylishness that is quite different, that assumes different guises according to the circle to which they belong, but has the particular characteristic—whether it be the sort of stylishness Odette dreamed of, or the sort Mme. Cottard worshiped—of being directly accessible to everyone. The other, the stylishness of the society people, is accessible too, in truth, but only after a certain delay. Odette would say of someone:

“He only goes to the really smart places.”

And if Swann asked her what she meant by that, she would answer him a little scornfully:

“Why, smart places! My goodness! If at your age you need to be taught what the smart places are, I don’t know what to tell you. For example, the avenue de l’Impératrice[38] on Sunday mornings, the Tour du Lac[39] at five o’clock, the Éden Théâtre[40] on Thursdays, the Hippodrome [41] on Friday, the balls . . .”

“Now, what balls?”

“Why, the balls people give in Paris, the smart people, I mean. Well, Herbinger, you know, the one that has a job with a broker? But you must know him, he’s one of the most successful men in Paris, that tall blond young man who’s such a snob, who always has a flower in his buttonhole, a part at the back, light-colored overcoats; he goes about with that old thing who wears so much paint on her face, he takes her out to all the premieres. Well, he gave a ball the other night, and the smartest people in Paris were there. How I would have loved to go! But you had to show your invitation card at the door and I couldn’t get one. Really, I’m just as glad I didn’t go, I would have got killed in the crush, and I wouldn’t have seen a thing. It’s really just to be able to say you were at Herbinger’s. And you know how I like to boast! Anyway, you can bet that out of a hundred girls who tell you they were there, half of them are lying . . . But actually, you’re such a swell, I’m amazed you weren’t there.”

But Swann in no way tried to make her change this conception of fashionable life; thinking that his own was no more real, was also foolish, unimportant, he saw no point in instructing her about it, so that after some months she had no interest in the people whose homes he went to except as a means of obtaining enclosure passes for the horse races or tickets to the premieres. She wanted him to cultivate useful relationships of that kind, but in other respects she was persuaded they were not very smart, after she saw the Marquise de Villeparisis go past her in the street wearing a black woolen dress and a bonnet with strings.

“Why, she looks like a working-class woman, darling,[42] like an old concierge! That was a marquise! I’m no marquise, but you’d have to pay me handsomely to make me go about rigged out like that!”

She could not understand why Swann lived in the house on the quai d’Orléans which, though she did not dare admit it to him, she found unworthy of him.

Of course she claimed she loved “antiques” and assumed a rapturous and discriminating air when she said she adored spending a whole day “collecting curios,” looking for “bric-a-brac,” things “from the past.” Although she persisted in a sort of point of honor (and as though she were obeying some family precept) in never answering questions or “accounting” for how she spent her days, she talked to Swann once about a friend who had invited her to her house, where everything was “period.” But Swann could not manage to make her say what that period was. After some reflection, however, she answered that it was “medieval.” By this she meant that there was wood paneling. Sometime later, she talked to him about her friend again and added, in the hesitant tone and with the knowing look with which you mention someone you have had dinner with the night before and whose name you never heard before, but whom your hosts seemed to consider someone so celebrated that you hope the person you are talking to will know who you are talking about: “Her dining room . . . is . . . eighteenth century!” She had thought the room was hideous, bare, as if the house were not finished, the women looked hideous in it too, and the fashion would never catch on. Finally, a third time, she talked about it again and showed Swann the address of the man who had made that dining room and whom she wanted to send for, when she had the money, to see if he could make one for her, not the same one, of course, but another which she was contemplating and which unfortunately the dimensions of her little house would not allow, one with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture, and fireplaces like the ones in the Château de Blois.[43] That day, she let slip in Swann’s presence what she thought of his home on the quai d’Orléans; because he had criticized the fact that Odette’s friend preferred, not Louis XVI, for, he said, even though that was not done, it could be charming, but the fake antique: “You wouldn’t want her to live the way you do, with your broken furniture and your threadbare carpets,” she said to him, her bourgeois deference to public opinion prevailing, again, over her cocotte dilettantism.

People who liked collecting curios, were fond of poetry, despised crass calculations, dreamed of honor and love, she saw as an elite superior to the rest of humanity. One did not really have to have these predilections, provided one proclaimed them; of a man who had confessed to her at dinner that he loved to wander about the city, to get his hands dirty in the old shops, that he would never be appreciated by this commercial century, because he did not look after his own interests, and that because of this he belonged to another age, she returned home saying: “Why, he’s a lovely person, so sensitive, I never would have guessed!” and she felt a sudden warm friendship for him. But men who, like Swann, had these tastes, yet did not talk about them, left her cold. No doubt she had to admit that Swann did not value money, but she would add sulkily: “But with him, it’s not the same thing”; and in fact, what spoke to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that he often failed to satisfy her dreams, he at least tried to see that she enjoyed being with him, not to oppose the vulgar ideas, the bad taste, which she displayed in all things, and which he loved, moreover, like everything else that emanated from her, which even enchanted him, for they were so many particular traits by which the woman’s essence appeared to him, became visible. And so, when she looked happy because she was going to *La Reine Topaz,*[44] or when her gaze became serious, worried, and petulant, because she was afraid of missing the flower show or merely of not being in time for tea, with *muffins* and *toasts,*[45] at the “Thé de la rue Royale,”[46] regular attendance at which she believed was indispensable in establishing a woman’s reputation for elegance, Swann, enchanted as one is by the naturalness of a child or the truthfulness of a portrait that seems about to speak, sensed so clearly his mistress’s soul rising to the surface of her face that he could not resist going over to touch it with his lips. “Ah! She wants to be taken to the flower show, little Odette, she wants to be admired, well then, we’ll take her, we must obey.” Since Swann’s vision was rather poor, he had resigned himself to wearing glasses for working at home, and to adopting, for going out in the world, a monocle, which was less disfiguring. The first time she saw him with one in his eye, she could not contain her joy: “I really do think for a man it’s very smart! How it suits you! You look like a real gentleman. All you’re missing is a title!” she added, with a touch of regret. He was happy that Odette was like this, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton woman, he would have enjoyed seeing her in a coif and hearing her tell him she believed in

ghosts. Until then, as is true of many men whose taste for the arts develops independently from their sensuality, a bizarre disparity had existed between the satisfactions he conceded to one and those he conceded to the other, as he enjoyed, in the company of increasingly crude women, the seductions of increasingly refined works of art, taking a little housemaid to a closed orchestra box for the performance of a decadent play that he wanted to see or to an exhibition of Impressionist painting, and sure, in any case, that a cultivated woman of the world would not have understood any more about it, but would not have been able to keep quiet so nicely. But now that he loved Odette, to feel what she felt, to try to share but a single soul between the two of them, was so sweet to him that he sought to enjoy the things she liked, and his pleasure, not only in imitating her habits, but in adopting her opinions, was all the more profound because, since they had no roots in his own intelligence, they reminded him only of his love, because of which he preferred them. If he went to more than one performance of *Serge Panine*,[47] if he sought out opportunities to go to see Olivier Métra[48] conduct, it was for the sweetness of being initiated into all of Odette's ideas, of feeling he was sharing equally in all her tastes. This charm of bringing him close to her, which was possessed by the works or places that she liked, seemed to him more mysterious than the charm intrinsic to those that were lovelier but did not remind him of her. What was more, because he had allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to weaken, and because his skepticism as a man of the world had, unbeknownst to him, penetrated to them, he thought (or at least he had thought this for so long that he still said it) that the objects of one's preferences do not have an absolute value in themselves, but that they all depend on one's period, one's social class, they are all merely fashions, the most vulgar of which are equal to those that pass for the most distinguished. And just as he believed that the importance Odette attached to having tickets for the opening was not in itself a more ridiculous thing than the pleasure he used to take in lunching at the home of the Prince of Wales, likewise he did not think that the admiration she professed for Monte Carlo or for the Righi[49] was more unreasonable than the fondness he himself felt for Holland, which she imagined to be ugly, or for Versailles, which she found dreary. And so he denied himself those places, taking pleasure in telling himself that it was for her sake, that he chose not to feel things, love things, except with her.

Like everything else that was part of Odette's environment and no more, in some sense, than a means by which he could see her, talk to her, he enjoyed the company of the Verdurins. There, because at the center of all the amusements, meals, music, games, costumed suppers, excursions into the country, theater parties, even the rare "grand soirees" given for the "bores," was the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, of which the Verdurins gave to Swann, by inviting him, the inestimable gift, he was happier among the "little clan" than anywhere else, and sought to attribute real merits to it, for by so doing he could imagine that, out of preference, he would associate with it all his life. For, since he did not dare to say to himself, afraid that he would not believe it, that he would always love Odette, at least by supposing that he would always associate with the Verdurins (a proposition that, a priori, raised fewer objections of principle on the part of his intelligence), he could see himself in the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; this did not perhaps quite amount to the same thing as always loving her, but for the moment, while he loved her, to believe that he would not stop seeing her one day was all that he asked. "What a charming place," he would say to himself. "How fundamentally real their life is! How much more intelligent, more artistic, they are there than high-society people! How sincere, despite some rather absurd little exaggerations, is Mme. Verdurin's love of painting, music—what a passion she has for works of art, and how she longs to please artists! The notion she has formed of society people is not accurate; but then again, society's notion of artistic circles is even more false! Perhaps I have no very great intellectual needs to satisfy in conversation, but I'm perfectly happy with Cottard though he does make inept puns. And as for the painter, his pretentiousness may be unpleasant when he's trying to surprise people, but on the other hand he has one of the finest minds I've ever known. And also, most of all, you feel free there, you do what you like without feeling constrained, without standing on ceremony. What a quantity of good humor is expended every day in that drawing room! Decidedly, apart from a few rare exceptions, I will never go anywhere else. More and more, that is where I will find my companionship and live my life."

And since the qualities that he believed to be intrinsic to the Verdurins were merely the reflection of the pleasures he enjoyed in their house because of his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, along with those pleasures. Because Mme. Verdurin sometimes gave Swann the only thing that could constitute happiness for him; because, on a certain evening when he felt anxious because Odette had been talking to one guest more than another, and when, irritated at her, he did not want to take the initiative of asking her if she would return home with him, Mme. Verdurin brought him peace and joy by saying spontaneously: "Odette, you will take M. Swann home, won't you?"; because, when summer was approaching, and he had at first wondered uneasily if Odette would be going away without him, if he could continue to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin invited them both to spend it at her home in the country—Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to infiltrate into his intelligence and influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was the soul of high-mindedness. Apropos of a few delightful or eminent people whom one of his old classmates from the École du Louvre might mention to him, he would respond: "I prefer the Verdurins a hundred times over." And, with a solemnity that was new to him: "They are magnanimous people, and magnanimity is, fundamentally, the only thing that matters and that gives us distinction here on earth. You know, there are only two classes of people: the magnanimous ones and all the rest; and when you reach my age you have to choose, you have to decide once and for all whom you intend to like and, whom you intend to despise, stick with the ones you like, and, so as to make up for the time you've wasted with the others, not leave them again until you die. Well!" he added with that slight emotion you feel when, even without fully realizing it, you say something not because it is true, but because you enjoy saying it and you listen to it in your own voice as if it came from somewhere other than from yourself, "my fate is settled, I have chosen to like only magnanimous hearts and to live from now on only in magnanimity. You ask me if Mme. Verdurin is truly intelligent. I assure you that she has given me proof of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul which, you know, can't be attained without an equal loftiness of mind. Certainly she has a profound intelligence where the arts are concerned. But perhaps this is not her most admirable quality; and every small, ingeniously, exquisitely good action that she has performed for me, every genial attention, every gesture of sublime familiarity, reveals a more profound understanding of life than any philosophical treatise."

Yet he could have said to himself that there were old friends of his parents just as simple as the Verdurins, friends of his youth as smitten with art, that he knew other greathearted people, and that nevertheless, now that he had opted for simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he never saw them anymore. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of bringing the two of them together.

And so there was probably not, in the whole Verdurin circle, a single faithful partisan who liked them or thought he liked them as much as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin had said he did not much care for Swann, he was not only expressing his own thoughts, but also guessing his wife's. Doubtless Swann's affection for Odette was too private and he had neglected to make Mme. Verdurin his daily confidante concerning it; doubtless the very discretion with which he had made use of the Verdurins' hospitality, often refraining from coming to dinner for a reason that they did not suspect and in place of which they saw a desire not to turn down an invitation to the home of some "bores"; doubtless, too, and despite all the precautions he had taken to hide it from them, their gradual discovery of his brilliant position in society, all fed their irritation with him. But the deeper reason for it was different. It was that they had very quickly sensed in him a reserved, impenetrable space where he continued to profess silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque and that Cottard's jokes were not funny, in the end, and, even though he never deviated from his affability and never rebelled against their dogmas, they sensed, too, an impossibility of imposing them on him, of wholly converting him to them, the likes of which they had never encountered before in anyone. They would have forgiven him for associating with bores (to whom, for that matter, in his heart of hearts, he preferred the Verdurins and the whole of the little clan a thousand times over), if he had consented, as a good example, to renounce them in the presence of the faithful. But this was an abjuration they understood could not be wrung from him.

How different from a "newcomer" whom Odette had asked them to invite, though she had not met him more than a few times, and in whom they invested many hopes: the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that in fact he was Saniette's brother-in-law, which filled the faithful with surprise: the old archivist's manners were so humble that they had always thought he was from a social rank inferior to theirs and did not expect to learn that he belonged to a world that was rich and relatively aristocratic.) True, Forcheville was grossly snobbish, whereas Swann was not; true, he did not even dream of placing the circle of the Verdurins above all others, as Swann did. But he did not have the natural delicacy that stopped Swann from joining in with the too manifestly false criticisms that Mme. Verdurin leveled against people he knew. As for the vulgar and pretentious tirades the painter launched into on certain days, and as for the traveling-salesman jokes that Cottard ventured, for which Swann, who liked both men, could easily find excuses without having the heart or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville by contrast was of an intellectual caliber that allowed him to be dumbfounded, awestruck by the first, though he did not understand them, and to delight in the second. And in fact the first dinner at the Verdurins' at which Forcheville was present exposed all these differences, brought out his qualities, and precipitated Swann's fall from grace.

At this dinner there was, besides the regulars, a professor from the Sorbonne, Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at the spa and, if his duties at the university and his scholarly work had not given him very few hours of freedom, would willingly have come to their house often. For he had that curiosity, that excessive interest in life which, when combined with a degree of skepticism concerning the object of their studies, gives certain intelligent men in any profession, doctors who do not believe in medicine, schoolteachers who do not believe in Latin compositions, a reputation for having minds that are broad, brilliant, and even superior. At Mme. Verdurin's, he made a point of seeking his illustrations in whatever was most up-to-date when he spoke of philosophy and history, principally because he thought such subjects were only a preparation for real life and he imagined he would find the little clan putting into practice what he had known before now only from books, and then perhaps also because, having had instilled in him in the past, and having preserved without knowing it, a respect for certain subjects, he believed he was casting off his academic tendencies by taking liberties with them which, on the contrary, appeared such to him only because he had remained an academic.

At the very beginning of the meal, when M. de Forcheville, placed to the right of Mme. Verdurin, who had gone to great trouble over her appearance so as to please the "newcomer," said to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the doctor, who had been steadily observing him, so curious was he to find out what sort of man a "de," as he termed it, would be, and who was looking for a chance of attracting his attention and entering into closer contact with him, seized on the word *"blanche"* and, without lifting his nose from his plate, said: "*Blanche*? Blanche de Castille?,"[50] then, without moving his head, cast his eyes furtively to the right and left with an uncertain, smiling look. Whereas Swann, with his painful and useless attempt at a smile, revealed how stupid he thought the pun was, Forcheville had shown both that he relished its subtlety and that he had good manners, by containing within judicious limits a gaiety whose frankness had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What do you make of our man of science?" she had asked Forcheville. "It's impossible to have even two minutes of serious conversation with him. Is that the sort of thing you say to them at your hospital?" she had added, turning to the doctor. "It must be rather lively there, if that's the case. I see I'll have to get them to admit me as a patient."

"I think I heard the doctor talking about that old termagant, Blanche de Castille, if I dare express myself that way. Am I correct, madame?" Brichot asked Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with laughter, her eyes shut, plunged her face into her hands, from which stifled cries escaped. "My God, madame, I wouldn't want to alarm whatever respectful souls there may be at this table, *sub rosa* . . . And I realize that our ineffable republic, Athenian as it is—how very much so!—might pay homage to that obscurantist Capetian lady as the very first truly authoritarian police prefect. Yes indeed, my dear host, yes indeed, yes indeed," he went on in his sonorous voice, detaching each syllable, in response to an objection of M. Verdurin's. "The *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* whose facts are incontestably reliable, leaves no doubt about this. No better choice of patron could have been made by a secularized proletariat than that mother of a saint to whom, incidentally, she gave a pretty rough time, as we are told by Suger and other Saint Bernards;[51] for with her everyone got hauled over the coals."

"Who is this gentleman?" Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. "He seems first-rate."

"What? You haven't heard of the famous Brichot? Why, he's celebrated all over Europe."

"Oh! So that's Bréchot!" cried Forcheville, who had not heard the name clearly. "You must tell me all about him," he added, staring wide-eyed at the famous man. "It's always interesting to have dinner with a prominent person. But I must say, you certainly give your guests some choice dinner mates. No one's likely to get bored in your house."

"Oh you know, the most important thing," Mme. Verdurin said modestly, "is that they know they can trust us. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation is off and running. For instance, now, take Brichot. This is nothing: I've seen him, you know, when he's been absolutely dazzling here in my house, you feel you ought to go down on your knees before him. Well, now, at other people's houses, he's not the same man, he hasn't a scrap of wit, you have to force the words out of him, he's actually boring."

"How odd!" said Forcheville, surprised.

A wit like Brichot's would have been considered pure stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his youth, even though it might be compatible with real intelligence. And the professor's intelligence, vigorous and well nourished, probably would have been envied by many of the society people whom Swann considered witty. But those people had inculcated him so thoroughly with their own likes and dislikes, at least concerning anything to do with society life, including even that annexed part of it which should, instead, belong to the domain of intelligence—namely, conversation—that Swann could only find Brichot's jokes pedantic, vulgar, and sickeningly coarse. Then, too, being so accustomed to good manners, he was shocked by the rough military tone affected, each time he addressed anyone, by the jingoistic academic. Finally, perhaps he had lost some of his indulgence that evening in particular, seeing the friendliness Mme. Verdurin was displaying toward this man Forcheville whom Odette had had the singular idea of bringing. A little ill at ease with Swann, she had asked him when she arrived:

"What do you think of my guest?"

And he, realizing for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for a long time, might be attractive to a woman and was a rather handsome man, had answered: "Disgusting!" Of course, it did not occur to him to be jealous over Odette, but he did not feel as happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell the story of Blanche de Castille's mother, who "had been with Henry Plantagenet[52] for years before she married him," tried to prompt Swann to ask him what happened next by saying to him: "Isn't that so, Monsieur Swann?" in the martial tone one adopts to make oneself understood by a peasant or instill courage in a soldier, Swann spoiled Brichot's effect, to the fury of their hostess, by answering that they must please excuse him for being so uninterested in Blanche de Castille, but he had something to ask the painter. That afternoon, in fact, the painter had gone to see the show of a friend of Mme. Verdurin's, an artist who had died recently, and Swann wanted to find out from him (for he respected his taste) if there really was even more in these last works than the virtuosity that was already so astounding in the earlier ones.

"In that respect it was extraordinary, but it didn't seem to me to be an art that was, as they say, all that 'elevated,'" said Swann, smiling.

"Elevated . . . to the height of an institution," interrupted Cottard, lifting his arms with mock gravity.

The whole table burst out laughing.

"Didn't I tell you? He won't allow anyone to be serious," said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. "Just when you least expect it, he comes out with a pun."

But she noticed that Swann alone had not brightened up. What was more, he was not very pleased that Cottard had made fun of him in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of answering Swann in an interesting way, which he probably would have done if he had been alone with him, preferred to win the admiration of the guests by contributing a little set piece on the skill of the deceased master.

"I went up to one of them," he said, "just to see how it was done. I stuck my nose into it. Well! Absolute truth! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, or rubies, or soap, or sunshine, or leaven, or bronze, or caca!"

"And one makes twelve," cried the doctor, too late, so that no one understood his interruption.

"The thing looked as though it were made with nothing at all," the painter went on; "absolutely no way of discovering the trick, any more than in *The Night Watch* or *The Regents,* and the brushwork is even stronger than Rembrandt or Hals.[53] It's got everything in it—no, I swear."

And just as singers who have reached the highest note they can sing continue in falsetto, softly, he confined himself to murmuring, and smiling, as if in fact the painting had been absurdly beautiful:

"It smells good, it goes to your head, it takes your breath away, it tickles you, and you haven't a hope of knowing what it's made with, it's some kind of sorcery, it's a trick, it's a miracle" (bursting fully into laughter): "it's dishonest!" And stopping, gravely lifting his head, adopting a deep bass note which he tried to make harmonious, he added: "and it's so sincere!"

Except at the moment when he had said "stronger than *The Night Watch,*" a blasphemy that had provoked a protest from Mme. Verdurin, who considered *The Night Watch* the greatest masterpiece in the world along with the Ninth and the *Winged Victory,*[54] and at "made with caca," which had caused Forcheville to cast a circular glance at the table to see if the word was acceptable and had then brought to his mouth a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the guests except for Swann had fastened their eyes on the painter with gazes hypnotized by admiration.

"How he amuses me when he gets carried away like that," cried Mme. Verdurin when he was finished, delighted that the table was so interesting on the very day when M. de Forcheville had come for the first time. "And what about you, what's the matter with you, letting your mouth hang open that way like some great dog?" she said to her husband. "You know very well how he can talk; it's as if my husband had never heard you before. If only you could have seen the way he looked while you were talking, he was lapping you up. And tomorrow he'll repeat everything you said without losing a word."

"But it's no joke," said the painter, enchanted with his success, "you seem to think I'm giving you a sales talk, you think it's all a sham; I'll take you there to see for yourself, then you'll decide whether I'm exaggerating. I'll bet your boots you'll come back even more enthusiastic than I was!"

"But we don't think you're exaggerating, we just want you to eat your dinner, and we want my husband to eat too; give Monsieur some more sole normande, you can see that his is cold. We're not in such a hurry as all that, you're serving as if the house were on fire, now wait a little before you bring in the salad."

Mme. Cottard, who was modest and did not talk much, did not lack self-assurance when a happy inspiration caused her to hit upon a suitable remark. She felt that it would have some success, this gave her confidence, and what she did with it was not so much in order to shine as to be useful to her husband's career. And so she did not allow the word *salad* to escape after it was spoken by Mme. Verdurin.

"That wouldn't be Japanese salad, would it?" she said softly, turning to Odette.

And delighted and abashed by the appropriateness and boldness of making this allusion, so discreet, yet so clear, to the new and astonishing play by Dumas,[55] she burst into charming, ingenuous laughter, not very noisy, but so irresistible that for a few moments she could not control it. "Who is that lady? She's a lively one," said Forcheville.

"No, it's not, but we'll have some for you if you'll all come to dine with us on Friday."

"I'm going to seem very provincial to you, monsieur," said Mme. Cottard to Swann, "but I haven't yet seen the famous *Francillon* everyone's talking about. The doctor has already gone (I even recall that he told me he had the very great pleasure of spending the evening with you) and I confess that I didn't find it reasonable that he should pay for seats to go again with me. Obviously, at the Théâtre-Français, one never regrets one's evening, it's always well acted, but as we have very nice friends" (Mme. Cottard rarely uttered a proper name and simply referred to "some friends of ours" or "one of my friends," because it was more "distinguished," speaking in an artificial tone and with the air of importance of a person who names only those she chooses to) "who often have a box and are kind enough to take us to all the new productions that are worth going to, I'm certain to see *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I can form an opinion for myself. Yet I must confess I find I'm a bit embarrassed, for in every drawing room I visit, naturally the only thing they're talking about is that wretched Japanese salad. One even begins to be a little tired of it," she added, seeing that Swann did not seem as interested as she would have thought in so burning a topic. "I must admit, though, that it sometimes provides an excuse for some rather amusing notions. For instance, I have a friend who's most original, though she's a very pretty woman, very popular, very sought after, who claims she got her cook to make that Japanese salad at her house, putting in everything that Alexandre Dumas *fils* mentions in the play. She invited some friends to come and eat it. Unfortunately I wasn't one of the elect. But she told us about it at her next 'at-home'; apparently it was quite horrible, she made us laugh till we cried. But you know, it's all in the way you tell it," she said, seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And imagining that it was perhaps because he did not like *Francillon:* "Anyway, I think I'll be disappointed. I don't think it's as good as *Serge Panine,* which Mme. de Crécy worships so. In that one, at least, there are deep things that make you think; but to give a recipe for salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Whereas *Serge Panine*! But then, it's like everything that comes from Georges Ohnet's pen, it's always so well written. I don't know if you know *Le Maître de Forges,* which I like even better than *Serge Panine*."

"Forgive me," Swann said to her with irony, "but I confess that my lack of admiration is almost equally divided between the two masterpieces."

"Really, what have you got against them? Are you sure you aren't prejudiced? Do you think perhaps they're a little dreary? Anyway, as I always say, one should never argue about novels or plays. Everyone has his own way of looking at things and what you find detestable may be the very thing I like best."

She was interrupted by Forcheville addressing Swann. In fact, while Mme. Cottard was talking about *Francillon,* Forcheville had told Mme. Verdurin how much he admired what he called the painter's little "*speech*."[56]

"The gentleman has a facility for speaking, a memory," he had said to Mme. Verdurin when the painter was finished, "such as I have rarely encountered! By my bootlaces! I'd love to have such a gift. He would make an excellent preacher. One may say that with him and M. Bréchot, you have two real characters, one as good as the other, though for gift of the gab I'm not even sure this one would not in fact ace the professor. It comes out more naturally, it's less studied. Although now and then he does use words that are a bit on the vulgar side, but that's the thing to do nowadays. It's not often that I've seen anyone hold the floor so cleverly —'hold the spittoon,' as we used to say in the regiment, and come to think of it, it was in the regiment that I had a friend the gentleman rather reminded me of. Apropos of anything, I don't know what, this glass, for instance, he could rattle on for hours; no, not about this glass, that's a silly thing to say; but about the Battle of Waterloo, anything you like, and he would throw in things you never would have thought of. Why, Swann was in the same regiment; he must have known him."

"Do you see M. Swann often?" asked Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh no," answered M. de Forcheville, and since in order to approach Odette more easily he wanted to be pleasant to Swann, he attempted to seize this opportunity of flattering him by talking about his distinguished friends, but talking about them as a man of the world, in the tone of an affectionate critic and not as though he were congratulating him as on an unhoped-for success: "Isn't it so, Swann? I never see you. Anyway, how could I ever see him? The man is always hanging about with the La Trémoïlles,[57] with the Laumes, people like that! . . ." An imputation especially false, since, for a year now, Swann had hardly gone anywhere but to the Verdurins'. But the mere name of a person they did not know was greeted by a reproving silence on their part. M. Verdurin, afraid of the painful impression that these names of "bores," especially when tactlessly hurled thus in the faces of all the faithful, must have produced on his wife, secretly cast at her a glance full of worried solicitude. He saw then that in her resolution not to take action, not to have been affected by the news that had just been announced to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, the way we pretend to be deaf when a friend who has offended us tries to slip into the conversation an excuse which we would seem to accept if we listened to it without protesting, or when someone utters in our presence the forbidden name of an ingrate, Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence would not seem to be a form of consent, but rather the ignorant silence of an inanimate object, had suddenly divested her face of all life, all mobility; her prominent forehead was now merely a lovely study in the round, which the name of those La Trémoïlles at whose house Swann was always hanging about had not been able to penetrate; her slightly wrinkled nose revealed an indentation that seemed copied from life. Her half-open mouth seemed about to speak. She was now merely a lost wax,[58] a plaster mask, a model for a monument, a bust for the Palais de l'Industrie[59] in front of which the public would certainly stop to admire how the sculptor, by expressing the indefeasible dignity of the Verdurins as opposed to that of the La Trémoïlles and the Laumes, whose equals they naturally were, as they were the equals of all the bores on earth, had managed to give an almost papal majesty to the whiteness and rigidity of the stone. But at last the marble came to life and insinuated that one could not be squeamish if one wanted to go to the homes of these people, because the wife was always drunk and the husband so ignorant that he said "collidor" instead of "corridor."

"You'd have to pay me handsomely before I'd let that sort enter my house," concluded Mme. Verdurin, looking at Swann with an imperious air.

She probably did not hope that he would be submissive enough to imitate the saintly simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who had just exclaimed: "You see that? What astonishes me is that there's still people who'll speak to them! I think I would be too afraid: once struck, out of luck! How can there still be folks low enough to go running after them?" But he might at least have answered like Forcheville: "Lord, she's a duchess; some people are still impressed by that," which had at least allowed Mme. Verdurin to reply: "Much good may it do them!" Instead of that, Swann merely laughed with an air that signified that he could not even take such extravagant nonsense seriously. M. Verdurin, continuing to cast furtive glances at his wife, saw with sadness and understood all too well that she was feeling the rage of a grand inquisitor who cannot manage to extirpate the heresy, and in order to try to lead Swann to a recantation, since the courage of one's convictions always seem to be a calculation and an act of cowardice in the eyes of those who do not share them, M. Verdurin challenged him:

"Now tell us frankly what you think of them, we won't repeat it to them."

To which Swann answered:

"Why, it's not in the least out of fear of the duchess (if you're talking about the La Trémoïlles). I assure you everyone likes to visit her. I'm not saying she's 'profound'" (he pronounced *profound* as if it were a ridiculous word, because his language still bore the trace of habits of mind which his recent rejuvenation, marked by a love of music, had temporarily made him lose, so that at times he now expressed his opinions warmly) "but I'm quite sincere when I say that she's intelligent and her husband is truly well read. They're charming people."

Whereupon Mme. Verdurin, feeling that because of this one infidel she would be prevented from creating a complete moral unanimity among the little clan, was unable to stop herself, in her rage against this stubborn man who did not see how much his words pained her, from crying out to him from the bottom of her heart:

"Believe it if you like, but at least don't say it to us."

"It all depends on what you call intelligence," said Forcheville, who felt it was his turn to shine. "Now, Swann, what do you mean by intelligence?"

"There you are!" exclaimed Odette. "That's the sort of big subject I'm always asking him to talk to me about, but he never will."

"But I do . . ." protested Swann.

"What tripe!" said Odette.

"Tripe with onions?" asked the doctor.

"As you see it," Forcheville went on, "does intelligence mean a gift of the gab, does it have to do with how people manage to worm their way in?"

"Finish up so they can take your plate," said Mme. Verdurin sourly, turning to Saniette, who, absorbed in thought, had stopped eating. And perhaps a little ashamed of the tone she had taken: "Never mind, take your time, I only said it for the sake of the others, because it holds up the next course."

"There is," said Brichot, rapping out the syllables, "a very curious definition of intelligence in that gentle anarchist, Fénelon . . ."[60]

"Listen!" said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville and the doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. Now that's interesting. It's not often you have a chance of hearing that."

But Brichot was waiting for Swann to give his own definition. Swann did not answer, and by evading them spoiled the brilliant contest that Mme. Verdurin was so delighted to be able to offer Forcheville.

"Of course. He's just like that with me all the time," said Odette sulkily. "I'm glad to see I'm not the only one he doesn't think is up to his level."

"Those de la Trémouailles,[61] who are so little to be recommended, as Mme. Verdurin has shown us," asked Brichot with powerfully clear articulation, "are they descended from the folk whom Mme. de Sévigné, that good snob, admitted she was pleased to know because it was good for her peasants? Of course, the Marquise had another reason, and one that had to be more important to her, for as a woman of letters through and through, she put copy before all else. Now in the journal she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de la Trémouaille, kept well informed by her great connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Why, no, I don't think it's the same family," ventured Mme. Verdurin.

Saniette, who, after hurriedly giving the butler his plate, which was still full, had plunged back into a meditative silence, emerged from it at last to tell them with a smile the story of a dinner he had attended with the Duc de La Trémoïlle at which it turned out that the Duc did not know George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who was fond of Saniette, thought he ought to supply him with a few particulars about the Duc's culture proving that such ignorance on the latter's part was materially impossible; but suddenly he stopped, realizing that Saniette did not need these proofs and knew the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had just invented it a moment ago. That excellent man suffered from being thought such a bore by the Verdurins; and, aware that he had been even duller than usual at this dinner, he had not wanted to let it end before he succeeded in amusing them. He capitulated so quickly, looked so unhappy at seeing that the effect on which he had counted had failed, and answered Swann in such a pitiful tone so that Swann would not persist in a refutation that was henceforth pointless, "All right, all right; and if I'm mistaken it's not a crime, I hope," that Swann would have liked to be able to say the story was true and delightful. The doctor, who had been listening to them, thought this was the moment to say: *Se non è vero,*[62] but he was not quite sure of the words and was afraid of getting muddled.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the doctor.

"She must not have been too bad at one time, Mme. Verdurin, and she's a woman you can talk to; for me that's everything. Of course she's beginning to get a bit long in the tooth. But Mme. de Crécy—now there's a little woman who seems intelligent—oh yes, by God; you can see at a glance that she keeps her eyes peeled! We're talking about Mme. de Crécy," he said to M. Verdurin, who was approaching, his pipe in his mouth. "I would imagine that as a specimen of the female figure . . ."

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a slap with a wet fish," Cottard rushed to say, having waited in vain for some moments for Forcheville to pause for breath so that he could insert that old joke, which he feared would not be appropriate again if the conversation changed course, and which he delivered with that excess of spontaneity and assurance which attempts to mask the coldness and anxiety inseparable from a recitation. Forcheville was familiar with the joke, he understood it and was amused by it. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing with his mirth, because he had recently discovered a signal for expressing it different from the one used by his wife but equally simple and clear. Scarcely had he begun moving his head and shoulders in the manner of a person shaking with laughter than he would immediately begin coughing as if, in laughing too hard, he had swallowed smoke from his pipe. And still keeping the pipe in one corner of his mouth, he would prolong indefinitely this pantomime of suffocation and hilarity. Thus he and Mme. Verdurin, who, across the room from him, listening to the painter tell her a story, was closing her eyes before dropping her face into her hands, looked like two theater masks each representing merriment in its own way.

M. Verdurin had in fact been wise not to withdraw his pipe from his mouth, for Cottard, who needed to leave the room for a moment, made a joke under his breath that he had learned recently and that he repeated each time he had to go to the same place: "I must absent myself for a moment in aid of the Duc d'Aumale,"[63] so that M. Verdurin's fit began again.

"Take your pipe out of your mouth. Can't you see you're going to choke to death trying not to laugh?" Mme. Verdurin said to him as she came around offering the liqueurs.

"How charming your husband is, he has wit enough for four," declared Forcheville to Mme. Cottard. "Thank you, madame. An old soldier like me never refuses a drop."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette is charming," said M. Verdurin to his wife.

"Why, actually she would like to come to lunch with you some time. We're going to contrive to make it happen, but Swann mustn't hear of it. You know, he puts rather a damper on things. That doesn't mean you shouldn't join us for dinner, of course, we hope to have you often. With summer coming, we'll be dining outdoors quite frequently. That won't bore you, will it—little dinners in the Bois? Good, good, it'll be very nice. You! Aren't you going to go do your job now?" she cried out to the little pianist, in order to display, in front of a newcomer as important as Forcheville, both her wit and her tyrannical power over the faithful.

"M. de Forcheville was saying bad things to me about you," said Mme. Cottard to her husband when he returned to the drawing room.

And he, pursuing the idea of Forcheville's noble lineage, which had preoccupied him from the beginning of dinner, said to him:

"I'm treating a baroness just now, Baronne Putbus;[64] the Putbuses took part in the Crusades, didn't they? They have a lake in Pomerania that's so big it must be ten times the size of the place de la Concorde. I'm treating her for rheumatoid arthritis; she's a charming woman. In fact she knows Mme. Verdurin, I believe."

Which allowed Forcheville, finding himself, a moment later, alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete the favorable judgment that he had passed on her husband:

"And he's so interesting, you can tell he's acquainted with more than a few people. Lord, they know such a lot, these doctors!"

"I'm going to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann," said the pianist.

"My God! I trust we don't have the 'sonata-snake'[65] in our midst?" asked M. de Forcheville to create an effect.

But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard that pun, did not understand it and thought M. de Forcheville was making a mistake. He went up to them briskly to correct it:

"No, no, one doesn't say *serpent à sonates,* it's *serpent à sonnettes,* 'rattlesnake,' " he said in a tone that was zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the pun to him. The doctor blushed.

"Admit that it's funny, Doctor!"

"Oh, I've known it for too long," answered Cottard.

But they fell silent; under the agitation of the violin tremolos which protected it with their quivering extended two octaves above—and as in a mountainous countryside, behind the apparent and vertiginous immobility of a waterfall one sees, two hundred feet down, the minuscule form of a woman walking—the little phrase had just appeared, distant, graceful, protected by the long unfurling of its transparent, ceaseless curtain of sound. And Swann, in his heart, appealed to it as to a confidant of his love, as to a friend of Odette's who certainly should tell her to pay no attention to that Forcheville.

"Ah, you're late!" said Mme. Verdurin to a regular whom she had invited only "for coffee." "Brichot was incomparable—so eloquent! But he's gone. Isn't that right, Monsieur Swann? I believe it was the first time you and he had met," she said in order to point out to him that she was the one to whom he owed the introduction. "Wasn't our Brichot delicious?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? He didn't interest you?" Mme. Verdurin asked him curtly.

"Why, of course, madame, very much, I was delighted. He is perhaps a little peremptory and a little jovial for my taste. I would like to see some hesitation, some gentleness now and then, but one senses that he knows so many things and he seems like an all-around decent man."

Everyone went home very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were:

"I've rarely seen Mme. Verdurin as spirited as she was this evening."

"What exactly is this Mme. Verdurin of yours, rather a mixed bag of goods?" said Forcheville to the painter, whom he had invited to ride with him.

Odette watched with regret as he went off; she did not dare decline to ride with Swann, but was in a bad mood in the carriage, and when he asked her if he ought to come in, she said, "Of course," shrugging her shoulders impatiently. When all the guests had gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband:

"Did you notice how Swann laughed foolishly when we were talking about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had noticed that several times, when saying this name, Swann and Forcheville had omitted the particle. Having no doubt that they did this to show they were not intimidated by titles, she wanted to imitate their pride, but had not fully understood by which grammatical form it was expressed. And so her incorrect way of speaking won out over her republican intransigence, and she still said "the de la Trémoïlles" or rather, using an abbreviation current in the words of the café songs and caricature captions, which swallowed the *de,* "the d'La Trémoïlles," but she made up for it by saying: "Madame La Trémoïlle," "The *Duchesse,* as Swann calls her," she added ironically with a smile which proved she was only quoting and did not accept responsibility for so naive and ridiculous a denomination.

"I must tell you I found him extremely stupid."

And M. Verdurin answered her:

"He's not direct, he's cunning, always betwixt and between. He's a fellow who's always wanting to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. How different from Forcheville! There's a man who at least tells you fair and square what he's thinking. You either agree with him or you don't. He's not like the other, neither fish nor fowl. Anyway, Odette really seems to prefer Forcheville, and I think she's right. And then, also, since Swann wants to play the society man with us, defender of duchesses, at least the other has his own title; he's still the Comte de Forcheville," he added delicately, as if, well informed about the history of that dignity, he was scrupulously weighing its particular value.

"I must tell you," said Mme. Verdurin, "that he felt called upon to direct some venomous and quite ridiculous insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, since he saw that Brichot was well liked in this house, it was a way of attacking us, of disparaging our dinner party. What I suspect is he's the sort of good friend who says nasty things about you on his way out."

"But that's what I told you," answered M. Verdurin. "He's a typical failure, the little fellow envious of anything that's at all big."

In reality there was not one of the faithful who was not more malicious than Swann; but they all took care to season their slander with familiar jokes, with little hints of anxiety and cordiality; whereas the slightest reserve that Swann allowed himself, omitting such conventional formulas as, "Now I don't mean to say anything bad," to which he did not deign to stoop, seemed perfidious. There are authors of true originality in whom the least boldness offends because they have not first flattered the tastes of the public and have not served it the commonplaces which it is used to; it was in the same way that Swann roused M. Verdurin's indignation. In Swann's case as in theirs, it was the novelty of his language that convinced one of the darkness of his intentions.

Swann was still unaware of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins' and continued to regard all their absurdities in a favorable light, with the eyes of his love.

Most of the time, at least, he met Odette only in the evening; but during the day, though he was afraid of causing her to become tired of him by going to her house, he wanted at least not to cease to occupy her thoughts and was always looking for an opportunity of involving himself in them, but in a way that would be pleasant for her. If, in the window of a florist or a jeweler, the sight of a shrub or a jewel charmed him, instantly he would think of sending it to Odette, imagining that the pleasure it had given him would be felt by her too, increasing her affection for him, and he would immediately have it delivered to the rue La Pérouse so as not to delay the moment when, because she was receiving something from him, he would feel he was in some way close to her. He especially wanted her to receive it before she went out so that the gratitude she felt would win him a more tender welcome when she saw him at the Verdurins', or even—who knows?—if the shopkeeper was prompt enough, perhaps a letter which she would send him before dinner, or her arrival in person at his house, in a supplementary visit to thank him. Just as he had once tested Odette's nature for reactions of resentment, so now he sought by reactions of gratitude to extract from her intimate particles of feeling that she had not yet revealed to him.

Often, she had money troubles and, hard-pressed by a debt, would ask him for help. He was happy about that, as about everything that could give Odette a strong impression of the love he had for her, or simply a strong impression of his influence, of how useful he could be to her. No doubt if someone had said to him in the beginning: "It's your position that attracts her," and now: "It's because of your wealth that she loves you," he would not have believed it, and would also not have minded very much that people imagined she was attached to him—that people felt they were joined together—by something as powerful as snobbishness or money. But, even if he had thought it was true, perhaps he would not have been hurt by discovering within Odette's love for him that mainstay more durable than his charm or the good qualities she might find in him: namely, self-interest, a self-interest that would prevent the day ever coming when she would be tempted to stop seeing him. For the moment, by overwhelming her with presents, by doing her favors, he could rely upon advantages extrinsic to his person, his intelligence, to take over from him the exhausting responsibility of pleasing her by himself. And as for the pleasure of being in love, of living by love alone, the reality of which he doubted at times, it was increased in value for him, as dilettante of immaterial sensations, by the price he was paying her for it—as we observe that people who are uncertain whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are delightful convince themselves of it and also of the exceptional quality and disinterest of their own taste, by paying a hundred francs a day for a hotel room that allows them to experience that sight and that sound.

One day when reflections of this kind were leading him back once again to the memory of the time when people had described Odette to him as a kept woman, and when he was amusing himself yet again by contrasting that strange personification, the kept woman—an iridescent amalgam of unfamiliar and diabolical elements, set, like some apparition by Gustave Moreau,[66] among venomous flowers interwoven with precious jewels—with the Odette on whose face he had seen the same feelings of pity for a sufferer, revolt against an injustice, gratitude for a favor, that he had seen in earlier days on his own mother's face and on the faces of his friends, the Odette whose conversation had so often turned on the things he knew best himself, on his collections, his room, his old servant, the banker who looked after his securities, it happened that this last image of the banker reminded him that he would have to call on him soon to draw some money. In fact, if this month he was less liberal when helping Odette out of her material difficulties than he had been the month before when he had given her five thousand francs, and if he did not present her with a diamond rivière that she wanted, he would not reawaken her admiration for his generosity, her gratitude, which made him so happy, and he would even risk making her think that his love for her, as she saw its manifestations become less abundant, had diminished. Then, suddenly, he wondered if this was not precisely what was meant by "keeping" her (as if, in fact, this notion of keeping could be derived from elements not at all mysterious or perverse but belonging to the intimate substance of his daily life, like that thousand-franc bill, domestic and familiar, torn and reglued, which

his valet, after having paid the month's accounts and the quarter's rent for him, had locked in the drawer of the old desk from which Swann had taken it out again to send it with four others to Odette) and if one could not apply to Odette, starting from when he had come to know her (because he did not for a moment suspect that she could ever have received money from anyone before him), those words which he had believed so irreconcilable with her—"kept woman." He could not study this idea in greater depth, because an attack of that mental laziness which in him was congenital, intermittent, and providential, happened at that moment to extinguish all light in his intelligence, as abruptly as, later, when electric lighting had been installed everywhere, one could cut off the electricity in a house. His mind groped for a moment in the darkness, he took off his glasses, wiped the lenses, passed his hand over his eyes, and saw the light again only when he found himself in the presence of an entirely different idea, namely that he ought to try to send six or seven thousand francs to Odette next month instead of five, because of the surprise and pleasure it would give her.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home waiting for the hour when he would meet Odette at the Verdurins' or rather in one of the summer restaurants they favored in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go and dine in one of those elegant houses where he had once been a habitual guest at table. He did not want to lose touch with people who—one never could tell—might perhaps be useful to Odette one day and through whom, in the meantime, he often succeeded in pleasing her. Also, his long habit of society, of luxury, had given him, at the same time as a disdain for them, a need for them, so that by the time he had come to regard the most modest houses as exactly on a par with the most princely, his senses were so accustomed to the latter that he experienced some indisposition at finding himself in the former. He had the same esteem—identical to a degree they could not have believed—for a petit bourgeois family which asked him up to a dance on the fifth floor, Stairway D, left at the landing, as for the Princess of Parma, who gave the finest parties in Paris; but he did not have the feeling of being actually at a ball while standing with the fathers in the bedroom of the mistress of the house and the sight of the washstands covered with towels, of the beds, transformed into cloakrooms, their coverlets piled with overcoats and hats, gave him the same stifling sensation that people today who are used to twenty years of electricity may experience at the smell of a lamp blackening or a night-light smoking. On the days when he dined in town, he would have the horses harnessed for seven-thirty; he would dress while thinking about Odette and so would not be alone, because the constant thought of Odette would give to the moments in which he was away from her the same particular charm as to those in which she was there. He would get into his carriage, but he would feel that this thought had leaped into it at the same time and settled on his knees like a beloved pet which one takes everywhere and which he would keep with him at the table, unbeknownst to the other guests. He would stroke it, warm himself at it, and, experiencing a sort of languor, yield to a light quivering that tensed his neck and his nose, and was new to him, all the while fastening the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. Having felt unwell and sad for some time, especially from the time that Odette had introduced Forcheville to the Verdurins, Swann would have liked to go and rest a little in the country. But he would not have had the courage to leave Paris for a single day while Odette was there. The air was warm; these were the finest days of spring. And though he might cross a city of stone to immure himself in some town house, what was constantly before his eyes was a park that he owned near Combray, where, from four o'clock on, before reaching the asparagus patch, because of the wind that comes from the fields of Méséglise, one could savor as much coolness under an arbor as at the edge of the pond encircled by forget-me-nots and gladioli, and where, when he dined, it was at a table around which ran red currants and roses intertwined by his gardener.

After dinner, if the appointed meeting time at the Bois or Saint-Cloud was early, he would leave so soon after getting up from the table—especially if rain was threatening to fall and make the "faithful" go home earlier—that once the Princesse des Laumes (at whose home they had dined late and whom Swann had left before coffee was served in order to join the Verdurins on the island in the Bois) had said:

"Really, if Swann were thirty years older and had bladder trouble, one would excuse him for running off like that. But the fact is he doesn't care what people think."

He told himself that the charm of springtime which he could not go down to enjoy at Combray he could at least find on the Île des Cygnes[67] or at Saint-Cloud. But since he could think only about Odette, he did not even know if he had detected the smell of the leaves, if there had been any light from the moon. He was greeted by the little phrase from the sonata played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was no piano there, the Verdurins would take great pains to have one brought down from a bedroom or dining room: it was not that Swann had come back into favor with them, on the contrary. But the idea of organizing an ingenious pleasure for someone, even for someone they did not like, fostered in them, during the time required for these preparations, exceptional and ephemeral feelings of warmth and cordiality. Now and then he would say to himself that another spring evening was passing, he would force himself to pay attention to the trees, the sky. But the agitation with which Odette's presence filled him, and also a slight feverish indisposition that had hardly left him for some time now, denied him that sense of calm and well-being which is the indispensable background to the impressions we derive from nature.

One evening when Swann had agreed to dine with the Verdurins, and had just mentioned during dinner that the next day he was going to attend a banquet for old comrades, Odette answered him across the table, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the faithful, in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

"Yes, I know you have your banquet, so I won't see you till I get home, but don't be too late."

Even though Swann had never become very seriously offended by Odette's friendliness toward one or another of the faithful, he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus confess in front of everyone, with such a calm lack of modesty, to their regular meetings every night, his privileged position in her house, and the preference for him which it implied. Of course Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman, and the ascendancy he exerted over a creature so inferior to him was not something that ought to appear to him so flattering to see proclaimed to all the "faithful," but from the time he had first noticed that many men found Odette an enchanting and desirable woman, the attraction her body had for them had awoken in him a painful need to master her entirely even in the smallest parts of her heart. And he had begun to set an inestimable price on those times spent in her house at night, when he would sit her on his knees, make her say what she thought of one thing, of another, when he would count up the only goods whose possession he now valued on earth. And so, after this dinner, taking her aside, he did not fail to thank her effusively, endeavoring to teach her according to the degrees of gratitude he displayed to her, the scale of pleasures that she could give him, the highest of which was to guarantee him, during the time that his love should last and make him vulnerable to them, protection from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from the banquet the next day, it was pouring rain, all he had was his victoria; a friend offered to drive him home in his coupé, and because Odette, since she had asked him to come, had given him the assurance that she was not waiting for anyone else, it was with a tranquil mind and a happy heart that, rather than set off in the rain like this, he would have gone back home to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he did not seem anxious to spend the last part of every evening without exception in her company, she might neglect to reserve it for him, precisely the one time when he particularly desired it.

He reached her house after eleven o'clock, and, as he was apologizing for not being able to come earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late, the storm had made her unwell, she had a headache and warned him that she would not keep him more than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; and, soon afterward, she felt tired and wanted to go to sleep.

"So, no cattleyas tonight," he said to her, "after I was so hoping for a nice little cattleya."

And, a little sulky and irritable, she answered:

"No, no, darling, no cattleyas tonight, you can see I'm unwell!"

"It might have done you good, but I won't insist."

She asked him to put out the light before he went, he himself closed the curtains of the bed and left. But when he was back at home, the idea came to him abruptly that perhaps Odette had been waiting for someone else that night, had only pretended to be tired, and had asked him to put out the light only so that he would believe she was going to go to sleep, that as soon as he left, she had put the light on again, and let in the man who was going to spend the night with her. He looked at the time. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her, he went back out, took a hackney carriage, and stopped it very close to where she lived, in a little street at right angles to the one which lay behind her house and into which he sometimes went to knock at her bedroom window so that she would come and open the door for him; he got out of the carriage, the neighborhood was dark and deserted, he had only to walk a few steps, and he came out almost opposite her house. Amid the blackness of all the windows in the street in which the lights had long since been put out, he saw just one from which there spilled out—between shutters which pressed its mysterious golden pulp—the light which filled the bedroom and which, on so many other evenings, as soon as he saw it when he came into the street, lifted his spirits and announced to him: "She's there waiting for you" and which now tortured him by saying: "She's there with the man she was waiting for." He wanted to know who it was; he slipped along the wall as far as the window, but between the oblique slats of the shutters he could see

nothing; all he heard in the silence of the night was the murmur of conversation. Certainly it hurt him to see that light and know that in its golden atmosphere, behind the sash, the unseen and detested pair were moving about, to hear the murmur revealing the presence of the man who had come after he left, Odette's duplicity, the happiness she was enjoying with him.

And yet he was glad he had come: the torment that had forced him to leave his house had become less acute as it became less vague, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, back then, a sudden helpless suspicion, was now in his grasp, fully illuminated by the lamp, an unwitting prisoner in that room into which, when he chose, he could go to surprise it and capture it; or rather he would knock on the shutters as he often did when he came very late; this way at least, Odette would learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and heard the talking, and that, after having just a moment ago pictured her laughing with the other man at his illusions, he would now be the one to see them, confident in their error, actually outwitted by him whom they believed to be so very far away and who, in fact, already knew he was going to knock at the shutters. And perhaps, what he was feeling at this moment, which was almost pleasant, was also something different from the assuaging of a doubt and a distress: it was a pleasure in knowledge. If, ever since he had fallen in love, things had regained for him a little of the delightful interest they had once had for him, but only insofar as they were illuminated by the memory of Odette, now it was another of the faculties of his studious youth that his jealousy revived, a passion for truth, but for a truth that was likewise interposed between him and his mistress, taking its light only from her, a completely individual truth whose sole object, of an infinite value and almost disinterested in its beauty, was Odette's actions, her relationships, her plans, her past. At all other periods of his life, the little everyday words and deeds of a person had always seemed worthless to Swann if someone conveyed them to him as the subject of a bit of gossip, he found such gossip meaningless, and, while he listened to it, only the most vulgar part of his attention was interested; these were the times when he felt himself to be most mediocre. But in this strange phase of love, an individual person assumes something so profound that the curiosity he now felt awakening in him concerning the smallest occupations of this woman, was the same curiosity he had once had about History. And all these things that would have shamed him up to now, such as spying, tonight, outside a window, tomorrow perhaps, for all he knew, cleverly inducing neutral people to speak, bribing servants, listening at doors, now seemed to him to be, fully as much as were the deciphering of texts, the weighing of evidence, and the interpretation of old monuments, merely methods of scientific investigation with a real intellectual value and appropriate to a search for the truth.

On the point of knocking on the shutters, he felt a pang of shame thinking that Odette was going to know he had been suspicious, that he had come back, that he had posted himself in the street. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was about to do was very uncouth, and from now on she would detest him, whereas now, for the moment, so long as he had not knocked, perhaps, even while deceiving him, she loved him. How often we sacrifice the fulfillment of a possible happiness to our impatience for an immediate pleasure! But the desire to know the truth was stronger and seemed to him nobler. He knew that the reality of certain circumstances which he would have given his life to reconstruct accurately could be read behind that window striated with light, as under the gold-illuminated cover of one of those precious manuscripts to whose artistic richness itself the scholar who consults them cannot remain indifferent. He felt a delicious pleasure in learning the truth that so impassioned him from this unique, ephemeral, and precious transcript, made of a translucid substance so warm and so beautiful. Then, too, the advantage he felt he had—that he so needed to feel he had—over them lay perhaps less in knowing than in being able to show them he knew. He raised himself on his tiptoes. He knocked. They had not heard, he knocked again more loudly, the conversation stopped. A man's voice which he tried to distinguish from among the voices of those of Odette's friends whom he knew asked:

"Who's there?"

He was not sure he recognized it. He knocked again. The window was opened, then the shutters. Now there was no way to retreat, and since she was going to know everything, so as not to seem too wretched, too jealous and curious, he merely called out carelessly and gaily:

"Please don't go to any trouble. I was just passing by and I saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked. Before him, two old gentlemen were standing at the window, one holding a lamp, and then he saw the bedroom, a bedroom unknown to him. Because he was in the habit, when he came to Odette's house very late, of recognizing her window by the fact that it was the only one lit among windows that were all alike, he had made a mistake and knocked at the window after hers, which belonged to the adjoining house. He went away apologizing and returned home, happy that the satisfaction of his curiosity had left their love intact and that after having simulated a sort of indifference toward Odette for so long, he had not given her, by his jealousy, that proof of loving her too much which, between two lovers, exempts forever after, from loving enough, the one who receives it. He did not talk to her about this misadventure, he himself did not think about it further. But now and then his thoughts as they moved about would come upon the memory of it which they had not noticed, bump up against it, drive it further in, and Swann would feel a sudden, deep pain. As if it were a physical pain, Swann's mind could not lessen it; but at least with physical pain, because it is independent of thought, thought can dwell on it, note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this pain the mind, merely by recalling it, re-created it. To wish not to think about it was still to think about it, still to suffer from it. And when, chatting with friends, he forgot his hurt, all of a sudden a word someone said to him would make him change expression, like a man with an injury whom some clumsy person has just carelessly touched on his sore arm or leg. When he left Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled her smiles, derisive when speaking of this or that other person, and affectionate toward him, the heaviness of her head which she had shifted from its axis to incline it, let it fall, almost despite herself, onto his lips, as she had done the first time in the carriage, the languishing looks she had cast at him while she was in his arms, as with a shiver she pulled her inclined head in against her shoulder.

But instantly his jealousy, as if it were the shadow of his love, would furnish itself with a duplicate of the new smile she had given him that very evening—and which, inverse now, mocked Swann and was filled with love for another man; with that inclination of her head but reversed toward other lips; with all the marks of affection, now given to another man, that she had given him. And all the sensuous memories he carried away from her house were like so many sketches, "plans" like those a decorator submits to you, that allowed Swann to form an idea of the ardent or swooning attitudes she might adopt with other men. So that he came to regret every pleasure he enjoyed with her, every invented caress whose sweetness he had been so imprudent as to point out to her, every grace he discovered in her, for he knew that a moment later, they would supply new instruments for torturing him.

This torture became still crueler when Swann remembered a brief expression he had surprised, a few days before, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner, at the Verdurins'. Either because Forcheville, feeling that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favor in their house, wanted to use him as a whipping boy and shine in front of them at his expense, or because he had been irritated by a clumsy remark which Saniette had just made to him and which, in fact, had gone unnoticed by those present, who were not aware of the unpleasant allusion it might contain quite contrary to the intentions of the one who had uttered it without any malice, or finally because for some time now he had been looking for an opportunity to induce them to banish from the house someone who was too well acquainted with him and whom he knew to be so refined that he felt embarrassed at certain moments merely by his presence, Forcheville answered this clumsy remark of Saniette's with such coarseness, hurling insults at him, and emboldened, as he shouted, by Saniette's pain, his dismay, his entreaties, that the wretched man, after asking Mme. Verdurin if he ought to stay, and receiving no answer, had left the house stammering, tears in his eyes. Odette had watched this scene impassively, but when the door closed on Saniette, lowering as it were by several notches her face's habitual expression, so as to be able to find herself, in her baseness, on an equal footing with Forcheville, she had put a sparkle in her eyes with a sly smile of congratulations for the audacity he had shown, of mockery for the man who had been its victim; she had cast him a glance of complicity in evil which was so clearly intended to say: "That finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see how pathetic he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met that glance, sobering in a moment from the anger or simulation of anger which still warmed him, smiled and answered:

"He needed only to be friendly, and he would still be here. A good rebuke does a man no harm at any age."

One day when Swann had gone out in the middle of the afternoon to pay a call, not having found the person he wanted to see, it occurred to him to go to Odette's house at an hour when he never went there, but when he knew she was always at home having her nap or writing letters before teatime, and when he would enjoy seeing her for a little while without bothering her. The concierge told him he thought she was there; he rang, thought he heard a noise, heard footsteps, but no one opened the door. Anxious, irritated, he went into the little street on which the other side of the house looked out, stood in front of the window of Odette's bedroom; the curtains prevented him from seeing anything, he knocked hard on the windowpanes, called out; no one opened the window. He saw that some neighbors were watching him. He went away, thinking that after all, perhaps he had been mistaken in believing he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied by it that he could not think about anything else. An hour later, he came back. He found her there; she told him she had been at home earlier

when he rang, but was sleeping; the bell had woken her, she had guessed it was Swann, she had run after him, but he had already left. She had certainly heard the sound of knocking at the windowpanes. Swann immediately recognized this statement as one of those fragments of true fact with which liars, when caught unprepared, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood they are inventing, believing they can accommodate it there and steal its resemblance to the Truth. Of course when Odette had just done something she did not want to reveal, she would hide it deep inside herself. But as soon as she found herself face-to-face with the man to whom she wanted to lie, she was overcome with uneasiness, all her ideas collapsed, her faculties of invention and reasoning were paralyzed, she found nothing in her head but emptiness, yet it was necessary to say something, and all she would find within reach was the very thing she had wanted to conceal and which, being true, was all that had remained there. She would detach a little piece from it, unimportant in itself, telling herself that after all this was better since the detail was authentic and did not present the same dangers as a false detail. "At least this is true," she would say to herself, "so much is gained, anyway. He may make inquiries and he'll see that it's true, so at least it won't be this that gives me away." She was wrong, it was this that gave her away, she did not realize that the true detail had angles that could fit only into the contiguous details of the true fact from which she had arbitrarily detached it, angles which, whatever the invented details among which she might place it, would always reveal, by the excess material and unfilled empty areas, that it was not from among these that it had come. "She admits that she heard me ring, then knock, and that she thought it was me, that she wanted to see me," Swann said to himself. "But this does not conform with the fact that no one opened the door."

But he did not point out this contradiction to her, because he thought that, left to herself, Odette would perhaps produce some lie that would be a faint indication of the truth; she would talk; he would not interrupt her, he would collect with an avid and painful piety the words she said to him, feeling (precisely because she was hiding it behind them as she talked to him) that, like the sacred veil, they retained the vague imprint, sketched the uncertain features, of that reality so infinitely precious and, alas! undiscoverable—what she had been doing that afternoon at three o'clock, when he came—of which he would never possess more than these lies, illegible and divine vestiges, and which now existed only in the memory of this woman, who would conceal it like stolen goods and contemplate it without being able to appreciate it, but would not hand it over to him. Of course, he fully suspected at times that in themselves Odette's daily actions were not passionately interesting, and that the relationships she might have with other men did not naturally, universally, and for every intelligent creature exhale a morbid sadness capable of infecting one with a feverish desire to commit suicide. He would then realize that this interest, this sadness existed only in him like a disease, and that, once this disease was cured, Odette's actions, the kisses she might have given would become once again as harmless as those of so many other women. But the fact that the painful curiosity which Swann brought to them now had its origin only in himself was not enough to make him think it was unreasonable to consider this curiosity important and to use every possible means to satisfy it. For Swann was reaching an age the philosophy of which—encouraged, in his case, by the current philosophy of the day, and also by that of the circle in which he had spent so much of his life, that of the social set attached to the Princess des Laumes, where one's intelligence was understood to be in direct ratio to one's skepticism and nothing was real and incontestable except the individual tastes of each person—is no longer that of youth, but the positive, almost medical philosophy of men who, instead of externalizing the objects of their aspirations, try to derive from the years they have already lived a stable residue of habits and passions which they can regard as characteristic and permanent and to which, deliberately, they will take care before anything else that the kind of life they adopt may provide satisfaction. Swann thought it prudent to make allowance in his life for the pain he felt at not knowing what Odette had been doing, just as he made allowance for the fresh outbreak which a damp climate might cause in his eczema; to provide in his budget for a sizable sum of available funds for obtaining information about how Odette spent her days, without which he would feel unhappy, just as he reserved the same for other partialities from which he knew he could expect to derive pleasure, at least before he had fallen in love, like his partiality for collections and for good food.

When he tried to say good-bye to Odette in order to leave for home, she asked him to stay longer and even held him back suddenly, by taking his arm, when he was about to open the door to go out. But he took no notice of this, because among the multitude of gestures, remarks, minor incidents that fill a conversation, it is inevitable that we should come close, without detecting anything in them to attract our attention, to those that hide a truth our suspicions are blindly seeking, and that we should stop, on the other hand, at those behind which there is nothing. She kept saying to him: "How unfortunate—you never come in the afternoon, and the one time you do come, I don't see you." He knew very well that she was not sufficiently in love with him to be so keenly distressed at having missed his visit, but, because she was good, desirous of pleasing him, and often sad when she had vexed him, he found it quite natural that she should be sad this time at having deprived him of the pleasure of spending an hour together, a very great pleasure, not for her, but for him. Yet it was a thing unimportant enough so that the pained air she continued to have ended by surprising him. She reminded him even more than usual, when she looked this way, of the faces of the women portrayed by the painter of the Primavera.[68] She had at this moment their downcast and heartbroken expression which seems to be succumbing beneath the weight of a grief too heavy for them, when they are merely letting the child Jesus play with a pomegranate or watching Moses pour water into a trough.[69] He had once before seen the same sadness on her face, but he no longer knew when. And suddenly he remembered: it was when Odette had lied in talking to Mme. Verdurin the day after that dinner to which she had not come on the pretext that she was ill and in reality so that she could stay with Swann. Of course, even if she had been the most scrupulous of women, she might not have felt remorse over a lie as innocent. But the lies Odette generally told were less innocent and served to prevent discoveries that might have created for her, with one person or another, terrible difficulties. And so when she lied, struck by fear, aware that she was feebly armed to defend herself, uncertain of success, she wanted to cry, from exhaustion, like certain children who have not slept. And she also knew that her lie was usually doing serious harm to the man to whom she was telling it, and into whose power she was perhaps going to fall if she lied badly. And so she felt at once humble and guilty in his presence. And when she had to tell an insignificant social lie, the association of sensations and memories would leave her with the faintness that follows overexertion and the regret that follows an act of malevolence.

What depressing lie was she telling Swann that gave her this pained look, this plaintive voice which seemed to falter under the effort she demanded of herself and to ask for forgiveness? He had an idea that it was not merely the truth about the incident in the afternoon that she was endeavoring to hide from him, but something more immediate, that had perhaps not yet transpired and was quite imminent, something that might enlighten him about this truth. At that moment, he heard the bell ring. Odette did not stop talking, but her words were now no more than a long lament: her regret at not having seen Swann in the afternoon, at not having opened the door to him, had turned into true despair.

He could hear the front door closing again and the sound of a carriage, as if someone was going away again—probably the one Swann was not supposed to meet—after being told that Odette was out. Then, when he reflected that merely by coming at an hour when he was not in the habit of coming he had managed to disturb so many arrangements she did not want him to discover, he was overcome with a feeling of discouragement, almost despondency. But because he loved Odette, because he was in the habit of turning all his thoughts toward her, the pity he might have inspired in himself he felt for her instead, and he murmured: "Poor darling!" As he was leaving her, she picked up several letters that she had on her table and asked him if he would put them in the post. He took them away with him and, once he was home, saw that he had kept the letters on him. He returned as far as the post office, drew them from his pocket, and before tossing them into the box looked at the addresses. They were all for tradesmen except one which was for Forcheville. He held it in his hand. He said to himself: "If I saw what was inside it, I would know what she calls him, how she talks to him, if there's anything between them. It may even be that by not looking, I'm behaving with a lack of delicacy toward Odette, because this is the only way to free myself of a suspicion which is perhaps calumnious for her, which is in any case bound to hurt her, and which nothing would be able to destroy, once the letter was gone."

He returned home after leaving the post office, but he had kept that last letter with him. He lit a candle and held up close to it the envelope he had not dared to open. At first he could not read anything, but the envelope was thin and, by making it adhere to the stiff card that was enclosed in it, he could read, through its transparency, the last words. It was a very cold, formal ending. If he had not been the one looking at a letter addressed to Forcheville, but instead Forcheville reading a letter addressed to Swann, Forcheville would have seen words that were far more affectionate! He took firm hold of the card that danced in the envelope, which was larger than it was, then, sliding it with his thumb, brought its different lines one after another under the part of the envelope where the paper was not doubled, the only part through which one could read.

Despite this he could not distinguish anything very well. But it did not matter, because he had seen enough to realize that its subject was a minor, unimportant event that had nothing to do with a love affair; it was something relating to an uncle of Odette's. Swann had read clearly at the beginning of the line: "I was right," but had not understood what Odette had been right in doing, when suddenly, a word he had not at first been able to decipher appeared and illuminated the

meaning of the entire sentence: “I was right to open the door, it was my uncle.” Open the door! So Forcheville had been there that afternoon when Swann rang the bell, and she had made him leave, which was the source of the noise Swann had heard.

Then he read the whole letter; at the end she apologized for having acted so unceremoniously toward him and said he had forgotten his cigarettes at her house, the same sentence she had written to Swann one of the first times he had come. But in Swann’s case she had added: “If you had left your heart here, I would not have let you take it away again.” For Forcheville nothing like that: no allusion that might suggest that they were having an affair. And in fact, Forcheville was more deceived in all this than he, since Odette was writing to him to assure him that the visitor had been her uncle. In the end he, Swann, was the one she considered important, the one for whom she had dismissed the other. And yet, if there was nothing between Odette and Forcheville, why had she not opened the door right away, why had she said, “I did the right thing to open the door, it was my uncle”? if she was doing nothing wrong at that moment, how would Forcheville even be able to explain to himself the fact that she had not opened the door? Swann remained there, disconsolate, embarrassed and yet happy, with this envelope which Odette had handed over to him quite fearlessly, so absolute was her confidence in his discretion, but through the transparent glazing of which was revealed to him, along with the secret of an incident which he would never have believed it possible to discover, a little of Odette’s life, as in a narrow illuminated section cut directly out of the unknown. Then his jealousy rejoiced over it, as if that jealousy had an independent, selfish vitality, voracious for anything that would feed it, even at Swann’s own expense. Now it had something to feed on and Swann was going to be able to begin worrying each day over the visitors Odette might have received at about five o’clock, and begin trying to learn where Forcheville had been at that hour. For Swann’s affection continued to preserve the same character imprinted on it from the very beginning by his ignorance as to how Odette spent her days and by the mental laziness that stopped him from compensating for his ignorance with his imagination. He had not been jealous at first of Odette’s whole life, but only of the times when some circumstances, perhaps wrongly interpreted, led him to suppose that Odette might have deceived him. His jealousy, like an octopus that casts a first, then a second, then a third mooring, attached itself solidly first to that time, five o’clock in the afternoon, then to another, then to yet another. But Swann was not capable of inventing his sufferings. They were merely the memory, the perpetuation of a suffering that had come to him from outside himself.

From outside, however, everything brought him more suffering. He wanted to separate Odette from Forcheville, take her away to spend a few days in the south. But he believed all the men who happened to be in the hotel desired her and that she desired them. And so he who in former days, when traveling, had sought out new people, large groups, now appeared unsociable, appeared to be fleeing the company of men as if it had cruelly wounded him. And how could he not be misanthropic, when he saw every man as a possible lover of Odette’s? And so his jealousy, even more than the sensuous and lighthearted feeling he had at first had for Odette, altered Swann’s character and changed entirely, in the eyes of other people, the very appearance of the external signs by which that character was manifested.

A month after the day on which he had read the letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner which the Verdurins were giving in the Bois. As they were preparing to leave, he noticed some confabulations between Mme. Verdurin and several of the guests and thought he heard them reminding the pianist to come to a party at Chatou[70] the next day; yet, he, Swann, had not been invited.

The Verdurins had spoken in low voices and in vague terms, but the painter, probably inattentive, exclaimed:

“There must be no lights on and he must play the ‘Moonlight Sonata’ in the dark so we can watch how things become illuminated.”

Mme. Verdurin, seeing that Swann was two steps away, now wore that expression in which the desire to make the person who is talking be quiet and the desire to maintain a look of innocence in the eyes of the person who is hearing neutralize each other in an intense nullity of gaze, in which the motionless sign of intelligence and complicity is concealed beneath an innocent smile, and which in the end, being common to all those who find themselves making a social blunder, reveals it instantly, if not to those making it, at least to the one who is its victim. Odette suddenly had the desperate look of one who has given up fighting the crushing difficulties of life, and Swann anxiously counted the minutes that separated him from the time when, after leaving the restaurant, during the drive home with her, he would be able to ask her for an explanation, persuade her not to go to Chatou the next day or to see that he was invited, and to soothe in her arms the anguish he was feeling. At last the carriages were sent for. Mme. Verdurin said to Swann:

“Well now, good-bye, we’ll see you soon, I trust?” attempting by the amiableness of her gaze and the constraint of her smile to keep him from realizing that she was not saying to him, as she had always done until now: “Tomorrow, then, at Chatou, the day after at my house.”

M. and Mme. Verdurin made Forcheville get in with them, Swann’s carriage had pulled up behind theirs, and he was waiting for theirs to leave so that he could help Odette into his.

“Odette, we’re taking you home,” said Mme. Verdurin, “we have a little spot for you here next to M. de Forcheville.”

“Yes, madame,” answered Odette.

“What? I thought I was driving you home,” cried Swann, saying what had to be said without dissembling, because the carriage door was open, the seconds were numbered, and he could not go home without her in his present state.

“But Mme. Verdurin asked me . . .”

“Now, you can certainly go home alone, we’ve let you have her to yourself often enough,” said Mme. Verdurin.

“But I had something important to say to Madame.”

“Well, you can write it to her in a letter . . .”

“Good-bye,” Odette said, holding out her hand.

He tried to smile but looked utterly crushed.

“Did you see the way Swann permits himself to behave with us now?” said Mme. Verdurin to her husband when they were back at home. “I thought he was going to eat me alive because we were taking Odette with us. It’s quite unseemly, really! Let him just say right out that we’re running a house of assignation! I don’t understand how Odette can tolerate such behavior. He absolutely seems to be saying: You belong to me. I’m going to tell Odette what I think, I hope she’ll understand.”

And she also added, a moment later, angrily:

“No, really, the vile creature!” using, without realizing it, and perhaps responding to the same obscure need to justify herself—like Françoise at Combray when the chicken did not want to die—the same words which the last twitches of an inoffensive animal in its death throes wring from the countryman who is killing it.

And when Mme. Verdurin’s carriage had left and Swann’s came forward, his coachman looked at him and asked if he was not ill or if there had not been an accident.

Swann sent him away, he wanted to walk, and he returned home on foot through the Bois. He talked to himself out loud, in the same slightly artificial tone he had always used when he enumerated the charms of the little clan and extolled the magnanimity of the Verdurins. But just as Odette’s conversation, smiles, kisses became as odious to him as he had once found them sweet, if they were addressed to another man, in the same way the Verdurins’ salon, which only recently had still seemed to him amusing, inspired with a real enthusiasm for art and even a sort of moral nobility, now that a man other than himself was the one Odette was going there to meet, to love without restraint, exhibited to him its absurdities, its foolishness, its ignominy.

He pictured to himself with disgust the next day’s soiree at Chatou. “The idea of going to Chatou anyway! Like drapers after shutting up shop! These people really are sublimely bourgeois, they can’t really exist, they must have come out of a Labiche comedy!”[71]

The Cottards would be there, maybe Brichot. “It’s quite grotesque, the lives of these nonentities, always in each other’s pockets like this. They would feel utterly lost, I swear, if they didn’t all meet up again tomorrow *at Chatou*!” Alas! the painter would be there too, the painter who enjoyed “matchmaking,” who would invite Forcheville to come to his studio with Odette. He could see Odette in clothes far too formal for this country outing, “because she’s so vulgar and worst of all, poor little thing, such a fool!!!”

He could hear the jokes that Mme. Verdurin would make after dinner, jokes which, whoever the bore might be at whom they were aimed, had always amused him because he saw Odette laughing, laughing with him, almost inside him. Now he felt that perhaps they would be making Odette laugh at him. “What fetid humor!” he said, twisting his mouth into an expression of disgust so powerful that he felt the muscular sensation of his grimace even in his neck, flung back

against the collar of his shirt. “And how can a creature whose face is made in the image of God find anything to laugh about in those nauseating jokes? Any nose of any delicacy at all would turn away with horror so as not to allow itself to be offended by such musty odors. It’s really incredible to think that a human being could fail to understand that, by permitting herself to smile at the expense of a fellow human being who has loyally reached out his hand to her, she is sinking down into a mire from which it will be impossible, even with the best will in the world, to rescue her. I live too many miles above the swamp in which these vermin are gabbling and wallowing to be splattered by the jokes of a Verdurin,” he cried, lifting his head, proudly throwing back his shoulders. “As God is my witness, I have honestly tried to pull Odette up out of there, and lift her into a nobler and purer atmosphere. But no human being has more than just so much patience, and mine is exhausted,” he said to himself, as if this mission to tear Odette away from an atmosphere of sarcasm dated from further back than the last few minutes and as if he had not taken it upon himself only when he thought perhaps these sarcasms were aimed at him and were attempting to separate Odette from him.

He could see the pianist preparing to play the “Moonlight Sonata” and the faces Mme. Verdurin would make as she grew dismayed at the harm that Beethoven’s music was going to do to her nerves: “Idiot, liar!” he exclaimed. “And the woman pretends to love *Art*!” She would tell Odette, after having adroitly insinuated a few words of praise for Forcheville, as she had so often done for him: “Make a little room next to you for M. de Forcheville.” “In the dark! The pimp, the procuress!” *Procuress* was also the name he applied to the music that would invite them to be quiet, to dream together, to look at each other, to take each other by the hand. He found there was some good to be said for the severity toward the arts displayed by Plato, by Bossuet,[72] and by the old school of French education.

In fact, the life one led at the Verdurins’ and which he had so often called “real life” seemed to him the worst of all, and their little clan the lowest of social circles. “It really is,” he said, “the lowest thing on the social ladder, Dante’s last circle.[73] No doubt about it, the venerable text refers to the Verdurins! Really, the fashionable folk, whom one may vilify, but who all the same are different from these gangs of riffraff, show a most profound sagacity in refusing to know them, or even to dirty the tips of their fingers with them! What sound intuition there is in the Faubourg Saint- Germain’s *Noli me tangere*!”[74] He had long since left the avenues of the Bois, he had nearly reached his house, and still, not yet sobered from his pain and from the insincere exuberance with which the deceitful intonations, the artificial sonority of his own voice, pouring into him more abundantly every minute, had intoxicated him, he continued to perorate out loud in the silence of the night: “Society people have their faults, as no one knows better than I do, but all the same really these are people for whom certain things are out of the question. For instance, one fashionable woman I knew was far from perfect, but all the same really she had a basic decency, a sense of honor in her dealings that would have made her incapable, whatever the circumstances, of any sort of treachery and which is quite sufficient to put a vast gulf between her and a vixen like Verdurin. Verdurin! What a name! Oh, one may truly say they are the ultimate, perfect specimens of their kind! Thank God—it was high time I stopped condescending to mix in utter promiscuousness with such infamy, such excrement.”

But, just as the virtues he had attributed that same afternoon to the Verdurins would not have been enough, had they even really possessed them but had not encouraged and protected his love, to provoke in Swann that intoxication in which he was moved by their magnanimity and which, even if it was propagated through other people, could only come to him from Odette—in the same way, the immorality that he now saw in the Verdurins, had it been real, would have been powerless, had they not invited Odette with Forcheville and without him, to unleash his indignation and cause him to vilify “their infamy.” And no doubt Swann’s voice was more perceptive than he was himself, when it refused to pronounce these words filled with disgust for the Verdurin social circle and joy at being done with it, otherwise than in an artificial tone and as if they were chosen to appease his anger rather than to express his thoughts. The latter, in fact, while he was indulging in these invectives, were probably, without his noticing it, occupied with a completely different object, for, once he reached home, scarcely had he closed the carriage gate behind him than suddenly he struck himself on the forehead, and, opening the gate again, went out exclaiming in a natural voice this time: “I think I know a way of getting invited to the dinner at Chatou tomorrow!” But the way must have been a poor one, for Swann was not invited: Dr. Cottard, who, summoned to the country on a serious case, had not seen the Verdurins for several days and had not been able to go to Chatou, said, the day after that dinner, as he sat down at the table at their house:

“Why, won’t we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He is certainly what you would call a personal friend of . . .”

“Why, I should hope not!” cried Mme. Verdurin. “May the Lord preserve us from him, he is deadly dull, stupid, and ill-mannered.”

At these words Cottard showed surprise and submission at the same time, as though confronted with a truth contrary to everything he had believed up to then, but irresistibly obvious; and, lowering his nose nervously and timidly into his plate, confined himself to answering: “Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!,” traversing along a descending scale, in his forced but orderly retreat into the depths of himself, the entire register of his voice. And at the Verdurins’, Swann was never mentioned again.

So the salon which had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle to their meetings. She no longer said to him as she had in the early days of their love: “We’ll see each other tomorrow night anyway, there’s a supper at the Verdurins’,” but: “We won’t be able to see each other tomorrow night, there’s a supper at the Verdurins’.” Or else the Verdurins were to take her to the Opéra-Comique to see *Une Nuit de Cléopatre*[75] and Swann would read in Odette’s eyes a fear that he would ask her not to go, which once upon a time he would not have been able to keep himself from kissing as it passed over his mistress’s face, and which now exasperated him. “It’s not anger, however,” he said to himself, “that I feel when I see that she wants to go and scratch about in that excremental music. It’s sorrow, not for myself certainly, but for her; sorrow at seeing that after more than six months of living in daily contact with me, she has not managed to change enough to eliminate Victor Massé spontaneously! Especially for not having come to understand that there are evenings when a person of any subtlety must know how to give up a pleasure, when one asks it of her. She ought to know how to say ‘I won’t go,’ if only by using her intelligence, since it is on the basis of her answer that one will rate once and for all the quality of her soul.” And having persuaded himself that it really was only in order to be able to pass a more favorable judgment on Odette’s spiritual value that he wanted her to stay with him that evening instead of going to the Opéra-Comique, he presented her with the same reasoning, with the same degree of insincerity as he had presented it to himself, and even with one degree more, for now he was also responding to a desire to capture her through her self-love.

“I swear,” he said to her a few moments before she left for the theater, “that in asking you not to go out, my every wish, if I were selfish, would be for you to refuse me, because I have a thousand things to do this evening and I will find myself trapped and thus quite annoyed if against all expectations you answer me that you won’t go. But my own occupations, my own pleasures, aren’t everything, I have to think of you. There may come a day when, seeing me gone from you forever, you will be justified in reproaching me for not having warned you in the crucial moments when I sensed that I was going to bring down upon you one of those severe judgments against which love cannot resist for long. You see, *Une Nuit de Cléopatre* (what a title!) doesn’t really matter. What we must find out is whether you are really that creature which ranks lowest in mentality, and even in charm, the contemptible creature who is incapable of giving up a pleasant thing. Now, if this is what you are, how could anyone love you, for you’re not even a person, a clearly defined entity, imperfect, but at least perfectible? You’re only a formless stream of water running down whatever slope one offers it, a fish without memory or reflection which, as long as it lives in its aquarium, continuing to mistake the glass for water, will bump against it a hundred times a day. Do you understand that your answer will have the effect—I won’t say of making me stop loving you immediately, of course, but of making you less attractive in my eyes when I realize that you’re not a person, that you’re lower than all other things, that I can’t place you above any of them? Obviously I would have preferred to ask you as a thing of no importance to give up *Une Nuit de Cléopatre* (since you oblige me to soil my lips with that despicable name) in hopes that you would go anyway. But since I’ve decided to tally such an account, to derive such consequences from your answer, I thought it would be more honest to let you know.”

For some time, Odette had shown signs of agitation and uncertainty. Although she failed to grasp the meaning of this speech, she did understand that it might belong to the category of “scoldings” and scenes of reproach or supplication, and her familiarity with men enabled her, without paying attention to the details of what they said, to conclude that they would not make such scenes if they were not in love, that since they were in love it was pointless to obey them, that they would be only more in love afterward. And so she would have listened to Swann with the utmost calm if she had not seen that time was passing and that if he talked much longer, she would, as she told him with a smile that was tender, obstinate, and abashed, “end by missing the overture!”

On other occasions he told her that the one thing that was more likely than anything else to make him stop loving her was that she would not give up lying. “Even from the point of view of your desire to be attractive,” he told her, “don’t you understand how much of your charm you lose when you stoop to lying? With one confession, think how many faults you could redeem! Really you are much less intelligent than I thought!” But it was in vain that Swann expounded for her thus all the reasons she had for not lying; they might have undermined some general and systematic approach to lying; but Odette had none; she merely contented herself, whenever she wanted Swann not to know about something she had done, with not telling him about it. And so lying was for her an expedient of a particular order; and the only thing that could decide whether she ought to make use of it or confess the truth was a reason of a particular order too, the greater or lesser likelihood that Swann might discover she had not told the truth.

Physically, she was going through a bad phase: she was growing stout; and the expressive and doleful charm, the surprised and dreamy glances she had once had seemed to have disappeared with her first youth. So that she had become so dear to Swann at the moment, as it were, when he found her in fact much less pretty. He would look at her for a long time trying to recover the charm he had once seen in her, and he would not find it. But knowing that under the new chrysalis, what lived on was still Odette, still the same will, evanescent, elusive, and guileful, was enough to make Swann continue to put the same passion into trying to capture her. Then he would look at a photograph from two years before, he would remember how exquisite she had been. And that would console him a little for taking such pains over her.

When the Verdurins carried her off to Saint-Germain, Chatou, Meulan, often, if it was the warm season, they would propose, on the spot, staying there to sleep and not coming back until the next day. Mme. Verdurin would try to quiet the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt had remained in Paris.

“She’ll be delighted to be rid of you for a day. And how could she worry, she knows you’re with us; anyway, she can put the blame on me.”

But if she was not successful, M. Verdurin would spring into action, find a telegraph office or a messenger, and inquire as to which of the faithful had someone they needed to inform. But Odette would thank him and say that she did not need to send anyone a telegram, because she had told Swann once and for all that by sending him one in front of everybody, she would be compromising herself. Sometimes she would be gone for several days, the Verdurins would take her to see the tombs at Dreux, or, on the advice of the painter, to Compiègne to admire sunsets as viewed from inside a forest, and then they would push on as far as the Château de Pierrefonds.[76]

“To think that she could visit real historic buildings with me. I’ve studied architecture for ten years and I’m forever being implored to take people of the highest standing to Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud [77] and would do it only for her, and instead she goes with the lowest of simpletons to wax ecstatic first over the dejecta of Louis-Philippe and then over those of Viollet-le-Duc! It seems to me you don’t need to be an artist for that and even without a particularly delicate nose, you don’t choose to go holiday making in latrines in order to be closer to the smell of excrement.”

But when she had left for Dreux or Pierrefonds—without, alas, allowing him to go too, as though by chance, on his own account, because “that would make a deplorable impression,” she said—he would plunge into that most intoxicating of romances, the railway timetable, which would present him with all the ways he might join her, in the afternoon, in the evening, that same morning! Not only the ways, but even more, almost: the authorization. Because after all, the timetable and the trains themselves were not meant for dogs. If one informed the public, via printed matter, that at eight o’clock in the morning a train left which arrived in Pierrefonds at ten o’clock, it was because going to Pierrefonds was a lawful act, for which permission from Odette was superfluous; and it was also an act that could have a motive completely different from the desire to meet Odette, since people who did not know her performed it each day, in large enough numbers for it to be worth the trouble of stoking the locomotives.

So she really couldn’t stop him from going to Pierrefonds if he wanted to! Now, in fact, he felt that he did want to, and that, if he had not known Odette, he certainly would have gone. For a long time now he had wanted to form a clearer idea for himself of Viollet-le-Duc’s restoration work. And in this weather, he was moved by an imperious desire for a walk in the forest of Compiègne.

It was truly hard luck that she was forbidding him the only spot that tempted him today. Today! If he went despite her prohibition, he might see her *today*! But whereas, if at Pierrefonds she had met someone who did not matter, she would have said joyfully: “Imagine finding you here!” and would have asked him to come see her at the hotel where she was staying with the Verdurins, if she met him, Swann, there, she would be offended, she would say to herself that she was being followed, she would love him less, perhaps she would turn away angrily when she saw him. “So, I no longer have the right to travel!” she would say to him when they returned, whereas really he was the one who no longer had the right to travel!

For a while he had had the idea, so as to be able to go to Compiègne and Pierrefonds without appearing to be doing it in order to meet Odette, of contriving to be taken there by one of his friends, the Marquis de Forestelle, who had a château in the vicinity. The Marquis, to whom he had communicated his plan without letting him know the reason for it, was beside himself with joy and marveled that Swann, for the first time in fifteen years, was at last consenting to come see his estate and, since he did not want to stay there, as he had told him, at least promised to take walks and go on excursions with him for a few days. Swann pictured himself already down there with M. de Forestelle. Even before seeing Odette there, even if he did not manage to see her, what happiness it would give him to step on that earth where, not knowing the exact location, at any given moment, of her presence, he would feel palpitating everywhere the possibility of her sudden appearance: in the courtyard of the château, now beautiful to him because it was for her sake that he had gone to see it; in every street of the town, which seemed to him romantic; on every road in the forest, rosy in the deep and tender sunset—numberless alternative asylums, where, in the uncertain ubiquity of his hopes, his multiplied heart simultaneously came to take refuge, happy and vagabond. “Whatever we do,” he would say to M. de Forestelle, “let’s take care we don’t stumble on Odette and the Verdurins; I’ve just learned they’re in Pierrefonds today, in fact. There’s time enough for us to see one another in Paris, it wouldn’t be worth the trouble of leaving Paris if they couldn’t take a step without me or I without them.” And his friend would not understand why, once he was there, Swann would change a plan twenty times, inspect the dining rooms of all the hotels in Compiègne without making up his mind to sit down in any of them even though no trace of the Verdurins had been seen, looking as though he were searching for the very thing he had said he wanted to avoid and then avoiding it as soon as he found it, because if he had encountered the little group, he would pointedly have gone off, glad he had seen Odette and that she had seen him, especially that she had seen him not bothering about her. But no, she would certainly guess that it was for her sake he was there. And when M. de Forestelle came to pick him up so that they could set off, he said to him: “Alas, no, I can’t go to Pierrefonds today, Odette is there, as it turns out.” And Swann was happy despite everything to feel that, if alone of all mortals that day he was not allowed to go to Pierrefonds, it was because for Odette he was someone different from the others, her lover, and that this restriction which was applied in his case alone to the universal right to freedom of movement was merely one of the forms of that slavery, of that love which was so dear to him. Decidedly it was better not to risk quarreling with her, to be patient, to wait for her to come back. He spent his days bent over a map of the Compiègne forest as if it were the Map of Love,[78] and surrounded himself with photographs of the château at Pierrefonds. As soon as the day arrived on which it was possible that she would be coming back, he opened the timetable again, calculated which train she must have taken and, if she had been delayed, those that were still available to her. He did not go out for fear of missing a telegram, did not go to bed in case, having returned on the last train, she wanted to surprise him by coming to see him in the middle of the night. In fact he heard the bell at the carriage gate, it seemed to him they were slow opening it, he wanted to wake up the concierge, went to the window to call out to Odette if it was she, for despite the instructions he had gone downstairs to give the servants himself more than ten times, they were still capable of telling her he was not there. It was a servant coming home. He noticed the incessant stream of passing carriages, to which he had never paid attention in the past. He listened to each one come from far off, draw near, pass his gate without stopping, and go on into the distance bearing a message that was not for him. He waited all night, quite uselessly, because the Verdurins had decided to return early, and Odette had been in Paris since noon; it had not occurred to her to tell him; not knowing what to do, she had gone and spent her evening alone at the theater and long ago, by now, had returned home to bed and gone to sleep.

The fact was that she had not even thought of him. And occasions such as this when she forgot Swann’s very existence were more useful to Odette, did more to attach Swann to her, than all her coquetry. Because in this way Swann was kept in that state of painful agitation which had already been powerful enough to make his love blossom on the night when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins’ and had searched for her all evening. And he did not have, as I had at Combray in my childhood, happy days during which to forget the sufferings that will return at night. Swann spent his days without Odette; and now and then he said to himself that to allow such a pretty woman to go out alone in Paris like that was as imprudent as to put a case full of jewels in the middle of the street. Then he would become indignant at all the people passing by as at so many thieves. But their faces, formless, collective, escaped the grasp of his imagination and did not

feed his jealousy. Swann's mind would become exhausted, until, passing his hand over his eyes, he would exclaim: "We must trust in God," like those who, after having persisted in embracing the problem of the reality of the external world or the immortality of the soul, grant their tired brains the relief of an act of faith. But always the thought of the absent woman was indissolubly mingled with the simplest actions of Swann's life—having lunch, receiving his mail, leaving the house, going to bed—by the very sadness he felt over performing them without her, like the initials of Philibert le Beau, which, in the church at Brou,[79] because of the longing she felt for him, Margaret of Austria intertwined everywhere with her own. On certain days, instead of staying at home, he would go and have his lunch in a restaurant not far from his house whose good cooking he had appreciated once upon a time and to which he now went only for one of those reasons, at once mystical and preposterous, that we call romantic; in fact this restaurant (which still exists) bore the same name as the street in which Odette lived: *Lapérouse*.[80] Sometimes, when she had gone away briefly, it was only after several days that she thought of letting him know she had returned to Paris. And she would say to him quite simply, no longer taking the precaution as she once had of covering herself, just in case, with a little fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had just returned that moment by the morning train. These words were mendacious; at least for Odette they were mendacious, insubstantial, not having, as they would have had if they had been true, a basis in her memory of arriving at the station; in fact, she was even prevented from picturing them herself at the moment she uttered them, by the contradictory image of what she had been doing that was quite different at the moment she was claiming she had stepped off the train. But in Swann's mind it was just the opposite, these words, encountering no obstacle, encrusted themselves and assumed the immobility of a truth so indubitable that if a friend told him he had come by that train and had not seen Odette, Swann would be convinced it was the friend who was mistaken about the day or the hour, since his account did not agree with Odette's. Her words would have seemed to him false only if he had suspected beforehand that they were. For him to believe she was lying, a previous suspicion was a necessary condition. In fact it was also a sufficient condition. Then everything Odette said to him would appear suspect. If he heard her mention a name, it was certainly the name of one of her lovers; the supposition once forged, he would spend weeks grieving; he even contacted a private investigation agency once in order to find out the address and the daily routine of the stranger who would not let him breathe easy except when he went off on a trip, and who, he learned in the end, was an uncle of Odette's dead for the past twenty years.

Even though in general she did not permit him to meet her in public places, saying that people would talk, sometimes at an evening party to which he and she both had been invited—at Forcheville's, at the painter's, or at a charity ball in one of the ministries—he would find himself there at the same time as she. He would see her but did not dare stay for fear of irritating her by appearing to spy on the pleasures she was enjoying with other people, pleasures which—as he drove home alone, went to bed as anxious as I myself was to be some years later on the evenings when he would come to dine at the house, at Combray—seemed unlimited to him because he had not seen them come to an end. And once or twice on such evenings he experienced the sort of happiness which, had it not been so violently affected by the recoil from the abrupt cessation of anxiety, one would be tempted to call a tranquil happiness, because it consisted of a return to a peaceful state of mind: he had dropped in on a party at the painter's home and was preparing to go off again; behind him he was leaving Odette transformed into a brilliant stranger, surrounded by men to whom her glances and her gaiety, which were not for him, seemed to speak of some sensuous pleasure that would be enjoyed there or elsewhere (maybe at the "Bal des Incohérents,"[81] where he trembled at the idea that she would go afterward) and that caused Swann more jealousy than the carnal act itself because he had more difficulty imagining it; he was already on the point of passing through the studio door, when he heard himself being called back with these words (which, by cutting off from the party that end which had terrified him so, made the party seem in retrospect innocent, made Odette's return a thing no longer inconceivable and terrible, but sweet and familiar and abiding next to him, like a bit of his everyday life, in his carriage, and divested Odette herself of her too brilliant and too gay appearance, showed that it was only a disguise which she had put on for a moment, for its own sake, not with a view to mysterious pleasures, and that she was already tired of it), with these words that Odette tossed at him, as he was already on the threshold: "Wouldn't you wait five minutes for me? I'm leaving, we'll go back together, you can take me home."

True, one day Forcheville had asked to be taken back at the same time but, when they had arrived at Odette's door and he had asked permission to come in too, Odette had answered him, pointing to Swann: "Ah! That depends on this gentleman here, ask him. Well, all right, come in for a moment if you want, but not for long because I warn you he likes to talk quietly with me, and he doesn't much like having visitors when he comes. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him! Isn't that so, *my love,*[82] I'm the only one who really knows you?"

And Swann was perhaps even more touched to see her addressing him thus, in front of Forcheville, not only these tender words of predilection, but also certain criticisms such as: "I'm sure you haven't answered your friends yet about that dinner on Sunday. Don't go if you don't want to, but at least be polite," or: "Now, have you left your essay on Vermeer here so that you can do a little more on it tomorrow? How lazy you are! I'll make you work—you'll see!," which proved that Odette kept up with his social engagements and his literary work, that the two of them really had a life together. And as she said this she gave him a smile in whose depths he felt she was entirely his.

And so at these moments, while she was making orangeade for them, suddenly, as when a poorly adjusted reflector at first casts on the wall around an object large fantastic shadows which then fold and disappear into it, all the terrible shifting ideas he had formed for himself about Odette would vanish, would rejoin the charming body that stood there in front of him. He would have the sudden suspicion that this hour spent at Odette's house, in the lamplight, was perhaps not an artificial hour, invented for his own use (intended to mask that dismaying and delightful thing which he thought about endlessly without being able really to picture it, an hour in Odette's real life, in Odette's life when he himself was not there), with stage-set accessories and cardboard fruit, but was perhaps a real hour in Odette's life, that if he had not been there, she would have set out the same armchair for Forcheville and poured him not some unfamiliar drink, but that very same orangeade, that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other frightful and supernatural world where he spent his time locating her and which perhaps existed only in his imagination, but rather the real world, radiating no special sadness, comprising that table where he was going to be able to write and that drink which he would be permitted to taste, all those objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude, for if by absorbing his dreams they had delivered him from them, they in return had been enriched by them, they showed him the palpable realization of his dreams, and they interested his mind, they assumed substance and shape before his eyes at the same time that they soothed his heart. Ah! If fate had permitted him to have but a single home with Odette so that in her house he would be in his own, if when he asked the servant what was planned for lunch, it was Odette's menu that he had learned in answer, if when Odette wanted to go out in the morning to walk down the avenue du Bois de Boulogne, his duty as a good husband had obliged him, even if he did not want to go out, to accompany her, carrying her coat when she was too warm, and at night after dinner if she wanted to stay at home informally dressed, if he had been forced to stay there with her, to do what she wanted; then how completely all those trifles in Swann's life which seemed to him so sad, would, on the contrary, because they were at the same time part of Odette's life, have taken on, even the most familiar of them—like that lamp, that orangeade, that armchair which contained so much of his dreams, which materialized so much desire—a sort of superabundant sweetness and mysterious density.

Yet he actually suspected that what he thus longed for was a calm, a peace that would not have been a favorable atmosphere for his love. When Odette ceased to be for him a creature always absent, longed for, imaginary, when the feeling he had for her was no longer the same mysterious disturbance caused in him by the phrase from the sonata, but affection, gratitude, when normal relations were established between them that would put an end to his madness and his gloom, then no doubt the actions of Odette's daily life would appear to him of little interest in themselves—as he had several times already suspected they were, for example on the day he had read through its envelope the letter addressed to Forcheville. Considering his disease with as much discernment as if he had inoculated himself with it in order to study it, he told himself that when he had recovered his health what Odette might be doing would leave him indifferent. But, from within his morbid state, in truth he feared death itself no more than such a recovery, which would in fact have been the death of all that he was at present.

After these peaceful evenings, Swann's suspicions would be calmed; he would bless Odette and the next day, first thing in the morning, he would send around to her house the most beautiful jewels, because those kind attentions the night before had excited either his gratitude, or the desire to see them repeated, or a paroxysm of love that needed to expend itself.

But at other times his pain would seize him again, he would imagine that Odette was Forcheville's mistress and that when the two of them had seen him, from the depths of the Verdurins' landau, at the Bois, the day before the Chatou party to which he had not been invited, entreat her vainly, with that look of despair which even his coachman had noticed, to go back with him, then return home on his own, alone and defeated, she must have had, as she pointed him out to Forcheville and said to him: "Look! How furious he is!" the same expression in her eyes, glittering, malicious, haughty, and sly, as on the day when Forcheville had driven Saniette from the Verdurins'.

Then Swann detested her. "But also, I'm too stupid," he would tell himself, "I'm paying with my own money for other people's pleasures. All the same, she ought to take care and not pull too hard on her bowstring, because I might very well not give anything more at all. In any case, let's forgo the supplementary favors for the time being! To think that only yesterday, when she said she wanted to attend the season at Bayreuth,[83] I was stupid enough to propose renting for the two of us one of the King of Bavaria's pretty castles in the vicinity. And anyway she did not seem all that delighted, she hasn't yet said either yes or no; let's hope she will decide against it. Good Lord! To spend two weeks listening to Wagner with her when she cares as much for it as a fish for an apple—what fun that would be!" And because his hatred, like his love, needed to manifest itself and to act, he took pleasure in pursuing his evil fantasies further and further, since, because of the perfidies he imputed to Odette, he detested her still more and could, if—something he tried to picture to himself—they were found to be true, have an occasion for punishing her and for satiating on her his increasing rage. Thus he went so far as to suppose that he was going to receive a letter from her in which she would ask him for money to rent that castle near Bayreuth, but warning him that he could not go there himself, because she had promised Forcheville and the Verdurins that she would invite them. Ah! How he would have liked her to be so bold! What joy he would feel as he refused, as he drafted the vengeful answer, the terms of which he took satisfaction in choosing, in uttering out loud, as if he had actually received the letter!

Yet this was in fact what happened the very next day. She wrote that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to attend these performances of Wagner and that, if he would be so good as to send her the money, she would at last, after having so often been entertained at their home, have the pleasure of inviting them in her turn. About him, she said not a word, it was implied that their presence would exclude his own.

And so that terrible answer, whose every word he had determined the day before without daring to hope that it would ever be used, he could now have the joy of sending off to her. Alas! He was quite aware that, all the same, with the money she had, or that she might easily find, she could rent something at Bayreuth since she wanted to, she who was incapable of telling the difference between Bach and Clapisson.[84] But still, she would live there more frugally. There would be no way, as there would have been had he sent her a few thousand-franc bills this time, of organizing every evening, in a castle, those exquisite suppers after which

she would perhaps have indulged the whim—which it was possible she had never yet had—of falling into Forcheville's arms. And then at least he, Swann, was not the one who would be paying for this detested journey! Oh, if only he could have prevented it! If only she could have sprained her ankle before she left, if the coachman of the carriage that would take her to the station had agreed, whatever the price, to drive her to a place where for some time she would remain sequestered—this perfidious woman, her eyes glittering with a smile of complicity addressed to Forcheville, which Odette had become for Swann in the past forty-eight hours!

But she was never that for very long; after a few days the gleaming hypocritical gaze would lose some of its luster and duplicity, the image of a despised Odette saying to Forcheville: "How furious he is!" would begin to grow pale, fade away. Then, gradually the face of the other Odette would reappear and rise up, shining softly, the Odette who also offered a smile to Forcheville, but a smile in which there was nothing but affection for Swann, when she said: "Don't stay long, because this gentleman does not much like me to have visitors when he wants to be with me. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him!," the same smile she wore when thanking Swann for some instance of his courtesy, which she prized so highly, for some advice she had asked of him in one of those serious circumstances in which she had confidence only in him.

Then, thinking of this Odette, he would ask himself how he could have written her that outrageous letter of which no doubt until now she had not thought him capable, and which must have brought him down from the high, the unique rank which by his goodness, his honesty, he had won in her esteem. He would now become less dear to her, because it was for those particular qualities, which she did not find in either Forcheville or any other man, that she loved him. It was because of them that Odette so often showed a graciousness toward him that he counted for nothing when he was jealous, because it was not a sign of desire, and even gave proof of affection rather than love, but whose importance he began to feel again in proportion as the spontaneous relaxation of his suspicions, a relaxation often increased by the distraction he found in reading about art or talking to a friend, caused his passion to become less demanding of reciprocities.

Now that, after this oscillation, Odette had naturally returned to the place from which Swann's jealousy had for a time removed her, to the angle from which he found her charming, he pictured her as full of tenderness, with a look of consent, and so pretty thus that he could not help offering her his lips as if she had been there and he had been able to kiss her; and he felt as strong a gratitude toward her for this enchanting, kindly glance as if she had really given it to him, as if it were not merely his imagination that had just portrayed it in order to satisfy his desire.

How he must have hurt her! Of course he could find valid reasons for his resentment against her, but they would not have been enough to make him feel that resentment if he had not loved her so much. Had he not had grievances of equal gravity against other women, for whom he would nevertheless readily have done favors now, feeling no anger toward them because he no longer loved them? If someday he was ever to find himself in the same state of indifference toward Odette, he would understand that it was his jealousy alone that had made him find something atrocious, unpardonable, in this desire of hers, fundamentally so natural, arising from a touch of childishness and also a certain delicacy in her nature, to be able in her turn, since an occasion presented itself, to repay the civilities of the Verdurins, to play the mistress of the house.

He returned to this point of view—which was opposed to that of his love and his jealousy, and in which he placed himself sometimes through a sort of intellectual equity so as to allow for the various probabilities—from which he tried to judge Odette as if he had never loved her, as if to him she were a woman like any other, as if Odette's life had not been, as soon as he was no longer there, different, contrived in hiding from him, plotted against him.

Why should he believe that there, she would enjoy with Forcheville or with other men intoxicating pleasures which she had never experienced with him and which his jealousy alone had fabricated out of nothing? In Bayreuth as in Paris, if Forcheville happened to think of him at all, it might be merely as of someone who mattered a great deal in Odette's life, to whom he was obliged to yield his place, when they met at her house. If Forcheville and she gloated over being there despite him, it was he who would be to blame by trying in vain to keep her from going, whereas if he had approved of her plan, which was in fact defensible, she would have appeared to be there on his recommendation, she would feel she had been sent there, housed there by him, and for the pleasure she felt in entertaining those people who had entertained her so often, it was to Swann that she would have been grateful.

And—instead of letting her go off on bad terms with him, without having seen him again—if he sent her this money, if he encouraged her to take this trip and went out of his way to make it pleasant for her, she would come running to him, happy, grateful, and he would have the joy of seeing her, a joy which he had not experienced for almost a week and which nothing could replace. Because as soon as Swann could picture her without horror, as soon as he once again saw kindness in her smile, and as soon as the desire to take her out of reach of all other men was not added by jealousy to his love, that love again became above all a predilection for the sensations that Odette's person gave him, for the pleasure he took in admiring like a spectacle or questioning like a phenomenon the dawn of one of her glances, the evolution of one of her smiles, the emission of an intonation of her voice. And this pleasure, different from all the others, had ended by creating in him a need for her that she alone could satisfy by her presence or her letters, a need almost as disinterested, almost as artistic, as perverse, as another need that characterized this new period in Swann's life, in which the dryness, the depression of earlier years had been succeeded by a sort of spiritual superabundance, without his knowing to what he owed this unhoped-for enrichment of his inner life any more than a person in delicate health who from a certain moment grows stronger, stouter, and seems for a time to be on the road to a complete recovery: that other need which was also developing apart from the real world was the need to hear, and to understand, music.

And so, with the very chemistry of his disease, after he had created jealousy with his love, he began once more to manufacture affection, and pity, for Odette. She had turned back into the Odette who was charming and good. He felt remorse at having been severe toward her. He wanted her to come to him, and, before that, he wanted to procure for her some sort of pleasure, so as to see gratitude mold her face and shape her smile.

And Odette, sure of seeing him come back after a few days, as tender and submissive as before, to ask her for a reconciliation, acquired the habit of no longer being afraid to displease or even to provoke him, and she refused him, when it was convenient for her, the favors he valued most.

Perhaps she did not realize how sincere he had been with her during the quarrel, when he had told her he would not send her any money and would try to hurt her. Perhaps she also did not realize how sincere he was, if not with her, at least with himself, on other occasions when for the sake of the future of their relationship, so as to show Odette he was capable of doing without her, that a break was always possible, he decided to let some time pass without going to see her.

Sometimes this was after several days during which she had not given him any new reason to worry; and since, from the next few visits he would make to her, he knew he would not derive any very great joy but more probably some vexation that would put an end to his present state of calm, he would write to her that since he was very busy he would not be able to see her on any of the days on which he had said he would. Then a letter from her, crossing his, would ask him to change one of those very meetings. He would wonder why; his suspicions, his anguish would take hold of him again. He would no longer be able to abide, in the new state of agitation in which he found himself, by the commitment he had made in his earlier state of relative calm, he would hurry to her house and demand to see her on all the following days. And even if she had not written to him first, if she merely answered, with an acquiescence, his request for a brief separation, this would be enough to make him unable to go on without seeing her. For, contrary to Swann's calculations, Odette's consent had entirely changed his attitude. Like all those who enjoy the possession of a thing, in order to know what would happen if he ceased for a moment to possess it he had removed that thing from his mind, leaving everything else in the same state as when it was there. But the absence of a thing is not merely that, it is not simply a partial lack, it is a disruption of everything else, it is a new state which one cannot foresee in the old.

But there were other occasions—Odette was about to go off on a trip—when, after some little dispute for which he had chosen the pretext, he would resolve not to write to her and not to see her again before she returned, thus giving the appearance, and expecting the reward, of a more serious quarrel, which she would perhaps believe was final, to a separation the greater part of which was unavoidable because of the trip and which he was merely allowing to begin a little earlier. Already he imagined Odette uneasy, distressed at having received neither visit nor letter, and this image, by calming his jealousy, made it easy for him to break himself of the habit of seeing her. No doubt, at times, at the far end of his mind where his resolution had thrust her because of the entire interposed length of the three weeks of separation he had accepted, it was with pleasure that he contemplated the idea of seeing Odette again when she returned; but it was also with so little impatience that he began to ask himself if he would not readily double the duration of an abstinence that was so easy. It had lasted as yet only three days, a period of time much shorter than he had often spent without seeing Odette and without having as now planned it in advance. And yet at this point a slight irritation or physical discomfort—by making him consider the present moment an exceptional one, outside the rules, one in which even common wisdom would

agree that he could accept the appeasement afforded by a pleasure and allow his will, until it might be useful to resume the effort, to rest—would suspend the action of the latter, which would cease to exert its pressure; or, less than that, the memory of something he had forgotten to ask Odette, whether she had decided which color she wanted to have her carriage repainted, or, with regard to a certain investment, whether it was common or preferred shares that she wanted to buy (it was all very well to show her that he could live without seeing her, but if, after that, the painting had to be done all over again or the shares paid no dividends, a lot of good it would have done him), and like a stretched piece of elastic that is let go or the air in a pneumatic machine that is opened, the idea of seeing her again, from the far distance where it had been kept, would come back in a single leap into the field of the present and of immediate possibilities.

It came back without encountering any further resistance, in fact so irresistible that Swann had had much less difficulty feeling the approach one by one of the fifteen days he was going to be separated from Odette than he had waiting the ten minutes which his coachman took to harness the carriage that was going to take him to her house and which he spent in transports of impatience and joy as he recaptured a thousand times in order to lavish his tenderness on it that idea of meeting her again which, by so abrupt a return, at a moment when he thought it was so far away, was once again with him in his most intimate consciousness. For this thought no longer encountered the obstacle of Swann's desire to attempt forthwith to resist it, a desire which had ceased to have any place in Swann's mind since, having proved to himself—at least this was what he believed—that he was so easily capable of it, he no longer saw any disadvantage in deferring an attempt at separation that he was now certain he could put into execution whenever he wished. And, too, this idea of seeing her again returned to him adorned with a novelty, a seductiveness, endowed with a virulence which habit had dulled, but which had been retempered in that privation not of three days but of fifteen (for a period of renunciation must be calculated, by anticipation, as having lasted already until the final date assigned to it), and had converted what had been until then an expected pleasure which could easily be sacrificed into an undreamed-of happiness which he was powerless to resist. Finally, the idea returned to Swann embellished by his ignorance of what Odette might have thought, perhaps done, seeing that he had given her no sign of life, so that what he was now going to find was the impassioning revelation of an Odette almost unknown to him.

But she, just as she had believed that his refusal to send her money was only a sham, saw nothing but a pretext in the information that Swann came to ask of her about the carriage to be repainted or the shares to be purchased. For she could not reconstruct the various phases of these crises through which he was passing and, in the idea she formed of them, she failed to understand the mechanism by which they worked, believing only in what she knew beforehand, in their necessary, infallible, and always identical outcome. An idea that was incomplete—all the more profound, perhaps—if one judged it from the point of view of Swann, who would no doubt have thought he was misunderstood by Odette, just as a morphine addict or a consumptive, persuaded that they have been prevented, one by an outside event just when he was about to free himself of his inveterate habit, the other by an accidental indisposition just when he was about to be restored to health at last, feel misunderstood by the doctor who does not attach the same importance they do to these alleged contingencies, mere disguises according to him, assumed, so as to make themselves perceptible again to his patients, by the vice and the morbid condition which, in reality, have not ceased to burden them incurably while they were feeding their dreams of reformation or recovery. And in fact, Swann's love had reached the stage where the doctor and, in certain affections, even the boldest surgeon, ask themselves if ridding a patient of his vice or relieving him of his disease is still reasonable or even possible.

Certainly, of the extent of this love Swann had no direct awareness. When he tried to measure it, it sometimes seemed to him diminished, reduced to almost nothing; for example, the lack of pleasure, the displeasure, almost, inspired in him, before he loved Odette, by her expressive features, her faded complexion, came back to him on certain days. "Really, I'm making some progress," he would say to himself the next day. "When I think about it carefully, I hardly enjoyed myself at all yesterday when I was in bed with her: it's odd, I actually found her ugly." And of course, he was sincere, but his love extended well beyond the realms of physical desire. Odette's body itself no longer had a large place in it. When his eyes fell upon Odette's photograph on the table, or when she came to see him, he had trouble identifying the figure of flesh or cardboard with the painful and constant disturbance that inhabited him. He would say to himself almost with surprise: "It's she!" as if suddenly someone were to show us in a separate, external form one of our own diseases and we found that it did not resemble what we were suffering. "She"—he tried to ask himself what that was; for one thing love and death have in common, more than those vague resemblances people are always talking about, is that they make us question more deeply, for fear that its reality will slip away from us, the mystery of personality. And this disease which was Swann's love had so proliferated, was so closely entangled with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he wanted after his death, it was now so much a part of him, that it could not have been torn from him without destroying him almost entirely: as they say in surgery, his love was no longer operable.

By this love Swann had been so far detached from all other interests that, when by chance he reappeared in society telling himself that his connections, like an elegant setting that she would not in fact have been able to appreciate with much accuracy, could restore a little of his value in Odette's eyes (and this would perhaps indeed have been true had these connections not been lowered in value by that love itself, which for Odette depreciated all the things it touched by seeming to proclaim them less precious), what he experienced there, along with the distress of being in places and among people whom she did not know, was the disinterested pleasure he would have taken in a novel or a painting which depicted the amusements of a leisured class, just as, in his own house, he enjoyed contemplating the functioning of his domestic life, the elegance of his wardrobe and livery, the proper placement of his stocks, in the same way that he enjoyed reading in Saint-Simon, who was one of his favorite authors, about the "mechanics" of the daily life, the menus of the dinners of Mme. de Maintenon,[85] or the well-advised avarice and grand style of Lully.[86] And to the small extent that this detachment was not absolute, the reason for this new pleasure that Swann was enjoying was that he could emigrate for a while into the rare parts of himself that had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain. In this respect the personality which my great-aunt attributed to him, of "young Swann," distinct from his more individual personality of Charles Swann, was the one in which he was now happiest. One day when, for the birthday of the Princess of Parma (and because she could often please Odette indirectly by making it possible for her to have seats at galas, jubilees, and other occasions), he had wanted to send her some fruit and was not sure how to order it, he had entrusted the task to a cousin of his mother's, a lady who, delighted to do an errand for him, had written to him, when sending him the account, that she had not got all the fruit at the same place, but the grapes at Crapote's, whose specialty they were, the strawberries at Jauret's, the pears at Chevet's, where they were the loveliest, etc., "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me." And indeed, from the Princess's thanks, he had been able to judge the flavor of the strawberries and the mellowness of the pears. But more important, that "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me" had soothed his pain, by taking his consciousness away into a region where he rarely went, even though it was his by right as the heir to a rich and solid bourgeois family in which there had been preserved by heredity, quite ready to be put at his service whenever he wished, a knowledge of the "best addresses" and the art of placing a proper order.

Certainly, he had forgotten for too long that he was "young Swann" not to feel, when he became that person again briefly, a keener pleasure than those he could have felt the rest of the time and to which he had grown indifferent; and if the friendliness of the bourgeoisie, for whom he had remained that person more than anything else, was less animated than that of the aristocracy (but in fact more flattering, for with them at least it is always inseparable from respect), a letter from a royal personage, whatever princely entertainment it offered, could never be as pleasant to him as a letter asking him to be a witness, or merely to be present, at a wedding in the family of old friends of his parents, some of whom had continued to see him—like my grandfather, who, the year before, had invited him to my mother's wedding—while certain others barely knew him personally but believed they were obligated to be polite to the son, to the worthy successor, of the late M. Swann.

But, because of the long-standing close ties he had among them, the nobility, to a certain extent, were also part of his house, his household, and his family. He felt he possessed, when contemplating his distinguished friendships, the same support from outside, the same comfort, as when looking at the fine lands, the fine silverware, the fine table linen, that had come to him from his own people. And the thought that if he were to collapse at home from the effects of a sudden illness it would quite naturally be the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg, and the Baron de Charlus whom his valet would run off to find, brought him the same consolation as to our old Françoise the knowledge that she would be wrapped in a shroud of her own fine sheets, marked, not mended (or so finely that it gave only a loftier idea of the care of the seamstress), a shroud from the frequent image of which in her mind's eye she derived a certain satisfying sense, if not of material well-being, at least of self-respect. But most important, since in every one of his actions and thoughts that referred to Odette, Swann was constantly governed and directed by the unavowed feeling that he was, perhaps not less dear, but less welcome to her than anyone else, than the most boring faithful of the Verdurins—when he returned to a world in which he was the highest example of excellence, whom one would do anything to attract, whom one

was sorry not to see, he began to believe again in the existence of a happier life, almost to feel an appetite for it, as an invalid may feel who has been bedridden for months, on a strict diet, and who sees in a newspaper the menu for an official luncheon or an advertisement for a cruise to Sicily.

If he was obliged to give his excuses to the society people for not visiting them, it was precisely for his visits to her that he sought to excuse himself to Odette. He even paid for them (asking himself at the end of the month, supposing he had abused her patience somewhat and gone to see her many times, if it was enough to send her four thousand francs), and for each one found a pretext, a present to bring her, a piece of information she needed, M. de Charlus whom he had met going to her house and who had demanded that he accompany him. And, lacking one, he would ask M. de Charlus if he would please run over to her house, remark to her as though spontaneously, in the course of the conversation, that he remembered he had something to say to Swann, would she kindly send for him to come to her house right away; but most often Swann would wait in vain and M. de Charlus would tell him in the evening that his plan had not succeeded. So that if she was often away from Paris now, even when she stayed there she saw very little of him, and she who, when she was in love with him, used to say: "I'm always free" and "What do I care what others think?" would now, each time he wanted to see her, invoke social conventions or plead other engagements. When he mentioned that he might be going to some charity ball, opening, premiere where she would be, she would tell him that he was trying to flaunt their affair, that he was treating her like a prostitute. It reached such a point that, in order to try not to be debarred from meeting her anywhere, Swann, knowing that she was acquainted with and had considerable affection for my great-uncle Adolphe and having once been a friend of his himself, went to see him one day in his little apartment in the rue de Bellechasse to ask him to use his influence with Odette. Since she always adopted poetical airs when speaking to Swann of my uncle, saying: "Ah, yes, he's not like you, his friendship with me is a lovely thing, so grand, so handsome! He would never think so little of me as to want to show himself with me in every public place," Swann was perplexed and did not know quite how lofty his tone ought to be in talking about her to my uncle. He first posited Odette's a priori excellence, her axiomatic and seraphic superhumanity, the revealed truth of her virtues, which could be neither demonstrated nor derived from experience. "I must talk to you. You know that Odette is a woman superior to all other women, an adorable creature, an angel. But you know what life in Paris is like. Not everyone sees Odette in the same light as you and I. And so there are people who think the role I'm playing is rather ridiculous: she can't even allow me to meet her outside, at the theater. She has such confidence in you—couldn't you say a few words to her for me, assure her that she's exaggerating the harm I would do her by greeting her in public?"

My uncle advised Swann to let a little time go by without seeing Odette, who would only love him all the more for it, and Odette to allow Swann to meet her wherever he liked. A few days later, Odette told Swann she had just had the disappointment of discovering that my uncle was the same as every other man: he had just tried to take her by force. She quieted Swann when at first he wanted to go off and challenge my uncle, but he refused to shake his hand the next time he met him. He especially regretted this quarrel with my uncle Adolphe since he had hoped, had he seen him again from time to time and been able to chat with him in complete confidence, to try to shed some light on certain rumors relating to the life Odette had once led in Nice. For my uncle Adolphe spent his winters there. And Swann thought that perhaps it was even there that he had met Odette. The little that had been let slip by someone in his presence, relating to a man who was said to have been Odette's lover, had greatly disturbed Swann. But the things he would have regarded, before knowing them, as the most frightful to learn and the most impossible to believe, once he knew them were incorporated forever after into his sadness, he accepted them, he would no longer have been able to understand that they did not exist. Only each one indelibly revised the idea he was forming of his mistress. He was even given to understand, at one point, that this laxness in Odette's morals, which he would not have suspected, was fairly well known, and that in Baden and in Nice, when she used to spend a few months there, she had had a degree of amorous notoriety. He sought out certain philanderers in order to question them; but they were aware that he knew Odette; and besides, he was afraid of reminding them of her, of putting them on her track. But he to whom before then nothing could have appeared as tedious as anything relating to the cosmopolitan life of Baden or Nice, learning that Odette had perhaps led a rather riotous life in those pleasure towns, though he could never manage to find out if it had been only to satisfy a need for money which thanks to him she no longer had, or from some capricious desire which might return, now leaned with an impotent, blind, and dizzying anguish over the bottomless abyss that had swallowed up those early years of the Septennate[87] during which one spent winters on the Promenade des Anglais, summers under the lime trees of Baden, and in them he saw a painful but magnificent profundity such as a poet might have lent them; and he would have devoted to the reconstruction of the petty events of the chronicle of the Côte d'Azur of that time, if that chronicle could have helped him understand something of Odette's smile or the look in her eyes—honest and simple though they were—more passion than an aesthete examining the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence in order to try to penetrate further into the soul of Botticelli's Primavera, bella Vanna, or Venus.[88] Often, without saying anything to her, he would gaze at her, he would daydream; she would say to him: "How sad you look!" It was not as yet very long since he had moved on from the idea that she was a good person, comparable to the best he had ever known, to the idea that she was a kept woman; inversely he had sometimes since then returned from Odette de Crécy, perhaps too well known among the fast crowd, among ladies' men, to this face whose expression was at times so gentle, to this nature so human. He would say to himself: "What does it matter that at Nice everyone knows Odette de Crécy? Reputations of this sort, even if true, are created out of other people's ideas"; he would reflect that this legend—even if it was authentic—lay outside Odette, was not inside her like an irreducible and baneful personality; that the creature who might have been led to do wrong was a woman with kind eyes, a heart full of pity for suffering, a submissive body which he had held, which he had clasped in his arms and handled, a woman whom one day he might come to possess entirely, if he succeeded in making himself indispensable to her. She was there, often tired, her face emptied for a moment of that feverish, joyful preoccupation with the unknown things that made Swann suffer; she would push back her hair with her hands; her forehead, her face would appear broader; then, suddenly, some ordinary human thought, some good feeling such as may be found in all individuals when in a moment of rest or reclusion they are left to themselves, would spring from her eyes like a beam of yellow sunlight. And immediately her whole face would brighten like a gray countryside covered with clouds which suddenly part, transfiguring it, at the moment the sun goes down. The life that was in Odette at that moment, even the future she seemed so dreamily to be watching, Swann could have shared with her; no evil disturbance seemed to have left its residue there. Rare though they became, these moments were not entirely useless. In memory Swann joined these fragments together, eliminated the intervals, cast, as though in gold, an Odette formed of goodness and calm for whom (as will be seen in the second part of this story) he later made sacrifices which the other Odette would never have won from him. But these moments were so rare, and he saw her so little now! Even in regard to their evening meeting, she would tell him only at the last minute if she could grant it to him, for, since she could count on his always being free, she first wanted to be certain that no one else would suggest coming around. She would maintain that she had to wait for an answer of the greatest importance, and if after she had sent for Swann friends asked her, when the evening had already begun, to meet them at the theater or at supper, she would give a joyful leap into the air and dress quickly. As she progressed in her preparations, each movement she made would bring Swann closer to the moment when he would have to leave her, when she would fly off with an irresistible force; and when ready at last, plunging into her mirror a final glance strained and brightened by attention, she put a little more red on her lips, settled a lock of hair on her forehead, and asked for her sky-blue evening cloak with gold tassels, Swann looked so sad that she could not suppress a gesture of impatience and said: "So that's how you thank me for letting you stay here till the last minute. And I thought I was being nice. I'll know better next time!" Now and then, at the risk of angering her, he would promise himself to try to find out where she had gone, he would dream of an alliance with Forcheville, who would perhaps have been able to enlighten him. In any case, when he knew who it was she had spent the evening with, it was very seldom that he could not discover among all his own acquaintance someone who knew, if only indirectly, the man with whom she had gone out and could easily obtain this or that piece of information about him. And while he was writing to one of his friends to ask him to try to clear up some point or other, he would feel how restful it was to stop asking himself his unanswerable questions and to transfer to someone else the fatigue of interrogation. True, Swann was scarcely better off when he had certain information. Knowing a thing does not always allow us to prevent it, but at least the things we know, we hold, if not in our hands, at any rate in our minds, where we can arrange them as we like, which gives us the illusion of a sort of power over them. He was happy each time M. de Charlus was with Odette. Between M. de Charlus and her, Swann knew that nothing could happen, that when M. de Charlus went out with her it was for the sake of his friendship with Swann and he would have no reluctance about telling him what she had done. Sometimes she had declared so categorically to Swann that it was impossible for her to see him on a certain evening, she seemed so keen on going out, that Swann attached real importance to M. de Charlus's being free to go with her. The next day, though he did not dare ask many questions of M. de Charlus, he would compel him, by appearing not quite to understand his first answers, to give him further answers, after each of which he would feel more relieved, because he very soon learned that Odette had occupied her evening with the most innocent of pleasures. "But what do you mean, my dear Mémé? I don't quite understand . . . You didn't go straight from her house to the Musée Grévin? You had gone somewhere else first. No? Oh!

How funny! You don't know how much you amuse me, my dear Mémé. But what a funny idea of hers to go on to the Chat Noir afterward, that's certainly her sort of idea . . . No? It was you? How strange. But in fact it's not such a bad idea; she must have known a good many people there? No? She spoke to no one? That's extraordinary. So you stayed there like that just the two of you all by yourselves? I can just picture it. You are kind, my dear Mémé, I'm very fond of you." Swann felt relieved. For him, to whom it had occasionally happened, when chatting casually with people to whom he was barely listening, that he sometimes heard certain remarks (as, for example: "I saw Mme. de Crécy yesterday; she was with a gentleman I don't know"), remarks which, as soon as they entered Swann's heart, solidified, hardened like an encrustation, cut into him, never moved from there again, how sweet by contrast were these words: "She knew no one, she spoke to no one," how they circulated comfortably in him, how fluid they were, easy, breathable! And yet after a moment he would say to himself that Odette must find him quite tiresome if these were the pleasures she preferred to his company. And their insignificance, though it reassured him, nevertheless pained him like a betrayal.

Even when he could not find out where she had gone, it would have been enough to soothe the anguish which he felt at these times, and for which Odette's presence, the sweetness of being close to her was the only specific (a specific that in the long run aggravated the disease, like many remedies, but at least momentarily soothed his pain), it would have been enough for him, if only Odette had permitted it, to remain in her house while she was out, to wait for her there until the hour of her return, into whose stillness and appeasement would have flowed and melted the hours which some magical illusion, some evil spell had made him believe were different from the rest. But she did not want this; he returned home; he forced himself, on the way, to make various plans, he stopped thinking about Odette; he even succeeded, while he was undressing, in turning over some fairly cheerful thoughts in his mind; and it was with a light heart, full of the hope of going to see some great painting the next day, that he got into bed and put out his light; but, no sooner, as he prepared to go to sleep, did he cease to exert upon himself a constraint of which he was not even aware because it was by now so habitual, than at that very instant an icy shiver would run through him and he would begin to sob. He did not even want to know why, dried his eyes, said to himself with a smile: "Delightful—I'm turning into a real neurotic." Then he could not think without a feeling of great weariness that the next day he would again have to begin trying to find out what Odette had been doing, use all his influence to attempt to see her. This compulsion to an activity without respite, without variety, without results was so cruel to him that one day, seeing a lump on his abdomen, he felt real joy at the thought that he might have a fatal tumor, that he was no longer going to have to take charge of anything, that it was the disease that would manage him, make him its plaything, until the impending end. And indeed if, during this period, he often desired death though without admitting it to himself, it was to escape not so much the acuteness of his sufferings as the monotony of his struggle.

And yet he would have liked to live on until the time came when he no longer loved her, when she would have no reason to lie to him and he could at last learn from her if, on the day when he had gone to see her in the afternoon, she was or was not in bed with Forcheville. Often for several days, the suspicion that she loved someone else would distract him from that question about Forcheville, would make it a matter almost of indifference to him, like those new developments in a continuing state of ill health which seem momentarily to have delivered us from the preceding ones. There were even days when he was not tormented by any suspicion. He thought he was cured. But the next morning, when he woke up, he felt in the same place the same pain, the sensation of which, in the course of the preceding day, he had diluted in a flood of different impressions. But it had not moved from its place. And in fact, it was the sharpness of this pain that had woken Swann.

Since Odette never gave him any information about these very important things which occupied her so fully each day (although he had lived long enough to know that these things are never anything else but pleasures), he could not try to imagine them for very long at a time, his brain was working with nothing in it; then he would pass his finger over his tired eyelids as he would have wiped the glass of his lorgnon, and stop thinking altogether. Yet floating up from that great unknown were certain occupations which reappeared from time to time, vaguely connected by her with some obligation toward distant relatives or friends from an earlier time, who, because they were the only ones she regularly mentioned to him as preventing her from seeing him, seemed to Swann to form the stable, necessary framework of Odette's life. Because of the tone in which she referred from time to time to "the day I go to the Hippodrome with my friend," if, having felt ill and thought: "Perhaps Odette would be kind enough to come round to the house," he recalled abruptly that this was in fact that very day, he would say to himself: "Oh no! It's not worth the trouble of asking her to come, I should have thought of it earlier, this is the day she goes to the Hippodrome with her friend. We must confine ourselves to what's possible; it's pointless wearing oneself out proposing things that are unacceptable and have already been refused in advance." And the duty incumbent upon Odette of going to the Hippodrome, to which Swann thus yielded, did not appear to him merely unavoidable; but the mark of necessity with which it was stamped seemed to make plausible and legitimate everything that was closely or distantly related to it. If, after a man passing in the street had greeted Odette and aroused Swann's jealousy, she answered his questions by associating the stranger with one of the two or three paramount duties of which she had spoken to him, if, for example, she said: "That was a gentleman who was in the box of the friend with whom I go to the Hippodrome," this explanation would calm Swann's suspicions, since he did indeed find it inevitable that the friend would have other guests besides Odette in her box at the Hippodrome, but had never tried or managed to picture them. Ah! how he would have liked to know her, the friend who went to the Hippodrome, and how he would have liked her to take him there with Odette! How gladly he would have given up all his connections in exchange for any person Odette was in the habit of seeing, even a manicurist or a shop assistant! He would have gone to more trouble for that person than for a queen. Wouldn't she have given him, with what she contained of Odette's life, the only effective calmative for his pain? How happily he would have hurried to spend the days at the home of one of those humble people with whom Odette kept up friendly relations out of either self-interest or true simplicity! How willingly he would have taken up residence forever on the fifth floor of a certain sordid and coveted house to which Odette did not take him and in which, if he had lived there with the little retired dressmaker whose lover he would willingly have pretended to be, he would have had a visit from her almost every day! In these almost working-class neighborhoods, what a modest life, abject, but sweet, nourished with calm and happiness, he would have agreed to live indefinitely!

It also sometimes happened that when, after meeting Swann, she saw some man approaching her whom he did not know, he could observe on Odette's face the sadness she had shown the day he had come to see her while Forcheville was there. But this was rare; for on the days when, despite everything she had to do and her fear of what other people would think, she managed to see Swann, what now predominated in her attitude was self-assurance: a great contrast, perhaps an unconscious revenge or a natural reaction to the timorous emotion which, in the early days when she had known him, she had felt with him, and even far away from him, when she would begin a letter with these words: "My dear, my hand is shaking so hard I can scarcely write" (at least so she claimed, and a little of that emotion must have been sincere for her to want to feign more of it). She liked Swann then. We do not tremble except for ourselves, except for those we love. When our happiness is no longer in their hands, what calm, what ease, what boldness we enjoy in their company! When speaking to him, when writing to him, she no longer used any of those words with which she had sought to give herself the illusion that he belonged to her, creating occasions for saying "my," "mine," when she referred to him—"You are my property, this is the fragrance of our friendship, I'm keeping it"—and for talking to him about the future, about death even, as a single thing that would be shared by the two of them. In those days, to everything he said, she would answer admiringly: "You—you will never be like anyone else"; she would look at his long face, his slightly bald head, about which the people who knew of Swann's successes with women would think: "He's not conventionally handsome, granted, but he is smart: that quiff of hair, that monocle, that smile!" and, perhaps with more curiosity to know what he was than desire to become his mistress, she would say: "If only I could know what is in that head!"

Now, to all of Swann's remarks she would reply in a tone that was at times irritated, at times indulgent: "Oh, you really never will be like anyone else!" She would look at that head, which was only a little more aged by worry (but about which now everyone thought, with that same aptitude which enables you to discover the intentions of a symphonic piece when you have read the program, and the resemblances of a child when you know its parents: "He's not positively ugly, granted, but he is absurd; that monocle, that quiff of hair, that smile!" creating in their suggestible imaginations the immaterial demarcation that separates by several months' distance the head of an adored lover from that of a cuckold), she would say: "Oh, if only I could change what's in that head, if only I could make it reasonable."

Always prepared to believe what he hoped for, if Odette's behavior toward him left any room at all for doubt, he would fling himself avidly on her words:

"You can if you want to," he would say to her.

And he would try to show her that to soothe him, direct him, make him work, would be a noble task to which many other women might ask nothing better than to devote themselves, though it would only be fair to add that in their hands the noble task would have appeared to him merely an indiscreet and intolerable

usurpation of his freedom. “If she did not love me a little,” he would say to himself, “she would not want to transform me. In order to transform me, she will have to see more of me.” Thus he regarded this reproach of hers as a sort of proof of interest, of love perhaps; and indeed, she now gave him so few that he was obliged to regard as such the various prohibitions she imposed on him. One day, she declared that she did not like his coachman, that he was perhaps turning Swann against her, that in any case he did not show the punctuality and the deference to Swann that she wanted. She felt that Swann wanted to hear her say: “Don’t use him anymore when you come to see me,” as he would have wanted a kiss. Since she was in a good mood, she said it; he was touched. That evening, chatting with M. de Charlus, with whom he had the comfort of being able to talk about her openly (for the least bit of conversation he had, even with people who did not know her, always somehow related to her), he said to him: “Yet I believe she loves me; she is so kind to me, what I do is certainly not a matter of indifference to her.” And if, when he was setting off for her house, getting into his carriage with a friend whom he was to drop along the way, the friend said: “Why, that’s not Lorédan on the box,” with what melancholy joy Swann would answer him: “Oh Lord no! I tell you I can’t use Lorédan when I go to the rue La Pérouse. Odette doesn’t like me to use Lorédan, she doesn’t think he suits me. Well, what do you expect! Women, you know, women! I tell you she wouldn’t like it at all. Oh, Lord, yes; if I’d used Rémi, there’d be no end of trouble!”

This new manner, indifferent, distracted, irritable, which was now Odette’s manner with him, certainly caused Swann to suffer; but he was not aware of his suffering; since it was only gradually, day by day, that Odette had cooled toward him, it was only by comparing what she was now to what she had been in the beginning that he would have been able to fathom the depth of the change that had taken place. Yet that change was his deep, his secret wound which hurt him day and night, and as soon as he felt that his thoughts were straying a little too close to it, he would quickly guide them in another direction for fear of suffering too much. He would certainly say to himself in an abstract way: “There was a time when Odette loved me more,” but he would never look back at that time. Just as there was a bureau in his office which he took pains not to look at, which he made a detour to avoid as he came and went, because in one of its drawers he had locked away the chrysanthemum she had given him that first evening on which he had driven her home, and the letters in which she had said: “If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you take it back,” and “At whatever hour of the day or night you need me, send word and my life will be yours to command,” so too there was a place inside him which he never let his thoughts approach, forcing them if necessary to make the detour of a lengthy argument so that they would not have to pass in front of it: this was the place where his memory of the happy days resided.

But his meticulous prudence was foiled one evening when he had gone out into society, to a party.

It was at the home of the Marquise de Saint-Euverte, on the last, for that year, of the evenings on which she invited people to hear the musicians whom she would afterward use for her charity concerts. Swann, who had wanted to go to each of the preceding evenings in turn and had not been able to resolve to do so, had received, while he was dressing for this one, a visit from the Baron de Charlus, who was coming with an offer to return with him to the home of the Marquise, if his company would help him to be a little less bored there, a little less sad. But Swann had answered:

“You can’t doubt how much pleasure I would take in being with you. But the greatest pleasure you could give me would be to go to see Odette instead. You know what an excellent influence you have on her. I believe she’s not going out this evening before she goes to see her old dressmaker, and I’m sure she’d be delighted to have you accompany her there. In any case you’ll find her at home before that. Try to amuse her and also to talk some sense to her. If you could arrange something for tomorrow that she enjoys and that we could all three do together . . . Also, try to begin planning for this summer, see if there’s something she might want to do, a cruise we might all three take, I don’t know. I’m not counting on seeing her tonight myself; still, if she wanted to see me or if you were to find a way, you would only need to send me word at Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s up to midnight, and afterward at home. Thank you for all that you do for me—you know how fond I am of you.”

The Baron promised to go and pay the visit that Swann wanted after he had driven him to the door of the Saint-Euverte house, where Swann arrived soothed by the thought that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the rue La Pérouse, but in a state of melancholy indifference to everything that did not concern Odette, and in particular to the accoutrements of fashionable life, which gave them the charm that is to be found in anything which, being no longer an object of our desire, appears to us in its own guise. As soon as he descended from the carriage, in the foreground of that fictitious summary of their domestic life which hostesses like to offer their guests on ceremonial occasions and in which they seek to respect accuracy of costume and setting, Swann enjoyed the sight of those descendants of Balzac’s “tigers,”[89] the grooms, who normally followed along on the daily outing, now hatted and booted and posted outside in front of the house on the soil of the avenue, or in front of the stables, like gardeners lined up at the entrances to their flower beds. The particular tendency he had always had to look for analogies between living people and portraits in museums was still active but in a more constant and general way; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him as a series of pictures. In the hall which in the old days, when he went out regularly into society, he would walk into wrapped in his overcoat and leave in his tails, but without knowing what had happened there, his mind having been, during the few moments he had stayed there, either still at the party he had just left, or already at the party he was about to be shown into, for the first time he noticed, woken by the unexpected arrival of the late guest, the scattered pack of magnificent, tall, idle footmen sleeping here and there on benches and chests who, raising their sharp, noble, greyhound profiles, stood up and gathered in a circle around him.

One of them, of a particularly ferocious aspect and rather like the executioner in certain Renaissance paintings which depicts scenes of torture, advanced upon him with an implacable air to take his things. But the hardness of his steely gaze was compensated by the softness of his cotton gloves, so that as he approached Swann he seemed to be showing contempt for his person and consideration for his hat. He took it with a care to which the exactness of his balance gave something meticulous, and with a delicacy rendered almost touching by the evidence of his strength. He then passed it to one of his assistants, new and timid, who expressed the terror he felt by casting wild glances in all directions and displayed the agitation of a captive animal in the first hours of its domestication.

A few steps away, a sturdy fellow in livery mused motionless, statuesque, useless, like the purely decorative warrior one sees in the most tumultuous paintings by Mantegna,[90] lost in thought, leaning on his shield, while others beside him rush forward and slaughter one another; detached from his group of companions as they pressed around Swann, he seemed as resolved to take no part in this scene, which he followed vaguely with his cruel sea-green eyes, as if it were the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint John. He seemed in fact to belong to that race which has vanished—or which perhaps never existed except in the altarpiece of San Zeno and the frescoes of the Erimitani, where Swann had encountered it and where it dreams on still—and which issued from the impregnation of an ancient statue by one of the Master’s Paduan models or some Albrecht Dürer Saxon.[91] And the locks of his red hair, crimped by nature but glued by brilliantine, were treated broadly as they are in the Greek sculpture which the painter from Mantua studied so constantly and which, if out of all creation it depicts only man, is at least able to derive from his simple forms richnesses so varied, as though borrowed from all of living nature, that a head of hair, in the smooth rolls and sharp beaks of its curls, or in the superimposition of the threefold flowering diadem of its tresses, looks at once like a bundle of seaweed, a nestful of doves, a band of hyacinths, and a coil of snakes.

Still others, also colossal, stood on the steps of a monumental staircase to which their decorative presence and marmoreal immobility might have induced one to give the same name as the one in the Ducal Palace—“Staircase of the Giants”—and which Swann began to climb with the sad thought that Odette had never ascended it. Oh, with what joy by contrast would he have gone up the dark, evil-smelling, and rickety flights to the little retired dressmaker’s, in whose “fifth floor” he would have been so happy to pay more than the price of a weekly stage box at the Opéra for the right to spend the evening when Odette came there, and even on the other days, so as to be able to talk about her, to live among the people she was in the habit of seeing when he was not there and who because of that seemed to him to harbor something, of his mistress’s life, that was more real, more inaccessible, and more mysterious. Whereas in the old dressmaker’s pestilential and longed-for staircase, since there was no second, service stair, one saw in the evening in front of each door an empty, dirty milk can set out in readiness on the mat, on the magnificent and disdained staircase which Swann was mounting at that moment, on either side, at different levels, in front of each anfractuosity formed in the wall by the window of the lodge or the entrance to a set of rooms, representing the domestic service which they directed and paying homage to the guests on their behalf, a concierge, a majordomo, a steward (good people who lived the rest of the week somewhat independent in their domains, dined there at home like small shopkeepers, and by tomorrow would perhaps be in the bourgeois service of a doctor or manufacturer), heedful not to fail to carry out the instructions they had been given before being allowed to put on the dazzling livery which they wore only at rare intervals and in which they did not feel very much at ease, stood under the arcature of their portals with a stately glitter tempered by common good nature, like saints in their niches, and an enormous usher, dressed as though he were in church, struck the flagstones with his staff as each new arrival passed. Having reached the top of the staircase up the length of

which he had been followed by a wan-faced servant with a little bunch of hair tied in a cadogan[92] at the back of his head, like a Goya[93] sexton or a scrivener in an old play, Swann passed in front of a desk where valets, seated like notaries in front of great registers, stood up and inscribed his name. He then crossed a little vestibule which—like certain rooms arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art, from which they take their name and, deliberately bare, contain nothing else—displayed at its entrance, like some precious effigy by Benvenuto Cellini[94] representing a watchman, a young footman, his body bent slightly forward, lifting from his red gorget a face even redder from which burst forth torrents of fire, timidity, and zeal, and who, piercing with his impetuous, vigilant, distracted gaze the Aubusson tapestries hung before the drawing room where people were listening to music, appeared, with a military impassivity or a supernatural faith—an allegory of alarm, an incarnation of alertness, a commemoration of the call to arms—to be watching, angel or sentinel, from the tower of a castle or cathedral, for the appearance of the enemy or the hour of Judgment. Now Swann had only to enter the concert room, whose doors an usher loaded with chains was opening for him with a bow, as he would have handed over to him the keys to a city. But he thought of the house in which he might have been at this very moment, if Odette had permitted it, and the memory he glimpsed of an empty milk can on a doormat wrung his heart.

Swann rapidly recovered his sense of how ugly men could be, when, beyond the tapestry hangings, the spectacle of the servants was followed by that of the guests. But even the ugliness of these faces, though he knew it so well, seemed new to him since their features—instead of being signs usable in a practical way for the identification of a certain person who had until then represented a cluster of pleasures to pursue, worries to avoid, or courtesies to pay—now remained coordinated only by aesthetic relations, within the autonomy of their lines. And of these men in whose midst Swann found himself hemmed in, even the monocles which many wore (and which, formerly, would at the very most have allowed Swann to say that they wore a monocle), having now been released from signifying a habit, the same for everyone, appeared to him each with a sort of individuality. Maybe because he did not regard Général de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréauté, who were talking to each other just inside the door, as more than two figures in a painting, whereas for a long time they had been useful friends who had introduced him to the Jockey Club and supported him in duels, the general's monocle, stuck between his eyelids like a shell splinter in his vulgar, scarred, overbearing face, in the middle of a forehead which it blinded like the Cyclops' single eye, appeared to Swann like a monstrous wound that might have been glorious to receive, but was indecent to show off; whereas the one that M. de Bréauté added, as a badge of festivity, to the pearl-gray gloves, the opera hat, and the white tie, and substituted for the familiar lorgnette (as Swann himself did) for going out in society, bore, glued to its other side, like a natural history specimen under a microscope, an infinitesimal gaze teeming with friendliness that smiled constantly at the loftiness of the ceilings, the beauty of the preparations, the interest of the programs, and the excellence of the refreshments.

"Well now, here you are! Why, it's been an eternity since we last saw you," said the general to Swann and, noticing his drawn features and concluding from this that it was perhaps a grave illness that had kept him away from society, he added: "You look quite well, you know!" while M. de Bréauté asked: "My dear, what in the world are you doing here?" of a society novelist who had just positioned in the corner of his eye a monocle which was his only organ of psychological investigation and pitiless analysis and who answered with an air of mystery and self-importance, rolling the *r:*

"I am observing!"

The Marquis de Forestelle's monocle was minuscule, had no border, and, requiring a constant painful clenching of the eye, where it was encrusted like a superfluous cartilage whose presence was inexplicable and whose material was exquisite, gave the Marquis's face a melancholy delicacy, and made women think he was capable of great sorrows in love. But that of M. de Saint-Candé, surrounded by a gigantic ring, like Saturn, was the center of gravity of a face which regulated itself at each moment in relation to it, a face whose quivering red nose and thick-lipped sarcastic mouth attempted by their grimaces to equal the unceasing salvos of wit sparkling from the disk of glass, and saw itself preferred to the handsomest eyes in the world by snobbish and depraved young women in whom it inspired dreams of artificial charms and a refinement of voluptuousness; and meanwhile, behind his own, M. de Palancy, who, with his big, round-eyed carp's head, moved about slowly in the midst of the festivities unclenching his mandibles from moment to moment as though seeking to orient himself, merely seemed to be transporting with him an accidental and perhaps purely symbolic fragment of the glass of his aquarium, a part intended to represent the whole, reminding Swann, a great admirer of Giotto's *Vices* and *Virtues* at Padua, of Injustice, next to whom a leafy bough evokes the forests in which his lair is hidden.

Swann had walked on into the room, at the insistence of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and, in order to hear a melody from *Orphée*[95] that was being performed by a flautist, had placed himself in a corner where unfortunately his only view was of two mature ladies seated next to each other, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot, who, because they were cousins, spent their time when attending a party, clutching their bags and followed by their daughters, looking for each other as though in a railway station, and did not rest easy until they had reserved, with a fan or a handkerchief, two seats side by side: Mme. de Cambremer, since she had very few acquaintances, being all the happier to have a companion, Mme. de Franquetot, who was in contrast extremely well connected, believing there was something elegant, something original, about showing all her fine friends that she preferred, to their company, an obscure lady with whom she shared memories of her youth. Full of a melancholy irony, Swann watched them listen to the piano intermezzo (*Saint Francis Speaking to the Birds* by Liszt)[96] which had come after the flute melody, and follow the vertiginous playing of the virtuoso, Mme. de Franquetot anxiously, her eyes wild as if the keys over which he ran with such agility were a series of trapezes from which he might fall from a height of eighty yards, and at the same time casting at her neighbor looks of astonishment, of denial which signified: "This is not to be believed, I would never have thought a man could do this," while Mme. de Cambremer, being a woman who had received a strong musical education, marked time with her head transformed into the arm of a metronome whose amplitude and rapidity of oscillations from one shoulder to the other had become such (with that sort of frenzy and abandon in the eyes characteristic of a kind of suffering which is no longer aware of itself nor tries to control itself and says "I can't help it!") that she kept snagging her solitaires in the straps of her bodice and was obliged to straighten the black grapes she had in her hair, though without ceasing to accelerate her motion. On the other side of Mme. de Franquetot, but a little in front, was the Marquise de Gallardon, occupied with her favorite thought, her alliance with the Guermantes, which in the eyes of the world and in her own was the source of a good deal of glory along with some shame, the most brilliant of them keeping her a bit at a distance, perhaps because she was tiresome, or because she was spiteful, or because she was from an inferior branch, or perhaps for no reason. When she found herself next to someone she did not know, as at this moment Mme. de Franquetot, it would pain her that her own awareness of her kinship with the Guermantes could not be manifested outwardly in visible characters like those which, in the mosaics of the Byzantine churches, placed one below another, inscribe in a vertical column, next to a holy personage, the words he is supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was pondering the fact that she had never received an invitation or a visit from her young cousin the Princesse des Laumes, in the six years the Princesse had been married. This thought filled her with anger, but also with pride; for, by dint of saying to people who were surprised not to see her at the home of Mme. des Laumes, that it was because she would have risked meeting Princesse Mathilde[97] there—for which her ultra-Legitimist[98] family would never have forgiven her—she had ended by believing this actually was the reason she did not go to her young cousin's house. Yet she recalled having asked Mme. des Laumes several times how she might contrive to meet her, but recalled it only confusedly and also more than neutralized this slightly humiliating memory by murmuring: "After all it's not up to me to make the first move, I'm twenty years older than she." Fortified by the efficacy of these unspoken words, she proudly threw back her shoulders, which seemed detached from her bust and on which her head was positioned almost horizontally so that one was reminded of the "restored" head of a haughty pheasant brought to the table in all its feathers. It was not so much that she was not stocky, mannish, and plump by nature; but the insults she had received had straightened her up like those trees which, born in a bad position at the brink of a precipice, are forced to grow backward to keep their balance. Obliged as she was, in order to console herself for not being altogether the equal of the other Guermantes, to keep telling herself that it was because of the intransigence of her principles and her pride that she did not see them very often, this thought had ended by shaping her body and by giving her an imposing sort of presence that passed in the eyes of bourgeois women for a sign of breeding and sometimes disturbed with a fleeting desire the clubmen's weary glances. If Mme. de Gallardon's conversation had been subjected to those analyses which, by recording the greater or lesser frequency of each word, permit one to discover the key to a language in code, one would have realized that no expression, even the most ordinary, recurred in it as often as "at the home of my cousins the Guermantes," "at the home of my aunt de Guermantes," "the health of Elzéar de Guermantes," "my cousin de Guermantes's baignoire."[99] When anyone spoke to her about a famous personage, she would answer that without knowing him personally she had met him a thousand times at the home of her aunt de Guermantes, but she would answer this in a tone so icy and in a voice so low that it was clear that, if she did not know him personally, it

was by virtue of all the ineradicable and stubborn principles which her shoulders touched behind her, like those ladders on which gymnastics instructors make you stretch out in order to develop your chest.

Now as it happened, the Princesse des Laumes, whom one would not have expected to see at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, had just arrived. In order to show that she was not trying to advertise, in a drawing room to which she had come only out of condescension, the superiority of her rank, she had entered with her shoulders turned sideways even where there was no crowd to cleave through and no person attempting to get past her, staying deliberately at the back, with the air of being in her proper place, like a king who stands in line at the door of a theater so long as the management has not been informed that he is there; and, merely confining her gaze—so as not to seem to be signaling her presence and demanding attention—to a consideration of the design in the carpet or in her own skirt, she stood in the spot that had seemed to her the most modest (and from which she was well aware she would be drawn by a delighted exclamation from Mme. de Saint-Euverte as soon as the latter noticed her), next to Mme. de Cambremer, whom she did not know. She observed the pantomime of her music-loving neighbor, but did not imitate it. It was not that, the one time she came to spend five minutes at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, the Princesse des Laumes would not have wished, so that the courtesy she was showing her might count double, to prove as friendly as possible. But by nature, she had a horror of what she called "exaggerations" and was anxious to show that she "did not have to" indulge in displays of emotion which were not in keeping with the "style" of the circle she moved in, but which still, on the other hand, could not help but impress her, by virtue of that spirit of imitation akin to timidity which is developed in the most confident persons by the atmosphere of a new environment, even if it is an inferior one. She began to wonder if this gesticulation was not perhaps a necessary response to the piece being played, which did not come quite within the scope of the music she had heard up to now, if to refrain was not to give proof of incomprehension with respect to the work and impropriety toward the lady of the house: so that, in order to express both of her contradictory inclinations by a compromise, she first merely straightened up her shoulder straps or put a hand to her blond hair to secure the little balls of diamond-flecked coral or pink enamel which formed her simple and charming coiffure, while at the same time examining her ardent neighbor with cold curiosity, then with her fan she beat time for a moment, but, so as not to forfeit her independence, on the offbeat. When the pianist ended the piece by Liszt and began a prelude by Chopin, Mme. de Cambremer gave Mme. de Franquetot a tender smile full of knowledgeable satisfaction and allusion to the past. When she was young she had learned to caress the phrases of Chopin with their sinuous and excessively long necks, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by seeking out and exploring a place for themselves far outside and away from the direction in which they started, far beyond the point which one might have expected them to reach, and which frolic in this fantasy distance only to come back more deliberately—with a more premeditated return, with more precision, as though upon a crystal glass that resonates until you cry out—to strike you in the heart.

Living in a provincial family that had few friends, scarcely ever going out to a ball, she had intoxicated herself in the solitude of her manor house, with all those imaginary dancing couples, now slowing them, now speeding them, now scattering them like flowers, now leaving the ball for a moment to hear the wind blow in the pine trees, at the edge of the lake, and suddenly seeing, as he came toward her there, more unlike anything anyone had ever dreamed of than an earthly lover could be, a slender young man in white gloves whose voice had a strange, false lilt to it. But nowadays the old-fashioned beauty of that music seemed stale. Having fallen in the esteem of the discriminating public over the past several years, it had lost its position of distinction and its charm, and even those whose taste is bad no longer took more than an unacknowledged and moderate pleasure in it. Mme. de Cambremer cast a furtive glance behind her. She was aware that her young daughter-in-law (full of respect for her new family, except regarding the things of the mind about which, since she knew a little harmony and even some Greek, she was especially enlightened) despised Chopin and suffered when she heard it played. But far away from the surveillance of that Wagnerian who was off in the distance with a group of people her own age, Mme. de Cambremer abandoned herself to her delightful impressions. The Princesse des Laumes was enjoying them too. Though without a natural gift for music, she had had lessons fifteen years earlier from a piano teacher of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who at the end of her life had been reduced to poverty and had returned, at the age of seventy, to giving piano lessons, to the daughters and granddaughters of her old pupils. She was dead now. But her method, her lovely sound, came back to life sometimes under the fingers of her pupils, even those who had become in other respects ordinary people, had abandoned music, and almost never opened a piano anymore. And so Mme. des Laumes could shake her head, with expert knowledge, with a just appreciation of the way the pianist was playing this prelude, which she knew by heart. The end of the phrase he had begun already sang on her lips. And she murmured, "It's always *ch*arming," with a double *ch* at the start of the word which was a mark of refinement and which, she felt, pursed her lips so romantically, like a beautiful flower, that she instinctively brought her eyes into harmony with them by giving them an expression just then of sentimentality and vague yearning. Meanwhile, Mme. de Gallardon was saying to herself how annoying it was that she only very rarely had the opportunity to meet the Princesse des Laumes, for she wanted to teach her a lesson by not responding to her greeting. She did not know her cousin was there. A movement of Mme. de Franquetot's head revealed the Princesse to her. Immediately she hurried toward her, disturbing everyone; but though she wanted to preserve a haughty and glacial manner which would remind everyone that she did not wish to be on friendly terms with a person in whose house one might find oneself coming face-to-face with Princesse Mathilde, and to whom it was not for her to make advances since she was not "of her generation," still she wanted to offset this air of haughtiness and reserve by some remark that would justify her overture and force the Princesse to engage in conversation; and so when she came near her cousin, Mme. de Gallardon, with a hard expression and a hand outthrust like a "forced" card, said to her: "How is your husband?" in the concerned tone she would have used if the Prince had been gravely ill. The Princesse, bursting into a laugh which was peculiar to her and which was intended at once to show others that she was making fun of someone and also to make herself look prettier by concentrating her features around her animated lips and sparkling eyes, answered:

"Why, he's never been better!"

And she laughed again. Whereupon Mme. de Gallardon, drawing herself up and contriving an even chillier expression, yet still concerned about the Prince's condition, said to her cousin:

"Oriane" (here Mme. des Laumes looked with an air of surprise and merriment at an invisible third party in whose presence she seemed anxious to attest that she had never authorized Mme. de Gallardon to call her by her first name), "I would be so pleased if you could stop in at my house for a moment tomorrow evening to hear a clarinet quintet by Mozart. I would like to have your opinion."

She seemed not to be offering an invitation, but to be asking a favor, and to need the Princesse's assessment of the Mozart quintet as if it were a dish composed by a new cook about whose talents it was valuable to her to obtain the opinion of a gourmet.

"But I know that quintet. I can tell you right now . . . I like it!"

"You know, my husband isn't well; it's his liver . . . It would give him great pleasure to see you," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, now placing the Princesse under a charitable obligation to appear at her soiree.

The Princesse never liked to tell people she did not want to go to their homes. Every day she would write notes expressing her regrets at having been prevented—by an unexpected visit from her mother-in-law, an invitation from her brother-in-law, the opera, an expedition to the country—from attending a soiree to which she would never have dreamed of going. In this way she gave many people the joy of believing that she was one of their friends, that she would readily have gone to visit them, that she had been kept from doing so only by princely inconveniences which they were flattered to see enter into competition with their soiree. Then, too, since she was part of that witty circle of the Guermantes in which something survived of the alert mentality unburdened by platitudes and conventional feelings which was handed down from Mérimée[100] and had found its latest expression in the theater of Meilhac and Halévy,[101] she adapted it even to social relations, transposed it even into her politeness, which endeavored to be positive and precise, and to approximate the plain truth. She would never develop at any length to a hostess the expression of her desire to be present at her party; she thought it friendlier to put to her a few little facts on which it would depend whether or not it was possible for her to come.

"The thing is," she said to Mme. de Gallardon, "tomorrow evening I have to go see a friend who has been asking me to make a date with her for ages. If she takes us to the theater, even with the best will in the world there won't be any chance of my coming to you; but if we stay in the house, since I know we'll be alone, I'll be able to leave her."

"Oh, by the way, did you see your friend M. Swann?"

"Why no! My beloved Charles, I didn't know he was here, I must try to attract his attention."

“It’s funny that he should go to old Saint-Euverte’s,” said Mme. de Gallardon. “Oh, I know he’s intelligent,” she added, meaning he was a schemer, “but still and all, a Jew in the home of the sister and sister-in-law of two archbishops!”

“I confess to my shame that I’m not shocked,” said the Princess des Laumes.

“I know he’s a convert, and even his parents and grandparents before him. But they do say converts remain more attached to their religion than anyone else, that it’s all just a pretense. Is that true?”

“I don’t know a thing about that.”

The pianist, who was to play two pieces by Chopin, after finishing the prelude had immediately attacked a polonaise. But now that Mme. de Gallardon had told her cousin that Swann was there, Chopin himself might have risen from the dead and played all his pieces in succession without Mme. des Laumes paying the slightest attention. She belonged to that half of the human race in whom the curiosity the other half feels about the people it does not know is replaced by an interest in the people it does. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the presence in a place where she happened to be of someone from her set, though she had nothing in particular to say to him, monopolized her attention at the expense of everything else. From that moment on, in the hopes that Swann would notice her, the Princesse, like a tame white mouse when a bit of sugar is offered to it and then taken away, kept turning her face, which was filled with a thousand signs of complicity unrelated to the feeling in Chopin’s polonaise, in Swann’s direction, and if he moved, she would shift in a corresponding direction her magnetic smile.

“Oriane, don’t be angry,” resumed Mme. de Gallardon, who could never stop herself from sacrificing her greatest social ambitions and highest hopes of someday dazzling the world to the immediate, obscure, and private pleasure of saying something disagreeable, “but people do claim that M. Swann is someone whom one can’t have in one’s house, is that true?”

“Why . . . you ought to know,” answered the Princesse des Laumes, “since you’ve invited him fifty times and he hasn’t come once.”

And leaving her mortified cousin, she burst into laughter again, scandalizing the people who were listening to the music, but attracting the attention of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had stayed near the piano out of politeness and only now noticed the Princesse. Mme. de Saint-Euverte was especially delighted to see Mme. des Laumes because she had thought she was still at Guermantes looking after her sick father-in-law.

“Why, Princesse, I didn’t know you were here!”

“Yes, I tucked myself away in a little corner, and I’ve been hearing such lovely things.”

“What! Have you been here for a long time?”

“Why yes, a very long time which seemed very short to me—it was long only because I couldn’t see you.”

Mme. de Saint-Euverte tried to give her chair to the Princesse, who answered:

“Oh, please, no! Why should you? I’m comfortable wherever I sit!”

And, intentionally selecting, the better to display her simplicity, great lady though she was, a low seat without a back:

“Here, this hassock is all I need. It’ll make me sit up straight. Oh, my Lord, I’m making too much noise again, if I’m not careful they’ll turn on me and throw me out.”

Meanwhile, the pianist having redoubled his speed, the musical emotion was at its height, a servant was passing refreshments on a tray and making the spoons clink, and, as happened every week, Mme. de Saint-Euverte signaled to him without his seeing her, to go away. A newlywed, who had been taught that a young woman must not appear bored, smiled with pleasure, and tried to catch the hostess’s eye in order to send her a look of gratitude for having “thought of her” for such a treat. However, although she remained calmer than Mme. de Franquetot, it was not without some uneasiness that she followed the music; but the object of her uneasiness was, not the pianist, but the piano, on which a candle jumping with each fortissimo risked, if not setting its shade on fire, at least spotting the Brazilian rosewood. In the end she could not bear it any longer and, scaling the two steps of the dais on which the piano was placed, swooped down to remove the sconce. But her hands were just about to touch it when, with a final chord, the piece ended and the pianist stood up. Nevertheless the young woman’s bold initiative, the resulting brief promiscuity between her and the instrumentalist, produced a generally favorable impression.

“Did you see what that young woman did, Princesse?” said Général de Froberville to the Princesse des Laumes, whom he had come up to greet and whom Mme. de Saint-Euverte had left for a moment. “Odd, wasn’t it? Is she a performer?”

“No, she’s just some young Mme. de Cambremer,” answered the Princesse without thinking and then added hurriedly: “I’m only repeating what I heard, I haven’t the slightest idea who she is; someone behind me was saying they were country neighbors of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, but I don’t think anyone knows them, really. They must be ‘country folk’! Anyway, I don’t know if you’re intimate with the brilliant society here, but I can’t put a name to any of these astonishing people. What do you think they spend their time doing when they’re not at Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s evenings? She must have ordered 373 them along with the musicians, the chairs, and the refreshments. You must admit these ‘guests from Belloir’s’[102] are magnificent. Does she really have the heart to rent the same ‘extras’ every week? It isn’t possible!”

“Ah! But Cambremer is quite a good name, and an old one too,” said the general.

“I see no harm in the fact that it’s old,” answered the Princesse dryly, “but still, it’s not *euphonious,*” she added, isolating the word *euphonious* as though between quotation marks, a little affectation in delivery that was peculiar to the Guermantes set.

“You think so? She’s pretty enough to eat, though,” said the general, who had not let Mme. de Cambremer out of his sight. “Don’t you agree, Princesse?”

“She thrusts herself forward too much, I think; in so young a woman, that’s not nice—because I don’t believe she’s of my generation,” answered Mme. des Laumes (this expression being common to both the Gallardons and the Guermantes).

But then the Princesse, seeing that M. de Froberville was continuing to gaze at Mme. de Cambremer, added half out of spite against her, half out of friendliness toward the general: “Not nice . . . for her husband! I’m sorry I don’t know her, since you’ve set your heart on her; I would have introduced you,” she continued, although she probably would have done nothing of the kind had she known the young woman. “I will have to say goodnight to you, because it’s the birthday of a friend of mine and I must go and pay my respects,” she said in a tone of modesty and sincerity, reducing the fashionable party to which she was going to the simplicity of a ceremony which was tiresome but which it was obligatory and also rather touching to attend. “Besides, I’m supposed to meet Basin there; while I’ve been here, he has been seeing friends of his—people you know, I believe. They have the same name as a bridge: the Iénas.”

“Before that it was the name of a victory, Princesse,” said the general. “What do you expect—an old soldier like me,” he went on, removing his monocle and wiping it, as he would have changed a bandage, while the Princesse instinctively looked away. “The nobility of the Empire, it’s different of course, but really, for what it is, it’s very fine of its kind. Those were men who fought, really, like heroes.”

“But I have the deepest respect for heroes,” said the Princesse, in a slightly ironic tone: “if I don’t go with Basin to see this woman, the Princesse d’Iéna, it’s not because of that, not at all, it’s quite simply because I don’t know them. Basin knows them, he loves them dearly. Oh no, it’s not what you may think, they’re not having an affair, I have no reason to object! Anyway, what use is it when I do try to object?” she added in a melancholy voice, because everyone knew that the very day after the Prince des Laumes married his ravishing cousin, he had deceived her, and he had not stopped deceiving her since. “But this is not the same, these are people he used to know, he’s happy as a pig in clover, I think it’s very nice. But I can tell you that even what he has told me about their house . . . Can you imagine, all their furniture is ‘Empire’!”[103]

“Well, naturally, Princesse; it was their grandparents’ furniture.”

“Well, I’m not saying it wasn’t, but it’s no less ugly for all that. I understand perfectly well that one can’t always have pretty things, but at least one’s things should not be ridiculous. What do you expect? I can’t think of anything more conventional, more bourgeois, than that horrible style—cabinets with swans’ heads, like bathtubs.”

“Actually I do believe they have some beautiful things, they must have that famous mosaic table that was used for the signing of the Treaty of . . .”

“Oh, I’m not saying they don’t have things that are interesting from a historical point of view. But things like that can’t ever be beautiful . . . because they’re simply horrible! I’ve got things like that myself which Basin inherited from the Montesquious. Only they’re in the attics of Guermantes where no one can see them. Anyway, really, that’s not the point, I would rush around to their house with Basin, I would see them even in the midst of their sphinxes and their brass if I

knew them, but . . . I don't know them! I was always told when I was little that it wasn't polite to go to the homes of people one didn't know," she said, assuming a childish tone. "So I'm just doing what I was taught. Can't you see those good people if someone they didn't know were to come bursting into the house? They might make me feel quite unwelcome!" said the Princesse.

And she coquettishly enhanced the smile which this supposition had brought to her lips by giving her blue eyes, which were fixed on the general, a dreamy, gentle expression.

"Ah, Princesse, you know very well they wouldn't be able to contain themselves for joy . . ."

"Not at all. Why?" she asked him with the utmost vivacity, either so as not to seem to know that it was because she was one of the foremost ladies in France, or so as to have the pleasure of hearing the general say it. "Why? What do you know about it? It might be the most disagreeable thing in the world for them. I don't know, but judging by myself, it already bores me so much to see people I know, I believe that if I had to see people I didn't know, even if they had 'fought like heroes,' I would go mad. Besides, you see, except when it's an old friend like you whom one knows quite apart from that, I don't know if heroism would take one very far in society. I often find it quite boring enough as it is to give a dinner party, but if I had to offer my arm to Spartacus going in to the table . . . No, really, Vercingétorix would never be the one I would send for, to make a fourteenth. I think I would save him for the large parties. And since I never give any . . ."

"Ah, Princesse, you're not a Guermantes for nothing. You have your share of it all right, the wit of the Guermantes family!"

"They always say 'the wit of the Guermantes *family*.' I've never been able to understand why. Do you know *other* Guermantes who have it?" she added in a bubbly, joyful burst of laughter, her features concentrated, interconnected in a web of animation, her eyes sparkling, blazing with a radiant sunshine of gaiety that could be kindled only by remarks, even if made by the Princesse herself, in praise of her wit or her beauty. "Wait, there's Swann. He seems to be speaking to your young Cambremer. There . . . he's next to old mother Saint-Euverte, don't you see him? Ask him to introduce you. But hurry up, he's trying to walk away!"

"How frightfully ill he's looking—did you notice?" said the general.

"My dear Charles! Ah! At last he's coming, I was beginning to think he didn't want to see me!"

Swann liked the Princesse des Laumes very much, and the sight of her also reminded him of Guermantes, the estate next to Combray, the whole countryside which he loved so much and had ceased to visit so as not to be away from Odette. Using the half-artistic, half-courtly formulae which he knew were pleasing to the Princesse and which he resumed quite naturally whenever he reimmersed himself for a moment in his old social milieu—and wanting anyway for his own sake to express the yearning he felt for the country:

"Ah," he said to some vague general audience, in order to be heard both by Mme. de Saint-Euverte, to whom he was speaking, and by Mme. des Laumes, for whom he was speaking, "here's the charming Princesse! See, she has come up from Guermantes expressly to hear Liszt's *Saint Francis of Assisi* and has only just had time, like a pretty titmouse, to go and pluck a little fruit from the wild plums and hawthorns and put them on her head; there is even a bit of dew on them still, a bit of the hoarfrost that must be making the duchess groan so. It's very pretty indeed, my dear Princesse."

"What, the Princesse has come up expressly from Guermantes? But that's too much! I didn't know, I'm embarrassed," exclaimed Mme. de Saint-Euverte naively, not being used to Swann's wit. Then, looking more closely at the Princesse's headgear: "Why you're quite right, it's meant to look like . . . what shall I say, not chestnuts, no—oh, what a ravishing idea! But how could the Princesse have known what was going to be on my program! The musicians didn't even tell me."

Swann, who was accustomed, when he was in the company of a woman whom he had kept up the habit of addressing in gallant language, to say things so delicately nuanced that many society people could not understand them, did not condescend to explain to Mme. de Saint-Euverte that he had merely been speaking metaphorically. As for the Princesse, she began laughing heartily, because Swann's wit was highly appreciated in her set and also because she could not hear a compliment addressed to her without finding it most exquisitely subtle and irresistibly droll.

"Well! I'm delighted, Charles, if you like my little hawthorn fruits. Why did you speak to that Cambremer woman? Are you her neighbor in the country too?"

Mme. de Saint-Euverte, seeing that the Princesse appeared happy to chat with Swann, had moved off.

"But you are too, Princesse."

"I! But then those people have country places everywhere! How I would like to be in their place!"

"It's not the Cambremers, it's her own family; she's a Legrandin daughter and used to come to Combray. I don't know if you know you're the Comtesse de Combray and the chapter owes you a due?"

"I don't know what the chapter owes me, but I know that I'm dunned a hundred francs every year by the curé, which I could do without. Really those Cambremers have a most astonishing name.[104] It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said, laughing.

"It doesn't begin any better," Swann answered.

"Really, the two abbreviations together! . . ."

"Someone very angry and very proper didn't dare finish the first word."

"But since he couldn't stop himself from beginning the second, he should have finished the first—then he'd be done with it once and for all. Our jokes are in charming taste, my little Charles, but how tiresome it is not to see you anymore," she added in a caressing tone, "I so much like talking to you. Just think, I wouldn't even have been able to make that idiot Froberville understand that the name Cambremer is astonishing. Admit that life is a dreadful thing. It's only when I see you that I stop feeling bored."

This was probably not true. But Swann and the Princesse had the same way of looking at the small things of life, the effect of which—unless it was the cause—was a great similarity in their ways of expressing themselves and even in their pronunciation. No one noticed the resemblance because their two voices were so utterly unlike. But if in one's imagination one managed to divest Swann's remarks of the sonority in which they were enveloped, of the mustache from under which they issued, one realized that these were the same sentences, the same inflections, that these turns of phrase belonged to the Guermantes set. When it came to the important things, Swann and the Princesse did not have the same ideas about anything. But now that Swann had become so sad, always in the sort of tremulous condition that precedes the moment one is going to cry, he felt as compelled to talk about grief as a murderer is to talk about his crime. When he heard the Princesse say that life was a dreadful thing, he felt as comforted as if she had been talking about Odette.

"Oh, yes! Life is a dreadful thing. We must see each other soon, my dear friend. What's so nice about being with you is that you're not cheerful. We could spend an evening together."

"What a good idea! Why don't you come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be wild with joy. It's supposed to be so ugly thereabouts, but I must say I don't dislike that countryside at all; I loathe 'picturesque' spots."

"I agree, it's wonderful," answered Swann, "it's almost too beautiful, too alive for me just now; it's a place to be happy in. Perhaps it's because I've lived there, but the things there speak to me so! As soon as a breath of wind comes up, when the wheat begins to move, it seems to me that someone is about to arrive, I'm going to hear some news; and those little houses by the edge of the water . . . I would be quite miserable!"

"Oh, my dear Charles, watch out, there's that dreadful Rampillon woman. She's seen me; please hide me. Remind me what it was that happened to her; I'm getting it all mixed up; she's just married off her daughter, or her lover, I can't remember which; maybe both of them . . . and to each other! . . . Oh no! I remember now, she's been dropped by her prince . . . Pretend to be talking to me, so that Bérénice woman won't come over and invite me to dinner. Anyway, I must fly. Listen, my dear Charles, now that I've seen you for once, won't you let me steal you away and take you to the Princess's? She'd be so pleased to see you, and Basin, too—he's meeting me there. If we didn't get news of you from Mémé . . . Just think, I never see you at all now!"

Swann declined; having told M. de Charlus that when he left Mme. de Saint-Euverte's he would go directly back home, he did not want to run the risk, by going on to the Princess of Parma's, of missing a note that he had been hoping all evening would be handed to him by a servant during the party, and that perhaps he would find in his concierge's keeping. "Poor Swann," said Mme. des Laumes that night to her husband, "he's always kind, but he appears quite unhappy. You'll see, because he has promised to come to dinner one of these days. I do find it absurd that a man of his intelligence should suffer over a person of that sort, who isn't even interesting—because they say she's an idiot," she added with the wisdom of people not in love who believe a man of sense should be unhappy only over a person who is worth it; which is rather like being surprised that anyone should condescend to suffer from cholera because of so small a creature as the comma bacillus.

Swann wanted to leave, but just when he was at last about to escape, Général de Froberville asked him for an introduction to Mme. de Cambremer and he was obliged to go back into the drawing room with him to look for her.

"Now, Swann, I'd rather be the husband of that woman than slaughtered by savages, what do you say?"

The words *slaughtered by savages* pierced Swann's heart painfully; and at once he felt the need to continue the conversation:

"Well, you know," he said to him, "some really fine men have lost their lives that way . . . For instance, if you remember . . . That navigator whose ashes were brought back by Dumont d'Urville, La Pérouse . . ." (And Swann was immediately happy, as if he had spoken Odette's name.) "He was a fine character, La Pérouse was, and one who interests me very much," he added with a melancholy air.

"Ah! Indeed yes. La Pérouse," said the general. "The name is well known. It's got its own street."

"You know someone in the rue La Pérouse?" asked Swann in some agitation.

"I know only Mme. de Chanlivault, the sister of that good fellow Chaussepierre. She gave us a nice theater party the other day. Her salon will be very elegant one of these days, you'll see!"

"Ah, so she lives in the rue La Pérouse. It's an appealing street, very pretty, and so melancholy."

"Why, not at all, in fact you haven't been there in some time; it's not melancholy these days, they're beginning to build there, they've got buildings going up in the whole neighborhood."

When at last Swann introduced M. de Froberville to young Mme. de Cambremer, since it was the first time she had heard the general's name she ventured the smile of joy and surprise she would have given him if no other name but that one had ever been uttered in her presence, for as she did not know the friends of her new family, each time a person was presented to her, she believed he was one of them, and thinking it would be tactful of her to look as though she had heard such a lot about him since she was married, she would put out her hand with a hesitant air meant as proof of the inculcated reserve she had to conquer and the spontaneous congeniality that succeeded in overcoming it. And so her parents-in-law, whom she still believed to be the most brilliant people in France, declared that she was an angel; especially since they preferred to appear, in marrying their son to her, to have responded to the attraction of her fine qualities rather than of her great wealth.

"One can see that you have the soul of a musician, madame," the general said to her, unconsciously alluding to the incident of the sconce.

But the concert was beginning again and Swann realized he would not be able to leave before the end of this new number. He was suffering at having to remain shut up among these people whose stupidity and absurd habits struck him all the more painfully since, being unaware of his love, incapable, had they known about it, of taking any interest in it or doing more than smile at it as at some childish nonsense or deplore it as utter madness, they made it appear to him as a subjective state which existed only for him, whose reality was confirmed for him by nothing outside himself; he suffered most of all, to the point where even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry out, from prolonging his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, where no one, where nothing knew her, from which she was entirely absent.

But suddenly it was as though she had appeared in the room, and this apparition caused him such harrowing pain that he had to put his hand on his heart. What had happened was that the violin had risen to a series of high notes on which it lingered as though waiting for something, holding on to them in a prolonged expectancy, in the exaltation of already seeing the object of its expectation approaching, and with a desperate effort to try to endure until it arrived, to welcome it before expiring, to keep the way open for it another moment with a last bit of strength so that it could come through, as one holds up a trapdoor that would otherwise fall back. And before Swann had time to understand, and say to himself: "It's the little phrase from the sonata by Vinteuil; don't listen!" all his memories of the time when Odette was in love with him, which he had managed until now to keep out of sight in the deepest part of himself, deceived by this sudden beam of light from the time of love which they believed had returned, had awoken and flown swiftly back up to sing madly to him, with no pity for his present misfortune, the forgotten refrains of happiness.

In place of the abstract expressions *the time when I was happy, the time when I was loved,* which he had often used before now without suffering too much, for his mind had enclosed within them only spurious extracts of the past that preserved nothing of it, he now recovered everything which had fixed forever the specific, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he saw everything again, the snowy curled petals of the chrysanthemum that she had tossed to him in his carriage, that he had held against his lips—the embossed address of the "Maison Dorée" on the letter in which he had read: "My hand is shaking so badly as I write to you"—the way her eyebrows had come together when she said to him with a supplicating look: "It won't be too long before you send word to me?"; he smelled the fragrance of the hairdresser's iron by which he would have his "brush cut" straightened while Lorédan went to fetch the young working girl, the stormy rains that fell so often that spring, the icy drive home in his victoria, by moonlight, all the meshes formed from habits of thinking, impressions of the seasons, reactions on the surface of his skin, which had laid over a succession of weeks a uniform net in which his body was now recaptured. At that time, he was satisfying a sensual curiosity by experiencing the pleasures of people who live for love. He had believed he could stop there, that he would not be obliged to learn their sorrows; how small a thing Odette's charm was for him now compared with the astounding terror that extended out from it like a murky halo, the immense anguish of not knowing at every moment what she had been doing, of not possessing her everywhere and always! Alas, he recalled the accents in which she had exclaimed: "But I will always be able to see you, I am always free!"—she who was never free now!—the interest, the curiosity she had shown in his own life, the passionate desire that he should do her the favor—which he in fact dreaded in those days as a cause of tiresome inconveniences—of allowing her to enter it; how she had been obliged to beg him to let her take him to the Verdurins'; and when he had allowed her to come to him once a month, how she had had to tell him over and over again, before he would let himself give in to her, how delightful it would be to have the habit of seeing each other every day, a habit which she dreamed of whereas to him it seemed only a tedious bother, which she had then grown tired of and broken once and for all, while for him it had become such an irresistible and painful need. He did not know how truthfully he was speaking when, the third time he saw her, as she said to him yet again: "But why don't you let me come more often?" he had said to her with a laugh, gallantly: "for fear of being hurt." Now, alas, she still wrote to him occasionally from a restaurant or hotel on paper that bore its printed name; but now the letters of that name burned him like letters of fire. "It's written from the Hôtel Vouillemont?[105] What can she have gone there to do? And with whom? What has been going on there?" He remembered the gas jets being extinguished along the boulevard des Italiens when he had met her against all hope among the wandering shades on that night which had seemed to him almost supernatural and which indeed—since it belonged to a time when he did not even have to ask himself if he would vex her by looking for her, by finding her, so sure was he that her greatest joy was to see him and go home with him—was truly part of a mysterious world to which one can never return once its doors have closed. And Swann saw, motionless before that relived happiness, a miserable figure who filled him with pity because he did not recognize him right away, and he had to lower his eyes so that no one would see that they were full of tears. It was himself.

When he realized this, his pity vanished, but he was jealous of the other self she had loved, he was jealous of those of whom he had often said to himself without suffering too much "maybe she loves them," now that he had exchanged the vague idea of loving, in which there is no love, for the petals of the chrysanthemum and the letterhead of the Maison d'Or, which were full of it. Then his pain became too sharp, he passed his hand over his forehead, let his monocle drop, wiped its glass. And no doubt, if he had seen himself at that moment, he would have added to the collection of those which he had singled out for distinction the monocle he was removing like an importunate thought and from whose clouded face, with a handkerchief, he was trying to wipe off his worries.

There are tones in a violin—if we cannot see the instrument and therefore cannot relate what we hear to our image of it, which changes the sound of it—so similar to those of certain contralto voices that we have the illusion a singer has been added to the concert. We lift our eyes, we see only the bodies of the instruments, as precious as Chinese boxes, but at times we are still fooled by the deceptive call of the siren; at times too we think we hear a captive genie struggling deep inside the intelligent, bewitched, and tremulous box, like a devil in a holy-water basin; sometimes, again it is like a pure and supernatural being that passes through the air uncoiling its invisible message.

As if the instrumentalists were not so much playing the little phrase as performing the rituals it required in order to make its appearance, and proceeding to the incantations necessary for obtaining and prolonging a few moments the wonder of its evocation, Swann, who could no more see it than if it had belonged to an ultraviolet world, and who was experiencing something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he was struck as he approached it, felt it to be present, like a protective goddess, a confidante of his love, who in order to be able to come to him in the midst of the crowd and take

him aside to talk to him, had assumed the disguise of this body of sound. And while it passed, light, soothing, murmured like a perfume, telling him what it had to tell him, as he scrutinized every word, sorry to see them fly off so quickly, he involuntarily made the motion with his lips of kissing the harmonious fleeting body as it passed. He no longer felt exiled and alone since the little phrase was addressing him, was talking to him in a low voice about Odette. For he no longer felt, as he once had, that the little phrase did not know him and Odette. It had so often witnessed their moments of happiness! True, it had just as often warned him how fragile they were. And in fact, whereas in those days he read suffering in its smile, in its limpid and disenchanted intonation, he now found in it instead the grace of a resignation that was almost gay. Of those sorrows of which it used to speak to him and which, without being affected by them, he had seen it carry along with it, smiling, in its rapid and sinuous course, of those sorrows which had now become his own, without his having any hope of ever being free of them, it seemed to say to him as it had once said of his happiness: "What does it matter? It means nothing." And for the first time Swann's thoughts turned with a stab of pity and tenderness to Vinteuil, to that unknown, sublime brother who must also have suffered so; what must his life have been like? From the depths of what sorrows had he drawn that godlike strength, that unlimited power to create? When it was the little phrase that spoke to him about the vanity of his sufferings, Swann found solace in that very wisdom which, just recently, had seemed to him intolerable when he thought he could read it on the faces of the indifferent people who considered his love an insignificant aberration. For the little phrase, unlike them, whatever its opinion of the brief duration of the conditions of the soul, did not see in them, as these people did, something less serious than the events of everyday life, but on the contrary, something so superior that it alone was worth expressing. These charms of an intimate sadness—these were what it sought to imitate, to re-create, and their very essence, even though it is to be incommunicable and to seem frivolous to everyone but the one who is experiencing them, had been captured by the little phrase and made visible. So much so that it caused their value to be acknowledged, and their divine sweetness savored, by all those same people sitting in the audience—if they were at all musical—who would afterward fail to recognize these charms in real life, in every individual love that came into being before their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified them could not be resolved into reasoned arguments. But ever since, more than a year ago now, the love of music had, for a time at least, been born in him, revealing to him many of the riches of his own soul, Swann had regarded musical motifs as actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadows, unknown, impenetrable to the intelligence, but not for all that less perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and significance. When, after the Verdurin evening, he had had the little phrase played over for him, and had sought to disentangle how it was that, like a perfume, like a caress, it encircled him, enveloped him, he had realized that it was to the closeness of the intervals between the five notes that composed it, and to the constant repetition of two of them, that was due this impression of a frigid and withdrawn sweetness; but in reality he knew that he was reasoning this way not about the phrase itself but about simple values substituted, for the convenience of his intelligence, for the mysterious entity he had perceived, before knowing the Verdurins, at that party where he had first heard the sonata played. He knew that even the memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the elements of the music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable scale of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard still almost entirely unknown on which, here and there only, separated by shadows thick and unexplored, a few of the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity which compose it, each as different from the others as one universe from another universe, have been found by a few great artists who do us the service, by awakening in us something corresponding to the theme they have discovered, of showing us what richness, what variety, is hidden unbeknownst to us within that great unpenetrated and disheartening darkness of our soul which we take for emptiness and nothingness. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. In his little phrase, although it might present an obscure surface to one's intelligence, one sensed a content so solid, so explicit, to which it gave a force so new, so original, that those who had heard it preserved it within themselves on the same plane as the ideas of the intelligence. Swann referred back to it as to a conception of love and happiness whose distinctive character he recognized at once, as he would that of *La Princesse de Clèves* or of *René,*[106] when their titles returned to his memory. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed latent in his mind in the same way as certain other notions without equivalents, like the notion of light, of sound, of perspective, of physical pleasure, which are the rich possessions that diversify and ornament the realms of our inner life. Perhaps we will lose them, perhaps they will fade away, if we return to nothingness. But as long as we are alive, we can no more eliminate our experience of them than we can our experience of some real object, than we can for example doubt the light of the lamp illuminating the metamorphosed objects in our room whence even the memory of darkness has vanished. In this way Vinteuil's phrase had, like some theme from *Tristan,* for example, which also represents to us a certain emotional acquisition, espoused our mortal condition, taken on a human quality that was rather touching. Its destiny was linked to the future, to the reality of our soul, of which it was one of the most distinctive, the best differentiated ornaments. Maybe it is the nothingness that is real and our entire dream is nonexistent, but in that case we feel that these phrases of music, and these notions that exist in relation to our dream, must also be nothing. We will perish, but we have for hostages these divine captives who will follow us and share our fate. And death in their company is less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps less probable.

Swann was therefore not wrong to believe that the phrase of the sonata really existed. Of course, although human from this point of view, it belonged to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom despite this we recognize with delight when some explorer of the invisible manages to capture one, to bring it, from that divine world to which he has access, to shine for a few moments above ours. This was what Vinteuil had done for the little phrase. Swann sensed that the composer had merely unveiled it, made it visible, with his musical instruments, following and respecting its sketched form with a hand so tender, so prudent, so delicate, and so sure that the sound altered at every moment, fading away to indicate a shadow, revivified when it had to follow a bolder contour. And one proof that Swann was not mistaken when he believed in the real existence of that phrase was that any lover of music with the least discernment would at once have noticed the imposture if Vinteuil, having had less capacity to see and to render its forms, had sought to conceal, by adding lines of his own invention here and there, the lacunae in his vision or the failures of his hand.

It had disappeared. Swann knew that it would reappear at the end of the last movement, after a whole long passage that Mme. Verdurin's pianist always skipped. There were marvelous ideas in it which Swann had not distinguished at his first hearing and that he perceived now, as if they had divested themselves, in the cloakroom of his memory, of the uniform disguise of novelty. Swann listened to all the scattered themes which would enter into the composition of the phrase, like premises in the necessary conclusion; he was attending its birth. "O audacity as inspired, perhaps," he said to himself, "as that of a Lavoisier, of an Ampère[107]—the audacity of a Vinteuil experimenting, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force, guiding and urging on, across a region unexplored, toward the only possible goal, the invisible team in which he has placed his trust and which he may never discern!" The beautiful dialogue which Swann heard between the piano and the violin at the beginning of the last passage! The suppression of human speech, far from letting fantasy reign there, as one might have believed, had eliminated it; never had spoken language been such an inflexible necessity, never had it known such pertinent questions, such irrefutable answers. First the solitary piano lamented, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard it, answered it as from a neighboring tree. It was as at the beginning of the world, as if there were only the two of them still on the earth, or rather in this world closed to all the rest, constructed by the logic of a creator, this world in which there would never be more than the two of them: this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul of the little phrase, not yet fully formed, was it a fairy—this creature invisibly lamenting, whose plaint the piano afterward tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist had to leap to his bow to collect them. Marvelous bird! The violinist seemed to want to charm it, tame it, capture it. Already it had passed into his soul, already the violinist's body, truly possessed, was shaking like a medium's with the summoned presence of the little phrase. Swann knew it was going to speak one more time. And he had so completely divided himself in two that the wait for the imminent moment when he would find himself confronting it again made him shudder with the kind of sob which a beautiful line of verse or a sad piece of news wrings from us, not when we are alone, but if we repeat it to friends in whom we can see ourselves as another person whose probable emotion moves them. It reappeared, but this time to hang in the air and play for a moment only, as though motionless, and afterward expire. And so Swann lost nothing of this very brief extension of its life. It was still there like an iridescent bubble floating by itself. Like a rainbow, whose brilliance weakens, fades, then rises again, and before dying away altogether, flares up a moment more brilliant than ever: to the two colors it had so far allowed to appear, it added others, variegated chords of every hue in the prism, and made them sing. Swann did not dare move and would have made all the other people be still too, as if the slightest motion might compromise the fragile, exquisite, and supernatural magic that was so close to vanishing. No one, in fact, dreamed of speaking. The ineffable word of one man who was absent, perhaps dead (Swann did not know if Vinteuil was still alive), breathing out above the rites of these officiants, was enough to hold the attention of three hundred people, and made of this dais, where a soul had thus been summoned, one of the noblest altars on which a supernatural ceremony could be performed. So that, when the phrase came unraveled at last, floating in shreds in the motifs which followed and had already taken its place, if at first Swann was irritated to see the Comtesse de Monteriender, famous for her naive remarks, lean toward him to confide her impressions even

before the sonata had ended, he could not help smiling, and perhaps also found a deeper meaning that she did not see in the words she used. Awestruck by the virtuosity of the performers, the Comtesse exclaimed to Swann: “It’s amazing, I’ve never seen anything so powerful . . .” But a scruple for accuracy causing her to correct her first assertion, she added this reservation: “anything so powerful . . . since the table turning!”

From that evening on, Swann understood that the feeling Odette had had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realized now. And on the days when she happened to be kind and affectionate toward him again, if she showed him some thoughtful attention, he would note these apparent and deceptive signs of a slight movement back toward him, with the loving, skeptical solicitude, the desperate joy of those who, caring for a friend in the last days of an incurable illness, relate as precious facts: “Yesterday, he did his accounts himself, and he was the one who spotted a mistake in addition that we had made; he ate an egg and enjoyed it—if he digests it easily we’ll try a cutlet tomorrow,” although they know these facts are meaningless on the eve of an unavoidable death. No doubt Swann was sure that if he had now been living far away from Odette, she would in the end have become unimportant to him, so that he would have been glad if she had left Paris forever; he would have had the courage to stay there; but he did not have the courage to leave.

He had often thought of it. Now that he had resumed his study of Vermeer, he needed to return at least for a few days to The Hague, Dresden, Brunswick. He was convinced that a *Diana with Her Companions* which had been bought by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicolas Maes, was in reality a Vermeer.[108] And he wished he could study the painting on the spot, in order to support his conviction. But to leave Paris while Odette was there, or even when she was absent—for in new places where our sensations are not dulled by habit, we retemper, we revive an old pain—was for him so cruel a plan that he was able to think about it constantly only because he knew he was resolved never to execute it. But sometimes, while he was asleep, the intention of taking the trip would revive in him—without his remembering that it was impossible—and in his sleep he would take the trip. One day he dreamed he was leaving for a year; leaning out the door of the railway car toward a young man on the platform who was saying good-bye to him, weeping, Swann tried to convince him to leave with him. The train began to move, his anxiety woke him, he remembered that he was not leaving, that he would see Odette that evening, the next day, and almost every day after. Then, still shaken by his dream, he blessed the particular circumstances that had made him independent, because of which he could remain near Odette, and also succeed in getting her to allow him to see her now and then; and, recapitulating all these advantages—his position; his fortune, from which she was too often in need of assistance not to shrink from contemplating a definite break with him (having even, people said, an ulterior plan of getting him to marry her); his friendship with M. de Charlus, which in truth had never helped him obtain much from Odette, but gave him the comfort of feeling that she heard flattering things about him from this mutual friend for whom she had such great esteem; and lastly even his intelligence, which he employed entirely in contriving a new intrigue every day that would make his presence, if not agreeable, at least necessary to Odette—he thought about what would have become of him if he had not had all this, he thought that if, like so many other men, he had been poor, humble, wretched, obliged to accept any sort of work, or tied to relatives, to a wife, he might have been forced to leave Odette, that that dream, the terror of which was still so close to him, might have been true, and he said to himself: “You don’t know it when you’re happy. You’re never as unhappy as you think.”[109] But he calculated that this existence had already lasted for several years, that all he could hope for now was that it would last forever, that he would sacrifice his work, his pleasures, his friends, finally his whole life to the daily expectation of a meeting that could bring him no happiness, and he wondered if he was not deceiving himself, if the circumstances that had favored his love affair and kept it from ending had not been bad for the course of his life, if the desirable outcome would not in fact have been the one which, to his delight, had taken place only in a dream: for him to have gone away; he told himself that you don’t know it when you’re unhappy, that you are never as happy as you think.

Sometimes he hoped she would die in an accident without suffering, she who was outside, in the streets, on the roads, from morning to night. And when she returned safe and sound, he marveled that the human body was so supple and so strong, that it continued to ward off, to outwit all the perils which surrounded it (and which Swann found innumerable now that his secret desire had computed them) and so allowed people to abandon themselves daily and almost with impunity to their work of mendacity, their pursuit of pleasure. And Swann felt very close in his heart to Mohammed II, whose portrait by Bellini he liked so much, who, realizing that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her in order, as his Venetian biographer ingenuously says, to recover his independence of mind. Then he would be filled with indignation that he should be thinking thus only of himself, and the sufferings he had endured would seem to him to deserve no pity since he himself had placed so low a value on Odette’s life.

Since he was unable to separate from her irrevocably, if he had at least been able to see her without any separations, his pain would in the end have abated and perhaps his love would have died. And if she did not want to leave Paris forever, he would have liked her never to leave Paris. At least since he knew that her only long absence was the yearly one in August and September, he had ample opportunity several months in advance to dissolve the bitter idea of it in all the Time to come which he carried within him in anticipation and which, composed of days identical with those of the present, flowed through his mind transparent and cold, sustaining his sadness, but without causing him too sharp a pain. But that interior future, that colorless free-flowing river, was suddenly assaulted by a single remark of Odette’s which entered Swann and, like a piece of ice, immobilized it, hardened its fluidity, made it freeze entirely; and Swann suddenly felt he was filled with an enormous infrangible mass that pressed on the inner walls of his being till it nearly burst: what Odette had said, observing him with a sly smiling glance, was: “Forcheville is going to be taking a lovely trip, at Pentecost. He’s going to Egypt,” and Swann had immediately understood that this meant: “I’m going to Egypt at Pentecost with Forcheville.” And in fact, if several days after, Swann said to her: “Look, about this trip you told me you would be taking with Forcheville,” she would answer thoughtlessly: “Yes, my dear boy, we’re leaving the nineteenth, we’ll send you a view of the Pyramids.” Then he would want to know if she was Forcheville’s mistress, would want to ask her directly. He knew that, superstitious as she was, there were certain perjuries she would not commit, and, too, the dread, which had restrained him up to this point, of irritating Odette by questioning her, of causing her to hate him, had vanished now that he had lost all hope of ever being loved by her.

One day he received an anonymous letter telling him that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (several of whom it mentioned, among them Forcheville, M. de Bréauté, and the painter), and of women too, and that she frequented houses of ill repute. He was tormented by the thought that among his friends there was an individual capable of sending him this letter (because certain details revealed that the person who had written it had an intimate knowledge of Swann’s life). He wondered who it could be. But he had never had any feelings of suspicion about the unknown actions of other people, those which had no visible connection with what they said. And when he tried to find out whether it was beneath the apparent character of M. de Charlus, or M. des Laumes, or M. d’Orsan, that he ought to situate the unknown region in which this ignoble act must have been conceived, since none of these men had ever spoken in praise of anonymous letters in his presence and since everything they had said to him implied that they condemned them, he saw no reason for connecting this infamy with the character of one rather than another. That of M. de Charlus was a little deranged but basically good and affectionate; that of M. des Laumes, a little hard, but sound and straightforward. As for M. d’Orsan, Swann had never met anyone who in even the most dismal circumstances would approach him with a more heartfelt remark, a more discreet or appropriate gesture. So much so that he could not understand the rather indelicate role people ascribed to M. d’Orsan in the love affair he was having with a rich woman, and that each time Swann thought of him, he was obliged to thrust to one side that bad reputation which was so irreconcilable with the many clear proofs of his discretion. For a moment Swann felt his mind was darkening and he thought about something else in order to recover a little light. Then he had the courage to return to these reflections. But now, after being unable to suspect anyone, he had to suspect everyone. True, M. de Charlus was fond of him, had a good heart. But he was a neurotic, tomorrow he might weep at the news that Swann was ill, and today, out of jealousy, out of anger, acting under the influence of some sudden idea, he had wanted to hurt him. Really, that kind of man was the worst of all. Of course, the Prince des Laumes was not nearly as fond of Swann as M. de Charlus. But for that very reason he did not have the same susceptibilities with regard to him; and then although his was undoubtedly a cold nature, he was as incapable of base actions as of great ones. Swann regretted that in his life he had not formed attachments exclusively to such people. Then he mused that what prevents men from doing harm to their fellowmen is goodness of heart, that really he could answer only for men whose natures were analogous to his own, as was, so far as the heart was concerned, that of M. de Charlus. The mere thought of causing such pain to Swann would have revolted him. But with an insensitive man, of another order of humanity, as was the Prince des Laumes, how could one foresee the actions to which he might be led by motives that were so different in essence? To have a kind heart is everything, and M. de Charlus had one. M. d’Orsan was not lacking in heart either and his cordial but not very close relationship with Swann, arising from the pleasure which, since they thought the same way about everything, they found in talking together, was more secure than the excitable affection of M. de Charlus, capable of committing acts of passion, good or bad. If there was anyone by whom Swann had always felt himself understood and liked in a discriminating way, it was by M. d’Orsan. Yes, but what about this dishonorable life he was

leading? Swann regretted never having taken it into account properly, having often confessed as a joke that he had never experienced such keen feelings of sympathy and respect as in the company of a scoundrel. It is not for nothing, he said to himself now, that when men judge another man, it is by his actions. They alone mean something, and not what we say, or what we think. Charlus and des Laumes may have their faults, but they are still honest men. Orsan perhaps has none, but he is not an honest man. He may have acted badly yet again. Then Swann suspected Rémi, who, it was true, could merely have inspired the letter, but for a moment he felt he was on the right track. In the first place Lorédan had reasons for resenting Odette. And then how can we help but imagine that our servants, living in a situation inferior to ours, adding to our fortunes and our faults imaginary wealth and vices for which they envy and despise us, will find themselves inevitably led to act in a way different from people of our own class? He also suspected my grandfather. Each time Swann had asked a favor of him, had he not always refused? And then with his bourgeois ideas he might have thought he was acting for Swann's own good. Swann also suspected Bergotte, the painter, the Verdurins, admired once more in passing the wisdom of society people in not wanting to mix in those artistic circles in which such things are possible, perhaps even openly admitted as good pranks; but he recalled certain honest traits in those bohemians, and contrasted them with the life of expediency, almost of fraudulence, into which the lack of money, the craving for luxury, the corrupting influence of their pleasures so often drive members of the aristocracy. In short, this anonymous letter proved that he knew an individual capable of villainy, but he could see no more reason why that villainy should be hidden in the bedrock—unexplored by any other person—of the character of an affectionate man rather than a cold one, an artist rather than a bourgeois, a great lord rather than a valet. What criterion should one adopt for judging men? Really there was not a single person among those he knew who might not be capable of infamy. Was it necessary to stop seeing all of them? His mind clouded over; he passed his hands across his forehead two or three times, wiped the lenses of his lorgnon with his handkerchief, and thinking that after all men as good as himself associated with M. de Charlus, the Prince des Laumes, and the others, he said to himself that this meant, if not that they were incapable of infamy, at least that it is a necessity of life to which each of us submits, to associate with people who are perhaps not incapable of it. And he continued to shake hands with all of those friends whom he had suspected, with the one purely formal reservation that they had perhaps tried to drive him to despair. As for the actual substance of the letter, he did not worry about it, because not one of the accusations formulated against Odette had a shadow of likelihood. Swann, like many people, had a lazy mind and lacked the faculty of invention. He knew very well as a general truth that people's lives are full of contrasts, but for each person in particular he imagined the whole part of his life that he did not know as being identical to the part that he knew. He imagined what he was not told with the help of what he was told. During the times when Odette was with him, if they were talking about some indelicate act committed or some indelicate feeling experienced by someone else, she would stigmatize them by virtue of the same principles that Swann had always heard professed by his parents and to which he had remained faithful; and then she would arrange her flowers, she would drink a cup of tea, she would worry about Swann's work. And so Swann extended these habits to the rest of Odette's life, he repeated these gestures when he wanted to picture to himself the times when she was away from him. If anyone had portrayed her to him as she was, or rather as she had been with him for so long, but in the company of another man, he would have suffered, because that image would have appeared to him quite likely. But to think that she went to procuresses, took part in orgies with other women, that she led the dissolute life of the most abject of creatures—what an insane aberration, for the realization of which, God be thanked, the imagined chrysanthemums, the successive teas, the virtuous indignation left no room! Only from time to time, he would insinuate to Odette that, out of spite, someone had been reporting to him about everything she did; and, making use, in connection with this, of an insignificant but true detail, which he had learned by chance, as if it were the sole fragment among many others that he had allowed to slip out despite himself, of a complete reconstruction of Odette's life which he kept hidden inside himself, he would lead her to suppose that he was well informed about things that in reality he did not know or even suspect, for if quite often he adjured Odette not to alter the truth, it was only, whether he realized it or not, so that she would tell him everything she did. Undoubtedly, as he said to Odette, he loved sincerity, but he loved it as a procuress who could keep him in touch with his mistress's life. And so his love of sincerity, not being disinterested, had not made him a better person. The truth he cherished was the truth Odette would tell him; but he himself, in order to obtain that truth, was not afraid to resort to falsehood, that very same falsehood which he constantly portrayed to Odette as leading every human creature down to utter degradation. And so he lied as much as Odette because, while unhappier than she, he was no less selfish. And she, hearing Swann tell her the things she had done, would gaze at him with a look of mistrust, and, just to be on the safe side, of vexation, so as not to seem to be humiliating herself and blushing at her actions.

One day, during the longest period of calm he had yet been able to go through without suffering renewed attacks of jealousy, he had agreed to go to the theater that evening with the Princesse des Laumes. Having opened the newspaper, in order to find out what was being played, the sight of the title, *Les Filles de Marbre* by Théodore Barrière,[110] struck him such a painful blow that he recoiled and turned his head away. Illuminated as though by footlights, in the new spot where it had appeared, the word *marble,* which he had lost the ability to distinguish because he was so used to seeing it before his eyes, had suddenly become visible again and had immediately reminded him of the story Odette had told him once long ago, about a visit she had made to the Salon du Palais de l'Industrie with Mme. Verdurin, where the latter had said to her: "Watch yourself, now! I know how to make you melt. You're not made of marble, you know." Odette had sworn to him it was only a joke, and he had attached no importance to it. But he had had more confidence in her at that time than he did now. And in fact the anonymous letter mentioned love affairs of that kind. Without daring to lift his eyes to the newspaper again, he unfolded it, turned a page in order not to see the words *Les Filles de Marbre,* and mechanically began reading news from the provinces. There had been a storm on the Channel, damage was reported at Dieppe, Cabourg, Beuzeval. Immediately he recoiled again.

The name Beuzeval had reminded him of the name of another place in the same area, Beuzeville, whose name is joined by a hyphen to another, Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps, but without ever noticing before that it was the same as that of his friend M. de Bréauté, whom the anonymous letter mentioned as having been Odette's lover. In fact, in the case of M. de Bréauté, the accusation was not unlikely; but so far as Mme. Verdurin was concerned, it was a sheer impossibility. From the fact that Odette sometimes lied, one could not conclude that she never told the truth, and in the remarks she had exchanged with Mme. Verdurin and which she herself had described to Swann, he had recognized those pointless and dangerous jokes made, from inexperience of life and ignorance of vice, by women whose innocence they merely reveal and who—like Odette for example—are least prone to feel passionate love for another woman. Whereas on the contrary, the indignation with which she had denied the suspicions she had involuntarily aroused in him for a moment by her story squared with all he knew about his mistress's tastes and temperament. But at this moment, through one of those inspirations common to jealous men, analogous to that which reveals to a poet or scientist who has still only one rhyme or one observation the idea or law that will give them all their power, Swann recalled for the first time a remark Odette had made to him fully two years before: "Oh, Mme. Verdurin! All she can think about these days is me. I'm her little pet. She kisses me, and she wants me to go shopping with her, and she wants me to call her *tu*."[111] Far from seeing, at the time, any sort of connection between this comment and the absurd remarks meant to simulate some sort of depravity which Odette had reported to him, he had welcomed it as proof of a warm friendship. Now the memory of Mme. Verdurin's affection had suddenly come to join the memory of her unseemly conversation. He could no longer separate them in his mind and saw them mingled in reality too, the affection lending something serious and important to the jokes which in return caused the affection to lose some of its innocence. He went to Odette's house. He sat down at a distance from her. He did not dare kiss her, not knowing whether it would be affection or anger that a kiss would provoke, either in her, or in himself. He said nothing, he watched their love die. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Odette," he said to her, "my dear, I know I'm being hateful, but there are a few things I must ask you. Do you remember the idea I had about you and Mme. Verdurin? Tell me, was it true, with her or with anyone else?"

She shook her head while pursing her lips, a sign people often use to answer that they will not go, that it bores them, if someone asks: "Would you like to come watch the cavalcade go past, will you be at the review?" But a shake of the head thus usually assigned to an event in the future, for this reason colors with some uncertainty the denial of an event that is past. What is more, it suggests only reasons of personal propriety rather than reprobation, a moral impossibility. When he saw Odette make this sign to him that it was untrue, Swann understood that it was perhaps true.

"I've already told you. You know perfectly well," she added, looking irritated and unhappy.

"Yes, I know, but are you sure? Don't say, 'You know perfectly well'; say, 'I have never done anything of that sort with any woman.' "

She repeated, as though it were a lesson, ironically, and as if she wanted to get rid of him:

"I have never done anything of that sort with any woman."

"Can you swear it on your medal of Our Lady of Laghet?"

Swann knew Odette would never swear a false oath on that medal.

"Oh, you make me so unhappy!" she exclaimed, abruptly dodging the grasp of his question. "Aren't you done? What's the matter with you today? Are you determined to make me hate you, to make me detest you? You see? I wanted to have a nice time with you again, the way we used to, and this is how you thank me!"

However, not letting her go, like a surgeon waiting for a spasm to subside that has interrupted his operation but will not make him abandon it:

"You're quite wrong to imagine I would hold it against you in the least, Odette," he said to her with a persuasive and deceptive gentleness. "I only talk to you about what I know, and I always know much more about it than I say. But you are the only one who can mitigate by your confession what makes me hate you as long as it has been reported to me only by other people. My anger toward you does not come from your actions, I forgive you everything because I love you, but from your duplicity, the absurd duplicity which makes you persist in denying things I know already. How can you expect me to go on loving you when I see you insisting upon something, swearing to something I know is untrue? Odette, don't prolong this moment, which is agony for both of us. If you want to, you can end it in a second, you'll be free of it forever. Tell me on your medal, yes or no, if you have ever done these things."

"But I have no idea," she exclaimed angrily, "maybe a very long time ago, without realizing what I was doing, maybe two or three times."

Swann had envisaged all the possibilities. Reality is therefore something that has no relation to possibilities, any more than the stab of a knife in our body has any relation to the gradual motions of the clouds overhead, since those words *two or three times* carved a kind of cross in the tissue of his heart. Strange that the words *two or three times,* no more than words, words spoken into the air, at a distance, can lacerate the heart this way as if they had really touched it, can make you as sick as if you had swallowed poison. Involuntarily Swann thought of the remark he had heard at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's: "That's the most powerful thing I've seen since the table turning." The pain he was now experiencing resembled nothing he had imagined. Not only because in the hours when he most entirely distrusted her he had rarely imagined such an extremity of evil, but because, even when he did imagine this thing, it remained vague, uncertain, not clothed in the particular horror that had issued from the words *maybe two or three times,* not armed with that specific cruelty as different from everything he had known as a disease with which one is stricken for the first time. And yet Odette, from whom all this harm came to him, was no less dear to him, quite the contrary, more precious, as if at the same rate that his suffering increased, the value of the sedative increased, of the antidote which only this woman possessed. He wanted to devote more care to her, as to a disease which one suddenly discovers is more serious. He wanted the frightful thing she had told him she had done "two or three times" not to be repeated. For this, he had to watch over Odette. People often say that when we inform a friend of his mistress's wrongdoings, we succeed only in attaching him to her more closely because he places no faith in them, but how much more so if he does place faith in them! But, said Swann to himself, how could he manage to protect her? He could perhaps keep her safe from a particular woman, but there were hundreds of others, and he realized what madness had come over him when he had begun, on the evening when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins', to want something that was always impossible—to possess another person. Happily for Swann, beneath the new sufferings that had just entered his soul like hordes of invaders, there lay a natural substratum, older, gentler, and silently industrious, like the cells of an injured organ that immediately set about preparing to restore the damaged tissues, like the muscles of a paralyzed limb that try to resume their former movements. These older, more autochthonous inhabitants of his soul employed, for a moment, all of Swann's strength in this dim recuperative work that gives the illusion of repose to a convalescent, to a surgical patient. This time it was not so much, as it usually was, in Swann's brain that this relaxation induced by exhaustion took effect, it was rather in his heart. But all the things in life that have once existed tend to recur, and like a dying animal shaken one last time by the throes of a convulsion which seemed to have ended, upon Swann's heart, spared for a moment, the same suffering returned of its own volition to carve the same cross again. He remembered those moonlit evenings when, lying back in the victoria that was taking him to the rue La Pérouse, he would voluptuously cultivate within himself the emotions of a man in love, without knowing the poisoned fruit they would necessarily bear. But all these thoughts did not last more than the space of a second, the time he took to bring his hand to his heart, catch his breath, and manage a smile to hide his agony. Already he was beginning to ask his questions again. For his jealousy, which had taken pains an enemy would not have taken to strike this blow, to introduce him to the most intense suffering he had yet known, did not believe he had suffered enough and sought to expose him to a wound that was deeper still. Thus, like a wicked deity, his jealousy inspired Swann and pushed him to his ruin. It was not his fault but only Odette's if at first his torment did not grow worse.

"My dear," he said to her, "it's in the past now. Was it with anyone I know?"

"No, of course not, I swear it wasn't. And anyway, I think I exaggerated, I don't think I went that far."

He smiled and went on:

"As you like. It doesn't really matter, but it's too bad you can't tell me the name. If I could picture the person it would keep me from ever thinking about her again. I say this for your own sake, because then I wouldn't be bothering you about it anymore. It's such a relief to be able to picture a thing! The truly horrifying things are the ones you can't imagine. But you've already been so kind, I don't want to tire you. I do thank you with all my heart for all the good you've done me. I'm quite finished now. Only this last question: How long ago was it?"

"Oh, Charles! Don't you see you're killing me? It's all so long ago. I never gave it another thought. And now it's as if you're positively trying to put those ideas in my head again. A lot of good it'll do you," she said, with unthinking foolishness and deliberate spite.

"Oh, I only wanted to know if it had happened since I've known you! It would be natural enough. Did it happen here? Could you tell me which particular evening, so that I could picture what I was doing at the time? I'm sure you realize it isn't possible that you don't remember who it was with, Odette, my love."

"Oh, I don't know, really I don't, I think it was in the Bois one evening when you came to meet us on the island. You had been to the Princesse des Laumes's for dinner," she said, happy to give him a specific detail that would attest to her truthfulness. "There was a woman at the next table; I hadn't seen her for ages. She said to me: 'Come around behind that little rock there and see the moonlight on the water.' At first I just yawned and said: 'No, I'm tired and I'm quite comfortable where I am.' She swore there had never been such moonlight. I said: 'What a joke!' I knew quite well what she was after."

Odette told this almost with a smile, either because it seemed to her quite natural, or because she thought she would thereby make it seem less important, or so as not to appear humiliated. At the sight of Swann's face, she changed her tone:

"You're a scoundrel, you like tormenting me, making me invent lies which I only tell you so you'll leave me in peace."

This second blow which Swann suffered was even more agonizing than the first. Never had he supposed the thing had been so recent, hidden from his eyes, which had not been able to discover it, not in a past which he had not known, but among evenings which he recalled so clearly, which he had experienced with Odette, which he had believed he knew so well, and which now assumed in retrospect an appearance that was false and atrocious; among them suddenly there opened up this wide gap, this moment on the island in the Bois. Odette, without being intelligent, had the charm of naturalness. She had described, she had mimed this scene with such simplicity that Swann, breathless, saw everything: Odette's yawn, the little rock. He heard her respond—gaily, alas: "What a joke!" He felt she would say nothing more this evening, there was no new revelation to expect just now; he said to her: "My poor dear, forgive me, I feel I'm hurting you, it's over and done with, I'm not thinking about it anymore."

But she saw that his eyes were still dwelling on the things he did not know and on that past era of their love, monotonous and sweet in his memory because it was vague, which was now being torn open like a wound by that minute on the island in the Bois, in the moonlight, after the dinner with the Princesse des Laumes. But he was so much in the habit by now of finding life interesting—of admiring the curious discoveries one can make—that even while suffering to the point of believing he could not endure such pain for long, he said to himself: "Life is really astonishing; it really has great surprises in store for us; immorality is actually more common than one would think. Here's a woman I trusted, who seemed so simple, so honest in any case, even if she was rather flighty, who seemed quite normal and healthy in her tastes; after an unlikely denunciation I question her, and the little she admits reveals much more than what one would have suspected." But he could not confine himself to these disinterested remarks. He tried to estimate the exact value of what she had told him, in order to know if he ought to conclude that she had done these things often, that they would happen again. He repeated to himself the words she had said: "I knew quite well what she was after," "Two or three times," "What a joke!" but they did not reappear in Swann's memory disarmed, each of them held a knife and with it struck him another blow. For a very long time, just as an invalid cannot stop himself from trying over and over again to make the motion that is painful to him, he repeated these words to himself: "I'm quite comfortable here," "What a joke!" but the pain was so intense he had to stop. He marveled that acts which he had always judged so lightly, so cheerfully, had now become as serious as a disease from which one may die. He certainly knew some women he could have asked to keep an

eye on Odette. But how could he hope they would adopt the same point of view he now had and not hold on to the point of view he had had for so long, that had always guided him in love affairs, would not say to him, laughing: "You nasty jealous man—trying to rob others of a little pleasure"? By what trapdoor, suddenly opened, had he (who in the past had derived only refined pleasures from his love for Odette) been roughly dropped into this new circle of hell from which he could not see how he would ever get out? Poor Odette! He did not hold it against her. She was only half guilty. Didn't people say it was her own mother who had handed her over to a rich Englishman in Nice when she was hardly more than a child? But what painful truth was now contained for him in those lines from *Journal d'un Poète* by Alfred de Vigny[112] which he had read with indifference in the past: "When you feel you are falling in love with a woman, you ought to say to yourself: Who are her friends? What sort of life has she had? All one's future happiness depends upon it." Swann was surprised that simple statements spelled out by his mind, like "What a joke!," "I could see very well what she was after," could hurt him so. But he realized that what he believed to be simple statements were merely the pieces of the framework that still contained, and could give back to him, the pain he had felt during Odette's story. For it was indeed the same pain which he was feeling again. Though he now knew, though he had even, as time passed, forgotten a little, forgiven, the moment he said these words to himself again the old suffering made him once again what he had been before Odette spoke: ignorant, trustful; his cruel jealousy placed him once again, so that he might be wounded by Odette's confession, in the position of a man who does not yet know, and after several months this old story still upset him like a revelation. He admired the terrible re-creative power of his memory. It was only by the weakening of that generator, whose fecundity diminishes with age, that he could hope for an easing of his torment. But as soon as the power of any one of Odette's remarks to make him suffer seemed nearly exhausted, then one of those on which Swann's mind had dwelt less until then, a remark that was almost new, would come to relieve the others and strike at him with undiminished vigor. The memory of the evening he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was painful to him, but it was only the center of his disease. The latter irradiated confusedly on all sides through the days before and after it. And whatever point in it he tried to touch in his memories, it was the whole of that season, during which the Verdurins had dined so often on the island in the Bois, that hurt him. Hurt him so badly that gradually the curiosity which his jealousy kept provoking in him was neutralized by his fear of the new torments he would inflict on himself by satisfying it. He realized that the entire period of Odette's life that had elapsed before she met him, a period he had never tried to picture, was not the abstract expanse which he could vaguely see, but had consisted of specific years, each filled with concrete incidents. But if he came to know them, he was afraid that that past of hers, colorless, fluid, and tolerable, might assume a body that was tangible and loathsome, a face that was individual and diabolical. And he continued to refrain from trying to imagine it, no longer from laziness of mind, but from fear of suffering. He hoped that one day he might at last be able to hear the name of the island in the Bois, of the Princesse des Laumes, without feeling the old tearing at his heart, and thought it would be imprudent to provoke Odette into supplying him with new remarks, names of places, different circumstances which, when his illness was still scarcely abated, would reawaken it again in another form.

But often the things he did not know, that he now was afraid of knowing, were revealed spontaneously by Odette herself, and without her realizing it; in fact the distance that depravity put between Odette's real life and the relatively innocent life which Swann had believed, and quite often still believed, his mistress led, was a distance whose extent Odette did not realize: a depraved person, still affecting the same virtue in front of the people by whom he does not want his vices to be suspected, has no gauge by which to recognize how far the latter, whose continuous growth is imperceptible to himself, are drawing him little by little away from normal ways of living. As they cohabited, deep in Odette's mind, with the memory of the acts she was hiding from Swann, other actions were gradually colored by them, infected by them, without her being able to see anything strange about them, without their seeming out of place in the particular surroundings where she kept them inside her; but if she described them to Swann, he was horrified by the revelation of the environment they betrayed. One day he was trying, without hurting Odette, to ask her if she had ever had any dealings with a procuress. Actually he was convinced she had not; reading the anonymous letter had introduced the conjecture into his mind, but in a mechanical way; it had met with no credence there, but had in fact remained there, and Swann, in order to be rid of the purely material but nonetheless awkward presence of the suspicion, wanted Odette to remove it. "Oh, no! Not that they don't pester me," she added, revealing by her smile a self-satisfied vanity which she no longer noticed could not seem justified to Swann. "There was one here yesterday who stayed more than two hours waiting for me, offered me any amount I liked. It seems some ambassador had said to her: 'I'll kill myself if you don't get her for me.' They told her I'd gone out. In the end I went and talked to her myself so she would leave. I wish you could have seen the way I spoke to her; my maid heard me from the next room and told me I was shouting at the top of my voice. I said, 'Haven't I told you I don't want to? It's a poor idea, I don't like it. Really, I should hope I'm still free to do what I want! If I needed the money, I could understand . . .' The concierge has orders not to let her in again. He'll tell her I'm in the country. Oh, I wish you had been hiding somewhere. I think you would have been pleased, my dear. You see, your little Odette has some good in her, all the same, even though some people find her so detestable."

Moreover her very admissions, when she made them, of faults that she supposed he had discovered, served Swann as points of departure toward new doubts rather than put an end to the old. For her admissions were never of exactly the same proportions as his doubts. Though Odette might subtract from her confession all the essential part, there remained in the accessory part something Swann had never imagined, that crushed him with its newness, and would permit him to change the terms of the problem of his jealousy. And these admissions he could no longer forget. His soul bore them along, cast them aside, cradled them, like dead bodies. And it was poisoned by them.

One time she told him about a visit Forcheville had paid her on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete. "What? You already knew him back then? Yes, of course, that's right," he said, catching himself so as not to show that he had not known. And suddenly he began to tremble at the thought that on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, on which he had received from her the letter he had kept so carefully, she had perhaps been having lunch with Forcheville at the Maison d'Or. She swore she had not. "Yet the Maison d'Or does remind me of something or other that I knew at the time wasn't true," he said in order to frighten her. "Yes, that I hadn't actually been there at all that evening when I told you I had just come from there and you had been looking for me at Prévost's," she answered (thinking from his expression that he knew this), with a decisiveness in which there was, not cynicism, but rather timidity, a fear of vexing Swann, which out of self-respect she wanted to hide, and also a desire to show him that she could be frank. Thus she struck with an executioner's neatness and energy though quite without cruelty, for Odette was not conscious of the harm she was doing Swann; and she even began to laugh, perhaps, it is true, chiefly so as not to seem humiliated, embarrassed. "It's quite true that I hadn't been to the Maison Dorée; I was coming away from Forcheville's house. I actually had been to Prévost's, I didn't make that up, and he ran into me there and asked me to come and look at his engravings. But someone else came to see him. I told you I was coming from the Maison d'Or because I was afraid you would be annoyed. See? That was rather kind of me, wasn't it? Even if I was wrong, at least I'm telling you all about it now quite frankly. What would I gain by not telling you I had lunch with him the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, if it was true? Especially since at the time we didn't know each other very well yet, you and I, dear." He smiled at her with sudden cowardice, changed by these crushing words into a creature without strength. So, even during the months which he had never dared to think about again because they had been too happy, during those months when she had loved him, she was already lying to him! Besides that time (the first evening they had "made cattleya") when she had told him she was coming from the Maison Dorée, how many others there must have been, each of them also harboring a lie which Swann had not suspected. He remembered that one day she had said to him: "I would simply tell Mme. Verdurin my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." From him too, probably, many times when she had murmured the sorts of words which explain a delay, justify a change in the hour of a meeting, they must have concealed, without his suspecting it then, something she was going to do with some other man, with some other man to whom she had said: "I'll simply tell Swann my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." And under all of Swann's sweetest memories, under the simplest words Odette had said to him in the old days, which he had believed like the words of the gospel, under the daily actions she had recounted to him, under the most ordinary places, her dressmaker's house, the avenue du Bois, the Hippodrome, he sensed, concealed within the surplus time which even in the most thoroughly itemized days still leaves some play, some room, and can serve as hiding places for certain actions, he sensed insinuating itself the possible subterranean presence of lies which made something ignoble out of all that had remained most dear to him (his best evenings, the rue La Pérouse itself, which Odette must always have left at other hours than those she had reported to him), propagating everywhere a little of the dark horror he had felt when he heard her admission about the Maison Dorée, and, like the loathsome beasts in the Desolation of Nineveh,[113] toppling stone by stone his entire past. If he now turned away each time his memory spoke the bitter name of the Maison Dorée, it was no longer, as still quite recently at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because it recalled to him a happiness he had long since lost, but because it recalled to him an unhappiness he had only just discovered. Then the same thing happened to the name of the Maison Dorée as to that of the island in the Bois, it gradually ceased to hurt

Swann. For what we believe to be our love, or our jealousy, is not one single passion, continuous and indivisible. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, which are ephemeral but by their uninterrupted multitude give the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The life of Swann's love, the faithfulness of his jealousy, were formed of the death, the faithlessness, of numberless desires, numberless doubts, all of which had Odette as their object. If he had remained for a long time without seeing her, those that died would not have been replaced by others. But the presence of Odette continued to sow Swann's heart with affection and suspicion by turns.

On certain evenings she would suddenly be full of kindness toward him again, and she would warn him severely that he ought to take advantage of it right away, under penalty of not seeing it repeated for years to come; they had to go back to her house immediately to "make cattleya," and this desire which she claimed to feel for him was so sudden, so inexplicable, so imperious, the caresses she lavished on him at these times so demonstrative and so unusual that this rough and improbable affection made Swann as unhappy as a lie or an unkindness. One evening when he had gone home with her thus after she commanded it, and she was kissing him and murmuring to him with a passion quite unlike her usual coldness, he suddenly thought he heard a noise; he stood up, looked everywhere, found no one, but did not have the courage to go back to his place next to her, whereupon she, in a paroxysm of rage, broke a vase and said to Swann: "One can never do anything right with you!" And he remained uncertain whether she had not hidden someone there with the desire of provoking the man's jealousy or inflaming his senses.

Sometimes he visited brothels hoping to learn something about her, though without daring to say her name. "I have a nice little one I know you'll like," the madam would say. And he would stay there for an hour chatting gloomily to some poor girl who was astonished that he did nothing more. One who was very young and beautiful said to him one day: "What I'd like would be to find a man who would be a real friend to me: then he could be quite certain I'd never go with another man again." "Really, do you believe it's possible for a woman to be touched that a man loves her, and never be unfaithful to him?" Swann asked her anxiously. "Well, of course! But it would depend on her character, wouldn't it now?" Swann could not help saying to these girls the same sorts of things that would have pleased the Princesse des Laumes. To the one who was looking for a friend, he said, smiling: "How nice—you've put on blue eyes to match the color of your belt." "And you too; you've got blue cuffs on." "What a lovely conversation we're having, for this sort of a place! I'm not boring you, am I? Perhaps you've got something else you have to do?" "No, I have plenty of time. If you were boring me, I would have told you. Actually, I like listening to you talk." "I'm very flattered. Aren't we having a nice chat?" he said to the madam, who had just come in. "Why yes, that's just what I was saying to myself. How well they're behaving! There! Now they come to my house to talk. The Prince said it himself, the other day, it's much nicer here than at his wife's house. It seems that in high society these days all the women put on such airs, it's a real scandal! But I'll leave you alone, I know when to be discreet." And she left Swann with the blue-eyed girl. But soon he stood up and said good-bye, she did not matter to him, she did not know Odette.

Because the painter had been ill, Dr. Cottard had advised him to go to sea for a while; several of the regulars talked about going along with him; the Verdurins could not reconcile themselves to being left alone, rented a yacht, then purchased it and so Odette went on frequent cruises. Each time she had been gone for a little while, Swann felt he was beginning to separate from her, but as if this mental distance were proportional to the physical distance, as soon as he knew Odette was back, he could not rest without seeing her. Once, having gone off for only a month, as they thought, either because they were tempted along the way, or because M. Verdurin had cunningly arranged things beforehand to please his wife and had informed the regulars only as they proceeded, from Algiers they went to Tunis, then to Italy, then to Greece, to Constantinople, to Asia Minor. The voyage had lasted close to a year. Swann felt absolutely calm, almost happy. Even though Mme. Verdurin had tried to persuade the pianist and Dr. Cottard that the aunt of the one and the patients of the other did not need them at all and that in any case it was imprudent to let Mme. Cottard return to Paris, which M. Verdurin assured them was in the midst of a revolution, she was obliged to give them back their freedom at Constantinople. And the painter left with them. One day, shortly after the three travelers[114] returned, Swann, seeing an omnibus go by headed for the Luxembourg, where he had business, had jumped inside and found himself sitting across from Mme. Cottard, who was making the rounds of the people whose "day" it was in full dress uniform, ostrich feather in hat, silk dress, muff, combination umbrella-sunshade, calling-card case, and freshly cleaned white gloves. Clothed in these insignia, when it was dry out she would go on foot from one house to the next in the same neighborhood, but for proceeding into a different neighborhood would use the omnibus with connection service. During the first few minutes, before the woman's native kindness perforated the starch of the petty bourgeoise, and also not very sure if she ought to talk about the Verdurins to Swann, she produced quite naturally, in her awkward, slow, soft voice which at times the omnibus drowned out completely with its rattling, remarks chosen from among those she heard and repeated in the twenty-five houses whose stories she climbed during one day:

"I don't need to ask you, monsieur, if a man in the swim such as yourself has gone to the Mirlitons,[115] to see the portrait by Machard[116] which the whole of Paris is rushing to see? Well, and what do you think of it? Whose camp are you in, those who approve or those who don't? It's the same in every house now, all they talk about is the portrait by Machard; you aren't fashionable, you aren't really cultured, you aren't up-to-date, unless you can give your opinion of Machard's portrait."

Swann answered that he had not see the portrait, and Mme. Cottard was afraid she had offended him by obliging him to confess it.

"Well, good, at least you admit it frankly, you don't think you're disgraced because you haven't seen Machard's portrait. I think that's admirable. Well now, I have seen it. Opinion is divided, you know, some people think there's too much polish in it, too much whipped cream, but I think it's just right. Of course she's not like the blue-and-yellow women by our friend Biche. But I must confess to you frankly, though you will not find me very fin-de-siècle, but I do say what I think—I don't understand his work. Good Lord, I can see the good points in his portrait of my husband, it's not as strange as what he usually does, but even so he had to go and put a blue mustache on him. Whereas Machard! Imagine, the husband of the friend I'm on my way to see at this moment (giving me the great pleasure of riding with you) has promised her that, if he's elected to the Academy (he's one of the doctor's colleagues), he'll have her portrait done by Machard. Obviously they're dreaming! I have another friend who claims she likes Leloir[117] better. I'm just a poor layman and perhaps Leloir is even superior technically. But I think the most important quality in a portrait, especially when it's going to cost ten thousand francs, is that it should be a good likeness, and pleasant to look at."

Having made these remarks, which were inspired by the loftiness of her plume, the monogram on her card case, the little number inked inside her gloves by the dry cleaner, and the difficulty of talking to Swann about the Verdurins, Mme. Cottard, seeing that they were still far away from the corner of the rue Bonaparte where the driver was to let her off, listened to her heart, which counseled other words.

"Your ears must have been burning, monsieur," she said, "during the voyage we made with Mme. Verdurin. We talked of nothing else but you."

Swann was very surprised; he had assumed that his name was never mentioned in the presence of the Verdurins.

"Anyway," added Mme. Cottard, "Mme. de Crécy was there, and that says it all. Wherever Odette is, she can never go for very long without mentioning you. And as you may expect she does not speak ill of you. What! You doubt it?" she said, seeing Swann make a gesture of skepticism.

And carried away by the sincerity of her conviction, and imputing no unfavorable meaning to the word, which she used only in the sense in which one employs it to speak of the affection between friends:

"Why, she adores you! Oh, I'm sure one couldn't say anything against you in front of her! One would be soundly scolded! Apropos of anything at all, if we saw a painting, for instance, she would say: 'Now, if he were here, he'd be able to tell us whether it was genuine or not. There's nobody like him for that.' And she was constantly asking: 'What can he be doing right now? If only he would do a little work! It's dreadful that a fellow with such gifts should be so lazy.' (You'll forgive me, won't you?) 'I can see him right now, he's thinking about us, he's wondering where we are.' She even made a remark that I found quite charming: M. Verdurin said to her: 'How in the world can you see what he's doing right now, since you're eight hundred leagues away?' And Odette answered: 'Nothing is impossible for the eye of a friend.' No, I swear, I'm not saying it just to flatter you, you have a true friend in her such as you don't often find. I can tell you besides, that if you don't know it, you're the only one who doesn't. Mme. Verdurin told me as much herself on our very last day (you know, when you're about to leave you always have the best talks): 'I'm not saying Odette doesn't care a great deal for us, but whatever we might say to her wouldn't have much weight compared to what M. Swann might say.' Oh, my Lord! The driver's stopping for me—here I've been chatting away with you and I nearly went right past the rue Bonaparte . . . Would you be so kind as to tell me if my plume is straight?"

And Mme. Cottard withdrew from her muff and held out to Swann a hand gloved in white from which escaped, along with a transfer ticket, a vision of upper-class life that filled the omnibus, mingling with the smell of the dry cleaner. And Swann felt himself overflowing with affection for her, as much as for Mme. Verdurin (and almost as much as for Odette, since the feeling he now had for the latter, being no longer mingled with pain, was hardly love anymore), while from the platform of the omnibus he followed her with his newly affectionate eyes as she courageously made her way up the rue Bonaparte, her plume high, lifting her skirt with one hand, holding in the other her sunshade and her card case with its monogram displayed, while her muff danced in front of her.

To compete with the morbid feelings that Swann had for Odette, Mme. Cottard, a better healer than her husband would have been, had grafted alongside them other feelings, normal ones, of gratitude, friendship, feelings which in Swann's mind would make Odette more human (more like other women, because other women too could inspire these feelings in him), would hasten her final transformation into the Odette who was loved with a peaceful affection, who had brought him back one evening after a party at the painter's home to drink a glass of orangeade with Forcheville and with whom Swann had glimpsed the possibility of living in happiness.

In the past having often thought with terror that one day he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had promised himself to be vigilant and, as soon as he felt his love was beginning to leave him, to cling to it, to hold it back. But now to the weakening of his love there corresponded a simultaneous weakening of his desire to remain in love. For one cannot change, that is to say become another person, while continuing to acquiesce to the feelings of the person one has ceased to be. Now and then the name, glimpsed in a newspaper, of one of the men he thought could have been Odette's lovers, restored his jealousy to him. But it was very mild and as it proved to him that he had not yet completely emerged from the time when he had suffered so much—but also when he had experienced such voluptuous feelings—and that the hazards of the road ahead might still permit him to catch a furtive, distant glimpse of its beauties, this jealousy actually gave him a pleasant thrill just as to the sad Parisian leaving Venice to return to France a last mosquito proves that Italy and the summer are not yet too remote. But most often, when he made the effort, if not to remain in this quite distinctive period of his life from which he was emerging, at least to have a clear view of it while he still could, he would notice that already he no longer could; he would have liked to observe, as though it were a landscape about to disappear, that love which he had just left behind; but it is so difficult to duplicate oneself and give oneself a truthful display of a feeling one no longer has that soon, darkness gathering in his brain, he could no longer see anything, gave up looking, took off his lorgnon, wiped its lenses; and he said to himself that it would be better to rest a little, that there would still be time later on, and would settle back with the incuriosity, the torpor of the drowsy traveler who pulls his hat down over his eyes in order to sleep in the railway carriage which he feels carrying him faster and faster away from the country where he has lived for so long and which he had promised himself not to let slip past without giving it a last farewell. Indeed, like the same traveler if he does not wake until he is back in France, when Swann happened upon proof close at hand that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he observed that he felt no pain, that his love was far away by now, and he was sorry not to have been warned of the moment when he was about to leave it behind forever. And just as before kissing Odette for the first time he had tried to imprint on his memory the face which had been familiar to him for so long and which was about to be transformed by the memory of that kiss, so he would have wanted, in his thoughts at least, to have been able to make his farewells, while she still existed, to the Odette who had inspired him with love, jealousy, to the Odette who had made him suffer and whom he would now never see again. He was mistaken. He did see see her again, one more time, a few weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilight of a dream. He was walking with Mme. Verdurin, Dr. Cottard, a young man in a fez whom he could not identify, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III, and my grandfather, along a path that followed the sea and overhung it steeply sometimes very high up, sometimes by a few yards only, so that one climbed and descended again constantly; those who were descending again were already no longer visible to those who were still climbing, what little daylight remained was failing, and it seemed then as though a profound darkness was going to spread over them at any moment. Now and again the waves leaped right up to the edge and Swann felt sprays of icy water on his cheek. Odette told him to wipe them off, he could not and was embarrassed by this in front of her, as he was embarrassed to be in his nightshirt. He hoped that in the darkness no one would realize, but Mme. Verdurin stared at him with a look of surprise for a long moment during which he saw her face change shape, her nose lengthen, and that she had a large mustache. He turned away to look at Odette, her cheeks were pale, with little red spots, her features drawn, ringed with shadows, but she was looking at him with eyes full of tenderness that were about to separate from her like teardrops and fall on him, and he felt he loved her so much that he wanted to take her away at once. Suddenly Odette turned her wrist, looked at a little watch, and said: "I have to go," she said good-bye to everyone, in the same manner, without taking Swann aside, without telling him where she would see him again that evening or another day. He did not dare ask her, he would have liked to follow her and was obliged, without turning back toward her, to answer with a smile some question of Mme. Verdurin's, but his heart was pounding horribly, he felt he hated Odette, he would have liked to cut out those eyes of hers that he had loved so much just a moment ago, crush those pallid cheeks. He continued to climb with Mme. Verdurin, which meant that with each step he moved farther away from Odette, who was descending in the opposite direction. After one second, it was many hours ago that she had left them. The painter remarked to Swann that Napoleon III had vanished an instant after she had. "They certainly must have arranged it together," he added. "They must have met at the bottom of the hill, but they didn't want to say good-bye at the same time for the sake of appearances. She's obviously his mistress." The unknown young man began to cry. Swann tried to comfort him. "Really, she's doing the right thing," he told him, drying his eyes and taking off his fez so that he would be more comfortable. "I told her a dozen times she should do it. Why be sad about it? He above all would understand her." Thus did Swann talk to himself, for the young man he had not been able to identify at first was also himself; like certain novelists, he had divided his personality between two characters, the one having the dream, and another he saw before him wearing a fez.

As for Napoleon III, it was to Forcheville that some vague association of ideas, then a certain modification in the Baron's usual physiognomy, lastly the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor on his chest, had induced him to give this name; but in reality, and in everything which the character in the dream represented to him and recalled to him, it was indeed Forcheville. For, from incomplete and changing images the sleeping Swann drew false deductions, having for the moment as well such creative power that he reproduced himself by simple division like certain lower organisms; with the warmth that he felt in his own palm he modeled the hollow of a strange hand which he thought he was clasping, and from feelings and impressions of which he was not yet conscious, devised peripeteias of a sort which, through their logical linking, would produce at just the right moment in Swann's sleep the person required to receive his love or prompt his awakening. Utter darkness descended on him in an instant, an alarm sounded, inhabitants of the place ran past, escaping from houses in flames; Swann heard the sound of the waves leaping and his heart, with the same violence, pounding with anxiety in his chest. Suddenly the palpitations of his heart redoubled in speed, he felt an inexplicable pain and nausea; a countryman covered with burns flung at him as he passed: "Come ask Charlus where Odette ended up this evening with her friend, he used to go about with her in the old days and she tells him everything. It's them that started the fire." It was his valet who had come to wake him and who said:

"Monsieur, it's eight o'clock and the hairdresser is here, I've told him to come by again in an hour."

But these words, penetrating the swells of sleep in which Swann was plunged, had reached his consciousness only by suffering that deflection which causes a ray of light in the depths of water to appear to be a sun, just as a moment earlier the sound of the doorbell, assuming in the depths of those abysses the sonority of an alarm, had begotten the episode of the fire. Meanwhile the scene before his eyes turned to dust, he opened his eyes, heard one last time the sound of a wave of the sea as it receded. He touched his cheek. It was dry. And yet he could recall the sensation of the cold water and the taste of the salt. He got up, dressed. He had asked the hairdresser to come early because he had written to my grandfather the night before that he would be going to Combray in the afternoon, having learned that Mme. de Cambremer—Mlle. Legrandin—was spending a few days there. Associating in his memory the charm of that young face with the charm of a countryside he had not visited in such a long time, he found that together they offered him an attraction that had made him decide to leave Paris for a few days at last. Because the different chance events which bring us into contact with certain people do not coincide with the time during which we are in love with them, but, extending beyond it, may occur before it begins and repeat themselves after it has ended, the earliest appearances in our lives of a person destined later to captivate us assume retrospectively in our eyes the significance of a warning, a presage. This was how Swann had often looked back at the image of Odette when he met her at the theater, that first evening when he did not dream he would ever see her again—and how he now recalled the party at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's where he had introduced Général de Froberville to Mme. de Cambremer. We have such numerous interests in our lives that it is not uncommon, on a single occasion, for the foundations of a happiness that does not yet exist to be laid down alongside the intensification of a grief from which we are still suffering. And undoubtedly this could have happened to Swann elsewhere than at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's. Who knows, even, had he found himself elsewhere, that evening, if

other happinesses, other griefs would not have come to him, which afterward should have appeared to him to have been inevitable? But what did seem to him to have been inevitable was what had taken place, and he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because his mind, wanting to admire life's richness of invention and incapable of posing itself a difficult question for very long, such as to determine what would have been most desirable, believed that in the sufferings he had experienced that evening and in the pleasures still unsuspected that were already germinating—between which the balance was too difficult to establish—there was a sort of necessary connection.

But while, an hour after he had woken, he was giving instructions to the hairdresser so that his brush cut would not become disordered on the train, he thought about his dream again, and saw once again, as he had felt them close beside him, Odette's pale complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, everything which—in the course of the successive expression of tenderness which had made of his abiding love for Odette a long oblivion of the first image he had formed of her—he had ceased to notice since the earliest days of their acquaintance, days to which no doubt, while he slept, his memory had returned to search for their exact sensation. And with the intermittent coarseness that reappeared in him as soon as he was no longer unhappy and the level of his morality dropped accordingly, he exclaimed to himself: "To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt my deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, who was not my type!"

PART II

Combray

COMBRAY, FROM A DISTANCE, for ten leagues[1] around, seen from the railway when we arrived there the last week before Easter, was no more than a church summing up the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it into the distance, and, when one approached, holding close around its high dark cloak, in the middle of a field, against the wind, like a shepherdess her sheep, the woolly gray backs of the gathered houses, which a vestige of medieval ramparts girdled here and there with a line as perfectly circular as a small town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a little dreary, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackish stones of the countryside, fronted by outside steps, capped with gables that cast shadows down before them, were so dark that once the daylight began to fade one had to draw back the curtains in the "formal rooms"; streets with the solemn names of saints (of whom many were connected to the history of the earliest seigneurs of Combray): the rue Saint-Hilaire, the rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt's house stood, the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, along which her railings ran, and the rue du Saint-Esprit, onto which opened the little side gate of her garden; and these streets of Combray exist in a part of my memory so withdrawn, painted in colors so different from those that now coat the world for me, that in truth all of them, and also the church that rose above them on the square, appear to me even more unreal than the projections of the magic lantern; and that at certain moments, it seems to me that to be able to cross the rue Saint-Hilaire again, to be able to take a room in the rue de l'Oiseau—at the old Hôtellerie de l'Oiseau Flesché, from whose basement windows rose a smell of cooking that now and then still rises in me as intermittently and as warmly—would be to enter into contact with the Beyond in a manner more marvelously supernatural than making the acquaintance of Golo or chatting with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather's cousin—my great-aunt—in whose house we lived, was the mother of that Aunt Léonie who, after the death of her husband, my uncle Octave, no longer wished to leave, first Combray, then within Combray her house, then her bedroom, then her bed and no longer "came down," always lying in an uncertain state of grief, physical debility, illness, obsession, and piety. Her own rooms looked out on the rue Saint-Jacques, which ended much farther away in the Grand-Pré (as opposed to the Petit-Pré, a green in the middle of the town where three streets met), and which, smooth and gray, with the three high steps of sandstone before almost every door, seemed like a narrow passage hewn by a cutter of Gothic images from the same stone out of which he would have sculpted a crèche or a calvary. My aunt effectively confined her life to two adjoining rooms, staying in one of them in the afternoon while the other was aired. These were the sorts of provincial rooms which—just as in certain countries entire tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or perfumed by myriad protozoa that we cannot see—enchant us with the thousand smells given off by the virtues, by wisdom, by habits, a whole secret life, invisible, superabundant, and moral, which the atmosphere holds in suspension; smells still natural, certainly, and colored by the weather like those of the neighboring countryside, but already homey, human and enclosed, an exquisite, ingenious, and limpid jelly of all the fruits of the year that have left the orchard for the cupboard; seasonal, but movable and domestic, correcting the piquancy of the hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, as lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving and orderly, heedless and foresightful, linen smells, morning smells, pious smells, happy with a peace that brings only an increase of anxiety and with a prosiness that serves as a great reservoir of poetry for one who passes through it without having lived in it. The air was saturated with the finest flower of a silence so nourishing, so succulent, that I could move through it only with a sort of greed, especially on those first still cold mornings of Easter week when I tasted it more keenly because I had only just arrived in Combray: before I went in to say good morning to my aunt, they made me wait for a moment, in the first room where the sun, still wintry, had come to warm itself before the fire, already lit between the two bricks and coating the whole room with an odor of soot, having the same effect as one of those great rustic open hearths, or one of those mantels in country houses, beneath which one sits hoping that outdoors there will be an onset of rain, snow, even some diluvian catastrophe so as to add to the comfort of reclusion the poetry of hibernation; I would take a few steps from the prayer stool to the armchairs of stamped velvet always covered with a crocheted antimacassar; and as the fire baked like a dough the appetizing smells with which the air of the room was all curdled and which had already been kneaded and made to "rise" by the damp and sunny coolness of the morning, it flaked them, gilded them, puckered them, puffed them, transforming them into an invisible, palpable country pastry, an immense "turnover" in which, having barely tasted the crisper, more delicate, more highly regarded but also drier aromas of the cupboard, the chest of drawers, the floral wallpaper, I would always come back with an unavowed covetousness to ensnare myself in the central, sticky, stale, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered coverlet.

In the next room, I would hear my aunt talking all alone in an undertone. She always talked rather softly because she thought there was something broken and floating in her head that she would have displaced by speaking too loudly, but she never remained for long, even alone, without saying something, because she believed it was beneficial to her throat and that if she prevented the blood from stopping there, she would reduce the frequency of the fits of breathlessness and the spasms from which she suffered; besides, in the absolute inertia in which she lived, she attributed to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance; she endowed them with a mobility that made it difficult for her to keep them to herself, and lacking a confidant to whom she could communicate them, she announced them to herself, in a perpetual monologue that was her only form of activity. Unfortunately, having acquired the habit of thinking out loud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the next room, and I often heard her saying to herself: "I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep" (for never sleeping was her great claim, and the language we all used deferred to it and was marked by it: in the morning Françoise did not come to "wake" her, but "entered" her room; when my aunt wanted to take a nap during the day, we said she wanted to "reflect" or "rest"; and when she happened to forget herself, while chatting, so far as to say: "what woke me up" or "I dreamed that," she would blush and correct herself instantly).

After a moment I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be steeping her tea; or, if my aunt was feeling agitated, she would ask instead for her infusion and I would be the one entrusted with pouring from the pharmacy bag onto a plate the quantity of lime blossom which then had to be put into the boiling water. The drying of the stems had curved them into a whimsical trelliswork in whose interlacings the pale flowers opened, as if a painter had arranged them, posing them in the most ornamental way. The leaves, having lost or changed their aspect, looked like the most disparate things, a fly's transparent wing, the white back of a label, a rose petal, but these things had been heaped up, crushed, or woven as in the construction of a nest. A thousand small useless details—the charming prodigality of the pharmacist—that would have been eliminated in an artificial preparation gave me, like a book in which one is amazed to encounter the name of a person one knows, the pleasure of realizing that these were actually stems of real lime blossoms, like those I saw in the avenue de la Gare, altered precisely because they were not duplicates but themselves, and because they had aged. And since here, each new characteristic was only the metamorphosis of an old characteristic, in some little gray balls I recognized the green buds that had not come to their term; but especially the pink luster, lunar and soft, that made the flowers stand out amid the fragile forest of stems where they were suspended like little gold roses—a sign, like the glow on a wall that still reveals the location of a fresco that has worn away, of the difference between the parts of the tree that had been "in color" and those that had not—showed me that these petals were in fact the same ones that, before filling the pharmacy bag with flowers, had embalmed the spring evenings. That candle-pink flame was their color still, but half doused and drowsing in the diminished life that was theirs now, and that is a sort of twilight of flowers. Soon my aunt would be able to dip into the boiling infusion, of which she savored the taste of dead leaf or faded flower, a small madeleine, a piece of which she would hold out to me when it had sufficiently softened.

On one side of her bed was a large yellow chest of drawers of lemon wood and a table that was akin to both a dispensary and a high altar, on which, below a small statue of the Virgin and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, could be found her missals and her medical prescriptions, everything needed for following from her bed both the services and her regimen, for not missing the hour either of her pepsin or of Vespers. On the other side, her bed lay by the window, she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterward comment upon with Françoise.

I would not have been with my aunt five minutes before she would send me away for fear that I would tire her. She would hold out to my lips her sad, pale, dull forehead, on which, at this morning hour, she had not yet arranged her false hair, and where the bones showed through like the points of a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: "Now, my poor child, off you go, get ready for Mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with all of you, she should come up soon to see if I need anything."

Françoise, who had been in her service for years and did not suspect at that time that one day she would enter exclusively into ours, did in fact neglect my aunt a little during the months when we were there. There had been a time, in my childhood, before we went to Combray, when my aunt Léonie still spent the winters in Paris with her mother, when Françoise was such a stranger to me that on the first of January, before entering my great-aunt's, my mother would put a five-franc coin in my hand and say to me: "Take great care not to give it to the wrong person. Wait until you hear me say, 'Good morning, Françoise'; at the same time, I'll touch you lightly on the arm." Hardly had we arrived in my aunt's dim hall than we would see in the shadows, under the flutes of a dazzling bonnet as stiff and fragile as if it were made of spun sugar, the concentric ripples of an anticipatory smile of gratitude. It was Françoise, standing motionless in the frame of the little door of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we were a little used to this chapel darkness, we could distinguish on her face the disinterested love of humanity, the fond respect for the upper classes excited in the best regions of her heart by the hope of a New Year's gift. Mama would pinch my arm violently and say in a loud voice: "Good morning, Françoise." At this signal, my fingers would open and I would release the coin, which found a bashful but outstretched hand to receive it. But ever since we had begun going to Combray I knew no one better than Françoise, we were her favorites, she had for us, at least during the first years, not only as much regard as for my aunt, but also a keener liking, because we added, to the prestige of being part of the family (she had, for the invisible bonds formed between the members of a family by the circulation of the same blood, as much respect as a Greek tragedian), the charm of not being her usual masters. And so with what joy would she welcome us, commiserate with us that we did not yet have finer weather, the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind, while Mama would ask her for news of her daughter and her nephews, whether her grandson was a pretty child, what they were planning to make of him, whether he was going to be like his grandmother.

And when there was no one else there, Mama, knowing that Françoise still mourned her parents, who had died years ago, would talk to her about them gently, ask her for a thousand details about what sort of life they had led.

She had guessed that Françoise did not like her son-in-law and that he spoiled the pleasure she took in being with her daughter, with whom she could not chat as freely when he was there. And so, when Françoise went to see them, a few leagues from Combray, Mama would say to her, smiling: "Isn't it so, Françoise, if Julien is obliged to be away and you have Marguerite all to yourself all day long, you'll be sorry, but you'll make the best of it?" And Françoise would say, laughing: "Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than those X rays" (she said X with an affected difficulty and a smile to poke fun at herself, an ignorant woman, for using that erudite term) "that they brought in for Mme. Octave and that see what you have in your heart," and disappeared, embarrassed that someone was paying attention to her, perhaps so that we would not see her cry; Mama was the first person who gave her that sweet sensation, the feeling that her life as a countrywoman, her joys, her sorrows could be of some interest, could be a reason for pleasure or sadness in someone other than herself. My aunt was resigned to managing with less help from her during our stay, knowing how much my mother appreciated the service of this maid who was so intelligent and active, who was as handsome at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a bonnet whose dazzling rigid flutes appeared to be made of porcelain, as she was when going to High Mass; who did everything well, working like a horse, whether she was in good health or not, but without a fuss, as though it were nothing, the only one of my aunt's maids who, when Mama asked for hot water or black coffee, brought them really boiling; she was one of those servants who, in a household, are at the same time those most immediately displeasing to a stranger, perhaps because they do not bother to win him over and are not attentive to him, knowing very well they have no need of him, that one would stop seeing him rather than dismiss them; and who are, on the other hand, those most valued by masters who have tested their real capacities, and do not care about the superficial charm, the servile chatter that makes a favorable impression on a visitor, but that often cloaks an ineducable incompetence.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they needed, went back for the first time to give my aunt her pepsin and ask what she would like to have for lunch, it was quite rare that she was not already required to offer an opinion or provide explanations about some event of importance:

"Françoise, imagine, Mme. Goupil went past more than a quarter of an hour late going to fetch her sister; if she lingers along the way it wouldn't surprise me at all if she were to arrive after the Elevation."

"Well, there wouldn't be anything astonishing in that," answered Françoise.

"Françoise, if you had come five minutes earlier you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past carrying some asparagus twice as fat as Mère Callot's; now try to find out from her maid where she got them. You have been serving us asparagus in every sauce this year; you of all people might have found some like those for our travelers."

"It wouldn't be surprising if they came from M. le Curé's," said Françoise.

"Ah! Do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise?" answered my aunt, shrugging her shoulders. "From M. le Curé's! You know very well he grows only wretched, spindly little asparagus. I tell you these were as fat as a woman's arm. Not your arm, of course, but one like mine, poor thing, which has got so much thinner again this year."

"Françoise, didn't you hear those chimes that nearly split my head open?"

"No, Madame Octave."

"Ah, my poor girl, you must have a hard head, you can thank the Good Lord for that. It was Maguelone coming to get Dr. Piperaud. He came back out with her right away and they turned down the rue de l'Oiseau. Some child must be ill."

"Oh my, dear God," sighed Françoise, who could not hear of a misfortune occurring to a stranger, even in a distant part of the world, without beginning to lament.

"Françoise, now who were they ringing the passing bell for? Oh, dear God, it must have been for Mme. Rousseau. I'm blessed if I hadn't forgotten that she passed away the other night. Oh, it's time for the Good Lord to call me home, I don't know what I've done with my head since my poor Octave died. But I'm wasting your time, my girl."

"Not at all, Madame Octave, my time is not so precious; He who made it did not sell it to us. I'm only just going to see that my fire isn't out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt together appraised, during that morning session, the first events of the day. But sometimes those events assumed a character so mysterious and so grave that my aunt felt she could not wait for the moment when Françoise would come up, and four astounding peals of the bell would echo through the house.

"But Madame Octave, it isn't time for your pepsin yet," Françoise would say. "Were you feeling faint?"

"Not at all, Françoise," my aunt would say; "what I mean is yes, you know very well there is seldom a time, now, when I don't feel faint; one day I'll pass away like Mme. Rousseau without even time to collect myself; but that's not why I rang. Would you believe that I just saw Mme. Goupil as clearly as I see you now with a little girl whom I don't know at all? Now go fetch two sous' worth of salt at Camus's. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who someone is."

"But that'll be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to be satisfied with an immediate explanation since she had already been to Camus's twice that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise? And you think I wouldn't have recognized her?"

"But I don't mean the big one, Madame Octave, I mean the little one that's away at school in Jouy. I think I saw her once already this morning."

"Ah! That must be it," said my aunt. "She must have come for the holidays. That's it! There's no need to ask, she will have come for the holidays. But then anytime now we might very likely see Mme. Sazerat come and ring at her sister's for lunch. That's what it is! I saw Galopin's boy going past with a tart! You'll see, the tart was on its way to Mme. Goupil's."

"Once Mme. Goupil has a visitor, Madame Octave, it won't be long before you'll see all her folk coming back for lunch, because it's not so early as it was," said Françoise, who, in a hurry to go back down and see to lunch, was not sorry to leave my aunt the prospect of this distraction.

"Oh, not before noon!" answered my aunt in a tone of resignation, casting an uneasy glance at the clock, yet furtively so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced everything, nevertheless took such a lively pleasure in learning whom Mme. Goupil was having to lunch, a pleasure that would unfortunately have to wait a little more than an hour longer. "And on top of that, it will happen during my lunch!" she added half aloud to herself. Her lunch was enough of a distraction for her so that she did not wish for another one at the same time. "Now you won't forget to give me my eggs with cream in a flat plate?" These were

the only plates with pictures on them, and my aunt amused herself at each meal by reading the inscription on the one she was served that day. She would put on her glasses and spell out: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin or the Magic Lamp, and smile, saying: "Very good, very good."

"I would certainly have gone to Camus's . . ." Françoise would say, seeing that now my aunt would not send her there.

"No, no, it's not worth the trouble anymore, it's certainly Mlle. Pupin. My poor Françoise, I'm sorry to have made you come up for nothing."

But my aunt knew perfectly well it was not for nothing that she had rung for Françoise, since, in Combray, a person "whom one did not know at all" was a creature as scarcely believable as a mythological god, and in fact one could not remember when, anytime one of these stupefying apparitions had occurred, in the rue du Saint-Esprit or on the square, well-conducted research had not ended by reducing the fabulous character to the proportions of a "person one knew," either personally or abstractly, in his or her civil status, as having such and such a degree of kinship with some people of Combray. It was Mme. Sauton's son returning from military service, Abbé Perdreau's niece leaving the convent, the curé's brother, a tax collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired or had come to spend the holidays. One had had, upon seeing them, the shock of believing that there were in Combray people whom one did not know at all, simply because one had not recognized them right away. And yet, long in advance, Mme. Sauton and the curé had let everyone know they were awaiting their "travelers." When in the evening I went upstairs, after returning home, to describe our walk to my aunt, if I was so imprudent as to tell her that we had met, near Pont-Vieux, a man my grandfather did not know, "A man Grandfather did not know at all!" she would cry. "Ah! I don't believe it!" Nonetheless somewhat disturbed by this news, she would want to clear the matter up, my grandfather would be summoned. "Now who did you meet near Pont-Vieux, Uncle? A man you didn't know?" "But I did know him," my grandfather would answer, "it was Prosper, the brother of Mme. Bouilleboeuf's gardener." "Ah! All right," my aunt would say, calmed and a little flushed; shrugging her shoulders with an ironic smile, she would add: "Now, he told me you had met a man you didn't know!" And they would advise me to be more circumspect the next time and not to go on agitating my aunt with thoughtless remarks. One knew everybody so well, in Combray, both animals and people, that if my aunt had chanced to see a dog pass by "whom she did not know at all," she would not stop thinking about it and devoting to this incomprehensible fact all her talents for induction and her hours of leisure.

"That must be Mme. Sazerat's dog," Françoise would say, without great conviction but in order to pacify my aunt, and so that she would not "split her head."

"As if I didn't know Mme. Sazerat's dog!" my aunt would answer, her critical mind not accepting a fact so easily.

"Ah! Then it will be the new dog M. Galopin brought back from Lisieux."

"Ah! That must be it."

"It seems it's quite an affable creature," added Françoise, who had got the information from Théodore, "as clever as a person, always in a good humor, always friendly, always as agreeable as you might wish. It's uncommon for an animal of that age to be so well behaved already. Madame Octave, I will have to leave you, I haven't time to enjoy myself, here it's almost ten o'clock, and my stove not lit yet, even, and I still have my asparagus to scrape."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! Why, you've got a regular mania for asparagus this year. You'll make our Parisians grow tired of it!"

"Why, no, Madame Octave, they're very fond of it. You'll see, they'll come home from church with a good appetite and they won't push it about with the backs of their spoons."

"Church! Why, they must be there already. You'd do well not to waste any time. Go and look after your lunch."

While my aunt was conferring thus with Françoise, I was going to Mass with my parents. How I loved it, how clearly I can see it again; our church! The old porch by which we entered, black, pocked like a skimming ladle, was uneven and deeply hollowed at the edges (like the font to which it led us), as if the gentle brushing of the countrywomen's cloaks as they entered the church and of their timid fingers taking holy water could, repeated over centuries, acquire a destructive force, bend the stone and carve it with furrows like those traced by the wheel of a cart in a boundary stone which it knocks against every day. Its tombstones, under which the noble dust of the abbots of Combray, who were buried there, formed for the choir a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer inert and hard matter, for time had softened them and made them flow like honey beyond the bounds of their own square shapes, which, in one place, they had overrun in a flaxen billow, carrying off on their drift a flowery Gothic capital letter, drowning the white violets of the marble; and into which, elsewhere, they had reabsorbed themselves, further contracting the elliptical Latin inscription, introducing a further caprice in the arrangement of those abridged characters, bringing close together two letters of a word of which the others had been disproportionately distended. Its windows never sparkled as much as on the days when the sun hardly appeared, so that, if it was gray outside, we were sure it would be beautiful inside the church; one was filled to its very top by a single figure like a king in a game of cards, who lived up there, under an architectural canopy, between heaven and earth (and in whose slanting blue light, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there is no service—at one of those rare times when the church, airy, vacant, more human, luxurious, with some sun on its rich furniture, looked almost habitable, like the hall of a medieval-style mansion, of sculpted stone and stained glass—one would see Mme. Sazerat kneel for a moment, setting down on the next prayer stool a packet of petits fours tied with string that she had just picked up from the pastry shop across the street and was going to take back home for lunch); in another, a mountain of pink snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frosted onto the glass itself, blistering it with its cloudy sleet like a windowpane on which a few snowflakes remained, but snowflakes lit by some aurora (the same, no doubt, that flushed the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh they seemed set there for a moment by a gleam from outside about to vanish, rather than by colors attached forever to the stone); and all were so old that here and there one saw their silvery age sparkle with the dust of the centuries and show, shimmering and worn down to the thread, the weft of their soft tapestry of glass. One of them, a tall compartment, was divided into a hundred or so small rectangular panes in which blue predominated, like a great deck of cards resembling those meant to entertain King Charles VI;[2] but either because a beam of sunlight was shining, or because my gaze, as it moved, carried across the glass, snuffed and lit again by turns, a precious moving conflagration, the next moment it had assumed the changing luster of a peacock's train, then trembled and undulated in a flaming chimerical rain that dripped from the top of the dark rocky vault, along the damp walls, as if this were the nave of some grotto iridescent with sinuous stalactites into which I was following my parents, who were carrying their prayer books; a moment later the little lozenge-shaped panes had assumed the deep transparency, the infrangible hardness of sapphires which had been juxtaposed on some immense breastplate, but behind which one felt, more beloved than all these riches, a momentary smile of sunlight; it was as recognizable in the soft blue billow with which it bathed the precious stones as on the pavement of the square or the straw of the marketplace; and even on our first Sundays when we had arrived before Easter, it consoled me for the earth being still bare and black, by bringing into bloom, as in a historical springtime dating from the age of Saint Louis's successors, this dazzling gilded carpet of glass forget-me-nots.

Two high-warp tapestries represented the coronation of Esther (tradition had it that Ahasuerus had been given the features of a king of France and Esther those of a lady of Guermantes with whom he was in love), to which their colors, by melting, had added expression, relief, light: a little pink floated over Esther's lips outside the tracing of their outline; the yellow of her dress spread so unctuously, so thickly, that it acquired a kind of solidity and stood out boldly from the receding atmosphere; and the green of the trees, remaining vivid in the lower parts of the panel of silk and wool, but "gone" at the top, brought out in a paler tone, above the dark trunks, the lofty yellowing branches, gilded and half obliterated by the abrupt, slanting illumination of an invisible sun. All this, and still more the precious objects that had come into the church from figures who were for me almost legendary (the gold cross worked, they said, by Saint Eloi[3] and given by Dagobert, the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic,[4] of porphyry and enameled copper), because of which I moved through the church, when we went to our seats, as though through a valley visited by the fairies, in which a country person is amazed to see in a rock, a tree, a pool, the palpable trace of their supernatural passage, all this made it, for me, something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying a space with, so to speak, four dimensions—the fourth being Time—extending over the centuries its nave which, from bay to bay, from chapel to chapel, seemed to vanquish and penetrate not only a few yards but epoch after epoch from which it emerged victorious; hiding the rough, savage eleventh century in the thickness of the walls, from which it appeared with its heavy arches plugged and blinded by crude blocks of ashlar only in the deep gash incised near the porch by the tower staircase, and even there concealed by the graceful Gothic arcades that crowded coquettishly in front of it like older sisters who, to hide him from strangers, place themselves smiling in front of a younger brother who is boorish, sulky, and badly dressed; lifting into the heavens above the square its tower which had contemplated Saint Louis and seemed to see him still; and plunging down with its crypt into a Merovingian night, in which, groping their way as they guided us under the dark vault as powerfully ribbed as the wing of an immense stone bat, Théodore and his sister would light for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's[5] little daughter, on which a deep scallop—like the mark of a fossil—had been dug, it was said, "by a crystal lamp which, on the night the Frankish princess was murdered, had separated of

its own accord from the golden chains by which it hung on the site of the present apse and without the crystal breaking, without the flame going out, had sunk deep into the stone which gave way softly under it."

The apse of the Combray church; what can one say about it? It was so crude, so lacking in artistic beauty and even religious spirit. From outside, because the crossroads which it commanded was on a lower level, its crude wall rose up from a subbasement of quite unpolished ashlar, bristling with flints, and having nothing particularly ecclesiastical about it, the windows seemed to have been pierced at an excessive height, and the whole looked more like the wall of a prison than the wall of a church. And certainly, later, when I recalled all the glorious apses I had seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare them with the apse of Combray. But, one day, at the bend of a little street in a country town, I noticed, opposite the crossing of three lanes, a rough and unusually high wall with windows pierced far above and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. Then I did not ask myself as at Chartres or Rheims how powerfully it expressed religious feeling, but involuntarily exclaimed: "The church!"

The church! Familiar; flanked, in the rue Saint-Hilaire, where its north door was situated, by its two neighbors, M. Rapin's pharmacy and Mme. Loiseau's house, which it touched without any separation; a simple citizen of Combray that could have had its number in the street if the streets of Combray had had numbers, and where it seems that the postman should have had to stop in the morning when he was making his rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and upon coming out of M. Rapin's, there existed, however, between it and everything that was not it a demarcation that my mind was never able to cross. Even though Mme. Loiseau might have at her window fuchsias which developed the bad habit of forever allowing their branches to run all over with heads lowered, and whose flowers had no business more pressing, when they were large enough, than to go and cool their flushed, violet cheeks against the dark front of the church, for me the fuchsias did not for this reason become holy; between the flowers and the blackened stone against which they leaned, if my eyes perceived no interval, my mind reserved an abyss.

One could recognize the steeple of Saint-Hilaire from quite far off inscribing its unforgettable form on the horizon where Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which, in Easter week, was bringing us from Paris, my father caught sight of it slipping by turns over all the furrows of the sky and sending its little iron weathercock running in all directions, he would say to us: "Come, gather up the rugs, we're here." And on one of the longest walks we took from Combray, there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on an immense plateau closed at the horizon by jagged forests above which rose only the delicate tip of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, but so thin, so pink, that it seemed merely scratched on the sky by a fingernail which wanted to give this landscape, this exclusively natural picture, that little mark of art, that indication of human presence. When one drew near and could see the remains of the half-destroyed square tower which, not as high, still stood next to it, one was struck most of all by the dark, reddish shade of the stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one might have thought it, rising above the stormy violet of the vineyards, a ruin of purple nearly the color of a wild vine.

Often in the square, when we were coming home, my grandmother would make me stop to look at it. From the windows of its tower, placed two by two one above the other, with the exact and original proportion in their spacing that gives beauty and dignity not just to human faces, it loosed, dropped at regular intervals, volleys of crows which, for a moment, circled about shrieking, as if the old stones that allowed them to hop and flutter about without appearing to see them had suddenly become uninhabitable and emitted some principle of infinite agitation, struck them and driven them out. Then, after striping in every direction the violet velvet of the evening air, they would return suddenly calm to be reabsorbed into the tower, which was no longer baneful but once again benign, a few of them sitting here and there, apparently motionless, but perhaps snapping up some insect, on the tip of a turret, like a seagull as still as a fisherman on the crest of a wave. Without really knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, of pretension, of meanness, which made her love and believe rich in beneficent influence not only nature, when the hand of man had not, as had my great-aunt's gardener, shrunk and reduced it, but also works of genius. And certainly, every part of the church that one could see distinguished it from all other buildings by a sort of thoughtfulness that was infused into it, but it was in the steeple that it seemed to become aware of itself, affirm an individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple that spoke for it. I believe above all that, confusedly, my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what for her had the highest value in the world, an air of naturalness and an air of distinction. Knowing nothing about architecture, she would say: "My children, make fun of me if you like, perhaps it isn't beautiful according to the rules, but I like its strange old face. I'm sure that if it could play the piano it would not play *dryly*." And looking at it, following with her eyes the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its slopes of stone, which approached each other as they rose like hands meeting in prayer, she would join so fully in the effusion of the spire that her gaze seemed to soar with it; and at the same time she would smile in a friendly way at the worn old stones, of which the setting sun now illuminated only the topmost part and which, the moment they entered that sunny region, softened by the light, appeared suddenly to have risen much higher, to be quite far away, like a song taken up again in "a head voice" an octave above.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that gave all the occupations, all the hours, all the viewpoints of the town their shape, their crown, their consecration. From my bedroom, I could see only its base, which had been covered with slates; but when, on Sunday, I saw them, on a warm summer morning, blazing like a black sun, I would say to myself: "Good Heavens! Nine o'clock! I'd better get ready for Mass if I want to have time to go and give Aunt Léonie a kiss first," and I knew exactly the color of the sun on the square, the heat and dust of the market, the shadow made by the awning of the store which Mama would perhaps enter before Mass in an odor of unbleached linen, to buy some handkerchief which would be displayed to her under the direction of the shopkeeper, his chest outthrust, who, as he prepared to close, had just gone into the back of the shop to put on his Sunday jacket and soap his hands, which it was his habit, every five minutes, even in the most melancholy of circumstances, to rub together with an air of enterprise, celebration, and success.

When after Mass we went in to ask Théodore to bring us a brioche larger than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come from Thiberzy to have lunch with us, we would have the steeple there in front of us, itself golden and baked like a greater blessed brioche, with flakes and gummy drippings of sun, pricking its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, when I was coming home from a walk and thinking about the moment when I would soon have to say goodnight to my mother and not see her anymore, it was on the contrary so soft, at the close of day, that it looked as if it had been set down and crushed like a cushion of brown velvet against the pale sky which had yielded under its pressure, hollowing slightly to give it room and flowing back over its edges; and the cries of the birds that wheeled around it seemed to increase its silence, lift its spire to a greater height, and endow it with something ineffable.

Even on the errands we had to do behind the church, where we could not see it, everything seemed to be arranged in relation to the steeple, which would rise up here or there between the houses, perhaps even more affecting when it appeared that way, without the church. And certainly, there are many others that are more beautiful when seen this way, and I have in my memory vignettes of steeples rising above roofs which have a different artistic character from those composed by the sad streets of Combray. I will never forget, in a curious town in Normandy near Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses that are in many respects dear to me and venerable and between which, when you look at it from the lovely garden that descends from the front steps to the river, the Gothic spire of a church hidden behind them soars up, appearing to complete, to surmount their facades, but in a material so different, so precious, so annulated, so pink, so polished, that you see clearly it no more belongs to them than does the crimson crenellated spire of some seashell, tapering to a turret and glazed with enamel, to the two handsome, smooth pebbles between which it is caught on the beach. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the city, I know a window from which you can see, beyond a foreground, middle ground, and even third ground composed of the piled-up roofs of several streets, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes also, in the noblest "proofs" of it printed by the atmosphere, a decanted cindery black, which is in fact the dome of Saint-Augustin and which gives this view of Paris the character of certain views of Rome by Piranesi. But since into none of these little engravings, with whatever taste my memory may have executed them, was it able to put what I had lost a long time ago, the feeling that makes us not consider a thing a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without equivalent, none of them holds in subjection an entire profound part of my life, as does the memory of those views of the Combray steeple from the streets behind the church. Whether we saw it at five o'clock, when we went to get the letters at the post office, a few houses away from us to the left, abruptly lifting with an isolated peak the ridgeline of the roofs; or whether, on the other hand, if we wanted to go in to ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, our eyes followed that line, low again after the descent of its other slope, knowing we would have to turn at the second street after the steeple; or whether, again, going on farther, if we went to the station, we saw it obliquely, showing in profile new edges and surfaces like a solid caught at an unfamiliar moment of its revolution; or whether, from the banks of the Vivonne, the apse, muscularly gathered and raised to a greater height by the perspective, seemed to spring with the effort the steeple was making to hurl its spire into the heart of the sky: it was always to the steeple that we had to return, always the steeple that dominated everything, summing up the

houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the finger of God, whose body might be hidden in the crowd of humans, though I would not confuse it with them because of that. And even today, if in a large provincial town or a part of Paris I do not know well, a passing stranger who has "put me on the right path" shows me in the distance, as a reference point, some hospital belfry, some convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of a street I am supposed to take, if only my memory can obscurely find in it some small feature resembling the dear departed form, the stranger, if he turns around to make sure I am not going astray, may, to his astonishment, see me, forgetting the walk I had begun or the necessary errand, remain there in front of the steeple for hours, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep in myself lands recovered from oblivion draining and rebuilding themselves; and then no doubt, and more anxiously than a short time before when I asked him to direct me, I am still seeking my path, I am turning a corner . . . but . . . I am doing so in my heart . . .

As we returned home from Mass, we would often meet M. Legrandin, who was detained in Paris by his profession of engineer and, except during the summer vacation, could come to his property in Combray only from Saturday evening until Monday morning. He was one of those men who, quite apart from a career in science in which they have in fact been brilliantly successful, possess an entirely different culture, one that is literary, artistic, which their professional specialization does not make use of and which enriches their conversation. Better read than many men of letters (we did not know at that time that M. Legrandin had a certain reputation as a writer and we were very surprised to see that a famous musician had composed a melody to some verses of his), gifted with more "facility" than many painters, they imagine that the life they are leading is not the one that really suits them and they bring to their actual occupations either an indifference mingled with whimsy, or an application that is sustained and haughty, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a handsome figure, a fine, thoughtful face with a long, blond mustache and disenchanted blue eyes, exquisitely courteous, a conversationalist such as we had never heard before, he was in the eyes of my family, who always cited him as an example, the epitome of the superior man, approaching life in the noblest and most delicate way. My grandmother reproached him only for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not having the same naturalness in his language as in his loosely knotted lavaliere bow ties, in his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was also surprised by the fiery tirades he often launched against the aristocracy, against fashionable life, against snobbery, "certainly the sin which Saint Paul has in mind when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness."

Worldly ambition was a sentiment that my grandmother was so incapable of feeling or even, almost, of understanding, that it seemed to her quite pointless to bring so much ardor to stigmatizing it. What was more, she did not think it in very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister near Balbec was married to a titled gentleman of Lower Normandy, should indulge himself in such violent attacks against the nobility, going so far as to reproach the Revolution for not having had them all guillotined.

"Greetings, my friends!" he would say, coming up to us. "How fortunate you are to live here for such extended periods of time; tomorrow I must return to Paris, to my little nook.

"Oh!" he would add, with his own particular smile, gently ironical, disappointed and slightly distracted, "of course my house contains every useless thing in the world. It lacks only the one essential, a large piece of sky like this one. Always try to keep a piece of sky over your life, little boy," he would add, turning to me. "You have a lovely soul, of a rare quality, an artist's nature, don't ever let it go without what it needs."

When we returned home and my aunt sent to ask us if Mme. Goupil had been late coming to Mass, we could not give her any information. Instead, we increased her disturbance by telling her there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise, sent immediately to the grocery, came back empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose two professions, that of chorister with a part in the maintenance of the church and of grocer's boy, gave him connections in all worlds and therefore knowledge that was universal.

"Ah!" sighed my aunt, "I wish it were time for Eulalie. She's really the only one who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was an active old maid, lame and hard-of-hearing, who had "retired" after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service since her childhood, and had then taken a room next to the church, descending from it constantly either for the services or, when there was no service, to say a little prayer or give Théodore a hand; the rest of the time she visited invalids like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would describe what had happened at Mass or at Vespers. She was not above adding some revenue to the small pension paid her by the family of her former employers by going from time to time to look after the curé's linen or that of some other prominent personality in Combray's clerical world. Above a cloak of black cloth she wore a small white hood almost like a nun's, and a skin disease gave parts of her cheeks and her hooked nose the bright pink tones of an impatiens. Her visits were the great diversion of my aunt Léonie, who hardly received anyone else now, apart from M. le Curé. My aunt had gradually eliminated all the other visitors because all of them made the mistake, in her eyes, of belonging to one of two categories of people whom she detested. One group, the worst, whom she had got rid of first, were the ones who advised her not to "listen to herself" so, and subscribed, if only negatively, manifesting it only by certain disapproving silences or by certain dubious smiles, to the subversive doctrine that a little walk in the sun and a good rare beefsteak (even though two wretched sips of Vichy water would lie on her stomach for fourteen hours!) would do her more good than her bed and her medicines. The other category was made up of the people who seemed to believe she was more seriously ill than she thought, that she was as seriously ill as she said she was. And so, those she had allowed to come up after some hesitation and upon Françoise's kindly meant entreaties and who, in the course of their visit, had shown how very unworthy they were of the favor being done them by timidly risking a "Don't you think that if you were to move about a little when the weather's fine," or who, on the contrary, when she said to them: "I'm very low, very low, this is the end, my poor friends," answered her: "Ah! when our health fails us! Still, you may last awhile longer yet as you are"—these, the former as well as the latter, were certain never to be received again. And if Françoise was amused by my aunt's horrified look when from her bed she saw one of these people in the rue du Saint-Esprit apparently coming toward her house or when she heard the doorbell ring, she would laugh more heartily still, and as though at a good trick, at my aunt's ever-victorious ruses for managing to have them turned away, and at their discomfited expressions as they went off without having seen her, and at heart admired her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these people since she did not want to receive them. In short, my aunt required that her visitors at the same time commend her on her regimen, commiserate with her for her sufferings, and encourage her as to her future.

This was where Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "This is the end, my poor Eulalie," twenty times Eulalie would answer: "Knowing your illness as you know it, Madame Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin was saying to me just yesterday." (One of Eulalie's firmest beliefs, which the impressive number of denials contributed by experience had not been enough to shake, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was Mme. Sazerin.)

"I am not asking to live to a hundred," answered my aunt, who preferred not to see her days assigned a precise term.

And since along with this Eulalie knew better than anyone else how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, barring an unforeseen obstacle, were for my aunt a pleasure, the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state that was at first pleasant, but quite soon painful like an excessive hunger, if Eulalie was even a little late. Overly prolonged, this ecstasy of waiting for Eulalie became a torment, my aunt looked constantly at the time, yawned, felt faint. The sound of Eulalie's chime, if it came at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. The fact was that on Sunday, she thought only of this visit, and as soon as lunch was finished, Françoise would be in a hurry for us to leave the dining room so that she could go up and "occupy" my aunt. But (especially once the fine weather settled in at Combray) a good long time would go by after the haughty hour of noon, descending from the Saint-Hilaire steeple, which it had emblazoned with the twelve momentary rosettes of its sonorous crown, had echoed around our table close to the consecrated bread which had also come in, familiarly, after church, while we remained sitting in front of the *Thousand and One Nights* plates, oppressed by the heat and especially by the meal. For, upon a permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, jams, biscuits which she no longer even announced to us, Françoise would add—depending on the labors in the fields and orchards, the fruit of the tide, the luck of the marketplace, the kindness of neighbors, and her own genius, and with the result that our menu, like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected somewhat the rhythm of the seasons and the incidents of daily life—a brill because the monger had guaranteed her that it was fresh, a turkey hen because she had seen a large one at the Roussainville-le-Pin market, cardoons with marrow because she had not made them for us that way before, a roast leg of mutton because fresh air whets the appetite and it would have plenty of time to "descend" in the next seven hours, spinach for a change, apricots because they were still uncommon, gooseberries because in two weeks there would not be any more, raspberries that M. Swann had brought especially, cherries, the first that had come from the cherry tree in the garden after two years in which it had not given any, cream cheese, which I liked very much at one time, an almond cake because she had ordered it the day before, a brioche because it was our turn to present it. When all of that was finished, there came a work of art composed expressly for us, but more particularly dedicated to my father who was so fond of it, a chocolate custard, the product of Françoise's personal inspiration and attention, ephemeral

and light as an occasional piece into which she had put all her talent. If anyone had refused to taste it, saying: "I'm finished, I'm not hungry anymore," that person would immediately have been relegated to the rank of those barbarians who, even in a gift an artist makes them of one of his works, scrutinize its weight and its material when the only things of value in it are its intention and its signature. To leave even a single drop of it on the plate would have been to display the same impoliteness as to stand up before the end of a piece under the very nose of the composer.

At last my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day, go up to your room if you're too hot outdoors, but get a little fresh air first so that you don't start reading right after leaving the table." I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, often ornamented, like a Gothic font, with a salamander which sculpted on the rough stone the mobile relief of its allegorical tapering body, on the backless bench shaded by a lilac, in the little corner of the garden that opened through a service gate onto the rue du Saint-Esprit and from whose untended earth the scullery rose by two steps, projecting from the house like an independent structure. One could see its red paving stones gleaming like porphyry. It looked not so much like Françoise's lair as a little temple of Venus. It overflowed with the offerings of the dairyman, the fruit man, the vegetable monger, who had come sometimes from quite remote hamlets to dedicate to it the first fruits of their fields. And its roof was forever crowned with the cooing of a dove.

In earlier years I did not linger in the sacred grove surrounding it, since, before going upstairs to read, I would enter the little sitting room that my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and a veteran who had retired with the rank of major, occupied on the ground floor, and which, even when its open windows let in the heat, if not the rays of the sun, which seldom reached that far, gave off inexhaustibly that dark cool smell of both forest and ancien régime, that makes your nostrils linger in a daydream when you venture into certain abandoned hunting lodges. But for a number of years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray because of a quarrel that had occurred between him and my family, through my fault, in the following circumstances.

Once or twice a month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a visit as he was finishing lunch wearing a plain loose-fitting jacket and waited on by his servant who was dressed in a work jacket of striped duck, violet and white. He would grumble complaining that I had not come for a long time, grumble that we were abandoning him; he would offer me a marzipan cake or a tangerine, we would pass through a drawing room in which no one ever stopped, where no one ever made a fire, whose walls were ornamented with gilded moldings, its ceilings painted with a blue that was meant to imitate the sky and its furniture upholstered in satin as at my grandparents', but yellow; then we would go on into what he called his "study," whose walls were hung with some of those engravings depicting, against a dark background, a fleshy pink goddess driving a chariot, standing on a globe, or wearing a star on her forehead, which were admired during the Second Empire[6] because they were felt to have a Pompeiian look about them, were then hated, and are beginning to be admired again for one reason and one reason only, despite the others that are given, and that is that they have such a Second Empire look about them. And I would stay with my uncle until his valet came to him from the coachman to ask what time the latter should harness up. My uncle would then sink into a deep meditation while his admiring valet, afraid of disturbing him by the slightest movement, waited curiously for the result, which was always identical. At last, after the greatest hesitation, my uncle would unfailingly utter these words: "At quarter past two," which the valet would repeat with surprise, but without disputing them: "At quarter past two? Very good . . . I'll go and tell him . . ."

In those days I loved the theater, with a platonic passion since my parents had not yet allowed me to enter a theater, and I pictured to myself so inaccurately the pleasures one might experience there that I almost believed that each spectator looked as though into a stereoscope at a scene that was for him alone, though similar to the thousand others being looked at, each one for himself, by the rest of the audience.

Every morning I would run to the Morris column[7] to see what shows were being announced. Nothing was more disinterested or happier than the daydreams inspired in my imagination by each play that was announced, daydreams conditioned both by the images inseparable from the words that made up its title and also by the color of the posters, still damp and blistered with paste, against which that title stood out. Except for those strange works like *Le Testament de César Girodot* or *Oedipe-Roi,* which were inscribed, not on the green poster of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-red poster of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me more different from the sparkling white plume of *Les Diamants de la Couronne* than the smooth, mysterious satin of *Le Domino Noir,*[8] and, since my parents had told me that when I went to the theater for the first time I would have to choose between these two plays, as I tried to study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and then the title of the other, since this was all I knew of them, so as to attempt to discern the pleasure each one promised me and compare it to the pleasure that lay concealed within the other, I managed to picture to myself so forcefully, on the one hand a play that was dazzling and proud, on the other a play that was soft and velvety, that I was as incapable of deciding which I would prefer as if, for dessert, I had been given the choice between rice *à l'Impératrice* and chocolate custard.

All my conversations with my friends concerned these actors whose art, though unknown to me, was the first form, of all those it assumes, in which Art allowed me a presentiment of what it was. Between the manner in which one actor and another delivered, nuanced a declamatory speech, the tiniest differences seemed to me to have an incalculable importance. And I would rank them in order of talent, according to what I had been told about them, in lists that I recited to myself all day long, and that in the end hardened in my brain and obstructed it with their immovability.

Later, when I was in school, each time I wrote to a new friend during class as soon as the teacher's head was turned, my first question was always whether he had been to the theater yet and whether he thought the greatest actor really was Got, the second best Delaunay, etc. And if, in his opinion, Febvre came only after Thiron, or Delaunay only after Coquelin, the sudden mobility that Coquelin, losing his stony rigidity, would develop in my mind in order to pass to second place, and the miraculous agility, the fecund animation with which Delaunay would be endowed in order to withdraw to fourth, would restore the sensation of flowering and life to my newly supple and fertilized brain.

But if the actors preoccupied me so, if the sight of Maubaut coming out of the Théâtre-Français one afternoon had filled me with the ecstasy and suffering of love, how much more did the name of a star, blazing on the door of a theater, how much more did the sight, at the window of a brougham passing in the street, its horses blossoming with roses in their headbands, of a woman I thought might be an actress, leave me in a state of prolonged disturbance, as I tried impotently and painfully to imagine her life! I would rank the most illustrious in order of talent, Sarah Bernhardt, La Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary, but all of them interested me. Now my uncle knew many of them and also some courtesans whom I did not distinguish clearly from the actresses. He would entertain them at home. And if we went to see him only on certain days, this was because on the other days women came whom his family could not have met, or so at least they thought, since my uncle himself, on the contrary, was only too ready to pay pretty widows who had perhaps never been married, and countesses with high-sounding names which were doubtless only noms de guerre, the courtesy of introducing them to my grandmother or even of presenting them with some of the family jewels, tendencies which had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, when an actress's name came into the conversation, I would hear my father say to my mother, smiling: "A friend of your uncle's"; and I would think that the novitiate pointlessly endured for perhaps years on end by eminent men at the door of some woman who would not answer their letters and would ask her doorman to turn them away could have been spared a boy like me by my uncle, who could introduce him in his own home to the actress who, unapproachable by so many others, was for him an intimate friend.

And so—using the excuse that a lesson which had been moved now came at such an awkward hour that it had prevented me several times and would continue to prevent me from seeing my uncle—one day, different from the day set apart for the visits we made to him, taking advantage of the fact that my parents had had lunch early, I went out and, instead of going to look at the column of posters, for which I was allowed to go out alone, I ran to him. I noticed in front of his door a carriage with two horses, each of which had a red carnation at its blinkers, as did the coachman in his buttonhole. From the staircase I heard a laugh and a woman's voice, and, as soon as I rang, a silence, then the sound of doors being shut. The valet came to open the door, and when he saw me seemed embarrassed, told me my uncle was very busy, probably would not be able to see me, and when he went to let him know anyway, the same voice I had heard before said: "Oh, yes! do let him come in; just for a minute, I would enjoy it so much. In the photograph you have on your desk, he looks so much like his mother, your niece; that's her photograph next to his, isn't it? I would so like to see the boy, just for a moment."

I heard my uncle grumble, become cross, finally the valet showed me in.

On the table, there was the same plate of marzipan as always; my uncle had on his usual jacket, but across from him, in a pink silk dress with a long string of pearls around her neck, sat a young woman who was eating the last of a tangerine. My uncertainty as to whether I should call her Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush and, not daring to turn my eyes too much in her direction for fear of having to talk to her, I went to kiss my uncle. She looked at me, smiling, my uncle

said to her, “My nephew,” without telling her my name, or telling me hers, probably because, ever since the difficulties he had had with my grandfather, he had been trying as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this sort of acquaintance.

“How much like his mother he is,” she said.

“But you’ve never seen my niece except in a photograph,” said my uncle brusquely.

“I beg your pardon, my dear friend, I passed her on the stairs last year when you were so ill. It’s true that I saw her for only a split second and your stairs are quite dark, but that was enough for me to admire her. This young man has her beautiful eyes and also *that,*” she said, drawing a line with her finger along the lower part of her forehead. “Does Madame, your niece, have the same name as you, my dear?” she asked my uncle.

“He looks like his father more than anyone,” muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to introduce them at a distance by saying Mama’s name than to do so at close quarters. “He is exactly like his father and also my poor mother.”

“I don’t know his father,” said the lady in pink with a slight inclination of her head, “and I never knew your poor mother, my dear. You remember, it was shortly after your bereavement that we met.”

I was feeling a little disappointed, because this young lady was no different from the other pretty women I had sometimes seen in my family, in particular the daughter of a cousin of ours to whose house I went every year on the first of January. Better dressed, only, my uncle’s friend had the same quick and kind glance, she seemed as open and affectionate. In her I found no trace of the theatrical appearance that I admired in photographs of actresses, nor of the diabolical expression that would have suited the life she must lead. I had trouble believing she was a courtesan and I especially would not have believed she was a stylish courtesan, if I had not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearl necklace, if I had not known that my uncle was acquainted only with those of the highest sort. But I wondered how the millionaire who had given her her carriage and her house and her jewels could enjoy squandering his fortune on a person whose appearance was so simple and proper. And yet, as I thought about what her life must be like, the immorality of it disturbed me perhaps more than if it had taken concrete form before my eyes in some special guise—it was so invisible, like the secret of some romantic story, of some scandal which had driven out of the home of her bourgeois parents and consigned to the public, which had brought to a bloom of beauty and raised to the demimonde and to notoriety, this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, the same as so many others I knew already, made me consider her despite myself to be a young woman from a good family, though she was no longer from any family.

We had gone into the “study,” and my uncle, appearing somewhat ill at ease because of my presence, offered her a cigarette.

“No,” she said, “my dear, you know I’ve become used to the ones the grand duke sends me. I told him you were jealous.” And from a case she drew cigarettes covered with gilded foreign writing. “Why yes,” she added abruptly, “I must have met this young man’s father at your house. Isn’t he your nephew? How could I have forgotten? He was so good, so exquisite to me,” she said modestly and sensitively. But as I thought about what might have been my father’s brusque greeting which she had found so exquisite, I, who knew his reserve and his coldness, was embarrassed, as by an indelicacy he had committed, by this disparity between the excessive gratitude that was bestowed on it and his insufficient cordiality. It seemed to me later that it was one of the touching aspects of the role of these idle and studious women that they devote their generosity, their talent, a free-floating dream of beauty in love—for, like artists, they do not carry it to fruition, do not bring it into the framework of a shared existence—and a gold that costs them little, to enrich with a precious and refined setting the rough and ill-polished lives of men. Just as this one, in the smoking room where my uncle was wearing his plain jacket to receive her, generously diffused her soft and sweet body, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, the elegance that emanates from the friendship of a grand duke, so in the same way she had taken some insignificant remark of my father’s, had worked it delicately, turned it, given it a precious appellation, and enchasing it with one of her glances of the finest water, tinged with humility and gratitude, had given it back changed into an artistic jewel, into something “completely exquisite.”

“Come now, it’s time for you to go,” my uncle said to me.

I stood up, I had an irresistible desire to kiss the hand of the lady in pink, but it seemed to me this would have been something as bold as an abduction. My heart pounded as I said to myself: “Should I do it, should I not do it,” then I stopped asking myself what I should do so as to be able to do something. And with a blind and senseless gesture divested of all the reasons I had found in its favor a moment ago, I carried to my lips the hand she was holding out to me.

“How nice he is! How gallant! Why, the boy’s a bit of a ladies’ man already: he takes after his uncle. He’ll be a perfect *gentleman,*”[9] she added, clenching her teeth to give the phrase a slightly British accent. “Couldn’t he come have *a cup of tea* with me sometime, as our neighbors the English say? He need only send me a ‘blue’[10] in the morning.”

I did not know what a “blue” was. I did not understand half the words the lady said, but my fear that there was some question concealed in them which it would have been impolite of me not to answer made me keep on listening to them with close attention, and this made me very tired.

“Oh no, that’s not possible,” said my uncle, shrugging his shoulders, “he’s very busy, he works hard. He wins all the prizes at school,” he added in a low voice so that I would not hear this lie and contradict it. “Who knows? Perhaps the boy will be a little Victor Hugo, another Vaulabelle,[11] you know.”

“I adore artists,” answered the lady in pink, “they’re the only ones who understand women . . . besides a few superior creatures like you. Excuse my ignorance, my dear, but who is Vaulabelle? Is it those gilt-edged volumes in the little glass bookcase in your sitting room? You know you promised to lend them to me, I’ll take great care of them.”

My uncle, who hated lending his books, said nothing in answer and took me to the front hall. Crazed with love for the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle’s tobacco-filled cheeks with mad kisses, and, while with some embarrassment he let me know without venturing to tell me openly that he would just as soon I not talk about this visit to my parents, I said to him, tears in my eyes, that the memory of his goodness was so powerful within me that one day I would certainly find the means to show him my gratitude. It was so powerful, in fact, that two hours later, after a few mysterious phrases that did not seem to me to give my parents a distinct enough idea of the new importance with which I was endowed, I found it more explicit to describe to them every last detail of the visit I had just paid. I did not think that in doing this I was causing problems for my uncle. How could I have thought that, since I did not wish it? And I could not imagine that my parents would see any harm in a visit in which I saw none. Doesn’t it happen every day that a friend asks us to be sure to apologize for him to a woman to whom he has been prevented from writing, and that we neglect to do it, feeling that this person cannot attach any importance to a silence that has none for us? I imagined, like everyone else, that the brain of another person was an inert and docile receptacle, without the power to react specifically to what one introduced into it; and I did not doubt that in depositing in my parents’ brains the news of the acquaintance I had made through my uncle, I was transmitting to them at the same time, as I wished to, the kindly opinion that I had of this introduction. My parents unfortunately deferred to principles entirely different from those I was suggesting they adopt, when they wished to appraise my uncle’s action. My father and grandfather had some violent arguments with him; of this, I was indirectly informed. A few days later, encountering my uncle outdoors as he was passing in an open carriage, I was filled with all the pain, the gratitude, the remorse that I would have liked to express to him. Compared to their immensity, I felt that raising my hat would be shabby and might make my uncle think I did not believe I owed him more than an ordinary sort of courtesy. I decided to refrain from that inadequate gesture and I turned my head away. My uncle thought that in doing this I was following my parents’ orders, he did not forgive them, and he died many years later without any of us ever seeing him again.

And so I no longer went into my uncle Adolphe’s sitting room, now closed, and would linger in the vicinity of the scullery until Françoise appeared in her temple yard and said to me: “I’m going to let my kitchen maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water, I must fly to Mme. Octave,” when I would decide to go back in and would go straight upstairs to read in my room. The kitchen maid was an abstract entity, a permanent institution whose invariable set of attributes assured her a sort of continuity and identity, through the succession of temporary forms in which she was incarnated, for we never had the same one two years running. The year we ate so much asparagus, the kitchen maid usually given the job of “scraping” them was a poor, sickly creature, in a state of pregnancy already rather advanced when we arrived at Easter, and we were in fact surprised that Françoise allowed her to do so many errands and so much heavy work, for she was beginning to have difficulty carrying before her the mysterious basket, rounder every day, whose magnificent form one could divine under her ample smocks. These smocks reminded me of the cloaks worn by certain of Giotto’s symbolic figures, photographs of whom I had been given by M. Swann. He himself was the one who had pointed this out to us and when he asked for news of the kitchen maid he would say: “How is Giotto’s Charity?” What was more, she herself, poor girl, fattened by her pregnancy even in her face, even in her cheeks, which descended straight and square, rather resembled, in fact, those strong,

mannish virgins, matrons really, in whom the virtues are personified in the Arena. And I realize now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua[12] resembled her in still another way. Just as the image of this girl was increased by the added symbol she carried before her belly without appearing to understand its meaning, without expressing in her face anything of its beauty and spirit, as a mere heavy burden, in the same way the powerful housewife who is represented at the Arena below the name "Caritas," and a reproduction of whom hung on the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, embodies this virtue without seeming to suspect it, without any thought of charity seeming ever to have been capable of being expressed by her vulgar, energetic face. Through a lovely invention of the painter, she is trampling upon the treasures of the earth, but absolutely as if she were treading grapes to extract their juice or rather as she would have climbed on some sacks to raise herself up; and she holds her flaming heart out to God, or, to put it more exactly, "hands" it to him, as a cook hands a corkscrew through the vent of her cellar to someone who is asking her for it at the ground-floor window. Envy, too, might have had more of a particular expression of envy. But in this fresco too, the symbol occupies such a large place and is represented as so real, the serpent hissing at the lips of Envy is so fat, it fills her wide-open mouth so completely, that the muscles of her face are distended to contain it, like those of a child swelling a balloon with its breath, and that Envy's attention—and ours along with it—entirely concentrated as it is on the action of her lips, has scarcely any time for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration M. Swann professed for these figures of Giotto, for a long time I took no pleasure in contemplating, in our schoolroom, where the copies he had brought back to me had been hung, this Charity without charity, this Envy which looked like nothing more than a plate in a medical book illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumor of the tongue or by the introduction of the operating surgeon's instrument, a Justice whose grayish and meanly regular face was the very same which, in Combray, characterized certain pretty, pious, and unfeeling bourgeois ladies I saw at Mass, some of whom had long since been enrolled in the reserve militia of Injustice. But later I understood that the startling strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes was due to the large place which the symbol occupied in them, and the fact that it was represented, not as a symbol, since the thought symbolized was not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or physically handled, gave something more literal and more precise to the meaning of the work, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson it taught. In the case of the poor kitchen maid, too, wasn't one's attention constantly brought back to her belly by the weight that pulled on it; and in the same way, also, the thoughts of the dying are quite often turned toward the aspect of death that is real, painful, dark, visceral, toward the underside of death, which is in fact the side it presents to them and so harshly makes them feel, and which more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty breathing, a need to drink, than what we call the idea of death.

There must have been a good deal of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they seemed to me as alive as the pregnant servant, and since she herself did not appear to me much less allegorical. And perhaps this (at least apparent) nonparticipation of a person's soul in the virtue that is acting through her has also, beyond its aesthetic value, a reality that is, if not psychological, at least, as they say, physiognomical. When, later, I had occasion to meet, in the course of my life, in convents for instance, truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they generally had the cheerful, positive, indifferent, and brusque air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can read no commiseration, no pity in the presence of human suffering, no fear of offending it, the sort which is the ungentle face, the antipathetic and sublime face of true goodness.

While the kitchen maid—involuntarily causing Françoise's superiority to shine forth, just as Error, by contrast, renders more dazzling the triumph of Truth—served coffee which according to Mama was merely hot water, and then took up to our rooms hot water which was barely lukewarm, I had lain down on my bed, a book in my hand, in my room which tremulously protected its frail transparent coolness from the afternoon sun behind its nearly closed shutters, through which a gleam of daylight had nonetheless contrived to pass its yellow wings, remaining motionless between the wood and the windowpane, in a corner, like a poised butterfly. It was barely light enough to read, and the sensation of the splendid brightness of the day came to me only from the blows struck in the rue de la Cure by Camus (told by Françoise that my aunt was "not resting" and that one could make noise) against some dusty crates, which, however, reverberating in the sonorous atmosphere peculiar to hot weather, seemed to send scarlet stars flying into the distance; and also by the houseflies that performed for me, in a little concert, a sort of chamber music of summer: this music does not evoke summer in the same way as a melody of human music, which, when you happen to hear it during the warm season, afterward reminds you of it; it is connected to the summer by a more necessary bond: born of the fine days, born again only with them, containing a little of their essence, it not only awakens their image in our memory, it guarantees their return, their presence, actual, ambient, immediately accessible.

This dim coolness of my room was to the full sun of the street what a shadow is to a ray of light, that is to say, it was just as luminous and offered my imagination the full spectacle of summer, which my senses, had I been out walking, could have enjoyed only piecemeal; and so it was quite in harmony with my repose, which (because of the stirring adventures narrated in my books) sustained, like the repose of an unmoving hand in the midst of a stream of water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity.

But my grandmother, even if the hot weather had turned bad, if a storm or merely a squall had arisen, would come and beg me to go out. And not wanting to stop my reading, I would go and continue it in the garden, at least, under the chestnut tree, in a little hooded chair of wicker and canvas, in the depths of which I would sit and think I was hidden from the eyes of the people who might come and pay a visit to my parents.

And wasn't my mind also like another crib in the depths of which I felt I remained ensconced, even in order to watch what was happening outside? When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. In the sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would simultaneously unfold while I read, and which ranged from the aspirations hidden deepest within me to the completely exterior vision of the horizon which I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and the beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be. For, even if I had bought it in Combray, having seen it in front of Borange's grocery, which was too far away from the house for Françoise to be able to do her shopping there as she did at Camus's, but which was better stocked as stationer and bookshop, held in place by some strings in the mosaic of pamphlets and monthly serials that covered the two panels of its door, which was itself more mysterious, more sown with ideas than the door of a cathedral, the fact was that I had recognized it as having been mentioned to me as a remarkable work by the teacher or friend who appeared to me at that period to hold the secret of the truth and beauty half sensed, half incomprehensible, the knowledge of which was the goal, vague but permanent, of my thoughts.

After this central belief, which moved incessantly during my reading from inside to outside, toward the discovery of the truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I was taking part, for those afternoons contained more dramatic events than does, often, an entire lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading; it is true that the people affected by them were not "real," as Françoise said. But all the feelings we are made to experience by the joy or the misfortune of a real person are produced in us only through the intermediary of an image of that joy or that misfortune; the ingeniousness of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in the apparatus of our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist in purely and simply abolishing real people would be a decisive improvement. A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is in large part perceived by our senses, that is to say, remains opaque to us, presents a dead weight which our sensibility cannot lift. If a calamity should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total notion we have of him that we will be able to be moved by this; even more, it is only in a part of the total notion he has of himself that he will be able to be moved himself. The novelist's happy discovery was to have the idea of replacing these parts, impenetrable to the soul, by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say, parts which our soul can assimilate. What does it matter thenceforth if the actions, and the emotions, of this new order of creatures seem to us true, since we have made them ours, since it is within us that they occur, that they hold within their control, as we feverishly turn the pages of the book, the rapidity of our breathing and the intensity of our gaze. And once the novelist has put us in that state, in which, as in all purely internal states, every emotion is multiplied tenfold, in which his book will disturb us as might a dream but a dream more lucid than those we have while sleeping and whose memory will last longer, then see how he provokes in us within one hour all possible happinesses and all possible unhappinesses just a few of which we would spend years of our lives coming to know and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slowness with which they occur prevents us from perceiving them (thus our heart changes, in life, and it is the worst pain; but we know it only through reading, through our imagination: in reality it changes,

as certain natural phenomena occur, slowly enough so that, if we are able to observe successively each of its different states, in return we are spared the actual sensation of change).

Already less interior to my body than these lives of the characters, next came, half projected in front of me, the landscape in which the action unfolded and which exerted on my thoughts a much greater influence than the other, the one I had before my eyes when I lifted them from the book. It was thus that during two summers, in the heat of the garden at Combray, I felt, because of the book I was reading then, homesick for a mountainous and fluvial country, where I would see many sawmills and where, in the depths of the clear water, pieces of wood rotted under tufts of watercress: not far off, climbing along low walls, were clusters of violet and reddish flowers. And since the dream of a woman who would love me was always present in my mind, during those summers that dream was impregnated with the coolness of the running waters; and whichever woman I conjured up, clusters of violet and reddish flowers would rise immediately on either side of her like complementary colors.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains forever stamped, is adorned and enriched, by the glimmer of the colors not its own that may happen to surround it in our daydream; for the landscapes in the books I read were for me not merely landscapes more vividly portrayed in my imagination than those which Combray set before my eyes but otherwise analogous. Because the author had chosen them, because of the faith with which my mind went to meet his word as though it were a revelation, they seemed to be—an impression hardly ever given me by the countryside in which I happened to be, and especially by our garden, the unmagical product of the perfectly correct conception of the gardener so despised by my grandmother—an actual part of Nature itself, worthy to be studied and explored.

If my parents had allowed me, when I was reading a book, to go visit the region it described, I would have believed I was taking an invaluable step forward in the conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always surrounded by our own soul, it is not as though by a motionless prison: rather, we are in some sense borne along with it in a perpetual leap to go beyond it, to reach the outside, with a sort of discouragement as we hear around us always that same resonance, which is not an echo from outside but the resounding of an internal vibration. We try to rediscover in things, now precious because of it, the glimmer that our soul projected on them; we are disappointed to find that they seem to lack in nature the charm they derived in our thoughts from the proximity of certain ideas; at times we convert all the forces of that soul into cunning, into magnificence, in order to have an effect on people who are outside us, as we are well aware, and whom we will never reach. Thus, if I always imagined the woman I loved surrounded by the places I longed for most at that time, if I would have liked her to be the one who took me to visit them, who opened the way for me into an unknown world, it was not because of a simple chance association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I am separating artificially today as if I were cutting sections at different heights of an apparently motionless iridescent jet of water—in a single inflexible upsurge of all the forces of my life.

Lastly, continuing to trace from the inside to the outside these states simultaneously juxtaposed in my consciousness, and before reaching the real horizon that enveloped them, I find pleasures of another kind, the pleasure of being comfortably seated, of smelling the good scent of the air, of not being disturbed by a visit; and, when an hour rang in the bell tower of Saint-Hilaire, of seeing fall piece by piece what was already consumed of the afternoon, until I heard the last stroke, which allowed me to add up the total and after which the long silence that followed it seemed to commence in the blue sky that whole part that was still granted me for reading until the good dinner which Françoise was preparing and which would restore me from the hardships I had incurred, during the reading of the book, in pursuit of its hero. And at each hour it would seem to me only a few moments since the preceding hour had rung; the most recent would come and inscribe itself close to the other in the sky, and I would not be able to believe that sixty minutes were held in that little blue arc comprised between their two marks of gold. Sometimes, even, this premature hour would ring two strokes more than the last; there was therefore one that I had not heard, something that had taken place had not taken place for me; the interest of the reading, as magical as a deep sleep, had deceived my hallucinated ears and erased the golden bell from the azure surface of the silence. Lovely Sunday afternoons under the chestnut tree in the garden at Combray, carefully emptied by me of the ordinary incidents of my own existence, which I had replaced by a life of foreign adventures and foreign aspirations in the heart of a country washed by running waters, you still evoke that life for me when I think of you and you contain it in fact from having gradually encircled and enclosed it—while I went on with my reading in the falling heat of the day—in the crystalline succession, slowly changing and spanned by leafy branches, of your silent, sonorous, redolent, and limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be drawn from my reading, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who would run like a lunatic, overturning an orange tree in its tub as she went by, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and shouting, "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run out too and not miss any of the show. This was on the days when the regiment passed through Combray on its way to garrison maneuvers, generally going down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on chairs outside the railings, gazed at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walk and allowed themselves to be gazed at in return, the gardener's daughter through a slit left between two distant houses in the avenue de la Gare had caught sight of the glitter of helmets. The servants had rushed to bring in their chairs, for when the cuirassiers paraded down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, they filled its entire breadth, and the cantering horses grazed the houses, covering pavements submerged like banks that offer too narrow a bed for a torrent unleashed.

"Poor children," said Françoise, having barely reached the railings and already in tears; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow; the very thought of it gives me a shock," she added, putting her hand on her heart, where she had received that *shock*.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Madame Françoise, all these youngsters with no care for their lives?" said the gardener to get a "rise" out of her.

He had not spoken in vain:

"No care for their lives? Well, now, what should we care for if we don't care for our lives, the only gift the dear Lord never gives us twice over? Alas, dear God! It's quite true, though, they don't care! I saw them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they're not worth the rope to hang them with; they're not men anymore, they're lions." (For Françoise, the comparison of a man to a lion, which she pronounced lie-on, was not at all complimentary.)

The rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see anything coming from far off, and it was through that slit between the two houses in the avenue de la Gare that we saw more and more new helmets flowing and shining in the sun. The gardener wanted to know if there were many more still to come, and he was thirsty, because the sun was beating down. So, all of a sudden, his daughter, leaping out as though from a place besieged, would sally forth, gain the corner of the street, and after braving death a hundred times, come back to us bringing, along with a carafe of licorice water, the news that there were at least a thousand of them coming without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, reconciled, would discuss what action should be taken in case of war.

"You see, Françoise," said the gardener, "revolution would be better, because when they declare a revolution, it's only them that wants to that goes."

"Well now, at least I can understand that, it's more honest."

The gardener believed that when war was declared they would stop all the railway trains.

"Of course! So we doesn't run off," said Françoise.

And the gardener: "Oh, they're clever ones!" because he would not admit that war was not a kind of bad trick that the State tried to play on the people, and that if only they had the means to do it, there was not a single person who would not have run away from it.

But Françoise would hurry back to my aunt, I would return to my book, the servants would settle in front of the gate again to watch as the dust subsided along with the emotion roused by the soldiers. Long after calm had descended, an unaccustomed flow of people out walking would continue to darken the streets of Combray. And in front of each house, even those where it was not the custom, the servants or even the masters, sitting and watching, would festoon the sill with a border as dark and irregular as the border of seaweed and shells whose crepe and embroidery are left on the shore by a strong tide after it recedes.

Except on those days, however, I could usually read in peace. But the interruption and the commentary that a visit of Swann's once produced as I was in the midst of reading a book by an author quite new to me, Bergotte, had the consequence that for a long time afterward it was not against a wall adorned with spikes of violet flowers, but against a quite different background, before the portal of a Gothic cathedral, that the image now appeared of one of the women I dreamed of.

I had heard Bergotte mentioned for the first time by a friend of mine older than I whom I greatly admired, Bloch. When he heard me admit how much I admired "La Nuit d'Octobre,"[13] he had exploded in laughter as noisy as a trumpet and said to me: "Beware this rather low fondness of yours for the Honorable de

Musset. He's an extremely pernicious individual and a rather sinister brute. I must admit, however, that he and even our man Racine did, each of them, in the course of their lives, make one fairly rhythmical line of verse that also has in its favor what I believe to be the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. They are: 'The white Oloossone and the white Camyre' and 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë.'[14] They were pointed out to me in defense of those two rogues in an article by my very dear master, old Leconte, acceptable to the Immortal Gods. Speaking of which, here's a book I don't have time to read right now which is recommended, it seems, by that colossal fellow. I've been told he considers the author, the Honorable Bergotte, to be a most subtle individual; and even though he may evince, at times, a goodness of heart rather hard to explain, for me his word is a Delphic Oracle. Do read these lyrical pieces of prose, therefore, and if the titanic rhymester who composed 'Bhagavat' and 'Le Lévrier de Magnus'[15] has spoken the truth, by Apollo, you will taste, dear master, the nectarine joys of Olympos." It was in a sarcastic tone that he had asked me to call him "dear master" and that he called me the same. But in reality we took a certain pleasure in this game, since we were still close to the age when one believes one creates what one names.

Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to Bloch and ask him for an explanation in order to quiet the disturbance he had caused in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I expected nothing less than a revelation of the truth) were all the finer if they meant nothing at all. For Bloch was not invited to the house again. At first he had been made quite welcome. It was true that my grandfather claimed that each time I formed a closer attachment to one of my friends than the others and brought him home, he was always a Jew, which would not have displeased him in principle—even his friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not felt that it was not from among the best that I had chosen him. And so when I brought home a new friend, he very seldom failed to hum "Oh God of our Fathers" from *La Juive*[16] or "Israel, break thy bond,"[17] singing only the tune, naturally (Ti la lam talam, talim), but I was afraid my friend would know it and restore the words.

Before he saw them, simply from hearing the name, which quite often had nothing particularly Jewish about it, he would guess not only the Jewish background of those of my friends who were in fact Jewish, but even whatever might be distressing about their family.

"And what is the name of this friend of yours who's coming this evening?"

"Dumont, Grandfather."

"Dumont! Oh, now I'm suspicious!"

And he would sing:

> Archers, be on your guard!
> Watch without rest, without sound.[18]

And after adroitly asking us a few more specific questions, he would cry out: "On guard! On guard!" or, if it was the victim himself, already there, whom he had forced, by a subtle interrogation, unwittingly to confess his origins, then, to show us he no longer had any doubts, he would simply gaze at us while barely perceptibly humming:

> Let you now guide
> The steps of this timid Israelite![19]

or:

> Fields of our fathers, sweet valley of Hebron.[20]

or else:

> Yes, I am of the chosen race.[21]

These little idiosyncrasies of my grandfather's did not imply any feeling of ill will toward my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by irritating my father, who, noticing that he was wet, had said to him with lively interest:

"Why, Monsieur Bloch, what's the weather like? Has it been raining? I don't understand this at all, the barometer couldn't have been better."

The only answer he had drawn from him had been this:

"Monsieur, I absolutely cannot tell you if it has been raining. I live so resolutely beyond physical contingencies that my senses do not bother to notify me of them."

"Why, my poor son, that friend of yours is an idiot," my father had said to me when Bloch had gone. "My goodness! He can't even tell me what the weather's like! Why, nothing is more interesting! He's an imbecile."

Then Bloch had displeased my grandmother because after lunch, when she said she was feeling a little indisposed, he had stifled a sob and wiped away a few tears.

"How can you tell me he's sincere?" she said to me. "He doesn't know me; unless he's out of his mind, of course."

And finally he had annoyed everyone because, having come for lunch an hour and a half late covered with mud, instead of apologizing, he had said:

"I never allow myself to be influenced either by atmospheric perturbations or by the conventional divisions of time. I would happily instate the use of the opium pipe and the Malay kris,[22] but I know nothing about the use of those infinitely more pernicious and also insipidly bourgeois implements, the watch and the umbrella."

He would have returned to Combray despite all this. He was not, of course, the friend my parents would have wanted for me; in the end they had believed that the tears he shed over my grandmother's indisposition were not feigned; but they knew, either instinctively or from experience, that our impulsive emotions have little influence over the course of our actions or the conduct of our lives, and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to friends, the completion of a piece of work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in blind habits than in those momentary transports, ardent and sterile. They would have preferred for me, over Bloch, companions who would have given me no more than is suitable to give one's friends, according to the laws of bourgeois morality; who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruits because they had been thinking of me with affection that day, but who, being incapable of tipping in my favor the correct balance of the obligations and claims of friendship by a simple impulse of their imagination and sensibility, would also not tamper with it to my detriment. Even our offenses will not easily divert from their duty toward us those natures of which the model was my great-aunt, who, estranged for years from a niece to whom she never spoke, did not for this reason change the will in which she left that niece her entire fortune, because she was her closest relative and it "was proper."

But I liked Bloch, my parents wanted to make me happy, the insoluble problems I posed for myself concerning the meaningless beauty of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë tired me more and made me more ill than further conversations with him would have done, even though my mother felt they were harmful. And he would still have been received at Combray, if, after that dinner, having just informed me—news that later had a great deal of influence on my life and made it first happier, then less happy—that no woman ever thought about anything but love and that there was not one whose resistance could not be overcome, he had not assured me that he had heard most positively that my great-aunt had had a wild youth and had been known to be a kept woman. I could not stop myself from repeating these remarks to my parents, he was shown the door when he returned, and when I approached him afterward in the street, he was extremely cold to me.

But on the subject of Bergotte what he had said was true.

In the first few days, like a melody with which one will become infatuated but which one cannot yet make out, what I was to love so much in his style was not apparent to me. I could not put down the novel of his that I was reading, but thought I was interested only in the subject, as during that first period of love when you go to meet a woman every day at some gathering, some entertainment, thinking you are drawn to it by its pleasures. Then I noticed the rare, almost archaic expressions he liked to use at certain moments, when a hidden wave of harmony, an inner prelude, would heighten his style; and it was also at these moments that

he would speak of the "vain dream of life," the "inexhaustible torrent of beautiful appearance," the "sterile and delicious torment of understanding and loving," the "moving effigies that forever ennoble the venerable and charming facades of our cathedrals," that he expressed an entire philosophy, new to me, through marvelous images which seemed themselves to have awakened this harp song which then arose and to whose accompaniment they gave a sublime quality. One of these passages by Bergotte, the third or fourth that I had isolated from the rest, filled me with a joy that could not be compared to the joy I had discovered in the first one, a joy I felt I was experiencing in a deeper, vaster, more unified region of myself, from which all obstacles and partitions seemed to have been removed. What had happened was that, recognizing the same preference for rare expressions, the same musical effusion, the same idealist philosophy that had already, the other times, without my realizing it, been the source of my pleasure, I no longer had the impression I was in the presence of a particular passage from a certain book by Bergotte, tracing on the surface of my mind a purely linear figure, but rather of the "ideal passage" by Bergotte, common to all his books, to which all the analogous passages that merged with it had added a sort of thickness, a sort of volume, by which my mind seemed enlarged.

I was not quite Bergotte's only admirer; he was also the favorite writer of a friend of my mother's, a very well read woman, while Dr. du Boulbon would keep his patients waiting as he read Bergotte's most recent book; and it was from his consulting room, and from a park near Combray, that some of the first seeds of that predilection for Bergotte took flight, a rare species then, now universally widespread, so that all through Europe, all through America, even in the smallest village, one can find its ideal and common flower. What my mother's friend and, it seems, Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in Bergotte's books, as I did, was that same melodic flow, those old-fashioned expressions, a few others which were very simple and familiar, but which enjoyed, to judge from the places in which he focused attention on them, a particular preference on his part; lastly, in the sad passages, a certain brusqueness, a tone that was almost harsh. And no doubt he himself must have felt that these were his greatest charms. For in the books that followed, if he had found out some great truth, or the name of a famous cathedral, he would interrupt his narrative and, in an invocation, an apostrophe, a long prayer, he would give vent to those exhalations which in his early works remained interior to his prose, revealed only by the undulations of its surface, even sweeter, perhaps, more harmonious, when they were thus veiled and one could not have pointed out precisely where their murmur rose, where it died. These passages in which he took such pleasure were our favorite passages. I myself knew them by heart. I was disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Each time he talked about something whose beauty had until then been hidden from me, about pine forests, about hail, about Notre-Dame Cathedral, about *Athalie* or *Phèdre,*[23] with one image he would make that beauty explode into me. And so, realizing how many parts of the universe there were that my feeble perception would not be able to distinguish if he did not convey them to me, I wanted to possess an opinion of his, a metaphor of his, for everything in the world, especially those things that I would have an opportunity to see myself, and, of the latter, particularly some of the historic buildings of France and certain seascapes, because the insistence with which he mentioned them in his books proved that he considered them rich in meaning and beauty. Unfortunately, concerning almost everything in the world I did not know what his opinion was. I did not doubt that it was entirely different from my own, since it came down from an unknown world toward which I was trying to rise: persuaded that my thoughts would have looked like pure ineptitude to that perfect mind, I had made such a clean sweep of them all that, when by chance I happened to encounter in one of his books a thought that I had already had myself, my heart would swell as though a god in his goodness had given it back to me, had declared it legitimate and beautiful. It happened now and then that a page of his would say the same things that I often wrote to my grandmother and my mother at night when I could not sleep, so that this page by Bergotte seemed like a collection of epigraphs to be placed at the beginnings of my letters. Later still, when I began writing a book, and the quality of certain sentences was not high enough to persuade me to continue it, I would find their equivalent in Bergotte. But it was only then, when I read them in his book, that I could enjoy them; when I was the one composing them, anxious that they should reflect exactly what I perceived in my thoughts, afraid I would not "make a good likeness," I hardly had time to ask myself whether what I was writing was agreeable! But in fact there was no other sort of sentence, no other sort of idea, that I really loved. My uneasy and dissatisfied efforts were themselves a sign of love, a love without pleasure but profound. And so, when I suddenly found sentences like these in a book by another person, that is, without having to suffer my usual qualms, my usual severity, without having to torment myself, I would at last abandon myself with delight to my partiality for them, like a cook who, when for once he does not have to prepare the meal, at last finds the time to gormandize. One day, when I encountered in a book by Bergotte a joke about an old servant woman which the writer's magnificent and solemn language made even more ironical, but which was the same joke I had often made to my grandmother when talking about Françoise, another time when I saw that he did not think it unworthy to portray in one of those mirrors of truth which were his books a remark similar to one I had had occasion to make about our friend M. Legrandin (remarks about Françoise and M. Legrandin that were certainly among those I would most resolutely have sacrificed to Bergotte, persuaded that he would find them uninteresting), it seemed to me suddenly that my humble life and the realms of the truth were not as widely separated as I had thought, that they even coincided at certain points, and from confidence and joy I wept over the writer's pages as though in the arms of a father I had found again.

From his books, I imagined Bergotte to be a frail, disappointed old man who had lost several of his children and never recovered. And so I would read, I would sing his prose to myself, more *dolce,* more *lento*[24] perhaps than it was written, and the simplest sentence spoke to me with a more tender intonation. Above all else I loved his philosophy, I had pledged myself to it for life. It made me impatient to reach the age when I would enter secondary school and enroll in the class called Philosophy. But I did not want to do anything else there but live according to Bergotte's ideas exclusively, and, had I been told that the metaphysicians to whom I would be devoting myself by then would not resemble him at all, I would have felt the despair of a lover who wants his love to be lifelong and to whom one talks about the other mistresses he will have later.

One Sunday, as I was reading in the garden, I was disturbed by Swann, who had come to see my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Well, well! Bergotte! Now, who told you about his books?" I said it was Bloch.

"Ah, yes! The boy I saw here once, who looks so much like the portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini.[25] Oh, it's quite striking! He has the same circumflex eyebrows, the same curved nose, the same jutting cheekbones. When he has a goatee, he'll be the same person. Well, he has good taste, in any case, because Bergotte is quite enchanting." And seeing how much I appeared to admire Bergotte, Swann, who never talked about the people he knew, out of kindness made an exception and said to me:

"I know him very well. If you would like him to write a few words in the front of your book, I could ask him."

I did not dare accept his offer, but asked Swann some questions about Bergotte. "Could you tell me which is his favorite actor?"

"Actor? I don't know. But I do know that he doesn't consider any man on the stage equal to La Berma; he puts her above everyone else. Have you seen her?"

"No, monsieur, my parents don't allow me to go to the theatre."

"That's unfortunate. You ought to ask them. La Berma in *Phèdre,* in *Le Cid,*[26] is only an actress, you might say, but you know, I'm not much of a believer in the *'hierarchy!'* of the arts" (and I noticed, as had often struck me in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that when he talked about serious things, when he used an expression that seemed to imply an opinion about an important subject, he took care to isolate it in a tone of voice that was particularly mechanical and ironic, as though he had put it between quotation marks, seeming not to want to take responsibility for it, as though saying "*hierarchy,* you know, as it is called by silly people?" But then if it was so silly, why did he say hierarchy?). A moment later, he added: "It will give you as noble a vision as any masterpiece, I don't know, really . . . as"—and he began to laugh—"the Queens of Chartres!"[27] Until then his horror of ever expressing a serious opinion had seemed to me a thing that must be elegant and Parisian and that was the opposite of the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother's sisters; and I also suspected that it was a form of wit in the social circles in which Swann moved, where, reacting against the lyricism of earlier generations, they went to an extreme in rehabilitating those small, precise facts formerly reputed to be vulgar, and proscribed "fine phrases." But now I found something shocking in this attitude of Swann's toward things. It appeared that he dared not have an opinion and was at his ease only when he could with meticulous accuracy offer some precise piece of information. But if that was the case, he did not realize that to postulate that the accuracy of these details was important was to profess an opinion. I thought again of that dinner at which I was so sad because Mama would not be coming up to my room and at which he had said that the balls given by the Princesse de Léon were of no importance whatsoever. But it was to just that sort of pleasure that he devoted his life. I found all this contradictory. For what other lifetime was he reserving the moment when he would at last say seriously what he thought of things, formulate opinions that he did not have to put between quotation marks, and no longer indulge with punctilious politeness in occupations which he declared at the same time to be ridiculous? I also noticed in the way Swann talked to me about Bergotte something that was, on the other hand, not peculiar to him, but shared at the time by all the writer's admirers, by my mother's friend, by Dr. du

Boulbon. Like Swann, they said about Bergotte: "He's quite enchanting, so individual, he has his own way of saying things which is a little overly elaborate, but so pleasing. You don't need to see the signature, you know right away that it's by him." But none of them would have gone so far as to say: "He's a great writer, he has a great talent." They did not even say he had talent. They did not say it because they did not know it. We are very slow to recognize in the particular features of a new writer the model that is labeled "great talent" in our museum of general ideas. Precisely because these features are new, we do not think they fully resemble what we call talent. Instead, we talk about originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we realize that all of this is, in fact, talent.

"Are there any books by Bergotte in which he talks about La Berma?" I asked M. Swann.

"I think so, in his slim little volume on Racine, but it must be out of print. There may have been a reissue, though. I'll find out. I can also ask Bergotte anything you like; there isn't a week in the whole year when he doesn't come to dinner at our house. He's my daughter's greatest friend. They go off together visiting old towns, cathedrals, castles."

Since I had no notion of social hierarchy, for a long time the fact that my father found it impossible for us to associate with Mme. and Mlle. Swann had had the effect above all, by making me imagine a great distance between them and us, of giving them prestige in my eyes. I was sorry my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips as I had heard our neighbor Mme. Sazerat say that Mme. Swann did in order to please, not her husband, but M. de Charlus, and I thought we must be an object of scorn to her, which distressed me most of all because of Mlle. Swann, who, from what I had been told, was such a pretty little girl and about whom I often dreamed, giving her each time the same arbitrary and charming face. But when I learned that day that Mlle. Swann was a creature of so rare a condition, bathing as though in her natural element in the midst of such privileges, that when she asked her parents if anyone was coming to dinner, she would be answered by those syllables filled with light, by the name of that golden dinner guest who was for her only an old friend of the family: Bergotte; that for her the intimate talk at the table, the equivalent for me of my great-aunt's conversation, would be Bergotte's words on all the subjects he had not been able to broach in his books, and on which I would have liked to hear him pronounce his oracles; and that, lastly, when she went to visit other towns, he would walk along next to her, unknown and glorious, like the Gods who descended among mortals; then I was conscious both of the worth of a creature like Mlle. Swann and also of how crude and ignorant I would appear to her, and I felt so keenly the sweetness and the impossibility of my being her friend that I was filled with both desire and despair. Most often, now, when I thought of her, I would see her in front of a cathedral porch, explaining to me what the statues signified and, with a smile that said good things about me, introducing me as her friend to Bergotte. And always the charm of all those ideas awakened in me by the cathedrals, the charm of the hills of Île-de-France and the plains of Normandy, cast its glimmers over the picture I was forming of Mlle. Swann: this was what it meant to be on the point of falling in love with her. Our belief that a person takes part in an unknown life which his or her love would allow us to enter is, of all that love demands in order to come into being, what it prizes the most, and what makes it care little for the rest. Even women who claim to judge a man by his appearance alone see that appearance as the emanation of a special life. This is why they love soldiers, firemen; the uniform makes them less particular about the face; they think that under the breastplate they are kissing a different heart, adventurous and sweet; and a young sovereign, a crown prince, may make the most flattering conquests in the foreign countries he visits without needing the regular profile that would perhaps be indispensable to a stockbroker.

While I read in the garden, something my great-aunt would not have understood my doing except on a Sunday, a day when it is forbidden to occupy oneself with anything serious and when she did not sew (on a weekday, she would have said to me, "What? Still *amusing* yourself with a book? This isn't Sunday, you know," endowing the word *amusement* with the meaning of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would gossip with Françoise, waiting until it was time for Eulalie. She would announce that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by "without an umbrella, in that silk dress she had made for her at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before Vespers, she could very well get it properly drenched."

"Maybe, maybe" (meaning maybe not), said Françoise so as not to rule out absolutely the possibility of a more favorable alternative.

"Oh dear," said my aunt, striking her forehead, "that reminds me I never found out if she arrived at church after the Elevation. I will have to remember to ask Eulalie . . . Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and that pitiful sunlight on the slates. It's sure to rain before the day is done. It couldn't possibly stay like this, it was too hot. And the sooner the better, because until the storm breaks, my Vichy water won't go down," added my aunt, in whose mind her desire to hasten the descent of her Vichy water was infinitely more important than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil ruin her dress.

"Maybe, maybe."

"And the fact is, when it rains on the square there isn't much shelter. What, three o'clock?" my aunt cried out suddenly, turning pale. "Why, my goodness, Vespers has begun and I've forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why my Vichy water was lying on my stomach."

And swooping down on a missal bound in violet velvet, with gilt clasps, from which, in her haste, she let escape a few of those pictures edged with a band of yellowing paper lace that mark the pages of the feast days, my aunt, while swallowing her drops, began reading the sacred texts as fast as she could, her comprehension of them slightly obscured by her uncertainty as to whether the pepsin, taken so long after the Vichy water, would still be able to catch up with it and make it go down. "Three o'clock! It's unbelievable how the time passes!"

A little tap against the windowpane, as though something had struck it, followed by a copious light spill, as of grains of sand dropping from a window above, then the spill extending, becoming regular, finding a rhythm, turning fluid, resonant, musical, immeasurable, universal: it was the rain.

"Well, now, Françoise! What did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go and see who could be outside in such weather."

Françoise returned:

"It was Mme. Amédée" (my grandmother). "She said she was going for a little walk. And yet it's raining hard."

"That doesn't surprise me at all," said my aunt, lifting her eyes to the heavens. "I've always said that her way of thinking is different from everyone else's. I'd rather it be her than me outdoors just now."

"Mme. Amédée is always as different as she can be from everyone else," said Françoise gently, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from saying that she believed my grandmother was a little "touched."

"Now, *see*? The Benediction is over! Eulalie won't be coming," sighed my aunt; "the weather must have frightened her away."

"But it's not five o'clock, Madame Octave, it's only half-past four."

"Only half-past four? And I had to raise the little curtains to get a wretched glimmer of daylight. At half-past four! One week before the Rogations! Oh, my poor Françoise, the Good Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far these days! As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten the Good Lord too often and he's taking his revenge."

A bright flush enlivened my aunt's cheeks; it was Eulalie. Unfortunately, scarcely had she been shown in before Françoise returned and, with a smile that was meant to indicate her participation in the joy she was sure her words would give my aunt, articulating the syllables to show that, despite her use of the indirect style, she was reporting, good servant that she was, the very words the visitor had condescended to use:

"M. le Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not resting and could see him. M. le Curé does not wish to disturb. M. le Curé is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlor."

In fact, the curé's visits did not give my aunt as much pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which Françoise thought she must illuminate her face each time she had to announce him did not entirely correspond to the invalid's feelings. The curé (an excellent man with whom I am sorry I did not have more conversations, for if he understood nothing about the arts, he did know many etymologies), being in the habit of enlightening distinguished visitors with information about the church (he even intended to write a book about the parish of Combray), fatigued her with endless explanations that were in fact always the same. But when his visit came at the very same time as Eulalie's, it became frankly unpleasant for my aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie and not have all her company at once. But she did not dare decline to see the curé and only made a sign to Eulalie not to leave at the same time, so that she could keep her there by herself for a little while after he was gone.

"Monsieur le Curé, what's this they've been telling me, that a painter has set up his easel in your church and is copying a window? I must say, old as I am, I've never in my life heard of such a thing! What is the world coming to? And the ugliest part of the church, too!"

"I will not go so far as to say it is the ugliest, for if there are some parts of Saint-Hilaire that are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored! My Lord, the porch is dirty and ancient, but still it is really majestic in character; the same is true of the tapestries of Esther, for which personally I would not give two sous but which the experts rank immediately below those at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain rather realistic details, they offer other details that show a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows! Is it really sensible to leave us with windows that give no light and even deceive our eyes with patches of color I would never be able to identify, in a church where no two paving stones are on the same level and they refuse to replace them for me, giving the excuse that these are the tombstones of the Abbés de Combray and the Seigneurs de Guermantes, the old Comtes de Brabant? The direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes and of the Duchesse too since she's a Demoiselle de Guermantes who married her cousin." (My grandmother, who, because she took no great interest in "persons," ended by confusing all names, would claim, each time anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes, that she must be a relative of Mme. de Villeparisis. Everyone would burst out laughing; she would try to defend herself by citing as proof a certain letter containing an announcement: "It seems to me I recall there was something about Guermantes in it." And for once I would side with the others against her, unable to admit that there was any connection between her friend from boarding school and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.) "Look at Roussainville, today it is no more than a parish of farmers, though in ancient times the locality experienced a great boom in the commerce of felt hats and clocks. (I'm not sure of the etymology of Roussainville. I'm inclined to think the original name was Rouville [*Radulfi villa*], analogous to Châteauroux [*Castrum radulfi*], but we can talk about that some other time.) Well! The church has superb windows, almost all modern, including that impressive *Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray,* which would be more suited to Combray itself and is just as good, they say, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I saw Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things and who regards it as a very fine piece of work. But, as I in fact said to this artist, who seems very courteous, by the way, and who is apparently a veritable virtuoso with the paintbrush, I said, now what do you find so extraordinary about this window, which is if anything a little darker than the others?"

"I'm sure that if you asked the bishop," my aunt said feebly, beginning to think she was going to be tired, "he would not refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Madame Octave," answered the curé. "But it was His Lordship himself who started all the fuss about this wretched window by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, Sire de Guermantes, a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was a Demoiselle de Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I can't see where Saint Hilaire would be."

"Why, in the corner of the window—you never noticed a lady in a yellow dress? Well, now, that's Saint Hilaire, who in certain provinces is also called, you know, Saint Illiers, Saint Hélier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. And these various corruptions of *sanctus Hilarius* are not the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed. For instance, your own patron, my good Eulalie, *sancta Eulalia*—do you know what she is in Burgundy? *Saint Éloi,* quite simply: she has become a male saint. You see Eulalie?—after you die they will turn you into a man."

"Monsieur le Curé always has a joke for us."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but having early in life lost his father, Pépin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has had no discipline in his youth, and if in a certain town he saw a man whose face he didn't like, he would massacre every last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to take revenge on Charles, caused the church of Combray to be burned down, the original church at the time, which Théodebert, when he and his court left the country house he had near here, at Thiberzy (which would be *Theodeberciacus*), to go fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Blessed One would grant him the victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt which Théodore must have taken you down into, for Gilbert burned the rest. Finally, he defeated the unfortunate Charles with the help of William the Conqueror" (the curé pronounced it Will'am), "which is why so many English visitors come to see it. But he apparently was unable to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they rushed upon him as he was coming out of Mass and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book he lends out to people that explains it all.

"But what is unquestionably the most extraordinary thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is magnificent. Certainly in your case, since you're not strong, I would never advise you to climb our ninety-seven steps, exactly half the number of the celebrated dome in Milan. It's quite tiring enough for someone in good health, especially as you must go up bent double if you don't want to crack your head, and you collect all the cobwebs off the stairwell on your clothes. In any case you would have to wrap yourself up quite snugly," he added (without noticing my aunt's indignation at the idea that she was capable of climbing into the belfry), "because there's quite a breeze once you get to the top! Some people declare they have felt the chill of death up there. Nonetheless, on Sundays there are always groups coming even from a long way off to admire the beauty of the panorama, and they go away enchanted. Now next Sunday, if the weather holds, you'll be sure to find some people there, since it's Rogation Day. It really must be admitted, though, that from that spot the scene is magical, with what you might call vistas over the plain that have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Verneuil. But the marvelous thing is that you can see, all in one glance, things you can't usually see except one at a time separately, like the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated by a screen of tall trees, or the different canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte (*Gaudiacus vice comitis,* as you know). Each time I've gone to Jouy-le-Vicomte, of course, I've seen a bit of the canal, and then I've turned a corner and seen another bit, but by then I could no longer see the preceding bit. I could put them together in my mind, but that didn't have much of an effect for me. But from the Saint-Hilaire belfry it's different, the whole area seems to have been caught in one great net. But you can't see any water; it's as though there were deep clefts dividing the town into different neighborhoods so neatly it looks like a brioche still holding together after it has been sliced. To do it right, you'd have to be in both places at the same time, in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The curé had so exhausted my aunt that he was scarcely gone before she had to send Eulalie away too.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said weakly, drawing a coin from a little purse that she had within reach of her hand, "this is so that you won't forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, Madame Octave! I don't know if I should; you know I don't come here for that!" Eulalie would say with the same hesitation and the same awkwardness, each time, as if it were the first, and with an appearance of dissatisfaction that diverted my aunt but did not displease her, because if one day Eulalie looked a little less vexed than usual as she took the coin, my aunt would say:

"I don't know what was bothering Eulalie; I gave her the same as usual, and yet she didn't look happy."

"I think she has nothing to complain about, all the same," Françoise would sigh, inclined to consider as small change anything my aunt gave her for herself or her children and as treasure madly squandered on an ingrate the little coins placed in Eulalie's hand each Sunday, but so discreetly that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that Françoise would have wanted for herself the money my aunt gave Eulalie. She took sufficient pleasure in what my aunt possessed, knowing that the mistress's wealth both elevated and embellished her servant in everyone's eyes; and that she, Françoise, was distinguished and renowned in Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other places, on account of my aunt's many farms, the curé's frequent and extended visits, the singular number of bottles of Vichy water consumed. She was greedy only for my aunt; if it had been up to her to manage my aunt's fortune, which would have been her dream, she would have preserved it from the encroachments of others with a maternal ferocity. She would not, however, have seen any great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, as long as it went to rich people. Perhaps she thought that they, having no need of gifts from my aunt, could not be suspected of showing fondness for her because of them. Besides, gifts made to people of eminence and wealth, like Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin, Mme. Goupil, to persons "of the same rank" as my aunt who "were well suited," appeared to her to belong to the customs of the strange and brilliant life of the wealthy who hunt, give balls, visit back and forth, people whom she admired and smiled upon. But it was not the same if the beneficiaries of my aunt's generosity were what Françoise called "people like me, people who are no better than me," the ones of whom she was most scornful unless they called her "Madame Françoise" and considered themselves to be "less than her." And when she saw that despite her advice my aunt did just as she pleased and threw her money away—as Françoise saw it, at least—on the unworthy, she began to think the gifts my aunt made to her were quite small compared to the imaginary sums lavished on Eulalie. There was not a single farm in the vicinity of Combray so substantial that Françoise did not suppose Eulalie could easily have bought it with all she earned from her visits. It is true that Eulalie formed the same estimate of the immense and hidden riches of Françoise. It was Françoise's habit, when

Eulalie had gone, to make unkind predictions about her. She detested her, but she was also afraid of her and believed that when Eulalie was there she had to present a "good face." She made up for it after Eulalie's departure, without ever naming her, in fact, but proffering sibylline oracles or pronouncements of a general character like those in Ecclesiastes, whose application could not escape my aunt. After watching through a corner of the curtain to see if Eulalie had closed the gate behind her, she would say: "Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome and collect a little pocket money; but have patience, the Good Lord will punish them all one fine day," with the sidelong glance and the insinuation of Joas thinking only of Athalie when he says:

The happiness of the wicked rushes down like a mountain stream.[28]

But when the curé had come as well and his interminable visit had exhausted my aunt's strength, Françoise would leave the bedroom behind Eulalie and say:

"Madame Octave, I will let you rest, you look very tired."

And my aunt would not even answer, breathing a sigh that must, it seemed, be the last, her eyes closed, as though dead. But scarcely had Françoise gone down than four peals dealt with the greatest violence would echo through the house, and my aunt, upright on her bed, would cry out:

"Has Eulalie gone yet? Can you believe it—I forgot to ask her if Mme. Goupil arrived at Mass before the Elevation! Quick, run after her!"

But Françoise would return without having been able to catch up with Eulalie.

"It's vexing," my aunt would say, shaking her head. "The only important thing I had to ask her!"

In this way life went on for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the sweet uniformity of what she called, with affected disdain and deep tenderness, her "little routine." Preserved by everyone, not only in the house, where we had all experienced the futility of advising her to adopt a better health regimen and so had gradually resigned ourselves to respecting the routine, but even in the village where, three streets away from us, the goods packer, before nailing his crates, would send word to ask Françoise if my aunt was "resting"—this routine was, however, disturbed once during that year. Like a hidden fruit that had ripened without anyone's noticing and had dropped spontaneously, one night the kitchen maid gave birth. But her pains were intolerable, and since there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to go off before daybreak to find one in Thiberzy. My aunt could not rest because of the kitchen maid's cries, and since Françoise, despite the short distance, did not come back until very late, my aunt missed her very much. And so my mother said to me in the course of the morning: "Go up, why don't you, and see if your aunt needs anything." I went into the first room, and through the open door saw my aunt lying on her side sleeping; I heard her snoring lightly. I was going to go away quietly, but the noise I had made had probably interfered with her sleep and made it "shift gears," as they say about cars, because the music of her snoring broke off for a second and resumed on a lower note, then she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror; she had obviously just had a horrible dream; she could not see me the way she was positioned, and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave; but already she seemed to have returned to a sense of reality and had recognized the falsity of the visions that had frightened her; a smile of joy, of pious gratitude to God who permits waking life to be less cruel than dreams, weakly illuminated her face, and in the habit she had formed of talking to herself half aloud when she thought she was alone, she murmured: "God be praised! Our only worry is the kitchen maid, who is having a baby. And here I've gone and dreamed that my poor Octave had come back to life and was trying to make me go for a walk every day!" Her hand went out toward her rosary, which lay on the little table, but sleep was overcoming her again and did not leave her the strength to reach it: she fell asleep, soothed, and I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard.

When I say that except for very rare events, like that confinement, my aunt's routine never suffered any variation, I am not speaking of those variations which, always the same and repeated at regular intervals, introduced into the heart of that uniformity only a sort of secondary uniformity. And so, for instance, every Saturday, because Françoise went to the Roussainville-le-Pin market in the afternoon, lunch was, for everyone, an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly violation of her habits that she clung to it as much as to the others. She was so well "routined" to it, as Françoise said, that if she had had to wait, some Saturday, to have lunch at the regular hour, this would have "disturbed" her as much as if on another day she had had to move her lunch forward to the Saturday hour. What was more, this early lunch gave Saturday, for all of us, a special face, indulgent and almost kindly. At the time of day when one usually has another hour to live through before the relaxation of the meal, we knew that in a few seconds we would see the arrival of some precocious endives, a gratuitous omelette, an undeserved beefsteak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those little events, internal, local, almost civic, which, in peaceful lives and closed societies, create a sort of national bond and become the favorite theme of conversations, jokes, stories wantonly exaggerated: it would have been the ready-made nucleus for a cycle of legends, if one of us had had an epic turn of mind. First thing in the morning, before we were dressed, for no particular reason, for the pleasure of feeling the strength of our comradeship, we would say to one another with good humor, warmth, patriotism: "There's no time to lose; don't forget—it's Saturday!" while my aunt, conferring with Françoise and remembering that the day would be longer than usual, would say: "You might make them a nice bit of veal, since it's Saturday." If at ten-thirty one of us absentmindedly drew out his watch and said: "Let's see, still an hour and a half before lunch," everyone was delighted to have to say to him: "Come now, what are you thinking of, you're forgetting it's Saturday!"; we would still be laughing over it a quarter of an hour after and we would promise ourselves to go up and report this lapse to my aunt to amuse her. Even the face of the sky seemed changed. After lunch, the sun, aware that it was Saturday, would linger an hour longer at the top of the sky, and when someone, thinking we were late for our walk, said, "What, only two o'clock?," watching, as they passed, the two strokes from the Saint-Hilaire steeple (which do not usually encounter anyone yet on paths which are deserted because of the midday meal or the afternoon nap, alongside the lively white stream which even the fisherman has abandoned, and go on alone into the empty sky where only a few lazy clouds remain), we would all answer him in chorus: "But you're wrong, we had lunch an hour early; you know very well it's Saturday!" The surprise of a barbarian (this was what we called anyone who did not know what was special about Saturday) who, arriving at eleven o'clock to talk to my father, found us at the table, was one of the things in her life which most amused Françoise. But if she found it funny that the dumbfounded visitor did not know we had lunch earlier on Saturday, she found it even more comical (while at the same time sympathizing from the bottom of her heart with this narrow chauvinism) that my father himself had not realized that the barbarian might not know this and had responded with no further explanation to his astonishment at seeing us already in the dining room: "Well what do you expect, it's Saturday!" Having reached this point in her story, she would wipe away a few tears of hilarity and, to increase her own pleasure, would prolong the dialogue, invent what had been said in answer by the visitor, to whom this "Saturday" did not explain anything. And quite far from complaining about her embellishments, we would feel they were not enough for us and we would say: "But I think he also said something else. It was longer the first time you told it." Even my great-aunt would put down her needlework, lift her head, and look over her glasses.

What was also special about Saturday was that on this day, during the month of May, we would go out after dinner to attend the "Month of Mary."

Since there we would sometimes meet M. Vinteuil, who was very severe about "the deplorable fashion of slovenliness in young people, which seems to be encouraged these days," my mother would take care that nothing was wrong with my appearance, then we would leave for church. It was in the Month of Mary that I remember beginning to be fond of hawthorns. Not only were they in the church, which was so holy but which we had the right to enter, they were put up on the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration they took part, their branches running out among the candles and holy vessels, attached horizontally to one another in a festive preparation and made even lovelier by the festoons of their foliage, on which were scattered in profusion, as on a bridal train, little bunches of buds of a dazzling whiteness. But, though I dared not do more than steal a glance at them, I felt that the ceremonious preparations were alive and that it was nature herself who, by carving those indentations in the leaves, by adding the supreme ornament of those white buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a popular festivity and a mystical celebration. Higher up, their corollas opened here and there with a careless grace, still holding so casually, like a last and vaporous adornment, the bouquets of stamens, delicate as gossamer, which clouded them entirely, that in following, in trying to mime deep inside myself the motion of their flowering, I imagined it as the quick and thoughtless movement of the head, with coquettish glance and contracted eyes, of a young girl in white, dreamy and alive. M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and sat down beside us. He was from a good family and had been my grandmother's sisters' piano teacher, and when, after his wife died and he came into an inheritance, he retired near Combray, we often entertained him at the house. But he was extremely prudish, and stopped coming so as not to meet Swann, who had made what he called "an unsuitable marriage, as is the fashion these days." My mother, after learning that he composed, had said to him in a friendly way that when she went to see him, he would have to let her hear something of his. M. Vinteuil would have taken great joy in this, but he was so scrupulous in his politeness and kindness that, always putting himself in the place of others, he was afraid he would bore them and appear egotistical if he pursued or even allowed them to infer his own desires. The day my parents had gone to visit him at his home, I had gone with them, but they had allowed me to stay outside and, since M. Vinteuil's house, Montjouvain, stood at the foot of a brush-covered hillock

where I had hidden, I had found I was on a level with the second-floor drawing room, a foot or two from the window. When the servant had come to announce my parents, I had seen M. Vinteuil hurry to place a piece of music in a conspicuous position on the piano. But once my parents had entered, he had taken it away and put it in a corner. No doubt he had been afraid of letting them think he was happy to see them only so that he could play them some of his compositions. And each time my mother had made a fresh attempt in the course of the visit, he had repeated several times: "I don't know who put that on the piano, it doesn't belong there," and had diverted the conversation to other subjects, precisely because they interested him less. His only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her boyish appearance, seemed so robust that one could not help smiling at the sight of the precautions her father took for her sake, always having extra shawls to throw over her shoulders. My grandmother pointed out what a gentle, delicate, almost shy expression often came into the eyes of that rough-mannered child, whose face was covered with freckles. After she made a remark, she would hear it with the minds of the people to whom she had made it, would grow alarmed at possible misunderstandings, and one would see, illuminated, showing through as though by transparency, under the mannish face of the "good fellow" that she was, the more refined features of a young girl in tears.

When, before leaving the church, I kneeled in front of the altar, I suddenly smelled, as I stood up, a bittersweet scent of almonds escaping from the hawthorns, and then I noticed, on the flowers, little yellower places under which I imagined that scent must be hidden, as the taste of a frangipani must be hidden under the burned parts, or that of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks under their freckles. Despite the silence and stillness of the hawthorns, this intermittent scent was like the murmuring of an intense life with which the altar quivered like a country hedge visited by living antennae, of which I was reminded by the sight of certain stamens, almost russet red, that seemed to have preserved the springtime virulence, the irritant power, of insects now metamorphosed into flowers.

We would talk with M. Vinteuil for a moment in front of the porch on our way out of the church. He would intervene among the children squabbling in the square, take up the defense of the little ones, deliver a lecture to the older ones. If his daughter said to us in her loud voice how happy she was to see us, it would immediately seem as if a more sensitive sister within her were blushing at this thoughtless, tomboyish remark, which might have made us think she was asking to be invited to our house. Her father would throw a cloak over her shoulders, they would get up into a little cabriolet, which she would drive herself, and the two of them would return to Montjouvain. As for us, since it was Sunday the next day and we would not get up until it was time for High Mass, if there was moonlight and the air was warm, instead of having us go home directly, my father, out of a love of personal glory, would take us by way of the Calvary on a long walk which my mother's little capacity for orienting herself, or knowing what road she was on, made her consider the feat of a strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, whose giant strides of stone began at the railway station and represented to me the exile and distress that lay outside the civilized world, because each year as we came from Paris we were warned to pay careful attention, when Combray came, not to let the station go by, to be ready ahead of time because the train would leave again after two minutes and would set off across the viaduct beyond the Christian countries of which Combray marked for me the farthest limit. We would return by way of the station boulevard, which was lined by the most pleasant houses in the parish. In each garden the moonlight, like Hubert Robert, scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains, its half-open gates. Its light had destroyed the Telegraph Office. All that remained was one column, half shattered but still retaining the beauty of an immortal ruin. I would be dragging my feet, I would be ready to drop with sleep, the fragrance of the lindens that perfumed the air would seem to me a reward that one could win only at the cost of the greatest fatigue and that was not worth the trouble. From gates far apart, dogs awakened by our solitary steps would send forth alternating volleys of barks such as I still hear at times in the evening and among which the station boulevard (when the public garden of Combray was created on its site) must have come to take refuge, for, wherever I find myself, as soon as they begin resounding and replying, I see it again, with its lindens and its pavement lit by the moon.

Suddenly my father would stop us and ask my mother: "Where are we?" Exhausted from walking but proud of him, she would admit tenderly that she had absolutely no idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. Then, as if he had taken it out of his jacket pocket along with his key, he would show us the little back gate of our own garden, which stood there before us, having come, along with the corner of the rue du Saint-Esprit, to wait for us at the end of these unfamiliar streets. My mother would say to him admiringly: "You are astonishing!" And from that moment on, I would not have to take another step, the ground would walk for me through that garden where for so long now my actions had ceased to be accompanied by any deliberate attention: Habit had taken me in its arms, and it carried me all the way to my bed like a little child.

* * *

If Saturday, which began an hour earlier and deprived her of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, she nonetheless awaited its return with impatience from the beginning of the week, because it contained all the novelty and distraction that her weakened and finical body was still able to endure. And yet this was not to say that she did not now and then aspire to some greater change, that she did not experience those exceptional moments when we thirst for something other than what we have, and when people who from a lack of energy or imagination cannot find a source of renewal in themselves ask the next minute that comes, the postman as he rings, to bring them something new, even if it is something worse, some emotion, some sorrow; when our sensibility, which happiness has silenced like an idle harp, wants to resonate under some hand, even a rough one, and even if it might be broken by it; when the will, which has with such difficulty won the right to surrender unimpeded to its own desires, to its own afflictions, would like to throw the reins into the hands of imperious events, even if they may be cruel. Doubtless, since my aunt's strength, drained by the least fatigue, returned to her only drop by drop deep within her repose, the reservoir was very slow to fill up, and months would go by before she had that slight overflow which others divert into activity and which she was incapable of knowing, and deciding, how to use. I have no doubt that then—just as the desire to replace them by potatoes with béchamel sauce ended after a certain time by being born from the very pleasure she felt at the daily return of the mashed potatoes of which she never "got tired"—she would derive from the accumulation of those monotonous days which she valued so the expectation of some domestic cataclysm lasting only a moment but forcing her to effect once and for all one of those changes which she recognized would be beneficial to her and to which she could not of her own accord make up her mind. She truly loved us, she would have taken pleasure in mourning us; had it come at a moment when she felt well and was not in a sweat, the news that the house was being consumed by a fire in which all of us had perished already and which would soon leave not a single stone of the walls standing, but from which she would have ample time to escape without hurrying, so long as she got out of bed right away, must often have lingered among her hopes, since it combined, with the secondary advantages of allowing her to savor all her tenderness for us in an extended grief and to be the cause of stupefaction in the village as she led the funeral procession, courageous and stricken, dying on her feet, that other much more precious advantage of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to lose, no possibility of an enervating hesitation, to go and spend the summer on her pretty farm, Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. As no event of that sort had ever occurred, the outcome of which she would certainly contemplate when she was alone, absorbed in her innumerable games of patience (and which would have reduced her to despair at the first moment of its realization, at the first of those little unforeseen developments, the first word announcing the bad news, whose accent can never be forgotten afterward, all those things that bear the imprint of real death, so different from its logical, abstract possibility), she would from time to time resort to introducing into her life, to make it more interesting, imaginary incidents which she would follow with passion. She enjoyed suddenly pretending that Françoise was stealing from her, that she herself had been cunning enough to make sure of it, that she had caught her in the act; being in the habit, when she played cards alone, of playing both her own hand and that of her opponent, she would utter out loud to herself Françoise's embarrassed excuses and would answer them with so much fire and indignation that if one of us entered at that moment, we would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes sparkling, her false hair dislodged and revealing her bald forehead. Françoise would perhaps sometimes hear from the next room mordant pieces of sarcasm addressed to her the invention of which would not have relieved my aunt sufficiently if they had remained in a purely immaterial state and if by murmuring them half aloud she had not given them more reality. Sometimes, even this "theater in bed"[29] was not enough for my aunt, she wanted to have her plays performed. And so, on a Sunday, all doors mysteriously closed, she would confide to Eulalie her doubts about Françoise's honesty, her intention of getting rid of her, and another time, to Françoise, her suspicions about the faithlessness of Eulalie, to whom the door would very soon be closed; a few days later, she would be disgusted with her confidante of the day before and once

again consort with the traitor, though for the next performance the two of them would exchange roles yet again. But the suspicions that Eulalie was at times able to inspire in her amounted only to a straw fire and died down quickly, for lack of fuel, since Eulalie did not live in the house. It was not the same for those that concerned Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof my aunt was perpetually conscious, though for fear of catching cold if she left her bed, she did not dare go down to the kitchen to verify whether they were well founded. Gradually her mind would come to be occupied entirely by attempting to guess what, at each moment, Françoise could be doing and trying to hide from her. She would notice the most furtive movements of Françoise's features, a contradiction in something she said, a desire that she seemed to be concealing. And she would show Françoise that she had unmasked her, with a single word that would make Françoise turn pale and that my aunt seemed to find a cruel amusement in driving deep into the heart of the unfortunate woman. And the following Sunday, a revelation of Eulalie's—like those discoveries that suddenly open an unsuspected field to a young science that has got into something of a rut—would prove to my aunt that her own suppositions were far short of the truth. "But Françoise ought to know that, now that you've given her a carriage." "Given her a carriage!" my aunt would cry. "Oh, well, I don't know really. I thought, well, I saw her passing just a short time ago in a calash, proud as Artaban,[30] going to the market at Roussainville. I thought it was Mme. Octave who gave it to her." And so by degrees Françoise and my aunt, like quarry and hunter, would reach the point of constantly trying to anticipate each other's ruses. My mother was afraid Françoise would develop a real hatred for my aunt, who insulted her as brutally as she could. Certainly Françoise came more and more to pay an extraordinary attention to the least of my aunt's remarks, to the least of her gestures. When she had to ask her something, she would hesitate for a long time over how she should go about it. And when she had tendered her request, she would observe my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the look on her face what she thought and what she would decide. And so—while some artist who reads the memoirs of the seventeenth century and wants to be like the great King, and thinks he will be making progress in that direction if he fabricates a genealogy for himself that traces his own descent from a historic family or if he carries on a correspondence with one of the current sovereigns of Europe, is actually turning his back on what he mistakenly sought in forms that were identical and consequently dead—an old lady from the provinces who was simply yielding to irresistible manias and to a malice born of idleness, saw, without ever thinking of Louis XIV, the most insignificant occupations of her day, those concerned with her rising, her lunch, her afternoon rest, acquire, because of their despotic singularity, some of the interest of what Saint-Simon called the "mechanics" of life at Versailles,[31] and could also believe that her silences, a nuance of good humor or disdain in her features, were for Françoise the object of a commentary as passionate, as fearful as were the silence, the good humor, the disdain of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest lords, handed him a petition at the bend of an avenue at Versailles.

One Sunday when my aunt had had a visit from the curé and Eulalie at the same time and had afterward rested, we all went up to say good evening to her, and Mama offered her her condolences on the bad luck that always brought her visitors at the same hour:

"I know that things turned out poorly again this afternoon, Léonie," she said to her gently, "you had all your company here at the same time."

Which my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too much of a good thing can do no harm . . ." because, ever since her daughter had become ill, she had believed it was her duty to cheer her up by consistently showing her the bright side of everything. But now my father spoke:

"I would like to take advantage," he said, "of the fact that the whole family is together to tell you all about something without having to begin all over again with each of you separately. I'm afraid we've had a falling-out with Legrandin: he barely said hello to me this morning."

I did not stay to hear my father's story, because I had actually been with him after Mass when we met M. Legrandin, and I went down to the kitchen to ask about the menu for our dinner, which diverted me every day like the news in the paper and excited me like the program for some festivity. When M. Legrandin had passed near us as he was coming out of the church, walking by the side of a lady from a neighboring château whom we knew only by sight, my father had greeted him in a way that was at once friendly and reserved, though we had not stopped; M. Legrandin had barely responded, with a surprised look, as if he did not recognize us, and with that perspective in his gaze peculiar to people who do not want to be friendly and who, from the suddenly extended depths of their eyes, seem to perceive you at the end of an interminable road and at so great a distance that they confine themselves to addressing to you a minuscule nod in order to give it the proportions of your puppetlike dimensions.

Now the lady Legrandin was accompanying was a virtuous and esteemed person; it was quite out of the question that he was having an affair and embarrassed at being found out, and my father wondered how he might have annoyed Legrandin. "I would be especially sorry to know he is vexed," said my father, "because of the fact that among all those people dressed up in their Sunday best there is something about him, with his little straight jacket, his loose tie, that is so uncontrived, so truly simple, an air of ingenuousness, almost, that is extremely likable." But the family council was unanimously of the opinion that my father was imagining things, or that Legrandin, at that particular moment, was absorbed in some other thought. And in fact my father's apprehension was dispelled the very next evening. As we were returning from a long walk, near the Pont-Vieux we saw Legrandin, who because of the holidays was staying in Combray for a few days. He came up to us with his hand outstretched: "My young bookworm," he asked me, "do you know this line by Paul Desjardins:

> The woods are dark, the sky still blue.[32]

Isn't that a fine rendering of this hour of the day? Perhaps you've never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my child; today he is transforming himself, they tell me, into a sermonizing friar, but for a long time he was a limpid watercolorist . . .

> The woods are dark, the sky still blue.

May the sky remain forever blue for you, my young friend; and even at the hour which is now approaching for me, when the woods are dark already, when night is falling fast, you will console yourself as I do by looking up at the sky." He took a cigarette out of his pocket, remained for a long time with his eyes on the horizon. "Good-bye, friends," he said suddenly, and he left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what the menu was, dinner would already have been started, and Françoise, commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants, as in fairy plays where giants hire themselves out as cooks, would strike the coal, entrust the steam with some potatoes to cook, and make the fire finish to perfection the culinary masterpieces first prepared in potters' vessels that ranged from great vats, casseroles, cauldrons, and fishkettles to terrines for game, molds for pastry, and little jugs for cream, and included a complete collection of pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen maid had just shelled them, to see the peas lined up and tallied like green marbles in a game; but what delighted me were the asparagus, steeped in ultramarine and pink, whose tips, delicately painted with little strokes of mauve and azure, shade off imperceptibly down to their feet—still soiled though they are from the dirt of their garden bed—with an iridescence that is not of this earth. It seemed to me that these celestial hues revealed the delicious creatures who had merrily metamorphosed themselves into vegetables and who, through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, disclosed in these early tints of dawn, in these beginnings of rainbows, in this extinction of blue evenings, the precious essence that I recognized again when, all night long following a dinner at which I had eaten them, they played, in farces as crude and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann called her, instructed by Françoise to "scrape" them, would have them beside her in a basket, her expression as mournful as though she were suffering all the misfortunes of the earth; and the light crowns of azure that girded the asparagus stalks above their tunics of pink were delicately drawn, star by star, as, in the fresco, are the flowers bound around the forehead or tucked into the basket of Virtue at Padua. And meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, which had carried the fragrance of her merits through the far reaches of Combray and which, while she was serving them to us at the table, would cause the quality of gentleness to predominate in my particular conception of her character, the aroma of that flesh which she knew how to render so unctuous and so tender being for me only the specific perfume of one of her virtues.

But the day on which, while my father consulted the family council about the encounter with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those on which Giotto's Charity, very ill from her recent confinement, could not get out of bed; Françoise, having no help now, was late. When I arrived downstairs she was busy in the scullery that opened onto the poultry yard, killing a chicken which, by its desperate and quite natural resistance, but accompanied by Françoise, beside herself as she tried to split its neck under the ear, with cries of "Vile creature! Vile creature!," put the saintly gentleness and unction of our servant a little less in evidence than it would, at dinner the next day, by its skin embroidered with gold like a chasuble and its precious juice drained from a ciborium. When it was dead, Françoise collected the blood, which flowed without drowning her resentment, had another fit of anger, and looking at her enemy's cadaver, said one

last time: “Vile creature!” I went back upstairs trembling all over; I wanted them to dismiss Françoise immediately. But who would have prepared me such cozy hot-water bottles, such fragrant coffee, and even . . . those chickens? . . . And in fact, everyone had had to make this cowardly calculation, just as I had. For my aunt Léonie knew—as I did not yet know—that Françoise, who would for her daughter, for her nephews, have given her life without a murmur, was singularly hard-hearted toward other people. Despite this my aunt had kept her, for if she was aware of her cruelty, she valued her service. I gradually came to see that the gentleness, the compunction, the virtues of Françoise concealed scullery tragedies, just as history reveals that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed with their hands joined in church windows were marked by bloody incidents. I realized that, apart from her own relatives, human beings inspired her with more pity for their afflictions the farther away from her they lived. The torrents of tears she shed while reading in the newspaper about the misfortunes of strangers would dry up quickly if she could picture to herself at all precisely the person concerned. On one of the nights following her confinement, the kitchen maid was seized by appalling cramps: Mama heard her moaning, got up, and woke Françoise, who, quite indifferent, declared that all this wailing was a sham, that the girl wanted “to be the center of attention.” The doctor, who had been afraid of this sort of attack, had put a marker in a medical book we had, at the page on which the symptoms are described, and told us to consult it in order to find out what kind of first aid to give. My mother sent Françoise to get the book, warning her not to let the bookmark fall out. After an hour, Françoise had not returned; my mother, indignant, thought she had gone back to bed and told me to go to the library myself and see. There I found Françoise, who, having wanted to look at what the marker showed, was reading the clinical description of the attack and sobbing, now that the patient was a hypothetical one whom she did not know. At each painful symptom mentioned by the author of the article, she would exclaim: “Oh dear, Holy Virgin, is it possible that the good Lord would want a wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!”

But as soon as I called her and she came back to the bedside of Giotto’s Charity, her tears immediately stopped flowing; she could recognize neither the pleasant sensation of pity and tenderness which she knew so well and which reading the newspapers had so often given her, nor any kindred pleasure, in the bother and irritation of having gotten up in the middle of the night for the kitchen-maid, and at the sight of the same sufferings whose description had made her cry, she now produced nothing more than bad-tempered mutterings, even nasty pieces of sarcasm, saying, when she thought we had gone and could no longer hear her: “She had only to stop herself doing what you do to get this way! Sure she enjoyed it well enough! So she needn’t make a fuss now! Anyways, a boy must be quite forsaken by the good Lord to want to keep company with *that*. Ah, ’tis just as they used to say in my poor mother’s own tongue:

> Love a dog’s arse, and to thy nose’Twill smell like a rose.” [33]

Although when her grandson had a little cold in the head she would set off at night even if she was ill, instead of going to bed, to see if he needed anything, covering four leagues on foot before daybreak in order to be back in time to do her work, this same love of her own people and her desire to ensure the future greatness of her house was expressed, in her policy toward the other servants, by a consistent principle, which was never to let a single one of them become attached to my aunt, whom she took, moreover, a sort of pride in not allowing to be approached by anyone, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get up out of bed in order to give her mistress her Vichy water rather than permit the kitchen maid access to the bedroom. And like the hymenopteran observed by Fabre,[34] the burrowing wasp who, so that its young may have fresh meat to eat after its death, summons anatomy in aid of its cruelty and, after capturing a few weevils and spiders, proceeds with a marvelous knowledge and skill to pierce them in the nerve center that governs the movement of their legs but not their other life functions, in such a way that the paralyzed insect near which it deposits its eggs provides the larvae, when they hatch, with prey that is docile, harmless, incapable of flight or resistance, but not in the least tainted, Françoise found, to serve her abiding desire to make the house intolerable to any other servant, ruses so clever and so merciless that many years later we learned that if we had eaten asparagus almost every day that summer, it was because their smell provoked in the poor kitchen girl who was given the job of scraping them attacks of asthma so violent that she was obliged in the end to leave.

Alas, we had to change our minds definitively about Legrandin. On one of the Sundays following the meeting on the Pont-Vieux after which my father had had to confess himself mistaken, as mass was ending and as something so far from holy was entering the Church, with the sunlight and the noise from outdoors, that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all those people who not long before, when I arrived a little late, had remained with their eyes absorbed in their prayers and who I might even have believed had not seen me come in if, at the same time, their feet had not gently pushed back the little kneeling bench that was blocking my path to my seat) began to converse with us loudly about quite temporal subjects as if we were already in the square, we saw on the blazing threshold of the porch, looking out over the motley tumult of the market, Legrandin being introduced by the husband of that lady with whom we had just recently encountered him to the wife of another large landowner of the area. Legrandin’s face expressed an animation, and a zeal, that were quite extraordinary; he made a deep bow with a secondary recoil that brought his back sharply up past its starting position and that must have been taught him by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid straightening caused Legrandin’s bottom, which I had not supposed was so fleshy, to flow back in a sort of ardent muscular wave; and I do not know why that undulation of pure matter, that quite fleshly billow, with no expression of spirituality and whipped into a storm by a fully contemptible alacrity, suddenly awakened in my mind the possibility of a Legrandin quite different from the one we knew. This lady asked him to say something to her coachman, and as he went over to the carriage, the imprint of timid and devoted joy which the introduction had set upon his face persisted there still. He was smiling, enraptured in a sort of dream, then he hurried back to the lady, and since he was walking more quickly than was his habit, his two shoulders oscillated ridiculously to the right and left, and so entirely did he abandon himself to this, without concern for anything else, that he looked like the inert and mechanical plaything of happiness itself. Meanwhile, we were leaving the porch, we were going to pass right by him, he was too well mannered to turn his head away, but he fastened his gaze, suddenly burdened by a profound reverie, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us and did not have to greet us. His face remained ingenuous above his straight and supple jacket that looked as though it had been led astray against its will into detestably splendid surroundings. And a polka-dotted lavaliere bow tie tossed by the wind in the square continued to float in front of Legrandin like the flag of his proud isolation and noble independence. Just as we reached the house, Mama realized that the Saint Honoré cake had been forgotten and asked my father to go back the way we had come, taking me with him, and tell them to bring it immediately. Near the church we met Legrandin, who was coming in the opposite direction escorting the same lady to her carriage. He passed close to us, did not break off his conversation with his neighbor, and from the corner of his blue eye gave us a little sign that was in some way interior to his eyelid and which, not involving the muscles of his face, could go perfectly unnoticed by the lady he was talking to; but seeking to compensate by intensity of feeling for the somewhat narrow field in which he had circumscribed its expression, in the azure corner assigned to us he set sparkling all the liveliness of a grace that exceeded playfulness, bordered on mischievousness; he overrefined the subtleties of amiability into winks of connivance, insinuations, innuendos, the mysteries of complicity; and finally exalted his assurances of friendship into protestations of affection, into a declaration of love, illuminating for us alone, at that moment, with a secret languor invisible to the lady, a love-smitten eye in a face of ice.

He had in fact asked my parents the day before to send me to dine with him that evening: “Come and keep your old friend company,” he had said to me. “Like a bouquet sent to us by a traveler from a country to which we will never return, allow me to breathe from the distance of your adolescence those flowers that belong to the spring-times which I too traversed many years ago. Come with the primrose, the monk’s beard, the buttercup, come with the sedum that makes the bouquet of love in Balzac’s flora,[35] come with the flower of Resurrection Day, the Easter daisy, and the garden snowdrop, which is beginning to perfume your great-aunt’s paths even though the last snows dropped by the Easter showers have not yet melted. Come with the glorious silk raiment of the lily worthy of Solomon himself, and with the polychrome enamel of the pansies, but above all come with the breeze still cool from the last frosts, that will open the petals, for the two butterflies that have waited at its door since morning, of the first Jerusalem rose.”

At home they wondered if they still ought to send me to have dinner with M. Legrandin even so. But my grandmother refused to believe he had been impolite. “Even you admit that he goes about dressed in very simple clothes, hardly those of a man of high society.” She declared that in any case, and at the very worst, if he had been, it was better to appear not to have noticed. In fact, my father himself, though he was the one most irritated by Legrandin’s attitude, may still have harbored a last doubt as to what it meant. It was like any attitude or action that reveals a person’s deep and hidden character: it has no connection with anything he has said before, we cannot seek confirmation from the culprit’s testimony for he will not confess; we are reduced to the testimony of our own senses concerning which we wonder, confronting this isolated and incoherent memory, if they were not the victims of an illusion; so that these attitudes, the only ones of any importance, often leave us with some doubts.

I had dinner with Legrandin on his terrace; the moon was shining: “This silence has a nice quality, does it not?” he said to me; “for wounded hearts such as mine, a novelist whom you will read later asserts that the only fit companions are shadow and silence.[36] And you know, my child, in life there comes a time, still quite remote for you, when our weary eyes can tolerate only one light, that which a lovely night like this prepares and distills from the darkness, when our ears cannot listen to any other music but that which is played by the moonlight on the flute of silence.” I was listening to M. Legrandin’s words, which always seemed to me so pleasant; but disturbed by the memory of a woman I had seen recently for the first time, and thinking, now that I knew Legrandin was friends with several of the prominent local aristocracy, that perhaps he knew this one, plucking up my courage I said to him: “Monsieur, do you know the lady . . . the ladies of Guermantes?,” happy too that in pronouncing this name I was assuming a sort of power over it, by the mere fact of bringing it out of my daydreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of sound.

But at the name of Guermantes, I saw a little brown notch appear in the center of each of our friend’s blue eyes as if they had been stabbed by invisible pinpoints, while the rest of the pupil reacted by secreting floods of azure. The arc of his eyelids darkened and drooped. And his mouth, marked by a bitter fold, but recovering more quickly, smiled while his eyes remained sorrowful, like the eyes of a handsome martyr whose body bristles with arrows: “No, I don’t know them,” he said, but instead of giving so simple a piece of information, so unsurprising an answer in the natural, everyday tone that would have been appropriate, he declaimed it stressing each word, leaning forward, nodding his head, with the insistence one imparts, so as to be believed, to an improbable statement—as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to a curious accident of fate—and also with the expressive force of a person who, unable to keep silent about a situation that is painful to him, prefers to proclaim it so as to give others the idea that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, is easy, pleasant, spontaneous, that the situation itself—the absence of relations with the Guermantes—could well have been, not suffered, but desired by him, could result from some family tradition, moral principle, or mystical vow specifically forbidding him any association with the Guermantes. “No,” he went on, explaining his own intonation by what he said, “no, I don’t know them, I’ve never wanted to, I’ve always made a point of safeguarding my complete independence; deep down I’m a Jacobin[37] in my thinking, you know. Many people have tried to save me, they told me I was wrong not to go to Guermantes, that I was making myself look like a savage, an old bear. But that’s not the sort of reputation that dismays me, it’s so very true! Deep down, I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, two or three books, scarcely more paintings, and the light of the moon when the breeze of your youth brings me the fragrance of the flower beds that my old eyes can no longer distinguish.” I did not understand very clearly why, in order not to go to the houses of people whom one did not know, it was necessary to cling to one’s independence, or how this might make one look like a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was that Legrandin was not being completely truthful when he said he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he cared very much for the people from the châteaux and in their presence was overcome by so great a fear of displeasing them that he did not dare let them see that some of his friends were bourgeois people, sons of notaries or stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth was to be revealed, that it be revealed in his absence, far away from him and “by default”; he was a snob. Certainly he never said any of this in the language my family and I loved so much. And if I asked: “Do you know the Guermantes?,” Legrandin the talker would answer: “No, I have never wanted to know them.” Unfortunately, he was not the first Legrandin to answer, but the second, because another Legrandin whom he kept carefully concealed deep inside himself, whom he did not exhibit because that Legrandin knew some compromising stories about our own, about his snobbishness, had already answered by the wound in his eyes, by the rictus of his mouth, by the excessive gravity in the tone of his answer, by the thousand arrows with which our own Legrandin had been instantly larded, languishing like a Saint Sebastian of snobbishness: “Alas! How you hurt me! No, I don’t know the Guermantes, do not reawaken the great sorrow of my life.” And since this troublemaker Legrandin, this blackmailer Legrandin, though he did not have the other’s pretty language, had the infinitely quicker speech consisting of what are called “reflexes,” when Legrandin the talker wished to impose silence on him, the other had already spoken, and though our friend might grieve over the poor impression that his *alter ego*’s revelations must have produced, he could only attempt to mitigate it.

And this certainly does not mean that M. Legrandin was not sincere when he ranted against snobs. He could not be aware, at least from his own knowledge, that he was one, since we are familiar only with the passions of others, and what we come to know about our own, we have been able to learn only from them. Upon ourselves they act only secondarily, by way of our imagination, which substitutes for our primary motives alternative motives that are more seemly. It was never Legrandin’s snobbishness that advised him to pay frequent visits to a duchess. It would instruct Legrandin’s imagination to make that duchess appear to him as being endowed with all the graces. Legrandin would become acquainted with the duchess, filled with esteem for himself because he was yielding to attractions of wit and virtue unknown to vile snobs. Only other people were aware that he was one himself; for, because they were incapable of understanding the intermediary work of his imagination, they saw, coupled together, Legrandin’s social activity and its primary cause.

Now we at home no longer had any illusions about M. Legrandin, and our contacts with him became less frequent. Mama was infinitely amused each time she caught Legrandin in flagrante delicto in the sin that he would not confess, that he continued to call the sin without forgiveness, snobbishness. My father, on the other hand, had trouble accepting Legrandin’s manifestations of disdain with such detachment and good humor; and when, one year, they thought of sending me to spend my summer vacation at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: “I absolutely must let Legrandin know that you’ll be going to Balbec, to see if he offers to put you in touch with his sister. He probably doesn’t remember telling us she lives only a mile from there.” My grandmother, who believed that when staying at a seaside resort one should be on the beach from morning to evening inhaling the salt and that one ought not to know anyone thereabouts because visits and excursions were only so much time taken from the sea air, asked on the contrary that we not speak about our plans to Legrandin, as she could already see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, arriving at the hotel just when we were about to go fishing and forcing us to remain confined indoors entertaining her. But Mama laughed at her fears, thinking privately that the danger was not so great, that Legrandin would not be in such a hurry to put us in touch with his sister. Yet no one had to mention Balbec to him, it was Legrandin himself who, never suspecting that we had any intention of going to those parts, walked into the trap of his own accord one evening when we met him on the banks of the Vivonne.

“There are very lovely violets and blues in the clouds this evening, are there not, my friend,” he said to my father, “a blue, especially, more flowery than airy, the blue of a cineraria, which is surprising in the sky. And that little pink cloud, too, has it not the tint of some flower, a sweet william or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, but on the Channel, between Normandy and Britanny, have I made richer observations of this sort of plant kingdom of the atmosphere. There, near Balbec, near those wild areas, there is a little bay, charmingly gentle, where the sunsets of the Auge country, the red and gold sunsets which I do not in the least disdain, let it be said, are characterless, insignificant; but in that damp and mild atmosphere, in the evening, you will see blooming in the space of a few instants celestial bouquets of blue and pink which are incomparable and often last for hours before they fade. There are others that lose their blossoms immediately, and then it is even lovelier to see the entire sky strewn with the scattering of their countless petals, sulfur or pink. In this bay, which they call Opal Bay, the golden beaches seem gentler still because they are chained like blond Andromedas[38] to those terrible rocks of the nearby coast, to that gloomy shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a vessel is lost to the perils of the sea. Balbec! The most ancient geological skeleton of our soil, truly Ar-mor, the Sea,[39] the land’s end, the accursed region which Anatole France[40]—an enchanter whom our little friend here ought to read—has painted so well, under its eternal fogs, like the veritable country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey*.[41] From Balbec especially, where they are already building hotels, superimposing them upon the ancient and charming soil which they cannot change, what a delight it is to go for excursions just a step or two away through regions so primitive and so lovely!”

“Oh, do you know someone in Balbec?” asked my father. “As it happens, this boy of ours will be spending two months there with his grandmother, and my wife, too, perhaps.”

Legrandin, caught unprepared by this question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, could not turn his eyes away, but fastening them more intensely second by second—and at the same time smiling sadly—to the eyes of his questioner, with an expression of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him full in the face, he seemed to have gone right through that face as though it had become transparent, and to be seeing at that moment, far beyond and behind it, a bright and colorful cloud that created a mental alibi for him and would allow him to prove that at the moment when he had been asked if he knew someone at Balbec, he was thinking of something else and had not heard the question. Usually, such an expression makes the other person say: “What are you thinking about?” But my father, curious, irritated, and cruel, said again:

“You know Balbec so well—do you have friends in the area?”

In a last desperate effort, Legrandin's smiling gaze reached its highest degree of tenderness, vagueness, sincerity, and distraction, but, no doubt thinking there was nothing else he could do but answer, he said to us:

"I have friends wherever there are companies of trees, wounded but not vanquished, which huddle together with touching obstinacy to implore an inclement and pitiless sky."

"That was not what I meant," interrupted my father, as obstinate as the trees and as pitiless as the sky. "In case something should happen to my mother-in-law and she needed to feel she was not all alone in an out-of-the-way place, I was asking if you knew anyone there?"

"There as everywhere, I know everyone and I know no one," answered Legrandin, who was not going to give in so quickly; "I know a great deal about things and very little about people. But in that place the very things themselves seem to be people, rare people, delicate in their very essence, disappointed by life. Sometimes it is a manor house that you encounter on a cliff, by the side of a road, where it has stopped to point its sorrow toward the still pink evening where the golden moon rises while the returning boats, fluting the dappled water, hoist the flame of evening on their masts and carry its colors; sometimes it is a simple solitary house, rather ugly, its expression shy but romantic, which conceals from all eyes some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. That land which is so lacking in truth," he added with a Machiavellian delicacy, "that land of pure fiction makes poor reading for a child, and is certainly not what I would choose and recommend for my little friend, already so inclined to sadness, for his heart, already so predisposed. Climates of amorous confessions and vain regrets may suit a disillusioned old man like me, but they are unhealthy for one whose temperament is not yet formed. Please believe me," he went on insistently, "the waters of that bay, already half Breton, may act as a sedative, though a questionable one, on a heart like mine that is no longer undamaged, on a heart for whose wounds there is no longer any compensation. They are contraindicated at your age, my boy. Good night, neighbors," he added, leaving us with that evasive abruptness which was his habit and, turning back toward us with a doctor's raised finger, he summed up his advice: "No Balbec before the age of fifty, and even then it must depend on the state of the heart," he called to us.

Although my father talked to him about this again in our subsequent encounters, torturing him with questions, it was a useless effort: like that erudite crook[42] who used to employ, in fabricating false palimpsests, a labor and a scholarship a hundredth part of which would have been enough to guarantee him a more lucrative, but honorable position, M. Legrandin, had we insisted further, would have ended by constructing a whole system of landscape ethics and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that his own sister lived a mile from Balbec and be obliged to offer us a letter of introduction which would not have been such an object of terror for him had he been absolutely certain—as in fact he should have been given his experience of my grandmother's character—that we would not have taken advantage of it.

We always returned in good time from our walks so that we could pay a visit to my aunt Léonie before dinner. At the beginning of the season, when the days ended early, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was still a reflection of the sunset on the windowpanes of the house and a band of crimson deep in the timbers of the Calvary, which was reflected farther off in the pool, a red which, often accompanied by a rather brisk chill, was associated in my mind with the red of the fire over which was roasting the chicken that would allow the poetic pleasure given me by the walk to be succeeded by the pleasure of gluttony, warmth and rest. But in the summer, when we returned, the sun was not yet setting; and during the visit we made to my aunt Léonie, its light, lowering and touching the window, had stopped between the great curtains and the curtain loops, divided, ramified, filtered, and, encrusting the lemon wood of the chest of drawers with little pieces of gold, illuminated the room obliquely with the delicacy it acquires in the forest undergrowth. But on certain very rare days, when we returned, the chest had lost its momentary encrustations long before, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was no reflection of the sunset spread over the windowpanes, and the pool at the foot of the Calvary had lost its red, sometimes it was already the color of opal and a long ray of moonlight that grew broader and broader and broke over all the wrinkles of the water traversed it entirely. Then, as we came near the house, we would see a figure on the doorstep and Mama would say to me:

"Dear me! There's Françoise, watching for us. Your aunt must be worried; that means we're late."

And, without taking the time to remove our things, we would quickly go up to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her and show her that, contrary to what she was already imagining, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the "Guermantes way" and, bless us, when one took that walk, my aunt knew very well one could never be sure what time one would be back.

"There, Françoise," said my aunt, "what did I tell you? Didn't I say they must have gone the Guermantes way? Heavens! How hungry they must be! And your leg of lamb all dried up after waiting so long. What a time to be getting back! Well, imagine that, you went the Guermantes way!"

"But I thought you knew, Léonie," said Mama. "I thought Françoise saw us go out the little gate from the kitchen garden."

For in the environs of Combray there were two "ways" which one could go for a walk, in such opposite directions that in fact we left our house by different doors when we wanted to go one way or the other: the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, which we also called the way by Swann's because we passed in front of M. Swann's estate when we went in that direction, and the Guermantes way. About Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything but the "way" and some strangers who used to come and stroll around Combray on a Sunday, people whom, this time, even my aunt, along with all the rest of us, "did not know at all" and whom because of this we assumed to be "people who must have come from Méséglise." As for Guermantes, I was to know more about it one day, but only much later; and during the whole of my adolescence, if for me Méséglise was something as inaccessible as the horizon, concealed from view, however far we went, by the folds of a landscape that already no longer resembled the landscape of Combray, Guermantes, on the other hand, appeared to me only as the terminus, more ideal than real, of its own "way," a sort of abstract geographical expression like the line of the equator, like the pole, like the Orient. So, "to set off toward Guermantes" in order to go to Méséglise, or the opposite, would have seemed to me an expression as devoid of meaning as to set off toward the east in order to go west. Since my father always talked about the Méséglise way as the most beautiful view of the plain that he knew and about the Guermantes way as a typical river landscape, I gave them, conceiving of them thus as two entities, the cohesion, the unity that belong only to the creations of our mind; the smallest part of either of them seemed to me precious and to manifest their particular excellence, while compared to them, before one reached the sacred ground of one or the other, the purely material paths in the midst of which they were set down as the ideal view of the plain and the ideal river landscape were no more worth the trouble of looking at than, for the spectator infatuated with the art of drama, the little streets next to a theater. But most importantly I set between them, much more than their distances in miles, the distance that lay between the two parts of my brain where I thought about them, one of those distances of the mind which not only moves things away from each other, but separates them and puts them on different planes. And that demarcation was made even more absolute because our habit of never going both ways on the same day, in a single walk, but one time the Méséglise way, one time the Guermantes way, shut them off, so to speak, far apart from each other, unknowable by each other, in the sealed and uncommunicating vessels of different afternoons.

When we wanted to go in the direction of Méséglise, we would go out (not too early, and even if the sky was overcast, because the walk was not very long and did not take us too far away) as though we were going anywhere at all, through the front door of my aunt's house on the rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters in the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had no more oil or coffee, and we would leave town by the lane that ran along the white gate of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it, we would meet the smell of his lilacs, coming out to greet the strangers. From among the fresh green little hearts of their leaves, the flowers would curiously lift above the gate of the park their tufts of mauve or white feathers, glazed, even in the shade, by the sun in which they had bathed. A few, half hidden by the little tiled lodge called the Archers' House, where the caretaker lived, overtopped its Gothic gable with their pink minarets. The Nymphs of Spring would have seemed vulgar compared to these young houris, which preserved within this French garden the pure and vivid tones of Persian miniatures. Despite my desire to entwine their supple waists and draw down to me the starry curls of their fragrant heads, we would pass by without stopping because my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann's marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into the park, instead of taking the lane that goes along its fence and climbs directly up to the fields, we would take another that leads to the same place, but obliquely, and that brought us out too far away. One day, my grandfather said to my father:

"Don't you remember Swann's telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter were going off to Rheims and that he would take the opportunity to spend a day in Paris? We could go along by the park, since the ladies aren't there; it would make the walk that much shorter for us."

We stopped for a moment in front of the gate. Lilac time was nearly over; a few, still, poured forth in tall mauve chandeliers the delicate bubbles of their flowers, but in many places among the leaves where only a week before they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, a hollow scum now withered, shrunken and dark, dry and odorless. My grandfather pointed out to my father how the look of the place had remained the same, and how it had changed, since the walk he had taken with M. Swann the day of his wife's death, and he used the occasion to tell the story of that walk one more time.

In front of us, an avenue bordered by nasturtiums climbed in full sun toward the house. To the right, the park extended over level ground. Darkened by the shade of the tall trees that surrounded it, an ornamental pond had been dug by Swann's parents; but even in his most artificial creations, man is still working upon nature; certain places will always impose their own particular empire on their surroundings, hoist their immemorial insignia in the middle of a park just as they would have done far from any human intervention, in a solitude which returns to surround them wherever they are, arising from the exigencies of the position they occupy and superimposed on the work of human hands. So it was that, at the foot of the path that overlooked the artificial pond, there might be seen in its two rows woven of forget-me-nots and periwinkles, a natural crown, delicate and blue, encircling the chiaroscuro brow of water, and so it was that the sword lily, bending its blades with a regal abandon, extended over the eupatorium and wet-footed frogbit the ragged fleurs-de-lis, violet and yellow, of its lacustrine scepter.

Mlle. Swann's departure, which—by taking from me the terrible chance that I might see her appear on a path, that I might be recognized and scorned by the privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a friend and went to visit cathedrals with him—made the contemplation of Tansonville a matter of indifference to me the first time it was allowed me, seemed on the contrary to add to that estate, in the eyes of my grandfather and my father, certain accommodations, a transitory charm, and, as does for an excursion into mountain country the absence of any cloud, to make that day exceptionally favorable for a walk in that direction; I would have liked their calculations to be foiled, a miracle to make Mlle. Swann appear with her father, so close to us that we would not have time to avoid her and would be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when suddenly I saw on the grass, like a sign of her possible presence, a creel sitting forgotten next to a line whose bob was floating on the water, I hastened to turn my father's and grandfather's eyes away in another direction. In any case, since Swann had told us it was bad of him to go off because he had family at the house just now, the line could belong to one of his guests. We heard no sound of steps on the avenues. Dividing the height of an unknown tree, an invisible bird, contriving to make the day seem short, explored the surrounding solitude with one prolonged note, but received from it a retort so unanimous, a repercussion so redoubled by silence and immobility, that one felt it had arrested forever that moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The light fell so implacably from the still sky that one would have wanted to elude its attention, and the dormant water itself, whose sleep was perpetually irritated by insects, dreaming no doubt of some imaginary maelstrom, increased the disturbance into which I had been plunged by the sight of the cork float, by appearing to draw it at full speed over the silent reaches of the reflected sky; almost vertical, it seemed about to dive and I was already wondering if, quite beyond my desire to know her and my fear of knowing her, I did not have a duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting—when I had to run to rejoin my father and grandfather, who were calling me, surprised that I had not followed them along the little lane they had already entered which leads up to the fields. I found it all humming with the smell of the hawthorns. The hedge formed a series of chapels that disappeared under the litter of their flowers, heaped into wayside altars; below them, the sun was laying down a grid of brightness on the ground as if it had just passed through a stained-glass window; their perfume spread as unctuous, as delimited in its form as if I were standing before the altar of the Virgin, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, each held out with a distracted air its sparkling bunch of stamens, delicate radiating ribs in the flamboyant style like those which, in the church, perforated the balustrade of the rood screen or the mullions of the window and blossomed out into the white flesh of a strawberry flower. How naive and folksy by comparison would seem the sweetbriers which, in a few weeks, would climb in full sun the same country lane, in the smooth silk of their blushing bodices undone by a breath.

But though I remained there in front of the hawthorns, breathing in, bringing into the presence of my thoughts, which did not know what to do with it, then losing and finding again their invisible and unchanging smell, absorbing myself in the rhythm that tossed their flowers here and there with youthful high spirits and at unexpected intervals like certain intervals in music, they offered me the same charm endlessly and with an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me study it more deeply, like the melodies you replay a hundred times in succession without descending further into their secrets. I turned away from them for a moment, to accost them again with renewed strength. I pursued, all the way onto the embankment behind the hedge that rose steeply toward the fields, some lost poppy, a few cornflowers which had lazily stayed behind, which decorated it here and there with their flower heads like the border of a tapestry on which there appears, thinly scattered, the rustic motif that will dominate the panel; infrequent still, spaced apart like the isolated houses that announce the approach of a village, they announced to me the immense expanse where the wheat breaks in waves, where the clouds fleece, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting its red flame to the top of its ropes and whipping it in the wind above its greasy black buoy made my heart pound like the heart of a traveler who spies on a lowland a first beached boat being repaired by a caulker and, before catching sight of it, cries out: "The Sea!"

Then I came back to stand in front of the hawthorns as you do in front of those masterpieces which, you think, you will be able to see more clearly when you have stopped looking at them for a moment, but although I formed a screen for myself with my hands so that I would have only them before my eyes, the feeling they awakened in me remained obscure and vague, seeking in vain to detach itself, to come and adhere to their flowers. They did not help me to clarify it, and I could not ask other flowers to satisfy it. Then, filling me with the joy we feel when we see a work by our favorite painter that is different from the ones we knew, or if someone takes us up to a painting of which we had until then seen only a pencil sketch, if a piece heard only on the piano appears to us later clothed in the colors of the orchestra, my grandfather, calling me and pointing to the Tansonville hedge, said to me: "You love hawthorns—just look at this pink one. Isn't it lovely!" Indeed it was a hawthorn, but a pink hawthorn, even more beautiful than the white ones. It, too, wore finery for a holiday—for the only true holidays, which are the religious holidays, since they are not assigned by some fortuitous whim, as are the secular holidays, to an ordinary day that is not especially intended for them, that has nothing essentially festal about it—but their finery was even more opulent, for the flowers, attached to the branch one above another, in such a way as to leave no spot that was not decorated, like pom-poms garlanding a rococo shepherd's crook, were "in color," and consequently of a superior quality according to the aesthetics of Combray, if one judged it by the scale of prices in "the store" in the square, or at Camus's, where the more expensive sponge cakes were the pink ones. Even I preferred cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to crush strawberries in it. And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of an edible thing, or of a delicate embellishment to an outfit for an important holiday, one of those colors which, because they offer children the reason for their superiority, seem most obviously beautiful to the eyes of children, and for that reason will always seem more vivid and more natural to them than the other tints, even after the children have learned that they did not promise anything for the appetite and had not been chosen by the dressmaker. And certainly, I had felt at once, as I had felt in front of the white hawthorns but with more wonder, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human fabrication that the festive intention of the flowers was expressed, but that nature had spontaneously expressed it with the naïveté of a village shopkeeper laboring over her wayside altar, by overloading the shrub with these rosettes which were too delicate in their color and provincially pompadour in their style. At the tops of the branches, like those little rosebushes, their pots hidden in lace paper, whose thin spindles radiated from the altar on the major feast days, teemed a thousand little buds of a paler tint which revealed, when they began to open, as though at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, reds of a bloody tinge, and expressed even more than the flowers the particular, irresistible essence of the hawthorn which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to flower, could do so only in pink. Inserted into the hedge, but as different from it as a young girl in a party dress among people in everyday clothes who are staying at home, the shrub was all ready for Mary's month, and seemed to form a part of it already, shining there, smiling in its fresh pink outfit, catholic and delicious.

Through the hedge we could see within the park an avenue edged with jasmines, pansies, and verbenas between which stocks opened their fresh purses, of a pink as fragrant and faded as an old piece of cordovan leather, while a long green-painted watering hose, uncoiling its loops over the gravel, sent up at each of the points where it was punctured, over the flowers whose fragrances it imbibed, the prismatic vertical fan of its multicolored droplets. Suddenly I stopped, I could not move, as happens when something we see does not merely address our eyes, but requires a deeper kind of perception and possesses our entire being. A little girl with reddish-blond hair, who appeared to be coming back from a walk and held a gardening spade in her hand, was looking at us, lifting toward us a face scattered with pink freckles. Her dark eyes shone, and since I did not know then, nor have I learned since, how to reduce a strong impression to its objective elements, since I did not have enough "power of observation," as they say, to isolate the notion of their color, for a long time afterward, whenever I thought of her again, the memory of their brilliance would immediately present itself to me as that of a vivid azure, since she was blonde: so that, perhaps if she had not had such dark eyes—which struck one so the first time one saw her—I would not have been, as I was, in love most particularly with her blue eyes.

I looked at her, at first with the sort of gaze that is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but a window at which all the senses lean out, anxious and petrified, a gaze that would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it; then, so afraid was I that at any second my grandfather and my father, noticing the girl, would send me off, telling me to run on a little ahead of them, with a second sort of gaze, one that was unconsciously supplicating, that tried to force her to pay attention to me, to know me! She cast her eyes forward and sideways in order to take stock of my grandfather and father, and no doubt the impression she formed of them was that we were absurd, for she turned away, and, with an indifferent and disdainful look, placed herself at an angle to spare her face from being in their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, passed beyond me, she allowed her glances to stream out at full length in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to see me, but with a concentration and a secret smile that I could only interpret, according to the notions of good breeding instilled in me, as a sign of insulting contempt; and at the same time her hand sketched an indecent gesture for which, when it was directed in public at a person one did not know, the little dictionary of manners I carried inside me supplied only one meaning, that of intentional insolence.

"Gilberte, come here! What are you doing?" came the piercing, authoritarian cry of a lady in white whom I had not seen, while, at some distance from her, a gentleman dressed in twill whom I did not know stared at me with eyes that started from his head; the girl abruptly stopped smiling, took her spade, and went away without turning back toward me, with an air that was submissive, inscrutable, and sly.

So it was that this name, Gilberte, passed by close to me, given like a talisman that might one day enable me to find this girl again whom it had just turned into a person and who, a moment before, had been merely an uncertain image. Thus it passed, spoken over the jasmines and the stocks, as sour and as cool as the drops from the green watering hose; impregnating, coloring the portion of pure air that it had crossed—and that it isolated—with the mystery of the life of the girl it designated for the happy creatures who lived, who traveled in her company; deploying under the pink thicket, at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity, for me so painful, with her and with the unknown territory of her life which I would never be able to enter.

For a moment (as we moved away, my grandfather murmuring: "Poor Swann, what a role they make him play: they make him leave so that she can stay there alone with her Charlus—because it was him, I recognized him! And the little girl, mixed up in that disgraceful business!") the impression left in me by the despotic tone with which Gilberte's mother had spoken to her without her answering back, by presenting her to me as someone obliged to obey another person, as not being superior to everything in the world, calmed my suffering a little, restored some of my hope, and diminished my love. But very soon that love welled up in me again like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was trying to put itself on the same level as Gilberte or bring her down to its own. I loved her, I was sorry I had not had the time or the inspiration to insult her, hurt her, and force her to remember me. I thought her so beautiful that I wished I could retrace my steps and shout at her with a shrug of my shoulders: "I think you're ugly, I think you're grotesque, I loathe you!" But I went away, carrying with me forever, as the first example of a type of happiness inaccessible to children of my kind because of certain laws of nature impossible to transgress, the image of a little girl with red hair, her skin scattered with pink freckles, holding a spade and smiling as she cast at me long, cunning, and inexpressive glances. And already the charm with which the incense of her name had imbued that place under the pink hawthorns where it had been heard by her and by me together was beginning to reach, to overlay, to perfume everything that came near it, her grandparents, whom my own had had the ineffable happiness of knowing, the sublime profession of stockbroker, the harrowing neighborhood of the Champs-Élysées where she lived in Paris.

"Léonie," said my grandfather when we returned, "I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would not recognize Tansonville. If I had dared, I would have cut you a branch of those pink hawthorns you used to love so much." And so my grandfather told Aunt Léonie the story of our walk, either to entertain her or because they had not lost all hope of inducing her to go outdoors. For at one time she had liked that estate very much, and, too, Swann's visits had been the last she had received, when she had already closed her door to everyone else. And just as, when he now called to inquire after her (she was the only person in our house he still asked to see), she would tell them to answer him that she was tired, but that she would let him come in the next time, so she said, that evening: "Yes, someday when it's nice out, I'll take the carriage and go as far as the gate of the park." She said it sincerely. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but this desire was enough for what strength remained to her; its fulfillment would have exceeded her strength. Sometimes the good weather restored a little of her energy, she would get up, get dressed; the fatigue would set in before she had gone into the other room and she would ask to go back to bed. What had begun for her—earlier, merely, than it usually happens—was the great renunciation which comes with old age as it prepares for death, wraps itself in its chrysalis, and which may be observed at the ends of lives that are at all extended, even in old lovers who have loved each other the most, even between friends bound by the closest ties of mutual sympathy, who, after a certain year, stop making the necessary journey or outing to see each other, stop writing to each other and know they will not communicate again in this world. My aunt must have known perfectly well that she would not see Swann again, that she would never again leave the house, but this final seclusion must have been made fairly comfortable to her for the very reason that, in our eyes, ought to have made it more painful for her: it was that this seclusion was required of her by the diminution in her strength which she could observe each day and which, making each action, each movement, a cause of fatigue, if not pain, in her eyes gave inaction, isolation, silence, the restorative and blessed sweetness of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the hedge of pink hawthorns, but again and again I asked my parents if she would not go, if at one time she had often gone to Tansonville, trying to make them talk about Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who seemed to me as great as gods. When I was talking with my parents, I pined from the need to hear them say that name, Swann, which had become almost mythological for me, I did not dare pronounce it myself, but I drew them onto subjects that were close to Gilberte and her family, that concerned them, in which I did not feel I was exiled too far from them; and I would suddenly compel my father, by pretending to believe, for instance, that my grandfather's official appointment had been in our family before his time, or that the hedge of pink hawthorns which my aunt Léonie wanted to see was on communal land, to correct what I had said, to say to me, as though in opposition to me, as though of his own accord: "No, that appointment belonged to *Swann's* father, that hedge is part of *Swann's* park." Then I had to catch my breath, so effectively did that name, coming to rest as it did on the spot where it was always written inside me, oppress me to the point of suffocation, that name which, at the moment I heard it, seemed to me more massive than any other name because it was heavy with all the times I had uttered it beforehand in my mind. It gave me a pleasure that I was embarrassed at having dared to demand from my parents, because that pleasure was so great that it must have required considerable effort on their part to procure it for me, and without compensation, since it was not a pleasure for them. And so I would turn the conversation in another direction out of discretion. Out of compunction, too. All the odd allurements that I invested in this name Swann I would hear in it again when they pronounced it. Then it would suddenly seem to me that my parents could not fail to experience these allurements, that they must share my point of view, that they in their turn perceived, forgave, embraced my dreams, and I was unhappy, as if I had defeated them and corrupted them.

That year, when my parents had decided which day we would be returning to Paris, a little earlier than usual, on the morning of our departure, after they had had my hair curled for a photograph, and carefully placed on my head a hat I had never worn before and dressed me in a quilted velvet coat, after looking for me everywhere, my mother found me in tears on the steep little path beside Tansonville, saying good-bye to the hawthorns, putting my arms around the prickly branches, and, like the princess in the tragedy burdened by vain ornaments, ungrateful to the importunate hand that with such care had gathered up my hair in curls across my brow,[43] trampling underfoot my torn-out curl papers and my new hat. My mother was not moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my crushed hat and ruined coat. I did not hear it: "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I said, weeping, "you're not the ones trying to make me unhappy, you aren't forcing me to leave. You've never hurt me! So I will always love you." And drying my tears, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not let my life be like the senseless lives of other men and that even in Paris, on spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would go out into the countryside to see the first hawthorns.

Once in the fields, we did not leave them again during the rest of our walk toward Méséglise. They were perpetually crossed, as though by an invisible vagabond, by the wind that was for me the presiding spirit of Combray. Each year, the day we arrived, in order to feel that I was really in Combray, I would go up to find it again where it ran along the furrows and made me run after it. We always had the wind beside us when we went the Méséglise way, over that cambered plain where for leagues it encounters no rise or fall in the land. I knew that Mlle. Swann often went to Laon to spend a few days, and even though it was several miles away, since the distance was compensated for by the absence of any obstacle, when, on hot afternoons, I saw a single gust of wind, coming from the farthest horizon, first bend the most distant wheat, then roll like a wave through all that vast expanse and come to lie down murmuring and warm among the sainfoin and clover at my feet, this plain which was shared by us both seemed to bring us together, join us, and I would imagine that this breath of wind had passed close

beside her, that what it whispered to me was some message from her though I could not understand it, and I would kiss it as it went by. On the left was a village called Champieu (*Campus pagani,* according to the curé). To the right, you could see beyond the wheat the two chiseled rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, imbricated, checkered, yellowing, and granulose as two spikes of wheat.

At symmetrical intervals, in the midst of the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which cannot be confused with the leaves of any other fruit tree, the apple trees opened their broad petals of white satin or dangled the timid bouquets of their reddening buds. It was on the Méséglise way that I first noticed the round shadow that apple trees make on the sunny earth and those silks of impalpable gold which the sunset weaves obliquely under the leaves, and which I saw my father interrupt with his stick without ever deflecting them.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky the moon would pass white as a cloud, furtive, lusterless, like an actress who does not have to perform yet and who, from the audience, in street clothes, watches the other actors for a moment, making herself inconspicuous, not wanting anyone to pay attention to her. I liked finding its image again in paintings and books, but these works of art were quite different—at least during the early years, before Bloch accustomed my eyes and my mind to subtler harmonies—from those in which the moon would seem beautiful to me today and in which I would not have recognized it then. It might be, for example, some novel by Saintine,[44] some landscape by Gleyre[45] in which it stands out distinctly against the sky in the form of a silver sickle, one of those works which were naively incomplete, like my own impressions, and which it angered my grandmother's sisters to see me enjoy. They thought that one ought to present to children, and that children showed good taste in enjoying right from the start, those works of art which, once one has reached maturity, one will admire forever after. The fact is that they probably regarded aesthetic merits as material objects which an open eye could not help perceiving, without one's needing to ripen equivalents of them slowly in one's own heart.

It was along the Méséglise way, at Montjouvain, a house situated at the edge of a large pond and backed up against a brush-covered hillock, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we often met his daughter on the road driving a cabriolet at top speed. One year, she was not alone when we met her, and from then on she was always accompanied by an older friend, a woman who had a bad reputation in the area and who one day moved permanently into Montjouvain. People said: "Poor M. Vinteuil must be blind with love not to realize what kind of rumors are going around—a man who is shocked by a single remark *out of place* letting his daughter bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says she's a most superior woman, with a good heart, and that she would have had an extraordinary aptitude for music if she had cultivated it. He can be sure she's not dabbling in music when she's with his daughter." M. Vinteuil did say this; and in fact it is remarkable how a person always inspires admiration for her moral qualities in the family of the person with whom she is having carnal relations. Physical love, so unfairly disparaged, compels people to manifest the very smallest particles they possess of goodness, of self-abnegation, so much so that these particles glow even in the eyes of those immediately surrounding them. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and thick eyebrows permitted him to play to his heart's content the role of the villain to which his general appearance was not suited, without in the least compromising his unshakable and undeserved reputation as a kindly old curmudgeon, was capable of making the curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying gruffly: "Well, now! It seems young Mlle. Vinteuil is making music with her friend. You seem surprised. Now I don't know. It was old Vinteuil who told me just yesterday. After all, the girl certainly has a right to enjoy her music. It's not for me to go against a child's artistic vocation. Nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he himself plays music with his daughter's friend, as well. Heaven help us! There's certainly a good deal of music-making going on in that establishment. Well, why are you laughing? They play too much music, those people. The other day I met old Vinteuil near the cemetery. He was ready to drop."

For those like us who saw M. Vinteuil at that time avoiding people he knew, turning away when he saw them, aging in a few months, immersing himself in his sorrow, becoming incapable of any effort whose direct goal was not his daughter's happiness, spending whole days before the grave of his wife—it would have been difficult not to realize that he was dying of sorrow, or to imagine that he was not aware of the talk that was going around. He knew about it, maybe he even believed it. Perhaps there exists no one, however virtuous he may be, who may not be led one day by the complexity of his circumstances to live on familiar terms with the vice he condemns most expressly—without his fully recognizing it, moreover, in the disguise of particular details that it assumes in order to come into contact with him in that way and make him suffer: strange remarks, an inexplicable attitude, one evening, on the part of someone whom he has otherwise so many reasons for liking. But a man like M. Vinteuil must have suffered much more than most in resigning himself to one of those situations which are wrongly believed to be the exclusive prerogative of the bohemian life: they occur whenever a vice which nature itself plants in a child, like the color of its eyes, sometimes merely by mingling the virtues of its father and mother, needs to reserve for itself the space and the security it requires. But the fact that M. Vinteuil perhaps knew about his daughter's behavior does not imply that his worship of her would thereby be diminished. Facts do not find their way into the world in which our beliefs reside; they did not produce our beliefs, they do not destroy them; they may inflict on them the most constant refutations without weakening them, and an avalanche of afflictions or ailments succeeding one another without interruption in a family will not make it doubt the goodness of its God or the talent of its doctor. But when M. Vinteuil thought about his daughter and himself from the point of view of society, from the point of view of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself with her in the rank which they occupied in the general esteem, then he made this social judgment exactly as it would have been made by the most hostile inhabitant of Combray, he saw himself and his daughter in the lowest depths, and because of this his manner had recently acquired that humility, that respect for those who were above him and whom he saw from below (even if they had been well below him until then), that tendency to seek to climb back up to them, which is an almost automatic result of any downfall. One day as we were walking with Swann down a street in Combray, M. Vinteuil, who was emerging from another, found himself face-to-face with us too suddenly to have time to avoid us; and Swann, with the proud charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another man's disgrace merely a reason for showing him a kindliness whose manifestations are all the more gratifying to the self-regard of the one offering them because he feels they are so precious to the one receiving them, had conversed with M. Vinteuil for a long time, although he had never spoken to him before then, and before leaving us had asked him if he would not send his daughter to play at Tansonville someday. This was an invitation which two years before would have incensed M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with such feelings of gratitude that he believed he was obliged by them not to have the indiscretion of accepting it. Swann's friendliness toward his daughter seemed to him in itself so honorable and so delightful a support that he thought it would perhaps be better not to make use of it, so as to have the wholly platonic pleasure of preserving it.

"What a charming man," he said, when Swann had left us, with the same enthusiastic veneration that causes bright and pretty middle-class women to be awed and entranced by a duchess, even if she is ugly and foolish. "What a charming man! How unfortunate that he should have made such an entirely inappropriate marriage!"

And then, since even the most sincere people have a streak of hypocrisy in them which makes them put to one side their opinion of a person while they are talking to him, and express it as soon as he is no longer present, my parents deplored Swann's marriage along with M. Vinteuil in the name of principles and conventions which (by the very fact that they joined him in invoking them, as decent people of the same stamp) they seemed to be implying he had not violated at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to Swann's house. And Swann was the first to regret it. For each time he left M. Vinteuil, he remembered that for some time now he had had a question to ask him about a person who bore the same name, a relative of his, he believed. And this time he had truly promised himself not to forget what he wanted to tell him when M. Vinteuil sent his daughter to Tansonville.

Since the walk along the Méséglise way was the shorter of the two that we took out of Combray and since, because of that, we saved it for uncertain weather, the climate along the Méséglise way was quite rainy and we would never lose sight of the edge of the Roussainville woods, in the thickness of which we could take cover.

Often the sun would hide behind a storm cloud, distorting its oval, yellowing the edges of the cloud. The brilliance, though not the brightness, would be withdrawn from the countryside, where all life seemed suspended, while the little village of Roussainville sculpted its white rooflines in relief upon the sky with an unbearable precision and finish. Nudged by a gust of wind, a crow flew up and dropped down again in the distance, and, against the whitening sky, the distant parts of the woods appeared bluer, as though painted in one of those monochromes that decorate the pier glasses of old houses.

But at other times the rain with which we had been threatened by the little hooded monk in the optician's window[46] would begin to fall; the drops of water, like migrating birds which take flight all at the same time, would descend in close ranks from the sky. They do not separate at all, they do not wander away during their rapid course, but each one keeps to its place, drawing along the one that comes after it, and the sky is more darkened by them than when the swallows leave. We would take refuge in the woods. When their flight seemed to be over, a few of them, feebler, slower, would still be arriving. But we would come back out of

our shelter, because raindrops delight in leafy branches, and, when the earth was already nearly dry again, more than one would still linger to play on the ribs of a leaf and, hanging from the tip, tranquil and sparkling in the sun, would suddenly let go, slip off, and drop from the entire height of the branch onto one's nose.

Often, too, we would go and take shelter all crowded in together with the stone saints and patriarchs in the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. How French that church was! Above the door, the saints, the knight-kings with fleurs-de-lis in their hands, wedding and funeral scenes, were depicted as they might have been in Françoise's soul. The sculptor had also narrated certain anecdotes involving Aristotle and Virgil just as Françoise in her kitchen was apt to talk about Saint Louis as if she had known him personally, usually in order to put my grandparents to shame by comparison since they were less "fair-minded." One felt that the notions which the medieval artist and the medieval countrywoman (living on into the nineteenth century) had acquired of ancient or Christian history, and which were distinguished by containing as much inaccuracy as simple good-heartedness, were derived not from books, but from a tradition that was at once very old and very direct, uninterrupted, oral, deformed, hardly recognizable, and alive. Another Combray character whom I also recognized, potential and prophesied, in the Gothic sculpture of Saint-André-des-Champs, was young Théodore, the delivery boy from Camus's grocery. Françoise, in fact, felt so clearly that he was a fellow countryman and a contemporary that when my aunt Léonie was too sick for Françoise by herself to turn her over in bed, or carry her to the armchair, instead of letting the kitchen maid come up and get into my aunt's "good books" she would send for Théodore. Now this boy, who was taken, and rightly, for such a ne'er-do-well, was so filled with the same spirit that had decorated Saint-André-des-Champs and especially with the feelings of respect that Françoise believed were owed to "poor sick folk," to "her poor mistress," that as he raised my aunt's head on her pillow he had the same naive and zealous expression as the little angels in the bas-reliefs, crowding around the fainting Virgin with tapers in their hands, as if the faces of sculpted stone, bare and gray as the woods in winter, were only a deep sleep, a reserve, about to blossom into life again in numberless common faces, reverent and crafty like Théodore's, illuminated with the redness of a ripe apple. No longer affixed to the stone like those little angels, but detached from the porch, of larger than human size, standing on a pedestal as though on a stool that spared her putting her feet on the damp ground, one saint had the full cheeks, the firm breast swelling the folds of the cloth like a cluster of ripe grapes in a horsehair sack, the narrow forehead, the short and saucy nose, the deep-set eyes, the able-bodied, impassive, and courageous demeanor of the countrywomen of the region. This resemblance, which insinuated into the statue a sweetness I had not looked for in it, was often authenticated by some girl from the fields, who, like us, had come to take cover, and whose presence, like the presence of the leaves of a climbing plant that has grown up next to some sculpted leaves, seemed intended to allow us, by confronting it with nature, to judge the truthfulness of the work of art. Before us in the distance, a promised land or an accursed one, Roussainville, was now, when the rain had already stopped for us, either continuing to be chastised like the village in the Bible by all the slanting spears of the storm, which scourged the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already been pardoned by God the Father, who caused to descend upon it, unequal in length, like the rays of an altar monstrance, the frayed golden shafts of his reappearing sun.

Sometimes the weather was completely spoiled, we had to go back home and stay shut up in the house. Here and there, far off in the countryside, which because of the dark and the wet resembled the sea, a few isolated houses, clinging to the side of a hill plunged in watery night, shone forth like little boats that have folded their sails and stand motionless out at sea all night long. But what did the rain matter, what did the storm matter! In summer, bad weather is only a passing, superficial mood on the part of the steady, underlying good weather, which is very different from the fluid and unstable good weather of winter, and having settled on the earth, where it has taken solid form in dense branches of leaves on which the rain may drip without compromising the resistance of their permanent joy, has hoisted for the whole season, even in the streets of the village, on the walls of the houses and gardens, its flags of white or violet silk. Sitting in the little drawing room, where I waited for the dinner hour while I read, I would hear the water dripping from our chestnut trees, but I knew that the downpour was only varnishing their leaves and that they would promise to stay there, like pledges of summer, all the rainy night, ensuring that the good weather would continue; that rain as it might, tomorrow little heart-shaped leaves would undulate just as numerous above the white gate of Tansonville; and it was without sadness that I saw the poplar in the rue des Perchamps meet the storm praying and bowing in despair; it was without sadness that I heard at the back of the garden the last rolls of thunder warbling among the lilacs.

If the weather was bad in the morning, my parents would give up the walk and I would not go out. But I later acquired the habit of going out to walk alone on those days along the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, during the autumn in which we had to come to Combray to settle my aunt Léonie's estate, because she had at last died, proving correct both those who had claimed that her enfeebling regimen would end by killing her, and those who had always maintained that she suffered from an illness that was not imaginary but organic, to the evidence of which the skeptics would certainly be obliged to yield when she succumbed to it; and causing no great suffering by her death except to a single person, but to that one, a grief that was savage. During the two weeks of my aunt's final illness, Françoise did not leave her for an instant, did not undress, did not allow anyone else to care for her in any way, and did not leave her body until it was buried. Then we realized that the kind of dread in which Françoise had lived, of my aunt's ill-natured remarks, suspicions, angry moods, had developed a feeling in her that we had taken for hatred and that was actually veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions were impossible to foresee, whose ruses were difficult to foil, whose good heart was easy to touch, her sovereign, her mysterious and all-powerful monarch, was no more. Next to her we counted for very little. The time was by now far in the past when, as we began coming to spend our holidays at Combray, we possessed as much prestige as my aunt in Françoise's eyes. That autumn, completely occupied as they were with the formalities that had to be observed, the interviews with notaries and tenants, my parents, having scarcely any time to go on excursions, which the weather frustrated in any case, fell into the habit of letting me go for walks without them along the Méséglise way, wrapped in a great plaid that protected me from the rain and that I threw over my shoulders all the more readily because I sensed that its Scottish patterning scandalized Françoise, into whose mind one could not have introduced the idea that the color of one's clothes had nothing to do with mourning and to whom, in any case, the sorrow that we felt over the death of my aunt was not very satisfactory, because we had not offered a large funeral dinner, because we did not adopt a special tone of voice in speaking of her, because I even hummed to myself now and then. I am sure that in a book—and in this I was actually quite like Françoise—such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland*[47] and the portal of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have appealed to me. But as soon as Françoise came near me, some demon would goad me to try to make her angry, I would seize the slightest pretext to tell her that I missed my aunt because she was a good woman despite her ridiculous ways, but not in the least because she was my aunt, that she might have been my aunt and still seemed odious to me, and then her death would not have caused me any pain, remarks that would have seemed to me absurd in a book.

If Françoise then, filled like a poet with a flood of confused thoughts about bereavement, about family memories, excused herself for not knowing how to answer my theories and said: "I don't know how to *espress* myself," I would gloat over that admission with a harsh and ironic common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she added: "All the same, she was your own kith and kindred,[48] and there's a proper respect we owe to our kith and kindred, you know,' I would shrug my shoulders and say to myself: "Look at me, arguing with an illiterate woman who makes such blunders," adopting, in judging Françoise, the mean-spirited attitude of men whose behavior those people who despise them the most when contemplating them impartially are quite capable of adopting, when actually playing one of life's vulgar scenes.

My walks that autumn were all the more pleasant because I took them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired from reading all morning in the parlor, throwing my plaid over my shoulders I would go out: my body, which had had to keep still for so long, but which had accumulated, as it sat, a reserve of animation and speed, now needed, like a top that has been released, to expend them in all directions. The walls of the houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of the Roussainville woods, the thickets at the back of Montjouvain, submitted to the blows of my umbrella or walking stick, heard my shouts of joy, these being both merely confused ideas that exhilarated me and found no repose in the light of understanding, because they had preferred, instead of a slow and difficult clarification, the pleasure of an easier diversion toward an immediate outcome. Most of the supposed expressions of our feelings merely relieve us of them in this way by drawing them out of us in an indistinct form that does not teach us to know them. When I try to count up what I owe to the Méséglise way, the humble discoveries for which it was the fortuitous setting or the necessary inspiration, I recall that it was that autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy hillock that protects Montjouvain, that I was struck for the first time by this discord between our impressions and their habitual expression. After an hour of rain and wind which I had fought cheerfully, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, beside a little hut covered in tiles where M. Vinteuil's gardener stowed his gardening tools, the sun had just reappeared, and its gildings, washed by the downpour, glistened freshly in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, on its still-wet tile roof along the crest of which a hen was walking. The wind that was blowing tugged at the wild grass growing in the side of the wall and the downy plumage of the hen, the one and the other streaming out at full length horizontally before its breath, with the abandon of things that are weightless and inert. In

the pond, reflective again under the sun, the tile roof made a pink marbling to which I had never before given any attention. And seeing on the water and on the face of the wall a pale smile answering the smile of the sky, I cried out to myself in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: "Damn, damn, damn, damn." But at the same time I felt I was in duty bound not to stop at these opaque words, but to try to see more clearly into my rapture.

And it was at that moment, too—because of a countryman who was passing by, who seemed rather cross already and was more so when my umbrella nearly went in his face, and who responded without warmth to my "fine weather, isn't it, perfect for a walk"—that I learned that the same emotions do not arise simultaneously, in a preestablished order, in all men. Later, each time a rather prolonged session of reading had put me in a mood to chat, the friend I was so eager to talk to would himself have just been indulging in the pleasure of conversation and now wanted to be left to read in peace. If I had just been thinking tenderly about my parents and making the wisest decisions, those most likely to please them, they would have been employing the same time in discovering some peccadillo I had forgotten, and they would reproach me severely for it just at the moment I bounded toward them to give them a hug.

Sometimes the exhilaration I felt at being alone was joined by another kind that I was not able to separate distinctly from it, and that came from my desire to see a peasant girl appear in front of me whom I could clasp in my arms. Born suddenly, and without my having had time to identify exactly what had caused it, from among very different thoughts, the pleasure which accompanied it seemed to me only one degree higher than that which those other thoughts had given me. Everything that was in my mind at that moment acquired an even greater value, the pink reflection of the tile roof, the wild grass, the village of Roussainville to which I had been wanting to go for so long now, the trees of its woods, the steeple of its church, as a result of this new emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to carry me toward them more rapidly when it filled my sail with a powerful, mysterious, and propitious wind. But if, for me, this desire that a woman should appear added something more exhilarating to the charms of nature, the charms of nature, in return, broadened what would have been too narrow in the woman's charm. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was also hers and that the soul of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books I was reading that year, would be given to me by her kiss; and as my imagination drew strength from contact with my sensuality, as my sensuality spread through all the domains of my imagination, my desire grew boundless. And, too—just as during those moments of reverie in the midst of nature when, the effect of habit being suspended, and our abstract notions of things set aside, we believe with a profound faith in the originality, in the individual life of the place in which we happen to be—the passing woman summoned by my desire seemed to be, not an ordinary exemplar of that general type—woman—but a necessary and natural product of this particular soil. For at that time everything which was not I, the earth and other people, appeared to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they appear to grown men. And I did not separate the earth and the people. I desired a peasant girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, a fisherwoman from Balbec, just as I desired Méséglise and Balbec. The pleasure they might give me would have appeared less real to me, I would no longer have believed in it, if I had modified its conditions as I pleased. To meet a fisherwoman from Balbec or a countrywoman from Méséglise in Paris would have been like receiving a seashell I could not have seen on the beach, a fern I could not have found in the woods, it would have subtracted from the pleasure which the woman would give me all those pleasures in which my imagination had enveloped her. But to wander through the woods of Roussainville without a peasant girl to hold in my arms was to see these woods and yet know nothing of their hidden treasure, their profound beauty. For me that girl, whom I could only envisage dappled with leaves, was herself like a local plant, merely of a higher species than the rest and whose structure enabled one to approach more closely than one could in the others the essential flavor of the country. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would allow me to reach that flavor would themselves be of a special kind, whose pleasure I would not have been able to experience through anyone else but her) because I was, and would be for a long time to come, at an age when one has not yet abstracted this pleasure from the possession of the different women with whom one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general notion that makes one regard them from then on as the interchangeable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. This pleasure does not even exist, isolated, distinct and formulated in the mind, as the aim we are pursuing when we approach a woman, as the cause of the previous disturbance that we feel. We scarcely even contemplate it as a pleasure which we will enjoy; rather, we call it her charm; for we do not think of ourselves, we think only of leaving ourselves. Obscurely awaited, immanent and hidden, it merely rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment of its realization, the other pleasures we find in the soft gazes, the kisses of the woman close to us, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of our gratitude for our companion's goodness of heart and for her touching predilection for us, which we measure by the blessings, by the beatitude she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the castle keep of Roussainville, that I asked it to have some child from its village come to me, appealing to it as to the only confidant I had had of my earliest desires, when at the top of our house in Combray in the little room smelling of orris root, I could see nothing but its tower in the middle of the pane of the half-open window, while with the heroic hesitations of a traveler embarking on an exploration or of a desperate man killing himself, with a feeling of faintness, I would clear an unknown and I thought fatal path within myself, until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail added itself to the leaves of the wild black currant that leaned in toward me. In vain did I appeal to it now. In vain did I hold the whole expanse of the country before me within the field of my vision, draining it with my eyes which tried to extract a woman from it. I would go as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs; there I would never find the countrywoman I would inevitably have met had I been with my grandfather and therefore prevented from striking up a conversation with her. I would stare endlessly at the trunk of a distant tree from behind which she was going to appear and come to me; the scanned horizon would remain uninhabited, night would fall, hopelessly my attention would attach itself, as though to aspirate the creatures they might harbor, to that sterile ground, to that exhausted earth; and it was no longer with a light heart, but with rage, that I struck the trees of the Roussainville woods, from among which no more living creatures emerged than if they had been trees painted on the canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to going back to the house without having held in my arms the woman I had so desired, I was nevertheless obliged to continue along the road to Combray admitting to myself that there was less and less chance that she had been placed in my path. And if she had been there, would I have dared talk to her? It seemed to me she would have thought I was mad; I no longer believed that the desires which I formed during my walks, and which were not fulfilled, were shared by other people, that they had any reality outside of me. They now seemed to me no more than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creations of my temperament. They no longer had any attachment to nature, to reality, which from then on lost all its charm and significance and was no more than a conventional framework for my life, as is, for the fiction of a novel, the railway carriage on the seat of which a traveler reads it in order to kill time.

It was perhaps from an impression received also near Montjouvain, a few years later, an impression that remained obscure to me at the time, that there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism. As will be seen later, for quite other reasons the the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had had to leave for the whole day, had told me to return home as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I liked to look at the reflections of the tile roof again, I had lain down in the shade and fallen asleep among the bushes of the hillock that overlooks the house, in the same spot where I had once waited for my father on a day when he had gone to see M. Vinteuil. It was almost night when I awoke, I wanted to stand up, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (insofar as I actually recognized her, because I had not seen her very often in Combray, and only when she was still a child, whereas now she was growing into a young woman), who had probably just come home, opposite me, a few inches from me, in the room in which her father had entertained my father and which she had made into her own little drawing room. The window was half open, the lamp was lit, I could see her every movement without her seeing me, but if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her.

She was in deep mourning, because her father had died a short time before. We had not gone to see her, my mother had not wanted to because of a virtue of hers which alone limited the effects of her goodness: her sense of decency; but she pitied her deeply. My mother recalled the sad end of M. Vinteuil's life, completely absorbed as it was first in giving his daughter the care of a mother or a nursemaid, then in the suffering his daughter had caused him; she could still see the tormented expression on the old man's face during that last period; she knew he had entirely given up completing the task of transcribing in clean copies all his work of the last few years, insignificant pieces by an old piano teacher, by a former village organist, which we could well imagine had scarcely any value in themselves, but which we did not disdain because they had so much value for him, having been his reason for living before he sacrificed them for his daughter, and which, for the most part not even written down, preserved only in his memory, a few jotted on scattered sheets of paper, unreadable, would remain unknown; my mother thought of that other, even crueler renunciation which had been forced upon M. Vinteuil, the renunciation of a future of decent and respectable happiness for his daughter; when she remembered all this extreme distress on the part of my aunts' old piano teacher, she was moved by real sorrow and thought with horror of the far more bitter sorrow that Mlle. Vinteuil must be feeling, mingled as it was with remorse at having more or less killed her father. "Poor M. Vinteuil," my mother would say, "he lived and died for his daughter, without getting any reward for it. Will he get it after his death, and in what form? It could only come to him from her."

At the back of Mlle. Vinteuil's drawing room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small portrait of her father which she quickly went to get at the moment when the rattle of a carriage could be heard from the road outside, then she threw herself down on a couch, drew a little table close to her, and set the portrait on it, just as M. Vinteuil had once placed beside him the piece that he wanted to play for my parents. Soon her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without standing up, both hands behind her head, and withdrew to the other end of the sofa as though to make room for her. But immediately she felt that by doing this she seemed to be forcing her friend into a position that might be annoying to her. She thought her friend might prefer to be some distance away from her on a chair, she thought she had been indiscreet, her tactful heart grew alarmed; moving so that she now occupied all the space on the sofa again, she closed her eyes and began yawning to imply that she had only stretched out like that because she was sleepy. Despite the crude and overweening familiarity with which she treated her friend, I recognized her father's obsequious and reticent gestures, his sudden qualms. Soon she stood up and pretended to be trying to close the shutters without success.

"No, leave them open, I'm hot," said her friend.

"But it's a nuisance, someone will see us," answered Mlle. Vinteuil.

But she must have guessed that her friend would think she had said these words only to goad her into answering with certain others that she in fact wanted to hear, but that out of discretion she wanted to leave her friend the initiative of uttering. And so her face, which I could not see, must have assumed the expression that my grandmother liked so much, as she quickly added:

"When I say see us, I mean see us reading; it's such a nuisance to think that whatever insignificant thing you may be doing, other eyes are watching you."

Out of an instinctive generosity and an involuntary courtesy she did not speak the premeditated words that she had felt were indispensable to the full realization of her desire. And time and again, deep inside her, a timid and supplicant virgin entreated and forced back a rough and swaggering brawler.

"Yes, I'm sure people are watching us at this hour, in this densely populated countryside," her friend said ironically. "And what if they are?" she added (thinking she had to give a mischievous, tender wink as she uttered these words, which she recited good-naturedly like a text she knew Mlle. Vinteuil liked, in a tone that she tried to make cynical). "If someone saw us, so much the better."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and stood up. Her scrupulous and sensitive heart did not know what words ought to come to her spontaneously to suit the scene that her senses demanded. She searched as far away from her true moral nature as she could to find a language that would fit the depraved girl she wanted to be, but the words she thought that girl would have uttered sincerely seemed false on her own lips. And the little she allowed herself to say was said in a stiff tone of voice in which her habitual shyness paralyzed her inclinations toward boldness, and was interlarded with: "You're not too cold, are you, you're not too warm, would you rather be alone and read?"

"Mademoiselle seems to be having rather libidinous thoughts this evening," she said at last, probably repeating a phrase she had heard before on her friend's lips.

Mlle. Vinteuil felt her friend plant a kiss in the opening of her crepe blouse, she gave a little cry, broke free, and they began chasing each other, leaping, fluttering their wide sleeves like wings, and clucking and cheeping like two amorous birds. At last Mlle. Vinteuil collapsed on the couch, with her friend's body covering her. But the friend had her back turned to the little table on which the old piano teacher's picture was placed. Mlle. Vinteuil realized that her friend would not see it if her attention was not drawn to it, and she said to her, as if she had only just noticed it:

"Oh! That picture of my father is looking at us. I don't know who could have put it there. I've told them a dozen times that it doesn't belong there."

I remembered that these were the same words M. Vinteuil had spoken to my father in connection with the piece of music. They were probably in the habit of using the portrait for ritual profanations, because her friend answered her in words which must have been part of her liturgical response:

"Oh, leave him where he is. He's not here to bother us anymore. Just think how he would start whining and try to make you put your coat on if he could see you there with the window open, the ugly old monkey."

Mlle. Vinteuil answered with words of gentle reproach—"Come, come"—which proved the goodness of her nature, not because they were dictated by the indignation she might have felt at this way of referring to her father (evidently this was a feeling that she had grown used to silencing in herself at these times, with the help of who knows what sophistical reasonings), but because they were a sort of curb that she herself, so as not to seem selfish, was applying to the pleasure that her friend was trying to give her. And, too, such smiling forbearance in response to these blasphemies, such a tender, hypocritical reproach, may have appeared to her frank and generous good nature a particularly unspeakable form, a saccharine form of the wickedness she was trying to emulate. But she could not resist the attraction of the pleasure she would feel at being treated with such tenderness by a woman so implacable toward a defenseless dead man; she jumped on her friend's knees, and chastely presented her forehead for a kiss, as a daughter might have done, with the delightful sensation that the two of them were achieving an extreme of cruelty by robbing M. Vinteuil, even in his grave, of his fatherhood. Her friend took her head in her hands and set a kiss on her forehead with a docility that came easily to her because of her great affection for Mlle. Vinteuil and her desire to bring some amusement into the orphan's life, now so sad.

"Do you know what I would like to do to him—that old horror?" she said, picking up the portrait.

And she murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil's ear something I could not hear.

"Oh, you wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't dare spit on him? On *that old thing*?" said her friend with deliberate savagery.

I did not hear any more, because Mlle. Vinteuil, with a manner that was weary, awkward, fussy, honest, and sad, came and closed the shutters and the window, but now I knew that for all the suffering which M. Vinteuil had endured on his daughter's account during his lifetime, this was what he had received from her as his reward after his death.

And yet I have thought, since then, that if M. Vinteuil had been able to witness this scene, he still might not have lost his faith in his daughter's good heart, and perhaps he would not even have been entirely wrong in that. It was true that in Mlle. Vinteuil's habits, the appearance of evil was so complete that it would have been hard to find it so perfectly represented in anyone other than a sadist; it is behind the footlights of a popular theater rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her; and almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama. In reality, even when she is not a sadist, a girl might perhaps have failings as cruel as those of Mlle. Vinteuil with regard to the memory and wishes of her dead father, but she would not deliberately express them in an act of such rudimentary and naive symbolism; what was criminal about her behavior would be more veiled from the eyes of others and even from her own, and she would do evil without admitting it to herself. But, beyond appearances, even in Mlle. Vinteuil's heart, the evil, in the beginning at least, was probably not unmixed. A sadist of her sort is an artist of evil, something that an entirely bad creature could not be, for then evil would not be exterior to her, it would seem to her quite natural, would not even be distinguishable from her; and as for virtue, memory of the dead, and filial tenderness, since she would not be devoutly attached to them she would take no sacrilegious pleasure in profaning them. Sadists of Mlle. Vinteuil's kind are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous that even sensual pleasure seems to them something bad, the privilege of the wicked. And when they allow themselves to yield to it for a moment, they are trying to step into the skin of the wicked and to make their partner do so as well, so as to have the illusion, for a moment, of escaping from their scrupulous and tender soul into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I understood how much she longed for it when I saw how impossible it was for her to succeed in it. At the very moment when she wanted to be so different from her father, what she at once suggested to me were the old piano teacher's ways of thinking, of speaking. Far more than his photograph, what she really desecrated, what she was really using for her pleasures, though it remained between them and her and kept her from enjoying them directly, was the resemblance between her face and his, his own mother's blue eyes which he had handed down to her like a family jewel, those kind gestures which interposed between Mlle. Vinteuil's vice and herself a style of talking, a mentality that was not made for it and that prevented her from recognizing it as something very different from the numberless obligatory courtesies to which she usually devoted herself. It was not evil which gave her the idea of pleasure, which seemed agreeable to her; it was pleasure that seemed to her malign. And since each time she indulged in it, it was accompanied by these bad thoughts which were absent the rest of the time from her virtuous soul, she came to see pleasure as something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that her friend was not fundamentally bad and was not really sincere when she talked to her in this blasphemous way. At least she had the pleasure of kissing her friend's face with its smiles and glances that might have been feigned but were similar in their depraved and base expression to the smiles and glances of, not a kind, suffering

person, but one given to cruelty and pleasure. She could imagine for a moment that she was really playing the games that would have been played, with so unnatural a confederate, by a girl who actually had these barbaric feelings toward her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought that evil was a state so rare, so extraordinary, so disorienting, and to which it was so restful to emigrate, if she had been able to discern in herself, as in everyone else, that indifference to the sufferings one causes which, whatever other names one gives it, is the terrible and lasting form assumed by cruelty.

If it was fairly simple to go the Méséglise way, it was another matter to go the Guermantes way, because the walk was long and we wanted to be sure what sort of weather we would be having. When we seemed to be entering a succession of fine days; when Françoise, desperate because not a single drop of water had fallen on the "poor crops," and seeing only rare white clouds swimming on the calm blue surface of the sky, exclaimed with a moan: "Why, they look just like a lot of dog-fishes playing about up yonder showing us their muzzles! Ah, they never think to make it rain a little for the poor farmers! And then as soon as the wheat is well up, that's when the rain will begin to fall pit-a-pat pit-a-pat without a break, and think no more of where it's falling than if 'twas falling on the sea"; when my father had been given the same unvarying favorable responses by both the gardener and the barometer, then we would say over dinner: "Tomorrow, if the weather's the same, we'll go the Guermantes way." We would leave right after lunch by the little garden gate and we would tumble out into the rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle and filled with different varieties of grasses among which two or three wasps would spend the day botanizing, a street as odd as its name, which it seemed to me was the source of its curious peculiarities and its cantankerous personality, a street one would seek in vain in Combray now, for on its old path the school now stands. But in my daydreams (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc,[49] who, thinking they will find under a Renaissance rood screen or a seventeenth-century altar the traces of a Romanesque choir, restore the whole edifice to the state in which it must have been in the twelfth century) I do not leave one stone of the new structure standing, I pierce through it and "reinstate" the rue des Perchamps. And for these reconstructions I also have more precise data than restorers generally have: a few pictures preserved by my memory, perhaps the last still in existence now, and destined soon to be obliterated, of what Combray was during the time of my childhood; and, because Combray itself drew them in me before disappearing, they are as moving—if one may compare an obscure portrait to those glorious representations of which my grandmother liked to give me reproductions—as those old engravings of the Last Supper or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, da Vinci's masterpiece and the portal of Saint Mark's.[50]

In the rue de l'Oiseau we would pass in front of the old Hôtellerie de Oiseau Flesché, which in the seventeenth century had sometimes seen in its great courtyard the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency when they had to come to Combray for some dispute with their tenants or to accept their homage. We would reach the mall, among whose trees the Saint-Hilaire steeple would appear. And I would have liked to be able to sit down and stay there the whole day reading while I listened to the bells; because it was so lovely and tranquil that, when the hour rang, you would have said not that it broke the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of what it contained and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking precision of a person who has nothing else to do, had merely—in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops which had slowly and naturally collected there in the heat—pressed at the proper moment the fullness of the silence.

The greatest charm of the Guermantes way was that we had next to us, almost the whole time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, on a footbridge called the Pont-Vieux. The day after we arrived, following the sermon on Easter Sunday, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see, amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning of a great festival, when the sumptuous preparations make the household utensils that are still lying about appear more sordid than usual, the river already promenading along dressed in sky blue between lands still black and bare, accompanied only by a flock of cuckooflowers that had arrived early and primroses ahead of their time, while here and there a violet with a blue beak bowed its stem under the weight of the drop of fragrance it held in its throat. The Pont-Vieux led to a towpath which at this spot would be draped in summer with the blue foliage of a hazel under which a fisherman in a straw hat had taken root. In Combray, where I knew which particular farrier or grocer's boy was concealed within the verger's uniform or choirboy's surplice, this fisherman is the only person whose identity I never discovered. He must have known my parents, because he would raise his hat when we passed; I would then try to ask his name, but they would signal me to keep quiet so as not to frighten the fish. We would enter the towpath, which ran along an embankment a few feet above the stream; on the other side the bank was low, extending in vast meadows to the village and to the train station far away. They were strewn with the remains, half buried in the grass, of the château of the old counts of Combray, who during the Middle Ages had had the stream of the Vivonne as defense on this side against the attacks of the lords of Guermantes and the abbots of Martinville. These remains were now no more than a few fragments of towers embossing the grassland, barely apparent, a few battlements from which in the old days the crossbowman would hurl stones, from which the watchman would keep an eye on Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleau-l'Exempt, all of them vassal lands of Guermantes among which Combray was enclosed, today level with the grass, gazed down upon by the children of the friars' school, who came here to learn their lessons or play at recreation time—a past that had almost descended into the earth, lying by the edge of the water like some hiker enjoying the cool air, but giving me a great deal to think about, making me add to the little town of today, under the name of Combray, a very different town, captivating my thoughts with its incomprehensible face of long ago, which it half concealed under the buttercups. There were a great many of them in this spot, which they had chosen for their games on the grass, solitary, in couples, in groups, yellow as the yellow of an egg, shining all the more, it seemed to me, because, since I could not channel the pleasure which the sight of them gave me into any impulse to taste them, I would let it accumulate in their golden surface, until it became potent enough to produce some useless beauty; and I did this starting from my earliest childhood, when I would stretch my arms out toward them from the towpath though I could not yet correctly spell their pretty name,[51] the name of some prince from a French fairy tale, whereas perhaps they had come from Asia many centuries ago, but were now naturalized for good in the village, content with the modest horizon, liking the sun and the water's edge, faithful to the little view of the station, but still retaining, like some of our old paintings in their folksy simplicity, a poetic luster of the Orient.

I liked to look at the carafes which the boys put in the Vivonne to catch little fish, and which were filled by the river that in turn enclosed them, so that they became at once a "container" with transparent sides like hardened water and a "content" immersed in a larger container of coursing liquid crystal, and evoked the image of coolness more deliciously and vexingly than they would have done on a table laid for dinner, by showing it only in that perpetual alliterative flight between the water without consistency in which my hands could not capture it and the glass without fluidity in which my palate could not enjoy it. I promised myself I would return there later with some fishing lines; I persuaded them to take out a bit of bread from the provisions for our snack; I threw it into the Vivonne in pellets that seemed sufficient to provoke a phenomenon of supersaturation, for the water immediately solidified around them in ovoid clusters of starving tadpoles which until then it had no doubt been holding in solution, invisible, on the point of beginning to crystallize.

Soon the course of the Vivonne is obstructed by water plants. First they appear singly, like this water lily, for instance, which was allowed so little rest by the current in the midst of which it was unfortunately placed that, like a mechanically activated ferry boat, it would approach one bank only to return to the one from which it had come, eternally crossing back and forth again. Pushed toward the bank, its peduncle would unfold, lengthen, flow out, reach the extreme limit of its tension at the edge where the current would pick it up again, then the green cord would fold up on itself and bring the poor plant back to what may all the more properly be called its point of departure because it did not stay there a second without starting off from it again in a repetition of the same maneuver. I would find it again, walk after walk, always in the same situation, reminding me of certain neurasthenics among whose number my grandfather would count my aunt Léonie, who present year after year the unchanging spectacle of the bizarre habits they believe, each time, they are about to shake off and which they retain forever; caught in the machinery of their maladies and their manias, the efforts with which they struggle uselessly to abandon them only guarantee the functioning and activate the triggers of their strange, unavoidable, and morose regimes. This water lily was the same, and it was also like one of those miserable creatures whose singular torment, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have asked the tormented creature himself to recount its cause and its particularities at greater length had Virgil, striding on ahead, not forced him to hurry after immediately, as my parents did me.

But farther on the current slows down, it crosses an estate to which access was opened to the public by the man who owned it, who had delighted in creating works of aquatic horticulture, turning the little pools formed by the Vivonne into true flowering gardens of white water lilies. Because the banks were heavily wooded here, the trees' great shadows gave the water a depth that was usually dark green although sometimes, when we came home on an evening that was calm again after a stormy afternoon, I saw that it was a light, raw blue verging on violet, cloisonné in appearance and Japanese in style. Here and there on the surface,

the flower of a water lily blushed like a strawberry, with a scarlet heart, white on its edges. Farther off, the more numerous flowers were paler, less smooth, coarser-grained, creased, and grouped by chance in coils so graceful that one thought one saw, floating adrift as after the melancholy dismantling of some gay party, loosened garlands of moss roses. In another place one corner seemed reserved for the various common species, of a tidy white or pink like dame's rocket, washed clean like porcelain with housewifely care, while a little farther off, others, pressed against one another in a true floating flower border, suggested garden pansies that had come like butterflies to rest their glossy blue-tinged wings on the transparent obliquity of that watery bed; of that celestial bed as well: for it gave the flowers a soil of a color more precious, more affecting than the color of the flowers themselves; and, whether it sparkled beneath the water lilies in the afternoon in a kaleidoscope of silent, watchful, and mobile contentment, or whether toward evening it filled, like some distant port, with the rose and reverie of the sunset, ceaselessly changing so as to remain in harmony, around the more fixed colors of the corollas themselves, with all that is most profound, most fleeting, most mysterious—all that is infinite—in the hour, it seemed to have caused them to flower in the middle of the sky itself.

As it left this park, the Vivonne flowed freely again. How often did I see, and want to imitate, as soon as I should be at liberty to live as I chose, a rower who, having let go of his oars, had lain flat on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, and allowing it to drift, seeing only the sky gliding slowly above him, bore on his face a foretaste of happiness and peace!

We would sit down among the irises at the edge of the water. One idle cloud would linger in the holiday sky. Now and then, oppressed by boredom, a carp would stand up from the water with an anxious gasp. It was time for our snack. Before starting off again we would stay there on the grass for a long time eating fruit, bread, and chocolate, and we would hear, coming all the way to us, horizontal, weakened, but still dense and metallic, the peals of the Saint Hilaire bell which had not melted into the air they had been traversing for so long and which, ribbed by the successive palpitation of all their waves of sound, vibrated as they brushed over the flowers, at our feet.

Sometimes, at the edge of the water and surrounded by woods, we would come upon what is called a "vacation house,"[52] isolated and secluded, seeing nothing of the world but the river that bathed its feet. A young woman whose pensive face and elegant veils did not belong to this region and who had probably come to "bury herself" here, as the expression has it, to taste the bitter sweetness of feeling that her name, and more importantly the name of the one whose heart she had not been able to hold fast, were unknown here, stood framed in a window that did not allow her to look farther than the boat moored near the door. She would absently lift her eyes as she heard, behind the trees along the riverbank, the voices of people passing of whom, even before she glimpsed their faces, she could be certain that they had never known the faithless one nor ever would know him, that nothing in their past bore his imprint, that nothing in their future would have occasion to receive it. One sensed that, in her renunciation, she had deliberately withdrawn from places where she might at least have glimpsed the man she loved, in favor of these places which had never seen him. And I watched her, as she came back from some walk on a path along which she knew he would not pass, drawing from her resigned hands long gloves of a useless grace.

Never in our walk along the Guermantes way could we go as far as the sources of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought and which had in my mind an existence so abstract, so ideal, that I had been as surprised when I was told they could be found within the *département* , at a certain distance in miles from Combray, as I was the day I learned there was another precise spot on the earth where the opening lay, in ancient times, of the entrance to the Underworld. Never, either, could we go all the way to the end point that I would so much have liked to reach, all the way to Guermantes. I knew this was where the castellans, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, lived, I knew they were real and presently existing figures, but when I thought about them, I pictured them to myself sometimes made of tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in our church's *Coronation of Esther*, sometimes in changing colors, like Gilbert the Bad in the stained-glass window where he turned from cabbage green to plum blue, depending on whether I was still in front of the holy water or was reaching our seats, sometimes completely impalpable like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestor of the Guermantes family, which our magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or up to the ceiling—but always wrapped in the mystery of Merovingian times and bathing as though in a sunset in the orange light emanating from that syllable *antes*. But if despite this they were, as duke and duchess, real human beings for me, even if strange ones, on the other hand their ducal person was inordinately distended, became immaterial, in order to contain within itself this Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all this sunlit "Guermantes way," the course of the Vivonne, its water lilies and its tall trees, and so many lovely afternoons. And I knew that they did not merely bear the title of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century when, after uselessly trying to defeat its former lords, they had formed an alliance with them through marriages, they were also Comtes de Combray, and thus the foremost citizens of Combray, and yet the only ones who did not live there. Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray in the midst of their name, of their person, and no doubt actually having within them that strange and pious sadness that was special to Combray; proprietors in the town, but not of a private house, probably dwelling outdoors, in the street, between sky and earth, like Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the windows of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the reverse side, of black lake, if I raised my head as I went to get salt at Camus's.

And along the Guermantes way I would sometimes pass damp little enclosures over which climbed clusters of dark flowers. I would stop, thinking I was about to acquire some precious idea, because it seemed to me that there before my eyes I possessed a fragment of that fluvial region I had so much wanted to know ever since I had seen it described by one of my favorite writers. And it was with this, with its imaginary ground traversed by currents of seething water, that Guermantes, changing its appearance in my mind, was identified when I heard Dr. Percepied talk to us about the flowers and beautiful spring waters that could be seen in the park of their country house. I dreamed that Mme. de Guermantes had summoned me there, smitten with a sudden fancy for me; all day long she would fish for trout with me. And in the evening, holding me by the hand as we walked past the little gardens of her vassals, she would show me the flowers that leaned their violet and red stems along the low walls, and would teach me their names. She would make me tell her the subjects of the poems that I intended to compose. And these dreams warned me that since I wanted to be a writer someday, it was time to find out what I meant to write. But as soon as I asked myself this, trying to find a subject in which I could anchor some infinite philosophical meaning, my mind would stop functioning, I could no longer see anything but empty space before my attentive eyes, I felt that I had no talent or perhaps a disease of the brain kept it from being born. Sometimes I counted on my father to make it all come out right. He was so powerful, in such favor with people in office, that he had succeeded in having us transgress the laws that Françoise had taught me to consider more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, to procure for our house alone, in the whole neighborhood, a year's postponement of the work of "replastering," to obtain permission from the minister for Mme. Sazerat's son, who wanted to go take the waters, to pass his *baccalauréat* two months ahead of time, in the series of candidates whose names began with *A,* instead of waiting for the turn of the *S*s. If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by bandits, convinced that my father was in too close communication with the supreme powers, had letters of recommendation to the Good Lord too irresistible for my illness or captivity to be anything but empty simulacra that posed no danger to me, I would have waited calmly for the inevitable hour of my return to the correct reality, the hour of my rescue or recovery; perhaps my lack of talent, the black hole that opened in my mind when I looked for the subject of my future writings, was also merely an illusion without substance, and this illusion would cease through the intervention of my father, who must have agreed with the government and Providence that I would be the foremost writer of the day. But at other times, as my parents grew impatient at the sight of me lingering behind and not following them, my present life, instead of seeming to me an artificial creation of my father's that he could modify as he liked, appeared to me on the contrary to be included in a reality that had not been made for me, against which there was no recourse, within which I had no ally, which concealed nothing beyond itself. At those times it seemed to me that I existed the same way other men did, that I would grow old, that I would die like them, and that among them I was simply one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, discouraged, I would give up literature forever, despite the encouragement I had been given by Bloch. This intimate, immediate awareness I had of the worthlessness of my ideas prevailed against all the praise that might be heaped on me, as do, in a wicked man whose good deeds are universally commended, the qualms of his conscience.

One day my mother said to me: "You're always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, because Dr. Percepied took such good care of her four years ago she's coming to Combray to attend his daughter's wedding. You'll be able to see her at the ceremony." It was from Dr. Percepied, in fact, that I had heard the most talk about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shown us an issue of an illustrated magazine in which she was depicted in the costume she wore to a fancy-dress ball at the home of the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly during the wedding service, a movement made by the verger as he shifted his position allowed me to see, sitting in a chapel, a blond lady with a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a full tie of smooth, shiny, new mauve silk, and a little pimple at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which

was red, as though she were very warm, I could distinguish bits of resemblance, diluted and barely perceptible, to the picture I had been shown, especially because the particular features that I observed in her, if I tried to enunciate them, were formulated in exactly the same words—a large nose, blue eyes—which Dr. Percepied had used when he described the Duchesse de Guermantes in my presence, I said to myself: "That lady looks like Mme. de Guermantes"; now the chapel where she was attending Mass was that of Gilbert the Bad, under the flat tombstones of which, golden and distended like cells of honey, rested the former counts of Brabant, and which, I recalled, was reserved, according to what I had been told, for the Guermantes family when any one of its members came to Combray for a ceremony; there probably could not be more than one woman who resembled Mme. de Guermantes's picture, who on that day, the very day when she was in fact supposed to come, was in that chapel: it was she! I was very disappointed. My disappointment came from the fact that I had never noticed, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colors of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in another century, of a material different from that of other living people. I had never realized that she might have a red face, a mauve tie like Mme. Sazerat, and the oval of her cheeks reminded me so much of people I had seen at our house that the suspicion touched me, dissipating immediately, however, that this lady, in her generative principle, in all her molecules, was perhaps not essentially the Duchesse de Guermantes, that instead, her body, unaware of the name applied to it, belonged to a certain female type that also included the wives of doctors and shopkeepers. "So that's Mme. de Guermantes—that's what she is, that's all she is!" said the attentive and astonished expression with which I contemplated an image of course quite unrelated to those which under the same name of Mme. de Guermantes had appeared so many times in my daydreams, since this one, this particular one, had not like the others been arbitrarily created by me, but had leaped to my eyes for the first time just a moment before, in the church; an image which was not of the same kind, was not colorable at will like those which had so readily absorbed the orange tint of a syllable, but was so real that everything, even the little pimple flaring up at the corner of her nose, attested to its subjection to the laws of life, just as, in a transformation scene in a theater, a fold of the fairy's dress, a trembling of her little finger, betray the physical presence of a living actress, whereas we had not been sure if we were not looking at a simple projection of light.

But at the same time, I was trying to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned into my vision (perhaps because it was they that had first reached it, that had made the first notch in it, at a moment when I had not yet had time to imagine that the woman who appeared before me could be Mme. de Guermantes), to this entirely recent, unchangeable image, the idea: "It's Mme. de Guermantes," without managing to do more than maneuver it in front of the image, like two disks separated by a gap. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she actually existed outside of me, acquired from this an even greater power over my imagination, which, paralyzed for a moment by this contact with a reality so different from what it had expected, began to react and say to me: "Glorious since before Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes is a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people here."

And—oh, the marvelous independence of the human gaze, tied to the face by a cord so lax, so long, so extensible that it can travel out alone far away from it—while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead, her gaze strolled here and there, climbed up the pillars, paused even on me like a ray of sunlight wandering through the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment I received its caress, seemed to me conscious. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained motionless, sitting there like a mother who does not appear to see the bold pranks and indiscreet enterprises of her children, who play and call out to people she does not know, it was impossible for me to tell if she approved or disapproved, in the idleness of her soul, of the vagabondage of her gaze.

I felt it was important that she not leave before I had looked at her enough, because I remembered that for years now I had considered the sight of her eminently desirable, and I did not detach my eyes from her, as if each gaze could physically carry away, and put in reserve inside me, the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, all the particular details that seemed to me so many precious, authentic, and singular pieces of information about her face. Now that I was impelled to consider it beautiful by all the thoughts I had brought to bear on it—and perhaps most of all by what is a kind of instinct to preserve the best parts of ourselves, by the desire we always have not to be disappointed—placing her once again (since she and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had evoked until then were one and the same) above the rest of humanity among whom the pure and simple sight of her body had for a moment made me confound her, I was irritated to hear people around me say: "She's better looking than Mme. Sazerat, she's better looking than Mlle. Vinteuil," as if she were comparable to them. And as my gaze stopped at her blond hair, her blue eyes, the fastening of her collar, and omitted the features that might have reminded me of other faces, I exclaimed in front of this sketch, deliberately incomplete: "How beautiful she is! How noble! What I see before me is indeed a proud Guermantes and a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant!" And the attention with which I illuminated her face isolated her to such an extent that today, if I think back to that ceremony, it is impossible for me to see a single one of the people who were present except for her and the verger who responded affirmatively when I asked him if that lady was really Mme. de Guermantes. But I can still see her, especially at the moment when the procession entered the sacristy, which was lit by the hot and intermittent sun of a day of wind and storm, and in which Mme. de Guermantes found herself surrounded by all those people of Combray whose names she did not even know, but whose inferiority too loudly proclaimed her supremacy for her not to feel a sincere benevolence toward them, and whom, besides, she hoped to impress even more by her good grace and simplicity. Thus, not being able to bestow those deliberate gazes charged with specific meaning which we address to someone we know, but only to allow her distracted thoughts to break free incessantly before her in a wave of blue light which she could not contain, she did not want that wave to disturb or appear to disdain those common people whom it encountered in passing, whom it touched again and again. I can still see, above her silky, swelling mauve tie, the gentle surprise in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to intend it for anyone but so that all might take their share of it, the slightly shy smile of a sovereign who looks as though she is apologizing to her vassals and loves them. That smile fell on me, who had not taken my eyes off her. Recalling, then, the gaze she had rested on me during the Mass, as blue as a ray of sunlight passing through Gilbert the Bad's window, I said to myself: "Why, she's actually paying attention to me." I believed that she liked me, that she would still be thinking of me after she had left the church, that because of me perhaps she would be sad that evening at Guermantes. And immediately I loved her, because if it may sometimes be enough for us to fall in love with a woman if she looks at us with contempt, as I had thought Mlle. Swann had done, and if we think she will never belong to us, sometimes, too, it may be enough if she looks at us with kindness, as Mme. de Guermantes was doing, and if we think she may someday belong to us. Her eyes turned as blue as a periwinkle which was impossible to pick, yet which she had dedicated to me; and the sun, threatened by a cloud but still beating down with all its strength on the square and in the sacristy, gave a geranium flesh tint to the red carpets that had been laid on the ground for the solemnities and over which Mme. de Guermantes advanced smiling, and added to their woolly weave a rosy velvet, an epidermis of light, the sort of tenderness, the sort of grave sweetness amid pomp and joy that characterize certain pages of *Lohengrin*,[53] certain paintings by Carpaccio,[54] and that explain why Baudelaire[55] was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet *delicious*.

How much more distressing still, after that day, during my walks along the Guermantes way, did it seem to me than it had seemed before to have no aptitude for literature, and to have to give up all hope of ever being a famous writer! The sorrow I felt over this, as I daydreamed alone, a little apart from the others, made me suffer so much that in order not to feel it anymore, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the face of pain, would stop thinking altogether about poems, novels, a poetic future on which my lack of talent forbade me to depend. Then, quite apart from all these literary preoccupations and not connected to them in any way, suddenly a roof, a glimmer of sun on a stone, the smell of the road would stop me because of a particular pleasure they gave me, and also because they seemed to be concealing, beyond what I could see, something which they were inviting me to come take and which despite my efforts I could not manage to discover. Since I felt that it could be found within them, I would stay there, motionless, looking, breathing, trying to go with my thoughts beyond the image or the smell. And if I had to catch up with my grandfather, continue on my way, I would try to find them again by closing my eyes; I would concentrate on recalling precisely the line of the roof, the shade of the stone which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me so full, so ready to open, to yield me the thing for which they themselves were merely a cover. Of course it was not impressions of this kind that could give me back the hope I had lost, of succeeding in becoming a writer and a poet someday, because they were always tied to a particular object with no intellectual value and no reference to any abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity, and so distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt each time I looked for a philosophical subject for a great literary work. But so arduous was the task imposed on my consciousness by the impressions I received from form, fragrance or color—to try to perceive what was concealed behind them—that I would soon look for excuses that would allow me to save myself from this effort and spare myself this fatigue. Fortunately, my parents would call me, I would feel I did not have the tranquillity I needed

at the moment for pursuing my search in a useful way, and that it would be better not to think about it anymore until I was back at home, and not to fatigue myself beforehand to no purpose. And so I would stop concerning myself with this unknown thing that was enveloped in a form or a fragrance, feeling quite easy in my mind since I was bringing it back to the house protected by the covering of images under which I would find it alive, like the fish that, on days when I had been allowed to go fishing, I would carry home in my creel covered by a layer of grass that kept them fresh. Once I was back at the house I would think about other things, and so there would accumulate in my mind (as in my room the flowers I had gathered on my walks or objects I had been given) a stone on which a glimmer of light played, a roof, the sound of a bell, a smell of leaves, many different images beneath which the reality I sensed but did not have enough determination to discover had died long before. Once, however—when our walk had extended far beyond its usual duration and we were very happy to encounter halfway home, as the afternoon was ending, Dr. Percepied, who, going past at full speed in his carriage, recognized us and invited us to climb in with him—I had an impression of this kind and did not abandon it without studying it a little. They had had me climb up next to the coachman, we were going like the wind because, before returning to Combray, the doctor still had to stop at Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient at whose door it had been agreed that we would wait for him. At the bend of a road I suddenly experienced that special pleasure which was unlike any other, when I saw the two steeples of Martinville, shining in the setting sun and appearing to change position with the motion of our carriage and the windings of the road, and then the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which, though separated from them by a hill and a valley and situated on a higher plateau in the distance, seemed to be right next to them.

As I observed, as I noted the shape of their spires, the shifting of their lines, the sunlight on their surfaces, I felt that I was not reaching the full depth of my impression, that something was behind that motion, that brightness, something which they seemed at once to contain and conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we seemed to approach them so slowly, that I was surprised when we stopped a few moments later in front of the Martinville church. I did not know why I had taken such pleasure in the sight of them on the horizon and the obligation to try to discover the reason seemed to me quite painful; I wanted to hold in reserve in my head those lines moving in the sun, and not think about them anymore now. And it is quite likely that had I done so, the two steeples would have gone forever to join the many trees, rooftops, fragrances, sounds, that I had distinguished from others because of the obscure pleasure they gave me which I never thoroughly studied. I got down to talk to my parents while we waited for the doctor. Then we set off again, I was back in my place on the seat, I turned my head to see the steeples again, a little later glimpsing them one last time at a bend in the road. Since the coachman, who did not seem inclined to talk, had hardly answered anything I said, I was obliged, for lack of other company, to fall back on my own and try to recall my steeples. Soon their lines and their sunlit surfaces split apart, as if they were a sort of bark, a little of what was hidden from me inside them appeared to me, I had a thought which had not existed a moment before, which took shape in words in my head, and the pleasure I had just recently experienced at the sight of them was so increased by this that, seized by a sort of drunkenness, I could no longer think of anything else. At that moment, as we were already far away from Martinville, turning my head I caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had already set. At moments the bends of the road would hide them from me, then they showed themselves one last time, and finally I did not see them again.

Without saying to myself that what was hidden behind the steeples of Martinville had to be something analogous to a pretty sentence, since it had appeared to me in the form of words that gave me pleasure, I asked the doctor for a pencil and some paper and I composed, despite the jolts of the carriage, and in order to ease my conscience and yield to my enthusiasm, the following little piece that I have since found again and that I have not had to submit to more than a few changes:

"Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and appearing lost in the open country, the two steeples of Martinville ascended toward the sky. Soon we saw three: wheeling around boldly to position itself opposite them, the laggard steeple of Vieuxvicq had come along to join them. The minutes were passing, we were going fast, and yet the three steeples were still far away ahead of us, like three birds poised on the plain, motionless, distinguishable in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq moved away, receded into the distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, illuminated by the light of the setting sun, which even at that distance I saw playing and smiling on their sloping sides. We had taken so long approaching them that I was thinking about the time we would still need in order to reach them, when suddenly the carriage turned and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so roughly in front of it that we had only just time to stop in order not to run into the porch. We continued on our way; we had already left Martinville a little while before, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch us flee, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq still waved good-bye with their sunlit tops. At times one of them would draw aside so that the other two could glimpse us again for an instant; but the road changed direction, they swung around in the light like three golden pivots and disappeared from my gaze. But a little later, when we were already close to Combray, and the sun had set, I caught sight of them one last time from very far away, seeming now no more than three flowers painted on the sky above the low line of the fields. They reminded me, too, of the three young girls in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place where darkness was already falling; and while we moved off at a gallop, I saw them timidly seek their way and, after some awkward stumbling of their noble silhouettes, press against one another, slip behind one another, now forming, against the still pink sky, no more than a single black shape, charming and resigned, and fade away into the night." I never thought of this page again, but at that moment, when in the corner of the seat where the doctor's coachman usually placed in a basket the poultry he had bought at the market in Martinville, I had finished writing it, I was so happy, I felt it had so perfectly relieved me of those steeples and what they had been hiding behind them, that, as if I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during those walks, I had been able to dream about what a pleasure it would be to be a friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, to fish for trout, to go out in a boat on the Vivonne, and, greedy for happiness, ask no more from life in those moments than for it always to be made up of a succession of happy afternoons. But when on the way back I saw on the left a farm which was fairly distant from two others very close to each other, and from which, in order to enter Combray, one had only to go down an avenue of oaks bordered on one side by meadows, each of which was part of a little enclosure and was planted at equal intervals with apple trees that wore, when they were lit by the setting sun, the Japanese design of their shadows, my heart would abruptly begin to beat faster, I would know that within half an hour we would be home and that, as was the rule on the days when we had gone the Guermantes way and dinner was served later, they would send me to bed as soon as I had had my soup, so that my mother, kept at the table as though there were company for dinner, would not come up to say goodnight to me in my bed. The region of sadness I had just entered was as distinct from the region into which I had hurled myself with such joy only a moment before, as in certain skies a band of pink is separated as though by a line from a band of green or black. One sees a bird fly into the pink, it is about to reach the end of it, it is nearly touching the black, then it has entered it. The desires that had surrounded me a short time ago, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to be happy, were so far behind me now that their fulfillment would not have brought me any pleasure. How I would have given all that up in order to be able to cry all night in Mama's arms! I was trembling, I did not take my anguished eyes off my mother's face, which would not be appearing that evening in the room where I could already see myself in my thoughts, I wanted to die. And that state of mind would continue until the following day, when the morning rays, like the gardener, would lean their bars against the wall clothed in nasturtiums that climbed up to my window, and I would jump out of bed to hurry down into the garden, without remembering, now, that evening would ever bring back with it the hour for leaving my mother. And so it was from the Guermantes way that I learned to distinguish those states of mind that follow one another in me, during certain periods, and that even go so far as to share out each day among them, one returning to drive out the other, with the punctuality of a fever; contiguous, but so exterior to one another, so lacking in means of communication among them, that I can no longer comprehend, no longer even picture to myself in one, what I desired, or dreaded, or accomplished in the other.

And so the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way remain for me linked to many of the little events of that life which, of all the various lives we lead concurrently, is the most abundant in vicissitudes, the richest in episodes, I mean our intellectual life. No doubt it progresses within us imperceptibly, and the truths that have changed its meaning and its appearance for us, that have opened new paths to us, we had been preparing to discover for a long time; but we did so without knowing it; and for us they date only from the day, from the minute in which they became visible. The flowers that played on the grass then, the water that flowed past in the sunlight, the whole landscape that surrounded their appearance continues to accompany the memory of them with its unconscious or abstracted face; and certainly when they were slowly studied by that humble passerby, that child dreaming—as a king is studied by a memorialist lost in the crowd—that corner of nature, that bit of garden could not have believed it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the fragrance of hawthorn that forages along the hedge where the sweetbriers will soon replace it, a sound of echoless steps on the gravel of a path, a bubble formed against a water plant by the current of the stream and bursting immediately—my exaltation has borne them along with it and managed to

carry them across so many years in succession, while the paths round about have disappeared and those who walked on them have died, and the memory of those who walked on them. At times the piece of landscape thus transported into the present detaches itself in such isolation from everything else that it floats uncertain in my mind like a flowery Delos,[56] while I cannot say from which country, which time—perhaps quite simply which dream—it comes. But it is most especially as deep layers of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I must think of the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along them, that the things and people they revealed to me are the only ones that I still take seriously today and that still bring me joy. Whether it is that the faith which creates has dried up in me, or that reality takes shape in memory alone, the flowers I am shown today for the first time do not seem to me to be real flowers. The Méséglise way with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple trees, the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water lilies and buttercups, formed for me for all time the contours of the countrysides where I would like to live, where I demand above all else that I may go fishing, drift about in a boat, see ruins of Gothic fortifications, and find among the wheat fields a church, like Saint-André-des-Champs, monumental, rustic, and golden as a haystack; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple trees that I still happen, when traveling, to come upon in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past, communicate immediately with my heart. And yet, because places have something individual about them, when I am seized by the desire to see the Guermantes way again, you would not satisfy it by taking me to the bank of a river where the water lilies were just as beautiful, more beautiful than in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening—at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which later emigrates into love, and may become forever inseparable from it—I would have wished that the mother who came to say goodnight to me would be one more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No; just as what I needed so that I could go to sleep happy, with that untroubled peace which no mistress has been able to give me since that time because one doubts them even at the moment one believes in them, and can never possess their hearts as I received in a kiss my mother's heart, complete, without the reservation of an afterthought, without the residue of an intention that was not for me—was that it should be her, that she should incline over me that face marked below the eye by something which was, it seems, a blemish, and which I loved as much as the rest, so what I want to see again is the Guermantes way that I knew, with the farm that is not very far from the two that come after pressed so close together, at the entrance to the avenue of oaks; those meadows on which, when the sun turns them reflective as a pond, the leaves of the apple trees are sketched, that landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night in my dreams, clasps me with an almost uncanny power and which I can no longer recover when I wake up. No doubt, by virtue of having forever indissolubly united in me different impressions merely because they had made me experience them at the same time, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way exposed me, for the future, to many disappointments and even to many mistakes. For often I have wanted to see a person again without discerning that it was simply because she reminded me of a hedge of hawthorns, and I have been led to believe, to make someone else believe, in a revival of affection, by what was simply a desire to travel. But because of that very fact, too, and by persisting in those of my impressions of today to which they may be connected, they give them foundations, depth, a dimension lacking from the others. They add to them, too, a charm, a meaning that is for me alone. When on summer evenings the melodious sky growls like a wild animal and everyone grumbles at the storm, it is because of the Méséglise way that I am the only one in ecstasy inhaling, through the noise of the falling rain, the smell of invisible, enduring lilacs.

Thus I would often lie until morning thinking back to the time at Combray, to my sad sleepless evenings, to the many days, too, whose image had been restored to me more recently by the taste—what they would have called at Combray the "fragrance"—of a cup of tea, and, by an association of memories, to what, many years after leaving that little town, I had learned, about a love affair Swann had had before I was born, with that precision of detail which is sometimes easier to obtain for the lives of people who died centuries ago than for the lives of our best friends, and which seems as impossible as it once seemed impossible to speak from one town to another—as long as we do not know about the expedient by which that impossibility was circumvented. All these memories added to one another now formed a single mass, but one could still distinguish between them—between the oldest, and those that were more recent, born of a fragrance, and then those that were only memories belonging to another person from whom I had learned them—if not fissures, if not true faults, at least that veining, that variegation of coloring, which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, reveal differences in origin, in age, in "formation."

Of course by the time morning approached, the brief uncertainty of my waking would long since have dissipated. I knew which room I was actually in, I had reconstructed it around me in the darkness and—either by orienting myself with memory alone, or by making use, as a clue, of a faint glimmer that I perceived, under which I placed the casement curtains—I had reconstructed it entirely and furnished it like an architect and a decorator who retain the original openings of the windows and doors, I had put back the mirrors and restored the chest of drawers to its usual place. But scarcely had the daylight—and no longer the reflection of a last ember on the brass curtain rod which I had mistaken for it—traced on the darkness, as though in chalk, its first white, correcting ray, than the window along with its curtains would leave the doorframe in which I had mistakenly placed it, while, to make room for it, the desk which my memory had clumsily moved there would fly off at top speed, pushing the fireplace before it and thrusting aside the wall of the passageway; a small courtyard would extend in the spot where only a moment before the dressing room had been, and the dwelling I had rebuilt in the darkness would have gone off to join the dwellings glimpsed in the maelstrom of my awakening, put to flight by the pale sign traced above the curtains by the raised finger of the dawn.

PART III

Place-Names: The Name

AMONG THE BEDROOMS whose images I summoned up most often in my nights of insomnia, none resembled less the rooms at Combray, dusted with an atmosphere that was grainy, pollinated, edible, and devout, than the room at the Grand-Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec, whose enamel-painted walls contained, like the polished sides of a swimming pool which tints the water blue, a pure azure salt sea air. The Bavarian decorator commissioned to furnish the hotel had varied the design schemes of the rooms and on three sides, along the walls, in the one I was occupying, had placed low bookcases, with glass panes, in which, depending on the spot they occupied, and by an effect he had not foreseen, one part or another of the changing picture of the sea was reflected, unfurling a frieze of bright seascapes, which was interrupted only by the solid pieces of mahogany. So much so that the whole room had the look of one of those model dormitories presented in "*modern style*"[1] furniture shows, where they are hung with works of art assumed to be likely to delight the eyes of the person who will be sleeping there, and representing subjects in keeping with the type of site where the room will be found.

But nothing resembled less this real Balbec, either, than the one I had often dreamed of, on stormy days, when the wind was so strong that Françoise as she took me to the Champs-Élysées warned me not to walk too close to the walls or the tiles might fall on my head and moaned to me about the great disasters and shipwrecks reported in the newspapers. I had no greater desire than to see a storm at sea, not so much because it would be a beautiful spectacle as because it would be a moment of nature's real life unveiled; or rather for me there were no beautiful spectacles except the ones which I knew were not artificially contrived for my pleasure, but were necessary, unchangeable—the beauties of landscapes or of great art. I was curious, I was avid to know only those things which I believed to be more real than myself, which had for me the value of showing me a little of the mind of a great genius, or of the force or grace of nature as it is manifested when left to itself, without the interference of men. Just as the lovely sound of her voice, reproduced in isolation by the phonograph, would not console us for having lost our mother, so too a storm mechanically imitated would have left me as indifferent as the illuminated fountains at the Exposition.[2] And so that the storm would be absolutely real, I also wanted the shore itself to be a natural shore, not a pier recently built by some municipality. In fact, because of all the feelings it awakened in me, nature seemed to me the thing most opposite to the mechanical productions of men. The less it bore their imprint the more room it offered in which my heart could expand. Now, I had remembered the name Balbec, which had been mentioned to us by Legrandin, as that of a seaside resort very close to "those funereal cliffs, famous for their many wrecks, wrapped six months of the year in a shroud of fog and the foam of the waves."

"In that place you can still feel beneath your feet," he said, "far more so than at Finistère itself[3] (and even though hotels are being superimposed upon it now without, however, the power to change the more ancient skeleton of the land), you can still feel the true end of the land of France, of Europe, of the Ancient World. And it's the last encampment of fishermen, precisely like all the fishermen who have ever lived since the beginning of the world, facing the eternal realm of the mists of the sea and the shadows of the night." One day when, at Combray, I had mentioned this seaside resort of Balbec in the presence of M. Swann in order to find out from him if it was the choicest spot for seeing the most powerful storms, he had answered me: "Yes indeed I certainly know Balbec! The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, still half Romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example of our Norman Gothic, and so singular! It's almost Persian in style." And that region, which until then had seemed to me similar in nature to the immemorial, still contemporaneous great phenomena of geology—and just as completely outside human history as the Ocean itself or the Great Bear,[4] with those wild fishermen for whom no more than for the whales had there been any Middle Ages—it had been a great delight for me to see it suddenly take its place in the sequence of the centuries, now that it had experienced the Romanesque period, and to know that the Gothic trefoil had come at the proper time to pattern those wild rocks too, like the frail but hardy plants which, when spring comes, spangle here and there the polar snow. And if the Gothic brought to those places and to those men a definition which they lacked, they too conferred one upon it in return. I tried to picture how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected attempt at social relations which they had made there, during the Middle Ages, clustered on a point along the shores of hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and the Gothic seemed to me more alive now that, having separated it from the towns in which until then I had always imagined it, I could see how, in one particular case, on those wild rocks, it had germinated and flowered into a delicate steeple. I was taken to see reproductions of the most famous of the statues at Balbec—the fleecy snub-nosed apostles, the Virgin in the porch—and my breathing stopped in my chest for joy when I thought that I could see them modeled in relief against the eternal briny mist. Then, on the sweet stormy evenings of February, the wind—blowing into my heart, which trembled under its gusts no less powerfully than my bedroom chimney, the plan of a trip to Balbec—mingled in me a desire for Gothic architecture with my desire for a tempest at sea.

I would have liked to leave the very next day on the handsome, generous 1:22 train whose hour of departure I could never read without a palpitating heart, in the railway company's advertisements or in announcements for circular tours: it seemed to me to incise at a precise point in the afternoon a delectable notch, a mysterious mark from which the diverted hours, though they still led to the evening, to the next morning, led to an evening and morning which one would see, not in Paris, but in one of those towns through which the train passes and among which it permitted us to choose; for it stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperlé, and moved on magnificently overloaded with proffered names so that, among them all, I did not know which one I would have preferred, so impossible was it to sacrifice any of them. But without even waiting for it, I could have, by dressing quickly, left that very evening, if my parents had allowed me, and arrived at Balbec when the morning twilight was rising over the furious sea, from whose volleys of foam I would take refuge in the Persian-style church. But at the approach of the Easter holidays, when my parents promised to let me spend them for once in the north of Italy, now, in place of those dreams of tempests by which I had been so entirely occupied, wanting to see only waves running in from all sides, higher and higher, on the wildest coast, near churches as steep and rugged as cliffs, from whose towers the seabirds would shriek, now suddenly erasing them, taking away all their charm, excluding them because they were its opposite and could only have weakened it, the converse dream now occupied me, of the most dappled spring, not the spring of Combray which still pricked us tartly with all the needles of the frost, but the spring which was already covering the fields of Fiesole with lilies and anemones and dazzling Florence with golden grounds like those of Fra Angelico. From then on, only sunlight, perfumes, colors seemed to me of any value; for this alternation of images had brought about a change of direction in my desire, and—as abrupt as those that occur now and then in music—a complete change of tone in my sensibility. Thus it came about that a simple variation in the atmosphere was enough to provoke this modulation in me without any need to wait for the return of a season. For often, in one season, we find a day that has strayed from another and that immediately evokes its particular pleasures, lets us experience them, makes us desire them, and interrupts the dreams we were having by placing, earlier or later than was its turn, this leaf detached from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness. But soon, like those natural phenomena from which our comfort or health can derive only an accidental and rather slender benefit until the day when science seizes hold of them, and producing them at will, puts into our hands the possibility of their appearance, withdrawn from the guardianship and exempted from the consent of chance, in the same way the production of those dreams of the Atlantic and of Italy ceased to be subjected solely to the changes of the seasons and of the weather. I needed only, to make them reappear, to pronounce those names—Balbec, Venice, Florence—in the interior of which had finally accumulated the desire inspired in me by the places they designated. Even in spring, finding the

name of Balbec in a book was enough to awaken in me the desire for storms and Norman Gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or Venice gave me a desire for the sun, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges, and for Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers.[5]

But if these names absorbed forever the image I had of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subjecting its reappearance in me to their own laws; in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but also more different from what the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could be in reality, and, by increasing the arbitrary joys of my imagination, aggravated the future disappointment of my travels. They exalted the idea I was forming of certain places on the earth, by making them more particular, consequently more real. I did not at the time represent to myself cities, landscapes, monuments as more or less pleasant pictures, cut out here and there from the same material, but each of them as an unknown thing, different in essence from the others, a thing for which my soul thirsted and which it would profit from knowing. How much more individuality still did they assume from being designated by names, names that were theirs alone, proper names like the names people have. Words present us with little pictures of things, clear and familiar, like those that are hung on the walls of schools to give children an example of what a workbench is, a bird, an anthill, things conceived of as similar to all others of the same sort. But names present a confused image of people—and of towns, which they accustom us to believe are individual, unique like people—an image which derives from them, from the brightness or darkness of their tone, the color with which it is painted uniformly, like one of those posters, entirely blue or entirely red, in which, because of the limitations of the process used or by a whim of the designer, not only the sky and the sea are blue or red, but the boats, the church, the people in the streets. Because the name of Parma, one of the towns I had most wanted to visit ever since I had read *La Chartreuse,*[6] seemed to me compact, smooth, mauve, and soft, if anyone mentioned a certain house in Parma in which I would be staying, he gave me the pleasure of thinking I would be living in a house that was smooth, compact, mauve, and soft, that bore no relation to the houses of any real town in Italy, since I had composed it in my imagination with the help only of that heavy syllable, *Parme,* in which no air circulates, and of all that I had made it absorb of Stendhalian softness and the tint of violets. And when I thought of Florence, it was of a town miraculously fragrant and like the petals of a flower, because it was called the City of Lilies and its cathedral Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers. As for Balbec, it was one of those names in which, as on a piece of old Norman pottery that retains the color of the earth from which it was taken, one can still see depicted the representation of some outmoded custom, of some feudal right, of some locality in an earlier condition, of an abandoned habit of pronunciation which had formed its heteroclite syllables and which I did not doubt I would rediscover spoken there even by the innkeeper who would serve me coffee with milk on my arrival, taking me down to watch the furious sea in front of the church, and to whom I would ascribe the disputatious, solemn, and medieval aspect of a character from a fabliau.[7]

If my health improved and my parents allowed me, if not to go stay in Balbec, at least to take just once, in order to acquaint myself with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or Brittany, that one-twenty-two train which I had boarded so many times in my imagination, I would have wished by preference to stop in the most beautiful towns; but compare them as I might, how could I choose, any more than between individual people, who are not interchangeable, between Bayeux, so lofty in its noble red-tinged lace, its summit illuminated by the old gold of its last syllable; Vitré,[8] whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with black wood lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness goes from eggshell yellow to pearl gray; Coutances, a Norman cathedral, which its final, fat, yellowing diphthong crowns with a tower of butter; Lannion with the sound, in its village silence, of the coach followed by the fly;[9] Questambert, Pontorson, naive and ridiculous, white feathers and yellow beaks scattered along the road to those poetic river spots; Benodet, a name scarcely moored, which the river seems to want to carry away among its algae; Pont-Aven, a pink-and-white flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif reflected trembling in the greeny waters of a canal; Quimperlé, more firmly attached, ever since the Middle Ages, among the streams about which it babbles as they bead it with a pearly grisaille like that which is sketched, through the spiderwebs of a stained-glass window, by rays of sunlight which have turned into blunted points of burnished silver?

These images were false for another reason also; namely that they were necessarily quite simplified; doubtless whatever it was that my imagination aspired to and that my senses took in only incompletely and without any immediate pleasure, I had enclosed in the sanctuary of a name; doubtless because I had accumulated there a store of dreams, these names now magnetized my desires; but names themselves are not very spacious; the most I could do was include in them two or three of the towns' principal curiosities, which would be juxtaposed there with nothing to connect them; in the name Balbec, as in the magnifying glass of the penholders you buy at a seaside resort, I saw waves rising around a Persian-style church. Perhaps indeed the simplification of these images was one of the reasons for the hold that they had over me. When my father decided, one year, that we would go spend the Easter holidays in Florence and Venice, not having enough room to insert into the name Florence the elements that usually make up a town, I was forced to produce a supernatural city from the fecundation, by certain springtime fragrances, of what I believed to be, in its essence, the spirit of Giotto. At the very most—and because one cannot attach to a name much more time than space—like certain of Giotto's paintings themselves which show us the same figure at two different moments in the action, here lying in his bed, there getting ready to mount his horse, the name Florence was divided into two compartments. In one, under an architectural canopy, I was contemplating a fresco on part of which was superimposed a curtain of morning sunlight, dusty, oblique, and gradually spreading; in the other (for, since I did not think of names as an inaccessible ideal but as a real atmosphere in which I was going to immerse myself, the life not yet lived, the pure and intact life that I enclosed in them gave to the most material pleasures, to the simplest scenes, the attraction they have in the works of the primitives), I was walking quickly—the sooner to reach the lunch that was waiting for me with fruits and wine from Chianti—across a Ponte Vecchio crowded with jonquils, narcissus, and anemones. That (even though I was in Paris) was what I saw, and not what was actually around me. Even from a simple realistic point of view, the countries we long for occupy a far larger place in our actual life, at any given moment, than the country in which we happen to be. Doubtless, had I myself paid more attention at the time to what was in my mind when I pronounced the words "go to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice," I would have realized that what I saw was not a town at all, but something as different from anything I knew, something as delightful, as might be, for a human race whose whole life had been spent in the late afternoons of winter, that unknown marvel: a spring morning. These images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling my nights and my days, differentiated this period of my life from those that had gone before it (and might have been confused with it in the eyes of an observer who sees things only from outside, that is to say who sees nothing), as in an opera a melodic motif introduces something new that one could not have suspected if one had only read the libretto, still less if one had remained outside the theater only counting the quarter hours as they passed. And besides, even from this point of view, of mere quantity, in our lives the days are not all equal. As they travel through the days, temperaments that are slightly nervous, as mine was, have available to them, like automobiles, different "speeds." There are arduous mountainous days which one spends an infinite time climbing, and downward-sloping days which one can descend at full tilt singing. During that month—in which I replayed over and over like a melody, without ever becoming sated, those images of Florence, Venice, and Pisa for which the desire they excited in me retained something as profoundly individual as if it had been love, love of a person—I did not cease to believe that they corresponded to a reality independent of me, and they introduced me to a hope as beautiful as that which a Christian of the earliest era might have nourished on the eve of entering Paradise. Thus without my worrying about the contradiction of wanting to look at and touch with the organs of my senses what I had created in a daydream and not perceived with my senses—though all the more tempting to them in consequence, more different from anything they knew—it was whatever reminded me of the reality of these images that most inflamed my desire, because it was a sort of promise that my desire would be gratified. And although the motive for my exhilaration was a desire for artistic delights, the guidebooks sustained it even more than the books on aesthetics and, more than the guidebooks, the railway timetable. What moved me was the thought that if this Florence which I could see near but inaccessible in my imagination was separated from me, in myself, by a tract which I could not cross, I could reach it indirectly, by a detour, by taking the land route. Certainly when I repeated to myself, thus giving such a high value to what I was going to see, that Venice was "the school of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of medieval domestic architecture," [10] I felt happy. Yet I was even happier when, out on an errand and walking quickly because of the weather, which, after a few days of precocious spring, had turned back into winter (like the weather we usually found at Combray in Holy Week)—seeing on the boulevards that the chestnut trees, though plunged in an atmosphere as icy and as liquid as water, were nonetheless beginning, punctual guests, already in formal dress, and not allowing themselves to be discouraged, to chisel out of their frozen masses the round shapes of the irresistible greenery whose steady growth the abortive power of the cold might hinder but could not succeed in restraining—I thought that already the Ponte Vecchio was abundantly strewn with hyacinths and anemones and the spring sunshine was already dyeing the waves of the Grand Canal with so dark an azure and such noble emeralds that when they came to break at the feet of Titian's paintings, they might rival them in richness of color. I could no longer contain my joy when my father, even as he consulted the barometer and deplored the cold, began to seek out which would be the best trains, and when I realized

that by making one's way, after lunch, into the coal-blackened laboratory, the magic chamber charged with working the complete transmutation of everything around it, one could wake the next morning in the city of marble and gold "bossed with jasper and paved with emeralds."[11] So that it and the City of Lilies were not merely fictive pictures which one could set up at will before one's imagination, but existed at a certain distance from Paris that one absolutely had to cross if one wanted to see them, at a certain determined place on the earth, and at no other, in a word were quite real. They became even more so for me, when my father, by saying: "So you could stay in Venice from the twentieth of April until the twenty-ninth and arrive in Florence on Easter morning" made them both emerge no longer merely from abstract Space, but from that imaginary Time in which we situate, not one journey at a time but others simultaneously and without too much emotion since they are only possibilities—that Time which re-creates itself so effectively that we can spend it again in one town after we have spent it in another—and devoted to them some of those particular days which are the certificate of authenticity of the objects on which one employs them, for those unique days are consumed by use, they do not come back, one cannot live them here when one has lived them there; I felt that it was toward the week which began on the Monday when the washerwoman was to bring back the white waistcoat I had covered with ink that the two Queen Cities were heading, to absorb themselves in it as they emerged from that ideal time in which they did not yet exist—those two Queen Cities the domes and towers of which I was soon going to be able, by the most moving kind of geometry, to inscribe on the map of my own life. But I was still merely on the way to the last degree of bliss; I reached it finally (for only then did the revelation come to me that on those wave-splashed streets, reddened by reflections from Giorgione's frescoes,[12] it was not, as I had, despite so many admonitions, continued to imagine, men "majestic and terrible as the sea, bearing armour that gleamed with bronze beneath the folds of their blood-red cloaks"[13] who would be walking through Venice next week, on the eve of Easter, but that I myself might be the minuscule figure, in a large photograph of St. Mark's that had been lent to me, whom the illustrator represented, in a bowler hat, in front of the porches), when I heard my father say: "It must be quite cold, still, on the Grand Canal; you would do well to put your winter overcoat and your heavy jacket in your trunk just in case." At these words I was lifted into a kind of ecstasy; I felt myself to be truly making my way, as I had until then thought impossible, between those "rocks of amethyst like a reef in the Indian Ocean";[14] by a supreme feat of gymnastics beyond my strength, divesting myself, as of a useless carapace, of the air of my bedroom that surrounded me, I replaced it by equal parts of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere as indescribable and particular as the atmosphere of dreams, which my imagination had enclosed in the name of Venice; I felt myself undergoing a miraculous disincarnation; it was immediately accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has come down with a severe sore throat, and they had to put me to bed with a fever so tenacious that the doctor declared they would not only have to give up the idea of allowing me to leave for Florence and Venice now but, even when I was entirely well again, spare me for at least a year any plans for traveling and any cause of excitement.

And also, alas, he forbade them absolutely to allow me to go to the theater to hear La Berma; the sublime artist whom Bergotte had regarded as a genius would have, by introducing me to something that was perhaps as important and as beautiful, consoled me for not having been to Florence and Venice, for not going to Balbec. They had to confine themselves to sending me to the Champs-Élysées every day under the supervision of someone who would keep me from tiring myself out, and that person was Françoise, who had entered our service after the death of my aunt Léonie. To go to the Champs-Élysées was unbearable to me. If only Bergotte had described it in one of his books, I probably would have wanted to get to know it, like all the things whose "double" someone had begun by putting into my imagination. It would warm them, bring them to life, give them a personality, and I would want to find them again in reality; but in this public garden nothing formed a part of my dreams.

One day, because I was bored in our usual spot, next to the merry-go-round, Françoise had taken me on an excursion—beyond the frontier guarded at equal intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar sellers—into those neighboring but foreign regions where the faces are unfamiliar, where the goat cart passes: then she had gone back to get her things from her chair, which stood with its back to a clump of laurels; as I waited for her I was pacing the broad lawn, sparse and shorn, yellowed by the sun, at the far end of which a statue stands above the pool, when, from the path, addressing a little girl with reddish hair playing with a shuttlecock in front of the basin, another girl, while putting on her cloak and stowing her racket, shouted to her in a sharp voice: "Good-bye, Gilberte, I'm going home, don't forget we're coming to your house tonight after dinner." The name Gilberte passed close by me, evoking all the more forcefully the existence of the girl it designated in that it did not merely name her, as one speaks of someone who is absent, but addressed her directly; thus it passed close by me, in action so to speak, with a force that increased with the curve of its trajectory and the approach of its target;—transporting along with it, I felt, the knowledge, the notions concerning her to whom it was addressed that belonged not to me, but to the friend who was calling her, everything that, as she uttered it, she saw again or at least possessed in her memory, of their daily companionship, of the visits they paid to each other, of the whole of that unknown existence which was all the more inaccessible and all the more painful to me for being conversely so familiar and so malleable for that happy girl who brushed me with it without my being able to penetrate it and hurled it up in the air in a shout;—letting float in the air the delicious emanation it had released, by touching them so precisely, from several invisible points in the life of Mlle. Swann, from the evening that was to come, such as it might be, after dinner, at her house;—forming, in its celestial passage among the children and the nursemaids, a little cloud of precious color, like that which, billowing over a lovely garden by Poussin,[15] reflects minutely like a cloud in an opera, full of horses and chariots, some manifestation of the life of the gods;—casting, finally, on that bald grass, at the spot where it was at once a patch of withered lawn and a moment in the afternoon of the blond shuttlecock player (who did not stop launching the shuttlecock and catching it again until a governess wearing a blue ostrich feather called her), a marvelous little band the color of heliotrope as impalpable as a reflection and laid down like a carpet over which I did not tire of walking back and forth with lingering, nostalgic, and desecrating steps, while Françoise cried out to me: "Come on now, button up your coat and let's make ourselves scarce," and I noticed for the first time with irritation that she had a vulgar way of speaking, and alas, no blue feather in her hat.

But would she come back to the Champs-Élysées? The next day she was not there; but I saw her there on the following days; I spent all my time circling around the spot where she played with her friends, so that once when they found they were short of players for their game of prisoners' base, she sent to ask if I wanted to make up the number on their side, and after that I played with her each time she was there. But this was not every day; there were days when she was kept from coming by her lessons, by the catechism, a tea, that whole life separate from mine which twice, condensed in the name of Gilberte, I had felt pass so painfully close to me, on the steep path at Combray and on the lawn at the Champs-Élysées. On those days, she would announce in advance that we would not be seeing her; if it was because of her studies, she would say: "It's an awful bore, I won't be able to come tomorrow; you'll all be having fun without me," with a sorrowful air that consoled me a little; but when she was invited to a party and I, not knowing, asked her if she would be coming out to play, she would answer: "I should certainly hope not! I certainly hope Mama will let me go to my friend's." At least on those days, I knew I would not see her, whereas other times, it was quite unexpectedly that her mother would take her shopping, and the next day she would say: "Oh yes! I went out with Mama," as though it were a natural thing and not, for someone else, the greatest possible misfortune. There were also the days of bad weather when her governess, who herself could not endure the rain, did not want to take her to the Champs-Élysées.

And so if the sky was dubious, from early in the morning I would question it constantly, taking every omen into account. If I saw the lady opposite, near the window, putting on her hat, I would say to myself: "That lady is going to go out; so it's the sort of weather one can go out in: why wouldn't Gilberte do the same as that lady?" But the weather would darken, my mother would say it could lift again, that a ray of sunlight would be enough, but that more probably it would rain; and if it rained what was the good of going to the Champs-Élysées? And so from lunch on my anxious eyes never left the unsettled, cloudy sky. It remained dark. Before the window, the balcony was gray. Suddenly, on its gloomy stone I did not see a color that was less dull, but I felt a sort of effort toward a color less dull, the pulsation of a hesitant ray that wished to discharge its light. A moment later, the balcony was as pale and reflective as a pool at dawn, and a thousand reflections of its ironwork lattice had alighted on it. A breath of wind dispersed them, the stone had darkened again, but, as though tamed, they returned; it began imperceptibly to whiten again and, in one of those continuous crescendos like those which, in music, at the end of an overture, carry a single note to the highest fortissimo by making it pass rapidly through all the intermediary degrees, I saw it reach that fixed, unalterable gold of fine days, against which the cutout shadow of the elaborate support of the balustrade stood out in black like a whimsical vegetation, with a delicacy in the delineation of its slightest details that seemed to betray a painstaking consciousness, an artistic satisfaction, and with such sharp relief, such velvet in the restfulness of its dark and happy masses that in truth those broad and leafy reflections resting on that lake of sun seemed to know they were pledges of calm and happiness.

Instantaneous ivy, fleeting wall flora! The least colorful, the saddest, in the opinion of many, of those that clamber over the wall or decorate the casement; for me, the dearest of them all since the day it appeared on our balcony, like the very shadow of the presence of Gilberte, who was perhaps already in the Champs-

Élysées and, as soon as I arrived there, would say to me: “Let’s start playing prisoners’ base right away, you’re on my side”; fragile, carried off by a breath, but also in harmony, not with the season, but with the hour; a promise of the immediate happiness which the day will deny or fulfill, and thereby of the highest sort of immediate happiness, the happiness of love; softer, warmer on the stone even than moss; hardy, for it needs only a ray of light to come into being and blossom into joy, even in the heart of winter.

And even on those days when all other vegetation has disappeared, when the handsome green leather that wraps the trunks of the old trees is hidden under snow, when the snow had stopped falling, but the weather was still too overcast to hope that Gilberte would go out, then suddenly, making my mother say: “Well now, it’s actually nice out, perhaps you might try going to the Champs-Élysées after all,” on the mantle of snow that covered the balcony the sun that had appeared was weaving gold threads together and embroidering black glimmers. That day we found no one, or one solitary girl about to leave, who assured me that Gilberte was not coming. The chairs, deserted by the imposing but chilly assembly of governesses, were empty. Alone, near the lawn, sat a lady of a certain age who came in all weathers, always dressed in the same clothing, magnificent and dark, to make whose acquaintance I would at that time have sacrificed, had the exchange been allowed me, all the greatest future advantages of my life. For Gilberte went up to greet her every day; she asked Gilberte for news of “her love of a mother”; and it seemed to me that, had I known her, I would have been someone quite different for Gilberte, someone who knew her parents’ friends. While her grandchildren played farther off, she always read *Les Débats,*[16] which she called “my old *Débats,*” and with an aristocratic affection would say, when speaking of the policeman or the woman who rented the chairs:[17] “my old friend the policeman,” “the chair warden and I who are old friends.”

Françoise was too cold to sit still; we walked to the pont de la Concorde to see the frozen Seine, which everyone including the children approached without fear as though it were a beached whale, immense, defenseless and about to be cut up. We returned to the Champs-Élysées; I was growing sick with misery between the motionless merry-go-round and the white lawn caught in the black web of paths from which the snow had been cleared and above which the statue had in its hand an added jet of ice which seemed to explain its gesture. Even the old lady, after folding her *Débats,* asked a passing nanny what time it was and thanked her by saying: “How kind of you!” then begged the man tending the paths to tell her grandchildren to come back, because she was cold, adding: “You are infinitely good. I am overwhelmed!” Suddenly the air was torn apart: between the puppet theater and the circus, on the clearing horizon, against the opening sky, I had just spied, as though it were a fabulous sign, Mademoiselle’s blue feather. And already Gilberte was running as fast as possible in my direction, sparkling and red under a square fur hat, animated by the cold, the lateness, and her desire to play; a little before reaching me, she let herself slide along the ice, and either to help keep her balance, or because she thought it more graceful, or pretending to move like a skater, her arms opened wide as she came forward smiling, as if she wanted to take me into them. “Brava! Brava! That was very good. I would say, as you do, that it was champion, first-rate, if I were not from another age, if I did not belong to the Ancien Régime,” cried the old lady, speaking on behalf of the silent Champs-Élysées to thank Gilberte for having come without letting herself be intimidated by the weather. “You’re like me, faithful to our old Champs-Élysées despite everything; we’re two brave souls, you and I. I tell you I love it, even this way. This snow—you’ll laugh at me—reminds me of ermine!” And the old lady began to laugh.

The first of these days—to which the snow, image of the forces that could stop me from seeing Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day of separation and even the aspect of a day of departure because it changed the appearance and almost prevented the use of the customary site of our only encounters, now changed, all wrapped in dustcovers—this day, however, caused my love to progress, for it was like a first sorrow that she had shared with me. There were only the two of us out of all our gang, and to be thus the only one there with her was not only like a beginning of intimacy, but also on her part—as though she had come out only for me, in such weather—it seemed to me as touching as if on one of those days when she was invited to a party she had given it up to come to find me in the Champs-Élysées; I gained more confidence in the vitality and the future of our friendship, which remained hardy in the midst of the numbness, loneliness, and ruin of the things around us; and while she put snowballs down my neck, I smiled with emotion at what seemed to me both a preference she was showing me by tolerating me as her traveling companion in this new and wintry land, and also a sort of loyalty she was cherishing for me in the midst of misfortune. Soon one after the other, like hesitant sparrows, her friends arrived all black against the snow. We began to play, and since this day so sadly begun was to end in joy, when I went up, before playing prisoners’ base, to the friend with the sharp voice whom I had heard the first day shouting the name Gilberte, she said to me: “No, no, we know perfectly well you’d rather be on Gilberte’s side, besides look, she’s signaling to you.” She was indeed calling me over to join her camp on the snowy lawn, which the sun, giving it glimmers of pink, the metallic worn surface of an old brocade, was turning into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.[18]

That day which I had so dreaded was, in fact, one of the only ones on which I was not too unhappy.

For, although I no longer thought, now, of anything else but of not allowing a single day to pass without seeing Gilberte (so much so that once when my grandmother had not returned by dinnertime, I could not help saying to myself immediately that if she had been run over by a carriage, I would not be able to go to the Champs-Élysées for a long time; we no longer love anyone else when we are in love), yet those moments when I was with her and which since the day before I had been awaiting so impatiently, for which I had trembled, for which I would have sacrificed everything else, were in no way happy moments; and I knew it very well for they were the only moments in my life on which I concentrated a meticulous, fierce attention, and that attention did not discover in them one atom of pleasure.

All the time I was away from Gilberte, I needed to see her because, constantly trying to form a picture of her for myself, in the end I could not do it, and no longer knew precisely to what my love corresponded. And then she had never yet told me she loved me. Quite the contrary, she had often claimed there were boys she liked better than me, that I was a good enough friend she was always willing to play with, though too distracted, not involved enough in the game; finally, she had often given me apparent signs of coldness that might have shaken my belief that for her I was someone different from the others, if the source of that belief had been the love Gilberte might feel for me, and not, as was the case, the love I felt for her, which rendered it far more resistant, since this made it depend entirely on the manner in which I was obliged, by an inner necessity, to think of Gilberte. But the feelings I had for her, I myself had not yet declared to her. Certainly, on every page of my notebooks I copied out her name and address endlessly, but at the sight of those indeterminate lines which I wrote without inducing her to think any more about me because of that, which made her take up so much apparent space around me without being any more involved in my life, I felt discouraged because they spoke to me not of Gilberte, who would not even see them, but of my own desire, which they seemed to show me as something purely personal, unreal, tedious, and impotent. The most urgent thing was that we should see each other, Gilberte and I, and that we should be able to make a reciprocal avowal of our love, which until then would not so to speak have begun. No doubt the various reasons that made me so impatient to see her would have been less imperious for a grown man. When we are older, more skilled in the cultivation of our pleasures, we are sometimes content with the enjoyment of thinking about a woman as I thought about Gilberte, without worrying about whether that image corresponds to the reality, and also with the pleasure of loving her without needing to be certain that she loves us; or we forgo the pleasure of confessing our warm feelings for her, in order to encourage the hardiness of hers for us, imitating those Japanese gardeners who, to obtain one lovelier flower, sacrifice several others. But during the period when I loved Gilberte, I still believed that Love really existed outside of us; that, allowing us at the very most to remove obstacles in our way, it offered its joys in an order which we were not free to alter; it seemed to me that if I had, on my own initiative, substituted for the sweetness of confession the simulation of indifference, I would not only have deprived myself of one of the joys of which I had dreamed most often but that I would have fabricated for myself in my own way a love that was artificial and without value, without any connection to the real one, whose mysterious and preexisting paths I would have had to forgo following.

But when I reached the Champs-Élysées—and when, before anything else, I would be able to confront my love, so as to subject it to the necessary corrections, with its living cause, independent of me—as soon as I was in the presence of that Gilberte Swann on the sight of whom I had counted to refresh the images that my tired memory could no longer recapture, of that Gilberte Swann with whom I had played yesterday, and whom I had just been moved to greet and recognize by a blind instinct like that which, when we are walking, sets one of our feet in front of the other before we have had time to think, immediately it was as if she and the little girl who was the object of my dreams had been two different creatures. For example if, since the day before, I had been carrying in my memory two blazing eyes in full and shining cheeks, Gilberte’s face now presented me insistently with something that quite specifically I had not recalled, a certain sharp tapering of the nose, which, instantaneously associating itself with certain other features, assumed the importance of those characteristics which in natural history define a whole species, and transmuted her into a little girl of the type that have pointed snouts. While I was preparing to take advantage of this longed-for moment in order to devote myself to submitting the image of Gilberte which I had prepared before coming, and which I could no longer find again in my mind, to an amendment that would allow me, in the long hours when I was alone, to be sure it was truly she whom I was recalling, that it was truly my love for her that I

was augmenting little by little like a book as it is being written, she would pass me a ball; and, like the idealist philosopher whose body makes allowances for the external world in the reality of which his intelligence does not believe, the same self who had made me greet her before I identified her, hastened to make me take the ball she was holding out to me (as if she were a friend with whom I had come here to play, and not a sister soul with whom I had come to be united), made me exchange with her, for the sake of decorum, until the hour when she went off, a thousand friendly and meaningless remarks and thus kept me both from preserving a silence during which I could at last have laid hands once more on the urgent truant image and from uttering the words that might have brought about the decisive progress in our love, the hope of which I was obliged each time to postpone until the following afternoon. It did, however, make some progress. One day when we had gone off with Gilberte to the booth of the vendor who was particularly nice to us—for it was to her that M. Swann sent for his spice cake,[19] and for health reasons, he consumed a great deal of it, suffering from ethnic eczema and the Prophets' constipation—Gilberte showed me with a smile two little boys who were like the little artist and the little naturalist in children's storybooks. For one of them did not want a stick of red barley sugar because he preferred violet, and the other, tears in his eyes, was refusing the plum his nanny wanted to buy for him because, he finally said with passion: "I like the other plum better, because it has a worm!" I bought two one-sou marbles. I gazed with admiration at the agates, luminous and captive in their separate wooden bowl, precious in my eyes because they were as blond and beaming as young girls and because they cost fifty centimes apiece. Gilberte, who was given a great deal more money than I was, asked me which I thought was the most beautiful. They had the molten transparency of life itself. I did not want to make her sacrifice a single one of them. I would have liked her to be able to buy them, liberate them, all. Yet I pointed to one which was the same color as her eyes. Gilberte took it, looked for its golden ray of light, stroked it, paid its ransom, but immediately handed her captive over to me saying: "Here, it's for you, I'm giving it to you, keep it as a souvenir."

Another time, still preoccupied by the desire to hear La Berma in a classical play, I had asked her if she happened to own a little book in which Bergotte talked about Racine, and which one could no longer find. She had asked me to remind her of its exact title and that evening I had addressed an express letter to her, writing on the envelope that name, Gilberte Swann, which I had so often copied out in my notebooks. The next day she brought me a packet tied up in mauve ribbons and sealed with white wax containing the little book, which she had asked someone to find for her. "You see? It really is the one you asked for," she said, taking from her muff the letter I had sent her. But on the address of this *pneumatique*[20]—which, only yesterday, was nothing, was merely a *petit bleu* which I had written, and which, now that a telegraph boy had delivered it to Gilberte's concierge and a servant had carried it to her room, had become this priceless thing, one of the *petits bleus* she had received that day—it was hard for me to recognize the insignificant, solitary lines of my handwriting under the printed circles apposed to it by the post office, under the inscriptions added in pencil by one of the telegraph messengers, signs of actual realization, stamps from the outside world, violet bands symbolizing life, which for the first time came to espouse, sustain, uplift, delight my dream.

And there was also one day when she said to me: "You know, you can call me Gilberte, I'm going to call you by your first name anyway. It's too tiresome otherwise." Yet for a while she went on simply calling me *vous*[21] and when I pointed this out to her, she smiled, and composing, constructing a sentence like the ones in grammar books of foreign languages whose only aim is to make us use a new word, she ended it with my given name. And remembering later what I had felt then, I could distinguish within it the impression that I had been held for a moment in her mouth, I myself, naked, without any of the social terms and conditions that also belonged, either to her other friends, or, when she said my family name, to my parents, and of which her lips—in the effort she made, rather like her father, to articulate the words she wanted to emphasize—seemed to strip me, undress me, as one removes the skin from a fruit of which only the pulp can be eaten, while her gaze, adopting the same new degree of intimacy as her words, reached me more directly also, while at the same time showing its awareness of this, its pleasure and even its gratitude, by accompanying itself with a smile.

But in the moment itself, I could not appreciate the value of these new pleasures. They were given, not by the little girl I loved, to me who loved her, but by the other, the one I played with, to my other self who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the inalienable heart which alone could have known the price of such a happiness, because it alone had desired it. Even after returning home I did not savor them, for, each day, the same need which made me hope that the next day I would be able to enjoy a clear, calm, happy contemplation of Gilberte, that she would at last confess her love for me, explaining why she had to hide it from me until now, also forced me to regard the past as nothing, to look ahead of me only, to consider the small attentions she had shown me not in themselves and as if they were enough, but as new rungs on which to set my foot, new rungs which would permit me to take another step up and at last attain the happiness I had not yet found.

If she gave me these signs of friendliness from time to time, she also hurt me by seeming not to be pleased to see me, and this often happened on the very days I had most counted on for the realization of my hopes. I was sure that Gilberte would come to the Champs-Élysées and I felt an elation that seemed to me only the vague anticipation of a great happiness when—entering the drawing room first thing in the morning to kiss Mama, who was already dressed to go out, the tower of her black hair fully constructed, and her lovely plump white hands still smelling of soap—I learned, seeing a column of dust standing by itself above the piano and hearing a barrel organ playing "En Revenant de la Revue"[22] under the window, that until nightfall winter would be receiving the unexpected and radiant visit of a day of spring. While we were eating lunch, the lady opposite, by opening her casement, had sent flying in the blink of an eye, from next to my chair—streaking the entire width of our dining room in a single bound—a beam of light that had settled there for its afternoon rest and returned to continue it a moment later. At school, during the one o'clock class,[23] the sun made me languish with impatience and boredom by trailing a glimmer of gold over my desk, like an invitation to a party I would not be able to attend before three o'clock, the hour when Françoise came to pick me up at the school gate and we made our way toward the Champs-Élysées through streets decorated with light, choked with crowds, where the balconies, unsealed by the sun and vaporous, floated before the houses like clouds of gold. Alas, in the Champs-Élysées I did not see Gilberte, she had not arrived yet. Motionless on the lawn fed by the invisible sun which here and there ignited the tip of a stalk of grass, while the pigeons that had landed on it looked like ancient sculptures which the gardener's pick had brought back up to the surface of the venerable soil, I stood with my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at any moment to see the image of Gilberte following her governess appear behind the statue, which seemed to hold out the child it was carrying, streaming with rays of light, to the benediction of the sun. The old lady who read *Les Débats* was sitting in her seat, still in the same spot; she hailed a park keeper, to whom she made a friendly gesture with her hand, calling out to him: "What fine weather!" And when the chair attendant approached to collect the price of the seat, she smirked and simpered as she put the ten-centime ticket away in the opening of her glove, as if it were a bouquet for which she was seeking, out of kindness toward the giver, the most flattering place possible. When she had found it, she performed a circular motion with her neck, straightened her boa, and fastened upon the attendant, showing her the bit of yellow paper sticking out over her wrist, the beautiful smile with which a woman, showing her bodice to a young man, says to him: "Recognize your roses?"

I led Françoise out as far as the Arc de Triomphe hoping to meet Gilberte, we did not find her, and I was returning to the lawn convinced that now she would not be coming, when, in front of the merry-go-round, the little girl with the sharp voice flung herself at me: "Quick, quick, Gilberte's already been here for a quarter of an hour. She's going soon. We were waiting for you to make up a game of prisoners' base." While I was going up the avenue des Champs-Élysées, Gilberte had come by way of the rue Boissy-d'Anglas, Mademoiselle having taken advantage of the fine weather to do some shopping for her; and M. Swann was coming to pick up his daughter. So it was my fault; I should not have left the lawn; for one never knew for certain which way Gilberte would come, if it would be later or earlier, and in the end this waiting caused me to be more deeply moved, not only by the whole of the Champs-Élysées and the entire extent of the afternoon, a sort of immense expanse of space and time at each point and at each moment of which it was possible that Gilberte's image would appear, but even by that image itself, because behind that image I felt there lay concealed the reason why it had been fired into my heart at four o'clock instead of two-thirty, topped by a hat for paying calls rather than a beret for playing, in front of the "Ambassadeurs"[24] and not between the two puppet theaters, I could divine one of those occupations in which I could not follow Gilberte and which forced her to go out or stay at home, I touched the mystery of her unknown life. It was this mystery, too, that disturbed me when, running on orders from the little girl with the sharp voice to begin our game of prisoners' base right away, I saw Gilberte, so brusque and lively with us, curtsying to the lady with *Les Débats* (who was saying to her: "What lovely sunshine, it's like a burning fire"), talking to her with a shy smile, with a formal air which called to my mind the different young girl that Gilberte must be at home with her parents, with the friends of her parents, when paying calls, in the whole of her other existence which eluded me. But of that existence no one gave me so strong an impression as did M. Swann, who came a little later to find his daughter. For he and Mme. Swann—because their daughter lived in their home, because her studies, her games, her friendships depended on them—contained for me, like Gilberte, perhaps even more than Gilberte, as was proper for gods all-powerful with respect to her, in whom it must have had its

source, an inaccessible strangeness, a painful charm. Everything that concerned them was the object of a preoccupation so constant on my part that on the days when, as on these, M. Swann (whom I had seen so often in the past without his having aroused my curiosity, when he was on friendly terms with my parents) came to pick Gilberte up in the Champs-Élysées, once the pounding of my heart that had been excited by the appearance of his gray hat and traveling cape had subsided, his appearance still impressed me like that of a historical character about whom we have just been reading a series of books and whose least peculiarities impassion us. His relations with the Comte de Paris, which, when I heard them discussed at Combray, had left me indifferent, now assumed for me something wonderful, as if no one else had ever known the Orléans; they caused him to stand out vividly against the vulgar background of people of different classes out for a walk who were crowding that path of the Champs-Élysées, and in the midst of whom I admired his consenting to appear without demanding of them any special consideration, which none of them dreamed of giving him anyway, so profound was the incognito in which he was wrapped.

He responded politely to the greetings of Gilberte's friends, even to mine although he had quarreled with my family, but without appearing to know me. (This reminded me that he had, however, seen me quite often in the country; a memory I had retained, but somewhere in a dim place, because ever since I had seen Gilberte again, for me Swann was preeminently her father, and no longer Swann of Combray; as the ideas with which I now linked his name were different from the ideas which had once formed the network in which it was included and which I no longer ever used when I wanted to think about him, he had become a new person; I did attach him, however, by an artificial, secondary, and transversal line to our guest of earlier times; and since nothing had any value for me anymore except to the extent that my love could profit from it, it was with a burst of shame and regret at not being able to erase them that I returned to the years when, in the eyes of this same Swann who was at this moment before me in the Champs-Élysées and to whom, happily, Gilberte had perhaps not mentioned my name, I had so often in the evenings made myself ridiculous by sending word asking Mama to come up to my room and say goodnight to me, while she was having coffee with him, my father, and my grandparents at the table in the garden.) He told Gilberte he would let her play one game, that he could wait a quarter of an hour, and sitting down like anyone else on an iron chair, paid for his ticket with the same hand which Philippe VII[25] had so often held in his own, while we began playing on the lawn, putting to flight the pigeons whose beautiful heart-shaped iridescent bodies, like the lilacs of the bird kingdom, went to seek refuge as though in so many sanctuaries, one on the large stone vase to which its beak, by disappearing into it, imparted the gesture, and assigned the purpose, of offering in abundance the fruits or seeds which the bird seemed to be pecking from it, another on the forehead of the statue, which it seemed to crown with one of those enameled objects whose polychrome varies the monotony of the stone in certain ancient works of art, and with an attribute which, when the goddess carries it, earns her a particular epithet, and makes her, as does for a mortal woman a different first name, a new divinity.

On one of those sunny days that had not fulfilled my hopes, I did not have the courage to hide my disappointment from Gilberte.

"I had so many things to ask you," I said to her. "I thought that today was going to mean such a lot to our friendship. And as soon as you get here, you have to leave again! Try to come early tomorrow, so I can finally talk to you."

Her face shone and she was jumping with joy as she answered me:

"Tomorrow, you may depend upon it, my dear friend, I won't be coming at all! I've got a big tea party; nor the day after tomorrow, either, I'm going to a friend's house to watch the arrival of King Theodosius [26] from her windows, it will be splendid, and then the day after we're going to *Michel Strogoff*[27] and then after that, Christmas will be coming soon and the New Year's holidays. Maybe they'll take me to the Midi.[28] How nice that would be! Though it will mean I won't have a Christmas tree; anyway, if I stay in Paris, I won't be coming here because I'll be paying calls with Mama. Good-bye, there's Papa, he's calling me."

I returned home with Françoise through streets that were still bedecked with sunlight, as on the evening of a holiday that is over. I could scarcely drag my legs along.

"It's not a bit surprising," said Françoise. "This weather is not right for the time of the year, it's far too hot. Alas! My Lord, think of all the folk around and about that must be ill today. It makes one think that things are all awry in the heavens above, as well!"

I repeated to myself, stifling my sobs, the words in which Gilberte had exploded with joy at the prospect of not coming back to the Champs-Élysées for such a long time. But already the charm with which, by the mere act of thinking, my mind was filled as soon as I thought about her, and the special, unique position—painful though it was—in which I was inevitably placed in relation to Gilberte by the internal constraint of a mental habit had begun to add, even to this sign of indifference, something romantic, and in the midst of my tears a smile formed that was simply the timid adumbration of a kiss. And when it was time for the mail to come, I said to myself that evening as on every evening: "I'm going to get a letter from Gilberte, she's going to tell me at last that she has always loved me, and explain the mysterious reason why she has been forced to hide it from me until now, to pretend she could be happy without seeing me, the reason why she has disguised herself as the other Gilberte who is merely a playmate."

Every evening I liked to imagine this letter, I would believe I was reading it, I would recite each sentence of it to myself. All of a sudden I stopped in alarm. I realized that if I were to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not be that one anyway since I was the one who had just written it. And from then on, I forced myself to turn my thoughts away from the words I would have liked her to write to me, for fear that by articulating them, I would exclude precisely those—the dearest, the most desired—from the field of all possible compositions. Even if through an improbable coincidence it had been precisely the letter that I had invented that Gilberte on her own account addressed to me, recognizing my work in it I would not have had the impression of receiving something that did not come from me, something real, new, a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, truly given by love.

Meanwhile I reread a page which had not been written to me by Gilberte, but which at least came to me from her, that page by Bergotte on the beauty of the old myths that inspired Racine, and which, next to the agate marble, I kept near me always. I was moved by the goodness of my friend who had had someone find it for me; and because everyone needs to discover reasons for his passion, so much so that he is happy to recognize in the person he loves qualities which literature or conversation have taught him are among those worthy of inspiring love, so much so that he assimilates them by imitation and makes them new reasons for his love, even if these qualities were the most diametrically opposed to those his love would have sought so long as it remained spontaneous—as Swann had done once upon a time, with the aesthetic nature of Odette's beauty—I, who had at first loved Gilberte, back in Combray, because of all that was unknown about her life, into which I would have liked to hurl myself, become incarnated, abandoning my own life which was no longer anything to me, I now thought, as of an inestimable advantage, that of this life of mine, too well known, disdained, Gilberte might one day become the humble servant, the companionable and comfortable collaborator who in the evening, helping me in my work, would compare and collate pamphlets for me. As for Bergotte, that infinitely wise and almost divine old man because of whom I had first loved Gilberte, even before I saw her, now it was above all because of Gilberte that I loved him. With as much pleasure as the pages he had written on Racine, I looked at the paper closed with great seals of white wax and tied with a cascade of mauve ribbons in which she had brought them to me. I kissed the agate marble which was the best part of my friend's heart, the part that was not frivolous, but faithful, and which even though adorned with the mysterious charm of Gilberte's life remained close to me, lived in my bedroom, slept in my bed. But as for the beauty of that stone, and the beauty also of those pages by Bergotte, which I was so pleased to associate with the idea of my love for Gilberte, as if in the moments when that love appeared to me to be nothing at all they gave it a sort of substance, I saw that they were anterior to that love, that they did not resemble it, that their elements had been determined by talent or by the laws of mineralogy before Gilberte knew me, that nothing in the book or in the stone would have been different if Gilberte had not loved me and that consequently nothing entitled me to read in them a message of happiness. And while my love, ceaselessly expecting from the next day an avowal of Gilberte's love, annulled and undid each evening the badly done work of the day, in the darkness inside me an unknown seamstress did not leave the pulled threads in the scrap heap but arranged them, with no concern for pleasing me or working for my happiness, in the different order to which she gave all her work. Showing no particular interest in my love, nor beginning by deciding that I was indeed loved, she gathered up those of Gilberte's actions which had seemed inexplicable to me, along with her faults, which I had excused. Then the first and the second acquired a meaning. It seemed to say, this new order, that when I saw that Gilberte, instead of coming to the Champs-Élysées, attended a party, went shopping with her governess, and prepared to be away over the New Year's holidays, I was wrong to think: "It's because she's frivolous or submissive." For she would have ceased to be either if she had loved me, and if she had been forced to obey it would have been with the same despair that I felt on the days when I did not see her. It told me further, this new order, that I must after all know what it was to love since I loved Gilberte; it pointed out to me the perpetual concern I felt to show myself to advantage in her eyes, because of which I tried to persuade my mother to buy Françoise a waterproof coat and a hat with a blue ostrich feather, or better still not to continue sending me to the Champs-Élysées with that maid who made me blush (to which my mother answered that I was unfair to Françoise, that she was a good woman and devoted to us), and also that

exclusive need to see Gilberte because of which months in advance I thought only of trying to learn at what time of the year she would be leaving Paris and where she would be going, finding even the most pleasant countryside a place of exile if she was not going to be there, and wanting only to stay in Paris all the time as long as I could see her at the Champs-Élysées; and it had no difficulty showing me that I would not find that concern, or that need, behind Gilberte's actions. She on the contrary appreciated her governess, without worrying about what I thought of her. She found it natural not to come to the Champs-Élysées, if she was going to make some purchases with Mademoiselle, pleasant if she was going out with her mother. And even supposing she would have allowed me to spend the holidays in the same place as she, at least in choosing that place she considered her parents' desires, the thousand amusements she had heard about, and not in the least that this was the place where my family was intending to send me. When she assured me from time to time that she liked me less than one of her other friends, less than she had liked me the day before because I had made her lose the game through my carelessness, I would ask her to forgive me, I would ask her what I should do so that she would begin to like me again as much as the others, so that she would like me more than them; I wanted her to tell me that it was already done, I begged her for it as if she could change her affection for me as she wished, as I wished, in order to please me, merely by the words that she would say, depending on my good or my bad behavior. Did I not know, then, that what I myself felt, for her, depended neither on her actions nor on my own will?

And, finally, this new order designed by the invisible seamstress showed me that if we may wish that the actions of a person who has hurt us up to now were not sincere, they are followed by a clarity against which our wishes are powerless and to which, rather than to them, we must address ourselves in asking what that person's actions will be tomorrow.

These new words were heard by my love; they persuaded it that the next day would not be different from what all the other days had been; that Gilberte's feeling for me, already too old to be able to change, was indifference; that in my friendship with Gilberte, I was the only one who loved. "It's true," my love answered, "there's nothing more to be done with this friendship, it won't change." And so, the very next day (or waiting for a public holiday if there was one coming up soon, or an anniversary, or the New Year perhaps, one of those days which are not like the others, when time makes a fresh start by rejecting the heritage of the past, by not accepting the legacy of its sorrows) I would ask Gilberte to give up our old friendship and lay the foundations of a new one.

I always had within reach of my hand a map of Paris which, because one could distinguish on it the street where M. and Mme. Swann lived, seemed to me to contain a treasure. And for pleasure, out of a sort of chivalrous loyalty also, apropos of anything at all, I would say the name of that street, until my father would ask, not being, as were my mother and grandmother, fully informed about my love:

"Now why do you talk about that street all the time, there's nothing extraordinary about it, it's a very pleasant street to live on because it's two steps from the Bois, but there are ten others quite like it."

I contrived at every turn to make my parents say the name Swann; of course I repeated it to myself in my own mind incessantly; but I also needed to hear the delicious sound of it and to have someone else play me this music the silent reading of which was not enough. The name Swann, which I had known for such a long time, was for me also, now, as happens for certain aphasics with the most everyday words, a new name. It was always present in my mind and yet my mind could not grow accustomed to it. I took it apart, I spelled it, its orthography was a surprise to me. And at the same time that it had ceased to be familiar, it had ceased to appear innocent. The joy I felt at hearing it I believed was so guilty that it seemed to me others guessed my thoughts and changed the conversation if I tried to lead it there. I resorted to subjects that still touched upon Gilberte, I recited the same words endlessly, and although I knew they were only words—words spoken far away from her, which she could not hear, words without potency that repeated what was, but could not modify it—yet it seemed to me that by dint of thus feeling, handling everything that touched Gilberte I would perhaps make something happy emerge from it. I told my parents again that Gilberte liked her governess very much, as if that proposition enunciated for the hundredth time were at last going to result in the sudden entrance of Gilberte, coming to live with us forever. I resumed my praise of the old lady who read *Les Débats* (I had hinted to my parents that she was an ambassadress or perhaps a royal highness) and I continued to celebrate her beauty, her magnificence, her nobility, until the day I said that from what I had heard Gilberte call her, her name must be Mme. Blatin.

"Oh, now I know who she is!" exclaimed my mother while I felt myself blushing from shame. "On guard! On guard! as your poor grandfather would have said. So she's the one you find so beautiful! Why, she's horrible and always has been. She's the widow of an usher. You don't remember when you were little the lengths I went to to avoid her at the gymnastics class where, though she didn't know me, she would come up to me and try to talk with the excuse of wanting to tell me you were 'too nice looking for a boy.' She always had a mania for getting to know people and she must indeed be rather mad as I always thought, if she really knows Mme. Swann. For though her background is quite common, at least there was never anything said against her so far as I know. But she always had to cultivate a new acquaintance. She's horrible, frightfully vulgar, and a troublemaker into the bargain."

As for Swann, in order to try to resemble him, I would spend all my time at the table pulling on my nose and rubbing my eyes. My father would say: "The child has no sense, he'll make himself quite hideous." I would especially have liked to be as bald as Swann. He seemed to me a person so extraordinary that I found it amazing that people I knew actually knew him too and that the chance events of an ordinary day might bring one face-to-face with him. And one time, my mother, in the course of telling us, as she did every evening at dinner, about the errands she had run that afternoon, merely by saying: "Speaking of which, guess who I ran into in Trois Quartiers,[29] at the umbrella counter: Swann," caused the center of her story, so very dry for me, to blossom with a mysterious flower. What a delectable melancholy pleasure, to learn that that very afternoon, profiling his supernatural form against the crowd, Swann had gone to buy an umbrella! Among the great and tiny events, equally unimportant, this one alone awoke in me those peculiar vibrations by which my love for Gilberte was perpetually stirred. My father said I was not interested in anything because I did not listen when they talked about the political consequences that might follow from the visit of King Theodosius, at this moment the guest of France and, it was claimed, its ally. But how keenly, on the other hand, I wanted to know if Swann was wearing his traveling cape!

"Did you say hello to each other?" I asked.

"Why, naturally," answered my mother, who always seemed to be afraid that, were she to admit there was any coolness between them and Swann, people would have tried to bring about a reconciliation closer than she wished, because of Mme. Swann, whom she did not want to know. "It was he who came up and spoke to me, I didn't see him."

"Then you haven't quarreled?"

"Quarreled? Now what makes you think we might have quarreled?" she answered briskly, as if I had assaulted the fiction of her good relations with Swann and tried to effect a "rapprochement."

"He might be cross with you for not inviting him anymore."

"One isn't obliged to invite everyone; does he invite me? I don't know his wife."

"But at Combray he used to come."

"Well, yes! He came at Combray, and now in Paris he has other things to do and so have I. But I promise you we didn't look in the least like two people who had quarreled. We stood there together for a moment because they hadn't yet brought him his parcel. He asked after you, he told me you played with his daughter," added my mother, stunning me with the prodigious fact that I existed in Swann's mind, even more, that I existed there in so complete a manner that, when I trembled with love there before him in the Champs-Élysées, he knew my name, who my mother was, and could amalgamate around my qualifications as playmate of his daughter certain facts about my grandparents, their family, the place where we lived, certain details of our past life which were perhaps unknown even to me. But my mother did not seem to have found any particular charm in that counter at Trois Quartiers where she had represented for Swann, at the moment when he saw her, a definite person with whom he had memories in common that had inspired the impulse to approach her, the gesture of greeting her.

Nor did she or my father either seem to find, in talking about Swann's grandparents, about the title of honorary stockbroker, a pleasure that surpassed all others. My imagination had singled out and sanctified one particular family from within the social Paris just as it had from within the Paris of stone one particular house whose carriage entrance it had sculpted and whose windows it had made precious. But I was the only one who could see these ornaments. In the same way that my father and mother regarded the house that Swann lived in as similar to the other houses built at the same time in the neighborhood of the Bois, so Swann's family seemed to them of the same sort as many other families of stockbrokers. They judged it more favorably or less depending on the degree to which

it shared in merits common to the rest of the universe and did not see in it anything unique. On the contrary, what they appreciated in it they encountered to an equal, or higher, degree elsewhere. And so, after having agreed that the house was well situated, they would talk about another that was better situated, but that had nothing to do with Gilberte, or about financiers a cut above her grandfather; and if they had seemed for a moment to be of the same opinion as me, it was because of a misunderstanding that would soon be dispelled. For, in order to perceive in everything that surrounded Gilberte an indefinable quality analogous in the world of emotions to what infrared may be in the world of colors, my parents would have needed that supplementary and ephemeral sense with which I had been endowed by love.

On the days when Gilberte had let me know she would not be coming to the Champs-Élysées, I would try to go for a walk that brought me a little closer to her. Sometimes I would lead Françoise on a pilgrimage before the house where the Swanns lived. I would make her repeat endlessly what, through the governess, she had learned relating to Mme. Swann. "It seems she puts a good deal of trust in her medals. You won't find her going off on a trip if she's heard an owl hooting, or something ticking like a clock inside the wall, or if she's seen a cat at midnight, or if the wood furniture creaks. Oh, yes! She's a person of great faith!" I was so in love with Gilberte that if, along the way, I saw their old butler walking a dog, my emotion would force me to stop, I would stare at his white whiskers with eyes full of passion. Françoise would say:

"What's wrong with you?"

Then we would continue on our way until we reached their carriage entrance, where a concierge different from any other concierge, and steeped even to the braid of his livery in the same painful charm I had felt in the name Gilberte, seemed to know that I was one of those people whom a primordial unworthiness would prohibit forever from penetrating into the mysterious life that he was charged with guarding and on which the windows of the entresol seemed conscious of being closed, resembling far less, between the stately fall of their muslin curtains, any other windows than they did Gilberte's own eyes. At other times, we would go down the boulevards and I would take up a position at the corner of the rue Duphot; I had been told that here one could often see Swann going past on his way to the dentist; and my imagination so differentiated Gilberte's father from the rest of humanity, his presence in the midst of the real world introduced into it such magic, that, even before I reached the Madeleine, I was moved at the thought of approaching a street where I might suddenly encounter that supernatural apparition.

But most often—when I was not going to see Gilberte—since I had learned that Mme. Swann went for a walk almost every day in the allée des Acacias, around the Grand Lac, and in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite,[30] I would steer Françoise in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. For me it was like those zoological gardens in which one sees diverse flora and contrasting landscapes brought together in one place; where, after a hill, one finds a grotto, a meadow, rocks, a stream, a ditch, a hill, a marsh, but knows they are there only to provide the frolicking of the hippopotamus, zebras, crocodiles, albino rabbits, bears, and heron with an appropriate environment or a picturesque setting; the Bois too, equally complex, bringing together as it does diverse enclosed little worlds—first a farm planted with red trees, American oaks, like an agricultural estate in Virginia, then a stand of firs at the edge of the lake, or a forest from which would rise suddenly in her supple fur, with the lovely eyes of an animal, some woman walking quickly—it was the Garden of Woman; and—like the Alley of the Myrtles in *The Aeneid*[31]—planted for their sake with trees of a single species, the allée des Acacias was a favorite spot of the most famous Beauties. Just as, from a long way off, the top of the rock from which it will dive into the water thrills the children who know they are about to see the sea lion, so, well before reaching the allée des Acacias, first their fragrance, which, radiating all around, allowed one to sense from a distance the approach and the singularity of a powerful, soft, vegetative entity, then, when I drew near, the glimpsed crest of their greenery, light and childishly graceful, with its easy elegance, its coquettish cut, its thin material, on which hundreds of flowers had swooped down like vibratile winged colonies of precious parasites, and, finally, even their name, feminine, indolent, and sweet—all of this made my heart pound, but with a worldly desire, like those waltzes which remind us only of the names of the beautiful guests whom the usher announces as they enter the ballroom. I had been told that in the avenue I would see certain fashionable women who, even though they were not all married, were habitually mentioned along with Mme. Swann, but most often by their professional name; their new name, when they had one, was only a sort of incognito which those who wanted to talk about them took care to remove in order to make themselves understood. Thinking that Beauty—in the order of feminine elegance—was governed by occult laws into the knowledge of which these women had been initiated, and that they had the power to bring it into being, I accepted in advance as a revelation the vision of their clothes, their carriages and horses, a thousand details deep within which I placed my belief as in an interior soul which gave the cohesiveness of a masterpiece to that ephemeral and shifting tableau. But it was Mme. Swann whom I wanted to see, and I waited for her to pass, as moved as if she were Gilberte, whose parents, steeped like all that surrounded her in her charm, excited in me as much love as she did, indeed a disturbance that was even more painful (because their point of contact with her was that domestic part of her life which was forbidden to me), and lastly (because I soon knew, as will be seen, that they did not like my playing with her) that feeling of veneration which we always have for those who wield unrestrained power to do us harm.

I assigned the first place to simplicity, in the order of aesthetic merits and social grandeur, when I saw Mme. Swann on foot, wearing a cloth polonaise, on her head a little toque trimmed with a pheasant wing, a bouquet of violets at her bodice, hurrying down the allée des Acacias as if it were merely the shortest way to return home and answering with a wink the gentlemen in carriages who, recognizing her figure from far away, bowed to her and said to themselves that no one was as smart. But in place of simplicity, it was ostentation that I put on the highest rank, if, after I had forced Françoise, who was exhausted and said her legs were "folding up," to walk back and forth for an hour, at last I would see, emerging from the avenue that comes from the Porte Dauphine—the picture for me of royal dignity, of a sovereign's arrival, an impression such as no real queen has since been able to give me, because my notion of their power was less vague and more founded upon experience—borne along by two flying fiery horses as slender and smoothly turned as in the drawings of Constantin Guys,[32] carrying an enormous coachman settled on his seat and wrapped in furs like a Cossack, next to a little groom who recalled the "tiger" of "the late Baudenord"[33] I would see—or rather I would feel it imprint its form on my heart with a neat and exhausting wound—a matchless victoria, in its design a little high and with allusions to the old forms showing through its "dernier cri" opulence, in the depths of which Mme. Swann lay back carelessly, her hair now blond with a single gray lock and girded with a thin band of flowers, most often violets, from which descended long veils, in her hand a mauve parasol, on her lips an ambiguous smile in which I saw only the beneficence of a monarch and in which there was, more than anything else, a cocotte's provocativeness, and which she inclined gently on the people who bowed to her. That smile in reality said to some of them: "I remember it very well—it was exquisite!"; to others: "How I would have loved to! What bad luck!"; to others: "Why yes, if you like! I'll stay in line for a moment longer and cut out as soon as I can." When strangers passed, she would still allow an idle smile to linger around her lips, as though it were turned toward the expectation or the memory of a friend, which made people say: "How beautiful she is!" And for certain men only she had a smile that was sour, stiff, reticent, and cold, and meant: "Yes, you beast, I know you have the tongue of a viper, that you can't keep from talking! But do I care about you? Do I?" Coquelin[34] went past holding forth among a group of attentive friends, and with his hand gave a broad theatrical hello to the people in the carriages. But I was thinking only about Mme. Swann and I pretended I had not seen her yet, for I knew that once she drew level with the Tir aux Pigeons[35] she would tell her coachman to cut out of the line and stop so that she could come back down the avenue on foot. And on the days when I felt I had the courage to pass close to her, I would drag Françoise in that direction. At a certain moment, in fact, in the footpath, walking toward us, I would see Mme. Swann letting the long train of her mauve dress spread out behind her, clothed, as the common people imagine queens, in fabrics and rich finery that other women did not wear, lowering her eyes now and then to the handle of her parasol, paying little attention to the people passing, as if her great business and her goal were to take some exercise, without thinking that she was being observed and that all heads were turned toward her. But now and then when she had looked back to call her greyhound, she would imperceptibly cast a circular gaze around her.

Even those who did not know her were alerted by something singular and excessive—or perhaps by a telepathic radiation like those that triggered bursts of applause from the ignorant crowd at moments when La Berma was sublime—that this must be some well-known person. They would ask one another: "Who is she?," or sometimes question a passing stranger, or promise themselves they would remember the way she was dressed as a reference for some better-informed friend who would immediately enlighten them. Others, half stopping in their walk, would say:

"Do you know who that is? Mme. Swann! That means nothing to you? Odette de Crécy?"

"Odette de Crécy? Why in fact I was just wondering . . . Those sad eyes . . . But you know she can't be as young as she once was! I remember I slept with her the day MacMahon resigned."

"You'd better not remind her of it. She's now Mme. Swann, wife of a gentleman in the Jockey Club who's a friend of the Prince of Wales. But she's still superb."

"Yes, but if only you'd known her then—how pretty she was! She lived in a very strange little house filled with Chinese bric-a-brac. I remember we were bothered by the newsboys shouting outside, in the end she made me get up."

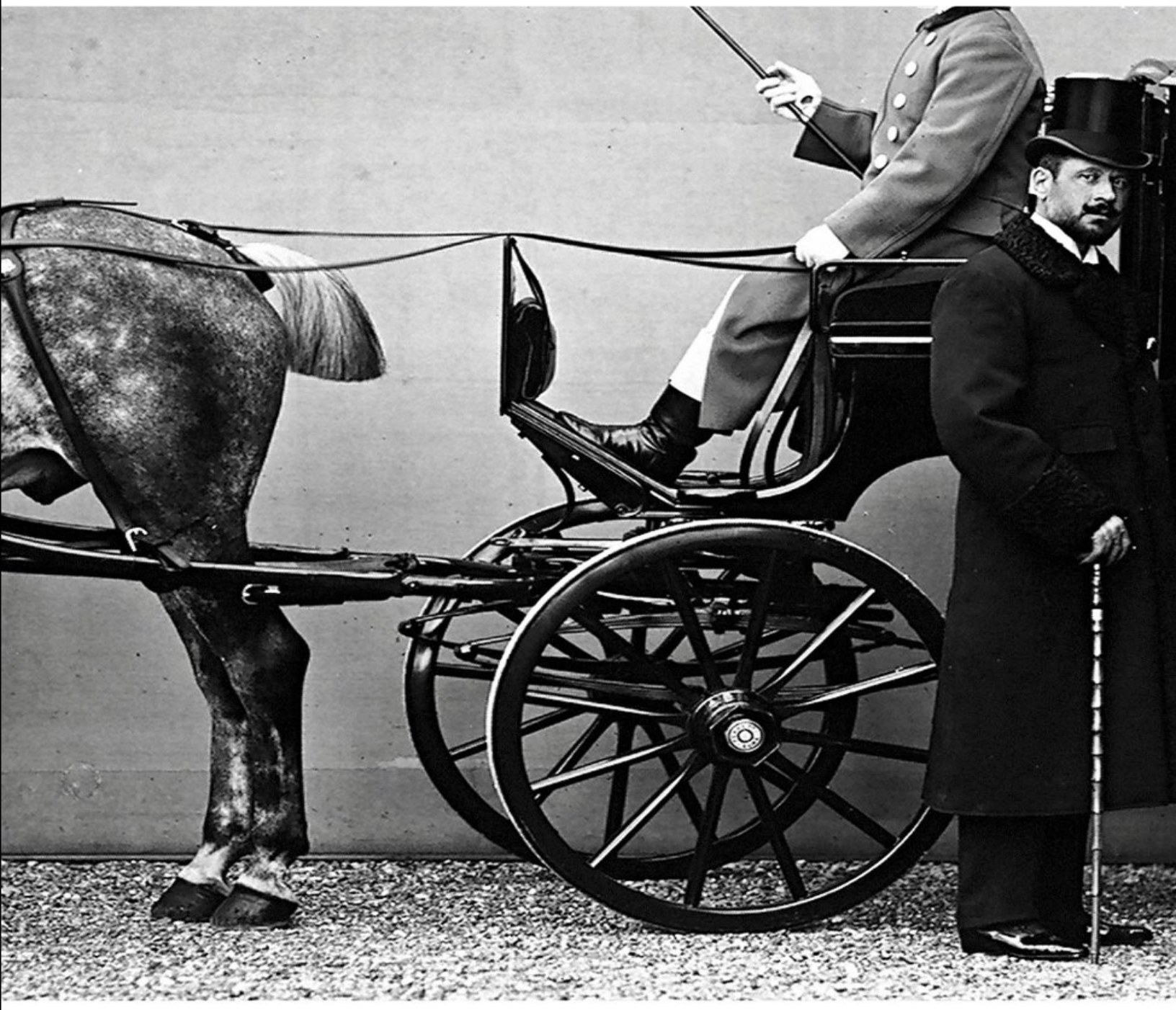
Though I could not hear these comments, I did perceive all around her the indistinct murmur of celebrity. My heart raced with impatience at the thought that yet another instant was going to pass before the moment when all these people, among whom I was disconsolate not to find a certain mulatto banker by whom I felt I was despised, would see the young stranger to whom they had paid no attention bow (without knowing her, in fact, but I felt I was authorized to do so because my parents knew her husband and I was her daughter's playmate) to that woman whose reputation for beauty, improper behavior, and elegance was universal. But I was already very close to Mme. Swann, so I raised my hat to her with a motion so large, so extended, so prolonged, that she could not help smiling. People laughed. As for her, she had never seen me with Gilberte, she did not know my name, but for her I was—like one of the keepers of the Bois, or the boatman or the ducks on the lake to which she threw bread—one of those secondary, familiar, anonymous figures, as lacking in individual character as an "extra" onstage, of her outings in the Bois. On certain days when I had not seen her in the allée des Acacias, I would sometimes find her in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, where women go who want to be alone, or to appear to want to be alone; she would not remain alone for long, soon joined by some friend, often wearing a gray "topper," whom I did not know and who would talk to her for a long time, while their two carriages followed.

MODERN CLASSICS

Marcel Proust

In Search of Lost Time

Volume 1
The Way by Swann's



Marcel Proust

Swann's Way

Translated with an Introduction
and Notes by Lydia Davis

GENERAL EDITOR:
CHRISTOPHER PRENDERGAST

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SWANN'S WAY

MARCEL PROUST was born in Auteuil in 1871. In his twenties, following a year in the army, he became a conspicuous society figure, frequenting the most fashionable Paris salons of the day. After 1899, however, his chronic asthma, the death of his parents, and his growing disillusionment with humanity caused him to lead an increasingly retired life. From 1907 on, he rarely emerged from a cork-lined room in his apartment on boulevard Haussmann. There he insulated himself against the distractions of city life and the effects of trees and flowers—though he loved them, they brought on his attacks of asthma. He slept by day and worked by night, writing letters and devoting himself to the completion of *In Search of Lost Time*. He died in 1922.

LYDIA DAVIS, a 2003 MacArthur Fellow, is the author of a novel, *The End of the Story*, and three volumes of short fiction, the latest of which is *Samuel Johnson Is Indignant*. She is also the translator of numerous works by Maurice Blanchot, Michel Leiris, Pierre Jean Jouve, and many others and was recently named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government. Her essay on close translation of Proust appeared in the April 2004 issue of the *Yale Review*.

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Introduction

Many passages from Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* are by now so well known that they have turned into clichés and reference points and occupy a permanent place in contemporary Western culture. Scenes and episodes are familiar even to many who have not actually read the book: say "Proust" and they will immediately think "madeleine" and "tea," if not "cork-lined room." Yet confronting the book itself is an entirely different, and individual, experience. One will have one's own way of visualizing the narrator's childhood bedtime scene with his mother, his visits to his hypochondriac aunt, his teasing of the servant Françoise, his embrace of the prickly hawthorns, his vision of the three steeples, and his first piece of serious writing. Swann's agonizing love affair with Odette and the narrator's youthful infatuation with Swann's daughter Gilberte will be colored by the personal associations of each reader, who will likewise have unexpected memories, recalled by unexpected stimuli, that will enable him or her to identify with the narrator in the most famous scene of all, in which the taste of a tea-soaked madeleine suddenly incites his full recollection of his childhood in the village of Combray and, from this, leads to the unfolding of all the subsequent action in the three-thousand-page novel.

One will find, too, that the better acquainted one becomes with this book, the more it yields. Given its richness and resilience, Proust's work may be, and has been, enjoyed on every level and in every form—as quotation, as excerpt, as compendium, even as movie and comic book—but in the end it is best experienced, for most, in the way it was meant to be, in the full, slow reading and rereading of every word, in complete submission to Proust's subtle psychological analyses, his precise portraits, his compassionate humor, his richly colored and lyrical landscapes, his extended digressions, his architectonic sentences, his symphonic structures, his perfect formal designs.

Swann's Way is divided into three parts: "Combray," "Swann in Love," and "Place-Names: The Name." "Combray," itself divided into two parts, opens with the bedtime of the narrator as a grown man: he describes how he used to spend the sleepless portions of his nights remembering events from earlier in his life and finally describes the episode of the madeleine. A second and much longer section of "Combray" follows, containing the memories of his childhood at Combray that were summoned by the taste of the "petite madeleine" and that came flooding back to him in unprecedentedly minute and sensuous detail. This first part of the book, having opened at bedtime, closes—itself like a long sleepless night—at dawn.

"Swann in Love," which jumps back in time to a period before the narrator was born, consists of the self-contained story of Swann's miserable, jealousy-racked love for the shallow and fickle Odette, who will one day be his wife; the narrator with whom we began the book scarcely appears at all.

The third and last part, "Place-Names: The Name," much shorter than the rest of the volume, includes the story of the narrator's infatuation, as a boy, with Swann's daughter Gilberte during the weeks they play together on the chilly lawns of the Champs-Élysées and ends with a sort of coda which jumps forward in time: on a late November day, at the time of the writing, the narrator, walking through the Bois de Boulogne, muses on the contrast between the beauties of the days of his childhood and the banality of the present, and on the nature of time.

The story is told in the first person. Proust scholars have identified a handful of slightly different *I*'s in the novel as a whole, but the two main *I*'s are those of the rather weary, middle-aged narrator as he tells the story and the narrator as a child and young man. The first person, however, is abandoned for shorter or longer intervals in favor of what is in effect an omniscient narrator, as when, in "Combray," we witness conversations between his aunt Léonie and the servant Françoise which the boy could not have heard; and most remarkably during nearly the whole of "Swann in Love."

The story is told in the first person, the protagonist is referred to several times in the course of *In Search of Lost Time,* though not in *Swann's Way,* as "Marcel," and the book is filled with events and characters closely resembling those of Proust's own life, yet this novel is not autobiography wearing a thin disguise of fiction but, rather, something more complex—fiction created out of real life, based on the experiences and beliefs of its author, and presented in the guise of autobiography. For although Proust's own life experience is the material from which he forms his novel, this material has been altered, recombined, shaped to create a coherent and meaningful fictional artifact, a crucial alchemy—art's transformation of life—which is itself one of Proust's preoccupations and a principal subject and theme of the book.

The episode of the madeleine, for instance, was based on an experience of Proust's own, but what Proust apparently dipped in his tea was a rusk of dry toast, and the memory that then returned to him was his morning visits to his grandfather. The scene of the goodnight kiss was set, not in a single actual home of Proust's childhood, but in a melding of two—one in Auteuil, the suburb of Paris where he was born, and the other in Illiers, a town outside Paris where he spent many summers. Similarly, the characters in the novel are composites, often more perfectly realized ideals or extremes, of characters in his own life: the annoying Mme. Verdurin is based closely on a certain Mme. X of Proust's acquaintance, but to avoid offending her by too blatantly describing her, Proust attributed her habit of incessantly painting pictures of roses to another character, Mme. de Villeparisis.

What is introduced in this inaugural volume of *In Search of Lost Time*? As Samuel Beckett remarks in his slim study *Proust,* "The whole of Proust's world comes out of a teacup, and not merely Combray and his childhood. For Combray brings us to the two 'ways' and to Swann, and to Swann may be related every element of the Proustian experience and consequently its climax in revelation. . . . Swann is the cornerstone of the entire structure, and the central figure of the narrator's childhood, a childhood that involuntary memory, stimulated or charmed by the long-forgotten taste of a madeleine steeped in an infusion of tea, conjures in all the relief and colour of its essential significance from the shallow well of a cup's inscrutable banality."

Through Charles Swann, the faithful friend and constant dinner guest of the narrator's family, we are led, either directly or indirectly, to all the most important characters of *In Search of Lost Time*. As Proust himself says, describing the book in a letter to a friend: "There are a great many characters; they are 'prepared' in this first volume, in such a way that in the second they will do exactly the opposite of what one would have expected from the first." Nearly all, in fact, are introduced in *Swann's Way:* the young protagonist, his parents and his grandmother; Swann, his daughter Gilberte, and Odette, whose is both the mysterious "lady in pink" early in the book and later the lovely Mme. Swann; Françoise, the family servant; the narrator's boyhood friend, the bookish Bloch; and the aristocrat Mme. de Villeparisis. Stories are told about them that will be echoed later by parallel stories, just as the story of the young protagonist's longing for his mother is echoed within this volume by the story of Swann's longing for Odette and the narrator's, when he was a boy, for Gilberte. Stories are begun that will be continued, hints are dropped that will be picked up, and questions are asked that will be answered in later volumes; places are described that will reappear in greater detail. "Combray," which contains some of the most beautiful writing in the novel, sets the stage for the rest, and in its first pages introduces the principal themes which will be elaborated in subsequent volumes: childhood, love, betrayal, memory, sleep, time, homosexuality, music, art, manners, taste, society, historic France. The later volumes, in turn, give "Combray" an ever richer meaning, and reveal more fully the logical interrelation of its parts. As Proust himself, again, in the same letter, says: "And from the point of view of composition, it is so complex that it only becomes clear much later when all the 'themes' have begun to coalesce."

In the narrator's recovery of his early memories through the tasting of the tea-soaked madeleine, for instance, we first learn of Proust's conception of the power of involuntary memory: the madeleine is only the first of a number of inanimate objects that will appear in the course of *In Search of Lost Time,* each of which provides a sensuous experience which will in turn provoke an involuntary memory (the uneven cobblestones in a courtyard, for instance, or the touch of a stiffly starched napkin on the lips). The incident of the madeleine will itself be taken up again and revealed in a new light in the final volume.

In the narrator's early passion for his mother and Swann's for Odette, we are introduced to the power of love for an elusive object, the obstinate perversity with which one's passion is intensified, if not in fact created, by the danger of losing one's beloved. The narrator's infatuation with Gilberte in the present volume will be echoed by his more fully developed passion, as an adult, for Albertine in a subsequent volume. In the very first pages of *Swann's Way,* the notion of escape from time is alluded to, and the description of the magic lantern which follows soon after hints at how time will be transcended through art. The wistful closing passage in the Bois de Boulogne introduces the theme of the receding, in time, and the disappearance, of beloved places and people, and their resurrection in our imagination, our memory, and finally our art. For only in recollection does an experience become fully significant, as we arrange it in a meaningful pattern, and

thus the crucial role of our intellect, our imagination, in our perception of the world and our re-creation of it to suit our desires; thus the importance of the role of the artist in transforming reality according to a particular inner vision: the artist escapes the tyranny of time through art.

In one early scene, for example, the young protagonist sees the object of his devotion, the Duchesse de Guermantes, in the village church. He has never seen her before; what he has loved has been his own image of her, which he has created from her name and family history, her country estate, her position and reputation. In the flesh, she is disappointing: she has a rather ordinary face, and a pimple beside her nose. But immediately his imagination goes to work again, and soon he has managed to change what he sees before him into an object once again worthy of his love. Similarly, later in the novel Swann finds that his love of Odette is wonderfully strengthened, even transformed, the moment he realizes how closely she resembles a favorite painting of his: he now sees the painting, as well, when he looks at her. The power of the intellect, and the imagination, have come to transform the inadequacy or tediousness of the real.

Proust began writing *Du côté de chez Swann* when he was in his late thirties, sometime between the summer of 1908 and the summer of 1909, as near as we can make out from references in his letters and conversations. His mother, with whom he had lived, had died in 1905, and following a stay of some months in a sanatorium, he had moved into an apartment at Versailles while friends searched for a suitable place for him to settle. This place turned out to be an apartment at 102, boulevard Haussmann, which was already familiar to him since the building had been in the possession of his family for some years; his uncle had died in the apartment and his mother had often visited it. The building is now owned by a bank, but one can still view Proust's high-ceilinged bedroom with its two tall windows and marble fireplace. In this room, of modest dimensions, Proust spent most of the rest of his life—slept, rested, ate, received visitors, read, and wrote. It was here that most of *À la recherche du temps perdu* came into being.

In a sense, the book had already been in preparation for several years before it began to take the form of a novel. It was never destined to be composed in a neatly chronological manner in any case, and elements of it had been emerging piecemeal in various guises: paragraphs, passages, scenes were written and even published in earlier versions, then later reworked and incorporated into the novel. The famous description in *Swann's Way* of the steeples of Martinville, for example, had an earlier incarnation as an article on road travel; and versions of many scenes had appeared in Proust's first, unfinished, and unpublished novel, *Jean Santeuil,* which juxtaposed the two childhood homes that Proust would later combine to form the setting of the drama of the goodnight kiss.

Proust had been projecting a number of shorter works, most of them essays. At a certain point he realized they could all be brought together in a single form, a novel. What became its start had, immediately before, begun as an essay contesting the ideas of the literary critic Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, a work which he conceived as having a fictional opening: the mother of the main character would come to his bedside in the morning and the two of them would begin a conversation about Sainte-Beuve. The first drafts of this essay evolved into the novel, and at last, by midsummer of 1909, Proust was actually referring to his work-in-progress as a novel. Thereafter the work continued to develop somewhat chaotically, as Proust wrote many different parts of the book at the same time, cutting, expanding, and revising endlessly. Even as he wrote the opening, however, he foresaw the conclusion, and in fact the end of the book was completed before the middle began to grow.

A version of the present first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann,* was in existence by January 1912, and extracts including "A Ray of Sun on the Balcony" and "Village Church" were published that year in the newspaper *Le Figaro*.

Although the publisher Eugène Fasquelle had announced that in his opinion "nothing must interfere with the *action*" in a work of fiction, Proust nevertheless submitted to him a manuscript of the book in October 1912. At this point, admitting that his novel was very long but pointing out that it was "very concise," he proposed a book in two volumes, one called *Le Temps perdu* (Time Lost) and the other *Le Temps retrouvé* (Time Found Again), under the general title *Les Intermittences du coeur* (The Intermittences of the Heart). (He had not yet found the title *Du côté de chez Swann*.)

He received no answer from Fasquelle and, in November 1912, wrote to the Nouvelle Revue Française, a more literary publisher which had developed from a literary journal of the same name founded by André Gide and was later to take the name of its director, Gaston Gallimard. Now he was considering three volumes.

In December 1912, Gallimard and Fasquelle both returned their copies of the manuscript. Fasquelle did not want to risk publishing something "so different from what the public is used to reading." Gide later admitted to Proust: "The rejection of this book will remain the most serious mistake ever made by the NRF —and (since to my shame I was largely responsible for it) one of the sorrows, one of the most bitter regrets of my life."

At the end of December 1912, Proust approached another publisher, Ollendorff. He offered not only to pay the costs of publication but also to share with the publisher any profits that might derive from it. Ollendorff's rejection came in February and included the comment: "I don't see why a man should take thirty pages to describe how he turns over in bed before he goes to sleep." At last Proust submitted the manuscript to the energetic young publisher Bernard Grasset, offering to pay the expenses of publishing the book and publicizing it, and Grasset accepted.

By April 1913, Proust was beginning to work on proofs. He said in a letter to a friend: "My corrections so far (I hope this won't continue) are not corrections. There remains not a single line out of 20 of the original text. . . . It is crossed out, corrected in every blank part I can find, and I am pasting papers at the top, at the bottom, to the right, to the left, etc. . . ." He said that although the resulting text was actually a bit shorter, it was a "hopelessly tangled mess."

During this time, he made final decisions about titles. Ideally, he would have preferred simply the general title, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, followed by "Volume I" and "Volume II" with no individual titles for the two volumes. However, his publisher wanted individual titles for commercial reasons. Proust decided the first volume would be called *Du côté de chez Swann* and the second probably *Le Côté de Guermantes* . He explained several times what these titles meant, that in the country around Combray there were two directions in which to take a walk, that one asked, for example: "Shall we go in the direction of M. Rostand's house?" (His friend Maurice Rostand had in fact suggested the title of the first volume.) *Du côté de chez Swann* would, most literally translated, be the answer: "in the direction of Swann's place" or "toward Swann's."

But the title also had a metaphorical signification. *Chez Swann* means not only "Swann's home, Swann's place," but also "on the part of Swann, about Swann"; i.e., the title refers not just to where Swann lives but to the person Swann is, to Swann's mind, opinions, character, nature. And by extension the first volume concerns not just Swann's manner of living, thinking, but also Swann's world, the worldly and artistic domain, while *Le Côté de Guermantes* (now the third volume of the novel) concerns the ancient family of the Guermantes and their world, the domain of the aristocracy. And it is true that the character of Swann gives the volume its unity. (By the end of the novel, the two divergent walks are symbolically joined.)

Proust's friend Louis de Robert did not like the title, and Proust mentioned a few others—rather idly, as it turns out, since he was not really going to change his mind: "Charles Swann," "Gardens in a Cup of Tea," and "The Age of Names." He said he had also thought of "Springtime." But he argued: "I still don't understand why the name of that Combray path which was known as 'the way by Swann's' with its earthy reality, its local truthfulness, does not have just as much poetry in it as those abstract or flowery titles."

The work of the printer was finished by November 1913—an edition of 1,750 was printed—and the book was in the bookstores November 14. Reviews by Lucien Daudet and Jean Cocteau, among others, appeared. Not all the reviews were positive. The publisher submitted the book for the Prix Goncourt, but the prize was won, instead, by a book called *Le Peuple de la mer* (The People of the Sea), by Marc Elder.

A later edition was published in 1919 by Gallimard with some small changes. A corrected edition was published by Gallimard in its Bibliothèque de la Pléiade series in 1954 and another, with further corrections and additions, in 1987.

The first English translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, C.K. Scott Moncrieff's *Swann's Way,* was done in Proust's lifetime and published in 1922. Sixty years later, a revision of Scott Moncrieff's translation by Terence Kilmartin, based on the corrected edition of the French, brought the translation closer to the original, cutting gratuitous additions and embellishments and correcting Scott Moncrieff's own misreadings, though it did not go as far as it could have in eliminating redundancy and also introduced the occasional grammatical mistake and mixed metaphor; in addition, Kilmartin's ear for the English language was not as sensitive as Scott Moncrieff's. In 1992, after Kilmartin's death and after the publication of the still-more-definitive 1987 Pléiade edition, the translation was further revised by D. J. Enright. The two revisions of Scott Moncrieff's *Swann's Way* retain so much of his original work that they cannot be called new translations. Thus, there existed, until the present volume, only one other translation of *Du côté de chez Swann,* and that was *Swann's Way* (Canberra, 1982) as translated by James Grieve, a writer and professor of French literature in Australia. Grieve's approach was not to follow the original French as closely as possible,

as had been Scott Moncrieff's, but to study the text for its meaning and then re-create it in a style which might have been that of an author writing originally in English. He therefore brings to his version a greater degree of freedom in word choice, order, and syntax.

If Proust has been reputed by some to be difficult reading, this can be attributed perhaps to several factors. One is that the interest of this novel, unlike that of the more traditional novel, is not merely, or even most of all, in the story it tells. (In one letter, Proust himself describes the work as a novel, but then, having second thoughts, qualifies that description with typical subtlety and precision by adding that, at least, "the novel form" is the form from which "it departs least.") In fact it does not set out to tell a linear, logically sequential story, but rather to create a world unified by the narrator's governing sensibility, in which blocks of a fictional past life are retrieved and presented, in roughly chronological order, in all their nuances. A reader may feel overwhelmed by the detail of this nuance and wish to get on with the story, and yet the only way to read Proust is to yield, with a patience equal to his, to his own unhurried manner of telling the story.

Another factor in Proust's reputed difficulty for Anglophone readers in particular may be that in the Scott Moncrieff translation, which has been virtually the only one read hitherto by readers of Proust in English, Proust's own lengthy, yet concise, expatiations were themselves amplified by a certain consistent redundancy which makes the translation at all points longer than the original. Proust's single word "strange" is rendered in English by Scott Moncrieff, for the sake of euphony or rhythm, as "strange and haunting"; "uninteresting" becomes "quite without interest"; "he" becomes "he himself." At the same time Proust's prose was heightened by Scott Moncrieff, by the replacement throughout of a plain word such as "said" by a more colorful one such as "remarked," "murmured," "asserted," etc.; he was given, regularly, a more sentimental or melodramatic turn: the "entrance to the Underworld," in the original French, becomes "the Jaws of Hell." The effect of all these individual choices was to produce a text which, although it "flows" very well and follows the original remarkably closely in word order and construction, is wordier and "dressier" than the original. It remains a very powerful translation, but, as with many of the first translations of seminal literary works, somewhat misrepresents the style of the original, which was, in this case, essentially natural and direct, and far plainer than one might have guessed.

Yet another factor in Proust's "difficulty" may be his famously long sentences. Proust never felt that great length was desirable in itself. He categorically rejected sentences that were artificially amplified, or that were overly abstract, or that groped, arriving at a thought by a succession of approximations, just as he despised empty flourishes; when he describes Odette as having a *sourire sournois,* or "sly smile," the alliteration is there for a purpose, to further unite the two words in one's mind. As he proceeded from draft to draft, he not only added material but also condensed. "I prefer concentration," he said, "even in length." And in fact, according to a meticulous count of the sentences in *Swann's Way* and the second volume of the novel, reported by Jean Milly in his study of the Proustian sentence, *La Phrase de Proust,* nearly forty percent of the sentences in these two books are reasonably short—one to five lines—and less than one-quarter are very long—ten lines or more.

Proust felt, however, that a long sentence contained a whole, complex thought, a thought that should not be fragmented or broken. The shape of the sentence was the shape of the thought, and every word was necessary to the thought: "I really have to weave these long silks as I spin them," he said. "If I shortened my sentences, it would make little pieces of sentences, not sentences." He wished to "encircle the truth with a single—even if long and sinuous—stroke."

Many contemporaries of Proust's insisted that he wrote the way he spoke, although when *Du côté de chez Swann* appeared in print, they were startled by what they saw as the severity of the page. Where were the pauses, the inflections? There were not enough empty spaces, not enough punctuation marks. To them, the sentences seemed longer when read on the page than they did when they were spoken, in his extraordinary hoarse voice: his voice punctuated them.

One friend, though surely exaggerating, reported that Proust would arrive late in the evening, wake him up, begin talking, and deliver one long sentence that did not come to an end until the middle of the night. The sentence would be full of asides, parentheses, illuminations, reconsiderations, revisions, addenda, corrections, augmentations, digressions, qualifications, erasures, deletions, and marginal notes. It would, in other words, attempt to be exhaustive, to capture every nuance of a piece of reality, to reflect Proust's entire thought. To be exhaustive is, of course, an infinite task: more events can always be inserted, and more nuance in the narration, more commentary on the event, and more nuance within the commentary. Growing by association of ideas, developing internally by contiguity, the long sentences are built up into pyramids of subordinate clauses.

These sentences are constructed very tightly, with their many layers, the insertion of parenthetical remarks and digressions adding color and background to the main point, and delaying the outcome, the conclusion of the sentence, which is most often a particularly strong or climactic word or pair of words. They are knit together using a variety of conscious and unconscious stylistic techniques that become fascinating to observe and analyze: repetition, apposition, logical contrast, comparison; extended metaphors; nuanced qualifications within the metaphors themselves; varieties of parallel structures; balanced series of pairs of nouns, adjectives, or phrases; and lavish aural effects—as in the alliteration of this phrase: *faisait refluer ses reflets;* or the ABBA structure of vowel sounds in this one: *lâcheté qui nous détourne de toute tâche;* or the cooing of the dove at the end of this paragraph: *Et son faîte était toujours couronné du roucoulement d'une colombe*. And yet Proust's economy prevails, and extends even to his punctuation, with in particular a marked underuse of the comma. The punctuation, with in particular a marked underuse of the comma. The effect of this light punctuation is, again, that the whole thought is conveyed with as little fragmentation as possible, and that it travels more quickly from writer to reader, has a more noticeably powerful trajectory. The punctuation, of course, in part determines the pace and the breath span of the prose. If, as occasionally and conspicuously happens in *Swann's Way,* a sentence is chopped into a succession of short phrases separated by commas which halt its flow, the prose gasps for air; whereas the very long sentence, relatively unimpeded by stops, gives the impression of a headlong rush to deliver the thought in one exhalation. In this translation I have attempted to stay as close to Proust's own style as possible, in its every aspect, without straying into an English style that is too foreign or awkward; with particular attention to word order and word choice, his punctuation, too, can often be duplicated in English, and commas which might have seemed necessary can quite happily be eliminated or reduced.

One last comment concerning word choice: often the closest, most accurate, and even most euphonious equivalent may be a word more commonly used decades ago than it is now: for instance, the French *chercher* means both "to look for" and "to try," so its perfect equivalent in English is our "seek," still current today but rarer and more specialized than its equivalents. Or, to go further back in time, for the French *corsage,* the part of a woman's dress extending from the neck to the hips and also known as the "waist" or "body" of the dress, the perfect equivalent is "bodice," which in fact means the same thing. I have chosen to use both of these and many other close equivalents. Other perfectly identical English equivalents have simply receded too far into the past by now and will be too obscure to be understood: Proust's *solitude,* which in French can mean "a lonely spot," has that meaning in English, too, but will no longer be understood in that sense. A couple of centuries ago, we referred, in English, to a "piece of water" just as Proust does to *une pièce d'eau,* and meant, like him, an ornamental pool or pond. And then there are some borderline cases, some perfect equivalents which may not convey as much to the contemporary reader as a close approximation, so that what one gains in exactness one loses in expressive power; some of these I have reluctantly bypassed (such as "parvis," identical to the French, which means the area in front of a sacred building and is the name neatly given by Proust to the part of the garden outside Françoise's "temple" and for which I have substituted "temple yard"); but others I have used because they were too perfect to give up. One of these was "aurora" for *aurore:* it is the rosy or yellow-gold light in the sky just before the sun rises, and it follows *aube,* the first appearance of light in the sky.

A Note on the Translation

The present translation came into being in the following way. A project was conceived by the Penguin UK Modern Classics series in which the whole of *In Search of Lost Time* would be translated freshly on the basis of the latest and most authoritative French text, *À la recherche du temps perdu,* edited by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Pléiade, Gallimard, 1987-89). The translation would be done by a group of translators, each of whom would take on one of the seven volumes. The project was directed first by Paul Keegan, then by Simon Winder, and was overseen by general editor Christopher Prendergast. I was contacted early in the selection process, in the fall of 1995, and I chose to translate the first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann.* The other translators are James Grieve, for *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower;* Mark Treharne, for *The Guermantes Way;* John Sturrock, for *Sodom and Gomorrah;* Carol Clark, for *The Prisoner;* Peter Collier, for *The Fugitive;* and Ian Patterson, for *Finding Time Again.*

Between 1996 and the delivery of our manuscripts, the tardiest in mid-2001, we worked at different rates in our different parts of the world—one in Australia, one in the United States, the rest in various parts of England. After a single face-to-face meeting in early 1998, which most of the translators attended, we communicated with one another and with Christopher Prendergast by letter and e-mail. We agreed, often after lively debate, on certain practices that needed to be consistent from one volume to the next, such as retaining French titles like Duchesse de Guermantes, and leaving the quotations that occur within the text—from Racine, most notably—in the original French, with translations in the notes.

At the initial meeting of the Penguin Classics project, those present had acknowledged that a degree of heterogeneity across the volumes was inevitable and perhaps even desirable, and that philosophical differences would exist among the translators. As they proceeded, therefore, the translators worked fairly independently, and decided for themselves how close their translations should be to the original—how many liberties, for instance, might be taken with the sanctity of Proust's long sentences. And Christopher Prendergast, as he reviewed all the translations, kept his editorial hand relatively light. The Penguin UK translation appeared in October 2002, in six hardcover volumes and as a boxed set.

Some changes may be noted in this American edition, besides the adoption of American spelling conventions. One is that the UK decision concerning quotes within the text has been reversed, and all the French has been translated into English, with the original quotations in the notes. We have also replaced the French punctuation of dialogue, which uses dashes and omits certain opening and closing quotation marks, with standard American dialogue punctuation, though we have respected Proust's paragraphing decisions—sometimes long exchanges take place within a single paragraph, while in other cases each speech begins a new paragraph. Last, I have gone through the text of the British edition and made whatever small changes seemed to me called for when I read it freshly in print.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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PART I

Combray

1

FOR A LONG TIME, I went to bed early. Sometimes, my candle scarcely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I did not have time to say to myself: "I'm falling asleep." And, half an hour later, the thought that it was time to try to sleep would wake me; I wanted to put down the book I thought I still had in my hands and blow out my light; I had not ceased while sleeping to form reflections on what I had just read, but these reflections had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This belief lived on for a few seconds after my waking; it did not shock my reason but lay heavy like scales on my eyes and kept them from realizing that the candlestick was no longer lit. Then it began to grow unintelligible to me, as after metempsychosis do the thoughts of an earlier existence; the subject of the book detached itself from me, I was free to apply myself to it or not; immediately I recovered my sight and I was amazed to find a darkness around me soft and restful for my eyes, but perhaps even more so for my mind, to which it appeared a thing without cause, incomprehensible, a thing truly dark. I would ask myself what time it might be; I could hear the whistling of the trains which, remote or nearby, like the singing of a bird in a forest, plotting the distances, described to me the extent of the deserted countryside where the traveler hastens toward the nearest station; and the little road he is following will be engraved on his memory by the excitement he owes to new places, to unaccustomed activities, to the recent conversation and the farewells under the unfamiliar lamp that follow him still through the silence of the night, to the imminent sweetness of his return.

I would rest my cheeks tenderly against the lovely cheeks of the pillow, which, full and fresh, are like the cheeks of our childhood. I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. This is the hour when the invalid who has been obliged to go off on a journey and has had to sleep in an unfamiliar hotel, wakened by an attack, is cheered to see a ray of light under the door. How fortunate, it's already morning! In a moment the servants will be up, he will be able to ring, someone will come help him. The hope of being relieved gives him the courage to suffer. In fact he thought he heard footsteps; the steps approach, then recede. And the ray of light that was under his door has disappeared. It is midnight; they have just turned off the gas; the last servant has gone and he will have to suffer the whole night through without remedy.

I would go back to sleep, and would sometimes afterward wake again for brief moments only, long enough to hear the organic creak of the woodwork, open my eyes and stare at the kaleidoscope of the darkness, savor in a momentary glimmer of consciousness the sleep into which were plunged the furniture, the room, that whole of which I was only a small part and whose insensibility I would soon return to share. Or else while sleeping I had effortlessly returned to a period of my early life that had ended forever, rediscovered one of my childish terrors such as my great-uncle pulling me by my curls, a terror dispelled on the day—the dawn for me of a new era—when they were cut off. I had forgotten that event during my sleep, I recovered its memory as soon as I managed to wake myself up to escape the hands of my great-uncle, but as a precautionary measure I would completely surround my head with my pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, as Eve was born from one of Adam's ribs, a woman was born during my sleep from a cramped position of my thigh. Formed from the pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, she, I imagined, was the one offering it to me. My body, which felt in hers my own warmth, would try to find itself inside her, I would wake up. The rest of humanity seemed very remote compared with this woman I had left scarcely a few moments before; my cheek was still warm from her kiss, my body aching from the weight of hers. If, as sometimes happened, she had the features of a woman I had known in life, I would devote myself entirely to this end: to finding her again, like those who go off on a journey to see a longed-for city with their own eyes and imagine that one can enjoy in reality the charm of a dream. Little by little the memory of her would fade, I had forgotten the girl of my dream.

A sleeping man holds in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and worlds. He consults them instinctively as he wakes and reads in a second the point on the earth he occupies, the time that has elapsed before his waking; but their ranks can be mixed up, broken. If toward morning, after a bout of insomnia, sleep overcomes him as he is reading, in a position quite different from the one in which he usually sleeps, his raised arm alone is enough to stop the sun and make it retreat, and, in the first minute of his waking, he will no longer know what time it is, he will think he has only just gone to bed. If he dozes off in a position still more displaced and divergent, after dinner sitting in an armchair for instance, then the confusion among the disordered worlds will be complete, the magic armchair will send him traveling at top speed through time and space, and, at the moment of opening his eyelids, he will believe he went to bed several months earlier in another country. But it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was deep and allowed my mind to relax entirely; then it would let go of the map of the place where I had fallen asleep and, when I woke in the middle of the night, since I did not know where I was, I did not even understand in the first moment who I was; I had only, in its original simplicity, the sense of existence as it may quiver in the depths of an animal; I was more destitute than a cave dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place where I was, but of several of those where I had lived and where I might have been—would come to me like help from on high to pull me out of the void from which I could not have got out on my own; I crossed centuries of civilization in one second, and the image confusedly glimpsed of oil lamps, then of wing-collar shirts, gradually recomposed my self's original features.

Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years. My body, too benumbed to move, would try to locate, according to the form of its fatigue, the position of its limbs so as to deduce from this the direction of the wall, the placement of the furniture, so as to reconstruct and name the dwelling in which it found itself. Its memory, the memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulders, offered in succession several of the rooms where it had slept, while around it the invisible walls, changing place according to the shape of the imagined room, spun through the shadows. And even before my mind, hesitating on the thresholds of times and shapes, had identified the house by reassembling the circumstances, it—my body—would recall the kind of bed in each one, the location of the doors, the angle at which the light came in through the windows, the existence of a hallway, along with the thought I had had as I fell asleep and that I had recovered upon waking. My stiffened side, trying to guess its orientation, would imagine, for instance, that it lay facing the wall in a big canopied bed and immediately I would say to myself: "Why, I went to sleep in the end even though Mama didn't come to say goodnight to me," I was in the country in the home of my grandfather, dead for many years; and my body, the side on which I was resting, faithful guardians of a past my mind ought never to have forgotten, recalled to me the flame of the night-light of Bohemian glass, in the shape of an urn, which hung from the ceiling by little chains, the mantelpiece of Siena marble, in my bedroom at Combray, at my grandparents' house, in faraway days which at this moment I imagined were present without picturing them to myself exactly and which I would see more clearly in a little while when I was fully awake.

Then the memory of a new position would reappear; the wall would slip away in another direction: I was in my room at Mme. de Saint-Loup's, in the country; good Lord! It's ten o'clock or even later, they will have finished dinner! I must have overslept during the nap I take every evening when I come back from my walk with Mme. de Saint-Loup, before putting on my evening clothes. For many years have passed since Combray, where, however late we returned, it was the sunset's red reflections I saw in the panes of my window. It is another sort of life one leads at Tansonville, at Mme. de Saint-Loup's, another sort of pleasure I take in going out only at night, in following by moonlight those lanes where I used to play in the sun; and the room where I fell asleep instead of dressing for dinner—from far off I can see it, as we come back, pierced by the flares of the lamp, a lone beacon in the night.

These revolving, confused evocations never lasted for more than a few seconds; often, in my brief uncertainty about where I was, I did not distinguish the various suppositions of which it was composed any better than we isolate, when we see a horse run, the successive positions shown to us by a kinetoscope. But I had seen sometimes one, sometimes another, of the bedrooms I had inhabited in my life, and in the end I would recall them all in the long reveries that followed my waking: winter bedrooms in which, as soon as you are in bed, you bury your head in a nest braided of the most disparate things: a corner of the pillow, the top of the covers, a bit of shawl, the side of the bed and an issue of the *Débats roses,*[1] which you end by cementing together using the birds' technique of pressing down on it indefinitely; where in icy weather the pleasure you enjoy is the feeling that you are separated from the outdoors (like the sea swallow which makes its nest deep in an underground passage in the warmth of the earth) and where, since the fire is kept burning all night in the fireplace, you sleep in a great cloak of

warm, smoky air, shot with the glimmers from the logs breaking into flame again, a sort of immaterial alcove, a warm cave dug out of the heart of the room itself, a zone of heat with shifting thermal contours, aerated by drafts which cool your face and come from the corners, from the parts close to the window or far from the hearth, and which have grown cold again: summer bedrooms where you delight in becoming one with the soft night, where the moonlight leaning against the half-open shutters casts its enchanted ladder to the foot of the bed, where you sleep almost in the open air, like a titmouse rocked by the breeze on the tip of a ray of light; sometimes the Louis XVI bedroom, so cheerful that even on the first night I had not been too unhappy there and where the slender columns that lightly supported the ceiling stood aside with such grace to show and reserve the place where the bed was; at other times, the small bedroom with the very high ceiling, hollowed out in the form of a pyramid two stories high and partly paneled in mahogany, where from the first second I had been mentally poisoned by the unfamiliar odor of the vetiver, convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and the insolent indifference of the clock chattering loudly as though I were not there; where a strange and pitiless quadrangular cheval glass, barring obliquely one of the corners of the room, carved from deep inside the soft fullness of my usual field of vision a site for itself which I had not expected; where my mind, struggling for hours to dislodge itself, to stretch upward so as to assume the exact shape of the room and succeed in filling its gigantic funnel to the very top, had suffered many hard nights, while I lay stretched out in my bed, my eyes lifted, my ear anxious, my nostril restive, my heart pounding, until habit had changed the color of the curtains, silenced the clock, taught pity to the cruel oblique mirror, concealed, if not driven out completely, the smell of the vetiver and appreciably diminished the apparent height of the ceiling. Habit! That skillful but very slow housekeeper who begins by letting our mind suffer for weeks in a temporary arrangement; but whom we are nevertheless truly happy to discover, for without habit our mind, reduced to no more than its own resources, would be powerless to make a lodging habitable.

Certainly I was now wide-awake, my body had veered around one last time and the good angel of certainty had brought everything around me to a standstill, laid me down under my covers, in my bedroom, and put approximately where they belonged in the darkness my chest of drawers, my desk, my fireplace, the window onto the street and the two doors. But even though I knew I was not in any of the houses of which my ignorance upon waking had instantly, if not presented me with the distinct picture, at least made me believe the presence possible, my memory had been stirred; generally I would not try to go back to sleep right away; I would spend the greater part of the night remembering our life in the old days, in Combray at my great-aunt's house, in Balbec, in Paris, in Doncières, in Venice, elsewhere still, remembering the places, the people I had known there, what I had seen of them, what I had been told about them.

At Combray, every day, in the late afternoon, long before the moment when I would have to go to bed and stay there, without sleeping, far away from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom again became the fixed and painful focus of my preoccupations. They had indeed hit upon the idea, to distract me on the evenings when they found me looking too unhappy, of giving me a magic lantern, which, while awaiting the dinner hour, they would set on top of my lamp; and, after the fashion of the first architects and master glaziers of the Gothic age, it replaced the opacity of the walls with impalpable iridescences, supernatural multicolored apparitions, where legends were depicted as in a wavering, momentary stained-glass window. But my sadness was only increased by this since the mere change in lighting destroyed the familiarity which my bedroom had acquired for me and which, except for the torment of going to bed, had made it tolerable to me. Now I no longer recognized it and I was uneasy there, as in a room in some hotel or "chalet" to which I had come for the first time straight from the railway train.

Moving at the jerky pace of his horse, and filled with a hideous design, Golo would come out of the small triangular forest that velveted the hillside with dark green and advance jolting toward the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. This castle was cut off along a curved line that was actually the edge of one of the glass ovals arranged in the frame which you slipped between the grooves of the lantern. It was only a section of castle and it had a moor in front of it where Geneviève stood dreaming, wearing a blue belt. The castle and the moor were yellow, and I had not had to wait to see them to find out their color since, before the glasses of the frame did so, the bronze sonority of the name Brabant had shown it to me clearly. Golo would stop for a moment to listen sadly to the patter read out loud by my great-aunt, which he seemed to understand perfectly, modifying his posture, with a meekness that did not exclude a certain majesty, to conform to the directions of the text; then he moved off at the same jerky pace. And nothing could stop his slow ride. If the lantern was moved, I could make out Golo's horse continuing to advance over the window curtains, swelling out with their folds, descending into their fissures. The body of Golo himself, in its essence as supernatural as that of his steed, accommodated every material obstacle, every hindersome object that he encountered by taking it as his skeleton and absorbing it into himself, even the doorknob he immediately adapted to and floated invincibly over with his red robe or his pale face as noble and as melancholy as ever, but revealing no disturbance at this transvertebration.

Certainly I found some charm in these brilliant projections, which seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and send out around me such ancient reflections of history. But I cannot express the uneasiness caused in me by this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room I had at last filled with myself to the point of paying no more attention to the room than to that self. The anesthetizing influence of habit having ceased, I would begin to have thoughts, and feelings, and they are such sad things. That doorknob of my room, which differed for me from all other doorknobs in the world in that it seemed to open of its own accord, without my having to turn it, so unconscious had its handling become for me, was now serving as an astral body for Golo. And as soon as they rang for dinner, I hastened to run to the dining room where the big hanging lamp, ignorant of Golo and Bluebeard, and well acquainted with my family and beef casserole, shed the same light as on every other evening; and to fall into the arms of Mama, whom Geneviève de Brabant's misfortunes made all the dearer to me, while Golo's crimes drove me to examine my own conscience more scrupulously.

After dinner, alas, I soon had to leave Mama, who stayed there talking with the others, in the garden if the weather was fine, in the little drawing room to which everyone withdrew if the weather was bad. Everyone, except my grandmother, who felt that "it's a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country" and who had endless arguments with my father on days when it rained too heavily, because he sent me to read in my room instead of having me stay outdoors. "That's no way to make him strong and active," she would say sadly, "especially that boy, who so needs to build up his endurance and willpower." My father would shrug his shoulders and study the barometer, for he liked meteorology, while my mother, making no noise so as not to disturb him, watched him with a tender respect, but not so intently as to try to penetrate the mystery of his superior qualities. But as for my grandmother, in all weathers, even in a downpour when Françoise had rushed the precious wicker armchairs indoors so that they would not get wet, we would see her in the empty, rain-lashed garden, pushing back her disordered gray locks so that her forehead could more freely drink in the salubriousness of the wind and rain. She would say: "At last, one can breathe!" and would roam the soaked paths—too symmetrically aligned for her liking by the new gardener, who lacked all feeling for nature and whom my father had been asking since morning if the weather would clear—with her jerky, enthusiastic little step, regulated by the various emotions excited in her soul by the intoxication of the storm, the power of good health, the stupidity of my upbringing, and the symmetry of the gardens, rather than by the desire, quite unknown to her, to spare her plum-colored skirt the spots of mud under which it would disappear up to a height that was always, for her maid, a source of despair and a problem.

When these garden walks of my grandmother's took place after dinner, one thing had the power to make her come inside again: this was—at one of the periodic intervals when her circular itinerary brought her back, like an insect, in front of the lights of the little drawing room where the liqueurs were set out on the card table—if my great-aunt called out to her: "Bathilde! Come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!" To tease her, in fact (she had brought into my father's family so different a mentality that everyone poked fun at her and tormented her), since liqueurs were forbidden to my grandfather, my great-aunt would make him drink a few drops. My poor grandmother would come in, fervently beg her husband not to taste the cognac; he would become angry, drink his mouthful despite her, and my grandmother would go off again, sad, discouraged, yet smiling, for she was so humble at heart and so gentle that her tenderness for others, and the lack of fuss she made over her own person and her sufferings, came together in her gaze in a smile in which, unlike what one sees in the faces of so many people, there was irony only for herself, and for all of us a sort of kiss from her eyes, which could not see those she cherished without caressing them passionately with her gaze. This torture which my great-aunt inflicted on her, the spectacle of my grandmother's vain entreaties and of her weakness, defeated in advance, trying uselessly to take the liqueur glass away from my grandfather, were the kinds of things which you later become so accustomed to seeing that you smile as you contemplate them and take the part of the persecutor resolutely and gaily enough to persuade yourself privately that no persecution is involved; at that time they filled me with such horror that I would have liked to hit my great-aunt. But as soon as I heard: "Bathilde, come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!," already a man in my cowardice, I did what we all do, once we are grown up, when confronted with sufferings and injustices: I did not want to see them; I went up to sob at the very top of the house next to the schoolroom,[2] under the roofs, in a little room that smelled of orris root and was also perfumed by a wild black-currant bush which had sprouted outside between the stones of the wall and extended a branch of flowers through the half-open window. Intended

for a more specialized and more vulgar use, this room, from which during the day you could see all the way to the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, for a long time served me as a refuge, no doubt because it was the only one I was permitted to lock, for all those occupations of mine that demanded an inviolable solitude: reading, reverie, tears, and sensuous pleasure. Alas! I did not know that, much more than her husband's little deviations from his regimen, it was my weak will, my delicate health, the uncertainty they cast on my future that so sadly preoccupied my grandmother in the course of those incessant perambulations, afternoon and evening, when we would see, as it passed and then passed again, lifted slantwise toward the sky, her beautiful face with its brown furrowed cheeks, which with age had become almost mauve like the plowed fields in autumn, crossed, if she was going out, by a veil half raised, while upon them, brought there by the cold or some sad thought, an involuntary tear was always drying.

My sole consolation, when I went upstairs for the night, was that Mama would come kiss me once I was in bed. But this goodnight lasted so short a time, she went down again so soon, that the moment when I heard her coming up, then the soft sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, hung with little cords of plaited straw, passing along the hallway with its double doors, was for me a painful moment. It ushered in the moment that would follow, in which she would have left me, in which she would have gone back down. So that I came to wish that this goodnight I loved so much would take place as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite in which Mama had not yet come. Sometimes when, after kissing me, she opened the door to go, I wanted to call her back, to say "kiss me one more time," but I knew that immediately her face would look vexed, because the concession she was making to my sadness and agitation by coming up to kiss me, by bringing me this kiss of peace, irritated my father, who found these rituals absurd, and she would have liked to try to induce me to lose the need for it, the habit of it, far indeed from allowing me to acquire that of asking her, when she was already on the doorstep, for one kiss more. And to see her vexed destroyed all the calm she had brought me a moment before, when she had bent her loving face down over my bed and held it out to me like a host for a communion of peace from which my lips would draw her real presence and the power to fall asleep. But those evenings, when Mama stayed so short a time in my room, were still sweet compared to the ones when there was company for dinner and when, because of that, she did not come up to say goodnight to me. That company was usually limited to M. Swann, who, apart from a few acquaintances passing through, was almost the only person who came to our house at Combray, sometimes for a neighborly dinner (more rarely after that unfortunate marriage of his, because my parents did not want to receive his wife), sometimes after dinner, unexpectedly. On those evenings when, as we sat in front of the house under the large chestnut tree, around the iron table, we heard at the far end of the garden, not the copious high-pitched bell that drenched, that deafened in passing with its ferruginous, icy, inexhaustible noise any person in the household who set it off by coming in "without ringing," but the shy, oval, golden double tinkling of the little visitors' bell, everyone would immediately wonder: "A visitor—now who can that be?" but we knew very well it could only be M. Swann; my great-aunt speaking loudly, to set an example, in a tone of voice that she strained to make natural, said not to whisper that way; that nothing is more disagreeable for a visitor just coming in who is led to think that people are saying things he should not hear; and they would send as a scout my grandmother, who was always glad to have a pretext for taking one more walk around the garden and who would profit from it by surreptitiously pulling up a few rose stakes on the way so as to make the roses look a little more natural, like a mother who runs her hand through her son's hair to fluff it up after the barber has flattened it too much.

We would all remain hanging on the news my grandmother was going to bring us of the enemy, as though there had been a great number of possible assailants to choose among, and soon afterward my grandfather would say: "I recognize Swann's voice." In fact one could recognize him only by his voice, it was difficult to make out his face, his aquiline nose, his green eyes under a high forehead framed by blond, almost red hair, cut Bressant-style,[3] because we kept as little light as possible in the garden so as not to attract mosquitoes, and I would go off, as though not going for that reason, to say that the syrups should be brought out; my grandmother placed a great deal of importance, considering it more amiable, on the idea that they should not seem anything exceptional, and for visitors only. M. Swann, though much younger, was very attached to my grandfather, who had been one of the closest friends of his father, an excellent man but peculiar, in whom, apparently, a trifle was sometimes enough to interrupt the ardor of his feelings, to change the course of his thinking. Several times a year I would hear my grandfather at the table telling anecdotes, always the same ones, about the behavior of old M. Swann upon the death of his wife, over whom he had watched day and night. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, had rushed to his side at the estate the Swanns owned in the vicinity of Combray and, so that he would not be present at the coffining, managed to entice him for a while, all in tears, out of the death chamber. They walked a short way in the park, where there was a little sunshine. Suddenly M. Swann, taking my grandfather by the arm, cried out: "Oh, my old friend, what a joy it is to be walking here together in such fine weather! Don't you think it's pretty, all these trees, these hawthorns! And my pond—which you've never congratulated me on! You look as sad as an old nightcap. Feel that little breeze? Oh, say what you like, life has something to offer despite everything, my dear Amédée!" Suddenly the memory of his dead wife came back to him and, no doubt feeling it would be too complicated to try to understand how he could have yielded to an impulse of happiness at such a time, he confined himself, in a habitual gesture of his whenever a difficult question came into his mind, to passing his hand over his forehead, wiping his eyes and the lenses of his lorgnon. Yet he could not be consoled for the death of his wife, but, during the two years he survived her, would say to my grandfather: "It's odd, I think of my poor wife often, but I can't think of her for long at a time." "Often, but only a little at a time, like poor old Swann," had become one of my grandfather's favorite phrases, which he uttered apropos of the most different sorts of things. I would have thought Swann's father was a monster, if my grandfather, whom I considered a better judge and whose pronouncement, forming a legal precedent for me, often allowed me later to dismiss offenses I might have been inclined to condemn, had not exclaimed: "What! He had a heart of gold!"

For many years, even though, especially before his marriage, the younger M. Swann often came to see them at Combray, my great-aunt and my grandparents did not suspect that he had entirely ceased to live in the kind of society his family had frequented and that, under the sort of incognito which this name Swann gave him among us, they were harboring—with the perfect innocence of honest inn-keepers who have under their roof, without knowing it, some celebrated highwayman—one of the most elegant members of the Jockey Club,[4] a favorite friend of the Comte de Paris[5] and the Prince of Wales,[6] one of the men most sought after by the high society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our ignorance of this brilliant social life that Swann led was obviously due in part to the reserve and discretion of his character, but also to the fact that bourgeois people in those days formed for themselves a rather Hindu notion of society and considered it to be made up of closed castes, in which each person, from birth, found himself placed in the station which his family occupied and from which nothing, except the accidents of an exceptional career or an unhoped-for marriage, could withdraw him in order to move him into a higher caste. M. Swann, the father, was a stockbroker; "Swann the son" would find he belonged for his entire life to a caste in which fortunes varied, as in a tax bracket, between such and such fixed incomes. One knew which had been his father's associations, one therefore knew which were his own, with which people he was "in a position" to consort. If he knew others, these were bachelor acquaintances on whom old friends of the family, such as my relatives, would close their eyes all the more benignly because he continued, after losing his parents, to come faithfully to see us; but we would have been ready to wager that these people he saw, who were unknown to us, were the sort he would not have dared greet had he encountered them when he was with us. If you were determined to assign Swann a social coefficient that was his alone, among the other sons of stockbrokers in a position equal to that of his parents, this coefficient would have been a little lower for him because, very simple in his manner and with a long-standing "craze" for antiques and painting, he now lived and amassed his collections in an old town house which my grandmother dreamed of visiting, but which was situated on the quai d'Orléans, a part of town where my great-aunt felt it was ignominious to live. "But are you a connoisseur? I ask for your own sake, because you're likely to let the dealers unload some awful daubs on you," my great-aunt would say to him; in fact she did not assume he had any competence and even from an intellectual point of view had no great opinion of a man who in conversation avoided serious subjects and showed a most prosaic preciseness not only when he gave us cooking recipes, entering into the smallest details, but even when my grandmother's sisters talked about artistic subjects. Challenged by them to give his opinion, to express his admiration for a painting, he would maintain an almost ungracious silence and then, on the other hand, redeem himself if he could provide, about the museum in which it was to be found, about the date at which it had been painted, a pertinent piece of information. But usually he would content himself with trying to entertain us by telling a new story each time about something that had just happened to him involving people selected from among those we knew, the Combray pharmacist, our cook, our coachman. Certainly these tales made my great-aunt laugh, but she could not distinguish clearly if this was because of the absurd role Swann always assigned himself or because of the wit he showed in telling them: "You are quite a character, Monsieur Swann!" Being the only rather vulgar person in our family, she took care to point out to strangers, when they were talking about Swann, that, had he wanted to, he could have lived on the boulevard Haussmann or the avenue de l'Opéra, that he was the son of M. Swann, who must have left four or five million, but that this was his whim. One that she

felt moreover must be so amusing to others that in Paris, when M. Swann came on New Year's Day to bring her her bag of marrons glacés,[7] she never failed, if there was company, to say to him: "Well, Monsieur Swann! Do you still live next door to the wine warehouse, so as to be sure of not missing the train when you go to Lyon?"[8] And she would look out of the corner of her eye, over her lorgnon, at the other visitors.

But if anyone had told my great-aunt that this same Swann, who, as the son of old M. Swann, was perfectly "qualified" to be received by all the "best of the bourgeoisie," by the most respected notaries or lawyers of Paris (a hereditary privilege he seemed to make little use of), had, as though in secret, quite a different life; that on leaving our house, in Paris, after telling us he was going home to bed, he retraced his steps as soon as he had turned the corner and went to a certain drawing room that no eye of any broker or broker's associate would ever contemplate, this would have seemed to my aunt as extraordinary as might to a better-educated lady the thought of being personally on close terms with Aristaeus and learning that, after having a chat with her, he would go deep into the heart of the realms of Thetis, into an empire hidden from mortal eyes, where Virgil shows him being received with open arms; or—to be content with an image that had more chance of occurring to her, for she had seen it painted on our petits-fours plates at Combray—of having had as a dinner guest Ali Baba, who, as soon as he knows he is alone, will enter the cave dazzling with unsuspected treasure.

One day when he had come to see us in Paris after dinner apologizing for being in evening clothes, Françoise having said, after he left, that she had learned from the coachman that he had dined "at the home of a princess," "Yes, a princess of the demimonde!" my aunt had responded, shrugging her shoulders without raising her eyes from her knitting, with serene irony.

Thus, my great-aunt was cavalier in her treatment of him. Since she believed he must be flattered by our invitations, she found it quite natural that he never came to see us in the summertime without having in his hand a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden and that from each of his trips to Italy he would bring me back photographs of masterpieces.

They did not hesitate to send him off in search of it when they needed a recipe for gribiche sauce or pineapple salad for large dinners to which they had not invited him, believing he did not have sufficient prestige for one to be able to serve him up to acquaintances who were coming for the first time. If the conversation turned to the princes of the House of France: "people you and I will never know, will we, and we can manage quite well without that, can't we," my great-aunt would say to Swann, who had, perhaps, a letter from Twickenham[9] in his pocket; she had him push the piano around and turn the pages on the evenings when my grandmother's sister sang, handling this creature, who was elsewhere so sought after, with the naive roughness of a child who plays with a collector's curio no more carefully than with some object of little value. No doubt the Swann who was known at the same time to so many clubmen was quite different from the one created by my great-aunt, when in the evening, in the little garden at Combray, after the two hesitant rings of the bell had sounded, she injected and invigorated with all that she knew about the Swann family the dark and uncertain figure who emerged, followed by my grandmother, from a background of shadows, and whom we recognized by his voice. But even with respect to the most insignificant things in life, none of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone, which a person has only to go look up as though we were a book of specifications or a last testament; our social personality is a creation of the minds of others. Even the very simple act that we call "seeing a person we know" is in part an intellectual one. We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him, and of the total picture that we form for ourselves, these notions certainly occupy the greater part. In the end they swell his cheeks so perfectly, follow the line of his nose in an adherence so exact, they do so well at nuancing the sonority of his voice as though the latter were only a transparent envelope that each time we see this face and hear this voice, it is these notions that we encounter again, that we hear. No doubt, in the Swann they had formed for themselves, my family had failed out of ignorance to include a host of details from his life in the fashionable world that caused other people, when they were in his presence, to see refinements rule his face and stop at his aquiline nose as though at their natural frontier; but they had also been able to garner in this face disaffected of its prestige, vacant and spacious, in the depths of these depreciated eyes, the vague, sweet residue—half memory, half forgetfulness—of the idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, around the card table or in the garden, during our life of good country neighborliness. The corporeal envelope of our friend had been so well stuffed with all this, as well as with a few memories relating to his parents, that this particular Swann had become a complete and living being, and I have the impression of leaving one person to go to another distinct from him, when, in my memory, I pass from the Swann I knew later with accuracy to that first Swann—to that first Swann in whom I rediscover the charming mistakes of my youth and who in fact resembles less the other Swann than he resembles the other people I knew at the time, as though one's life were like a museum in which all the portraits from one period have a family look about them, a single tonality—to that first Swann abounding in leisure, fragrant with the smell of the tall chestnut tree, the baskets of raspberries, and a sprig of tarragon.

Yet one day when my grandmother had gone to ask a favor from a lady she had known at the Sacré-Coeur[10] (and with whom, because of our notion of the castes, she had not wished to remain in close contact despite a reciprocal congeniality), this lady, the Marquise de Villeparisis of the famous de Bouillon[11] family, had said to her: "I believe you know M. Swann very well; he is a great friend of my nephew and niece, the des Laumes." My grandmother had returned from her visit full of enthusiasm for the house, which overlooked some gardens and in which Mme. de Villeparisis had advised her to rent a flat, and also for a waistcoat maker and his daughter, who kept a shop in the courtyard where she had gone to ask them to put a stitch in her skirt, which she had torn in the stairwell. My grandmother had found these people wonderful, she declared that the girl was a gem and the waistcoat maker was most distinguished, the finest man she had ever seen. Because for her, distinction was something absolutely independent of social position. She went into ecstasies over an answer the waistcoat maker had given her, saying to Mama: "Sévigné[12] couldn't have said it any better!" and, in contrast, of a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis whom she had met at the house: "Oh, my dear daughter, how common he is!"

Now the remark about Swann had had the effect, not of raising him in my great-aunt's estimation, but of lowering Mme. de Villeparisis. It seemed that the respect which, on my grandmother's faith, we accorded Mme. de Villeparisis created a duty on her part to do nothing that would make her less worthy, a duty in which she had failed by learning of Swann's existence, by permitting relatives of hers to associate with him. "What! She knows Swann? A person you claim is a relation of the Maréchal de MacMahon?"[13] My family's opinion regarding Swann's associations seemed confirmed later by his marriage to a woman of the worst social station, practically a cocotte, whom, what was more, he never attempted to introduce, continuing to come to our house alone, though less and less, but from whom they believed they could judge—assuming it was there that he had found her—the social circle, unknown to them, that he habitually frequented.

But one time, my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most faithful guests at the Sunday lunches given by the Duc de X . . . , whose father and uncle had been the most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis-Philippe.[14] Now, my grandfather was interested in all the little facts that could help him enter imaginatively into the private lives of men like Molé, the Duc Pasquier, the Duc de Broglie.[15] He was delighted to learn that Swann associated with people who had known them. My great-aunt, however, interpreted this news in a sense unfavorable to Swann: anyone who chose his associations outside the caste into which he had been born, outside his social "class," suffered in her eyes a regrettable lowering of his social position. It seemed to her that he gave up forthwith the fruit of all the good relations with well-placed people so honorably preserved and stored away for their children by foresightful families (my great-aunt had even stopped seeing the son of a lawyer we knew because he had married royalty and was therefore in her opinion demoted from the respected rank of lawyer's son to that of one of those adventurers, former valets or stableboys, on whom they say that queens sometimes bestowed their favors). She disapproved of my grandfather's plan to question Swann, the next evening he was to come to dinner, about these friends of his we had discovered. At the same time my grandmother's two sisters, old maids who shared her nobility of character, but not her sort of mind, declared that they could not understand what pleasure their brother-in-law could find in talking about such foolishness. They were women of lofty aspirations, who for that very reason were incapable of taking an interest in what is known as tittle-tattle, even if it had some historic interest, and more generally in anything that was not directly connected to an aesthetic or moral subject. The disinterestedness of their minds was such, with respect to all that, closely or distantly, seemed connected with worldly matters, that their sense of hearing—having finally understood its temporary uselessness when the conversation at dinner assumed a tone that was frivolous or merely pedestrian without these two old spinsters being able to lead it back to the subjects dear to them—would suspend the functioning of its receptive organs and allow them to begin to atrophy. If my grandfather needed to attract the two sisters' attention at such times, he had to resort to those bodily signals used by alienists with certain lunatics suffering from distraction: striking a glass repeatedly with the blade of a knife while speaking to them sharply and looking them suddenly in the eye, violent methods which these

psychiatrists often bring with them into their ordinary relations with healthy people, either from professional habit or because they believe everyone is a little crazy.

They were more interested when, the day before Swann was to come to dinner, and had personally sent them a case of Asti wine, my aunt, holding a copy of the *Figaro* in which next to the title of a painting in an exhibition of Corot,[16] these words appeared: "From the collection of M. Charles Swann," said: "Did you see this? Swann is 'front page news' in the *Figaro*." "But I've always told you he had a great deal of taste," said my grandmother. "Of course you would! Anything so long as your opinion is not the same as *ours,*" answered my great-aunt, who, knowing that my grandmother was never of the same opinion as she, and not being quite sure that she herself was the one we always declared was right, wanted to extract from us a general condemnation of my grandmother's convictions against which she was trying to force us into solidarity with her own. But we remained silent. When my grandmother's sisters expressed their intention of speaking to Swann about this mention in the *Figaro,* my great-aunt advised them against it. Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however small, that she did not have, she persuaded herself that it was not an advantage but a detriment and she pitied them so as not to have to envy them. "I believe you would not be pleasing him at all; I am quite sure I would find it very unpleasant to see my name printed boldly like that in the newspaper, and I would not be at all gratified if someone spoke to me about it." But she did not persist in trying to convince my grandmother's sisters; for they in their horror of vulgarity had made such a fine art of concealing a personal allusion beneath ingenious circumlocutions that it often went unnoticed even by the person to whom it was addressed. As for my mother, she thought only of trying to persuade my father to agree to talk to Swann not about his wife but about his daughter, whom he adored and because of whom it was said he had finally entered into this marriage. "You might just say a word to him; just ask how she is: It must be so hard for him." But my father would become annoyed: "No, no; you have the most absurd ideas. It would be ridiculous."

But the only one of us for whom Swann's arrival became the object of a painful preoccupation was I. This was because on the evenings when strangers, or merely M. Swann, were present, Mama did not come up to my room. I had dinner before everyone else and afterward I came and sat at the table, until eight o'clock when it was understood that I had to go upstairs; the precious and fragile kiss that Mama usually entrusted to me in my bed when I was going to sleep I would have to convey from the dining room to my bedroom and protect during the whole time I undressed, so that its sweetness would not shatter, so that its volatile essence would not disperse and evaporate, and on precisely those evenings when I needed to receive it with more care, I had to take it, I had to snatch it brusquely, publicly, without even having the time and the freedom of mind necessary to bring to what I was doing the attention of those individuals controlled by some mania, who do their utmost not to think of anything else while they are shutting a door, so as to be able, when the morbid uncertainty returns to them, to confront it victoriously with the memory of the moment when they did shut the door. We were all in the garden when the two hesitant rings of the little bell sounded. We knew it was Swann; even so we all looked at one another questioningly and my grandmother was sent on reconnaissance. "Remember to thank him intelligibly for the wine, you know how delicious it is and the case is enormous," my grandfather exhorted his two sisters-in-law. "Don't start whispering," said my great-aunt. "How comfortable would you feel arriving at a house where everyone is speaking so quietly!" "Ah! Here's M. Swann. Let's ask him if he thinks the weather will be good tomorrow," said my father. My mother thought that one word from her would wipe out all the pain that we in our family might have caused Swann since his marriage. She found an opportunity to take him aside. But I followed her; I could not bring myself to part from her by even one step while thinking that very soon I would have to leave her in the dining room and that I would have to go up to my room without having the consolation I had on the other evenings, that she would come kiss me. "Now, M. Swann," she said to him, "do tell me about your daughter; I'm sure she already has a taste for beautiful things like her papa." "Here, come and sit with the rest of us on the veranda," said my grandfather, coming up to them. My mother was obliged to stop, but she derived from this very constraint one more delicate thought, like good poets forced by the tyranny of rhyme to find their most beautiful lines: "We can talk about her again when we're by ourselves," she said softly to Swann. "Only a mother is capable of understanding you. I'm sure her own mother would agree with me." We all sat down around the iron table. I would have preferred not to think about the hours of anguish I was going to endure that evening alone in my room without being able to go to sleep; I tried to persuade myself they were not at all important, since I would have forgotten them by tomorrow morning, and to fix my mind on ideas of the future that should have led me as though across a bridge beyond the imminent abyss that frightened me so. But my mind, strained by my preoccupation, convex like the glance which I shot at my mother, would not allow itself to be penetrated by any foreign impressions. Thoughts certainly entered it, but only on condition that they left outside every element of beauty or simply of playfulness that could have moved or distracted me. Just as a patient, by means of an anesthetic, can watch with complete lucidity the operation being performed on him, but without feeling anything, I could recite to myself some lines that I loved or observe the efforts my grandfather made to talk to Swann about the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, without the former making me feel any emotion, the latter any hilarity. Those efforts were fruitless. Scarcely had my grandfather asked Swann a question relating to that orator than one of my grandmother's sisters, in whose ears the question was resonating like a profound but untimely silence that should be broken for the sake of politeness, would address the other: "Just imagine, Céline, I've met a young Swedish governess who has been telling me about cooperatives in the Scandinavian countries; the details are most interesting. We really must have her here for dinner one evening." "Certainly!" answered her sister Flora,[17] "but I haven't been wasting my time either. At M. Vinteuil's I met a learned old man who knows Maubant[18] very well, and Maubant has explained to him in the greatest detail how he creates his parts. It's most interesting. He's a neighbor of M. Vinteuil's, I had no idea; and he's very nice." "M. Vinteuil isn't the only one who has nice neighbors," exclaimed my aunt Céline in a voice amplified by her shyness and given an artificial tone by her premeditation, while casting at Swann what she called a meaningful look. At the same time my aunt Flora, who had understood that this phrase was Céline's way of thanking Swann for the Asti, was also looking at Swann with an expression that combined congratulation and irony, either simply to emphasize her sister's witticism, or because she envied Swann for having inspired it, or because she could not help making fun of him since she thought he was being put on the spot. "I think we can manage to persuade the old gentleman to come for dinner," continued Flora; "when you get him started on Maubant or Mme. Materna,[19] he talks for hours without stopping." "That must be delightful," sighed my grandfather, in whose mind, unfortunately, nature had as completely failed to include the possibility of taking a passionate interest in Swedish cooperatives or the creation of Maubant's parts as it had forgotten to furnish those of my grandmother's sisters with the little grain of salt one must add oneself, in order to find some savor in it, to a story about the private life of Molé or the Comte de Paris. "Now, then," said Swann to my grandfather, "what I'm going to say has more to do than it might appear with what you were asking me, because in certain respects things haven't changed enormously. This morning I was rereading something in Saint-Simon[20] that would have amused you. It's in the volume about his mission to Spain;[21] it's not one of the best, hardly more than a journal, but at least it's a marvelously well written one, which already makes it rather fundamentally different from the deadly boring journals we think we have to read every morning and evening." "I don't agree, there are days when reading the papers seems to me very pleasant indeed . . ." my aunt Flora interrupted, to show that she had read the sentence about Swann's Corot in *Le Figaro*. "When they talk about things or people that interest us!" said my aunt Céline, going one better. "I don't deny it," answered Swann with surprise. "What I fault the newspapers for is that day after day they draw our attention to insignificant things whereas only three or four times in our lives do we read a book in which there is something really essential. Since we tear the band off the newspaper so feverishly every morning, they ought to change things and put into the newspaper, oh, I don't know, perhaps . . . Pascal's *Pensées*!" (He isolated this word with an ironic emphasis so as not to seem pedantic.) "And then, in the gilt-edged volume that we open only once in ten years," he added, showing the disdain for worldly matters affected by certain worldly men, "we would read that the Queen of Greece has gone to Cannes or that the Princesse de Léon has given a costume ball. This way, the proper proportions would be reestablished." But, feeling sorry he had gone so far as to speak even lightly of serious things: "What a lofty conversation we're having," he said ironically; "I don't know why we're climbing to such 'heights'"—and turning to my grandfather: "Well, Saint-Simon describes how Maulévrier[22] had the audacity to offer to shake hands with Saint-Simon's sons. You know, this is the same Maulévrier of whom he says: 'Never did I see in that thick bottle anything but ill-humor, vulgarity, and foolishness.'" "Thick or not, I know some bottles in which there is something quite different," said Flora vivaciously, determined that she too should thank Swann, because the gift of Asti was addressed to both of them. Céline laughed. Swann, disconcerted, went on: "'I cannot say whether it was ignorance or a trap,' wrote Saint-Simon. 'He tried to shake hands with my children. I noticed it in time to prevent him.' " My grandfather was already in ecstasies over "ignorance or a trap," but Mlle. Céline, in whom the name of Saint-Simon—a literary man—had prevented the complete anesthesia of her auditory faculties, was already growing indignant: "What? You admire that? Well, that's a fine thing! But what can it mean; isn't one man as good as the next? What difference does it make whether he's a duke or a coachman, if he's intelligent and good-hearted? Your Saint-Simon had a fine way of raising his children, if he didn't teach them to offer their hands to all decent people. Why, it's quite

abominable. And you dare to quote that?" And my grandfather, terribly upset and sensing how impossible it would be, in the face of this obstruction, to try to get Swann to tell the stories that would have amused him, said quietly to Mama: "Now remind me of the line you taught me that comforts me so much at times like this. Oh, yes! 'What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor!'[23] Oh, how good that is!"

I did not take my eyes off my mother, I knew that when we were at the table, they would not let me stay during the entire dinner and that, in order not to annoy my father, Mama would not let me kiss her several times in front of the guests as though we were in my room. And so I promised myself that in the dining room, as they were beginning dinner and I felt the hour approaching, I would do everything I could do alone in advance of this kiss which would be so brief and furtive, choose with my eyes the place on her cheek that I would kiss, prepare my thoughts so as to be able, by means of this mental beginning of the kiss, to devote the whole of the minute Mama would grant me to feeling her cheek against my lips, as a painter who can obtain only short sittings prepares his palette and, guided by his notes, does in advance from memory everything for which he could if necessary manage without the presence of the model. But now before the dinner bell rang my grandfather had the unwitting brutality to say: "The boy looks tired, he ought to go up to bed. We're dining late tonight anyway." And my father, who was not as scrupulous as my grandmother and my mother about honoring treaties, said: "Yes, go on now, up to bed with you." I tried to kiss Mama, at that moment we heard the dinner bell. "No, really, leave your mother alone, you've already said goodnight to each other as it is, these demonstrations are ridiculous. Go on now, upstairs!" And I had to leave without my viaticum; I had to climb each step of the staircase, as the popular expression has it, "against my heart,"[24] climbing against my heart which wanted to go back to my mother because she had not, by kissing me, given it license to go with me. That detested staircase which I always entered with such gloom exhaled an odor of varnish that had in some sense absorbed, fixated, the particular sort of sorrow I felt every evening and made it perhaps even crueler to my sensibility because, when it took that olfactory form, my intelligence could no longer share in it. When we are asleep and a raging toothache is as yet perceived by us only in the form of a girl whom we attempt two hundred times to pull out of the water or a line by Molière that we repeat to ourselves incessantly, it is a great relief to wake up so that our intelligence can divest the idea of raging toothache of its disguise of heroism or cadence. It was the opposite of this relief that I experienced when my sorrow at going up to my room entered me in a manner infinitely swifter, almost instantaneous, at once insidious and abrupt, through the inhalation—far more toxic than the intellectual penetration—of the smell of varnish peculiar to that staircase. Once in my room, I had to stop up all the exits, close the shutters, dig my own grave by undoing my covers, put on the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed which they had added to the room because I was too hot in the summer under the rep curtains of the big bed, I had a fit of rebelliousness, I wanted to attempt the ruse of a condemned man. I wrote to my mother begging her to come upstairs for something serious that I could not tell her in my letter. My fear was that Françoise, my aunt's cook who was charged with looking after me when I was at Combray, would refuse to convey my note. I suspected that, for her, delivering a message to my mother when there was company would seem as impossible as for a porter to hand a letter to an actor while he was onstage. With respect to things that could or could not be done she possessed a code at once imperious, extensive, subtle, and intransigent about distinctions that were impalpable or otiose (which made it resemble those ancient laws which, alongside such fierce prescriptions as the massacre of children at the breast, forbid one with an exaggerated delicacy to boil a kid in its mother's milk, or to eat the sinew from an animal's thigh). This code, to judge from her sudden obstinacy when she did not wish to do certain errands that we gave her, seemed to have anticipated social complexities and worldly refinements that nothing in Françoise's associations or her life as a village domestic could have suggested to her; and we had to say to ourselves that in her there was a very old French past, noble and ill understood, as in those manufacturing towns where elegant old houses testify that there was once a court life, and where the employees of a factory for chemical products work surrounded by delicate sculptures representing the miracle of Saint Théophile or the four sons of Aymon.[25] In this particular case, the article of the code which made it unlikely that except in case of fire Françoise would go bother Mama in the presence of M. Swann for so small a personage as myself simply betokened the respect she professed not only for the family—as for the dead, for priests, and for kings—but also for the visitor to whom one was offering one's hospitality, a respect that would perhaps have touched me in a book but that always irritated me on her lips, because of the solemn and tender tones she adopted in speaking of it, and especially so this evening, when the sacred character she conferred on the dinner might have the effect of making her refuse to disturb its ceremonial. But to give myself a better chance, I did not hesitate to lie and tell her that it was not in the least I who had wanted to write to Mama, but that it was Mama who, as she said goodnight to me, had exhorted me not to forget to send her an answer concerning something she had asked me to look for; and she would certainly be very annoyed if this note was not delivered to her. I think Françoise did not believe me, for, like those primitive men whose senses were so much more powerful than ours, she could immediately discern, from signs imperceptible to us, any truth that we wanted to hide from her; she looked at the envelope for five minutes as if the examination of the paper and the appearance of the writing would inform her about the nature of the contents or tell her which article of her code she ought to apply. Then she went out with an air of resignation that seemed to signify: "If it isn't a misfortune for parents to have a child like that!" She came back after a moment to tell me that they were still only at the ice stage, that it was impossible for the butler to deliver the letter right away in front of everyone, but that, when the mouth-rinsing bowls[26] were put round, they would find a way to hand it to Mama. Instantly my anxiety subsided; it was now no longer, as it had been only a moment ago, until tomorrow that I had left my mother, since my little note, no doubt annoying her (and doubly because this stratagem would make me ridiculous in Swann's eyes), would at least allow me, invisible and enraptured, to enter the same room as she, would whisper about me in her ear; since that forbidden, hostile dining room, where, just a moment before, the ice itself—the "*granité*"[27]—and the rinsing bowls seemed to me to contain pleasures noxious and mortally sad because Mama was enjoying them far away from me, was opening itself to me and, like a fruit that has turned sweet and bursts its skin, was about to propel, to project, all the way to my intoxicated heart, Mama's attention as she read my lines. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down, an exquisite thread joined us. And that was not all: Mama would probably come!

I thought Swann would surely have laughed at the anguish I had just suffered if he had read my letter and guessed its purpose; yet, on the contrary, as I learned later, a similar anguish was the torment of long years of his life and no one, perhaps, could have understood me as well as he; in his case, the anguish that comes from feeling that the person you love is in a place of amusement where you are not, where you cannot join her, came to him through love, to which it is in some sense predestined, by which it will be hoarded, appropriated; but when, as in my case, this anguish enters us before love has made its appearance in our life, it drifts as it waits for it, vague and free, without a particular assignment, at the service of one feeling one day, of another the next, sometimes of filial tenderness or affection for a friend. And the joy with which I served my first apprenticeship when Françoise came back to tell me my letter would be delivered Swann too had known well, that deceptive joy given to us by some friend, some relative of the woman we love when, arriving at the house or theater where she is, for some dance, gala evening, or premiere at which he is going to see her, this friend notices us wandering outside, desperately awaiting some opportunity to communicate with her. He recognizes us, speaks to us familiarly, asks us what we are doing there. And when we invent the story that we have something urgent to say to his relative or friend, he assures us that nothing could be simpler, leads us into the hall, and promises to send her to us in five minutes. How we love him, as at that moment I loved Françoise—the wellintentioned intermediary who with a single word has just made tolerable, human, and almost propitious the unimaginable, infernal festivity into the thick of which we had been imagining that hostile, perverse, and exquisite vortices of pleasure were carrying away from us and inspiring with derisive laughter the woman we love! If we are to judge by him, the relative who has come up to us and is himself also one of the initiates in the cruel mysteries, the other guests at the party cannot have anything very demoniacal about them. Those inaccessible and excruciating hours during which she was about to enjoy unknown pleasures—now, through an unexpected breach, we are entering them; now, one of the moments which, in succession, would have composed those hours, a moment as real as the others, perhaps even more important to us, because our mistress is more involved in it, we can picture to ourselves, we possess it, we are taking part in it, we have created it, almost: the moment in which he will tell her we are here, downstairs. And no doubt the other moments of the party would not have been essentially very different from this one, would not have had anything more delectable about them that should make us suffer so, since the kind friend has said to us: "Why, she'll be delighted to come down! It'll be much nicer for her to chat with you than to be bored up there." Alas! Swann had learned by experience that the good intentions of a third person have no power over a woman who is annoyed to find herself pursued even into a party by someone she does not love. Often, the friend comes back down alone.

My mother did not come, and with no consideration for my pride (which was invested in her not denying the story that she was supposed to have asked me to let her know the results of some search) asked Françoise to say these words to me: "There is no answer," words I have so often since then heard the doormen in grand hotels or the footmen in bawdy houses bring back to some poor girl who exclaims in surprise: "What, he said nothing? Why, that's impossible! Did you

really give him my note? All right, I'll go on waiting." And—just as she invariably assures him she does not need the extra gas jet which the doorman wants to light for her, and remains there, hearing nothing further but the few remarks about the weather exchanged by the doorman and a lackey whom he sends off suddenly, when he notices the time, to put a customer's drink on ice—having declined Françoise's offer to make me some tea or to stay with me, I let her return to the servants' hall, I went to bed and closed my eyes, trying not to hear the voices of my family, who were having their coffee in the garden. But after a few seconds, I became aware that, by writing that note to Mama, by approaching, at the risk of angering her, so close to her that I thought I could touch the moment when I would see her again, I had shut off from myself the possibility of falling asleep without seeing her again, and the beating of my heart grew more painful each minute because I was increasing my agitation by telling myself to be calm, to accept my misfortune. Suddenly my anxiety subsided, a happiness invaded me as when a powerful medicine begins to take effect and our pain vanishes: I had just formed the resolution not to continue trying to fall asleep without seeing Mama again, to kiss her at all costs even though it was with the certainty of being on bad terms with her for a long time after, when she came up to bed. The calm that came with the end of my distress filled me with an extraordinary joy, quite as much as did my expectation, my thirst for and my fear of danger. I opened the window noiselessly and sat down on the foot of my bed; I hardly moved so that I would not be heard from below. Outdoors, too, things seemed frozen in silent attention so as not to disturb the moonlight which, duplicating and distancing each thing by extending its shadow before it, denser and more concrete than itself, had at once thinned and enlarged the landscape like a map that had been folded and was now opened out. What needed to move, a few leaves of the chestnut tree, moved. But their minute quivering, complete, executed even in its slightest nuances and ultimate refinements, did not spill over onto the rest, did not merge with it, remained circumscribed. Exposed against this silence, which absorbed nothing of them, the most distant noises, those that must have come from gardens that lay at the other end of town, could be perceived detailed with such "finish" that they seemed to owe this effect of remoteness only to their pianissimo, like those muted motifs so well executed by the orchestra of the Conservatoire that, although you do not lose a single note, you nonetheless think you are hearing them far away from the concert hall and all the old subscribers—my grandmother's sisters too, when Swann had given them his seats—strained their ears as if they were listening to the distant advances of an army on the march that had not yet turned the corner of the rue de Trévise.

I knew that the situation I was now placing myself in was the one that could provoke the gravest consequences of all for me, coming from my parents, much graver in truth than a stranger would have supposed, the sort he would have believed could be produced only by truly shameful misdeeds. But in my upbringing, the order of misdeeds was not the same as in that of other children, and I had become accustomed to placing before all the rest (because there were probably no others from which I needed to be more carefully protected) those whose common characteristic I now understand was that you lapse into them by yielding to a nervous impulse. But at the time no one uttered these words, no one revealed this cause, which might have made me believe I was excusable for succumbing to them or even perhaps incapable of resisting them. But I recognized them clearly from the anguish that preceded them as well as from the rigor of the punishment that followed them; and I knew that the one I had just committed was in the same family as others for which I had been severely punished, though infinitely graver. When I went and placed myself in my mother's path at the moment she was going up to bed, and when she saw that I had stayed up to say goodnight to her again in the hallway, they would not let me continue to live at home, they would send me away to school the next day, that much was certain. Well! Even if I had had to throw myself out of the window five minutes later, I still preferred this. What I wanted now was Mama, to say goodnight to her, I had gone too far along the road that led to the fulfillment of that desire to be able to turn back now.

I heard my parents' footsteps as they saw Swann out; and when the bell on the gate let me know he had gone, I went to the window. Mama was asking my father if he had thought the lobster was good and if M. Swann had had more coffee-and-pistachio ice. "I found it quite ordinary," said my mother; "I think next time we'll have to try another flavor." "I can't tell you how changed I find Swann," said my great-aunt, "he has aged so!" My great-aunt was so used to seeing Swann always as the same adolescent that she was surprised to find him suddenly not as young as the age she continued to attribute to him. And my family was also beginning to feel that in him this aging was abnormal, excessive, shameful, and more deserved by the unmarried, by all those for whom it seems that the great day that has no tomorrow is longer than for others, because for them it is empty and the moments in it add up from morning on without then being divided among children. "I think he has no end of worries with that wretched wife of his who is living with a certain Monsieur de Charlus, as all of Combray knows. It's the talk of the town." My mother pointed out that in spite of this he had been looking much less sad for some time now. "He also doesn't make that gesture of his as often, so like his father, of wiping his eyes and running his hand across his forehead. I myself think that in his heart of hearts he no longer loves that woman." "Why, naturally he doesn't love her anymore," answered my grandfather. "I received a letter from him about it a long time ago, by now, a letter with which I hastened not to comply and which leaves no doubt about his feelings, at least his feelings of love, for his wife. Well now! You see, you didn't thank him for the Asti," added my grandfather, turning to his two sisters-in-law. "What? We didn't thank him? I think, just between you and me, that I put it quite delicately," answered my aunt Flora. "Yes, you managed it very well: quite admirable," said my aunt Céline. "But you were very good too." "Yes, I was rather proud of my remark about kind neighbors." "What? Is that what you call thanking him?" exclaimed my grandfather. "I certainly heard that, but devil take me if I thought it was directed at Swann. You can be sure he never noticed." "But see here, Swann isn't stupid, I'm sure he appreciated it. After all, I couldn't tell him how many bottles there were and what the wine cost!" My father and mother were left alone there, and sat down for a moment; then my father said: "Well, shall we go up to bed?" "If you like, my dear, even though I'm not the least bit sleepy; yet it couldn't be that perfectly harmless coffee ice that's keeping me so wide-awake; but I can see a light in the servants' hall, and since poor Françoise has waited up for me, I'll go and ask her to unhook my bodice while you're getting undressed." And my mother opened the latticed door that led from the vestibule to the staircase. Soon, I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went without a sound into the hallway; my heart was beating so hard I had trouble walking, but at least it was no longer pounding from anxiety, but from terror and joy. I saw the light cast in the stairwell by Mama's candle. Then I saw Mama herself; I threw myself forward. In the first second, she looked at me with astonishment, not understanding what could have happened. Then an expression of anger came over her face, she did not say a single word to me, and indeed for much less than this they would go several days without speaking to me. If Mama had said one word to me, it would have been an admission that they could talk to me again and in any case it would perhaps have seemed to me even more terrible, as a sign that, given the gravity of the punishment that was going to be prepared for me, silence, and estrangement, would have been childish. A word would have been like the calm with which you answer a servant when you have just decided to dismiss him; the kiss you give a son you are sending off to enlist, whereas you would have refused it if you were simply going to be annoyed with him for a few days. But she heard my father coming up from the dressing room where he had gone to undress and, to avoid the scene he would make over me, she said to me in a voice choked with anger: "Run, run, so at least your father won't see you waiting like this as if you were out of your mind!" But I repeated to her: "Come say goodnight to me," terrified as I saw the gleam from my father's candle already rising up the wall, but also using his approach as a means of blackmail and hoping that Mama, to avoid my father's finding me there still if she continued to refuse, would say: "Go back to your room, I'll come." It was too late, my father was there in front of us. Involuntarily, though no one heard, I murmured these words: "I'm done for!"

It was not so. My father was constantly refusing me permission for things that had been authorized in the more generous covenants granted by my mother and grandmother because he did not bother about "principles" and for him there was no "rule of law." For a completely contingent reason, or even for no reason at all, he would at the last minute deny me a certain walk that was so customary, so consecrated that to deprive me of it was a violation, or, as he had done once again this evening, long before the ritual hour he would say to me: "Go on now, up to bed, no arguments!" But also, because he had no principles (in my grandmother's sense), he was not strictly speaking intransigent. He looked at me for a moment with an expression of surprise and annoyance, then as soon as Mama had explained to him with a few embarrassed words what had happened, he said to her: "Go along with him, then. You were just saying you didn't feel very sleepy, stay in his room for a little while, I don't need anything." "But my dear," answered my mother timidly, "whether I'm sleepy or not doesn't change anything, we can't let the child get into the habit . . ." "But it isn't a question of habit," said my father, shrugging his shoulders, "you can see the boy is upset, he seems very sad; look, we're not executioners! You'll end by making him ill, and that won't do us much good! There are two beds in his room; go tell Françoise to prepare the big one for you and sleep there with him tonight. Now then, goodnight, I'm not as high-strung as the two of you, I'm going to bed."

It was impossible to thank my father; he would have been irritated by what he called mawkishness. I stood there not daring to move; he was still there in front of us, tall in his white nightshirt, under the pink and violet Indian cashmere shawl that he tied around his head now that he had attacks of neuralgia, with the gesture of Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli[28] that M. Swann had given me, as he told Sarah she must leave Issac's side. This was many years ago. The staircase wall on which I saw the rising glimmer of his candle has long since ceased to exist. In me, too, many things have been destroyed that I thought were

bound to last forever and new ones have formed that have given birth to new sorrows and joys which I could not have foreseen then, just as the old ones have become difficult for me to understand. It was a very long time ago, too, that my father ceased to be able to say to Mama: "Go with the boy." The possibility of such hours will never be reborn for me. But for a little while now, I have begun to hear again very clearly, if I take care to listen, the sobs that I was strong enough to contain in front of my father and that broke out only when I found myself alone again with Mama. They have never really stopped; and it is only because life is now becoming quieter around me that I can hear them again, like those convent bells covered so well by the clamor of the town during the day that one would think they had ceased altogether but which begin sounding again in the silence of the evening.

Mama spent that night in my room; when I had just committed such a misdeed that I expected to have to leave the house, my parents granted me more than I could ever have won from them as a reward for any good deed. Even at the moment when it manifested itself through this pardon, my father's conduct toward me retained that arbitrary and undeserved quality that characterized it and was due to the fact that it generally resulted from fortuitous convenience rather than a premeditated plan. It may even be that what I called his severity, when he sent me to bed, deserved that name less than my mother's or my grandmother's, for his nature, in certain respects more different from mine than theirs was, had probably kept him from discovering until now how very unhappy I was every evening, something my mother and my grandmother knew well; but they loved me enough not to consent to spare me my suffering, they wanted to teach me to master it in order to reduce my nervous sensitivity and strengthen my will. As for my father, whose affection for me was of another sort, I do not know if he would have been courageous enough for that: the one time he realized that I was upset, he had said to my mother: "Go and comfort him." Mama stayed in my room that night and, as though not to allow any remorse to spoil those hours which were so different from what I had had any right to expect, when Françoise, realizing that something extraordinary was happening when she saw Mama sitting next to me, holding my hand and letting me cry without scolding me, asked her: "Why, madame, now what's wrong with Monsieur that he's crying so?" Mama answered her: "Why, even he doesn't know, Françoise, he's in a state; prepare the big bed for me quickly and then go on up to bed yourself." And so, for the first time, my sadness was regarded no longer as a punishable offense but as an involuntary ailment that had just been officially recognized, a nervous condition for which I was not responsible; I had the relief of no longer having to mingle qualms of conscience with the bitterness of my tears, I could cry without sin. I was also not a little proud, with respect to Françoise, of this turnabout in human affairs which, an hour after Mama had refused to come up to my room and had sent the disdainful answer that I should go to sleep, raised me to the dignity of a grown-up and brought me suddenly to a sort of puberty of grief, of emancipation from tears. I ought to have been happy: I was not. It seemed to me that my mother had just made me a first concession which must have been painful to her, that this was a first abdication on her part from the ideal she had conceived for me, and that for the first time she, who was so courageous, had to confess herself beaten. It seemed to me that, if I had just gained a victory, it was over her, that I had succeeded, as illness, affliction, or age might have done, in relaxing her will, in weakening her judgment, and that this evening was the beginning of a new era, would remain as a sad date. If I had dared, now, I would have said to Mama: "No, I don't want you to do this, don't sleep here." But I was aware of the practical wisdom, the realism as it would be called now, which in her tempered my grandmother's ardently idealistic nature, and I knew that, now that the harm was done, she would prefer to let me at least enjoy the soothing pleasure of it and not disturb my father. To be sure, my mother's lovely face still shone with youth that evening when she so gently held my hands and tried to stop my tears; but it seemed to me that this was precisely what should not have been, her anger would have saddened me less than this new gentleness which my childhood had not known before; it seemed to me that with an impious and secret hand I had just traced in her soul a first wrinkle and caused a first white hair to appear. At the thought of this my sobs redoubled, and then I saw that Mama, who never let herself give way to any emotion with me, was suddenly overcome by my own and was trying to suppress a desire to cry. When she saw that I had noticed, she said to me with a smile: "There now, my little chick, my little canary, he's going to make his mama as silly as himself if this continues. Look, since you're not sleepy and your mama isn't either, let's not go on upsetting each other, let's do something, let's get one of your books." But I had none there. "Would you enjoy it less if I took out the books your grandmother will be giving you on your saint's day? Think about it carefully: you mustn't be disappointed not to have anything the day after tomorrow." On the contrary, I was delighted, and Mama went to get a packet of books, of which I could not distinguish, through the paper in which they were wrapped, more than their shape, short and thick, but which, in this first guise, though summary and veiled, already eclipsed the box of colors from New Year's Day and the silkworms from last year. They were *La Mare au Diable, François le Champi, La Petite Fadette,* and *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*. My grandmother, as I learned afterward, had first chosen the poems of Musset, a volume of Rousseau, and *Indiana*;[29] for though she judged frivolous reading to be as unhealthy as sweets and pastries, it did not occur to her that a great breath of genius might have a more dangerous and less invigorating influence on the mind even of a child than would the open air and the sea breeze on his body. But as my father had nearly called her mad when he learned which books she wanted to give me, she had returned to the bookstore in Jouy-le-Vicomte herself, so that I would not risk not having my present (it was a burning-hot day and she had come home so indisposed that the doctor had warned my mother not to let her tire herself out that way again) and she had resorted to the four pastoral novels of George Sand. "My dear daughter," she said to Mama, "I could not bring myself to give the boy something badly written."

In fact, she could never resign herself to buying anything from which one could not derive an intellectual profit, and especially that which beautiful things afford us by teaching us to seek our pleasure elsewhere than in the satisfactions of material comfort and vanity. Even when she had to make someone a present of the kind called "useful," when she had to give an armchair, silverware, a walking stick, she looked for "old" ones, as though, now that long desuetude had effaced their character of usefulness, they would appear more disposed to tell us about the life of people of other times than to serve the needs of our own life. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of the most beautiful monuments or landscapes. But at the moment of buying them, and even though the thing represented had an aesthetic value, she would find that vulgarity and utility too quickly resumed their places in that mechanical mode of representation, the photograph. She would try to use cunning and, if not to eliminate commercial banality entirely, at least to reduce it, to substitute for the greater part of it more art, to introduce into it in a sense several "layers" of art: instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, the Fountains of Saint-Cloud, or Mount Vesuvius, she would make inquiries of Swann as to whether some great painter had not depicted them, and preferred to give me photographs of Chartres Cathedral by Corot, of the Fountains of Saint-Cloud by Hubert Robert,[30] of Mount Vesuvius by Turner,[31] which made one further degree of art. But if the photographer had been removed from the representation of the masterpiece or of nature and replaced by a great artist, he still reclaimed his rights to reproduce that very interpretation. Having deferred vulgarity as far as possible, my grandmother would try to move it back still further. She would ask Swann if the work had not been engraved, preferring, whenever possible, old engravings that also had an interest beyond themselves, such as those that represent a masterpiece in a state in which we can no longer see it today (like the engraving by Morghen[32] of Leonardo's *Last Supper* before its deterioration). It must be said that the results of this interpretation of the art of gift giving were not always brilliant. The idea I formed of Venice from a drawing by Titian that is supposed to have the lagoon in the background was certainly far less accurate than the one I would have derived from simple photographs. We could no longer keep count, at home, when my great-aunt wanted to draw up an indictment against my grandmother, of the armchairs she had presented to young couples engaged to be married or old married couples which, at the first attempt to make use of them, had immediately collapsed under the weight of one of the recipients. But my grandmother would have believed it petty to be overly concerned about the solidity of a piece of wood in which one could still distinguish a small flower, a smile, sometimes a lovely invention from the past. Even what might, in these pieces of furniture, answer a need, since it did so in a manner to which we are no longer accustomed, charmed her like the old ways of speaking in which we see a metaphor that is obliterated, in our modern language, by the abrasion of habit. Now, in fact, the pastoral novels of George Sand that she was giving me for my saint's day were, like an old piece of furniture, full of expressions that had fallen into disuse and turned figurative again, the sort you no longer find anywhere but in the country. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to others just as she would sooner have rented an estate on which there was a Gothic dovecote or another of those old things that exercise such a happy influence on the mind by filling it with longing for impossible voyages through time.

Mama sat down by my bed; she had picked up *François le Champi,* whose reddish cover and incomprehensible title gave it, in my eyes, a distinct personality and a mysterious attraction. I had not yet read a real novel. I had heard people say that George Sand was an exemplary novelist. This already predisposed me to imagine something indefinable and delicious in *François le Champi*. Narrative devices intended to arouse curiosity or emotion, certain modes of expression that make one uneasy or melancholy, and that a reader with some education will recognize as common to many novels, appeared to me—who considered a new book not as a thing having many counterparts, but as a unique person, having no reason for existing but in itself—simply as a disturbing emanation of *François le Champi*'s peculiar essence. Behind those events so ordinary, those things so common, those words so current, I sensed a strange sort of intonation, accentuation.

The action began; it seemed to me all the more obscure because in those days, when I read, I often daydreamed, for entire pages, of something quite different. And in addition to the lacunae that this distraction left in the story, there was the fact, when Mama was the one reading aloud to me, that she skipped all the love scenes. Thus, all the bizarre changes that take place in the respective attitudes of the miller's wife and the child and that can be explained only by the progress of a nascent love seemed to me marked by a profound mystery whose source I readily imagined must be in that strange and sweet name "Champi," which gave the child, who bore it without my knowing why, its vivid, charming purplish color. If my mother was an unfaithful reader she was also, in the case of books in which she found the inflection of true feeling, a wonderful reader for the respect and simplicity of her interpretation, the beauty and gentleness of the sound of her voice. Even in real life, when it was people and not works of art which moved her to compassion or admiration, it was touching to see with what deference she removed from her voice, from her motions, from her words, any spark of gaiety that might hurt some mother who had once lost a child, any recollection of a saint's day or birthday that might remind some old man of his advanced age, any remark about housekeeping that might seem tedious to some young scholar. In the same way, when she was reading George Sand's prose, which always breathes that goodness, that moral distinction which Mama had learned from my grandmother to consider superior to all else in life, and which I was to teach her only much later not to consider superior to all else in books too, taking care to banish from her voice any pettiness, any affectation which might have prevented it from receiving that powerful torrent, she imparted all the natural tenderness, all the ample sweetness they demanded to those sentences which seemed written for her voice and which remained, so to speak, entirely within the register of her sensibility. She found, to attack them in the necessary tone, the warm inflection that preexists them and that dictated them, but that the words do not indicate; with this inflection she softened as she went along any crudeness in the tenses of the verbs, gave the imperfect and the past historic the sweetness that lies in goodness, the melancholy that lies in tenderness, directed the sentence that was ending toward the one that was about to begin, sometimes hurrying, sometimes slowing down the pace of the syllables so as to bring them, though their quantities were different, into one uniform rhythm, she breathed into this very common prose a sort of continuous emotional life.

My remorse was quieted, I gave in to the sweetness of that night in which I had my mother close to me. I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the greatest desire I had in the world, to keep my mother in my room during those sad hours of darkness, was too contrary to the necessities of life and the wishes of others for its fulfillment, granted this night, to be anything other than artificial and exceptional. Tomorrow my anxieties would reawaken and Mama would not stay here. But when my anxieties were soothed, I no longer understood them; and then tomorrow night was still far away; I told myself I would have time to think of what to do, even though that time could not bring me any access of power, since these things did not depend on my will and seemed more avoidable to me only because of the interval that still separated them from me.

So it was that, for a long time, when, awakened at night, I remembered Combray again, I saw nothing of it but this sort of luminous panel, cut out among indistinct shadows, like those panels which the glow of a Bengal light or some electric projection will cut out and illuminate in a building whose other parts remain plunged in darkness: at the rather broad base, the small parlor, the dining room, the opening of the dark path by which M. Swann, the unconscious author of my sufferings, would arrive, the front hall where I would head toward the first step of the staircase, so painful to climb, that formed, by itself, the very narrow trunk of this irregular pyramid; and, at the top, my bedroom with the little hallway and its glass-paned door for Mama's entrance; in a word, always seen at the same hour, isolated from everything that might surround it, standing out alone against the darkness, the bare minimum of scenery (such as one sees prescribed at the beginnings of the old plays for performances in the provinces) needed for the drama of my undressing; as though Combray had consisted only of two floors connected by a slender staircase and as though it had always been seven o'clock in the evening there. The fact is, I could have answered anyone who asked me that Combray also included other things and existed at other times of day. But since what I recalled would have been supplied to me only by my voluntary memory, the memory of the intelligence, and since the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of the past itself, I would never have had any desire to think about the rest of Combray. It was all really quite dead for me.

Dead forever? Possibly.

There is a great deal of chance in all this, and a second sort of chance event, that of our own death, often does not allow us to wait long for the favors of the first.

I find the Celtic belief very reasonable, that the souls of those we have lost are held captive in some inferior creature, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, effectively lost to us until the day, which for many never comes, when we happen to pass close to the tree, come into possession of the object that is their prison. Then they quiver, they call out to us, and as soon as we have recognized them, the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and they return to live with us.

It is the same with our past. It is a waste of effort for us to try to summon it, all the exertions of our intelligence are useless. The past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) which we do not suspect. It depends on chance whether we encounter this object before we die, or do not encounter it.

For many years, already, everything about Combray that was not the theater and drama of my bedtime had ceased to exist for me, when one day in winter, as I returned home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, suggested that, contrary to my habit, I have a little tea. I refused at first and then, I do not know why, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump cakes called *petites madeleines* that look as though they have been molded in the grooved valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, oppressed by the gloomy day and the prospect of another sad day to follow, I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a bit of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. It had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. I had ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Where could it have come to me from—this powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected to the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it went infinitely far beyond it, could not be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I grasp it? I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third that gives me a little less than the second. It is time for me to stop, the virtue of the drink seems to be diminishing. Clearly, the truth I am seeking is not in the drink, but in me. The drink has awoken it in me, but does not know this truth, and can do no more than repeat indefinitely, with less and less force, this same testimony which I do not know how to interpret and which I want at least to be able to ask of it again and find again, intact, available to me, soon, for a decisive clarification. I put down the cup and turn to my mind. It is up to my mind to find the truth. But how? Such grave uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face-to-face with something that does not yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light.

And I begin asking myself again what it could be, this unknown state which brought with it no logical proof, but only the evidence of its felicity, its reality, and in whose presence the other states of consciousness faded away. I want to try to make it reappear. I return in my thoughts to the moment when I took the first spoonful of tea. I find the same state again, without any new clarity. I ask my mind to make another effort, to bring back once more the sensation that is slipping away. And, so that nothing may interrupt the thrust with which it will try to grasp it again, I clear away every obstacle, every foreign idea, I protect my ears and my attention from the noises in the next room. But feeling my mind grow tired without succeeding, I now compel it to accept the very distraction I was denying it, to think of something else, to recover its strength before a supreme attempt. Then for a second time I create an empty space before it, I confront it again with the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something quiver in me, shift, try to rise, something that seems to have been unanchored at a great depth; I do not know what it is, but it comes up slowly; I feel the resistance and I hear the murmur of the distances traversed.

Undoubtedly what is palpitating thus, deep inside me, must be the image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste and is trying to follow it to me. But it is struggling too far away, too confusedly; I can just barely perceive the neutral glimmer in which the elusive eddying of stirred-up colors is blended; but I cannot distinguish the form, cannot ask it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate for me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable companion, the taste, ask it to tell me what particular circumstance is involved, what period of the past.

Will it reach the clear surface of my consciousness—this memory, this old moment which the attraction of an identical moment has come from so far to invite, to move, to raise up from the deepest part of me? I don't know. Now I no longer feel anything, it has stopped, gone back down perhaps; who knows if it will ever rise up from its darkness again? Ten times I must begin again, lean down toward it. And each time, the laziness that deters us from every difficult task, every work of importance, has counseled me to leave it, to drink my tea and think only about my worries of today, my desires for tomorrow, upon which I may ruminate effortlessly.

And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom. The sight of the little madeleine had not reminded me of anything before I tasted it; perhaps because I had often seen them since, without eating them, on the shelves of the pastry shops, and their image had therefore left those days of Combray and attached itself to others more recent; perhaps because of these recollections abandoned so long outside my memory, nothing survived, everything had come apart; the forms and the form, too, of the little shell made of cake, so fatly sensual within its severe and pious pleating—had been destroyed, or, still half asleep, had lost the force of expansion that would have allowed them to rejoin my consciousness. But, when nothing subsists of an old past, after the death of people, after the destruction of things, alone, frailer but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, smell and taste still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, upon the ruins of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.

And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me (though I did not yet know and had to put off to much later discovering why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old gray house on the street, where her bedroom was, came like a stage set to attach itself to the little wing opening onto the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. And as in that game enjoyed by the Japanese in which they fill a porcelain bowl with water and steep in it little pieces of paper until then indistinct which, the moment they are immersed, stretch and twist, assume colors and distinctive shapes, become flowers, houses, human figures, firm and recognizable, so now all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies of the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

2

COMBRAY, FROM A DISTANCE, for ten leagues[1] around, seen from the railway when we arrived there the last week before Easter, was no more than a church summing up the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it into the distance, and, when one approached, holding close around its high dark cloak, in the middle of a field, against the wind, like a shepherdess her sheep, the woolly gray backs of the gathered houses, which a vestige of medieval ramparts girdled here and there with a line as perfectly circular as a small town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a little dreary, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackish stones of the countryside, fronted by outside steps, capped with gables that cast shadows down before them, were so dark that once the daylight began to fade one had to draw back the curtains in the "formal rooms"; streets with the solemn names of saints (of whom many were connected to the history of the earliest seigneurs of Combray): the rue Saint-Hilaire, the rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt's house stood, the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, along which her railings ran, and the rue du Saint-Esprit, onto which opened the little side gate of her garden; and these streets of Combray exist in a part of my memory so withdrawn, painted in colors so different from those that now coat the world for me, that in truth all of them, and also the church that rose above them on the square, appear to me even more unreal than the projections of the magic lantern; and that at certain moments, it seems to me that to be able to cross the rue Saint-Hilaire again, to be able to take a room in the rue de l'Oiseau—at the old Hôtellerie de l'Oiseau Flesché, from whose basement windows rose a smell of cooking that now and then still rises in me as intermittently and as warmly—would be to enter into contact with the Beyond in a manner more marvelously supernatural than making the acquaintance of Golo or chatting with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather's cousin—my great-aunt—in whose house we lived, was the mother of that Aunt Léonie who, after the death of her husband, my uncle Octave, no longer wished to leave, first Combray, then within Combray her house, then her bedroom, then her bed and no longer "came down," always lying in an uncertain state of grief, physical debility, illness, obsession, and piety. Her own rooms looked out on the rue Saint-Jacques, which ended much farther away in the Grand-Pré (as opposed to the Petit-Pré, a green in the middle of the town where three streets met), and which, smooth and gray, with the three high steps of sandstone before almost every door, seemed like a narrow passage hewn by a cutter of Gothic images from the same stone out of which he would have sculpted a crèche or a calvary. My aunt effectively confined her life to two adjoining rooms, staying in one of them in the afternoon while the other was aired. These were the sorts of provincial rooms which—just as in certain countries entire tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or perfumed by myriad protozoa that we cannot see—enchant us with the thousand smells given off by the virtues, by wisdom, by habits, a whole secret life, invisible, superabundant, and moral, which the atmosphere holds in suspension; smells still natural, certainly, and colored by the weather like those of the neighboring countryside, but already homey, human and enclosed, an exquisite, ingenious, and limpid jelly of all the fruits of the year that have left the orchard for the cupboard; seasonal, but movable and domestic, correcting the piquancy of the hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, as lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving and orderly, heedless and foresightful, linen smells, morning smells, pious smells, happy with a peace that brings only an increase of anxiety and with a prosiness that serves as a great reservoir of poetry for one who passes through it without having lived in it. The air was saturated with the finest flower of a silence so nourishing, so succulent, that I could move through it only with a sort of greed, especially on those first still cold mornings of Easter week when I tasted it more keenly because I had only just arrived in Combray: before I went in to say good morning to my aunt, they made me wait for a moment, in the first room where the sun, still wintry, had come to warm itself before the fire, already lit between the two bricks and coating the whole room with an odor of soot, having the same effect as one of those great rustic open hearths, or one of those mantels in country houses, beneath which one sits hoping that outdoors there will be an onset of rain, snow, even some diluvian catastrophe so as to add to the comfort of reclusion the poetry of hibernation; I would take a few steps from the prayer stool to the armchairs of stamped velvet always covered with a crocheted antimacassar; and as the fire baked like a dough the appetizing smells with which the air of the room was all curdled and which had already been kneaded and made to "rise" by the damp and sunny coolness of the morning, it flaked them, gilded them, puckered them, puffed them, transforming them into an invisible, palpable country pastry, an immense "turnover" in which, having barely tasted the crisper, more delicate, more highly regarded but also drier aromas of the cupboard, the chest of drawers, the floral wallpaper, I would always come back with an unavowed covetousness to ensnare myself in the central, sticky, stale, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered coverlet.

In the next room, I would hear my aunt talking all alone in an undertone. She always talked rather softly because she thought there was something broken and floating in her head that she would have displaced by speaking too loudly, but she never remained for long, even alone, without saying something, because she believed it was beneficial to her throat and that if she prevented the blood from stopping there, she would reduce the frequency of the fits of breathlessness and the spasms from which she suffered; besides, in the absolute inertia in which she lived, she attributed to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance; she endowed them with a mobility that made it difficult for her to keep them to herself, and lacking a confidant to whom she could communicate them, she announced them to herself, in a perpetual monologue that was her only form of activity. Unfortunately, having acquired the habit of thinking out loud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the next room, and I often heard her saying to herself: "I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep" (for never sleeping was her great claim, and the language we all used deferred to it and was marked by it: in the morning Françoise did not come to "wake" her, but "entered" her room; when my aunt wanted to take a nap during the day, we said she wanted to "reflect" or "rest"; and when she happened to forget herself, while chatting, so far as to say: "what woke me up" or "I dreamed that," she would blush and correct herself instantly).

After a moment I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be steeping her tea; or, if my aunt was feeling agitated, she would ask instead for her infusion and I would be the one entrusted with pouring from the pharmacy bag onto a plate the quantity of lime blossom which then had to be put into the boiling water. The drying of the stems had curved them into a whimsical trelliswork in whose interlacings the pale flowers opened, as if a painter had arranged them, posing them in the most ornamental way. The leaves, having lost or changed their aspect, looked like the most disparate things, a fly's transparent wing, the white back of a label, a rose petal, but these things had been heaped up, crushed, or woven as in the construction of a nest. A thousand small useless details—the charming prodigality of the pharmacist—that would have been eliminated in an artificial preparation gave me, like a book in which one is amazed to encounter the name of a person one knows, the pleasure of realizing that these were actually stems of real lime blossoms, like those I saw in the avenue de la Gare, altered precisely because they were not duplicates but themselves, and because they had aged. And since here, each new characteristic was only the metamorphosis of an old characteristic, in some little gray balls I recognized the green buds that had not come to their term; but especially the pink luster, lunar and soft, that made the flowers stand out amid the fragile forest of stems where they were suspended like little gold roses—a sign, like the glow on a wall that still reveals the location of a fresco that has worn away, of the difference between the parts of the tree that had been "in color" and those that had not—showed me that these petals were in fact the same ones that, before filling the pharmacy bag with flowers, had embalmed the spring evenings. That candle-pink flame was their color still, but half doused and drowsing in the diminished life that was theirs now, and that is a sort of twilight of flowers. Soon my aunt would be able to dip into the boiling infusion, of which she savored the taste of dead leaf or faded flower, a small madeleine, a piece of which she would hold out to me when it had sufficiently softened.

On one side of her bed was a large yellow chest of drawers of lemon wood and a table that was akin to both a dispensary and a high altar, on which, below a small statue of the Virgin and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, could be found her missals and her medical prescriptions, everything needed for following from her bed both the services and her regimen, for not missing the hour either of her pepsin or of Vespers. On the other side, her bed lay by the window, she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterward comment upon with Françoise.

I would not have been with my aunt five minutes before she would send me away for fear that I would tire her. She would hold out to my lips her sad, pale, dull forehead, on which, at this morning hour, she had not yet arranged her false hair, and where the bones showed through like the points of a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: "Now, my poor child, off you go, get ready for Mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with all of you, she should come up soon to see if I need anything."

Françoise, who had been in her service for years and did not suspect at that time that one day she would enter exclusively into ours, did in fact neglect my aunt a little during the months when we were there. There had been a time, in my childhood, before we went to Combray, when my aunt Léonie still spent the winters in Paris with her mother, when Françoise was such a stranger to me that on the first of January, before entering my great-aunt's, my mother would put a five-franc coin in my hand and say to me: "Take great care not to give it to the wrong person. Wait until you hear me say, 'Good morning, Françoise'; at the same time, I'll touch you lightly on the arm." Hardly had we arrived in my aunt's dim hall than we would see in the shadows, under the flutes of a dazzling bonnet as stiff and fragile as if it were made of spun sugar, the concentric ripples of an anticipatory smile of gratitude. It was Françoise, standing motionless in the frame of the little door of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we were a little used to this chapel darkness, we could distinguish on her face the disinterested love of humanity, the fond respect for the upper classes excited in the best regions of her heart by the hope of a New Year's gift. Mama would pinch my arm violently and say in a loud voice: "Good morning, Françoise." At this signal, my fingers would open and I would release the coin, which found a bashful but outstretched hand to receive it. But ever since we had begun going to Combray I knew no one better than Françoise, we were her favorites, she had for us, at least during the first years, not only as much regard as for my aunt, but also a keener liking, because we added, to the prestige of being part of the family (she had, for the invisible bonds formed between the members of a family by the circulation of the same blood, as much respect as a Greek tragedian), the charm of not being her usual masters. And so with what joy would she welcome us, commiserate with us that we did not yet have finer weather, the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind, while Mama would ask her for news of her daughter and her nephews, whether her grandson was a pretty child, what they were planning to make of him, whether he was going to be like his grandmother.

And when there was no one else there, Mama, knowing that Françoise still mourned her parents, who had died years ago, would talk to her about them gently, ask her for a thousand details about what sort of life they had led.

She had guessed that Françoise did not like her son-in-law and that he spoiled the pleasure she took in being with her daughter, with whom she could not chat as freely when he was there. And so, when Françoise went to see them, a few leagues from Combray, Mama would say to her, smiling: "Isn't it so, Françoise, if Julien is obliged to be away and you have Marguerite all to yourself all day long, you'll be sorry, but you'll make the best of it?" And Françoise would say, laughing: "Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than those X rays" (she said X with an affected difficulty and a smile to poke fun at herself, an ignorant woman, for using that erudite term) "that they brought in for Mme. Octave and that see what you have in your heart," and disappeared, embarrassed that someone was paying attention to her, perhaps so that we would not see her cry; Mama was the first person who gave her that sweet sensation, the feeling that her life as a countrywoman, her joys, her sorrows could be of some interest, could be a reason for pleasure or sadness in someone other than herself. My aunt was resigned to managing with less help from her during our stay, knowing how much my mother appreciated the service of this maid who was so intelligent and active, who was as handsome at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a bonnet whose dazzling rigid flutes appeared to be made of porcelain, as she was when going to High Mass; who did everything well, working like a horse, whether she was in good health or not, but without a fuss, as though it were nothing, the only one of my aunt's maids who, when Mama asked for hot water or black coffee, brought them really boiling; she was one of those servants who, in a household, are at the same time those most immediately displeasing to a stranger, perhaps because they do not bother to win him over and are not attentive to him, knowing very well they have no need of him, that one would stop seeing him rather than dismiss them; and who are, on the other hand, those most valued by masters who have tested their real capacities, and do not care about the superficial charm, the servile chatter that makes a favorable impression on a visitor, but that often cloaks an ineducable incompetence.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they needed, went back for the first time to give my aunt her pepsin and ask what she would like to have for lunch, it was quite rare that she was not already required to offer an opinion or provide explanations about some event of importance:

"Françoise, imagine, Mme. Goupil went past more than a quarter of an hour late going to fetch her sister; if she lingers along the way it wouldn't surprise me at all if she were to arrive after the Elevation."

"Well, there wouldn't be anything astonishing in that," answered Françoise.

"Françoise, if you had come five minutes earlier you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past carrying some asparagus twice as fat as Mère Callot's; now try to find out from her maid where she got them. You have been serving us asparagus in every sauce this year; you of all people might have found some like those for our travelers."

"It wouldn't be surprising if they came from M. le Curé's," said Françoise.

"Ah! Do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise?" answered my aunt, shrugging her shoulders. "From M. le Curé's! You know very well he grows only wretched, spindly little asparagus. I tell you these were as fat as a woman's arm. Not your arm, of course, but one like mine, poor thing, which has got so much thinner again this year."

"Françoise, didn't you hear those chimes that nearly split my head open?"

"No, Madame Octave."

"Ah, my poor girl, you must have a hard head, you can thank the Good Lord for that. It was Maguelone coming to get Dr. Piperaud. He came back out with her right away and they turned down the rue de l'Oiseau. Some child must be ill."

"Oh my, dear God," sighed Françoise, who could not hear of a misfortune occurring to a stranger, even in a distant part of the world, without beginning to lament.

"Françoise, now who were they ringing the passing bell for? Oh, dear God, it must have been for Mme. Rousseau. I'm blessed if I hadn't forgotten that she passed away the other night. Oh, it's time for the Good Lord to call me home, I don't know what I've done with my head since my poor Octave died. But I'm wasting your time, my girl."

"Not at all, Madame Octave, my time is not so precious; He who made it did not sell it to us. I'm only just going to see that my fire isn't out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt together appraised, during that morning session, the first events of the day. But sometimes those events assumed a character so mysterious and so grave that my aunt felt she could not wait for the moment when Françoise would come up, and four astounding peals of the bell would echo through the house.

"But Madame Octave, it isn't time for your pepsin yet," Françoise would say. "Were you feeling faint?"

"Not at all, Françoise," my aunt would say; "what I mean is yes, you know very well there is seldom a time, now, when I don't feel faint; one day I'll pass away like Mme. Rousseau without even time to collect myself; but that's not why I rang. Would you believe that I just saw Mme. Goupil as clearly as I see you now with a little girl whom I don't know at all? Now go fetch two sous' worth of salt at Camus's. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who someone is."

"But that'll be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to be satisfied with an immediate explanation since she had already been to Camus's twice that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise? And you think I wouldn't have recognized her?"

"But I don't mean the big one, Madame Octave, I mean the little one that's away at school in Jouy. I think I saw her once already this morning."

"Ah! That must be it," said my aunt. "She must have come for the holidays. That's it! There's no need to ask, she will have come for the holidays. But then anytime now we might very likely see Mme. Sazerat come and ring at her sister's for lunch. That's what it is! I saw Galopin's boy going past with a tart! You'll see, the tart was on its way to Mme. Goupil's."

"Once Mme. Goupil has a visitor, Madame Octave, it won't be long before you'll see all her folk coming back for lunch, because it's not so early as it was," said Françoise, who, in a hurry to go back down and see to lunch, was not sorry to leave my aunt the prospect of this distraction.

"Oh, not before noon!" answered my aunt in a tone of resignation, casting an uneasy glance at the clock, yet furtively so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced everything, nevertheless took such a lively pleasure in learning whom Mme. Goupil was having to lunch, a pleasure that would unfortunately have to wait a little more than an hour longer. "And on top of that, it will happen during my lunch!" she added half aloud to herself. Her lunch was enough of a distraction for her so that she did not wish for another one at the same time. "Now you won't forget to give me my eggs with cream in a flat plate?" These were

the only plates with pictures on them, and my aunt amused herself at each meal by reading the inscription on the one she was served that day. She would put on her glasses and spell out: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin or the Magic Lamp, and smile, saying: "Very good, very good."

"I would certainly have gone to Camus's . . ." Françoise would say, seeing that now my aunt would not send her there.

"No, no, it's not worth the trouble anymore, it's certainly Mlle. Pupin. My poor Françoise, I'm sorry to have made you come up for nothing."

But my aunt knew perfectly well it was not for nothing that she had rung for Françoise, since, in Combray, a person "whom one did not know at all" was a creature as scarcely believable as a mythological god, and in fact one could not remember when, anytime one of these stupefying apparitions had occurred, in the rue du Saint-Esprit or on the square, well-conducted research had not ended by reducing the fabulous character to the proportions of a "person one knew," either personally or abstractly, in his or her civil status, as having such and such a degree of kinship with some people of Combray. It was Mme. Sauton's son returning from military service, Abbé Perdreau's niece leaving the convent, the curé's brother, a tax collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired or had come to spend the holidays. One had had, upon seeing them, the shock of believing that there were in Combray people whom one did not know at all, simply because one had not recognized them right away. And yet, long in advance, Mme. Sauton and the curé had let everyone know they were awaiting their "travelers." When in the evening I went upstairs, after returning home, to describe our walk to my aunt, if I was so imprudent as to tell her that we had met, near Pont-Vieux, a man my grandfather did not know, "A man Grandfather did not know at all!" she would cry. "Ah! I don't believe it!" Nonetheless somewhat disturbed by this news, she would want to clear the matter up, my grandfather would be summoned. "Now who did you meet near Pont-Vieux, Uncle? A man you didn't know?" "But I did know him," my grandfather would answer, "it was Prosper, the brother of Mme. Bouilleboeuf's gardener." "Ah! All right," my aunt would say, calmed and a little flushed; shrugging her shoulders with an ironic smile, she would add: "Now, he told me you had met a man you didn't know!" And they would advise me to be more circumspect the next time and not to go on agitating my aunt with thoughtless remarks. One knew everybody so well, in Combray, both animals and people, that if my aunt had chanced to see a dog pass by "whom she did not know at all," she would not stop thinking about it and devoting to this incomprehensible fact all her talents for induction and her hours of leisure.

"That must be Mme. Sazerat's dog," Françoise would say, without great conviction but in order to pacify my aunt, and so that she would not "split her head."

"As if I didn't know Mme. Sazerat's dog!" my aunt would answer, her critical mind not accepting a fact so easily.

"Ah! Then it will be the new dog M. Galopin brought back from Lisieux."

"Ah! That must be it."

"It seems it's quite an affable creature," added Françoise, who had got the information from Théodore, "as clever as a person, always in a good humor, always friendly, always as agreeable as you might wish. It's uncommon for an animal of that age to be so well behaved already. Madame Octave, I will have to leave you, I haven't time to enjoy myself, here it's almost ten o'clock, and my stove not lit yet, even, and I still have my asparagus to scrape."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! Why, you've got a regular mania for asparagus this year. You'll make our Parisians grow tired of it!"

"Why, no, Madame Octave, they're very fond of it. You'll see, they'll come home from church with a good appetite and they won't push it about with the backs of their spoons."

"Church! Why, they must be there already. You'd do well not to waste any time. Go and look after your lunch."

While my aunt was conferring thus with Françoise, I was going to Mass with my parents. How I loved it, how clearly I can see it again; our church! The old porch by which we entered, black, pocked like a skimming ladle, was uneven and deeply hollowed at the edges (like the font to which it led us), as if the gentle brushing of the countrywomen's cloaks as they entered the church and of their timid fingers taking holy water could, repeated over centuries, acquire a destructive force, bend the stone and carve it with furrows like those traced by the wheel of a cart in a boundary stone which it knocks against every day. Its tombstones, under which the noble dust of the abbots of Combray, who were buried there, formed for the choir a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer inert and hard matter, for time had softened them and made them flow like honey beyond the bounds of their own square shapes, which, in one place, they had overrun in a flaxen billow, carrying off on their drift a flowery Gothic capital letter, drowning the white violets of the marble; and into which, elsewhere, they had reabsorbed themselves, further contracting the elliptical Latin inscription, introducing a further caprice in the arrangement of those abridged characters, bringing close together two letters of a word of which the others had been disproportionately distended. Its windows never sparkled as much as on the days when the sun hardly appeared, so that, if it was gray outside, we were sure it would be beautiful inside the church; one was filled to its very top by a single figure like a king in a game of cards, who lived up there, under an architectural canopy, between heaven and earth (and in whose slanting blue light, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there is no service—at one of those rare times when the church, airy, vacant, more human, luxurious, with some sun on its rich furniture, looked almost habitable, like the hall of a medieval-style mansion, of sculpted stone and stained glass—one would see Mme. Sazerat kneel for a moment, setting down on the next prayer stool a packet of petits fours tied with string that she had just picked up from the pastry shop across the street and was going to take back home for lunch); in another, a mountain of pink snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frosted onto the glass itself, blistering it with its cloudy sleet like a windowpane on which a few snowflakes remained, but snowflakes lit by some aurora (the same, no doubt, that flushed the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh they seemed set there for a moment by a gleam from outside about to vanish, rather than by colors attached forever to the stone); and all were so old that here and there one saw their silvery age sparkle with the dust of the centuries and show, shimmering and worn down to the thread, the weft of their soft tapestry of glass. One of them, a tall compartment, was divided into a hundred or so small rectangular panes in which blue predominated, like a great deck of cards resembling those meant to entertain King Charles VI;[2] but either because a beam of sunlight was shining, or because my gaze, as it moved, carried across the glass, snuffed and lit again by turns, a precious moving conflagration, the next moment it had assumed the changing luster of a peacock's train, then trembled and undulated in a flaming chimerical rain that dripped from the top of the dark rocky vault, along the damp walls, as if this were the nave of some grotto iridescent with sinuous stalactites into which I was following my parents, who were carrying their prayer books; a moment later the little lozenge-shaped panes had assumed the deep transparency, the infrangible hardness of sapphires which had been juxtaposed on some immense breastplate, but behind which one felt, more beloved than all these riches, a momentary smile of sunlight; it was as recognizable in the soft blue billow with which it bathed the precious stones as on the pavement of the square or the straw of the marketplace; and even on our first Sundays when we had arrived before Easter, it consoled me for the earth being still bare and black, by bringing into bloom, as in a historical springtime dating from the age of Saint Louis's successors, this dazzling gilded carpet of glass forget-me-nots.

Two high-warp tapestries represented the coronation of Esther (tradition had it that Ahasuerus had been given the features of a king of France and Esther those of a lady of Guermantes with whom he was in love), to which their colors, by melting, had added expression, relief, light: a little pink floated over Esther's lips outside the tracing of their outline; the yellow of her dress spread so unctuously, so thickly, that it acquired a kind of solidity and stood out boldly from the receding atmosphere; and the green of the trees, remaining vivid in the lower parts of the panel of silk and wool, but "gone" at the top, brought out in a paler tone, above the dark trunks, the lofty yellowing branches, gilded and half obliterated by the abrupt, slanting illumination of an invisible sun. All this, and still more the precious objects that had come into the church from figures who were for me almost legendary (the gold cross worked, they said, by Saint Eloi[3] and given by Dagobert, the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic,[4] of porphyry and enameled copper), because of which I moved through the church, when we went to our seats, as though through a valley visited by the fairies, in which a country person is amazed to see in a rock, a tree, a pool, the palpable trace of their supernatural passage, all this made it, for me, something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying a space with, so to speak, four dimensions—the fourth being Time—extending over the centuries its nave which, from bay to bay, from chapel to chapel, seemed to vanquish and penetrate not only a few yards but epoch after epoch from which it emerged victorious; hiding the rough, savage eleventh century in the thickness of the walls, from which it appeared with its heavy arches plugged and blinded by crude blocks of ashlar only in the deep gash incised near the porch by the tower staircase, and even there concealed by the graceful Gothic arcades that crowded coquettishly in front of it like older sisters who, to hide him from strangers, place themselves smiling in front of a younger brother who is boorish, sulky, and badly dressed; lifting into the heavens above the square its tower which had contemplated Saint Louis and seemed to see him still; and plunging down with its crypt into a Merovingian night, in which, groping their way as they guided us under the dark vault as powerfully ribbed as the wing of an immense stone bat, Théodore and his sister would light for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's[5] little daughter, on which a deep scallop—like the mark of a fossil—had been dug, it was said, "by a crystal lamp which, on the night the Frankish princess was murdered, had separated of

its own accord from the golden chains by which it hung on the site of the present apse and without the crystal breaking, without the flame going out, had sunk deep into the stone which gave way softly under it."

The apse of the Combray church; what can one say about it? It was so crude, so lacking in artistic beauty and even religious spirit. From outside, because the crossroads which it commanded was on a lower level, its crude wall rose up from a subbasement of quite unpolished ashlar, bristling with flints, and having nothing particularly ecclesiastical about it, the windows seemed to have been pierced at an excessive height, and the whole looked more like the wall of a prison than the wall of a church. And certainly, later, when I recalled all the glorious apses I had seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare them with the apse of Combray. But, one day, at the bend of a little street in a country town, I noticed, opposite the crossing of three lanes, a rough and unusually high wall with windows pierced far above and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. Then I did not ask myself as at Chartres or Rheims how powerfully it expressed religious feeling, but involuntarily exclaimed: "The church!"

The church! Familiar; flanked, in the rue Saint-Hilaire, where its north door was situated, by its two neighbors, M. Rapin's pharmacy and Mme. Loiseau's house, which it touched without any separation; a simple citizen of Combray that could have had its number in the street if the streets of Combray had had numbers, and where it seems that the postman should have had to stop in the morning when he was making his rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and upon coming out of M. Rapin's, there existed, however, between it and everything that was not it a demarcation that my mind was never able to cross. Even though Mme. Loiseau might have at her window fuchsias which developed the bad habit of forever allowing their branches to run all over with heads lowered, and whose flowers had no business more pressing, when they were large enough, than to go and cool their flushed, violet cheeks against the dark front of the church, for me the fuchsias did not for this reason become holy; between the flowers and the blackened stone against which they leaned, if my eyes perceived no interval, my mind reserved an abyss.

One could recognize the steeple of Saint-Hilaire from quite far off inscribing its unforgettable form on the horizon where Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which, in Easter week, was bringing us from Paris, my father caught sight of it slipping by turns over all the furrows of the sky and sending its little iron weathercock running in all directions, he would say to us: "Come, gather up the rugs, we're here." And on one of the longest walks we took from Combray, there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on an immense plateau closed at the horizon by jagged forests above which rose only the delicate tip of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, but so thin, so pink, that it seemed merely scratched on the sky by a fingernail which wanted to give this landscape, this exclusively natural picture, that little mark of art, that indication of human presence. When one drew near and could see the remains of the half-destroyed square tower which, not as high, still stood next to it, one was struck most of all by the dark, reddish shade of the stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one might have thought it, rising above the stormy violet of the vineyards, a ruin of purple nearly the color of a wild vine.

Often in the square, when we were coming home, my grandmother would make me stop to look at it. From the windows of its tower, placed two by two one above the other, with the exact and original proportion in their spacing that gives beauty and dignity not just to human faces, it loosed, dropped at regular intervals, volleys of crows which, for a moment, circled about shrieking, as if the old stones that allowed them to hop and flutter about without appearing to see them had suddenly become uninhabitable and emitted some principle of infinite agitation, struck them and driven them out. Then, after striping in every direction the violet velvet of the evening air, they would return suddenly calm to be reabsorbed into the tower, which was no longer baneful but once again benign, a few of them sitting here and there, apparently motionless, but perhaps snapping up some insect, on the tip of a turret, like a seagull as still as a fisherman on the crest of a wave. Without really knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, of pretension, of meanness, which made her love and believe rich in beneficent influence not only nature, when the hand of man had not, as had my great-aunt's gardener, shrunk and reduced it, but also works of genius. And certainly, every part of the church that one could see distinguished it from all other buildings by a sort of thoughtfulness that was infused into it, but it was in the steeple that it seemed to become aware of itself, affirm an individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple that spoke for it. I believe above all that, confusedly, my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what for her had the highest value in the world, an air of naturalness and an air of distinction. Knowing nothing about architecture, she would say: "My children, make fun of me if you like, perhaps it isn't beautiful according to the rules, but I like its strange old face. I'm sure that if it could play the piano it would not play *dryly*." And looking at it, following with her eyes the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its slopes of stone, which approached each other as they rose like hands meeting in prayer, she would join so fully in the effusion of the spire that her gaze seemed to soar with it; and at the same time she would smile in a friendly way at the worn old stones, of which the setting sun now illuminated only the topmost part and which, the moment they entered that sunny region, softened by the light, appeared suddenly to have risen much higher, to be quite far away, like a song taken up again in "a head voice" an octave above.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that gave all the occupations, all the hours, all the viewpoints of the town their shape, their crown, their consecration. From my bedroom, I could see only its base, which had been covered with slates; but when, on Sunday, I saw them, on a warm summer morning, blazing like a black sun, I would say to myself: "Good Heavens! Nine o'clock! I'd better get ready for Mass if I want to have time to go and give Aunt Léonie a kiss first," and I knew exactly the color of the sun on the square, the heat and dust of the market, the shadow made by the awning of the store which Mama would perhaps enter before Mass in an odor of unbleached linen, to buy some handkerchief which would be displayed to her under the direction of the shopkeeper, his chest outthrust, who, as he prepared to close, had just gone into the back of the shop to put on his Sunday jacket and soap his hands, which it was his habit, every five minutes, even in the most melancholy of circumstances, to rub together with an air of enterprise, celebration, and success.

When after Mass we went in to ask Théodore to bring us a brioche larger than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come from Thiberzy to have lunch with us, we would have the steeple there in front of us, itself golden and baked like a greater blessed brioche, with flakes and gummy drippings of sun, pricking its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, when I was coming home from a walk and thinking about the moment when I would soon have to say goodnight to my mother and not see her anymore, it was on the contrary so soft, at the close of day, that it looked as if it had been set down and crushed like a cushion of brown velvet against the pale sky which had yielded under its pressure, hollowing slightly to give it room and flowing back over its edges; and the cries of the birds that wheeled around it seemed to increase its silence, lift its spire to a greater height, and endow it with something ineffable.

Even on the errands we had to do behind the church, where we could not see it, everything seemed to be arranged in relation to the steeple, which would rise up here or there between the houses, perhaps even more affecting when it appeared that way, without the church. And certainly, there are many others that are more beautiful when seen this way, and I have in my memory vignettes of steeples rising above roofs which have a different artistic character from those composed by the sad streets of Combray. I will never forget, in a curious town in Normandy near Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses that are in many respects dear to me and venerable and between which, when you look at it from the lovely garden that descends from the front steps to the river, the Gothic spire of a church hidden behind them soars up, appearing to complete, to surmount their facades, but in a material so different, so precious, so annulated, so pink, so polished, that you see clearly it no more belongs to them than does the crimson crenellated spire of some seashell, tapering to a turret and glazed with enamel, to the two handsome, smooth pebbles between which it is caught on the beach. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the city, I know a window from which you can see, beyond a foreground, middle ground, and even third ground composed of the piled-up roofs of several streets, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes also, in the noblest "proofs" of it printed by the atmosphere, a decanted cindery black, which is in fact the dome of Saint-Augustin and which gives this view of Paris the character of certain views of Rome by Piranesi. But since into none of these little engravings, with whatever taste my memory may have executed them, was it able to put what I had lost a long time ago, the feeling that makes us not consider a thing a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without equivalent, none of them holds in subjection an entire profound part of my life, as does the memory of those views of the Combray steeple from the streets behind the church. Whether we saw it at five o'clock, when we went to get the letters at the post office, a few houses away from us to the left, abruptly lifting with an isolated peak the ridgeline of the roofs; or whether, on the other hand, if we wanted to go in to ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, our eyes followed that line, low again after the descent of its other slope, knowing we would have to turn at the second street after the steeple; or whether, again, going on farther, if we went to the station, we saw it obliquely, showing in profile new edges and surfaces like a solid caught at an unfamiliar moment of its revolution; or whether, from the banks of the Vivonne, the apse, muscularly gathered and raised to a greater height by the perspective, seemed to spring with the effort the steeple was making to hurl its spire into the heart of the sky: it was always to the steeple that we had to return, always the steeple that dominated everything, summing up the

houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the finger of God, whose body might be hidden in the crowd of humans, though I would not confuse it with them because of that. And even today, if in a large provincial town or a part of Paris I do not know well, a passing stranger who has "put me on the right path" shows me in the distance, as a reference point, some hospital belfry, some convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of a street I am supposed to take, if only my memory can obscurely find in it some small feature resembling the dear departed form, the stranger, if he turns around to make sure I am not going astray, may, to his astonishment, see me, forgetting the walk I had begun or the necessary errand, remain there in front of the steeple for hours, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep in myself lands recovered from oblivion draining and rebuilding themselves; and then no doubt, and more anxiously than a short time before when I asked him to direct me, I am still seeking my path, I am turning a corner . . . but . . . I am doing so in my heart . . .

As we returned home from Mass, we would often meet M. Legrandin, who was detained in Paris by his profession of engineer and, except during the summer vacation, could come to his property in Combray only from Saturday evening until Monday morning. He was one of those men who, quite apart from a career in science in which they have in fact been brilliantly successful, possess an entirely different culture, one that is literary, artistic, which their professional specialization does not make use of and which enriches their conversation. Better read than many men of letters (we did not know at that time that M. Legrandin had a certain reputation as a writer and we were very surprised to see that a famous musician had composed a melody to some verses of his), gifted with more "facility" than many painters, they imagine that the life they are leading is not the one that really suits them and they bring to their actual occupations either an indifference mingled with whimsy, or an application that is sustained and haughty, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a handsome figure, a fine, thoughtful face with a long, blond mustache and disenchanted blue eyes, exquisitely courteous, a conversationalist such as we had never heard before, he was in the eyes of my family, who always cited him as an example, the epitome of the superior man, approaching life in the noblest and most delicate way. My grandmother reproached him only for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not having the same naturalness in his language as in his loosely knotted lavaliere bow ties, in his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was also surprised by the fiery tirades he often launched against the aristocracy, against fashionable life, against snobbery, "certainly the sin which Saint Paul has in mind when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness."

Worldly ambition was a sentiment that my grandmother was so incapable of feeling or even, almost, of understanding, that it seemed to her quite pointless to bring so much ardor to stigmatizing it. What was more, she did not think it in very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister near Balbec was married to a titled gentleman of Lower Normandy, should indulge himself in such violent attacks against the nobility, going so far as to reproach the Revolution for not having had them all guillotined.

"Greetings, my friends!" he would say, coming up to us. "How fortunate you are to live here for such extended periods of time; tomorrow I must return to Paris, to my little nook.

"Oh!" he would add, with his own particular smile, gently ironical, disappointed and slightly distracted, "of course my house contains every useless thing in the world. It lacks only the one essential, a large piece of sky like this one. Always try to keep a piece of sky over your life, little boy," he would add, turning to me. "You have a lovely soul, of a rare quality, an artist's nature, don't ever let it go without what it needs."

When we returned home and my aunt sent to ask us if Mme. Goupil had been late coming to Mass, we could not give her any information. Instead, we increased her disturbance by telling her there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise, sent immediately to the grocery, came back empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose two professions, that of chorister with a part in the maintenance of the church and of grocer's boy, gave him connections in all worlds and therefore knowledge that was universal.

"Ah!" sighed my aunt, "I wish it were time for Eulalie. She's really the only one who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was an active old maid, lame and hard-of-hearing, who had "retired" after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service since her childhood, and had then taken a room next to the church, descending from it constantly either for the services or, when there was no service, to say a little prayer or give Théodore a hand; the rest of the time she visited invalids like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would describe what had happened at Mass or at Vespers. She was not above adding some revenue to the small pension paid her by the family of her former employers by going from time to time to look after the curé's linen or that of some other prominent personality in Combray's clerical world. Above a cloak of black cloth she wore a small white hood almost like a nun's, and a skin disease gave parts of her cheeks and her hooked nose the bright pink tones of an impatiens. Her visits were the great diversion of my aunt Léonie, who hardly received anyone else now, apart from M. le Curé. My aunt had gradually eliminated all the other visitors because all of them made the mistake, in her eyes, of belonging to one of two categories of people whom she detested. One group, the worst, whom she had got rid of first, were the ones who advised her not to "listen to herself" so, and subscribed, if only negatively, manifesting it only by certain disapproving silences or by certain dubious smiles, to the subversive doctrine that a little walk in the sun and a good rare beefsteak (even though two wretched sips of Vichy water would lie on her stomach for fourteen hours!) would do her more good than her bed and her medicines. The other category was made up of the people who seemed to believe she was more seriously ill than she thought, that she was as seriously ill as she said she was. And so, those she had allowed to come up after some hesitation and upon Françoise's kindly meant entreaties and who, in the course of their visit, had shown how very unworthy they were of the favor being done them by timidly risking a "Don't you think that if you were to move about a little when the weather's fine," or who, on the contrary, when she said to them: "I'm very low, very low, this is the end, my poor friends," answered her: "Ah! when our health fails us! Still, you may last awhile longer yet as you are"—these, the former as well as the latter, were certain never to be received again. And if Françoise was amused by my aunt's horrified look when from her bed she saw one of these people in the rue du Saint-Esprit apparently coming toward her house or when she heard the doorbell ring, she would laugh more heartily still, and as though at a good trick, at my aunt's ever-victorious ruses for managing to have them turned away, and at their discomfited expressions as they went off without having seen her, and at heart admired her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these people since she did not want to receive them. In short, my aunt required that her visitors at the same time commend her on her regimen, commiserate with her for her sufferings, and encourage her as to her future.

This was where Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "This is the end, my poor Eulalie," twenty times Eulalie would answer: "Knowing your illness as you know it, Madame Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin was saying to me just yesterday." (One of Eulalie's firmest beliefs, which the impressive number of denials contributed by experience had not been enough to shake, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was Mme. Sazerin.)

"I am not asking to live to a hundred," answered my aunt, who preferred not to see her days assigned a precise term.

And since along with this Eulalie knew better than anyone else how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, barring an unforeseen obstacle, were for my aunt a pleasure, the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state that was at first pleasant, but quite soon painful like an excessive hunger, if Eulalie was even a little late. Overly prolonged, this ecstasy of waiting for Eulalie became a torment, my aunt looked constantly at the time, yawned, felt faint. The sound of Eulalie's chime, if it came at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. The fact was that on Sunday, she thought only of this visit, and as soon as lunch was finished, Françoise would be in a hurry for us to leave the dining room so that she could go up and "occupy" my aunt. But (especially once the fine weather settled in at Combray) a good long time would go by after the haughty hour of noon, descending from the Saint-Hilaire steeple, which it had emblazoned with the twelve momentary rosettes of its sonorous crown, had echoed around our table close to the consecrated bread which had also come in, familiarly, after church, while we remained sitting in front of the *Thousand and One Nights* plates, oppressed by the heat and especially by the meal. For, upon a permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, jams, biscuits which she no longer even announced to us, Françoise would add—depending on the labors in the fields and orchards, the fruit of the tide, the luck of the marketplace, the kindness of neighbors, and her own genius, and with the result that our menu, like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected somewhat the rhythm of the seasons and the incidents of daily life—a brill because the monger had guaranteed her that it was fresh, a turkey hen because she had seen a large one at the Roussainville-le-Pin market, cardoons with marrow because she had not made them for us that way before, a roast leg of mutton because fresh air whets the appetite and it would have plenty of time to "descend" in the next seven hours, spinach for a change, apricots because they were still uncommon, gooseberries because in two weeks there would not be any more, raspberries that M. Swann had brought especially, cherries, the first that had come from the cherry tree in the garden after two years in which it had not given any, cream cheese, which I liked very much at one time, an almond cake because she had ordered it the day before, a brioche because it was our turn to present it. When all of that was finished, there came a work of art composed expressly for us, but more particularly dedicated to my father who was so fond of it, a chocolate custard, the product of Françoise's personal inspiration and attention, ephemeral

and light as an occasional piece into which she had put all her talent. If anyone had refused to taste it, saying: "I'm finished, I'm not hungry anymore," that person would immediately have been relegated to the rank of those barbarians who, even in a gift an artist makes them of one of his works, scrutinize its weight and its material when the only things of value in it are its intention and its signature. To leave even a single drop of it on the plate would have been to display the same impoliteness as to stand up before the end of a piece under the very nose of the composer.

At last my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day, go up to your room if you're too hot outdoors, but get a little fresh air first so that you don't start reading right after leaving the table." I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, often ornamented, like a Gothic font, with a salamander which sculpted on the rough stone the mobile relief of its allegorical tapering body, on the backless bench shaded by a lilac, in the little corner of the garden that opened through a service gate onto the rue du Saint-Esprit and from whose untended earth the scullery rose by two steps, projecting from the house like an independent structure. One could see its red paving stones gleaming like porphyry. It looked not so much like Françoise's lair as a little temple of Venus. It overflowed with the offerings of the dairyman, the fruit man, the vegetable monger, who had come sometimes from quite remote hamlets to dedicate to it the first fruits of their fields. And its roof was forever crowned with the cooing of a dove.

In earlier years I did not linger in the sacred grove surrounding it, since, before going upstairs to read, I would enter the little sitting room that my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and a veteran who had retired with the rank of major, occupied on the ground floor, and which, even when its open windows let in the heat, if not the rays of the sun, which seldom reached that far, gave off inexhaustibly that dark cool smell of both forest and ancien régime, that makes your nostrils linger in a daydream when you venture into certain abandoned hunting lodges. But for a number of years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray because of a quarrel that had occurred between him and my family, through my fault, in the following circumstances.

Once or twice a month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a visit as he was finishing lunch wearing a plain loose-fitting jacket and waited on by his servant who was dressed in a work jacket of striped duck, violet and white. He would grumble complaining that I had not come for a long time, grumble that we were abandoning him; he would offer me a marzipan cake or a tangerine, we would pass through a drawing room in which no one ever stopped, where no one ever made a fire, whose walls were ornamented with gilded moldings, its ceilings painted with a blue that was meant to imitate the sky and its furniture upholstered in satin as at my grandparents', but yellow; then we would go on into what he called his "study," whose walls were hung with some of those engravings depicting, against a dark background, a fleshy pink goddess driving a chariot, standing on a globe, or wearing a star on her forehead, which were admired during the Second Empire[6] because they were felt to have a Pompeiian look about them, were then hated, and are beginning to be admired again for one reason and one reason only, despite the others that are given, and that is that they have such a Second Empire look about them. And I would stay with my uncle until his valet came to him from the coachman to ask what time the latter should harness up. My uncle would then sink into a deep meditation while his admiring valet, afraid of disturbing him by the slightest movement, waited curiously for the result, which was always identical. At last, after the greatest hesitation, my uncle would unfailingly utter these words: "At quarter past two," which the valet would repeat with surprise, but without disputing them: "At quarter past two? Very good . . . I'll go and tell him . . ."

In those days I loved the theater, with a platonic passion since my parents had not yet allowed me to enter a theater, and I pictured to myself so inaccurately the pleasures one might experience there that I almost believed that each spectator looked as though into a stereoscope at a scene that was for him alone, though similar to the thousand others being looked at, each one for himself, by the rest of the audience.

Every morning I would run to the Morris column[7] to see what shows were being announced. Nothing was more disinterested or happier than the daydreams inspired in my imagination by each play that was announced, daydreams conditioned both by the images inseparable from the words that made up its title and also by the color of the posters, still damp and blistered with paste, against which that title stood out. Except for those strange works like *Le Testament de César Girodot* or *Oedipe-Roi,* which were inscribed, not on the green poster of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-red poster of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me more different from the sparkling white plume of *Les Diamants de la Couronne* than the smooth, mysterious satin of *Le Domino Noir,*[8] and, since my parents had told me that when I went to the theater for the first time I would have to choose between these two plays, as I tried to study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and then the title of the other, since this was all I knew of them, so as to attempt to discern the pleasure each one promised me and compare it to the pleasure that lay concealed within the other, I managed to picture to myself so forcefully, on the one hand a play that was dazzling and proud, on the other a play that was soft and velvety, that I was as incapable of deciding which I would prefer as if, for dessert, I had been given the choice between rice *à l'Impératrice* and chocolate custard.

All my conversations with my friends concerned these actors whose art, though unknown to me, was the first form, of all those it assumes, in which Art allowed me a presentiment of what it was. Between the manner in which one actor and another delivered, nuanced a declamatory speech, the tiniest differences seemed to me to have an incalculable importance. And I would rank them in order of talent, according to what I had been told about them, in lists that I recited to myself all day long, and that in the end hardened in my brain and obstructed it with their immovability.

Later, when I was in school, each time I wrote to a new friend during class as soon as the teacher's head was turned, my first question was always whether he had been to the theater yet and whether he thought the greatest actor really was Got, the second best Delaunay, etc. And if, in his opinion, Febvre came only after Thiron, or Delaunay only after Coquelin, the sudden mobility that Coquelin, losing his stony rigidity, would develop in my mind in order to pass to second place, and the miraculous agility, the fecund animation with which Delaunay would be endowed in order to withdraw to fourth, would restore the sensation of flowering and life to my newly supple and fertilized brain.

But if the actors preoccupied me so, if the sight of Maubaut coming out of the Théâtre-Français one afternoon had filled me with the ecstasy and suffering of love, how much more did the name of a star, blazing on the door of a theater, how much more did the sight, at the window of a brougham passing in the street, its horses blossoming with roses in their headbands, of a woman I thought might be an actress, leave me in a state of prolonged disturbance, as I tried impotently and painfully to imagine her life! I would rank the most illustrious in order of talent, Sarah Bernhardt, La Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary, but all of them interested me. Now my uncle knew many of them and also some courtesans whom I did not distinguish clearly from the actresses. He would entertain them at home. And if we went to see him only on certain days, this was because on the other days women came whom his family could not have met, or so at least they thought, since my uncle himself, on the contrary, was only too ready to pay pretty widows who had perhaps never been married, and countesses with high-sounding names which were doubtless only noms de guerre, the courtesy of introducing them to my grandmother or even of presenting them with some of the family jewels, tendencies which had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, when an actress's name came into the conversation, I would hear my father say to my mother, smiling: "A friend of your uncle's"; and I would think that the novitiate pointlessly endured for perhaps years on end by eminent men at the door of some woman who would not answer their letters and would ask her doorman to turn them away could have been spared a boy like me by my uncle, who could introduce him in his own home to the actress who, unapproachable by so many others, was for him an intimate friend.

And so—using the excuse that a lesson which had been moved now came at such an awkward hour that it had prevented me several times and would continue to prevent me from seeing my uncle—one day, different from the day set apart for the visits we made to him, taking advantage of the fact that my parents had had lunch early, I went out and, instead of going to look at the column of posters, for which I was allowed to go out alone, I ran to him. I noticed in front of his door a carriage with two horses, each of which had a red carnation at its blinkers, as did the coachman in his buttonhole. From the staircase I heard a laugh and a woman's voice, and, as soon as I rang, a silence, then the sound of doors being shut. The valet came to open the door, and when he saw me seemed embarrassed, told me my uncle was very busy, probably would not be able to see me, and when he went to let him know anyway, the same voice I had heard before said: "Oh, yes! do let him come in; just for a minute, I would enjoy it so much. In the photograph you have on your desk, he looks so much like his mother, your niece; that's her photograph next to his, isn't it? I would so like to see the boy, just for a moment."

I heard my uncle grumble, become cross, finally the valet showed me in.

On the table, there was the same plate of marzipan as always; my uncle had on his usual jacket, but across from him, in a pink silk dress with a long string of pearls around her neck, sat a young woman who was eating the last of a tangerine. My uncertainty as to whether I should call her Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush and, not daring to turn my eyes too much in her direction for fear of having to talk to her, I went to kiss my uncle. She looked at me, smiling, my uncle

said to her, “My nephew,” without telling her my name, or telling me hers, probably because, ever since the difficulties he had had with my grandfather, he had been trying as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this sort of acquaintance.

“How much like his mother he is,” she said.

“But you’ve never seen my niece except in a photograph,” said my uncle brusquely.

“I beg your pardon, my dear friend, I passed her on the stairs last year when you were so ill. It’s true that I saw her for only a split second and your stairs are quite dark, but that was enough for me to admire her. This young man has her beautiful eyes and also *that,*” she said, drawing a line with her finger along the lower part of her forehead. “Does Madame, your niece, have the same name as you, my dear?” she asked my uncle.

“He looks like his father more than anyone,” muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to introduce them at a distance by saying Mama’s name than to do so at close quarters. “He is exactly like his father and also my poor mother.”

“I don’t know his father,” said the lady in pink with a slight inclination of her head, “and I never knew your poor mother, my dear. You remember, it was shortly after your bereavement that we met.”

I was feeling a little disappointed, because this young lady was no different from the other pretty women I had sometimes seen in my family, in particular the daughter of a cousin of ours to whose house I went every year on the first of January. Better dressed, only, my uncle’s friend had the same quick and kind glance, she seemed as open and affectionate. In her I found no trace of the theatrical appearance that I admired in photographs of actresses, nor of the diabolical expression that would have suited the life she must lead. I had trouble believing she was a courtesan and I especially would not have believed she was a stylish courtesan, if I had not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearl necklace, if I had not known that my uncle was acquainted only with those of the highest sort. But I wondered how the millionaire who had given her her carriage and her house and her jewels could enjoy squandering his fortune on a person whose appearance was so simple and proper. And yet, as I thought about what her life must be like, the immorality of it disturbed me perhaps more than if it had taken concrete form before my eyes in some special guise—it was so invisible, like the secret of some romantic story, of some scandal which had driven out of the home of her bourgeois parents and consigned to the public, which had brought to a bloom of beauty and raised to the demimonde and to notoriety, this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, the same as so many others I knew already, made me consider her despite myself to be a young woman from a good family, though she was no longer from any family.

We had gone into the “study,” and my uncle, appearing somewhat ill at ease because of my presence, offered her a cigarette.

“No,” she said, “my dear, you know I’ve become used to the ones the grand duke sends me. I told him you were jealous.” And from a case she drew cigarettes covered with gilded foreign writing. “Why yes,” she added abruptly, “I must have met this young man’s father at your house. Isn’t he your nephew? How could I have forgotten? He was so good, so exquisite to me,” she said modestly and sensitively. But as I thought about what might have been my father’s brusque greeting which she had found so exquisite, I, who knew his reserve and his coldness, was embarrassed, as by an indelicacy he had committed, by this disparity between the excessive gratitude that was bestowed on it and his insufficient cordiality. It seemed to me later that it was one of the touching aspects of the role of these idle and studious women that they devote their generosity, their talent, a free-floating dream of beauty in love—for, like artists, they do not carry it to fruition, do not bring it into the framework of a shared existence—and a gold that costs them little, to enrich with a precious and refined setting the rough and ill-polished lives of men. Just as this one, in the smoking room where my uncle was wearing his plain jacket to receive her, generously diffused her soft and sweet body, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, the elegance that emanates from the friendship of a grand duke, so in the same way she had taken some insignificant remark of my father’s, had worked it delicately, turned it, given it a precious appellation, and enchasing it with one of her glances of the finest water, tinged with humility and gratitude, had given it back changed into an artistic jewel, into something “completely exquisite.”

“Come now, it’s time for you to go,” my uncle said to me.

I stood up, I had an irresistible desire to kiss the hand of the lady in pink, but it seemed to me this would have been something as bold as an abduction. My heart pounded as I said to myself: “Should I do it, should I not do it,” then I stopped asking myself what I should do so as to be able to do something. And with a blind and senseless gesture divested of all the reasons I had found in its favor a moment ago, I carried to my lips the hand she was holding out to me.

“How nice he is! How gallant! Why, the boy’s a bit of a ladies’ man already: he takes after his uncle. He’ll be a perfect *gentleman,*”[9] she added, clenching her teeth to give the phrase a slightly British accent. “Couldn’t he come have *a cup of tea* with me sometime, as our neighbors the English say? He need only send me a ‘blue’[10] in the morning.”

I did not know what a “blue” was. I did not understand half the words the lady said, but my fear that there was some question concealed in them which it would have been impolite of me not to answer made me keep on listening to them with close attention, and this made me very tired.

“Oh no, that’s not possible,” said my uncle, shrugging his shoulders, “he’s very busy, he works hard. He wins all the prizes at school,” he added in a low voice so that I would not hear this lie and contradict it. “Who knows? Perhaps the boy will be a little Victor Hugo, another Vaulabelle,[11] you know.”

“I adore artists,” answered the lady in pink, “they’re the only ones who understand women . . . besides a few superior creatures like you. Excuse my ignorance, my dear, but who is Vaulabelle? Is it those gilt-edged volumes in the little glass bookcase in your sitting room? You know you promised to lend them to me, I’ll take great care of them.”

My uncle, who hated lending his books, said nothing in answer and took me to the front hall. Crazed with love for the lady in pink, I covered my old uncle’s tobacco-filled cheeks with mad kisses, and, while with some embarrassment he let me know without venturing to tell me openly that he would just as soon I not talk about this visit to my parents, I said to him, tears in my eyes, that the memory of his goodness was so powerful within me that one day I would certainly find the means to show him my gratitude. It was so powerful, in fact, that two hours later, after a few mysterious phrases that did not seem to me to give my parents a distinct enough idea of the new importance with which I was endowed, I found it more explicit to describe to them every last detail of the visit I had just paid. I did not think that in doing this I was causing problems for my uncle. How could I have thought that, since I did not wish it? And I could not imagine that my parents would see any harm in a visit in which I saw none. Doesn’t it happen every day that a friend asks us to be sure to apologize for him to a woman to whom he has been prevented from writing, and that we neglect to do it, feeling that this person cannot attach any importance to a silence that has none for us? I imagined, like everyone else, that the brain of another person was an inert and docile receptacle, without the power to react specifically to what one introduced into it; and I did not doubt that in depositing in my parents’ brains the news of the acquaintance I had made through my uncle, I was transmitting to them at the same time, as I wished to, the kindly opinion that I had of this introduction. My parents unfortunately deferred to principles entirely different from those I was suggesting they adopt, when they wished to appraise my uncle’s action. My father and grandfather had some violent arguments with him; of this, I was indirectly informed. A few days later, encountering my uncle outdoors as he was passing in an open carriage, I was filled with all the pain, the gratitude, the remorse that I would have liked to express to him. Compared to their immensity, I felt that raising my hat would be shabby and might make my uncle think I did not believe I owed him more than an ordinary sort of courtesy. I decided to refrain from that inadequate gesture and I turned my head away. My uncle thought that in doing this I was following my parents’ orders, he did not forgive them, and he died many years later without any of us ever seeing him again.

And so I no longer went into my uncle Adolphe’s sitting room, now closed, and would linger in the vicinity of the scullery until Françoise appeared in her temple yard and said to me: “I’m going to let my kitchen maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water, I must fly to Mme. Octave,” when I would decide to go back in and would go straight upstairs to read in my room. The kitchen maid was an abstract entity, a permanent institution whose invariable set of attributes assured her a sort of continuity and identity, through the succession of temporary forms in which she was incarnated, for we never had the same one two years running. The year we ate so much asparagus, the kitchen maid usually given the job of “scraping” them was a poor, sickly creature, in a state of pregnancy already rather advanced when we arrived at Easter, and we were in fact surprised that Françoise allowed her to do so many errands and so much heavy work, for she was beginning to have difficulty carrying before her the mysterious basket, rounder every day, whose magnificent form one could divine under her ample smocks. These smocks reminded me of the cloaks worn by certain of Giotto’s symbolic figures, photographs of whom I had been given by M. Swann. He himself was the one who had pointed this out to us and when he asked for news of the kitchen maid he would say: “How is Giotto’s Charity?” What was more, she herself, poor girl, fattened by her pregnancy even in her face, even in her cheeks, which descended straight and square, rather resembled, in fact, those strong,

mannish virgins, matrons really, in whom the virtues are personified in the Arena. And I realize now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua[12] resembled her in still another way. Just as the image of this girl was increased by the added symbol she carried before her belly without appearing to understand its meaning, without expressing in her face anything of its beauty and spirit, as a mere heavy burden, in the same way the powerful housewife who is represented at the Arena below the name "Caritas," and a reproduction of whom hung on the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, embodies this virtue without seeming to suspect it, without any thought of charity seeming ever to have been capable of being expressed by her vulgar, energetic face. Through a lovely invention of the painter, she is trampling upon the treasures of the earth, but absolutely as if she were treading grapes to extract their juice or rather as she would have climbed on some sacks to raise herself up; and she holds her flaming heart out to God, or, to put it more exactly, "hands" it to him, as a cook hands a corkscrew through the vent of her cellar to someone who is asking her for it at the ground-floor window. Envy, too, might have had more of a particular expression of envy. But in this fresco too, the symbol occupies such a large place and is represented as so real, the serpent hissing at the lips of Envy is so fat, it fills her wide-open mouth so completely, that the muscles of her face are distended to contain it, like those of a child swelling a balloon with its breath, and that Envy's attention—and ours along with it—entirely concentrated as it is on the action of her lips, has scarcely any time for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration M. Swann professed for these figures of Giotto, for a long time I took no pleasure in contemplating, in our schoolroom, where the copies he had brought back to me had been hung, this Charity without charity, this Envy which looked like nothing more than a plate in a medical book illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumor of the tongue or by the introduction of the operating surgeon's instrument, a Justice whose grayish and meanly regular face was the very same which, in Combray, characterized certain pretty, pious, and unfeeling bourgeois ladies I saw at Mass, some of whom had long since been enrolled in the reserve militia of Injustice. But later I understood that the startling strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes was due to the large place which the symbol occupied in them, and the fact that it was represented, not as a symbol, since the thought symbolized was not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or physically handled, gave something more literal and more precise to the meaning of the work, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson it taught. In the case of the poor kitchen maid, too, wasn't one's attention constantly brought back to her belly by the weight that pulled on it; and in the same way, also, the thoughts of the dying are quite often turned toward the aspect of death that is real, painful, dark, visceral, toward the underside of death, which is in fact the side it presents to them and so harshly makes them feel, and which more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty breathing, a need to drink, than what we call the idea of death.

There must have been a good deal of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they seemed to me as alive as the pregnant servant, and since she herself did not appear to me much less allegorical. And perhaps this (at least apparent) nonparticipation of a person's soul in the virtue that is acting through her has also, beyond its aesthetic value, a reality that is, if not psychological, at least, as they say, physiognomical. When, later, I had occasion to meet, in the course of my life, in convents for instance, truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they generally had the cheerful, positive, indifferent, and brusque air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can read no commiseration, no pity in the presence of human suffering, no fear of offending it, the sort which is the ungentle face, the antipathetic and sublime face of true goodness.

While the kitchen maid—involuntarily causing Françoise's superiority to shine forth, just as Error, by contrast, renders more dazzling the triumph of Truth—served coffee which according to Mama was merely hot water, and then took up to our rooms hot water which was barely lukewarm, I had lain down on my bed, a book in my hand, in my room which tremulously protected its frail transparent coolness from the afternoon sun behind its nearly closed shutters, through which a gleam of daylight had nonetheless contrived to pass its yellow wings, remaining motionless between the wood and the windowpane, in a corner, like a poised butterfly. It was barely light enough to read, and the sensation of the splendid brightness of the day came to me only from the blows struck in the rue de la Cure by Camus (told by Françoise that my aunt was "not resting" and that one could make noise) against some dusty crates, which, however, reverberating in the sonorous atmosphere peculiar to hot weather, seemed to send scarlet stars flying into the distance; and also by the houseflies that performed for me, in a little concert, a sort of chamber music of summer: this music does not evoke summer in the same way as a melody of human music, which, when you happen to hear it during the warm season, afterward reminds you of it; it is connected to the summer by a more necessary bond: born of the fine days, born again only with them, containing a little of their essence, it not only awakens their image in our memory, it guarantees their return, their presence, actual, ambient, immediately accessible.

This dim coolness of my room was to the full sun of the street what a shadow is to a ray of light, that is to say, it was just as luminous and offered my imagination the full spectacle of summer, which my senses, had I been out walking, could have enjoyed only piecemeal; and so it was quite in harmony with my repose, which (because of the stirring adventures narrated in my books) sustained, like the repose of an unmoving hand in the midst of a stream of water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity.

But my grandmother, even if the hot weather had turned bad, if a storm or merely a squall had arisen, would come and beg me to go out. And not wanting to stop my reading, I would go and continue it in the garden, at least, under the chestnut tree, in a little hooded chair of wicker and canvas, in the depths of which I would sit and think I was hidden from the eyes of the people who might come and pay a visit to my parents.

And wasn't my mind also like another crib in the depths of which I felt I remained ensconced, even in order to watch what was happening outside? When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. In the sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would simultaneously unfold while I read, and which ranged from the aspirations hidden deepest within me to the completely exterior vision of the horizon which I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and the beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be. For, even if I had bought it in Combray, having seen it in front of Borange's grocery, which was too far away from the house for Françoise to be able to do her shopping there as she did at Camus's, but which was better stocked as stationer and bookshop, held in place by some strings in the mosaic of pamphlets and monthly serials that covered the two panels of its door, which was itself more mysterious, more sown with ideas than the door of a cathedral, the fact was that I had recognized it as having been mentioned to me as a remarkable work by the teacher or friend who appeared to me at that period to hold the secret of the truth and beauty half sensed, half incomprehensible, the knowledge of which was the goal, vague but permanent, of my thoughts.

After this central belief, which moved incessantly during my reading from inside to outside, toward the discovery of the truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I was taking part, for those afternoons contained more dramatic events than does, often, an entire lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading; it is true that the people affected by them were not "real," as Françoise said. But all the feelings we are made to experience by the joy or the misfortune of a real person are produced in us only through the intermediary of an image of that joy or that misfortune; the ingeniousness of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in the apparatus of our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist in purely and simply abolishing real people would be a decisive improvement. A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is in large part perceived by our senses, that is to say, remains opaque to us, presents a dead weight which our sensibility cannot lift. If a calamity should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total notion we have of him that we will be able to be moved by this; even more, it is only in a part of the total notion he has of himself that he will be able to be moved himself. The novelist's happy discovery was to have the idea of replacing these parts, impenetrable to the soul, by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say, parts which our soul can assimilate. What does it matter thenceforth if the actions, and the emotions, of this new order of creatures seem to us true, since we have made them ours, since it is within us that they occur, that they hold within their control, as we feverishly turn the pages of the book, the rapidity of our breathing and the intensity of our gaze. And once the novelist has put us in that state, in which, as in all purely internal states, every emotion is multiplied tenfold, in which his book will disturb us as might a dream but a dream more lucid than those we have while sleeping and whose memory will last longer, then see how he provokes in us within one hour all possible happinesses and all possible unhappinesses just a few of which we would spend years of our lives coming to know and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slowness with which they occur prevents us from perceiving them (thus our heart changes, in life, and it is the worst pain; but we know it only through reading, through our imagination: in reality it changes,

as certain natural phenomena occur, slowly enough so that, if we are able to observe successively each of its different states, in return we are spared the actual sensation of change).

Already less interior to my body than these lives of the characters, next came, half projected in front of me, the landscape in which the action unfolded and which exerted on my thoughts a much greater influence than the other, the one I had before my eyes when I lifted them from the book. It was thus that during two summers, in the heat of the garden at Combray, I felt, because of the book I was reading then, homesick for a mountainous and fluvial country, where I would see many sawmills and where, in the depths of the clear water, pieces of wood rotted under tufts of watercress: not far off, climbing along low walls, were clusters of violet and reddish flowers. And since the dream of a woman who would love me was always present in my mind, during those summers that dream was impregnated with the coolness of the running waters; and whichever woman I conjured up, clusters of violet and reddish flowers would rise immediately on either side of her like complementary colors.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains forever stamped, is adorned and enriched, by the glimmer of the colors not its own that may happen to surround it in our daydream; for the landscapes in the books I read were for me not merely landscapes more vividly portrayed in my imagination than those which Combray set before my eyes but otherwise analogous. Because the author had chosen them, because of the faith with which my mind went to meet his word as though it were a revelation, they seemed to be—an impression hardly ever given me by the countryside in which I happened to be, and especially by our garden, the unmagical product of the perfectly correct conception of the gardener so despised by my grandmother—an actual part of Nature itself, worthy to be studied and explored.

If my parents had allowed me, when I was reading a book, to go visit the region it described, I would have believed I was taking an invaluable step forward in the conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always surrounded by our own soul, it is not as though by a motionless prison: rather, we are in some sense borne along with it in a perpetual leap to go beyond it, to reach the outside, with a sort of discouragement as we hear around us always that same resonance, which is not an echo from outside but the resounding of an internal vibration. We try to rediscover in things, now precious because of it, the glimmer that our soul projected on them; we are disappointed to find that they seem to lack in nature the charm they derived in our thoughts from the proximity of certain ideas; at times we convert all the forces of that soul into cunning, into magnificence, in order to have an effect on people who are outside us, as we are well aware, and whom we will never reach. Thus, if I always imagined the woman I loved surrounded by the places I longed for most at that time, if I would have liked her to be the one who took me to visit them, who opened the way for me into an unknown world, it was not because of a simple chance association of thoughts; no, it was because my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I am separating artificially today as if I were cutting sections at different heights of an apparently motionless iridescent jet of water—in a single inflexible upsurge of all the forces of my life.

Lastly, continuing to trace from the inside to the outside these states simultaneously juxtaposed in my consciousness, and before reaching the real horizon that enveloped them, I find pleasures of another kind, the pleasure of being comfortably seated, of smelling the good scent of the air, of not being disturbed by a visit; and, when an hour rang in the bell tower of Saint-Hilaire, of seeing fall piece by piece what was already consumed of the afternoon, until I heard the last stroke, which allowed me to add up the total and after which the long silence that followed it seemed to commence in the blue sky that whole part that was still granted me for reading until the good dinner which Françoise was preparing and which would restore me from the hardships I had incurred, during the reading of the book, in pursuit of its hero. And at each hour it would seem to me only a few moments since the preceding hour had rung; the most recent would come and inscribe itself close to the other in the sky, and I would not be able to believe that sixty minutes were held in that little blue arc comprised between their two marks of gold. Sometimes, even, this premature hour would ring two strokes more than the last; there was therefore one that I had not heard, something that had taken place had not taken place for me; the interest of the reading, as magical as a deep sleep, had deceived my hallucinated ears and erased the golden bell from the azure surface of the silence. Lovely Sunday afternoons under the chestnut tree in the garden at Combray, carefully emptied by me of the ordinary incidents of my own existence, which I had replaced by a life of foreign adventures and foreign aspirations in the heart of a country washed by running waters, you still evoke that life for me when I think of you and you contain it in fact from having gradually encircled and enclosed it—while I went on with my reading in the falling heat of the day—in the crystalline succession, slowly changing and spanned by leafy branches, of your silent, sonorous, redolent, and limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be drawn from my reading, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who would run like a lunatic, overturning an orange tree in its tub as she went by, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and shouting, "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run out too and not miss any of the show. This was on the days when the regiment passed through Combray on its way to garrison maneuvers, generally going down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on chairs outside the railings, gazed at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walk and allowed themselves to be gazed at in return, the gardener's daughter through a slit left between two distant houses in the avenue de la Gare had caught sight of the glitter of helmets. The servants had rushed to bring in their chairs, for when the cuirassiers paraded down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, they filled its entire breadth, and the cantering horses grazed the houses, covering pavements submerged like banks that offer too narrow a bed for a torrent unleashed.

"Poor children," said Françoise, having barely reached the railings and already in tears; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow; the very thought of it gives me a shock," she added, putting her hand on her heart, where she had received that *shock*.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Madame Françoise, all these youngsters with no care for their lives?" said the gardener to get a "rise" out of her.

He had not spoken in vain:

"No care for their lives? Well, now, what should we care for if we don't care for our lives, the only gift the dear Lord never gives us twice over? Alas, dear God! It's quite true, though, they don't care! I saw them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they're not worth the rope to hang them with; they're not men anymore, they're lions." (For Françoise, the comparison of a man to a lion, which she pronounced lie-on, was not at all complimentary.)

The rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see anything coming from far off, and it was through that slit between the two houses in the avenue de la Gare that we saw more and more new helmets flowing and shining in the sun. The gardener wanted to know if there were many more still to come, and he was thirsty, because the sun was beating down. So, all of a sudden, his daughter, leaping out as though from a place besieged, would sally forth, gain the corner of the street, and after braving death a hundred times, come back to us bringing, along with a carafe of licorice water, the news that there were at least a thousand of them coming without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, reconciled, would discuss what action should be taken in case of war.

"You see, Françoise," said the gardener, "revolution would be better, because when they declare a revolution, it's only them that wants to that goes."

"Well now, at least I can understand that, it's more honest."

The gardener believed that when war was declared they would stop all the railway trains.

"Of course! So we doesn't run off," said Françoise.

And the gardener: "Oh, they're clever ones!" because he would not admit that war was not a kind of bad trick that the State tried to play on the people, and that if only they had the means to do it, there was not a single person who would not have run away from it.

But Françoise would hurry back to my aunt, I would return to my book, the servants would settle in front of the gate again to watch as the dust subsided along with the emotion roused by the soldiers. Long after calm had descended, an unaccustomed flow of people out walking would continue to darken the streets of Combray. And in front of each house, even those where it was not the custom, the servants or even the masters, sitting and watching, would festoon the sill with a border as dark and irregular as the border of seaweed and shells whose crepe and embroidery are left on the shore by a strong tide after it recedes.

Except on those days, however, I could usually read in peace. But the interruption and the commentary that a visit of Swann's once produced as I was in the midst of reading a book by an author quite new to me, Bergotte, had the consequence that for a long time afterward it was not against a wall adorned with spikes of violet flowers, but against a quite different background, before the portal of a Gothic cathedral, that the image now appeared of one of the women I dreamed of.

I had heard Bergotte mentioned for the first time by a friend of mine older than I whom I greatly admired, Bloch. When he heard me admit how much I admired "La Nuit d'Octobre,"[13] he had exploded in laughter as noisy as a trumpet and said to me: "Beware this rather low fondness of yours for the Honorable de

Musset. He's an extremely pernicious individual and a rather sinister brute. I must admit, however, that he and even our man Racine did, each of them, in the course of their lives, make one fairly rhythmical line of verse that also has in its favor what I believe to be the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. They are: 'The white Oloossone and the white Camyre' and 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë.'[14] They were pointed out to me in defense of those two rogues in an article by my very dear master, old Leconte, acceptable to the Immortal Gods. Speaking of which, here's a book I don't have time to read right now which is recommended, it seems, by that colossal fellow. I've been told he considers the author, the Honorable Bergotte, to be a most subtle individual; and even though he may evince, at times, a goodness of heart rather hard to explain, for me his word is a Delphic Oracle. Do read these lyrical pieces of prose, therefore, and if the titanic rhymester who composed 'Bhagavat' and 'Le Lévrier de Magnus'[15] has spoken the truth, by Apollo, you will taste, dear master, the nectarine joys of Olympos." It was in a sarcastic tone that he had asked me to call him "dear master" and that he called me the same. But in reality we took a certain pleasure in this game, since we were still close to the age when one believes one creates what one names.

Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to Bloch and ask him for an explanation in order to quiet the disturbance he had caused in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I expected nothing less than a revelation of the truth) were all the finer if they meant nothing at all. For Bloch was not invited to the house again. At first he had been made quite welcome. It was true that my grandfather claimed that each time I formed a closer attachment to one of my friends than the others and brought him home, he was always a Jew, which would not have displeased him in principle—even his friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not felt that it was not from among the best that I had chosen him. And so when I brought home a new friend, he very seldom failed to hum "Oh God of our Fathers" from *La Juive*[16] or "Israel, break thy bond,"[17] singing only the tune, naturally (Ti la lam talam, talim), but I was afraid my friend would know it and restore the words.

Before he saw them, simply from hearing the name, which quite often had nothing particularly Jewish about it, he would guess not only the Jewish background of those of my friends who were in fact Jewish, but even whatever might be distressing about their family.

"And what is the name of this friend of yours who's coming this evening?"

"Dumont, Grandfather."

"Dumont! Oh, now I'm suspicious!"

And he would sing:

> Archers, be on your guard!
> Watch without rest, without sound.[18]

And after adroitly asking us a few more specific questions, he would cry out: "On guard! On guard!" or, if it was the victim himself, already there, whom he had forced, by a subtle interrogation, unwittingly to confess his origins, then, to show us he no longer had any doubts, he would simply gaze at us while barely perceptibly humming:

> Let you now guide
> The steps of this timid Israelite![19]

or:

> Fields of our fathers, sweet valley of Hebron.[20]

or else:

> Yes, I am of the chosen race.[21]

These little idiosyncrasies of my grandfather's did not imply any feeling of ill will toward my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by irritating my father, who, noticing that he was wet, had said to him with lively interest:

"Why, Monsieur Bloch, what's the weather like? Has it been raining? I don't understand this at all, the barometer couldn't have been better."

The only answer he had drawn from him had been this:

"Monsieur, I absolutely cannot tell you if it has been raining. I live so resolutely beyond physical contingencies that my senses do not bother to notify me of them."

"Why, my poor son, that friend of yours is an idiot," my father had said to me when Bloch had gone. "My goodness! He can't even tell me what the weather's like! Why, nothing is more interesting! He's an imbecile."

Then Bloch had displeased my grandmother because after lunch, when she said she was feeling a little indisposed, he had stifled a sob and wiped away a few tears.

"How can you tell me he's sincere?" she said to me. "He doesn't know me; unless he's out of his mind, of course."

And finally he had annoyed everyone because, having come for lunch an hour and a half late covered with mud, instead of apologizing, he had said:

"I never allow myself to be influenced either by atmospheric perturbations or by the conventional divisions of time. I would happily instate the use of the opium pipe and the Malay kris,[22] but I know nothing about the use of those infinitely more pernicious and also insipidly bourgeois implements, the watch and the umbrella."

He would have returned to Combray despite all this. He was not, of course, the friend my parents would have wanted for me; in the end they had believed that the tears he shed over my grandmother's indisposition were not feigned; but they knew, either instinctively or from experience, that our impulsive emotions have little influence over the course of our actions or the conduct of our lives, and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to friends, the completion of a piece of work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in blind habits than in those momentary transports, ardent and sterile. They would have preferred for me, over Bloch, companions who would have given me no more than is suitable to give one's friends, according to the laws of bourgeois morality; who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruits because they had been thinking of me with affection that day, but who, being incapable of tipping in my favor the correct balance of the obligations and claims of friendship by a simple impulse of their imagination and sensibility, would also not tamper with it to my detriment. Even our offenses will not easily divert from their duty toward us those natures of which the model was my great-aunt, who, estranged for years from a niece to whom she never spoke, did not for this reason change the will in which she left that niece her entire fortune, because she was her closest relative and it "was proper."

But I liked Bloch, my parents wanted to make me happy, the insoluble problems I posed for myself concerning the meaningless beauty of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë tired me more and made me more ill than further conversations with him would have done, even though my mother felt they were harmful. And he would still have been received at Combray, if, after that dinner, having just informed me—news that later had a great deal of influence on my life and made it first happier, then less happy—that no woman ever thought about anything but love and that there was not one whose resistance could not be overcome, he had not assured me that he had heard most positively that my great-aunt had had a wild youth and had been known to be a kept woman. I could not stop myself from repeating these remarks to my parents, he was shown the door when he returned, and when I approached him afterward in the street, he was extremely cold to me.

But on the subject of Bergotte what he had said was true.

In the first few days, like a melody with which one will become infatuated but which one cannot yet make out, what I was to love so much in his style was not apparent to me. I could not put down the novel of his that I was reading, but thought I was interested only in the subject, as during that first period of love when you go to meet a woman every day at some gathering, some entertainment, thinking you are drawn to it by its pleasures. Then I noticed the rare, almost archaic expressions he liked to use at certain moments, when a hidden wave of harmony, an inner prelude, would heighten his style; and it was also at these moments that

he would speak of the "vain dream of life," the "inexhaustible torrent of beautiful appearance," the "sterile and delicious torment of understanding and loving," the "moving effigies that forever ennoble the venerable and charming facades of our cathedrals," that he expressed an entire philosophy, new to me, through marvelous images which seemed themselves to have awakened this harp song which then arose and to whose accompaniment they gave a sublime quality. One of these passages by Bergotte, the third or fourth that I had isolated from the rest, filled me with a joy that could not be compared to the joy I had discovered in the first one, a joy I felt I was experiencing in a deeper, vaster, more unified region of myself, from which all obstacles and partitions seemed to have been removed. What had happened was that, recognizing the same preference for rare expressions, the same musical effusion, the same idealist philosophy that had already, the other times, without my realizing it, been the source of my pleasure, I no longer had the impression I was in the presence of a particular passage from a certain book by Bergotte, tracing on the surface of my mind a purely linear figure, but rather of the "ideal passage" by Bergotte, common to all his books, to which all the analogous passages that merged with it had added a sort of thickness, a sort of volume, by which my mind seemed enlarged.

I was not quite Bergotte's only admirer; he was also the favorite writer of a friend of my mother's, a very well read woman, while Dr. du Boulbon would keep his patients waiting as he read Bergotte's most recent book; and it was from his consulting room, and from a park near Combray, that some of the first seeds of that predilection for Bergotte took flight, a rare species then, now universally widespread, so that all through Europe, all through America, even in the smallest village, one can find its ideal and common flower. What my mother's friend and, it seems, Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in Bergotte's books, as I did, was that same melodic flow, those old-fashioned expressions, a few others which were very simple and familiar, but which enjoyed, to judge from the places in which he focused attention on them, a particular preference on his part; lastly, in the sad passages, a certain brusqueness, a tone that was almost harsh. And no doubt he himself must have felt that these were his greatest charms. For in the books that followed, if he had found out some great truth, or the name of a famous cathedral, he would interrupt his narrative and, in an invocation, an apostrophe, a long prayer, he would give vent to those exhalations which in his early works remained interior to his prose, revealed only by the undulations of its surface, even sweeter, perhaps, more harmonious, when they were thus veiled and one could not have pointed out precisely where their murmur rose, where it died. These passages in which he took such pleasure were our favorite passages. I myself knew them by heart. I was disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Each time he talked about something whose beauty had until then been hidden from me, about pine forests, about hail, about Notre-Dame Cathedral, about *Athalie* or *Phèdre,*[23] with one image he would make that beauty explode into me. And so, realizing how many parts of the universe there were that my feeble perception would not be able to distinguish if he did not convey them to me, I wanted to possess an opinion of his, a metaphor of his, for everything in the world, especially those things that I would have an opportunity to see myself, and, of the latter, particularly some of the historic buildings of France and certain seascapes, because the insistence with which he mentioned them in his books proved that he considered them rich in meaning and beauty. Unfortunately, concerning almost everything in the world I did not know what his opinion was. I did not doubt that it was entirely different from my own, since it came down from an unknown world toward which I was trying to rise: persuaded that my thoughts would have looked like pure ineptitude to that perfect mind, I had made such a clean sweep of them all that, when by chance I happened to encounter in one of his books a thought that I had already had myself, my heart would swell as though a god in his goodness had given it back to me, had declared it legitimate and beautiful. It happened now and then that a page of his would say the same things that I often wrote to my grandmother and my mother at night when I could not sleep, so that this page by Bergotte seemed like a collection of epigraphs to be placed at the beginnings of my letters. Later still, when I began writing a book, and the quality of certain sentences was not high enough to persuade me to continue it, I would find their equivalent in Bergotte. But it was only then, when I read them in his book, that I could enjoy them; when I was the one composing them, anxious that they should reflect exactly what I perceived in my thoughts, afraid I would not "make a good likeness," I hardly had time to ask myself whether what I was writing was agreeable! But in fact there was no other sort of sentence, no other sort of idea, that I really loved. My uneasy and dissatisfied efforts were themselves a sign of love, a love without pleasure but profound. And so, when I suddenly found sentences like these in a book by another person, that is, without having to suffer my usual qualms, my usual severity, without having to torment myself, I would at last abandon myself with delight to my partiality for them, like a cook who, when for once he does not have to prepare the meal, at last finds the time to gormandize. One day, when I encountered in a book by Bergotte a joke about an old servant woman which the writer's magnificent and solemn language made even more ironical, but which was the same joke I had often made to my grandmother when talking about Françoise, another time when I saw that he did not think it unworthy to portray in one of those mirrors of truth which were his books a remark similar to one I had had occasion to make about our friend M. Legrandin (remarks about Françoise and M. Legrandin that were certainly among those I would most resolutely have sacrificed to Bergotte, persuaded that he would find them uninteresting), it seemed to me suddenly that my humble life and the realms of the truth were not as widely separated as I had thought, that they even coincided at certain points, and from confidence and joy I wept over the writer's pages as though in the arms of a father I had found again.

From his books, I imagined Bergotte to be a frail, disappointed old man who had lost several of his children and never recovered. And so I would read, I would sing his prose to myself, more *dolce,* more *lento*[24] perhaps than it was written, and the simplest sentence spoke to me with a more tender intonation. Above all else I loved his philosophy, I had pledged myself to it for life. It made me impatient to reach the age when I would enter secondary school and enroll in the class called Philosophy. But I did not want to do anything else there but live according to Bergotte's ideas exclusively, and, had I been told that the metaphysicians to whom I would be devoting myself by then would not resemble him at all, I would have felt the despair of a lover who wants his love to be lifelong and to whom one talks about the other mistresses he will have later.

One Sunday, as I was reading in the garden, I was disturbed by Swann, who had come to see my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Well, well! Bergotte! Now, who told you about his books?" I said it was Bloch.

"Ah, yes! The boy I saw here once, who looks so much like the portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini.[25] Oh, it's quite striking! He has the same circumflex eyebrows, the same curved nose, the same jutting cheekbones. When he has a goatee, he'll be the same person. Well, he has good taste, in any case, because Bergotte is quite enchanting." And seeing how much I appeared to admire Bergotte, Swann, who never talked about the people he knew, out of kindness made an exception and said to me:

"I know him very well. If you would like him to write a few words in the front of your book, I could ask him."

I did not dare accept his offer, but asked Swann some questions about Bergotte. "Could you tell me which is his favorite actor?"

"Actor? I don't know. But I do know that he doesn't consider any man on the stage equal to La Berma; he puts her above everyone else. Have you seen her?"

"No, monsieur, my parents don't allow me to go to the theatre."

"That's unfortunate. You ought to ask them. La Berma in *Phèdre,* in *Le Cid,*[26] is only an actress, you might say, but you know, I'm not much of a believer in the *'hierarchy!'* of the arts" (and I noticed, as had often struck me in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that when he talked about serious things, when he used an expression that seemed to imply an opinion about an important subject, he took care to isolate it in a tone of voice that was particularly mechanical and ironic, as though he had put it between quotation marks, seeming not to want to take responsibility for it, as though saying "*hierarchy,* you know, as it is called by silly people?" But then if it was so silly, why did he say hierarchy?). A moment later, he added: "It will give you as noble a vision as any masterpiece, I don't know, really . . . as"—and he began to laugh—"the Queens of Chartres!"[27] Until then his horror of ever expressing a serious opinion had seemed to me a thing that must be elegant and Parisian and that was the opposite of the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother's sisters; and I also suspected that it was a form of wit in the social circles in which Swann moved, where, reacting against the lyricism of earlier generations, they went to an extreme in rehabilitating those small, precise facts formerly reputed to be vulgar, and proscribed "fine phrases." But now I found something shocking in this attitude of Swann's toward things. It appeared that he dared not have an opinion and was at his ease only when he could with meticulous accuracy offer some precise piece of information. But if that was the case, he did not realize that to postulate that the accuracy of these details was important was to profess an opinion. I thought again of that dinner at which I was so sad because Mama would not be coming up to my room and at which he had said that the balls given by the Princesse de Léon were of no importance whatsoever. But it was to just that sort of pleasure that he devoted his life. I found all this contradictory. For what other lifetime was he reserving the moment when he would at last say seriously what he thought of things, formulate opinions that he did not have to put between quotation marks, and no longer indulge with punctilious politeness in occupations which he declared at the same time to be ridiculous? I also noticed in the way Swann talked to me about Bergotte something that was, on the other hand, not peculiar to him, but shared at the time by all the writer's admirers, by my mother's friend, by Dr. du

Boulbon. Like Swann, they said about Bergotte: "He's quite enchanting, so individual, he has his own way of saying things which is a little overly elaborate, but so pleasing. You don't need to see the signature, you know right away that it's by him." But none of them would have gone so far as to say: "He's a great writer, he has a great talent." They did not even say he had talent. They did not say it because they did not know it. We are very slow to recognize in the particular features of a new writer the model that is labeled "great talent" in our museum of general ideas. Precisely because these features are new, we do not think they fully resemble what we call talent. Instead, we talk about originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we realize that all of this is, in fact, talent.

"Are there any books by Bergotte in which he talks about La Berma?" I asked M. Swann.

"I think so, in his slim little volume on Racine, but it must be out of print. There may have been a reissue, though. I'll find out. I can also ask Bergotte anything you like; there isn't a week in the whole year when he doesn't come to dinner at our house. He's my daughter's greatest friend. They go off together visiting old towns, cathedrals, castles."

Since I had no notion of social hierarchy, for a long time the fact that my father found it impossible for us to associate with Mme. and Mlle. Swann had had the effect above all, by making me imagine a great distance between them and us, of giving them prestige in my eyes. I was sorry my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips as I had heard our neighbor Mme. Sazerat say that Mme. Swann did in order to please, not her husband, but M. de Charlus, and I thought we must be an object of scorn to her, which distressed me most of all because of Mlle. Swann, who, from what I had been told, was such a pretty little girl and about whom I often dreamed, giving her each time the same arbitrary and charming face. But when I learned that day that Mlle. Swann was a creature of so rare a condition, bathing as though in her natural element in the midst of such privileges, that when she asked her parents if anyone was coming to dinner, she would be answered by those syllables filled with light, by the name of that golden dinner guest who was for her only an old friend of the family: Bergotte; that for her the intimate talk at the table, the equivalent for me of my great-aunt's conversation, would be Bergotte's words on all the subjects he had not been able to broach in his books, and on which I would have liked to hear him pronounce his oracles; and that, lastly, when she went to visit other towns, he would walk along next to her, unknown and glorious, like the Gods who descended among mortals; then I was conscious both of the worth of a creature like Mlle. Swann and also of how crude and ignorant I would appear to her, and I felt so keenly the sweetness and the impossibility of my being her friend that I was filled with both desire and despair. Most often, now, when I thought of her, I would see her in front of a cathedral porch, explaining to me what the statues signified and, with a smile that said good things about me, introducing me as her friend to Bergotte. And always the charm of all those ideas awakened in me by the cathedrals, the charm of the hills of Île-de-France and the plains of Normandy, cast its glimmers over the picture I was forming of Mlle. Swann: this was what it meant to be on the point of falling in love with her. Our belief that a person takes part in an unknown life which his or her love would allow us to enter is, of all that love demands in order to come into being, what it prizes the most, and what makes it care little for the rest. Even women who claim to judge a man by his appearance alone see that appearance as the emanation of a special life. This is why they love soldiers, firemen; the uniform makes them less particular about the face; they think that under the breastplate they are kissing a different heart, adventurous and sweet; and a young sovereign, a crown prince, may make the most flattering conquests in the foreign countries he visits without needing the regular profile that would perhaps be indispensable to a stockbroker.

While I read in the garden, something my great-aunt would not have understood my doing except on a Sunday, a day when it is forbidden to occupy oneself with anything serious and when she did not sew (on a weekday, she would have said to me, "What? Still *amusing* yourself with a book? This isn't Sunday, you know," endowing the word *amusement* with the meaning of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would gossip with Françoise, waiting until it was time for Eulalie. She would announce that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by "without an umbrella, in that silk dress she had made for her at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before Vespers, she could very well get it properly drenched."

"Maybe, maybe" (meaning maybe not), said Françoise so as not to rule out absolutely the possibility of a more favorable alternative.

"Oh dear," said my aunt, striking her forehead, "that reminds me I never found out if she arrived at church after the Elevation. I will have to remember to ask Eulalie . . . Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and that pitiful sunlight on the slates. It's sure to rain before the day is done. It couldn't possibly stay like this, it was too hot. And the sooner the better, because until the storm breaks, my Vichy water won't go down," added my aunt, in whose mind her desire to hasten the descent of her Vichy water was infinitely more important than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil ruin her dress.

"Maybe, maybe."

"And the fact is, when it rains on the square there isn't much shelter. What, three o'clock?" my aunt cried out suddenly, turning pale. "Why, my goodness, Vespers has begun and I've forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why my Vichy water was lying on my stomach."

And swooping down on a missal bound in violet velvet, with gilt clasps, from which, in her haste, she let escape a few of those pictures edged with a band of yellowing paper lace that mark the pages of the feast days, my aunt, while swallowing her drops, began reading the sacred texts as fast as she could, her comprehension of them slightly obscured by her uncertainty as to whether the pepsin, taken so long after the Vichy water, would still be able to catch up with it and make it go down. "Three o'clock! It's unbelievable how the time passes!"

A little tap against the windowpane, as though something had struck it, followed by a copious light spill, as of grains of sand dropping from a window above, then the spill extending, becoming regular, finding a rhythm, turning fluid, resonant, musical, immeasurable, universal: it was the rain.

"Well, now, Françoise! What did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go and see who could be outside in such weather."

Françoise returned:

"It was Mme. Amédée" (my grandmother). "She said she was going for a little walk. And yet it's raining hard."

"That doesn't surprise me at all," said my aunt, lifting her eyes to the heavens. "I've always said that her way of thinking is different from everyone else's. I'd rather it be her than me outdoors just now."

"Mme. Amédée is always as different as she can be from everyone else," said Françoise gently, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from saying that she believed my grandmother was a little "touched."

"Now, *see*? The Benediction is over! Eulalie won't be coming," sighed my aunt; "the weather must have frightened her away."

"But it's not five o'clock, Madame Octave, it's only half-past four."

"Only half-past four? And I had to raise the little curtains to get a wretched glimmer of daylight. At half-past four! One week before the Rogations! Oh, my poor Françoise, the Good Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far these days! As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten the Good Lord too often and he's taking his revenge."

A bright flush enlivened my aunt's cheeks; it was Eulalie. Unfortunately, scarcely had she been shown in before Françoise returned and, with a smile that was meant to indicate her participation in the joy she was sure her words would give my aunt, articulating the syllables to show that, despite her use of the indirect style, she was reporting, good servant that she was, the very words the visitor had condescended to use:

"M. le Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not resting and could see him. M. le Curé does not wish to disturb. M. le Curé is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlor."

In fact, the curé's visits did not give my aunt as much pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which Françoise thought she must illuminate her face each time she had to announce him did not entirely correspond to the invalid's feelings. The curé (an excellent man with whom I am sorry I did not have more conversations, for if he understood nothing about the arts, he did know many etymologies), being in the habit of enlightening distinguished visitors with information about the church (he even intended to write a book about the parish of Combray), fatigued her with endless explanations that were in fact always the same. But when his visit came at the very same time as Eulalie's, it became frankly unpleasant for my aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie and not have all her company at once. But she did not dare decline to see the curé and only made a sign to Eulalie not to leave at the same time, so that she could keep her there by herself for a little while after he was gone.

"Monsieur le Curé, what's this they've been telling me, that a painter has set up his easel in your church and is copying a window? I must say, old as I am, I've never in my life heard of such a thing! What is the world coming to? And the ugliest part of the church, too!"

"I will not go so far as to say it is the ugliest, for if there are some parts of Saint-Hilaire that are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored! My Lord, the porch is dirty and ancient, but still it is really majestic in character; the same is true of the tapestries of Esther, for which personally I would not give two sous but which the experts rank immediately below those at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain rather realistic details, they offer other details that show a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows! Is it really sensible to leave us with windows that give no light and even deceive our eyes with patches of color I would never be able to identify, in a church where no two paving stones are on the same level and they refuse to replace them for me, giving the excuse that these are the tombstones of the Abbés de Combray and the Seigneurs de Guermantes, the old Comtes de Brabant? The direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes and of the Duchesse too since she's a Demoiselle de Guermantes who married her cousin." (My grandmother, who, because she took no great interest in "persons," ended by confusing all names, would claim, each time anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes, that she must be a relative of Mme. de Villeparisis. Everyone would burst out laughing; she would try to defend herself by citing as proof a certain letter containing an announcement: "It seems to me I recall there was something about Guermantes in it." And for once I would side with the others against her, unable to admit that there was any connection between her friend from boarding school and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.) "Look at Roussainville, today it is no more than a parish of farmers, though in ancient times the locality experienced a great boom in the commerce of felt hats and clocks. (I'm not sure of the etymology of Roussainville. I'm inclined to think the original name was Rouville [*Radulfi villa*], analogous to Châteauroux [*Castrum radulfi*], but we can talk about that some other time.) Well! The church has superb windows, almost all modern, including that impressive *Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray,* which would be more suited to Combray itself and is just as good, they say, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I saw Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things and who regards it as a very fine piece of work. But, as I in fact said to this artist, who seems very courteous, by the way, and who is apparently a veritable virtuoso with the paintbrush, I said, now what do you find so extraordinary about this window, which is if anything a little darker than the others?"

"I'm sure that if you asked the bishop," my aunt said feebly, beginning to think she was going to be tired, "he would not refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Madame Octave," answered the curé. "But it was His Lordship himself who started all the fuss about this wretched window by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, Sire de Guermantes, a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who was a Demoiselle de Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I can't see where Saint Hilaire would be."

"Why, in the corner of the window—you never noticed a lady in a yellow dress? Well, now, that's Saint Hilaire, who in certain provinces is also called, you know, Saint Illiers, Saint Hélier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. And these various corruptions of *sanctus Hilarius* are not the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed. For instance, your own patron, my good Eulalie, *sancta Eulalia*—do you know what she is in Burgundy? *Saint Éloi,* quite simply: she has become a male saint. You see Eulalie?—after you die they will turn you into a man."

"Monsieur le Curé always has a joke for us."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but having early in life lost his father, Pépin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has had no discipline in his youth, and if in a certain town he saw a man whose face he didn't like, he would massacre every last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to take revenge on Charles, caused the church of Combray to be burned down, the original church at the time, which Théodebert, when he and his court left the country house he had near here, at Thiberzy (which would be *Theodeberciacus*), to go fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Blessed One would grant him the victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt which Théodore must have taken you down into, for Gilbert burned the rest. Finally, he defeated the unfortunate Charles with the help of William the Conqueror" (the curé pronounced it Will'am), "which is why so many English visitors come to see it. But he apparently was unable to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they rushed upon him as he was coming out of Mass and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book he lends out to people that explains it all.

"But what is unquestionably the most extraordinary thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is magnificent. Certainly in your case, since you're not strong, I would never advise you to climb our ninety-seven steps, exactly half the number of the celebrated dome in Milan. It's quite tiring enough for someone in good health, especially as you must go up bent double if you don't want to crack your head, and you collect all the cobwebs off the stairwell on your clothes. In any case you would have to wrap yourself up quite snugly," he added (without noticing my aunt's indignation at the idea that she was capable of climbing into the belfry), "because there's quite a breeze once you get to the top! Some people declare they have felt the chill of death up there. Nonetheless, on Sundays there are always groups coming even from a long way off to admire the beauty of the panorama, and they go away enchanted. Now next Sunday, if the weather holds, you'll be sure to find some people there, since it's Rogation Day. It really must be admitted, though, that from that spot the scene is magical, with what you might call vistas over the plain that have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Verneuil. But the marvelous thing is that you can see, all in one glance, things you can't usually see except one at a time separately, like the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated by a screen of tall trees, or the different canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte (*Gaudiacus vice comitis,* as you know). Each time I've gone to Jouy-le-Vicomte, of course, I've seen a bit of the canal, and then I've turned a corner and seen another bit, but by then I could no longer see the preceding bit. I could put them together in my mind, but that didn't have much of an effect for me. But from the Saint-Hilaire belfry it's different, the whole area seems to have been caught in one great net. But you can't see any water; it's as though there were deep clefts dividing the town into different neighborhoods so neatly it looks like a brioche still holding together after it has been sliced. To do it right, you'd have to be in both places at the same time, in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The curé had so exhausted my aunt that he was scarcely gone before she had to send Eulalie away too.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said weakly, drawing a coin from a little purse that she had within reach of her hand, "this is so that you won't forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, Madame Octave! I don't know if I should; you know I don't come here for that!" Eulalie would say with the same hesitation and the same awkwardness, each time, as if it were the first, and with an appearance of dissatisfaction that diverted my aunt but did not displease her, because if one day Eulalie looked a little less vexed than usual as she took the coin, my aunt would say:

"I don't know what was bothering Eulalie; I gave her the same as usual, and yet she didn't look happy."

"I think she has nothing to complain about, all the same," Françoise would sigh, inclined to consider as small change anything my aunt gave her for herself or her children and as treasure madly squandered on an ingrate the little coins placed in Eulalie's hand each Sunday, but so discreetly that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that Françoise would have wanted for herself the money my aunt gave Eulalie. She took sufficient pleasure in what my aunt possessed, knowing that the mistress's wealth both elevated and embellished her servant in everyone's eyes; and that she, Françoise, was distinguished and renowned in Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other places, on account of my aunt's many farms, the curé's frequent and extended visits, the singular number of bottles of Vichy water consumed. She was greedy only for my aunt; if it had been up to her to manage my aunt's fortune, which would have been her dream, she would have preserved it from the encroachments of others with a maternal ferocity. She would not, however, have seen any great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, as long as it went to rich people. Perhaps she thought that they, having no need of gifts from my aunt, could not be suspected of showing fondness for her because of them. Besides, gifts made to people of eminence and wealth, like Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin, Mme. Goupil, to persons "of the same rank" as my aunt who "were well suited," appeared to her to belong to the customs of the strange and brilliant life of the wealthy who hunt, give balls, visit back and forth, people whom she admired and smiled upon. But it was not the same if the beneficiaries of my aunt's generosity were what Françoise called "people like me, people who are no better than me," the ones of whom she was most scornful unless they called her "Madame Françoise" and considered themselves to be "less than her." And when she saw that despite her advice my aunt did just as she pleased and threw her money away—as Françoise saw it, at least—on the unworthy, she began to think the gifts my aunt made to her were quite small compared to the imaginary sums lavished on Eulalie. There was not a single farm in the vicinity of Combray so substantial that Françoise did not suppose Eulalie could easily have bought it with all she earned from her visits. It is true that Eulalie formed the same estimate of the immense and hidden riches of Françoise. It was Françoise's habit, when

Eulalie had gone, to make unkind predictions about her. She detested her, but she was also afraid of her and believed that when Eulalie was there she had to present a "good face." She made up for it after Eulalie's departure, without ever naming her, in fact, but proffering sibylline oracles or pronouncements of a general character like those in Ecclesiastes, whose application could not escape my aunt. After watching through a corner of the curtain to see if Eulalie had closed the gate behind her, she would say: "Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome and collect a little pocket money; but have patience, the Good Lord will punish them all one fine day," with the sidelong glance and the insinuation of Joas thinking only of Athalie when he says:

The happiness of the wicked rushes down like a mountain stream.[28]

But when the curé had come as well and his interminable visit had exhausted my aunt's strength, Françoise would leave the bedroom behind Eulalie and say:

"Madame Octave, I will let you rest, you look very tired."

And my aunt would not even answer, breathing a sigh that must, it seemed, be the last, her eyes closed, as though dead. But scarcely had Françoise gone down than four peals dealt with the greatest violence would echo through the house, and my aunt, upright on her bed, would cry out:

"Has Eulalie gone yet? Can you believe it—I forgot to ask her if Mme. Goupil arrived at Mass before the Elevation! Quick, run after her!"

But Françoise would return without having been able to catch up with Eulalie.

"It's vexing," my aunt would say, shaking her head. "The only important thing I had to ask her!"

In this way life went on for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the sweet uniformity of what she called, with affected disdain and deep tenderness, her "little routine." Preserved by everyone, not only in the house, where we had all experienced the futility of advising her to adopt a better health regimen and so had gradually resigned ourselves to respecting the routine, but even in the village where, three streets away from us, the goods packer, before nailing his crates, would send word to ask Françoise if my aunt was "resting"—this routine was, however, disturbed once during that year. Like a hidden fruit that had ripened without anyone's noticing and had dropped spontaneously, one night the kitchen maid gave birth. But her pains were intolerable, and since there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to go off before daybreak to find one in Thiberzy. My aunt could not rest because of the kitchen maid's cries, and since Françoise, despite the short distance, did not come back until very late, my aunt missed her very much. And so my mother said to me in the course of the morning: "Go up, why don't you, and see if your aunt needs anything." I went into the first room, and through the open door saw my aunt lying on her side sleeping; I heard her snoring lightly. I was going to go away quietly, but the noise I had made had probably interfered with her sleep and made it "shift gears," as they say about cars, because the music of her snoring broke off for a second and resumed on a lower note, then she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror; she had obviously just had a horrible dream; she could not see me the way she was positioned, and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave; but already she seemed to have returned to a sense of reality and had recognized the falsity of the visions that had frightened her; a smile of joy, of pious gratitude to God who permits waking life to be less cruel than dreams, weakly illuminated her face, and in the habit she had formed of talking to herself half aloud when she thought she was alone, she murmured: "God be praised! Our only worry is the kitchen maid, who is having a baby. And here I've gone and dreamed that my poor Octave had come back to life and was trying to make me go for a walk every day!" Her hand went out toward her rosary, which lay on the little table, but sleep was overcoming her again and did not leave her the strength to reach it: she fell asleep, soothed, and I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard.

When I say that except for very rare events, like that confinement, my aunt's routine never suffered any variation, I am not speaking of those variations which, always the same and repeated at regular intervals, introduced into the heart of that uniformity only a sort of secondary uniformity. And so, for instance, every Saturday, because Françoise went to the Roussainville-le-Pin market in the afternoon, lunch was, for everyone, an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly violation of her habits that she clung to it as much as to the others. She was so well "routined" to it, as Françoise said, that if she had had to wait, some Saturday, to have lunch at the regular hour, this would have "disturbed" her as much as if on another day she had had to move her lunch forward to the Saturday hour. What was more, this early lunch gave Saturday, for all of us, a special face, indulgent and almost kindly. At the time of day when one usually has another hour to live through before the relaxation of the meal, we knew that in a few seconds we would see the arrival of some precocious endives, a gratuitous omelette, an undeserved beefsteak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those little events, internal, local, almost civic, which, in peaceful lives and closed societies, create a sort of national bond and become the favorite theme of conversations, jokes, stories wantonly exaggerated: it would have been the ready-made nucleus for a cycle of legends, if one of us had had an epic turn of mind. First thing in the morning, before we were dressed, for no particular reason, for the pleasure of feeling the strength of our comradeship, we would say to one another with good humor, warmth, patriotism: "There's no time to lose; don't forget—it's Saturday!" while my aunt, conferring with Françoise and remembering that the day would be longer than usual, would say: "You might make them a nice bit of veal, since it's Saturday." If at ten-thirty one of us absentmindedly drew out his watch and said: "Let's see, still an hour and a half before lunch," everyone was delighted to have to say to him: "Come now, what are you thinking of, you're forgetting it's Saturday!"; we would still be laughing over it a quarter of an hour after and we would promise ourselves to go up and report this lapse to my aunt to amuse her. Even the face of the sky seemed changed. After lunch, the sun, aware that it was Saturday, would linger an hour longer at the top of the sky, and when someone, thinking we were late for our walk, said, "What, only two o'clock?," watching, as they passed, the two strokes from the Saint-Hilaire steeple (which do not usually encounter anyone yet on paths which are deserted because of the midday meal or the afternoon nap, alongside the lively white stream which even the fisherman has abandoned, and go on alone into the empty sky where only a few lazy clouds remain), we would all answer him in chorus: "But you're wrong, we had lunch an hour early; you know very well it's Saturday!" The surprise of a barbarian (this was what we called anyone who did not know what was special about Saturday) who, arriving at eleven o'clock to talk to my father, found us at the table, was one of the things in her life which most amused Françoise. But if she found it funny that the dumbfounded visitor did not know we had lunch earlier on Saturday, she found it even more comical (while at the same time sympathizing from the bottom of her heart with this narrow chauvinism) that my father himself had not realized that the barbarian might not know this and had responded with no further explanation to his astonishment at seeing us already in the dining room: "Well what do you expect, it's Saturday!" Having reached this point in her story, she would wipe away a few tears of hilarity and, to increase her own pleasure, would prolong the dialogue, invent what had been said in answer by the visitor, to whom this "Saturday" did not explain anything. And quite far from complaining about her embellishments, we would feel they were not enough for us and we would say: "But I think he also said something else. It was longer the first time you told it." Even my great-aunt would put down her needlework, lift her head, and look over her glasses.

What was also special about Saturday was that on this day, during the month of May, we would go out after dinner to attend the "Month of Mary."

Since there we would sometimes meet M. Vinteuil, who was very severe about "the deplorable fashion of slovenliness in young people, which seems to be encouraged these days," my mother would take care that nothing was wrong with my appearance, then we would leave for church. It was in the Month of Mary that I remember beginning to be fond of hawthorns. Not only were they in the church, which was so holy but which we had the right to enter, they were put up on the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration they took part, their branches running out among the candles and holy vessels, attached horizontally to one another in a festive preparation and made even lovelier by the festoons of their foliage, on which were scattered in profusion, as on a bridal train, little bunches of buds of a dazzling whiteness. But, though I dared not do more than steal a glance at them, I felt that the ceremonious preparations were alive and that it was nature herself who, by carving those indentations in the leaves, by adding the supreme ornament of those white buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a popular festivity and a mystical celebration. Higher up, their corollas opened here and there with a careless grace, still holding so casually, like a last and vaporous adornment, the bouquets of stamens, delicate as gossamer, which clouded them entirely, that in following, in trying to mime deep inside myself the motion of their flowering, I imagined it as the quick and thoughtless movement of the head, with coquettish glance and contracted eyes, of a young girl in white, dreamy and alive. M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and sat down beside us. He was from a good family and had been my grandmother's sisters' piano teacher, and when, after his wife died and he came into an inheritance, he retired near Combray, we often entertained him at the house. But he was extremely prudish, and stopped coming so as not to meet Swann, who had made what he called "an unsuitable marriage, as is the fashion these days." My mother, after learning that he composed, had said to him in a friendly way that when she went to see him, he would have to let her hear something of his. M. Vinteuil would have taken great joy in this, but he was so scrupulous in his politeness and kindness that, always putting himself in the place of others, he was afraid he would bore them and appear egotistical if he pursued or even allowed them to infer his own desires. The day my parents had gone to visit him at his home, I had gone with them, but they had allowed me to stay outside and, since M. Vinteuil's house, Montjouvain, stood at the foot of a brush-covered hillock

where I had hidden, I had found I was on a level with the second-floor drawing room, a foot or two from the window. When the servant had come to announce my parents, I had seen M. Vinteuil hurry to place a piece of music in a conspicuous position on the piano. But once my parents had entered, he had taken it away and put it in a corner. No doubt he had been afraid of letting them think he was happy to see them only so that he could play them some of his compositions. And each time my mother had made a fresh attempt in the course of the visit, he had repeated several times: "I don't know who put that on the piano, it doesn't belong there," and had diverted the conversation to other subjects, precisely because they interested him less. His only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her boyish appearance, seemed so robust that one could not help smiling at the sight of the precautions her father took for her sake, always having extra shawls to throw over her shoulders. My grandmother pointed out what a gentle, delicate, almost shy expression often came into the eyes of that rough-mannered child, whose face was covered with freckles. After she made a remark, she would hear it with the minds of the people to whom she had made it, would grow alarmed at possible misunderstandings, and one would see, illuminated, showing through as though by transparency, under the mannish face of the "good fellow" that she was, the more refined features of a young girl in tears.

When, before leaving the church, I kneeled in front of the altar, I suddenly smelled, as I stood up, a bittersweet scent of almonds escaping from the hawthorns, and then I noticed, on the flowers, little yellower places under which I imagined that scent must be hidden, as the taste of a frangipani must be hidden under the burned parts, or that of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks under their freckles. Despite the silence and stillness of the hawthorns, this intermittent scent was like the murmuring of an intense life with which the altar quivered like a country hedge visited by living antennae, of which I was reminded by the sight of certain stamens, almost russet red, that seemed to have preserved the springtime virulence, the irritant power, of insects now metamorphosed into flowers.

We would talk with M. Vinteuil for a moment in front of the porch on our way out of the church. He would intervene among the children squabbling in the square, take up the defense of the little ones, deliver a lecture to the older ones. If his daughter said to us in her loud voice how happy she was to see us, it would immediately seem as if a more sensitive sister within her were blushing at this thoughtless, tomboyish remark, which might have made us think she was asking to be invited to our house. Her father would throw a cloak over her shoulders, they would get up into a little cabriolet, which she would drive herself, and the two of them would return to Montjouvain. As for us, since it was Sunday the next day and we would not get up until it was time for High Mass, if there was moonlight and the air was warm, instead of having us go home directly, my father, out of a love of personal glory, would take us by way of the Calvary on a long walk which my mother's little capacity for orienting herself, or knowing what road she was on, made her consider the feat of a strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, whose giant strides of stone began at the railway station and represented to me the exile and distress that lay outside the civilized world, because each year as we came from Paris we were warned to pay careful attention, when Combray came, not to let the station go by, to be ready ahead of time because the train would leave again after two minutes and would set off across the viaduct beyond the Christian countries of which Combray marked for me the farthest limit. We would return by way of the station boulevard, which was lined by the most pleasant houses in the parish. In each garden the moonlight, like Hubert Robert, scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains, its half-open gates. Its light had destroyed the Telegraph Office. All that remained was one column, half shattered but still retaining the beauty of an immortal ruin. I would be dragging my feet, I would be ready to drop with sleep, the fragrance of the lindens that perfumed the air would seem to me a reward that one could win only at the cost of the greatest fatigue and that was not worth the trouble. From gates far apart, dogs awakened by our solitary steps would send forth alternating volleys of barks such as I still hear at times in the evening and among which the station boulevard (when the public garden of Combray was created on its site) must have come to take refuge, for, wherever I find myself, as soon as they begin resounding and replying, I see it again, with its lindens and its pavement lit by the moon.

Suddenly my father would stop us and ask my mother: "Where are we?" Exhausted from walking but proud of him, she would admit tenderly that she had absolutely no idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. Then, as if he had taken it out of his jacket pocket along with his key, he would show us the little back gate of our own garden, which stood there before us, having come, along with the corner of the rue du Saint-Esprit, to wait for us at the end of these unfamiliar streets. My mother would say to him admiringly: "You are astonishing!" And from that moment on, I would not have to take another step, the ground would walk for me through that garden where for so long now my actions had ceased to be accompanied by any deliberate attention: Habit had taken me in its arms, and it carried me all the way to my bed like a little child.

* * *

If Saturday, which began an hour earlier and deprived her of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, she nonetheless awaited its return with impatience from the beginning of the week, because it contained all the novelty and distraction that her weakened and finical body was still able to endure. And yet this was not to say that she did not now and then aspire to some greater change, that she did not experience those exceptional moments when we thirst for something other than what we have, and when people who from a lack of energy or imagination cannot find a source of renewal in themselves ask the next minute that comes, the postman as he rings, to bring them something new, even if it is something worse, some emotion, some sorrow; when our sensibility, which happiness has silenced like an idle harp, wants to resonate under some hand, even a rough one, and even if it might be broken by it; when the will, which has with such difficulty won the right to surrender unimpeded to its own desires, to its own afflictions, would like to throw the reins into the hands of imperious events, even if they may be cruel. Doubtless, since my aunt's strength, drained by the least fatigue, returned to her only drop by drop deep within her repose, the reservoir was very slow to fill up, and months would go by before she had that slight overflow which others divert into activity and which she was incapable of knowing, and deciding, how to use. I have no doubt that then—just as the desire to replace them by potatoes with béchamel sauce ended after a certain time by being born from the very pleasure she felt at the daily return of the mashed potatoes of which she never "got tired"—she would derive from the accumulation of those monotonous days which she valued so the expectation of some domestic cataclysm lasting only a moment but forcing her to effect once and for all one of those changes which she recognized would be beneficial to her and to which she could not of her own accord make up her mind. She truly loved us, she would have taken pleasure in mourning us; had it come at a moment when she felt well and was not in a sweat, the news that the house was being consumed by a fire in which all of us had perished already and which would soon leave not a single stone of the walls standing, but from which she would have ample time to escape without hurrying, so long as she got out of bed right away, must often have lingered among her hopes, since it combined, with the secondary advantages of allowing her to savor all her tenderness for us in an extended grief and to be the cause of stupefaction in the village as she led the funeral procession, courageous and stricken, dying on her feet, that other much more precious advantage of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to lose, no possibility of an enervating hesitation, to go and spend the summer on her pretty farm, Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. As no event of that sort had ever occurred, the outcome of which she would certainly contemplate when she was alone, absorbed in her innumerable games of patience (and which would have reduced her to despair at the first moment of its realization, at the first of those little unforeseen developments, the first word announcing the bad news, whose accent can never be forgotten afterward, all those things that bear the imprint of real death, so different from its logical, abstract possibility), she would from time to time resort to introducing into her life, to make it more interesting, imaginary incidents which she would follow with passion. She enjoyed suddenly pretending that Françoise was stealing from her, that she herself had been cunning enough to make sure of it, that she had caught her in the act; being in the habit, when she played cards alone, of playing both her own hand and that of her opponent, she would utter out loud to herself Françoise's embarrassed excuses and would answer them with so much fire and indignation that if one of us entered at that moment, we would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes sparkling, her false hair dislodged and revealing her bald forehead. Françoise would perhaps sometimes hear from the next room mordant pieces of sarcasm addressed to her the invention of which would not have relieved my aunt sufficiently if they had remained in a purely immaterial state and if by murmuring them half aloud she had not given them more reality. Sometimes, even this "theater in bed"[29] was not enough for my aunt, she wanted to have her plays performed. And so, on a Sunday, all doors mysteriously closed, she would confide to Eulalie her doubts about Françoise's honesty, her intention of getting rid of her, and another time, to Françoise, her suspicions about the faithlessness of Eulalie, to whom the door would very soon be closed; a few days later, she would be disgusted with her confidante of the day before and once

again consort with the traitor, though for the next performance the two of them would exchange roles yet again. But the suspicions that Eulalie was at times able to inspire in her amounted only to a straw fire and died down quickly, for lack of fuel, since Eulalie did not live in the house. It was not the same for those that concerned Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof my aunt was perpetually conscious, though for fear of catching cold if she left her bed, she did not dare go down to the kitchen to verify whether they were well founded. Gradually her mind would come to be occupied entirely by attempting to guess what, at each moment, Françoise could be doing and trying to hide from her. She would notice the most furtive movements of Françoise's features, a contradiction in something she said, a desire that she seemed to be concealing. And she would show Françoise that she had unmasked her, with a single word that would make Françoise turn pale and that my aunt seemed to find a cruel amusement in driving deep into the heart of the unfortunate woman. And the following Sunday, a revelation of Eulalie's—like those discoveries that suddenly open an unsuspected field to a young science that has got into something of a rut—would prove to my aunt that her own suppositions were far short of the truth. "But Françoise ought to know that, now that you've given her a carriage." "Given her a carriage!" my aunt would cry. "Oh, well, I don't know really. I thought, well, I saw her passing just a short time ago in a calash, proud as Artaban,[30] going to the market at Roussainville. I thought it was Mme. Octave who gave it to her." And so by degrees Françoise and my aunt, like quarry and hunter, would reach the point of constantly trying to anticipate each other's ruses. My mother was afraid Françoise would develop a real hatred for my aunt, who insulted her as brutally as she could. Certainly Françoise came more and more to pay an extraordinary attention to the least of my aunt's remarks, to the least of her gestures. When she had to ask her something, she would hesitate for a long time over how she should go about it. And when she had tendered her request, she would observe my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the look on her face what she thought and what she would decide. And so—while some artist who reads the memoirs of the seventeenth century and wants to be like the great King, and thinks he will be making progress in that direction if he fabricates a genealogy for himself that traces his own descent from a historic family or if he carries on a correspondence with one of the current sovereigns of Europe, is actually turning his back on what he mistakenly sought in forms that were identical and consequently dead—an old lady from the provinces who was simply yielding to irresistible manias and to a malice born of idleness, saw, without ever thinking of Louis XIV, the most insignificant occupations of her day, those concerned with her rising, her lunch, her afternoon rest, acquire, because of their despotic singularity, some of the interest of what Saint-Simon called the "mechanics" of life at Versailles,[31] and could also believe that her silences, a nuance of good humor or disdain in her features, were for Françoise the object of a commentary as passionate, as fearful as were the silence, the good humor, the disdain of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest lords, handed him a petition at the bend of an avenue at Versailles.

One Sunday when my aunt had had a visit from the curé and Eulalie at the same time and had afterward rested, we all went up to say good evening to her, and Mama offered her her condolences on the bad luck that always brought her visitors at the same hour:

"I know that things turned out poorly again this afternoon, Léonie," she said to her gently, "you had all your company here at the same time."

Which my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too much of a good thing can do no harm . . ." because, ever since her daughter had become ill, she had believed it was her duty to cheer her up by consistently showing her the bright side of everything. But now my father spoke:

"I would like to take advantage," he said, "of the fact that the whole family is together to tell you all about something without having to begin all over again with each of you separately. I'm afraid we've had a falling-out with Legrandin: he barely said hello to me this morning."

I did not stay to hear my father's story, because I had actually been with him after Mass when we met M. Legrandin, and I went down to the kitchen to ask about the menu for our dinner, which diverted me every day like the news in the paper and excited me like the program for some festivity. When M. Legrandin had passed near us as he was coming out of the church, walking by the side of a lady from a neighboring château whom we knew only by sight, my father had greeted him in a way that was at once friendly and reserved, though we had not stopped; M. Legrandin had barely responded, with a surprised look, as if he did not recognize us, and with that perspective in his gaze peculiar to people who do not want to be friendly and who, from the suddenly extended depths of their eyes, seem to perceive you at the end of an interminable road and at so great a distance that they confine themselves to addressing to you a minuscule nod in order to give it the proportions of your puppetlike dimensions.

Now the lady Legrandin was accompanying was a virtuous and esteemed person; it was quite out of the question that he was having an affair and embarrassed at being found out, and my father wondered how he might have annoyed Legrandin. "I would be especially sorry to know he is vexed," said my father, "because of the fact that among all those people dressed up in their Sunday best there is something about him, with his little straight jacket, his loose tie, that is so uncontrived, so truly simple, an air of ingenuousness, almost, that is extremely likable." But the family council was unanimously of the opinion that my father was imagining things, or that Legrandin, at that particular moment, was absorbed in some other thought. And in fact my father's apprehension was dispelled the very next evening. As we were returning from a long walk, near the Pont-Vieux we saw Legrandin, who because of the holidays was staying in Combray for a few days. He came up to us with his hand outstretched: "My young bookworm," he asked me, "do you know this line by Paul Desjardins:

> The woods are dark, the sky still blue.[32]

Isn't that a fine rendering of this hour of the day? Perhaps you've never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my child; today he is transforming himself, they tell me, into a sermonizing friar, but for a long time he was a limpid watercolorist . . .

> The woods are dark, the sky still blue.

May the sky remain forever blue for you, my young friend; and even at the hour which is now approaching for me, when the woods are dark already, when night is falling fast, you will console yourself as I do by looking up at the sky." He took a cigarette out of his pocket, remained for a long time with his eyes on the horizon. "Good-bye, friends," he said suddenly, and he left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what the menu was, dinner would already have been started, and Françoise, commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants, as in fairy plays where giants hire themselves out as cooks, would strike the coal, entrust the steam with some potatoes to cook, and make the fire finish to perfection the culinary masterpieces first prepared in potters' vessels that ranged from great vats, casseroles, cauldrons, and fishkettles to terrines for game, molds for pastry, and little jugs for cream, and included a complete collection of pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen maid had just shelled them, to see the peas lined up and tallied like green marbles in a game; but what delighted me were the asparagus, steeped in ultramarine and pink, whose tips, delicately painted with little strokes of mauve and azure, shade off imperceptibly down to their feet—still soiled though they are from the dirt of their garden bed—with an iridescence that is not of this earth. It seemed to me that these celestial hues revealed the delicious creatures who had merrily metamorphosed themselves into vegetables and who, through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, disclosed in these early tints of dawn, in these beginnings of rainbows, in this extinction of blue evenings, the precious essence that I recognized again when, all night long following a dinner at which I had eaten them, they played, in farces as crude and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann called her, instructed by Françoise to "scrape" them, would have them beside her in a basket, her expression as mournful as though she were suffering all the misfortunes of the earth; and the light crowns of azure that girded the asparagus stalks above their tunics of pink were delicately drawn, star by star, as, in the fresco, are the flowers bound around the forehead or tucked into the basket of Virtue at Padua. And meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, which had carried the fragrance of her merits through the far reaches of Combray and which, while she was serving them to us at the table, would cause the quality of gentleness to predominate in my particular conception of her character, the aroma of that flesh which she knew how to render so unctuous and so tender being for me only the specific perfume of one of her virtues.

But the day on which, while my father consulted the family council about the encounter with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those on which Giotto's Charity, very ill from her recent confinement, could not get out of bed; Françoise, having no help now, was late. When I arrived downstairs she was busy in the scullery that opened onto the poultry yard, killing a chicken which, by its desperate and quite natural resistance, but accompanied by Françoise, beside herself as she tried to split its neck under the ear, with cries of "Vile creature! Vile creature!," put the saintly gentleness and unction of our servant a little less in evidence than it would, at dinner the next day, by its skin embroidered with gold like a chasuble and its precious juice drained from a ciborium. When it was dead, Françoise collected the blood, which flowed without drowning her resentment, had another fit of anger, and looking at her enemy's cadaver, said one

last time: “Vile creature!” I went back upstairs trembling all over; I wanted them to dismiss Françoise immediately. But who would have prepared me such cozy hot-water bottles, such fragrant coffee, and even . . . those chickens? . . . And in fact, everyone had had to make this cowardly calculation, just as I had. For my aunt Léonie knew—as I did not yet know—that Françoise, who would for her daughter, for her nephews, have given her life without a murmur, was singularly hard-hearted toward other people. Despite this my aunt had kept her, for if she was aware of her cruelty, she valued her service. I gradually came to see that the gentleness, the compunction, the virtues of Françoise concealed scullery tragedies, just as history reveals that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed with their hands joined in church windows were marked by bloody incidents. I realized that, apart from her own relatives, human beings inspired her with more pity for their afflictions the farther away from her they lived. The torrents of tears she shed while reading in the newspaper about the misfortunes of strangers would dry up quickly if she could picture to herself at all precisely the person concerned. On one of the nights following her confinement, the kitchen maid was seized by appalling cramps: Mama heard her moaning, got up, and woke Françoise, who, quite indifferent, declared that all this wailing was a sham, that the girl wanted “to be the center of attention.” The doctor, who had been afraid of this sort of attack, had put a marker in a medical book we had, at the page on which the symptoms are described, and told us to consult it in order to find out what kind of first aid to give. My mother sent Françoise to get the book, warning her not to let the bookmark fall out. After an hour, Françoise had not returned; my mother, indignant, thought she had gone back to bed and told me to go to the library myself and see. There I found Françoise, who, having wanted to look at what the marker showed, was reading the clinical description of the attack and sobbing, now that the patient was a hypothetical one whom she did not know. At each painful symptom mentioned by the author of the article, she would exclaim: “Oh dear, Holy Virgin, is it possible that the good Lord would want a wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!”

But as soon as I called her and she came back to the bedside of Giotto’s Charity, her tears immediately stopped flowing; she could recognize neither the pleasant sensation of pity and tenderness which she knew so well and which reading the newspapers had so often given her, nor any kindred pleasure, in the bother and irritation of having gotten up in the middle of the night for the kitchen-maid, and at the sight of the same sufferings whose description had made her cry, she now produced nothing more than bad-tempered mutterings, even nasty pieces of sarcasm, saying, when she thought we had gone and could no longer hear her: “She had only to stop herself doing what you do to get this way! Sure she enjoyed it well enough! So she needn’t make a fuss now! Anyways, a boy must be quite forsaken by the good Lord to want to keep company with *that*. Ah, ’tis just as they used to say in my poor mother’s own tongue:

> Love a dog’s arse, and to thy nose’Twill smell like a rose.” [33]

Although when her grandson had a little cold in the head she would set off at night even if she was ill, instead of going to bed, to see if he needed anything, covering four leagues on foot before daybreak in order to be back in time to do her work, this same love of her own people and her desire to ensure the future greatness of her house was expressed, in her policy toward the other servants, by a consistent principle, which was never to let a single one of them become attached to my aunt, whom she took, moreover, a sort of pride in not allowing to be approached by anyone, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get up out of bed in order to give her mistress her Vichy water rather than permit the kitchen maid access to the bedroom. And like the hymenopteran observed by Fabre,[34] the burrowing wasp who, so that its young may have fresh meat to eat after its death, summons anatomy in aid of its cruelty and, after capturing a few weevils and spiders, proceeds with a marvelous knowledge and skill to pierce them in the nerve center that governs the movement of their legs but not their other life functions, in such a way that the paralyzed insect near which it deposits its eggs provides the larvae, when they hatch, with prey that is docile, harmless, incapable of flight or resistance, but not in the least tainted, Françoise found, to serve her abiding desire to make the house intolerable to any other servant, ruses so clever and so merciless that many years later we learned that if we had eaten asparagus almost every day that summer, it was because their smell provoked in the poor kitchen girl who was given the job of scraping them attacks of asthma so violent that she was obliged in the end to leave.

Alas, we had to change our minds definitively about Legrandin. On one of the Sundays following the meeting on the Pont-Vieux after which my father had had to confess himself mistaken, as mass was ending and as something so far from holy was entering the Church, with the sunlight and the noise from outdoors, that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all those people who not long before, when I arrived a little late, had remained with their eyes absorbed in their prayers and who I might even have believed had not seen me come in if, at the same time, their feet had not gently pushed back the little kneeling bench that was blocking my path to my seat) began to converse with us loudly about quite temporal subjects as if we were already in the square, we saw on the blazing threshold of the porch, looking out over the motley tumult of the market, Legrandin being introduced by the husband of that lady with whom we had just recently encountered him to the wife of another large landowner of the area. Legrandin’s face expressed an animation, and a zeal, that were quite extraordinary; he made a deep bow with a secondary recoil that brought his back sharply up past its starting position and that must have been taught him by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid straightening caused Legrandin’s bottom, which I had not supposed was so fleshy, to flow back in a sort of ardent muscular wave; and I do not know why that undulation of pure matter, that quite fleshly billow, with no expression of spirituality and whipped into a storm by a fully contemptible alacrity, suddenly awakened in my mind the possibility of a Legrandin quite different from the one we knew. This lady asked him to say something to her coachman, and as he went over to the carriage, the imprint of timid and devoted joy which the introduction had set upon his face persisted there still. He was smiling, enraptured in a sort of dream, then he hurried back to the lady, and since he was walking more quickly than was his habit, his two shoulders oscillated ridiculously to the right and left, and so entirely did he abandon himself to this, without concern for anything else, that he looked like the inert and mechanical plaything of happiness itself. Meanwhile, we were leaving the porch, we were going to pass right by him, he was too well mannered to turn his head away, but he fastened his gaze, suddenly burdened by a profound reverie, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us and did not have to greet us. His face remained ingenuous above his straight and supple jacket that looked as though it had been led astray against its will into detestably splendid surroundings. And a polka-dotted lavaliere bow tie tossed by the wind in the square continued to float in front of Legrandin like the flag of his proud isolation and noble independence. Just as we reached the house, Mama realized that the Saint Honoré cake had been forgotten and asked my father to go back the way we had come, taking me with him, and tell them to bring it immediately. Near the church we met Legrandin, who was coming in the opposite direction escorting the same lady to her carriage. He passed close to us, did not break off his conversation with his neighbor, and from the corner of his blue eye gave us a little sign that was in some way interior to his eyelid and which, not involving the muscles of his face, could go perfectly unnoticed by the lady he was talking to; but seeking to compensate by intensity of feeling for the somewhat narrow field in which he had circumscribed its expression, in the azure corner assigned to us he set sparkling all the liveliness of a grace that exceeded playfulness, bordered on mischievousness; he overrefined the subtleties of amiability into winks of connivance, insinuations, innuendos, the mysteries of complicity; and finally exalted his assurances of friendship into protestations of affection, into a declaration of love, illuminating for us alone, at that moment, with a secret languor invisible to the lady, a love-smitten eye in a face of ice.

He had in fact asked my parents the day before to send me to dine with him that evening: “Come and keep your old friend company,” he had said to me. “Like a bouquet sent to us by a traveler from a country to which we will never return, allow me to breathe from the distance of your adolescence those flowers that belong to the spring-times which I too traversed many years ago. Come with the primrose, the monk’s beard, the buttercup, come with the sedum that makes the bouquet of love in Balzac’s flora,[35] come with the flower of Resurrection Day, the Easter daisy, and the garden snowdrop, which is beginning to perfume your great-aunt’s paths even though the last snows dropped by the Easter showers have not yet melted. Come with the glorious silk raiment of the lily worthy of Solomon himself, and with the polychrome enamel of the pansies, but above all come with the breeze still cool from the last frosts, that will open the petals, for the two butterflies that have waited at its door since morning, of the first Jerusalem rose.”

At home they wondered if they still ought to send me to have dinner with M. Legrandin even so. But my grandmother refused to believe he had been impolite. “Even you admit that he goes about dressed in very simple clothes, hardly those of a man of high society.” She declared that in any case, and at the very worst, if he had been, it was better to appear not to have noticed. In fact, my father himself, though he was the one most irritated by Legrandin’s attitude, may still have harbored a last doubt as to what it meant. It was like any attitude or action that reveals a person’s deep and hidden character: it has no connection with anything he has said before, we cannot seek confirmation from the culprit’s testimony for he will not confess; we are reduced to the testimony of our own senses concerning which we wonder, confronting this isolated and incoherent memory, if they were not the victims of an illusion; so that these attitudes, the only ones of any importance, often leave us with some doubts.

I had dinner with Legrandin on his terrace; the moon was shining: “This silence has a nice quality, does it not?” he said to me; “for wounded hearts such as mine, a novelist whom you will read later asserts that the only fit companions are shadow and silence.[36] And you know, my child, in life there comes a time, still quite remote for you, when our weary eyes can tolerate only one light, that which a lovely night like this prepares and distills from the darkness, when our ears cannot listen to any other music but that which is played by the moonlight on the flute of silence.” I was listening to M. Legrandin’s words, which always seemed to me so pleasant; but disturbed by the memory of a woman I had seen recently for the first time, and thinking, now that I knew Legrandin was friends with several of the prominent local aristocracy, that perhaps he knew this one, plucking up my courage I said to him: “Monsieur, do you know the lady . . . the ladies of Guermantes?,” happy too that in pronouncing this name I was assuming a sort of power over it, by the mere fact of bringing it out of my daydreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of sound.

But at the name of Guermantes, I saw a little brown notch appear in the center of each of our friend’s blue eyes as if they had been stabbed by invisible pinpoints, while the rest of the pupil reacted by secreting floods of azure. The arc of his eyelids darkened and drooped. And his mouth, marked by a bitter fold, but recovering more quickly, smiled while his eyes remained sorrowful, like the eyes of a handsome martyr whose body bristles with arrows: “No, I don’t know them,” he said, but instead of giving so simple a piece of information, so unsurprising an answer in the natural, everyday tone that would have been appropriate, he declaimed it stressing each word, leaning forward, nodding his head, with the insistence one imparts, so as to be believed, to an improbable statement—as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to a curious accident of fate—and also with the expressive force of a person who, unable to keep silent about a situation that is painful to him, prefers to proclaim it so as to give others the idea that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, is easy, pleasant, spontaneous, that the situation itself—the absence of relations with the Guermantes—could well have been, not suffered, but desired by him, could result from some family tradition, moral principle, or mystical vow specifically forbidding him any association with the Guermantes. “No,” he went on, explaining his own intonation by what he said, “no, I don’t know them, I’ve never wanted to, I’ve always made a point of safeguarding my complete independence; deep down I’m a Jacobin[37] in my thinking, you know. Many people have tried to save me, they told me I was wrong not to go to Guermantes, that I was making myself look like a savage, an old bear. But that’s not the sort of reputation that dismays me, it’s so very true! Deep down, I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, two or three books, scarcely more paintings, and the light of the moon when the breeze of your youth brings me the fragrance of the flower beds that my old eyes can no longer distinguish.” I did not understand very clearly why, in order not to go to the houses of people whom one did not know, it was necessary to cling to one’s independence, or how this might make one look like a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was that Legrandin was not being completely truthful when he said he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he cared very much for the people from the châteaux and in their presence was overcome by so great a fear of displeasing them that he did not dare let them see that some of his friends were bourgeois people, sons of notaries or stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth was to be revealed, that it be revealed in his absence, far away from him and “by default”; he was a snob. Certainly he never said any of this in the language my family and I loved so much. And if I asked: “Do you know the Guermantes?,” Legrandin the talker would answer: “No, I have never wanted to know them.” Unfortunately, he was not the first Legrandin to answer, but the second, because another Legrandin whom he kept carefully concealed deep inside himself, whom he did not exhibit because that Legrandin knew some compromising stories about our own, about his snobbishness, had already answered by the wound in his eyes, by the rictus of his mouth, by the excessive gravity in the tone of his answer, by the thousand arrows with which our own Legrandin had been instantly larded, languishing like a Saint Sebastian of snobbishness: “Alas! How you hurt me! No, I don’t know the Guermantes, do not reawaken the great sorrow of my life.” And since this troublemaker Legrandin, this blackmailer Legrandin, though he did not have the other’s pretty language, had the infinitely quicker speech consisting of what are called “reflexes,” when Legrandin the talker wished to impose silence on him, the other had already spoken, and though our friend might grieve over the poor impression that his *alter ego*’s revelations must have produced, he could only attempt to mitigate it.

And this certainly does not mean that M. Legrandin was not sincere when he ranted against snobs. He could not be aware, at least from his own knowledge, that he was one, since we are familiar only with the passions of others, and what we come to know about our own, we have been able to learn only from them. Upon ourselves they act only secondarily, by way of our imagination, which substitutes for our primary motives alternative motives that are more seemly. It was never Legrandin’s snobbishness that advised him to pay frequent visits to a duchess. It would instruct Legrandin’s imagination to make that duchess appear to him as being endowed with all the graces. Legrandin would become acquainted with the duchess, filled with esteem for himself because he was yielding to attractions of wit and virtue unknown to vile snobs. Only other people were aware that he was one himself; for, because they were incapable of understanding the intermediary work of his imagination, they saw, coupled together, Legrandin’s social activity and its primary cause.

Now we at home no longer had any illusions about M. Legrandin, and our contacts with him became less frequent. Mama was infinitely amused each time she caught Legrandin in flagrante delicto in the sin that he would not confess, that he continued to call the sin without forgiveness, snobbishness. My father, on the other hand, had trouble accepting Legrandin’s manifestations of disdain with such detachment and good humor; and when, one year, they thought of sending me to spend my summer vacation at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: “I absolutely must let Legrandin know that you’ll be going to Balbec, to see if he offers to put you in touch with his sister. He probably doesn’t remember telling us she lives only a mile from there.” My grandmother, who believed that when staying at a seaside resort one should be on the beach from morning to evening inhaling the salt and that one ought not to know anyone thereabouts because visits and excursions were only so much time taken from the sea air, asked on the contrary that we not speak about our plans to Legrandin, as she could already see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, arriving at the hotel just when we were about to go fishing and forcing us to remain confined indoors entertaining her. But Mama laughed at her fears, thinking privately that the danger was not so great, that Legrandin would not be in such a hurry to put us in touch with his sister. Yet no one had to mention Balbec to him, it was Legrandin himself who, never suspecting that we had any intention of going to those parts, walked into the trap of his own accord one evening when we met him on the banks of the Vivonne.

“There are very lovely violets and blues in the clouds this evening, are there not, my friend,” he said to my father, “a blue, especially, more flowery than airy, the blue of a cineraria, which is surprising in the sky. And that little pink cloud, too, has it not the tint of some flower, a sweet william or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, but on the Channel, between Normandy and Britanny, have I made richer observations of this sort of plant kingdom of the atmosphere. There, near Balbec, near those wild areas, there is a little bay, charmingly gentle, where the sunsets of the Auge country, the red and gold sunsets which I do not in the least disdain, let it be said, are characterless, insignificant; but in that damp and mild atmosphere, in the evening, you will see blooming in the space of a few instants celestial bouquets of blue and pink which are incomparable and often last for hours before they fade. There are others that lose their blossoms immediately, and then it is even lovelier to see the entire sky strewn with the scattering of their countless petals, sulfur or pink. In this bay, which they call Opal Bay, the golden beaches seem gentler still because they are chained like blond Andromedas[38] to those terrible rocks of the nearby coast, to that gloomy shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a vessel is lost to the perils of the sea. Balbec! The most ancient geological skeleton of our soil, truly Ar-mor, the Sea,[39] the land’s end, the accursed region which Anatole France[40]—an enchanter whom our little friend here ought to read—has painted so well, under its eternal fogs, like the veritable country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey*.[41] From Balbec especially, where they are already building hotels, superimposing them upon the ancient and charming soil which they cannot change, what a delight it is to go for excursions just a step or two away through regions so primitive and so lovely!”

“Oh, do you know someone in Balbec?” asked my father. “As it happens, this boy of ours will be spending two months there with his grandmother, and my wife, too, perhaps.”

Legrandin, caught unprepared by this question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, could not turn his eyes away, but fastening them more intensely second by second—and at the same time smiling sadly—to the eyes of his questioner, with an expression of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him full in the face, he seemed to have gone right through that face as though it had become transparent, and to be seeing at that moment, far beyond and behind it, a bright and colorful cloud that created a mental alibi for him and would allow him to prove that at the moment when he had been asked if he knew someone at Balbec, he was thinking of something else and had not heard the question. Usually, such an expression makes the other person say: “What are you thinking about?” But my father, curious, irritated, and cruel, said again:

“You know Balbec so well—do you have friends in the area?”

In a last desperate effort, Legrandin's smiling gaze reached its highest degree of tenderness, vagueness, sincerity, and distraction, but, no doubt thinking there was nothing else he could do but answer, he said to us:

"I have friends wherever there are companies of trees, wounded but not vanquished, which huddle together with touching obstinacy to implore an inclement and pitiless sky."

"That was not what I meant," interrupted my father, as obstinate as the trees and as pitiless as the sky. "In case something should happen to my mother-in-law and she needed to feel she was not all alone in an out-of-the-way place, I was asking if you knew anyone there?"

"There as everywhere, I know everyone and I know no one," answered Legrandin, who was not going to give in so quickly; "I know a great deal about things and very little about people. But in that place the very things themselves seem to be people, rare people, delicate in their very essence, disappointed by life. Sometimes it is a manor house that you encounter on a cliff, by the side of a road, where it has stopped to point its sorrow toward the still pink evening where the golden moon rises while the returning boats, fluting the dappled water, hoist the flame of evening on their masts and carry its colors; sometimes it is a simple solitary house, rather ugly, its expression shy but romantic, which conceals from all eyes some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. That land which is so lacking in truth," he added with a Machiavellian delicacy, "that land of pure fiction makes poor reading for a child, and is certainly not what I would choose and recommend for my little friend, already so inclined to sadness, for his heart, already so predisposed. Climates of amorous confessions and vain regrets may suit a disillusioned old man like me, but they are unhealthy for one whose temperament is not yet formed. Please believe me," he went on insistently, "the waters of that bay, already half Breton, may act as a sedative, though a questionable one, on a heart like mine that is no longer undamaged, on a heart for whose wounds there is no longer any compensation. They are contraindicated at your age, my boy. Good night, neighbors," he added, leaving us with that evasive abruptness which was his habit and, turning back toward us with a doctor's raised finger, he summed up his advice: "No Balbec before the age of fifty, and even then it must depend on the state of the heart," he called to us.

Although my father talked to him about this again in our subsequent encounters, torturing him with questions, it was a useless effort: like that erudite crook[42] who used to employ, in fabricating false palimpsests, a labor and a scholarship a hundredth part of which would have been enough to guarantee him a more lucrative, but honorable position, M. Legrandin, had we insisted further, would have ended by constructing a whole system of landscape ethics and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that his own sister lived a mile from Balbec and be obliged to offer us a letter of introduction which would not have been such an object of terror for him had he been absolutely certain—as in fact he should have been given his experience of my grandmother's character—that we would not have taken advantage of it.

We always returned in good time from our walks so that we could pay a visit to my aunt Léonie before dinner. At the beginning of the season, when the days ended early, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was still a reflection of the sunset on the windowpanes of the house and a band of crimson deep in the timbers of the Calvary, which was reflected farther off in the pool, a red which, often accompanied by a rather brisk chill, was associated in my mind with the red of the fire over which was roasting the chicken that would allow the poetic pleasure given me by the walk to be succeeded by the pleasure of gluttony, warmth and rest. But in the summer, when we returned, the sun was not yet setting; and during the visit we made to my aunt Léonie, its light, lowering and touching the window, had stopped between the great curtains and the curtain loops, divided, ramified, filtered, and, encrusting the lemon wood of the chest of drawers with little pieces of gold, illuminated the room obliquely with the delicacy it acquires in the forest undergrowth. But on certain very rare days, when we returned, the chest had lost its momentary encrustations long before, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was no reflection of the sunset spread over the windowpanes, and the pool at the foot of the Calvary had lost its red, sometimes it was already the color of opal and a long ray of moonlight that grew broader and broader and broke over all the wrinkles of the water traversed it entirely. Then, as we came near the house, we would see a figure on the doorstep and Mama would say to me:

"Dear me! There's Françoise, watching for us. Your aunt must be worried; that means we're late."

And, without taking the time to remove our things, we would quickly go up to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her and show her that, contrary to what she was already imagining, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the "Guermantes way" and, bless us, when one took that walk, my aunt knew very well one could never be sure what time one would be back.

"There, Françoise," said my aunt, "what did I tell you? Didn't I say they must have gone the Guermantes way? Heavens! How hungry they must be! And your leg of lamb all dried up after waiting so long. What a time to be getting back! Well, imagine that, you went the Guermantes way!"

"But I thought you knew, Léonie," said Mama. "I thought Françoise saw us go out the little gate from the kitchen garden."

For in the environs of Combray there were two "ways" which one could go for a walk, in such opposite directions that in fact we left our house by different doors when we wanted to go one way or the other: the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, which we also called the way by Swann's because we passed in front of M. Swann's estate when we went in that direction, and the Guermantes way. About Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything but the "way" and some strangers who used to come and stroll around Combray on a Sunday, people whom, this time, even my aunt, along with all the rest of us, "did not know at all" and whom because of this we assumed to be "people who must have come from Méséglise." As for Guermantes, I was to know more about it one day, but only much later; and during the whole of my adolescence, if for me Méséglise was something as inaccessible as the horizon, concealed from view, however far we went, by the folds of a landscape that already no longer resembled the landscape of Combray, Guermantes, on the other hand, appeared to me only as the terminus, more ideal than real, of its own "way," a sort of abstract geographical expression like the line of the equator, like the pole, like the Orient. So, "to set off toward Guermantes" in order to go to Méséglise, or the opposite, would have seemed to me an expression as devoid of meaning as to set off toward the east in order to go west. Since my father always talked about the Méséglise way as the most beautiful view of the plain that he knew and about the Guermantes way as a typical river landscape, I gave them, conceiving of them thus as two entities, the cohesion, the unity that belong only to the creations of our mind; the smallest part of either of them seemed to me precious and to manifest their particular excellence, while compared to them, before one reached the sacred ground of one or the other, the purely material paths in the midst of which they were set down as the ideal view of the plain and the ideal river landscape were no more worth the trouble of looking at than, for the spectator infatuated with the art of drama, the little streets next to a theater. But most importantly I set between them, much more than their distances in miles, the distance that lay between the two parts of my brain where I thought about them, one of those distances of the mind which not only moves things away from each other, but separates them and puts them on different planes. And that demarcation was made even more absolute because our habit of never going both ways on the same day, in a single walk, but one time the Méséglise way, one time the Guermantes way, shut them off, so to speak, far apart from each other, unknowable by each other, in the sealed and uncommunicating vessels of different afternoons.

When we wanted to go in the direction of Méséglise, we would go out (not too early, and even if the sky was overcast, because the walk was not very long and did not take us too far away) as though we were going anywhere at all, through the front door of my aunt's house on the rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters in the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had no more oil or coffee, and we would leave town by the lane that ran along the white gate of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it, we would meet the smell of his lilacs, coming out to greet the strangers. From among the fresh green little hearts of their leaves, the flowers would curiously lift above the gate of the park their tufts of mauve or white feathers, glazed, even in the shade, by the sun in which they had bathed. A few, half hidden by the little tiled lodge called the Archers' House, where the caretaker lived, overtopped its Gothic gable with their pink minarets. The Nymphs of Spring would have seemed vulgar compared to these young houris, which preserved within this French garden the pure and vivid tones of Persian miniatures. Despite my desire to entwine their supple waists and draw down to me the starry curls of their fragrant heads, we would pass by without stopping because my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann's marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into the park, instead of taking the lane that goes along its fence and climbs directly up to the fields, we would take another that leads to the same place, but obliquely, and that brought us out too far away. One day, my grandfather said to my father:

"Don't you remember Swann's telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter were going off to Rheims and that he would take the opportunity to spend a day in Paris? We could go along by the park, since the ladies aren't there; it would make the walk that much shorter for us."

We stopped for a moment in front of the gate. Lilac time was nearly over; a few, still, poured forth in tall mauve chandeliers the delicate bubbles of their flowers, but in many places among the leaves where only a week before they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, a hollow scum now withered, shrunken and dark, dry and odorless. My grandfather pointed out to my father how the look of the place had remained the same, and how it had changed, since the walk he had taken with M. Swann the day of his wife's death, and he used the occasion to tell the story of that walk one more time.

In front of us, an avenue bordered by nasturtiums climbed in full sun toward the house. To the right, the park extended over level ground. Darkened by the shade of the tall trees that surrounded it, an ornamental pond had been dug by Swann's parents; but even in his most artificial creations, man is still working upon nature; certain places will always impose their own particular empire on their surroundings, hoist their immemorial insignia in the middle of a park just as they would have done far from any human intervention, in a solitude which returns to surround them wherever they are, arising from the exigencies of the position they occupy and superimposed on the work of human hands. So it was that, at the foot of the path that overlooked the artificial pond, there might be seen in its two rows woven of forget-me-nots and periwinkles, a natural crown, delicate and blue, encircling the chiaroscuro brow of water, and so it was that the sword lily, bending its blades with a regal abandon, extended over the eupatorium and wet-footed frogbit the ragged fleurs-de-lis, violet and yellow, of its lacustrine scepter.

Mlle. Swann's departure, which—by taking from me the terrible chance that I might see her appear on a path, that I might be recognized and scorned by the privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a friend and went to visit cathedrals with him—made the contemplation of Tansonville a matter of indifference to me the first time it was allowed me, seemed on the contrary to add to that estate, in the eyes of my grandfather and my father, certain accommodations, a transitory charm, and, as does for an excursion into mountain country the absence of any cloud, to make that day exceptionally favorable for a walk in that direction; I would have liked their calculations to be foiled, a miracle to make Mlle. Swann appear with her father, so close to us that we would not have time to avoid her and would be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when suddenly I saw on the grass, like a sign of her possible presence, a creel sitting forgotten next to a line whose bob was floating on the water, I hastened to turn my father's and grandfather's eyes away in another direction. In any case, since Swann had told us it was bad of him to go off because he had family at the house just now, the line could belong to one of his guests. We heard no sound of steps on the avenues. Dividing the height of an unknown tree, an invisible bird, contriving to make the day seem short, explored the surrounding solitude with one prolonged note, but received from it a retort so unanimous, a repercussion so redoubled by silence and immobility, that one felt it had arrested forever that moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The light fell so implacably from the still sky that one would have wanted to elude its attention, and the dormant water itself, whose sleep was perpetually irritated by insects, dreaming no doubt of some imaginary maelstrom, increased the disturbance into which I had been plunged by the sight of the cork float, by appearing to draw it at full speed over the silent reaches of the reflected sky; almost vertical, it seemed about to dive and I was already wondering if, quite beyond my desire to know her and my fear of knowing her, I did not have a duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting—when I had to run to rejoin my father and grandfather, who were calling me, surprised that I had not followed them along the little lane they had already entered which leads up to the fields. I found it all humming with the smell of the hawthorns. The hedge formed a series of chapels that disappeared under the litter of their flowers, heaped into wayside altars; below them, the sun was laying down a grid of brightness on the ground as if it had just passed through a stained-glass window; their perfume spread as unctuous, as delimited in its form as if I were standing before the altar of the Virgin, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, each held out with a distracted air its sparkling bunch of stamens, delicate radiating ribs in the flamboyant style like those which, in the church, perforated the balustrade of the rood screen or the mullions of the window and blossomed out into the white flesh of a strawberry flower. How naive and folksy by comparison would seem the sweetbriers which, in a few weeks, would climb in full sun the same country lane, in the smooth silk of their blushing bodices undone by a breath.

But though I remained there in front of the hawthorns, breathing in, bringing into the presence of my thoughts, which did not know what to do with it, then losing and finding again their invisible and unchanging smell, absorbing myself in the rhythm that tossed their flowers here and there with youthful high spirits and at unexpected intervals like certain intervals in music, they offered me the same charm endlessly and with an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me study it more deeply, like the melodies you replay a hundred times in succession without descending further into their secrets. I turned away from them for a moment, to accost them again with renewed strength. I pursued, all the way onto the embankment behind the hedge that rose steeply toward the fields, some lost poppy, a few cornflowers which had lazily stayed behind, which decorated it here and there with their flower heads like the border of a tapestry on which there appears, thinly scattered, the rustic motif that will dominate the panel; infrequent still, spaced apart like the isolated houses that announce the approach of a village, they announced to me the immense expanse where the wheat breaks in waves, where the clouds fleece, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting its red flame to the top of its ropes and whipping it in the wind above its greasy black buoy made my heart pound like the heart of a traveler who spies on a lowland a first beached boat being repaired by a caulker and, before catching sight of it, cries out: "The Sea!"

Then I came back to stand in front of the hawthorns as you do in front of those masterpieces which, you think, you will be able to see more clearly when you have stopped looking at them for a moment, but although I formed a screen for myself with my hands so that I would have only them before my eyes, the feeling they awakened in me remained obscure and vague, seeking in vain to detach itself, to come and adhere to their flowers. They did not help me to clarify it, and I could not ask other flowers to satisfy it. Then, filling me with the joy we feel when we see a work by our favorite painter that is different from the ones we knew, or if someone takes us up to a painting of which we had until then seen only a pencil sketch, if a piece heard only on the piano appears to us later clothed in the colors of the orchestra, my grandfather, calling me and pointing to the Tansonville hedge, said to me: "You love hawthorns—just look at this pink one. Isn't it lovely!" Indeed it was a hawthorn, but a pink hawthorn, even more beautiful than the white ones. It, too, wore finery for a holiday—for the only true holidays, which are the religious holidays, since they are not assigned by some fortuitous whim, as are the secular holidays, to an ordinary day that is not especially intended for them, that has nothing essentially festal about it—but their finery was even more opulent, for the flowers, attached to the branch one above another, in such a way as to leave no spot that was not decorated, like pom-poms garlanding a rococo shepherd's crook, were "in color," and consequently of a superior quality according to the aesthetics of Combray, if one judged it by the scale of prices in "the store" in the square, or at Camus's, where the more expensive sponge cakes were the pink ones. Even I preferred cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to crush strawberries in it. And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of an edible thing, or of a delicate embellishment to an outfit for an important holiday, one of those colors which, because they offer children the reason for their superiority, seem most obviously beautiful to the eyes of children, and for that reason will always seem more vivid and more natural to them than the other tints, even after the children have learned that they did not promise anything for the appetite and had not been chosen by the dressmaker. And certainly, I had felt at once, as I had felt in front of the white hawthorns but with more wonder, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human fabrication that the festive intention of the flowers was expressed, but that nature had spontaneously expressed it with the naïveté of a village shopkeeper laboring over her wayside altar, by overloading the shrub with these rosettes which were too delicate in their color and provincially pompadour in their style. At the tops of the branches, like those little rosebushes, their pots hidden in lace paper, whose thin spindles radiated from the altar on the major feast days, teemed a thousand little buds of a paler tint which revealed, when they began to open, as though at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, reds of a bloody tinge, and expressed even more than the flowers the particular, irresistible essence of the hawthorn which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to flower, could do so only in pink. Inserted into the hedge, but as different from it as a young girl in a party dress among people in everyday clothes who are staying at home, the shrub was all ready for Mary's month, and seemed to form a part of it already, shining there, smiling in its fresh pink outfit, catholic and delicious.

Through the hedge we could see within the park an avenue edged with jasmines, pansies, and verbenas between which stocks opened their fresh purses, of a pink as fragrant and faded as an old piece of cordovan leather, while a long green-painted watering hose, uncoiling its loops over the gravel, sent up at each of the points where it was punctured, over the flowers whose fragrances it imbibed, the prismatic vertical fan of its multicolored droplets. Suddenly I stopped, I could not move, as happens when something we see does not merely address our eyes, but requires a deeper kind of perception and possesses our entire being. A little girl with reddish-blond hair, who appeared to be coming back from a walk and held a gardening spade in her hand, was looking at us, lifting toward us a face scattered with pink freckles. Her dark eyes shone, and since I did not know then, nor have I learned since, how to reduce a strong impression to its objective elements, since I did not have enough "power of observation," as they say, to isolate the notion of their color, for a long time afterward, whenever I thought of her again, the memory of their brilliance would immediately present itself to me as that of a vivid azure, since she was blonde: so that, perhaps if she had not had such dark eyes—which struck one so the first time one saw her—I would not have been, as I was, in love most particularly with her blue eyes.

I looked at her, at first with the sort of gaze that is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but a window at which all the senses lean out, anxious and petrified, a gaze that would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it; then, so afraid was I that at any second my grandfather and my father, noticing the girl, would send me off, telling me to run on a little ahead of them, with a second sort of gaze, one that was unconsciously supplicating, that tried to force her to pay attention to me, to know me! She cast her eyes forward and sideways in order to take stock of my grandfather and father, and no doubt the impression she formed of them was that we were absurd, for she turned away, and, with an indifferent and disdainful look, placed herself at an angle to spare her face from being in their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, passed beyond me, she allowed her glances to stream out at full length in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to see me, but with a concentration and a secret smile that I could only interpret, according to the notions of good breeding instilled in me, as a sign of insulting contempt; and at the same time her hand sketched an indecent gesture for which, when it was directed in public at a person one did not know, the little dictionary of manners I carried inside me supplied only one meaning, that of intentional insolence.

"Gilberte, come here! What are you doing?" came the piercing, authoritarian cry of a lady in white whom I had not seen, while, at some distance from her, a gentleman dressed in twill whom I did not know stared at me with eyes that started from his head; the girl abruptly stopped smiling, took her spade, and went away without turning back toward me, with an air that was submissive, inscrutable, and sly.

So it was that this name, Gilberte, passed by close to me, given like a talisman that might one day enable me to find this girl again whom it had just turned into a person and who, a moment before, had been merely an uncertain image. Thus it passed, spoken over the jasmines and the stocks, as sour and as cool as the drops from the green watering hose; impregnating, coloring the portion of pure air that it had crossed—and that it isolated—with the mystery of the life of the girl it designated for the happy creatures who lived, who traveled in her company; deploying under the pink thicket, at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity, for me so painful, with her and with the unknown territory of her life which I would never be able to enter.

For a moment (as we moved away, my grandfather murmuring: "Poor Swann, what a role they make him play: they make him leave so that she can stay there alone with her Charlus—because it was him, I recognized him! And the little girl, mixed up in that disgraceful business!") the impression left in me by the despotic tone with which Gilberte's mother had spoken to her without her answering back, by presenting her to me as someone obliged to obey another person, as not being superior to everything in the world, calmed my suffering a little, restored some of my hope, and diminished my love. But very soon that love welled up in me again like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was trying to put itself on the same level as Gilberte or bring her down to its own. I loved her, I was sorry I had not had the time or the inspiration to insult her, hurt her, and force her to remember me. I thought her so beautiful that I wished I could retrace my steps and shout at her with a shrug of my shoulders: "I think you're ugly, I think you're grotesque, I loathe you!" But I went away, carrying with me forever, as the first example of a type of happiness inaccessible to children of my kind because of certain laws of nature impossible to transgress, the image of a little girl with red hair, her skin scattered with pink freckles, holding a spade and smiling as she cast at me long, cunning, and inexpressive glances. And already the charm with which the incense of her name had imbued that place under the pink hawthorns where it had been heard by her and by me together was beginning to reach, to overlay, to perfume everything that came near it, her grandparents, whom my own had had the ineffable happiness of knowing, the sublime profession of stockbroker, the harrowing neighborhood of the Champs-Élysées where she lived in Paris.

"Léonie," said my grandfather when we returned, "I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would not recognize Tansonville. If I had dared, I would have cut you a branch of those pink hawthorns you used to love so much." And so my grandfather told Aunt Léonie the story of our walk, either to entertain her or because they had not lost all hope of inducing her to go outdoors. For at one time she had liked that estate very much, and, too, Swann's visits had been the last she had received, when she had already closed her door to everyone else. And just as, when he now called to inquire after her (she was the only person in our house he still asked to see), she would tell them to answer him that she was tired, but that she would let him come in the next time, so she said, that evening: "Yes, someday when it's nice out, I'll take the carriage and go as far as the gate of the park." She said it sincerely. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but this desire was enough for what strength remained to her; its fulfillment would have exceeded her strength. Sometimes the good weather restored a little of her energy, she would get up, get dressed; the fatigue would set in before she had gone into the other room and she would ask to go back to bed. What had begun for her—earlier, merely, than it usually happens—was the great renunciation which comes with old age as it prepares for death, wraps itself in its chrysalis, and which may be observed at the ends of lives that are at all extended, even in old lovers who have loved each other the most, even between friends bound by the closest ties of mutual sympathy, who, after a certain year, stop making the necessary journey or outing to see each other, stop writing to each other and know they will not communicate again in this world. My aunt must have known perfectly well that she would not see Swann again, that she would never again leave the house, but this final seclusion must have been made fairly comfortable to her for the very reason that, in our eyes, ought to have made it more painful for her: it was that this seclusion was required of her by the diminution in her strength which she could observe each day and which, making each action, each movement, a cause of fatigue, if not pain, in her eyes gave inaction, isolation, silence, the restorative and blessed sweetness of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the hedge of pink hawthorns, but again and again I asked my parents if she would not go, if at one time she had often gone to Tansonville, trying to make them talk about Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who seemed to me as great as gods. When I was talking with my parents, I pined from the need to hear them say that name, Swann, which had become almost mythological for me, I did not dare pronounce it myself, but I drew them onto subjects that were close to Gilberte and her family, that concerned them, in which I did not feel I was exiled too far from them; and I would suddenly compel my father, by pretending to believe, for instance, that my grandfather's official appointment had been in our family before his time, or that the hedge of pink hawthorns which my aunt Léonie wanted to see was on communal land, to correct what I had said, to say to me, as though in opposition to me, as though of his own accord: "No, that appointment belonged to *Swann's* father, that hedge is part of *Swann's* park." Then I had to catch my breath, so effectively did that name, coming to rest as it did on the spot where it was always written inside me, oppress me to the point of suffocation, that name which, at the moment I heard it, seemed to me more massive than any other name because it was heavy with all the times I had uttered it beforehand in my mind. It gave me a pleasure that I was embarrassed at having dared to demand from my parents, because that pleasure was so great that it must have required considerable effort on their part to procure it for me, and without compensation, since it was not a pleasure for them. And so I would turn the conversation in another direction out of discretion. Out of compunction, too. All the odd allurements that I invested in this name Swann I would hear in it again when they pronounced it. Then it would suddenly seem to me that my parents could not fail to experience these allurements, that they must share my point of view, that they in their turn perceived, forgave, embraced my dreams, and I was unhappy, as if I had defeated them and corrupted them.

That year, when my parents had decided which day we would be returning to Paris, a little earlier than usual, on the morning of our departure, after they had had my hair curled for a photograph, and carefully placed on my head a hat I had never worn before and dressed me in a quilted velvet coat, after looking for me everywhere, my mother found me in tears on the steep little path beside Tansonville, saying good-bye to the hawthorns, putting my arms around the prickly branches, and, like the princess in the tragedy burdened by vain ornaments, ungrateful to the importunate hand that with such care had gathered up my hair in curls across my brow,[43] trampling underfoot my torn-out curl papers and my new hat. My mother was not moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my crushed hat and ruined coat. I did not hear it: "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I said, weeping, "you're not the ones trying to make me unhappy, you aren't forcing me to leave. You've never hurt me! So I will always love you." And drying my tears, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not let my life be like the senseless lives of other men and that even in Paris, on spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would go out into the countryside to see the first hawthorns.

Once in the fields, we did not leave them again during the rest of our walk toward Méséglise. They were perpetually crossed, as though by an invisible vagabond, by the wind that was for me the presiding spirit of Combray. Each year, the day we arrived, in order to feel that I was really in Combray, I would go up to find it again where it ran along the furrows and made me run after it. We always had the wind beside us when we went the Méséglise way, over that cambered plain where for leagues it encounters no rise or fall in the land. I knew that Mlle. Swann often went to Laon to spend a few days, and even though it was several miles away, since the distance was compensated for by the absence of any obstacle, when, on hot afternoons, I saw a single gust of wind, coming from the farthest horizon, first bend the most distant wheat, then roll like a wave through all that vast expanse and come to lie down murmuring and warm among the sainfoin and clover at my feet, this plain which was shared by us both seemed to bring us together, join us, and I would imagine that this breath of wind had passed close

beside her, that what it whispered to me was some message from her though I could not understand it, and I would kiss it as it went by. On the left was a village called Champieu (*Campus pagani,* according to the curé). To the right, you could see beyond the wheat the two chiseled rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, imbricated, checkered, yellowing, and granulose as two spikes of wheat.

At symmetrical intervals, in the midst of the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which cannot be confused with the leaves of any other fruit tree, the apple trees opened their broad petals of white satin or dangled the timid bouquets of their reddening buds. It was on the Méséglise way that I first noticed the round shadow that apple trees make on the sunny earth and those silks of impalpable gold which the sunset weaves obliquely under the leaves, and which I saw my father interrupt with his stick without ever deflecting them.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky the moon would pass white as a cloud, furtive, lusterless, like an actress who does not have to perform yet and who, from the audience, in street clothes, watches the other actors for a moment, making herself inconspicuous, not wanting anyone to pay attention to her. I liked finding its image again in paintings and books, but these works of art were quite different—at least during the early years, before Bloch accustomed my eyes and my mind to subtler harmonies—from those in which the moon would seem beautiful to me today and in which I would not have recognized it then. It might be, for example, some novel by Saintine,[44] some landscape by Gleyre[45] in which it stands out distinctly against the sky in the form of a silver sickle, one of those works which were naively incomplete, like my own impressions, and which it angered my grandmother's sisters to see me enjoy. They thought that one ought to present to children, and that children showed good taste in enjoying right from the start, those works of art which, once one has reached maturity, one will admire forever after. The fact is that they probably regarded aesthetic merits as material objects which an open eye could not help perceiving, without one's needing to ripen equivalents of them slowly in one's own heart.

It was along the Méséglise way, at Montjouvain, a house situated at the edge of a large pond and backed up against a brush-covered hillock, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we often met his daughter on the road driving a cabriolet at top speed. One year, she was not alone when we met her, and from then on she was always accompanied by an older friend, a woman who had a bad reputation in the area and who one day moved permanently into Montjouvain. People said: "Poor M. Vinteuil must be blind with love not to realize what kind of rumors are going around—a man who is shocked by a single remark *out of place* letting his daughter bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says she's a most superior woman, with a good heart, and that she would have had an extraordinary aptitude for music if she had cultivated it. He can be sure she's not dabbling in music when she's with his daughter." M. Vinteuil did say this; and in fact it is remarkable how a person always inspires admiration for her moral qualities in the family of the person with whom she is having carnal relations. Physical love, so unfairly disparaged, compels people to manifest the very smallest particles they possess of goodness, of self-abnegation, so much so that these particles glow even in the eyes of those immediately surrounding them. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and thick eyebrows permitted him to play to his heart's content the role of the villain to which his general appearance was not suited, without in the least compromising his unshakable and undeserved reputation as a kindly old curmudgeon, was capable of making the curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying gruffly: "Well, now! It seems young Mlle. Vinteuil is making music with her friend. You seem surprised. Now I don't know. It was old Vinteuil who told me just yesterday. After all, the girl certainly has a right to enjoy her music. It's not for me to go against a child's artistic vocation. Nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he himself plays music with his daughter's friend, as well. Heaven help us! There's certainly a good deal of music-making going on in that establishment. Well, why are you laughing? They play too much music, those people. The other day I met old Vinteuil near the cemetery. He was ready to drop."

For those like us who saw M. Vinteuil at that time avoiding people he knew, turning away when he saw them, aging in a few months, immersing himself in his sorrow, becoming incapable of any effort whose direct goal was not his daughter's happiness, spending whole days before the grave of his wife—it would have been difficult not to realize that he was dying of sorrow, or to imagine that he was not aware of the talk that was going around. He knew about it, maybe he even believed it. Perhaps there exists no one, however virtuous he may be, who may not be led one day by the complexity of his circumstances to live on familiar terms with the vice he condemns most expressly—without his fully recognizing it, moreover, in the disguise of particular details that it assumes in order to come into contact with him in that way and make him suffer: strange remarks, an inexplicable attitude, one evening, on the part of someone whom he has otherwise so many reasons for liking. But a man like M. Vinteuil must have suffered much more than most in resigning himself to one of those situations which are wrongly believed to be the exclusive prerogative of the bohemian life: they occur whenever a vice which nature itself plants in a child, like the color of its eyes, sometimes merely by mingling the virtues of its father and mother, needs to reserve for itself the space and the security it requires. But the fact that M. Vinteuil perhaps knew about his daughter's behavior does not imply that his worship of her would thereby be diminished. Facts do not find their way into the world in which our beliefs reside; they did not produce our beliefs, they do not destroy them; they may inflict on them the most constant refutations without weakening them, and an avalanche of afflictions or ailments succeeding one another without interruption in a family will not make it doubt the goodness of its God or the talent of its doctor. But when M. Vinteuil thought about his daughter and himself from the point of view of society, from the point of view of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself with her in the rank which they occupied in the general esteem, then he made this social judgment exactly as it would have been made by the most hostile inhabitant of Combray, he saw himself and his daughter in the lowest depths, and because of this his manner had recently acquired that humility, that respect for those who were above him and whom he saw from below (even if they had been well below him until then), that tendency to seek to climb back up to them, which is an almost automatic result of any downfall. One day as we were walking with Swann down a street in Combray, M. Vinteuil, who was emerging from another, found himself face-to-face with us too suddenly to have time to avoid us; and Swann, with the proud charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another man's disgrace merely a reason for showing him a kindliness whose manifestations are all the more gratifying to the self-regard of the one offering them because he feels they are so precious to the one receiving them, had conversed with M. Vinteuil for a long time, although he had never spoken to him before then, and before leaving us had asked him if he would not send his daughter to play at Tansonville someday. This was an invitation which two years before would have incensed M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with such feelings of gratitude that he believed he was obliged by them not to have the indiscretion of accepting it. Swann's friendliness toward his daughter seemed to him in itself so honorable and so delightful a support that he thought it would perhaps be better not to make use of it, so as to have the wholly platonic pleasure of preserving it.

"What a charming man," he said, when Swann had left us, with the same enthusiastic veneration that causes bright and pretty middle-class women to be awed and entranced by a duchess, even if she is ugly and foolish. "What a charming man! How unfortunate that he should have made such an entirely inappropriate marriage!"

And then, since even the most sincere people have a streak of hypocrisy in them which makes them put to one side their opinion of a person while they are talking to him, and express it as soon as he is no longer present, my parents deplored Swann's marriage along with M. Vinteuil in the name of principles and conventions which (by the very fact that they joined him in invoking them, as decent people of the same stamp) they seemed to be implying he had not violated at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to Swann's house. And Swann was the first to regret it. For each time he left M. Vinteuil, he remembered that for some time now he had had a question to ask him about a person who bore the same name, a relative of his, he believed. And this time he had truly promised himself not to forget what he wanted to tell him when M. Vinteuil sent his daughter to Tansonville.

Since the walk along the Méséglise way was the shorter of the two that we took out of Combray and since, because of that, we saved it for uncertain weather, the climate along the Méséglise way was quite rainy and we would never lose sight of the edge of the Roussainville woods, in the thickness of which we could take cover.

Often the sun would hide behind a storm cloud, distorting its oval, yellowing the edges of the cloud. The brilliance, though not the brightness, would be withdrawn from the countryside, where all life seemed suspended, while the little village of Roussainville sculpted its white rooflines in relief upon the sky with an unbearable precision and finish. Nudged by a gust of wind, a crow flew up and dropped down again in the distance, and, against the whitening sky, the distant parts of the woods appeared bluer, as though painted in one of those monochromes that decorate the pier glasses of old houses.

But at other times the rain with which we had been threatened by the little hooded monk in the optician's window[46] would begin to fall; the drops of water, like migrating birds which take flight all at the same time, would descend in close ranks from the sky. They do not separate at all, they do not wander away during their rapid course, but each one keeps to its place, drawing along the one that comes after it, and the sky is more darkened by them than when the swallows leave. We would take refuge in the woods. When their flight seemed to be over, a few of them, feebler, slower, would still be arriving. But we would come back out of

our shelter, because raindrops delight in leafy branches, and, when the earth was already nearly dry again, more than one would still linger to play on the ribs of a leaf and, hanging from the tip, tranquil and sparkling in the sun, would suddenly let go, slip off, and drop from the entire height of the branch onto one's nose.

Often, too, we would go and take shelter all crowded in together with the stone saints and patriarchs in the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. How French that church was! Above the door, the saints, the knight-kings with fleurs-de-lis in their hands, wedding and funeral scenes, were depicted as they might have been in Françoise's soul. The sculptor had also narrated certain anecdotes involving Aristotle and Virgil just as Françoise in her kitchen was apt to talk about Saint Louis as if she had known him personally, usually in order to put my grandparents to shame by comparison since they were less "fair-minded." One felt that the notions which the medieval artist and the medieval countrywoman (living on into the nineteenth century) had acquired of ancient or Christian history, and which were distinguished by containing as much inaccuracy as simple good-heartedness, were derived not from books, but from a tradition that was at once very old and very direct, uninterrupted, oral, deformed, hardly recognizable, and alive. Another Combray character whom I also recognized, potential and prophesied, in the Gothic sculpture of Saint-André-des-Champs, was young Théodore, the delivery boy from Camus's grocery. Françoise, in fact, felt so clearly that he was a fellow countryman and a contemporary that when my aunt Léonie was too sick for Françoise by herself to turn her over in bed, or carry her to the armchair, instead of letting the kitchen maid come up and get into my aunt's "good books" she would send for Théodore. Now this boy, who was taken, and rightly, for such a ne'er-do-well, was so filled with the same spirit that had decorated Saint-André-des-Champs and especially with the feelings of respect that Françoise believed were owed to "poor sick folk," to "her poor mistress," that as he raised my aunt's head on her pillow he had the same naive and zealous expression as the little angels in the bas-reliefs, crowding around the fainting Virgin with tapers in their hands, as if the faces of sculpted stone, bare and gray as the woods in winter, were only a deep sleep, a reserve, about to blossom into life again in numberless common faces, reverent and crafty like Théodore's, illuminated with the redness of a ripe apple. No longer affixed to the stone like those little angels, but detached from the porch, of larger than human size, standing on a pedestal as though on a stool that spared her putting her feet on the damp ground, one saint had the full cheeks, the firm breast swelling the folds of the cloth like a cluster of ripe grapes in a horsehair sack, the narrow forehead, the short and saucy nose, the deep-set eyes, the able-bodied, impassive, and courageous demeanor of the countrywomen of the region. This resemblance, which insinuated into the statue a sweetness I had not looked for in it, was often authenticated by some girl from the fields, who, like us, had come to take cover, and whose presence, like the presence of the leaves of a climbing plant that has grown up next to some sculpted leaves, seemed intended to allow us, by confronting it with nature, to judge the truthfulness of the work of art. Before us in the distance, a promised land or an accursed one, Roussainville, was now, when the rain had already stopped for us, either continuing to be chastised like the village in the Bible by all the slanting spears of the storm, which scourged the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already been pardoned by God the Father, who caused to descend upon it, unequal in length, like the rays of an altar monstrance, the frayed golden shafts of his reappearing sun.

Sometimes the weather was completely spoiled, we had to go back home and stay shut up in the house. Here and there, far off in the countryside, which because of the dark and the wet resembled the sea, a few isolated houses, clinging to the side of a hill plunged in watery night, shone forth like little boats that have folded their sails and stand motionless out at sea all night long. But what did the rain matter, what did the storm matter! In summer, bad weather is only a passing, superficial mood on the part of the steady, underlying good weather, which is very different from the fluid and unstable good weather of winter, and having settled on the earth, where it has taken solid form in dense branches of leaves on which the rain may drip without compromising the resistance of their permanent joy, has hoisted for the whole season, even in the streets of the village, on the walls of the houses and gardens, its flags of white or violet silk. Sitting in the little drawing room, where I waited for the dinner hour while I read, I would hear the water dripping from our chestnut trees, but I knew that the downpour was only varnishing their leaves and that they would promise to stay there, like pledges of summer, all the rainy night, ensuring that the good weather would continue; that rain as it might, tomorrow little heart-shaped leaves would undulate just as numerous above the white gate of Tansonville; and it was without sadness that I saw the poplar in the rue des Perchamps meet the storm praying and bowing in despair; it was without sadness that I heard at the back of the garden the last rolls of thunder warbling among the lilacs.

If the weather was bad in the morning, my parents would give up the walk and I would not go out. But I later acquired the habit of going out to walk alone on those days along the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, during the autumn in which we had to come to Combray to settle my aunt Léonie's estate, because she had at last died, proving correct both those who had claimed that her enfeebling regimen would end by killing her, and those who had always maintained that she suffered from an illness that was not imaginary but organic, to the evidence of which the skeptics would certainly be obliged to yield when she succumbed to it; and causing no great suffering by her death except to a single person, but to that one, a grief that was savage. During the two weeks of my aunt's final illness, Françoise did not leave her for an instant, did not undress, did not allow anyone else to care for her in any way, and did not leave her body until it was buried. Then we realized that the kind of dread in which Françoise had lived, of my aunt's ill-natured remarks, suspicions, angry moods, had developed a feeling in her that we had taken for hatred and that was actually veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions were impossible to foresee, whose ruses were difficult to foil, whose good heart was easy to touch, her sovereign, her mysterious and all-powerful monarch, was no more. Next to her we counted for very little. The time was by now far in the past when, as we began coming to spend our holidays at Combray, we possessed as much prestige as my aunt in Françoise's eyes. That autumn, completely occupied as they were with the formalities that had to be observed, the interviews with notaries and tenants, my parents, having scarcely any time to go on excursions, which the weather frustrated in any case, fell into the habit of letting me go for walks without them along the Méséglise way, wrapped in a great plaid that protected me from the rain and that I threw over my shoulders all the more readily because I sensed that its Scottish patterning scandalized Françoise, into whose mind one could not have introduced the idea that the color of one's clothes had nothing to do with mourning and to whom, in any case, the sorrow that we felt over the death of my aunt was not very satisfactory, because we had not offered a large funeral dinner, because we did not adopt a special tone of voice in speaking of her, because I even hummed to myself now and then. I am sure that in a book—and in this I was actually quite like Françoise—such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland*[47] and the portal of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have appealed to me. But as soon as Françoise came near me, some demon would goad me to try to make her angry, I would seize the slightest pretext to tell her that I missed my aunt because she was a good woman despite her ridiculous ways, but not in the least because she was my aunt, that she might have been my aunt and still seemed odious to me, and then her death would not have caused me any pain, remarks that would have seemed to me absurd in a book.

If Françoise then, filled like a poet with a flood of confused thoughts about bereavement, about family memories, excused herself for not knowing how to answer my theories and said: "I don't know how to *espress* myself," I would gloat over that admission with a harsh and ironic common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she added: "All the same, she was your own kith and kindred,[48] and there's a proper respect we owe to our kith and kindred, you know,' I would shrug my shoulders and say to myself: "Look at me, arguing with an illiterate woman who makes such blunders," adopting, in judging Françoise, the mean-spirited attitude of men whose behavior those people who despise them the most when contemplating them impartially are quite capable of adopting, when actually playing one of life's vulgar scenes.

My walks that autumn were all the more pleasant because I took them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired from reading all morning in the parlor, throwing my plaid over my shoulders I would go out: my body, which had had to keep still for so long, but which had accumulated, as it sat, a reserve of animation and speed, now needed, like a top that has been released, to expend them in all directions. The walls of the houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of the Roussainville woods, the thickets at the back of Montjouvain, submitted to the blows of my umbrella or walking stick, heard my shouts of joy, these being both merely confused ideas that exhilarated me and found no repose in the light of understanding, because they had preferred, instead of a slow and difficult clarification, the pleasure of an easier diversion toward an immediate outcome. Most of the supposed expressions of our feelings merely relieve us of them in this way by drawing them out of us in an indistinct form that does not teach us to know them. When I try to count up what I owe to the Méséglise way, the humble discoveries for which it was the fortuitous setting or the necessary inspiration, I recall that it was that autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy hillock that protects Montjouvain, that I was struck for the first time by this discord between our impressions and their habitual expression. After an hour of rain and wind which I had fought cheerfully, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, beside a little hut covered in tiles where M. Vinteuil's gardener stowed his gardening tools, the sun had just reappeared, and its gildings, washed by the downpour, glistened freshly in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, on its still-wet tile roof along the crest of which a hen was walking. The wind that was blowing tugged at the wild grass growing in the side of the wall and the downy plumage of the hen, the one and the other streaming out at full length horizontally before its breath, with the abandon of things that are weightless and inert. In

the pond, reflective again under the sun, the tile roof made a pink marbling to which I had never before given any attention. And seeing on the water and on the face of the wall a pale smile answering the smile of the sky, I cried out to myself in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: “Damn, damn, damn, damn.” But at the same time I felt I was in duty bound not to stop at these opaque words, but to try to see more clearly into my rapture.

And it was at that moment, too—because of a countryman who was passing by, who seemed rather cross already and was more so when my umbrella nearly went in his face, and who responded without warmth to my “fine weather, isn’t it, perfect for a walk”—that I learned that the same emotions do not arise simultaneously, in a preestablished order, in all men. Later, each time a rather prolonged session of reading had put me in a mood to chat, the friend I was so eager to talk to would himself have just been indulging in the pleasure of conversation and now wanted to be left to read in peace. If I had just been thinking tenderly about my parents and making the wisest decisions, those most likely to please them, they would have been employing the same time in discovering some peccadillo I had forgotten, and they would reproach me severely for it just at the moment I bounded toward them to give them a hug.

Sometimes the exhilaration I felt at being alone was joined by another kind that I was not able to separate distinctly from it, and that came from my desire to see a peasant girl appear in front of me whom I could clasp in my arms. Born suddenly, and without my having had time to identify exactly what had caused it, from among very different thoughts, the pleasure which accompanied it seemed to me only one degree higher than that which those other thoughts had given me. Everything that was in my mind at that moment acquired an even greater value, the pink reflection of the tile roof, the wild grass, the village of Roussainville to which I had been wanting to go for so long now, the trees of its woods, the steeple of its church, as a result of this new emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to carry me toward them more rapidly when it filled my sail with a powerful, mysterious, and propitious wind. But if, for me, this desire that a woman should appear added something more exhilarating to the charms of nature, the charms of nature, in return, broadened what would have been too narrow in the woman’s charm. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was also hers and that the soul of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books I was reading that year, would be given to me by her kiss; and as my imagination drew strength from contact with my sensuality, as my sensuality spread through all the domains of my imagination, my desire grew boundless. And, too—just as during those moments of reverie in the midst of nature when, the effect of habit being suspended, and our abstract notions of things set aside, we believe with a profound faith in the originality, in the individual life of the place in which we happen to be—the passing woman summoned by my desire seemed to be, not an ordinary exemplar of that general type—woman—but a necessary and natural product of this particular soil. For at that time everything which was not I, the earth and other people, appeared to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they appear to grown men. And I did not separate the earth and the people. I desired a peasant girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, a fisherwoman from Balbec, just as I desired Méséglise and Balbec. The pleasure they might give me would have appeared less real to me, I would no longer have believed in it, if I had modified its conditions as I pleased. To meet a fisherwoman from Balbec or a countrywoman from Méséglise in Paris would have been like receiving a seashell I could not have seen on the beach, a fern I could not have found in the woods, it would have subtracted from the pleasure which the woman would give me all those pleasures in which my imagination had enveloped her. But to wander through the woods of Roussainville without a peasant girl to hold in my arms was to see these woods and yet know nothing of their hidden treasure, their profound beauty. For me that girl, whom I could only envisage dappled with leaves, was herself like a local plant, merely of a higher species than the rest and whose structure enabled one to approach more closely than one could in the others the essential flavor of the country. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would allow me to reach that flavor would themselves be of a special kind, whose pleasure I would not have been able to experience through anyone else but her) because I was, and would be for a long time to come, at an age when one has not yet abstracted this pleasure from the possession of the different women with whom one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general notion that makes one regard them from then on as the interchangeable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. This pleasure does not even exist, isolated, distinct and formulated in the mind, as the aim we are pursuing when we approach a woman, as the cause of the previous disturbance that we feel. We scarcely even contemplate it as a pleasure which we will enjoy; rather, we call it her charm; for we do not think of ourselves, we think only of leaving ourselves. Obscurely awaited, immanent and hidden, it merely rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment of its realization, the other pleasures we find in the soft gazes, the kisses of the woman close to us, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of our gratitude for our companion’s goodness of heart and for her touching predilection for us, which we measure by the blessings, by the beatitude she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the castle keep of Roussainville, that I asked it to have some child from its village come to me, appealing to it as to the only confidant I had had of my earliest desires, when at the top of our house in Combray in the little room smelling of orris root, I could see nothing but its tower in the middle of the pane of the half-open window, while with the heroic hesitations of a traveler embarking on an exploration or of a desperate man killing himself, with a feeling of faintness, I would clear an unknown and I thought fatal path within myself, until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail added itself to the leaves of the wild black currant that leaned in toward me. In vain did I appeal to it now. In vain did I hold the whole expanse of the country before me within the field of my vision, draining it with my eyes which tried to extract a woman from it. I would go as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs; there I would never find the countrywoman I would inevitably have met had I been with my grandfather and therefore prevented from striking up a conversation with her. I would stare endlessly at the trunk of a distant tree from behind which she was going to appear and come to me; the scanned horizon would remain uninhabited, night would fall, hopelessly my attention would attach itself, as though to aspirate the creatures they might harbor, to that sterile ground, to that exhausted earth; and it was no longer with a light heart, but with rage, that I struck the trees of the Roussainville woods, from among which no more living creatures emerged than if they had been trees painted on the canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to going back to the house without having held in my arms the woman I had so desired, I was nevertheless obliged to continue along the road to Combray admitting to myself that there was less and less chance that she had been placed in my path. And if she had been there, would I have dared talk to her? It seemed to me she would have thought I was mad; I no longer believed that the desires which I formed during my walks, and which were not fulfilled, were shared by other people, that they had any reality outside of me. They now seemed to me no more than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creations of my temperament. They no longer had any attachment to nature, to reality, which from then on lost all its charm and significance and was no more than a conventional framework for my life, as is, for the fiction of a novel, the railway carriage on the seat of which a traveler reads it in order to kill time.

It was perhaps from an impression received also near Montjouvain, a few years later, an impression that remained obscure to me at the time, that there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism. As will be seen later, for quite other reasons the the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had had to leave for the whole day, had told me to return home as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I liked to look at the reflections of the tile roof again, I had lain down in the shade and fallen asleep among the bushes of the hillock that overlooks the house, in the same spot where I had once waited for my father on a day when he had gone to see M. Vinteuil. It was almost night when I awoke, I wanted to stand up, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (insofar as I actually recognized her, because I had not seen her very often in Combray, and only when she was still a child, whereas now she was growing into a young woman), who had probably just come home, opposite me, a few inches from me, in the room in which her father had entertained my father and which she had made into her own little drawing room. The window was half open, the lamp was lit, I could see her every movement without her seeing me, but if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her.

She was in deep mourning, because her father had died a short time before. We had not gone to see her, my mother had not wanted to because of a virtue of hers which alone limited the effects of her goodness: her sense of decency; but she pitied her deeply. My mother recalled the sad end of M. Vinteuil’s life, completely absorbed as it was first in giving his daughter the care of a mother or a nursemaid, then in the suffering his daughter had caused him; she could still see the tormented expression on the old man’s face during that last period; she knew he had entirely given up completing the task of transcribing in clean copies all his work of the last few years, insignificant pieces by an old piano teacher, by a former village organist, which we could well imagine had scarcely any value in themselves, but which we did not disdain because they had so much value for him, having been his reason for living before he sacrificed them for his daughter, and which, for the most part not even written down, preserved only in his memory, a few jotted on scattered sheets of paper, unreadable, would remain unknown; my mother thought of that other, even crueler renunciation which had been forced upon M. Vinteuil, the renunciation of a future of decent and respectable happiness for his daughter; when she remembered all this extreme distress on the part of my aunts’ old piano teacher, she was moved by real sorrow and thought

with horror of the far more bitter sorrow that Mlle. Vinteuil must be feeling, mingled as it was with remorse at having more or less killed her father. “Poor M. Vinteuil,” my mother would say, “he lived and died for his daughter, without getting any reward for it. Will he get it after his death, and in what form? It could only come to him from her.”

At the back of Mlle. Vinteuil's drawing room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small portrait of her father which she quickly went to get at the moment when the rattle of a carriage could be heard from the road outside, then she threw herself down on a couch, drew a little table close to her, and set the portrait on it, just as M. Vinteuil had once placed beside him the piece that he wanted to play for my parents. Soon her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without standing up, both hands behind her head, and withdrew to the other end of the sofa as though to make room for her. But immediately she felt that by doing this she seemed to be forcing her friend into a position that might be annoying to her. She thought her friend might prefer to be some distance away from her on a chair, she thought she had been indiscreet, her tactful heart grew alarmed; moving so that she now occupied all the space on the sofa again, she closed her eyes and began yawning to imply that she had only stretched out like that because she was sleepy. Despite the crude and overweening familiarity with which she treated her friend, I recognized her father's obsequious and reticent gestures, his sudden qualms. Soon she stood up and pretended to be trying to close the shutters without success.

"No, leave them open, I'm hot," said her friend.

"But it's a nuisance, someone will see us," answered Mlle. Vinteuil.

But she must have guessed that her friend would think she had said these words only to goad her into answering with certain others that she in fact wanted to hear, but that out of discretion she wanted to leave her friend the initiative of uttering. And so her face, which I could not see, must have assumed the expression that my grandmother liked so much, as she quickly added:

"When I say see us, I mean see us reading; it's such a nuisance to think that whatever insignificant thing you may be doing, other eyes are watching you."

Out of an instinctive generosity and an involuntary courtesy she did not speak the premeditated words that she had felt were indispensable to the full realization of her desire. And time and again, deep inside her, a timid and supplicant virgin entreated and forced back a rough and swaggering brawler.

"Yes, I'm sure people are watching us at this hour, in this densely populated countryside," her friend said ironically. "And what if they are?" she added (thinking she had to give a mischievous, tender wink as she uttered these words, which she recited good-naturedly like a text she knew Mlle. Vinteuil liked, in a tone that she tried to make cynical). "If someone saw us, so much the better."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and stood up. Her scrupulous and sensitive heart did not know what words ought to come to her spontaneously to suit the scene that her senses demanded. She searched as far away from her true moral nature as she could to find a language that would fit the depraved girl she wanted to be, but the words she thought that girl would have uttered sincerely seemed false on her own lips. And the little she allowed herself to say was said in a stiff tone of voice in which her habitual shyness paralyzed her inclinations toward boldness, and was interlarded with: "You're not too cold, are you, you're not too warm, would you rather be alone and read?"

"Mademoiselle seems to be having rather libidinous thoughts this evening," she said at last, probably repeating a phrase she had heard before on her friend's lips.

Mlle. Vinteuil felt her friend plant a kiss in the opening of her crepe blouse, she gave a little cry, broke free, and they began chasing each other, leaping, fluttering their wide sleeves like wings, and clucking and cheeping like two amorous birds. At last Mlle. Vinteuil collapsed on the couch, with her friend's body covering her. But the friend had her back turned to the little table on which the old piano teacher's picture was placed. Mlle. Vinteuil realized that her friend would not see it if her attention was not drawn to it, and she said to her, as if she had only just noticed it:

"Oh! That picture of my father is looking at us. I don't know who could have put it there. I've told them a dozen times that it doesn't belong there."

I remembered that these were the same words M. Vinteuil had spoken to my father in connection with the piece of music. They were probably in the habit of using the portrait for ritual profanations, because her friend answered her in words which must have been part of her liturgical response:

"Oh, leave him where he is. He's not here to bother us anymore. Just think how he would start whining and try to make you put your coat on if he could see you there with the window open, the ugly old monkey."

Mlle. Vinteuil answered with words of gentle reproach—"Come, come"—which proved the goodness of her nature, not because they were dictated by the indignation she might have felt at this way of referring to her father (evidently this was a feeling that she had grown used to silencing in herself at these times, with the help of who knows what sophistical reasonings), but because they were a sort of curb that she herself, so as not to seem selfish, was applying to the pleasure that her friend was trying to give her. And, too, such smiling forbearance in response to these blasphemies, such a tender, hypocritical reproach, may have appeared to her frank and generous good nature a particularly unspeakable form, a saccharine form of the wickedness she was trying to emulate. But she could not resist the attraction of the pleasure she would feel at being treated with such tenderness by a woman so implacable toward a defenseless dead man; she jumped on her friend's knees, and chastely presented her forehead for a kiss, as a daughter might have done, with the delightful sensation that the two of them were achieving an extreme of cruelty by robbing M. Vinteuil, even in his grave, of his fatherhood. Her friend took her head in her hands and set a kiss on her forehead with a docility that came easily to her because of her great affection for Mlle. Vinteuil and her desire to bring some amusement into the orphan's life, now so sad.

"Do you know what I would like to do to him—that old horror?" she said, picking up the portrait.

And she murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil's ear something I could not hear.

"Oh, you wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't dare spit on him? On *that old thing*?" said her friend with deliberate savagery.

I did not hear any more, because Mlle. Vinteuil, with a manner that was weary, awkward, fussy, honest, and sad, came and closed the shutters and the window, but now I knew that for all the suffering which M. Vinteuil had endured on his daughter's account during his lifetime, this was what he had received from her as his reward after his death.

And yet I have thought, since then, that if M. Vinteuil had been able to witness this scene, he still might not have lost his faith in his daughter's good heart, and perhaps he would not even have been entirely wrong in that. It was true that in Mlle. Vinteuil's habits, the appearance of evil was so complete that it would have been hard to find it so perfectly represented in anyone other than a sadist; it is behind the footlights of a popular theater rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her; and almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama. In reality, even when she is not a sadist, a girl might perhaps have failings as cruel as those of Mlle. Vinteuil with regard to the memory and wishes of her dead father, but she would not deliberately express them in an act of such rudimentary and naive symbolism; what was criminal about her behavior would be more veiled from the eyes of others and even from her own, and she would do evil without admitting it to herself. But, beyond appearances, even in Mlle. Vinteuil's heart, the evil, in the beginning at least, was probably not unmixed. A sadist of her sort is an artist of evil, something that an entirely bad creature could not be, for then evil would not be exterior to her, it would seem to her quite natural, would not even be distinguishable from her; and as for virtue, memory of the dead, and filial tenderness, since she would not be devoutly attached to them she would take no sacrilegious pleasure in profaning them. Sadists of Mlle. Vinteuil's kind are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous that even sensual pleasure seems to them something bad, the privilege of the wicked. And when they allow themselves to yield to it for a moment, they are trying to step into the skin of the wicked and to make their partner do so as well, so as to have the illusion, for a moment, of escaping from their scrupulous and tender soul into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I understood how much she longed for it when I saw how impossible it was for her to succeed in it. At the very moment when she wanted to be so different from her father, what she at once suggested to me were the old piano teacher's ways of thinking, of speaking. Far more than his photograph, what she really desecrated, what she was really using for her pleasures, though it remained between them and her and kept her from enjoying them directly, was the resemblance between her face and his, his own mother's blue eyes which he had handed down to her like a family jewel, those kind gestures which interposed between Mlle. Vinteuil's vice and herself a style of talking, a mentality that was not made for it and that prevented her from recognizing it as something very different from the numberless obligatory courtesies to which she usually devoted herself. It was not evil which gave her the idea of pleasure, which seemed agreeable to her; it was pleasure that seemed to her malign. And since each time she indulged in it, it was accompanied by these bad thoughts which were absent the rest of the time from her virtuous soul, she came to see pleasure as something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that her friend was not fundamentally bad and was not really sincere when she talked to her in this blasphemous way. At least she had the pleasure of kissing her friend's face with its smiles and glances that might have been feigned but were similar in their depraved and base expression to the smiles and glances of, not a kind, suffering

person, but one given to cruelty and pleasure. She could imagine for a moment that she was really playing the games that would have been played, with so unnatural a confederate, by a girl who actually had these barbaric feelings toward her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought that evil was a state so rare, so extraordinary, so disorienting, and to which it was so restful to emigrate, if she had been able to discern in herself, as in everyone else, that indifference to the sufferings one causes which, whatever other names one gives it, is the terrible and lasting form assumed by cruelty.

If it was fairly simple to go the Méséglise way, it was another matter to go the Guermantes way, because the walk was long and we wanted to be sure what sort of weather we would be having. When we seemed to be entering a succession of fine days; when Françoise, desperate because not a single drop of water had fallen on the "poor crops," and seeing only rare white clouds swimming on the calm blue surface of the sky, exclaimed with a moan: "Why, they look just like a lot of dog-fishes playing about up yonder showing us their muzzles! Ah, they never think to make it rain a little for the poor farmers! And then as soon as the wheat is well up, that's when the rain will begin to fall pit-a-pat pit-a-pat without a break, and think no more of where it's falling than if 'twas falling on the sea"; when my father had been given the same unvarying favorable responses by both the gardener and the barometer, then we would say over dinner: "Tomorrow, if the weather's the same, we'll go the Guermantes way." We would leave right after lunch by the little garden gate and we would tumble out into the rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle and filled with different varieties of grasses among which two or three wasps would spend the day botanizing, a street as odd as its name, which it seemed to me was the source of its curious peculiarities and its cantankerous personality, a street one would seek in vain in Combray now, for on its old path the school now stands. But in my daydreams (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc,[49] who, thinking they will find under a Renaissance rood screen or a seventeenth-century altar the traces of a Romanesque choir, restore the whole edifice to the state in which it must have been in the twelfth century) I do not leave one stone of the new structure standing, I pierce through it and "reinstate" the rue des Perchamps. And for these reconstructions I also have more precise data than restorers generally have: a few pictures preserved by my memory, perhaps the last still in existence now, and destined soon to be obliterated, of what Combray was during the time of my childhood; and, because Combray itself drew them in me before disappearing, they are as moving—if one may compare an obscure portrait to those glorious representations of which my grandmother liked to give me reproductions—as those old engravings of the Last Supper or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, da Vinci's masterpiece and the portal of Saint Mark's.[50]

In the rue de l'Oiseau we would pass in front of the old Hôtellerie de Oiseau Flesché, which in the seventeenth century had sometimes seen in its great courtyard the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency when they had to come to Combray for some dispute with their tenants or to accept their homage. We would reach the mall, among whose trees the Saint-Hilaire steeple would appear. And I would have liked to be able to sit down and stay there the whole day reading while I listened to the bells; because it was so lovely and tranquil that, when the hour rang, you would have said not that it broke the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of what it contained and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking precision of a person who has nothing else to do, had merely—in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops which had slowly and naturally collected there in the heat—pressed at the proper moment the fullness of the silence.

The greatest charm of the Guermantes way was that we had next to us, almost the whole time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, on a footbridge called the Pont-Vieux. The day after we arrived, following the sermon on Easter Sunday, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see, amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning of a great festival, when the sumptuous preparations make the household utensils that are still lying about appear more sordid than usual, the river already promenading along dressed in sky blue between lands still black and bare, accompanied only by a flock of cuckooflowers that had arrived early and primroses ahead of their time, while here and there a violet with a blue beak bowed its stem under the weight of the drop of fragrance it held in its throat. The Pont-Vieux led to a towpath which at this spot would be draped in summer with the blue foliage of a hazel under which a fisherman in a straw hat had taken root. In Combray, where I knew which particular farrier or grocer's boy was concealed within the verger's uniform or choirboy's surplice, this fisherman is the only person whose identity I never discovered. He must have known my parents, because he would raise his hat when we passed; I would then try to ask his name, but they would signal me to keep quiet so as not to frighten the fish. We would enter the towpath, which ran along an embankment a few feet above the stream; on the other side the bank was low, extending in vast meadows to the village and to the train station far away. They were strewn with the remains, half buried in the grass, of the château of the old counts of Combray, who during the Middle Ages had had the stream of the Vivonne as defense on this side against the attacks of the lords of Guermantes and the abbots of Martinville. These remains were now no more than a few fragments of towers embossing the grassland, barely apparent, a few battlements from which in the old days the crossbowman would hurl stones, from which the watchman would keep an eye on Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleau-l'Exempt, all of them vassal lands of Guermantes among which Combray was enclosed, today level with the grass, gazed down upon by the children of the friars' school, who came here to learn their lessons or play at recreation time—a past that had almost descended into the earth, lying by the edge of the water like some hiker enjoying the cool air, but giving me a great deal to think about, making me add to the little town of today, under the name of Combray, a very different town, captivating my thoughts with its incomprehensible face of long ago, which it half concealed under the buttercups. There were a great many of them in this spot, which they had chosen for their games on the grass, solitary, in couples, in groups, yellow as the yellow of an egg, shining all the more, it seemed to me, because, since I could not channel the pleasure which the sight of them gave me into any impulse to taste them, I would let it accumulate in their golden surface, until it became potent enough to produce some useless beauty; and I did this starting from my earliest childhood, when I would stretch my arms out toward them from the towpath though I could not yet correctly spell their pretty name,[51] the name of some prince from a French fairy tale, whereas perhaps they had come from Asia many centuries ago, but were now naturalized for good in the village, content with the modest horizon, liking the sun and the water's edge, faithful to the little view of the station, but still retaining, like some of our old paintings in their folksy simplicity, a poetic luster of the Orient.

I liked to look at the carafes which the boys put in the Vivonne to catch little fish, and which were filled by the river that in turn enclosed them, so that they became at once a "container" with transparent sides like hardened water and a "content" immersed in a larger container of coursing liquid crystal, and evoked the image of coolness more deliciously and vexingly than they would have done on a table laid for dinner, by showing it only in that perpetual alliterative flight between the water without consistency in which my hands could not capture it and the glass without fluidity in which my palate could not enjoy it. I promised myself I would return there later with some fishing lines; I persuaded them to take out a bit of bread from the provisions for our snack; I threw it into the Vivonne in pellets that seemed sufficient to provoke a phenomenon of supersaturation, for the water immediately solidified around them in ovoid clusters of starving tadpoles which until then it had no doubt been holding in solution, invisible, on the point of beginning to crystallize.

Soon the course of the Vivonne is obstructed by water plants. First they appear singly, like this water lily, for instance, which was allowed so little rest by the current in the midst of which it was unfortunately placed that, like a mechanically activated ferry boat, it would approach one bank only to return to the one from which it had come, eternally crossing back and forth again. Pushed toward the bank, its peduncle would unfold, lengthen, flow out, reach the extreme limit of its tension at the edge where the current would pick it up again, then the green cord would fold up on itself and bring the poor plant back to what may all the more properly be called its point of departure because it did not stay there a second without starting off from it again in a repetition of the same maneuver. I would find it again, walk after walk, always in the same situation, reminding me of certain neurasthenics among whose number my grandfather would count my aunt Léonie, who present year after year the unchanging spectacle of the bizarre habits they believe, each time, they are about to shake off and which they retain forever; caught in the machinery of their maladies and their manias, the efforts with which they struggle uselessly to abandon them only guarantee the functioning and activate the triggers of their strange, unavoidable, and morose regimes. This water lily was the same, and it was also like one of those miserable creatures whose singular torment, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have asked the tormented creature himself to recount its cause and its particularities at greater length had Virgil, striding on ahead, not forced him to hurry after immediately, as my parents did me.

But farther on the current slows down, it crosses an estate to which access was opened to the public by the man who owned it, who had delighted in creating works of aquatic horticulture, turning the little pools formed by the Vivonne into true flowering gardens of white water lilies. Because the banks were heavily wooded here, the trees' great shadows gave the water a depth that was usually dark green although sometimes, when we came home on an evening that was calm again after a stormy afternoon, I saw that it was a light, raw blue verging on violet, cloisonné in appearance and Japanese in style. Here and there on the surface,

the flower of a water lily blushed like a strawberry, with a scarlet heart, white on its edges. Farther off, the more numerous flowers were paler, less smooth, coarser-grained, creased, and grouped by chance in coils so graceful that one thought one saw, floating adrift as after the melancholy dismantling of some gay party, loosened garlands of moss roses. In another place one corner seemed reserved for the various common species, of a tidy white or pink like dame's rocket, washed clean like porcelain with housewifely care, while a little farther off, others, pressed against one another in a true floating flower border, suggested garden pansies that had come like butterflies to rest their glossy blue-tinged wings on the transparent obliquity of that watery bed; of that celestial bed as well: for it gave the flowers a soil of a color more precious, more affecting than the color of the flowers themselves; and, whether it sparkled beneath the water lilies in the afternoon in a kaleidoscope of silent, watchful, and mobile contentment, or whether toward evening it filled, like some distant port, with the rose and reverie of the sunset, ceaselessly changing so as to remain in harmony, around the more fixed colors of the corollas themselves, with all that is most profound, most fleeting, most mysterious—all that is infinite—in the hour, it seemed to have caused them to flower in the middle of the sky itself.

As it left this park, the Vivonne flowed freely again. How often did I see, and want to imitate, as soon as I should be at liberty to live as I chose, a rower who, having let go of his oars, had lain flat on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, and allowing it to drift, seeing only the sky gliding slowly above him, bore on his face a foretaste of happiness and peace!

We would sit down among the irises at the edge of the water. One idle cloud would linger in the holiday sky. Now and then, oppressed by boredom, a carp would stand up from the water with an anxious gasp. It was time for our snack. Before starting off again we would stay there on the grass for a long time eating fruit, bread, and chocolate, and we would hear, coming all the way to us, horizontal, weakened, but still dense and metallic, the peals of the Saint Hilaire bell which had not melted into the air they had been traversing for so long and which, ribbed by the successive palpitation of all their waves of sound, vibrated as they brushed over the flowers, at our feet.

Sometimes, at the edge of the water and surrounded by woods, we would come upon what is called a "vacation house,"[52] isolated and secluded, seeing nothing of the world but the river that bathed its feet. A young woman whose pensive face and elegant veils did not belong to this region and who had probably come to "bury herself" here, as the expression has it, to taste the bitter sweetness of feeling that her name, and more importantly the name of the one whose heart she had not been able to hold fast, were unknown here, stood framed in a window that did not allow her to look farther than the boat moored near the door. She would absently lift her eyes as she heard, behind the trees along the riverbank, the voices of people passing of whom, even before she glimpsed their faces, she could be certain that they had never known the faithless one nor ever would know him, that nothing in their past bore his imprint, that nothing in their future would have occasion to receive it. One sensed that, in her renunciation, she had deliberately withdrawn from places where she might at least have glimpsed the man she loved, in favor of these places which had never seen him. And I watched her, as she came back from some walk on a path along which she knew he would not pass, drawing from her resigned hands long gloves of a useless grace.

Never in our walk along the Guermantes way could we go as far as the sources of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought and which had in my mind an existence so abstract, so ideal, that I had been as surprised when I was told they could be found within the *département* , at a certain distance in miles from Combray, as I was the day I learned there was another precise spot on the earth where the opening lay, in ancient times, of the entrance to the Underworld. Never, either, could we go all the way to the end point that I would so much have liked to reach, all the way to Guermantes. I knew this was where the castellans, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, lived, I knew they were real and presently existing figures, but when I thought about them, I pictured them to myself sometimes made of tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in our church's *Coronation of Esther*, sometimes in changing colors, like Gilbert the Bad in the stained-glass window where he turned from cabbage green to plum blue, depending on whether I was still in front of the holy water or was reaching our seats, sometimes completely impalpable like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestor of the Guermantes family, which our magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or up to the ceiling—but always wrapped in the mystery of Merovingian times and bathing as though in a sunset in the orange light emanating from that syllable *antes*. But if despite this they were, as duke and duchess, real human beings for me, even if strange ones, on the other hand their ducal person was inordinately distended, became immaterial, in order to contain within itself this Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all this sunlit "Guermantes way," the course of the Vivonne, its water lilies and its tall trees, and so many lovely afternoons. And I knew that they did not merely bear the title of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century when, after uselessly trying to defeat its former lords, they had formed an alliance with them through marriages, they were also Comtes de Combray, and thus the foremost citizens of Combray, and yet the only ones who did not live there. Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray in the midst of their name, of their person, and no doubt actually having within them that strange and pious sadness that was special to Combray; proprietors in the town, but not of a private house, probably dwelling outdoors, in the street, between sky and earth, like Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the windows of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the reverse side, of black lake, if I raised my head as I went to get salt at Camus's.

And along the Guermantes way I would sometimes pass damp little enclosures over which climbed clusters of dark flowers. I would stop, thinking I was about to acquire some precious idea, because it seemed to me that there before my eyes I possessed a fragment of that fluvial region I had so much wanted to know ever since I had seen it described by one of my favorite writers. And it was with this, with its imaginary ground traversed by currents of seething water, that Guermantes, changing its appearance in my mind, was identified when I heard Dr. Percepied talk to us about the flowers and beautiful spring waters that could be seen in the park of their country house. I dreamed that Mme. de Guermantes had summoned me there, smitten with a sudden fancy for me; all day long she would fish for trout with me. And in the evening, holding me by the hand as we walked past the little gardens of her vassals, she would show me the flowers that leaned their violet and red stems along the low walls, and would teach me their names. She would make me tell her the subjects of the poems that I intended to compose. And these dreams warned me that since I wanted to be a writer someday, it was time to find out what I meant to write. But as soon as I asked myself this, trying to find a subject in which I could anchor some infinite philosophical meaning, my mind would stop functioning, I could no longer see anything but empty space before my attentive eyes, I felt that I had no talent or perhaps a disease of the brain kept it from being born. Sometimes I counted on my father to make it all come out right. He was so powerful, in such favor with people in office, that he had succeeded in having us transgress the laws that Françoise had taught me to consider more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, to procure for our house alone, in the whole neighborhood, a year's postponement of the work of "replastering," to obtain permission from the minister for Mme. Sazerat's son, who wanted to go take the waters, to pass his *baccalauréat* two months ahead of time, in the series of candidates whose names began with *A,* instead of waiting for the turn of the *S*s. If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by bandits, convinced that my father was in too close communication with the supreme powers, had letters of recommendation to the Good Lord too irresistible for my illness or captivity to be anything but empty simulacra that posed no danger to me, I would have waited calmly for the inevitable hour of my return to the correct reality, the hour of my rescue or recovery; perhaps my lack of talent, the black hole that opened in my mind when I looked for the subject of my future writings, was also merely an illusion without substance, and this illusion would cease through the intervention of my father, who must have agreed with the government and Providence that I would be the foremost writer of the day. But at other times, as my parents grew impatient at the sight of me lingering behind and not following them, my present life, instead of seeming to me an artificial creation of my father's that he could modify as he liked, appeared to me on the contrary to be included in a reality that had not been made for me, against which there was no recourse, within which I had no ally, which concealed nothing beyond itself. At those times it seemed to me that I existed the same way other men did, that I would grow old, that I would die like them, and that among them I was simply one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, discouraged, I would give up literature forever, despite the encouragement I had been given by Bloch. This intimate, immediate awareness I had of the worthlessness of my ideas prevailed against all the praise that might be heaped on me, as do, in a wicked man whose good deeds are universally commended, the qualms of his conscience.

One day my mother said to me: "You're always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, because Dr. Percepied took such good care of her four years ago she's coming to Combray to attend his daughter's wedding. You'll be able to see her at the ceremony." It was from Dr. Percepied, in fact, that I had heard the most talk about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shown us an issue of an illustrated magazine in which she was depicted in the costume she wore to a fancy-dress ball at the home of the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly during the wedding service, a movement made by the verger as he shifted his position allowed me to see, sitting in a chapel, a blond lady with a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a full tie of smooth, shiny, new mauve silk, and a little pimple at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which

was red, as though she were very warm, I could distinguish bits of resemblance, diluted and barely perceptible, to the picture I had been shown, especially because the particular features that I observed in her, if I tried to enunciate them, were formulated in exactly the same words—a large nose, blue eyes—which Dr. Percepied had used when he described the Duchesse de Guermantes in my presence, I said to myself: "That lady looks like Mme. de Guermantes"; now the chapel where she was attending Mass was that of Gilbert the Bad, under the flat tombstones of which, golden and distended like cells of honey, rested the former counts of Brabant, and which, I recalled, was reserved, according to what I had been told, for the Guermantes family when any one of its members came to Combray for a ceremony; there probably could not be more than one woman who resembled Mme. de Guermantes's picture, who on that day, the very day when she was in fact supposed to come, was in that chapel: it was she! I was very disappointed. My disappointment came from the fact that I had never noticed, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colors of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in another century, of a material different from that of other living people. I had never realized that she might have a red face, a mauve tie like Mme. Sazerat, and the oval of her cheeks reminded me so much of people I had seen at our house that the suspicion touched me, dissipating immediately, however, that this lady, in her generative principle, in all her molecules, was perhaps not essentially the Duchesse de Guermantes, that instead, her body, unaware of the name applied to it, belonged to a certain female type that also included the wives of doctors and shopkeepers. "So that's Mme. de Guermantes—that's what she is, that's all she is!" said the attentive and astonished expression with which I contemplated an image of course quite unrelated to those which under the same name of Mme. de Guermantes had appeared so many times in my daydreams, since this one, this particular one, had not like the others been arbitrarily created by me, but had leaped to my eyes for the first time just a moment before, in the church; an image which was not of the same kind, was not colorable at will like those which had so readily absorbed the orange tint of a syllable, but was so real that everything, even the little pimple flaring up at the corner of her nose, attested to its subjection to the laws of life, just as, in a transformation scene in a theater, a fold of the fairy's dress, a trembling of her little finger, betray the physical presence of a living actress, whereas we had not been sure if we were not looking at a simple projection of light.

But at the same time, I was trying to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned into my vision (perhaps because it was they that had first reached it, that had made the first notch in it, at a moment when I had not yet had time to imagine that the woman who appeared before me could be Mme. de Guermantes), to this entirely recent, unchangeable image, the idea: "It's Mme. de Guermantes," without managing to do more than maneuver it in front of the image, like two disks separated by a gap. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she actually existed outside of me, acquired from this an even greater power over my imagination, which, paralyzed for a moment by this contact with a reality so different from what it had expected, began to react and say to me: "Glorious since before Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes is a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people here."

And—oh, the marvelous independence of the human gaze, tied to the face by a cord so lax, so long, so extensible that it can travel out alone far away from it—while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead, her gaze strolled here and there, climbed up the pillars, paused even on me like a ray of sunlight wandering through the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment I received its caress, seemed to me conscious. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained motionless, sitting there like a mother who does not appear to see the bold pranks and indiscreet enterprises of her children, who play and call out to people she does not know, it was impossible for me to tell if she approved or disapproved, in the idleness of her soul, of the vagabondage of her gaze.

I felt it was important that she not leave before I had looked at her enough, because I remembered that for years now I had considered the sight of her eminently desirable, and I did not detach my eyes from her, as if each gaze could physically carry away, and put in reserve inside me, the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, all the particular details that seemed to me so many precious, authentic, and singular pieces of information about her face. Now that I was impelled to consider it beautiful by all the thoughts I had brought to bear on it—and perhaps most of all by what is a kind of instinct to preserve the best parts of ourselves, by the desire we always have not to be disappointed—placing her once again (since she and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had evoked until then were one and the same) above the rest of humanity among whom the pure and simple sight of her body had for a moment made me confound her, I was irritated to hear people around me say: "She's better looking than Mme. Sazerat, she's better looking than Mlle. Vinteuil," as if she were comparable to them. And as my gaze stopped at her blond hair, her blue eyes, the fastening of her collar, and omitted the features that might have reminded me of other faces, I exclaimed in front of this sketch, deliberately incomplete: "How beautiful she is! How noble! What I see before me is indeed a proud Guermantes and a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant!" And the attention with which I illuminated her face isolated her to such an extent that today, if I think back to that ceremony, it is impossible for me to see a single one of the people who were present except for her and the verger who responded affirmatively when I asked him if that lady was really Mme. de Guermantes. But I can still see her, especially at the moment when the procession entered the sacristy, which was lit by the hot and intermittent sun of a day of wind and storm, and in which Mme. de Guermantes found herself surrounded by all those people of Combray whose names she did not even know, but whose inferiority too loudly proclaimed her supremacy for her not to feel a sincere benevolence toward them, and whom, besides, she hoped to impress even more by her good grace and simplicity. Thus, not being able to bestow those deliberate gazes charged with specific meaning which we address to someone we know, but only to allow her distracted thoughts to break free incessantly before her in a wave of blue light which she could not contain, she did not want that wave to disturb or appear to disdain those common people whom it encountered in passing, whom it touched again and again. I can still see, above her silky, swelling mauve tie, the gentle surprise in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to intend it for anyone but so that all might take their share of it, the slightly shy smile of a sovereign who looks as though she is apologizing to her vassals and loves them. That smile fell on me, who had not taken my eyes off her. Recalling, then, the gaze she had rested on me during the Mass, as blue as a ray of sunlight passing through Gilbert the Bad's window, I said to myself: "Why, she's actually paying attention to me." I believed that she liked me, that she would still be thinking of me after she had left the church, that because of me perhaps she would be sad that evening at Guermantes. And immediately I loved her, because if it may sometimes be enough for us to fall in love with a woman if she looks at us with contempt, as I had thought Mlle. Swann had done, and if we think she will never belong to us, sometimes, too, it may be enough if she looks at us with kindness, as Mme. de Guermantes was doing, and if we think she may someday belong to us. Her eyes turned as blue as a periwinkle which was impossible to pick, yet which she had dedicated to me; and the sun, threatened by a cloud but still beating down with all its strength on the square and in the sacristy, gave a geranium flesh tint to the red carpets that had been laid on the ground for the solemnities and over which Mme. de Guermantes advanced smiling, and added to their woolly weave a rosy velvet, an epidermis of light, the sort of tenderness, the sort of grave sweetness amid pomp and joy that characterize certain pages of *Lohengrin*,[53] certain paintings by Carpaccio,[54] and that explain why Baudelaire[55] was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet *delicious*.

How much more distressing still, after that day, during my walks along the Guermantes way, did it seem to me than it had seemed before to have no aptitude for literature, and to have to give up all hope of ever being a famous writer! The sorrow I felt over this, as I daydreamed alone, a little apart from the others, made me suffer so much that in order not to feel it anymore, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the face of pain, would stop thinking altogether about poems, novels, a poetic future on which my lack of talent forbade me to depend. Then, quite apart from all these literary preoccupations and not connected to them in any way, suddenly a roof, a glimmer of sun on a stone, the smell of the road would stop me because of a particular pleasure they gave me, and also because they seemed to be concealing, beyond what I could see, something which they were inviting me to come take and which despite my efforts I could not manage to discover. Since I felt that it could be found within them, I would stay there, motionless, looking, breathing, trying to go with my thoughts beyond the image or the smell. And if I had to catch up with my grandfather, continue on my way, I would try to find them again by closing my eyes; I would concentrate on recalling precisely the line of the roof, the shade of the stone which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me so full, so ready to open, to yield me the thing for which they themselves were merely a cover. Of course it was not impressions of this kind that could give me back the hope I had lost, of succeeding in becoming a writer and a poet someday, because they were always tied to a particular object with no intellectual value and no reference to any abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity, and so distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt each time I looked for a philosophical subject for a great literary work. But so arduous was the task imposed on my consciousness by the impressions I received from form, fragrance or color—to try to perceive what was concealed behind them—that I would soon look for excuses that would allow me to save myself from this effort and spare myself this fatigue. Fortunately, my parents would call me, I would feel I did not have the tranquillity I needed

at the moment for pursuing my search in a useful way, and that it would be better not to think about it anymore until I was back at home, and not to fatigue myself beforehand to no purpose. And so I would stop concerning myself with this unknown thing that was enveloped in a form or a fragrance, feeling quite easy in my mind since I was bringing it back to the house protected by the covering of images under which I would find it alive, like the fish that, on days when I had been allowed to go fishing, I would carry home in my creel covered by a layer of grass that kept them fresh. Once I was back at the house I would think about other things, and so there would accumulate in my mind (as in my room the flowers I had gathered on my walks or objects I had been given) a stone on which a glimmer of light played, a roof, the sound of a bell, a smell of leaves, many different images beneath which the reality I sensed but did not have enough determination to discover had died long before. Once, however—when our walk had extended far beyond its usual duration and we were very happy to encounter halfway home, as the afternoon was ending, Dr. Percepied, who, going past at full speed in his carriage, recognized us and invited us to climb in with him—I had an impression of this kind and did not abandon it without studying it a little. They had had me climb up next to the coachman, we were going like the wind because, before returning to Combray, the doctor still had to stop at Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient at whose door it had been agreed that we would wait for him. At the bend of a road I suddenly experienced that special pleasure which was unlike any other, when I saw the two steeples of Martinville, shining in the setting sun and appearing to change position with the motion of our carriage and the windings of the road, and then the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which, though separated from them by a hill and a valley and situated on a higher plateau in the distance, seemed to be right next to them.

As I observed, as I noted the shape of their spires, the shifting of their lines, the sunlight on their surfaces, I felt that I was not reaching the full depth of my impression, that something was behind that motion, that brightness, something which they seemed at once to contain and conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we seemed to approach them so slowly, that I was surprised when we stopped a few moments later in front of the Martinville church. I did not know why I had taken such pleasure in the sight of them on the horizon and the obligation to try to discover the reason seemed to me quite painful; I wanted to hold in reserve in my head those lines moving in the sun, and not think about them anymore now. And it is quite likely that had I done so, the two steeples would have gone forever to join the many trees, rooftops, fragrances, sounds, that I had distinguished from others because of the obscure pleasure they gave me which I never thoroughly studied. I got down to talk to my parents while we waited for the doctor. Then we set off again, I was back in my place on the seat, I turned my head to see the steeples again, a little later glimpsing them one last time at a bend in the road. Since the coachman, who did not seem inclined to talk, had hardly answered anything I said, I was obliged, for lack of other company, to fall back on my own and try to recall my steeples. Soon their lines and their sunlit surfaces split apart, as if they were a sort of bark, a little of what was hidden from me inside them appeared to me, I had a thought which had not existed a moment before, which took shape in words in my head, and the pleasure I had just recently experienced at the sight of them was so increased by this that, seized by a sort of drunkenness, I could no longer think of anything else. At that moment, as we were already far away from Martinville, turning my head I caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had already set. At moments the bends of the road would hide them from me, then they showed themselves one last time, and finally I did not see them again.

Without saying to myself that what was hidden behind the steeples of Martinville had to be something analogous to a pretty sentence, since it had appeared to me in the form of words that gave me pleasure, I asked the doctor for a pencil and some paper and I composed, despite the jolts of the carriage, and in order to ease my conscience and yield to my enthusiasm, the following little piece that I have since found again and that I have not had to submit to more than a few changes:

"Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and appearing lost in the open country, the two steeples of Martinville ascended toward the sky. Soon we saw three: wheeling around boldly to position itself opposite them, the laggard steeple of Vieuxvicq had come along to join them. The minutes were passing, we were going fast, and yet the three steeples were still far away ahead of us, like three birds poised on the plain, motionless, distinguishable in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq moved away, receded into the distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, illuminated by the light of the setting sun, which even at that distance I saw playing and smiling on their sloping sides. We had taken so long approaching them that I was thinking about the time we would still need in order to reach them, when suddenly the carriage turned and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so roughly in front of it that we had only just time to stop in order not to run into the porch. We continued on our way; we had already left Martinville a little while before, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch us flee, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq still waved good-bye with their sunlit tops. At times one of them would draw aside so that the other two could glimpse us again for an instant; but the road changed direction, they swung around in the light like three golden pivots and disappeared from my gaze. But a little later, when we were already close to Combray, and the sun had set, I caught sight of them one last time from very far away, seeming now no more than three flowers painted on the sky above the low line of the fields. They reminded me, too, of the three young girls in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place where darkness was already falling; and while we moved off at a gallop, I saw them timidly seek their way and, after some awkward stumbling of their noble silhouettes, press against one another, slip behind one another, now forming, against the still pink sky, no more than a single black shape, charming and resigned, and fade away into the night." I never thought of this page again, but at that moment, when in the corner of the seat where the doctor's coachman usually placed in a basket the poultry he had bought at the market in Martinville, I had finished writing it, I was so happy, I felt it had so perfectly relieved me of those steeples and what they had been hiding behind them, that, as if I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during those walks, I had been able to dream about what a pleasure it would be to be a friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, to fish for trout, to go out in a boat on the Vivonne, and, greedy for happiness, ask no more from life in those moments than for it always to be made up of a succession of happy afternoons. But when on the way back I saw on the left a farm which was fairly distant from two others very close to each other, and from which, in order to enter Combray, one had only to go down an avenue of oaks bordered on one side by meadows, each of which was part of a little enclosure and was planted at equal intervals with apple trees that wore, when they were lit by the setting sun, the Japanese design of their shadows, my heart would abruptly begin to beat faster, I would know that within half an hour we would be home and that, as was the rule on the days when we had gone the Guermantes way and dinner was served later, they would send me to bed as soon as I had had my soup, so that my mother, kept at the table as though there were company for dinner, would not come up to say goodnight to me in my bed. The region of sadness I had just entered was as distinct from the region into which I had hurled myself with such joy only a moment before, as in certain skies a band of pink is separated as though by a line from a band of green or black. One sees a bird fly into the pink, it is about to reach the end of it, it is nearly touching the black, then it has entered it. The desires that had surrounded me a short time ago, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to be happy, were so far behind me now that their fulfillment would not have brought me any pleasure. How I would have given all that up in order to be able to cry all night in Mama's arms! I was trembling, I did not take my anguished eyes off my mother's face, which would not be appearing that evening in the room where I could already see myself in my thoughts, I wanted to die. And that state of mind would continue until the following day, when the morning rays, like the gardener, would lean their bars against the wall clothed in nasturtiums that climbed up to my window, and I would jump out of bed to hurry down into the garden, without remembering, now, that evening would ever bring back with it the hour for leaving my mother. And so it was from the Guermantes way that I learned to distinguish those states of mind that follow one another in me, during certain periods, and that even go so far as to share out each day among them, one returning to drive out the other, with the punctuality of a fever; contiguous, but so exterior to one another, so lacking in means of communication among them, that I can no longer comprehend, no longer even picture to myself in one, what I desired, or dreaded, or accomplished in the other.

And so the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way remain for me linked to many of the little events of that life which, of all the various lives we lead concurrently, is the most abundant in vicissitudes, the richest in episodes, I mean our intellectual life. No doubt it progresses within us imperceptibly, and the truths that have changed its meaning and its appearance for us, that have opened new paths to us, we had been preparing to discover for a long time; but we did so without knowing it; and for us they date only from the day, from the minute in which they became visible. The flowers that played on the grass then, the water that flowed past in the sunlight, the whole landscape that surrounded their appearance continues to accompany the memory of them with its unconscious or abstracted face; and certainly when they were slowly studied by that humble passerby, that child dreaming—as a king is studied by a memorialist lost in the crowd—that corner of nature, that bit of garden could not have believed it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the fragrance of hawthorn that forages along the hedge where the sweetbriers will soon replace it, a sound of echoless steps on the gravel of a path, a bubble formed against a water plant by the current of the stream and bursting immediately—my exaltation has borne them along with it and managed to

carry them across so many years in succession, while the paths round about have disappeared and those who walked on them have died, and the memory of those who walked on them. At times the piece of landscape thus transported into the present detaches itself in such isolation from everything else that it floats uncertain in my mind like a flowery Delos,[56] while I cannot say from which country, which time—perhaps quite simply which dream—it comes. But it is most especially as deep layers of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I must think of the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along them, that the things and people they revealed to me are the only ones that I still take seriously today and that still bring me joy. Whether it is that the faith which creates has dried up in me, or that reality takes shape in memory alone, the flowers I am shown today for the first time do not seem to me to be real flowers. The Méséglise way with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple trees, the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water lilies and buttercups, formed for me for all time the contours of the countrysides where I would like to live, where I demand above all else that I may go fishing, drift about in a boat, see ruins of Gothic fortifications, and find among the wheat fields a church, like Saint-André-des-Champs, monumental, rustic, and golden as a haystack; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple trees that I still happen, when traveling, to come upon in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past, communicate immediately with my heart. And yet, because places have something individual about them, when I am seized by the desire to see the Guermantes way again, you would not satisfy it by taking me to the bank of a river where the water lilies were just as beautiful, more beautiful than in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening—at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which later emigrates into love, and may become forever inseparable from it—I would have wished that the mother who came to say goodnight to me would be one more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No; just as what I needed so that I could go to sleep happy, with that untroubled peace which no mistress has been able to give me since that time because one doubts them even at the moment one believes in them, and can never possess their hearts as I received in a kiss my mother's heart, complete, without the reservation of an afterthought, without the residue of an intention that was not for me—was that it should be her, that she should incline over me that face marked below the eye by something which was, it seems, a blemish, and which I loved as much as the rest, so what I want to see again is the Guermantes way that I knew, with the farm that is not very far from the two that come after pressed so close together, at the entrance to the avenue of oaks; those meadows on which, when the sun turns them reflective as a pond, the leaves of the apple trees are sketched, that landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night in my dreams, clasps me with an almost uncanny power and which I can no longer recover when I wake up. No doubt, by virtue of having forever indissolubly united in me different impressions merely because they had made me experience them at the same time, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way exposed me, for the future, to many disappointments and even to many mistakes. For often I have wanted to see a person again without discerning that it was simply because she reminded me of a hedge of hawthorns, and I have been led to believe, to make someone else believe, in a revival of affection, by what was simply a desire to travel. But because of that very fact, too, and by persisting in those of my impressions of today to which they may be connected, they give them foundations, depth, a dimension lacking from the others. They add to them, too, a charm, a meaning that is for me alone. When on summer evenings the melodious sky growls like a wild animal and everyone grumbles at the storm, it is because of the Méséglise way that I am the only one in ecstasy inhaling, through the noise of the falling rain, the smell of invisible, enduring lilacs.

Thus I would often lie until morning thinking back to the time at Combray, to my sad sleepless evenings, to the many days, too, whose image had been restored to me more recently by the taste—what they would have called at Combray the "fragrance"—of a cup of tea, and, by an association of memories, to what, many years after leaving that little town, I had learned, about a love affair Swann had had before I was born, with that precision of detail which is sometimes easier to obtain for the lives of people who died centuries ago than for the lives of our best friends, and which seems as impossible as it once seemed impossible to speak from one town to another—as long as we do not know about the expedient by which that impossibility was circumvented. All these memories added to one another now formed a single mass, but one could still distinguish between them—between the oldest, and those that were more recent, born of a fragrance, and then those that were only memories belonging to another person from whom I had learned them—if not fissures, if not true faults, at least that veining, that variegation of coloring, which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, reveal differences in origin, in age, in "formation."

Of course by the time morning approached, the brief uncertainty of my waking would long since have dissipated. I knew which room I was actually in, I had reconstructed it around me in the darkness and—either by orienting myself with memory alone, or by making use, as a clue, of a faint glimmer that I perceived, under which I placed the casement curtains—I had reconstructed it entirely and furnished it like an architect and a decorator who retain the original openings of the windows and doors, I had put back the mirrors and restored the chest of drawers to its usual place. But scarcely had the daylight—and no longer the reflection of a last ember on the brass curtain rod which I had mistaken for it—traced on the darkness, as though in chalk, its first white, correcting ray, than the window along with its curtains would leave the doorframe in which I had mistakenly placed it, while, to make room for it, the desk which my memory had clumsily moved there would fly off at top speed, pushing the fireplace before it and thrusting aside the wall of the passageway; a small courtyard would extend in the spot where only a moment before the dressing room had been, and the dwelling I had rebuilt in the darkness would have gone off to join the dwellings glimpsed in the maelstrom of my awakening, put to flight by the pale sign traced above the curtains by the raised finger of the dawn.

PART II

Swann in Love

TO BELONG TO the "little set," the "little circle," the "little clan" attached to the Verdurins, one condition was sufficient but necessary: You had to abide tacitly by a Credo one of whose articles was that the young pianist patronized by Mme. Verdurin that year, of whom she would say: "It ought to be against the law to be able to play Wagner like that!," "was miles above" both Planté[1] and Rubinstein[2] and that Dr. Cottard was a better diagnostician than Potain.[3] Any "new recruit" who could not be persuaded by the Verdurins that the soirées given by people who did not come to the Verdurins' house were as tiresome as rain was immediately excluded. Because the women were more rebellious in this respect than the men when it came to setting aside their curiosity about society, their desire to find out for themselves how amusing the other salons might be, and because the Verdurins felt that this spirit of investigation and this demon of frivolity could in fact be fatally contagious to the orthodoxy of the little church, they had been led to expel one after another all the "faithful" of the female sex.

Apart from the doctor's young wife, they were reduced almost exclusively that year (even though Mme. Verdurin herself was virtuous and from a respectable bourgeois family, an extremely rich and entirely obscure one with which she had by degrees and of her own accord ceased to have any contact) to a person almost of the demimonde, Mme. de Crécy, whom Mme. Verdurin called by her first name, Odette, and declared to be "a love," and to the pianist's aunt, who must once have been employed as a caretaker; both of them being women ignorant of the world whom, in their naïveté, it had been so easy to delude into believing that the Princesse de Sagan and the Duchesse de Guermantes were obliged to pay certain poor wretches in order to have any guest at their dinners, that if you had offered to get them invitations to the homes of these two great ladies, the former concierge and the cocotte would disdainfully have refused.

The Verdurins did not invite you to dinner: you had, at their house, a "place set for you." For the soirée there was no program. The young pianist would play, but only if "he fancied," because they did not force anyone and, as M. Verdurin said: "Anything for our friends. Here's to friendship!" If the pianist wanted to play the ride from *The Valkyrie* or the prelude from *Tristan*,[4] Mme. Verdurin would protest, not because she did not like that music, but on the contrary because it made too strong an impression on her. "Then you want me to have one of my migraines? You know perfectly well the same thing happens every time he plays that. I can count on it! Tomorrow when I try to get up—that's it, not possible!" If he did not play, people would chat and one of the friends, most often their favorite painter at the time, would "spin," as M. Verdurin said, "a damn funny tale that would make 'em all shriek with laughter," especially Mme. Verdurin, for such was her habit of taking literally the figurative expressions for the emotions she was feeling that Dr. Cottard (a young novice at the time) would one day have to set her jaw after she dislocated it from laughing too much.

Evening clothes were forbidden because one was "among friends" and also so as not to look like the "bores" whom they avoided like the plague and invited only to the larger soirées, given as rarely as possible and only if it might amuse the painter or help to promote the musician. The rest of the time, they were content to play charades, have supper in fancy dress, but only among themselves, not mixing any strangers in with the little "clan."

But as the "pals" had assumed more of a place in Mme. Verdurin's life, the "bores," the "pariahs" were anything that kept the friends away from her, anything that now and then kept them from being free, whether it was the mother of one, the profession of another, the country house or the bad health of a third. If Dr. Cottard thought he ought to leave just after he got up from the table in order to return to a patient who was dangerously ill, "Who knows," Mme. Verdurin would say to him, "he might be better off if you don't go disturbing him again this evening; without you, he'll have a good night; tomorrow morning early you'll go there and find him quite recovered." At the beginning of December, she would be sick at the thought that the faithful would "let them down" on Christmas Day and the first of January. The pianist's aunt insisted that he come to dinner with the family that day at her mother's home:

"You seem to think your mother might die," Mme. Verdurin exclaimed harshly, "if you don't have dinner with her on New Year's Day the way they do in the *provinces*!"

Her worries revived during Holy Week:

"Doctor, since you're such a scholar and freethinker, may I assume you will be coming on Good Friday just as you would on any other day?" she said confidently to Cottard the first year, as if she were sure what the answer would be. But she trembled as she waited for him to utter it, because if he did not come, she might find herself alone.

"I will come on Good Friday . . . to say good-bye to you, because we're going to be spending the Easter holiday in Auvergne."

"In Auvergne? You'll be eaten alive by fleas and vermin! Much good may it do you!"

And after a silence:

"If only you had told us, we would have tried to organize something; we could have made the trip together in comfort."

Likewise, if one of the "faithful" had a friend or if one of the ladies had a beau who might make them "desert" occasionally, the Verdurins, who were not afraid of a woman having a lover provided she had him at their house, loved him in their midst, and did not prefer his company to theirs, would say: "Well, bring your friend along!" And they would engage him on trial, to see if he was capable of having no secrets from Mme. Verdurin, if he was worthy of being enrolled in the "little clan." If he was not, the "regular" who had introduced him would be taken aside and helped to break with his friend or his mistress. In the opposite case, the "newcomer" would in his turn become one of the faithful. And so when, that year, the demimondaine told M. Verdurin she had made the acquaintance of a charming man, M. Swann, and insinuated that he would be very pleased to be received at their home, M. Verdurin transmitted the request to his wife then and there. (He never formed an opinion until she had formed hers, his particular role being to carry out her wishes, along with those of the faithful, with great and resourceful ingenuity.)

"My dear, Mme. de Crécy has something to ask you. She would like to introduce one of her friends to you, a M. Swann. What do you think?"

"Well, now, who could refuse anything to a little angel like that? Quiet, no one asked your opinion. I tell you you're an angel."

"Well, if you say so," answered Odette in a mincing tone, and she added: "You know I'm not *fishing for compliments."*[5]

"All right! Bring your friend, if he's nice."

Of course the "little clan" had no connection to the society in which Swann moved, and true men of fashion would have felt there was little point in enjoying, as he did, an exceptional position only to end up with an introduction to the Verdurins. But Swann was so fond of women that once he had come to know more or less all the women in aristocratic circles and they had nothing more to teach him, he had ceased to regard those naturalization papers, almost a patent of nobility, which the Faubourg Saint-Germain had bestowed upon him, except as a sort of negotiable bond, a letter of credit with no value in itself but which allowed him to improvise a status for himself in some little provincial hole or obscure circle of Paris where the daughter of a squire or clerk had struck him as pretty. For at such times desire or love would revive in him a feeling of vanity from which he was now quite free in his everyday life (although it was doubtless this feeling that had originally pointed him toward the career as man of fashion in which he had wasted his intellectual gifts in frivolous pleasures and allowed his erudition in matters of art to be used to advise society ladies what pictures to buy and how to decorate their houses), and which made him want to shine, in the eyes of any unknown woman with whom he was infatuated, with an elegance which the name Swann in itself did not imply. He wanted this most especially if the unknown woman was

in humble circumstances. Just as it is not by another man of intelligence that an intelligent man will be afraid of being thought stupid, so it is not by a great lord but by a country bumpkin that a man of fashion will be afraid of seeing his elegance go unappreciated. Three-quarters of the expenditure of wit and the lies told out of vanity that have been squandered since the world began by people who in doing so merely diminish themselves have been squandered on inferiors. And though Swann was unaffected and casual with a duchess, he trembled at being scorned by a chamber-maid, and posed in front of her.

He was not like so many people who from laziness or a resigned sense of the obligation created by social grandeur to remain moored to a certain shore, abstain from the pleasures real life offers them outside the high-society position in which they live billeted and encamped until their death, contenting themselves in the end with describing as pleasures, for lack of any better, once they have managed to become used to them, the mediocre amusements or bearable tedium it contains. Swann did not try to convince himself that the women with whom he spent his time were pretty, but to spend his time with women he already knew were pretty. And these were often women of a rather vulgar beauty, for the physical qualities that he looked for without realizing it were the direct opposite of those he admired in the women sculpted or painted by his favorite masters. Depth of expression, melancholy, would freeze his senses, which were, however, immediately aroused by flesh that was healthy, plump, and pink.

If when travelling he met a family whom it would have been more stylish not to seek to cultivate, but in which one woman presented herself to his eyes adorned with a charm he had never experienced before, to "stand on his dignity" and cheat the desire she had awoken in him, to substitute a different pleasure for the pleasure he might have experienced with her, by writing to a former mistress to come and join him, would have seemed to him as cowardly an abdication before life, as stupid a renunciation of a new happiness as if instead of touring the countryside, he had shut himself up in his room and looked at pictures of Paris. He did not enclose himself in the edifice of his relationships, but had transformed that edifice, in order to be able to raise it again effortlessly on site wherever he found a woman who pleased him, into one of those collapsible tents of the kind explorers carry with them. As for what was not transportable or exchangeable for a new pleasure, he would have given it away for nothing, however enviable it might appear to others. How often had his credit with a duchess, built up from the desire she had been accumulating over the years to do something kind for him without having found the occasion, been spent all at once by his sending her an indiscreet message asking for a recommendation by telegraph that would put him in touch, immediately, with one of her stewards whose daughter he had noticed in the country, just as a starving man would barter a diamond for a piece of bread! He had even, after the fact, been amused by it, for there existed in him, compensated for by uncommon refinements, a certain boorishness. Then, too, he belonged to that category of intelligent men who have lived idle lives and who seek a consolation and perhaps an excuse in the idea that this idleness offers their intelligence objects just as worthy of interest as art or scholarship could offer, that "Life" contains situations more interesting, more novelistic than any novel. So he declared, at least, and easily convinced even the sharpest of his society friends, in particular the Baron de Charlus, whom he liked to entertain with tales of the racy adventures he had had, such as when he had met a woman on the railway train and afterward taken her back home with him, and then discovered that she was the sister of a monarch who at that time held in his hands all the mingled threads of European politics, thus finding he was kept abreast of them in a most agreeable way, or when, through a complex play of circumstances, the choice about to be made by the conclave[6] was going to determine whether or not he succeeded in sleeping with somebody's cook.

And it was not only the brilliant phalanx of virtuous dowagers, generals, and academicians with whom he was particularly close, whom Swann compelled with such cynicism to serve him as go-betweens. All his friends were used to receiving periodic letters from him in which a word of recommendation or introduction was asked of them with a diplomatic skill that, persisting as it did through his successive love affairs and different pretexts, revealed, more than moments of awkwardness would have done, a permanent trait in his character and an unvarying quest. I often asked to hear, many years later when I began to take an interest in his character because of the resemblances it offered to my own in completely different respects, how when he wrote to my grandfather (who was not my grandfather yet, for it was about the time of my birth that Swann's great love affair began, and it interrupted these habits for a long time), the latter, recognizing his friend's handwriting on the envelope, would exclaim: "It's Swann, about to ask for something: on guard!" And either from mistrust, or from the unconsciously diabolical spirit that incites us to offer a thing only to the people who do not want it, my grandparents would issue a blunt refusal to the most easily satisfied requests he addressed to them, as for instance to introduce him to a girl who dined at the house every Sunday, and whom they were obliged, each time Swann mentioned it to them again, to pretend they were no longer seeing, whereas all week long they would wonder who in the world they could invite with her, often finding no one in the end, because they would not ask the one who would have been so happy to come.

Sometimes a certain couple, friends of my grandparents who until then had complained of never seeing Swann, would announce to them with satisfaction and perhaps a little desire to arouse their envy that he had become as charming as could be, that he was never out of their house. My grandfather did not want to cloud their pleasure but would look at my grandmother and hum:

> What is then this mystery?
> I cannot understand.[7]

or:

> Fleeting vision . . .[8]

or:

> In these affairs
> 'Tis better to be blind.[9]

A few months later, if my grandfather asked Swann's new friend: "And Swann—do you still see as much of him as ever?" the face of the man he was talking to would grow long: "Never mention his name to me again!" "But I thought you were so close . . ." For several months he had, for instance, been intimate friends with cousins of my grandmother, dining almost every day at their house. Suddenly, and without letting them know, he stopped coming. They thought he was ill, and my grandmother's cousin was about to send word asking for news of him, when in the pantry she found a letter from him left inadvertently in the cook's account book. In it he told the woman he was leaving Paris, that he would not be able to continue seeing her. She was his mistress, and when he broke it off with her, she was the only one he thought he needed to tell.

But when his mistress of the moment was a woman of rank or at least one whose background was not too humble or her situation too irregular for him to arrange for her to be received in society, then for her he would return to it, but only to the particular orbit in which she moved or into which he had drawn her. "No use depending on Swann for this evening," they would say. "Don't you remember? It's his American's night at the Opera." He would see to it that she was invited to the particularly exclusive salons where he was a constant guest, where he had his weekly dinners, his poker; every evening, after a slight crimp was added to the brush cut of his red hair, tempering with some gentleness the vivacity of his green eyes, he would choose a flower for his buttonhole and go off to join his mistress at dinner at the home of one or another of the women of his circle; and then, thinking of the admiration and affection which the fashionable people for whom he was the be-all and end-all and whom he was going to see there would lavish on him in the presence of the woman he loved, he would once again find some charm in this worldly life to which he had become indifferent but whose substance, penetrated and warmly colored by a flame that had been insinuated into it and flickered there, seemed to him precious and beautiful as soon as he had incorporated into it a new love.

But, while each of these love affairs, or each of these flirtations, had been the more or less complete fulfillment of a dream inspired by the sight of a face or body that Swann had spontaneously, without making any effort to do so, found charming, on the contrary when he was introduced to Odette de Crécy one day at the theater by an old friend of his, who had spoken of her as an entrancing woman with whom he might perhaps have some success, but making her out to be more difficult than she really was in order to appear to have done him a bigger favor by introducing her to him, she had seemed to Swann not without beauty, certainly, but of a type of beauty that left him indifferent, that aroused no desire in him, even caused him a sort of physical repulsion, one of those women such as everyone has his own, different for each, who are the opposite of the kind our senses crave. Her profile was too pronounced for his taste, her skin too delicate, her cheekbones too prominent, her features too pinched. Her eyes were lovely, but so large they bent under their own mass, exhausted the rest of her face, and always

gave her a look of being in ill health or ill humor. Sometime after this introduction at the theater she had written to ask if she could see his collections, which interested her so, "she, an ignoramus with a taste for pretty things," saying that it seemed to her she would understand him better when she had seen him in "his home,"[10] where she imagined him to be "so comfortable with his tea and his books," though she had not hidden her surprise that he should live in that part of town, which must be so dreary and "which was so un-*smart* for a man who was so very smart himself." And after he had allowed her to come, as she left she had told him how sorry she was to have spent such a short time in a house that she had been so glad to enter, speaking of him as though he meant something more to her than the other people she knew, and seeming to establish between their two persons a sort of romantic bond that had made him smile. But at the age, already a little disillusioned, which Swann was approaching, at which one knows how to content oneself with being in love for the pleasure of it without requiring too much reciprocity, this closeness of two hearts, if it is no longer, as it was in one's earliest youth, the goal toward which love necessarily tends, still remains linked to it by an association of ideas so strong that it may become the cause of love, if it occurs first. At an earlier time one dreamed of possessing the heart of the woman with whom one was in love; later, to feel that one possesses a woman's heart may be enough to make one fall in love with her. And so, at an age when it would seem, since what one seeks most of all in love is subjective pleasure, that the enjoyment of a woman's beauty should play the largest part in it, love may come into being—love of the most physical kind—without there having been, underlying it, any previous desire. At this time of life, one has already been wounded many times by love; it no longer evolves solely in accordance with its own unknown and inevitable laws, before our astonished and passive heart. We come to its aid, we distort it with memory, with suggestion. Recognizing one of its symptoms, we recall and revive the others. Since we know its song, engraved in us in its entirety, we do not need a woman to repeat the beginning of it—filled with the admiration that beauty inspires—in order to find out what comes after. And if she begins in the middle—where the two hearts come together, where it sings of living only for each other—we are accustomed enough to this music to join our partner right away in the passage where she is waiting for us.

Odette de Crécy came to see Swann again, then visited him more and more often; and certainly each visit renewed the disappointment he felt at finding himself once again in the presence of that face whose details he had somewhat forgotten in the meantime and which he had not recalled as being either so expressive or, despite her youth, so faded; he felt sorry, as she talked to him, that her considerable beauty was not the type he would spontaneously have preferred. Odette's face seemed thinner and sharper, in fact, because her forehead and the upper part of her cheeks, those smoother and flatter surfaces, were covered by the masses of hair which women wore at that time drawn forward in fringes, lifted in "switches," spread in stray locks down along the ears; and as for her body, which was admirably formed, it was difficult to discern its continuity (because of the fashions of the period, and even though she was one of the best-dressed women in Paris), because her blouse, jutting out as though over an imaginary paunch and ending abruptly in a point, below which the balloon of the double skirts swelled out, made a woman look as though she were composed of different parts poorly fitted inside one another; because the flounces, the flutes, the vest followed so independently, according to the whimsy of their design or the consistency of their material, the line that led to the knots, the puffs of lace, the perpendicular fringes of jet, or that directed them along the corset, but were in no way attached to the living person, who, depending on whether the architecture of these frills and furbelows approached too closely or moved too far away from her own, was either encased or lost in them.

But when Odette had left, Swann would smile, thinking of how she had told him the time would drag until he allowed her to come again; he would recall the worried, shy air with which she had begged him once that it should not be too long, and the expression in her eyes at that moment, fastened on him in anxious entreaty, which made her look so touching under the bouquet of artificial pansies fastened to the front of her round white straw hat with its black velvet ribbons. "And you," she had said, "wouldn't you come to my house just once for tea?" He had pleaded unfinished work, a study—in reality abandoned years before—of Vermeer of Delft.[11] "I realize I can't do anything, pitiful little me, compared with all you great scholars," she had answered. "I would be like the frog in front of the Areopagus.[12] And yet I would so love to educate myself, to be informed, to know things. How amusing it must be to bury your nose in old papers!" she had added with the self-satisfaction a stylish woman adopts to assert that she is happiest abandoning herself with no fear of getting dirty to some messy job, like doing a little cooking "with her own hands in the dough." "You're going to make fun of me, but that painter who keeps you from seeing me—" (she meant Vermeer) "I've never heard of him; is he still alive? Can I see any of his things in Paris, so that I could imagine what it is you like, so that I could have some idea what's behind that great forehead that works so hard, inside that mind that I always sense is so busy with its thoughts, so that I could say to myself: There, this is what he's thinking about. What a joy it would be, to share in your work!" He apologized for his fear of new friendships, for what he had called, out of politeness, his fear of being unhappy. "You're afraid of affection? How odd; that's all I ever look for, I would give my life to find it," she had said in a voice so natural, so convinced, that he had been moved. "Some woman must have hurt you. And you think all other women are like her. She must not have understood you; you're such an unusual person. That's what I liked about you right away, I really felt you weren't like anyone else." "And you too," he had said to her, "I know very well what women are like, you must be busy with a great many things, you must not have much time." "Me! I never have anything to do! I'm always free, I will always be free for you. At any hour of the day or night that might be convenient for you to see me, send for me and I'll be only too happy to come immediately. Will you do it? Do you know what would be nice—if you could obtain an introduction to Mme. Verdurin; I go to her house every evening. Just imagine if we met there and I thought it was partly because of me that you were there!"

And as he recalled their conversations this way, as he thought of her this way when he was alone, he was no doubt merely turning over her image among those of many other women in his romantic daydreams; but if, due to some circumstance (or even perhaps not due to it, since a circumstance that presents itself at the moment when a state of mind, latent until then, comes out into the open may possibly not have influenced it in any way) the image of Odette de Crécy came to absorb all these daydreams, if these daydreams were no longer separable from the memory of her, then the imperfection of her body would no longer have any importance, nor would the fact that it might be, more or less than some other body, to Swann's taste, since, now that it had become the body of the woman he loved, it would be the only one capable of filling him with joy and torment.

As it happened, my grandfather had known—which was more than could be said of any of their current friends—the family of these Verdurins. But he had lost all contact with "young Verdurin," as he called him, whom he regarded, somewhat approximately, as having fallen—even while holding on to his many millions—among bohemians and riffraff. One day, he received a letter from Swann asking him if he could put him in touch with the Verdurins: "On guard! On guard!" my grandfather had exclaimed. "This doesn't surprise me at all; it's just where Swann was bound to end up. A nice group they are! In the first place, I can't do what he asks, because I don't know the gentleman in question anymore. And secondly, there must be a woman in it somewhere, and I never get mixed up in such affairs. Well, well! We shall have a rather amusing time of it if Swann falls in with the young Verdurins."

And after my grandfather returned a negative answer, it was Odette herself who had taken Swann to the Verdurins'.

The Verdurins had had to dinner, on the day Swann made his first appearance there, Dr. and Mme. Cottard, the young pianist and his aunt, and the painter who was in their favor at the time, and these were joined during the evening by several other faithful regulars.

Dr. Cottard was never quite certain of the tone in which he ought to answer someone, whether the person addressing him wanted to make a joke or was serious. And just in case, he would add to each of his facial expressions the offer of a conditional and tentative smile whose expectant shrewdness would exculpate him from the reproach of naïveté, if the remark that had been made to him was found to have been facetious. But since, so as to respond to the opposite hypothesis, he did not dare allow that smile to declare itself distinctly on his face, one saw an uncertainty perpetually floating upon it in which could be read the question he did not dare ask: "Are you saying this in earnest?" He was no more sure how he ought to behave in the street, and even in life generally, than in a drawing room, and he could be seen greeting passersby, carriages, and any minor event that occurred with the same ironic smile that removed all impropriety from his attitude in advance, since he was proving that if the attitude was not a fashionable one he was well aware of it and that if he had adopted it, it was as a joke.

On all points, however, where a direct question seemed to him permissible, the doctor did not fail to endeavor to reduce the field of his doubts and complete his education.

And so, acting on the advice given him by a foresightful mother when he left her province, he never let pass either an expression or a proper name that was unknown to him, without trying to acquire documentation about it.

In the case of expressions, he was insatiable for enlightenment, because, sometimes assuming they had a more precise meaning than they had, he wanted to know exactly what was meant by those he heard used most often: the bloom of youth, blue blood, a fast life, the hour of reckoning, to be a prince of refinement,

to give carte blanche, to be nonplussed, etc., and in which specific cases he in his turn could introduce them into his conversation. If there were none, he would substitute puns he had learned. As for new names of people mentioned in his presence, he contented himself merely with repeating them in a questioning tone that he thought sufficient to procure him explanations without his appearing to ask for them.

Since he completely lacked the critical faculty which he thought he exercised on everything, that refinement of politeness which consists in declaring to a person to whom you are doing a favor, without however expecting to be believed, that you are in fact indebted to him, was a waste of effort with the doctor, who took everything literally. Whatever Mme. Verdurin's blindness with respect to him, she had in the end, while continuing to find him very subtle, been annoyed to see that, when she invited him to share a box near the stage for a performance by Sarah Bernhardt, saying to him, to be especially gracious: "It was too kind of you to come, Doctor, especially since I'm sure you've already heard Sarah Bernhardt many times, and we may also be too close to the stage," Dr. Cottard, who had entered the box with a smile that was waiting to become more pronounced or to disappear as soon as some authoritative person informed him as to the quality of the entertainment, answered her: "It's true that we're much too close and one begins to tire of Sarah Bernhardt. But you expressed a desire that I should come. And your desire is my command. I am only too happy to do you this small service. Is there anything one would not do in order to please you, you're so good!" And he added: "Sarah Bernhardt—she is in fact the Golden Voice, isn't she? And they often write that she sets the stage on fire. That's an odd expression, isn't it?" in hope of commentaries which were not forthcoming.

"You know," Mme. Verdurin had said to her husband, "I believe we're steering the wrong course when we belittle our gifts to the doctor out of modesty. He's a man of science, out of touch with the practical side of life, he has no idea of the value of things and relies on what we tell him." "I hadn't dared say anything to you, but I had noticed," answered M. Verdurin. And the following New Year's Day, instead of sending Dr. Cottard a three-thousand-franc ruby, remarking that it was only a trifle, M. Verdurin paid three hundred francs for an artificial stone, implying that it would be hard to find one as beautiful.

When Mme. Verdurin had announced that they would be having M. Swann at the soirée, "Swann?" the doctor had exclaimed in a tone of voice made rough by surprise, for the slightest piece of news always caught him more off guard than anyone else, though this was a man who believed he was perpetually prepared for anything. And seeing that no one answered him, "Swann? Who's this Swann?" he roared, filled with an anxiety that suddenly abated when Mme. Verdurin said: "Why, the friend Odette told us about." "Ah, good, good! That's all right then," answered the doctor, pacified. As for the painter, he was delighted by the introduction of Swann to Mme. Verdurin's, because he assumed Swann was in love with Odette and he liked to encourage love affairs. "There's nothing I enjoy more than arranging a marriage," he confided in Dr. Cottard's ear. "I've already managed a good many, even between women!"

By telling the Verdurins that Swann was very "*smart*," Odette had awoken in them the fear that he would be a "bore." However, he made an excellent impression, of which, without their knowing it, his association with fashionable society was one of the indirect causes. He had, in fact, over men who have never mixed in high society, even intelligent men, one of the superior qualities of those who have had some experience of it, which is that they no longer transfigure it out of the desire or the horror it inspires in their imagination, considering it unimportant. Their friendliness, disassociated from all snobbishness and from a fear of seeming too friendly, thus quite independent, has that ease, that grace characteristic of the motions of people whose supple limbs perform exactly what they want, without any indiscreet or awkward participation of the rest of the body. The simple elementary gymnastics of a man of the world extending his hand with good grace to the unknown young man who is being introduced to him, and bowing with reserve to the ambassador to whom he is being introduced, had in the end passed, without his being aware of it, into Swann's whole social attitude, so that toward people of a social circle inferior to his, like the Verdurins and their friends, he instinctively displayed a marked attention, permitted himself to make advances, from which, according to them, a bore would have refrained. He had a moment of coldness only with Cottard: seeing the doctor wink at him and smile ambiguously before they had spoken to each other (a dumb show that Cottard called "wait-and-see"), Swann thought the doctor probably recognized him from a previous encounter in some house of pleasure, even though he himself went to such places very seldom, having never inhabited the world of dissipation. Finding the allusion in bad taste, especially in the presence of Odette, who might receive a poor impression of him from it, he assumed an icy manner. But when he learned that the lady standing near him was Mme. Cottard, he thought that such a young husband would not have tried to allude to amusements of that sort in front of his wife; and he ceased to give the doctor's knowing look the meaning he had feared. The painter immediately invited Swann to come to his studio with Odette; Swann thought he was nice. "Perhaps he'll favor you more than he has me," said Mme. Verdurin in a tone of mock resentment, "perhaps he'll show you Cottard's portrait" (she had commissioned it from the painter). "Make sure, 'Monsieur' Biche," she reminded the painter, whom it was a sacred joke to address as Monsieur, "to capture that nice look in his eye, that subtle, amusing little way he has of glancing at you. As you know, what I want most of all is his smile; what I asked you for was a portrait of his smile." And since the phrase seemed to her noteworthy, she repeated it very loudly to make sure a number of guests heard it, and even, using some vague pretext, summoned a few of them over to her first. Swann asked to be introduced to everyone, even to an old friend of the Verdurins, Saniette, whose shyness, simplicity, and good nature had lost him all the esteem he had won by his skill as an archivist, his substantial fortune, and the distinguished family he came from. When he talked, there was a sort of mushy sound to his pronunciation that was charming because one sensed that it betrayed not so much an impediment in his speech as a quality of his soul, a sort of vestige of early childhood innocence that he had never lost. Each consonant he could not pronounce appeared to be another instance of a hardness of which he was incapable. In asking to be introduced to M. Saniette, Swann appeared to Mme. Verdurin to be reversing roles (to the degree that in response, she said, insisting on the difference: "Monsieur Swann, would you have the goodness to allow me to introduce to you our friend Saniette"), but aroused in Saniette a warm feeling of congeniality which the Verdurins, however, never revealed to Swann, for Saniette irritated them a little, and they were not anxious to make friends for him. But, on the other hand, Swann touched them infinitely by believing he ought to ask immediately to be introduced to the pianist's aunt. She was in a black dress, as always, because she thought one always looked nice in black and that it was most distinguished, and her face was extremely red, as it always was after she had just eaten. She bowed to Swann with respect, but straightened with majesty. Because she had no education and was afraid of making mistakes in grammar, she deliberately pronounced things in a garbled way, thinking that if she made a blunder it would be fogged over by such indefiniteness that no one would be able to make it out with any certainty, so that her conversation was reduced to an indistinct hawking, from which emerged now and then the few vocables of which she felt confident. Swann thought he could poke a little fun at her when he was talking to M. Verdurin, but the latter was offended.

"She's such an excellent woman," he answered. "I grant you she's not brilliant; but I assure you she can be most agreeable when you talk to her on your own." "I don't doubt it," Swann hastened to concede. "I meant to say she did not seem to me 'eminent,' " he added, isolating the adjective, "and really that's rather a compliment!" "Well, now," said M. Verdurin, "this will surprise you: she writes charmingly. You've never heard her nephew? He's wonderful, isn't he, Doctor? Would you like me to ask him to play something, Monsieur Swann?" "Why, it would be a joy . . ." Swann was beginning to answer, when the doctor interrupted him with a mocking look. In fact, having acquired the notion that in conversation, to be emphatic, to employ formal expressions was old-fashioned, as soon as he heard a solemn word used seriously, as the word *joy* had just been used, he thought the person who haduttered it had just been guilty of pomposity. And if, in addition, the word happened to occur in what he called an old cliché, however current it might be in other respects, the doctor would assume that the sentence that had been begun was ridiculous and would finish it ironically using the platitude he seemed to be accusing the speaker of having wanted to deploy, although the latter had never thought of it.

"A joy forever!" he cried mischievously, raising his arms for emphasis.

M. Verdurin could not help laughing.

"What are those good people laughing about! You don't seem to be having such a bad time over there in your corner," cried Mme. Verdurin. "I hope you don't think I'm enjoying myself here in disgrace all alone," she added in a tone of childish chagrin.

Mme. Verdurin was sitting on a high Swedish chair of waxed pine, which she had been given by a violinist from that country and which she had kept, though it looked rather like a stool and was at odds with the beautiful old furniture that she had, but she insisted on keeping in evidence the gifts which the faithful regulars were in the habit of giving her from time to time, so that the givers would have the pleasure of spotting them when they came. And so she tried to persuade them to give her nothing but flowers and sweets, which are at least perishable; but she was not successful, and her home contained a collection of foot warmers, cushions, clocks, screens, barometers, and urns, in an accumulation of useless, repetitive, and incongruous offerings.

From this elevated spot she took energetic part in the conversation of the faithful and revelled in their practical jokes, but after the accident involving her jaw, she no longer took pains to explode in true laughter and performed instead a conventionalized pantomime that signified, without fatigue or risk for her, that she

was laughing to the point of tears. At the mildest remark fired off by a regular against a bore or against a former regular who had been flung back into the camp of the bores—and to the greatest despair of M. Verdurin, who for a long time had had pretensions of being as affable as his wife, but who, when laughing in earnest, would soon get out of breath and so had been outdistanced and defeated by this ruse of incessant and fictive hilarity—she would utter a little cry, entirely close her birdlike eyes, which were slightly dimmed by leucoma, and abruptly, as if she had only just had time to avoid some indecent spectacle or avert a fatal blow, plunging her face in her hands, which covered it and allowed nothing of it to be seen, would appear to be doing her best to suppress, to annihilate a fit of laughter which, had she given way to it, would have caused her to faint. So, dazed by the gaiety of the faithful, drunk with good-fellowship, scandal-mongering, and approbation, Mme. Verdurin, poised on her perch, like a bird whose seedcake has been soaked in warm wine, sobbed with affability.

Meanwhile, M. Verdurin, after asking Swann's permission to light his pipe ("we don't stand on ceremony here, we're among friends"), begged the young musician to sit down at the piano.

"Now don't bother him, he didn't come here to be tormented," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin, "I won't have him tormented!"

"But why on earth should it bother him?" said M. Verdurin. "Perhaps M. Swann doesn't know the Sonata in F-sharp which we've discovered. He'll play the piano arrangement for us."

"Oh, no, no, not my sonata!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "I don't want to be made to weep till I get a cold in my head and neuralgia in my face, like the last time. Thanks for your offer, but I don't intend to repeat that performance. You're so kind, all of you; it's easy to see you're not the ones who'll be spending the next week in bed!"

This little scene, which was reenacted each time the pianist prepared to play, enchanted her friends as much as if it had been brand-new, because it was proof of the *"Patronne's"* [13] charming originality and sensitivity to music. Those who were near her signaled to those farther away who were smoking or playing cards to come closer, that something was happening, saying to them, as they do in the Reichstag[14] at interesting moments: "Listen, listen." And the next day they would tell those who had not been able to be there how sorry they were, reporting that the scene had been even more entertaining than usual.

"Well, all right then," said M. Verdurin. "He'll just play the andante."

"Just the andante! What are you saying!" exclaimed Mme. Verdurin. "It's precisely the andante that completely paralyzes me. Listen to the *Patron*! He's really marvelous! It's as if he said: In the Ninth we'll just hear the finale, or in *The Meistersingers*[15] we'll just hear the overture."

The doctor, however, urged Mme. Verdurin to let the pianist play, not because he thought the troubling effects the music had on her were feigned—he recognized certain neurasthenic symptoms in them—but from a habit which many doctors have, of immediately relaxing the severity of their prescriptions when something is involved that seems much more important to them, like some social gathering at which they are present and in which the person they are advising for once to forget his dyspepsia or his grippe is an essential factor.

"You won't become ill this time, you'll see," he told her, trying to hypnotize her with his eyes. "And if you do, we'll look after you."

"Really and truly?" answered Mme. Verdurin, as if the hope of such a favor left her no alternative but to capitulate. Perhaps also, because she said she would be ill, there were times when she did not recall that it was a lie and took on the character of an ill person. For invalids, tired of always having to make the rarity of their attacks dependent on their prudence, like to indulge in the belief that they can with impunity do all of the things that give them pleasure and usually hurt them, as long as they put themselves in the hands of a powerful person who, without their having to take any pains, with a word or a pill will put them back on their feet.

Odette had gone to sit on a tapestry-covered couch near the piano:

"You know I have my own little spot," she said to Mme. Verdurin.

The latter, seeing Swann on a chair, made him get up:

"You're not very comfortable there: now go and sit next to Odette. You'll make room for M. Swann there, won't you, Odette?"

"What a pretty Beauvais," said Swann before he sat down, trying to be pleasant.

"Oh, I'm glad you appreciate my couch," answered Mme. Verdurin. "And let me tell you, if you think you're ever going to see another one as beautiful, you may abandon the idea at once. They never did anything else like it. The little chairs are marvels too. You can look at them in a moment. Each bronze is an emblem that corresponds to the little subject on the chair; you know, you'll have a great deal to entertain you if you want to look at them. I can promise you a good time. Even the little friezes around the edges—look at that, look at the little vine against the red background in the Bear and the Grapes. Isn't it well drawn? What do you say? I think they really knew how to draw! Doesn't that vine make your mouth water? My husband claims I don't like the fruit you get from it, because I don't eat as many as he does. The fact is, actually, I'm more of a glutton than any of you, but I don't need to put them in my mouth because I enjoy them with my eyes. What are you all laughing about, now? Ask the doctor, he'll tell you—for me those grapes are a regular purgative. Other people take the cure at Fontainebleau, I take my little Beauvais cure. But, Monsieur Swann, you won't go away without feeling the little bronzes on the backs! Isn't the patina soft? No, no—with your whole hand: feel them properly."

"Ah, if Madame Verdurin begins fondling the bronzes, we won't hear any music tonight," said the painter.

"You be quiet. You're a rascal. In fact," she said, turning to Swann, "we women are forbidden to do things far less voluptuous than this. But no flesh can compare to it! When M. Verdurin did me the honor of being jealous of me—come now, be polite at least, don't say you never were . . ."

"But I said absolutely nothing. Doctor, be my witness: did I say anything?"

Swann was feeling the bronzes to be polite and did not dare stop right away.

"Come, you can caress them later; now you're the one who's going to be caressed. Your ears are going to be caressed; you'll like that, I think; here's the dear young man who'll be doing it."

Now after the pianist had played, Swann was even friendlier to him than to the others who were present. This is why:

The year before, at a soiree, he had heard a piece of music performed on the piano and violin. At first, he had experienced only the physical quality of the sounds secreted by the instruments. And it had been a keen pleasure when, below the little line of the violin, slender, unyielding, compact, and commanding, he had seen the mass of the piano part all at once struggling to rise in a liquid swell, multiform, undivided, smooth, and colliding like the purple tumult of the waves when the moonlight charms them and lowers their pitch by half a tone. But at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish an outline clearly, or give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly charmed, he had tried to gather up and hold on to the phrase or harmony—he himself did not know which—that was passing by him and that had opened his soul so much wider, the way the smells of certain roses circulating in the damp evening air have the property of dilating our nostrils. Maybe it was because of his ignorance of music that he had been capable of receiving so confused an impression, the kind of impression that is, however, perhaps the only one which is purely musical, immaterial, entirely original, irreducible to any other order of impression. An impression of this kind is, for an instant, so to speak, *sine materia*. No doubt the notes we hear then tend already, depending on their loudness and their quantity, to spread out before our eyes over surfaces of varying dimensions, to trace arabesques, to give us sensations of breadth, tenuousness, stability, whimsy. But the notes vanish before these sensations are sufficiently formed in us not to be submerged by those already excited by the succeeding or even simultaneous notes. And this impression would continue to envelop with its liquidity and its "mellowness" the motifs that at times emerge from it, barely discernible, immediately to dive under and disappear, known only by the particular pleasure they give, impossible to describe, to recall, to name, ineffable—if memory, like a laborer working to put down lasting foundations in the midst of the waves, by fabricating for us facsimiles of these fleeting phrases, did not allow us to compare them to those that follow them and to differentiate them. And so, scarcely had the delicious sensation which Swann had felt died away than his memory at once furnished him with a transcription that was summary and temporary but at which he could glance while the piece continued, so that already, when the same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer impossible to grasp. He could picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical groupings, its notation, its expressive value; he had before him this thing which is no longer pure music, which is drawing, architecture, thought, and which allows us to recall the music. This time he had clearly distinguished one phrase rising for a few moments above the waves of sound. It had immediately proposed to him particular sensual pleasures which he had never imagined before hearing it, which he felt could be introduced to him by nothing else, and he had experienced for it something like an unfamiliar love.

With a slow rhythm it led him first here, then there, then elsewhere, toward a happiness that was noble, unintelligible, and precise. And then suddenly, having reached a point from which he was preparing to follow it, after an instant's pause, abruptly it changed direction, and with a new movement, quicker, slighter, more melancholy, incessant, and sweet, it carried him off with it toward unfamiliar vistas. Then it disappeared. He wished passionately to see it a third time. And it did indeed reappear but without speaking to him more clearly, bringing him, indeed, a sensual pleasure that was less profound. But once he was back at home he needed it, he was like a man into whose life a woman he has glimpsed for only a moment as she passed by has introduced the image of a new sort of a beauty that increases the value of his own sensibility, without his even knowing if he will ever see this woman again whom he loves already and of whom he knows nothing, not even her name.

It even seemed, for a moment, that this love for a phrase of music would have to open in Swann the possibility of a sort of rejuvenation. He had for so long given up directing his life toward an ideal goal and limited it to the pursuit of everyday satisfactions that he believed, without ever saying so formally to himself, that this would not change as long as he lived; much worse, since his mind no longer entertained any lofty ideas, he had ceased to believe in their reality, though without being able to deny it altogether. Thus he had acquired the habit of taking refuge in unimportant thoughts that allowed him to ignore the fundamental essence of things. Just as he did not ask himself if it would have been better for him not to go into society, but on the other hand knew quite certainly that if he had accepted an invitation he ought to go and that if he did not pay a call afterward he must at least leave cards, so in his conversation he endeavored never to express with any warmth a personal opinion about things, but to furnish material details that had some sort of value in themselves and allowed him not to show his real capacities. He was extremely precise when it came to the recipe for a dish, the date of a painter's birth or death, the nomenclature of his works. Now and then, despite everything, he went so far as to utter a judgment on a work, on someone's interpretation of life, but he would then give his remarks an ironic tone, as if he did not entirely subscribe to what he was saying. Now, like certain confirmed invalids in whom, suddenly, a country they have arrived in, a different diet, sometimes a spontaneous and mysterious organic development seem to bring on such a regression of their ailment that they begin to envisage the unhoped-for possibility of belatedly starting a completely different life, Swann found within himself, in the recollection of the phrase he had heard, in certain sonatas he asked people to play for him, to see if he would not discover it in them, the presence of one of those invisible realities in which he had ceased to believe and to which, as if the music had had a sort of sympathetic influence on the moral dryness from which he suffered, he felt in himself once again the desire and almost the strength to devote his life. But, since he had not succeeded in finding out who had composed the work he had heard, he had not been able to acquire it for himself and had ended by forgetting it. True, during the week he had encountered several people who had been with him at that party and he had asked them about it; but many had arrived after the music or left before; some were indeed there while it was performed but had gone into the other drawing room to talk, and others, who had stayed to listen, had heard no more of it than had the first group. As for the master and mistress of the house, they knew it was a recent work which the musicians whom they had hired had asked to play; since the latter had gone off on a tour, Swann could not find out anything more. He had many friends who were musicians, but though he recalled the special and inexpressible pleasure the phrase had given him, and saw before his eyes the shapes it outlined, he was not able to sing it for them. Then he stopped thinking about it.

Now, scarcely a few minutes after the young pianist had begun playing at Mme. Verdurin's, suddenly, after a high note held for a long time through two measures, he saw it approaching, escaping from under that prolonged sonority stretched like a curtain of sound hiding the mystery of its incubation, he recognized it, secret, murmuring, and, divided, the airy and redolent phrase that he loved. And it was so particular, it had a charm so individual, which no other charm could have replaced, that Swann felt as though he had encountered in a friend's drawing room a person whom he had admired in the street and despaired of ever finding again. In the end, diligent, purposeful, it receded through the ramifications of its perfume, leaving on Swann's face the reflection of its smile. But now he could ask the name of his stranger (they told him it was the andante from the Sonata for Piano and Violin by Vinteuil), he possessed it, he could have it in his house as often as he liked, try to learn its language and its secret.

And so when the pianist had finished, Swann went up to him to express a gratitude whose warmth was very pleasing to Mme. Verdurin.

"He's a charmer, isn't he?" she said to Swann. "You might say he knows a thing or two about that sonata, the little devil. You didn't know the piano could achieve such things. It's everything—except a piano! My word! I'm startled by it every time; I think I'm hearing an orchestra. Though it's even more beautiful than an orchestra, more complete."

The young pianist bowed, and with a smile, stressing the words as if he were making a witty remark:

"You're very generous to me," he said.

And while Mme. Verdurin was saying to her husband: "Come, give him some orangeade, he certainly deserves it," Swann was describing to Odette how he had been in love with that little phrase. When Mme. Verdurin, nearby, said: "Well now, it seems to me someone is saying sweet things to you, Odette," she answered: "Yes, very sweet," and Swann found her simplicity delightful. Meanwhile, he was asking for information about Vinteuil, about his work, about the period of his life in which he had composed this sonata, about what the little phrase could have meant to him, this was what he would have liked most of all to know.

But all these people who professed to admire that musician (when Swann had said that his sonata was truly beautiful, Mme. Verdurin had exclaimed: "I should say it's beautiful! But one simply doesn't admit that one does not know Vinteuil's sonata, one is not allowed not to know it," and the painter had added: "Ah, yes! It's a work of genius, isn't it? It may not be what you would call 'obvious' or 'popular,' is it? But it makes a very great impression on us artists"), these people seemed never to have asked themselves these questions, for they were incapable of answering them.

Even in answer to one or two particular remarks that Swann made about his favorite phrase, Mme. Verdurin said:

"Well now, that's funny, I never paid any attention. I'll tell you, I don't very much enjoy nitpicking or discussing fine points; we don't waste our time splitting hairs here, it's not that kind of a house," while Dr. Cottard watched her with blissful admiration and scholarly zeal as she frolicked in this billow of stock expressions. He and Mme. Cottard, however, with a kind of good sense which is also possessed by certain people from humble backgrounds, carefully refrained from offering an opinion or feigning admiration for a sort of music which they confessed to each other, once they were back home, they did not understand any more than the painting of "Monsieur Biche." Since, of the charm, the grace, the forms of nature, the public knows only what it has absorbed from the clichés of an art slowly assimilated, and since an original artist begins by rejecting these clichés, M. and Mme. Cottard, being in this sense typical of the public, found neither in Vinteuil's sonata, nor in the painter's portraits, what for them created the harmony of music and the beauty of painting. It seemed to them when the pianist played the sonata that he was randomly attaching to the piano notes that were not in fact connected to the forms they were used to, and that the painter was randomly hurling colors onto his canvases. When they were able to recognize a form in these canvases, they found it heavy and vulgarized (that is, lacking the elegance of the school of painting through which they viewed all living creatures, even in the street), and lacking truth, as if Monsieur Biche did not know how a shoulder was constructed or that women do not have lavender hair.

However, when the regulars had dispersed, the doctor felt this was a favorable opportunity, and while Mme. Verdurin was saying a last word about Vinteuil's sonata, like a beginning swimmer who throws himself into the water in order to learn, but chooses a moment when there are not too many people to see him, he exclaimed with sudden determination:

"Now, this is what one calls a musician *di primo cartello*!"[16]

Swann learned only that the recent appearance of Vinteuil's sonata had caused quite a stir among the most advanced school of musicians, but was entirely unknown to the larger public.

"I know someone quite well named Vinteuil," said Swann, thinking of the piano teacher who had taught my grandmother's sisters.

"Perhaps it's him," exclaimed Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh, no!" Swann answered, laughing. "If you had ever spent just a minute or two with him, you wouldn't ask."

"Then, to ask the question is to answer it?" said the doctor.

"But he could be a relative," Swann went on. "That would be rather sad, but the fact is, a man of genius can be cousin to an old fool. If this is so, I confess I would submit to any kind of torture to get the old fool to introduce me to the composer of that sonata: starting with the torture of associating with the old fool, which would be frightful."

The painter knew that Vinteuil was very ill at the moment and that Dr. Potain was afraid he would not be able to save him.

"What!" cried Mme. Verdurin. "Are there people who still go to Potain?"

"Ah, Madame Verdurin!" said Cottard, in a tone of witty repartee. "You forget that you're talking about one of my colleagues, I should say one of my teachers."

The painter had heard that Vinteuil was threatened with mental illness. And he declared that one could perceive it in certain passages of his sonata. Swann did not find this comment absurd, but it bothered him; for since a pure work of music contains none of the logical relationships whose alteration in language reveals madness, madness recognized in a sonata seemed to him something as mysterious as the madness of a bitch, the madness of a horse, though these can indeed be observed.

"Don't upset me with talk about your 'teachers.' You know ten times as much as he does," Mme. Verdurin answered Dr. Cottard, in the tone of a person who has the courage of her convictions and stoutly holds her own against those who are not of the same opinion. "At least you don't kill your patients!"

"But Madame, he belongs to the Academy,"[17] replied the doctor ironically. "If a patient would rather die by the hand of one of the princes of science . . . It's much more stylish to be able to say: 'I'm being treated by Potain.'"

"Ah! It's more stylish?" said Mme. Verdurin. "So there's such a thing as style in illness now? I wasn't aware of that . . . How funny you are!" she exclaimed suddenly, dropping her face in her hands. "And I was such a silly fool, talking about it seriously without seeing that you were pulling my leg."

As for M. Verdurin, finding it rather a strain to force a laugh over such a trifle, he contented himself with drawing on his pipe, musing sadly that he would never be able to rival his wife in a contest of amiability.

"You know, we like your friend very much," said Mme. Verdurin to Odette when the latter was wishing her a good night. "He's so unaffected, he's so charming; if all the friends you think of introducing to us are like him, you may certainly bring them."

M. Verdurin pointed out that Swann had not, however, appreciated the pianist's aunt.

"The man felt a little out of his element," answered Mme. Verdurin. "Now you wouldn't expect him to have caught the tone of the house already, the very first time, like Cottard, who has been one of our little clan for years. The first time doesn't count; it was useful for breaking the ice. Odette, it's agreed that he'll meet us tomorrow at the Châtelet. Will you pick him up?"

"No, he doesn't want me to."

"Ah! Whatever you like, then. As long as he doesn't go and abandon us at the last minute!"

To Mme. Verdurin's great surprise, he never abandoned them. He went to meet them wherever they were, sometimes in restaurants in the outlying districts where no one went much yet, because it was not the season, more often to the theater, which Mme. Verdurin liked very much; and because one day, at her house, she said in his presence that on evenings when there were premieres, or galas, a pass would have been very useful to them, that it had inconvenienced them very much not to have one the day of Gambetta's funeral,[18] Swann, who never talked about his distinguished connections, but only about those which were not very highly esteemed, which he thought it indelicate to conceal, and among which he had, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, fallen into the habit of including his relations with the official world, answered:

"I promise to take care of it, you'll have it in time for the revival of *Les Danicheff*.[19] As it happens, I'm having lunch with the prefect of police tomorrow at the Élysée Palace."

"What? At the Élysée Palace?" shouted Dr. Cottard in a thunderous voice.

"Yes, at M. Grévy's,"[20] answered Swann, a little embarrassed by the effect his remark had produced.

And the painter said to the doctor as a joke:

"Do you have these attacks very often?"

Generally, once an explanation had been given, Cottard would say: "Oh, I see, that's all right then," and not show a trace more of emotion. But this time, Swann's last words, instead of procuring him the usual peace of mind, raised to a fever pitch his astonishment that a man with whom he had dined, who had no official position, no celebrity of any sort, would hobnob with the Head of State.

"What do you mean, M. Grévy? You know M. Grévy?" he said to Swann with the stupid and incredulous look of a policeman on guard at the palace who is asked by a stranger to see the President of the Republic, and who, realizing from these words "what sort of person he is dealing with," as the newspapers say, assures the poor lunatic that he will be received immediately and leads him to the special infirmary of the central police station.

"I know him slightly, we have friends in common." (He did not dare say that one of them was the Prince of Wales.) "Actually, he entertains a good deal, and I assure you these lunches aren't in the least amusing, they're also very simple, there are never more than eight at table," answered Swann, trying to expunge what had seemed to be too dazzling, in the doctor's eyes, about his relations with the President of the Republic.

Immediately Cottard, trusting in the truth of what Swann had said, adopted the opinion, concerning the value of an invitation to M. Grévy's, that it was not a very desirable thing and could be picked up anywhere. From then on, he was no longer surprised that Swann, or anyone else, should visit the Élysée Palace, and he was even a little sorry for him because he had to go to lunches which Swann himself admitted were boring.

"Oh, I see, that's quite all right then," he said in the tone of a customs inspector who, though suspicious a moment before, after hearing your explanations stamps your passport and lets you go through without opening your bags.

"Oh, I believe you, I'm sure those lunches must not be very amusing, and it's good of you to go to them," said Mme. Verdurin, who saw the President of the Republic as a bore to be especially dreaded because he had at his disposal various means of seduction and compulsion which, if employed upon the faithful, would be quite capable of making them desert her. "Apparently he's as deaf as a doorpost and eats with his fingers."

"In that case, certainly it must not be much fun to go there," said the doctor with a touch of commiseration; and, recalling that eight was the number of guests at table: "Are these intimate lunches?" he asked sharply with a linguist's zeal more than a snoop's curiosity.

But the prestige of the President of the Republic in the eyes of the doctor ended by prevailing over both Swann's modesty and Mme. Verdurin's animosity, and at each dinner Cottard would ask with interest: "Will we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He's on personal terms with M. Grévy. Is he in fact what one would call a *gentleman*?"[21] He even went so far as to present him with an invitation card for the dentistry exhibition.

"This will admit you, along with anyone you might like to bring with you, but they won't let dogs in. You understand, I tell you this because some friends of mine didn't know and kicked themselves for it afterward."

As for M. Verdurin, he noticed the bad effect produced on his wife by the discovery that Swann had influential friends whom he had never mentioned.

If they had not arranged a party somewhere, it was at the Verdurins' that Swann would join the little clan, but he came only in the evening, and almost never agreed to have dinner there despite Odette's earnest requests.

"I could even have dinner alone with you, if you would like that better," she would tell him.

"And what about Mme. Verdurin?"

"Oh, that would be easy enough. I would simply tell her my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it."

"You're very sweet."

But Swann said to himself that if he showed Odette (by agreeing only to meet her after dinner) that there were other pleasures he preferred to the pleasure of being with her, a long time would pass before her appetite for him was surfeited. And, too, since he infinitely preferred to Odette's kind of beauty the beauty of a little working girl as fresh and plump as a rose with whom he was smitten, he chose to spend the beginning of the evening with her, being sure of seeing Odette afterward. It was for the same reasons that he never agreed to have Odette pick him up on her way to the Verdurins'. The little working girl would wait for him near his house at a corner known to his coachman Rémi, she would get in beside Swann and stay there in his arms until the moment the carriage drew up in front of the Verdurins'. When he came in, as Mme. Verdurin, pointing to some roses he had sent that morning, said to him: "You deserve a scolding" and showed him a spot next to Odette, the pianist would play for the two of them the little phrase by Vinteuil that was like the anthem of their love. He would begin with the

sustained violin tremolos that are heard alone for a few measures, occupying the entire foreground, then all of a sudden they seemed to move away and, as in those paintings by Pieter de Hooch,[22] which assume greater depth because of the narrow frame of a half-open door, away in the distance, in a different color, in the velvet of an interposed light, the little phrase would appear, dancing, pastoral, interpolated, episodic, belonging to another world. It rippled past, simple and immortal, distributing here and there the gifts of its grace, with the same ineffable smile; but Swann thought he could now distinguish within it some disenchantment. It seemed to realize how futile this happiness was to which it showed the way. In its light grace, there was something finished about it, like the detachment that follows regret. But this hardly mattered to him; he considered the phrase less in itself—in what it could express to a musician who was unaware of his existence or of Odette's when he composed it, and to all those who would hear it in the centuries to come—than as a token, a memory of his love which, even for the Verdurins, even for the young pianist, would remind them of Odette and him at the same time, would join them together; so much so that when Odette, capriciously, had begged him to, he had given up the idea of having some pianist play him the entire sonata, of which he knew as yet only this passage. "Why would you need the rest?" she said to him. "This is *our* piece." And in fact, pained by the thought that, at the moment when it passed so close and yet infinitely far away, though it was addressed to them it did not know them, he was almost sorry it had any meaning, any intrinsic and unalterable beauty, alien to them, just as in the jewels given to us, or even the letters written to us by a woman we love, we resent the water of the gem and the words of the language, because they are not created exclusively from the essence of a passing love affair and a particular person.

It often happened that he had lingered so late with the young working girl before going to the Verdurins' that after the little phrase had been played by the pianist, Swann would notice that it would soon be time for Odette to go home. He would drive her back as far as the door of her little house in the rue La Pérouse behind the Arc de Triomphe. And it was perhaps because of this, in order not to demand all her favors, that he sacrificed the less necessary pleasure of seeing her earlier, of arriving at the Verdurins' with her, to the exercise of this right to leave together which she recognized as his and to which he attached a greater value, since, because of it, he had the impression that no one else saw her, no one else came between them, stopped her from being with him still, after he left her.

And so she would go back in Swann's carriage; one night, when she had just stepped down from it and he was saying he would see her tomorrow, she rushed to pick a last chrysanthemum from the little garden in front of the house and gave it to him before he went off. He held it pressed against his lips on the way home, and when after a few days the flower withered, he locked it with great care in his secretary desk.

But he never went into her house. Only twice, he had gone there in the afternoon to participate in that operation which was of such capital importance for her: "having tea." The isolation and emptiness of the short streets (almost all of them lined with small contiguous private houses, whose monotony would suddenly be interrupted by some sinister street stall, the historic sign and sordid vestige of a time when these districts were still in bad repute), the snow lingering in the garden and on the trees, the slovenliness of the season, the proximity of nature, lent something more mysterious to the warmth, the flowers that he had found when he went in.

Leaving to the left, on the raised ground floor, Odette's bedroom, which looked out on a little parallel street in the back, a straight staircase between walls painted a dark color and hung with Oriental cloths, strings of Turkish beads, and a large Japanese lantern suspended from a slender silk cord (but which, so as not to deprive visitors of the latest comforts of Western civilization, was lit with gas) led up to the drawing room and the morning room. These were preceded by a narrow vestibule whose wall, checkered by a garden trellis, but a gilded one, was lined down its entire length by a rectangular box in which bloomed, as in a greenhouse, a row of those fat chrysanthemums which were still rare at that time, yet nothing like the ones that horticulturalists later succeeded in obtaining. Swann was irritated by the fashion that had favored them since the previous year, but he had taken pleasure, this time, in seeing the half-light of the room striped with pink, orange, and white by the fragrant rays of those ephemeral stars which light up on gray days. Odette had received him in a morning gown of pink silk, her neck and arms bare. She had had him sit next to her in one of the many mysterious alcoves that were contrived in the bays of the drawing room, protected by immense palm trees contained in china cachepots, or by screens festooned with photographs, bows of ribbon, and fans. She had said to him: "You aren't comfortable like that, wait, I'll fix you up," and with the conceited little laugh she would have given at some invention of her own, had settled behind Swann's head, and under his feet, cushions of Japanese silk which she kneaded as if she were lavish with these riches and careless of their value. But when the valet came bringing one after another the many lamps which, nearly all enclosed in large Chinese vases, burned singly or in pairs, all on different pieces of furniture as though on altars, and which had summoned back to the already almost nocturnal twilight of that late afternoon in winter a more lasting sunset, rosier and more human—perhaps making some lover stop and daydream in the street before the mystery of the presence that was at once disclosed and concealed by the glowing panes—she had watched the servant severely from the corner of her eye to see whether he was setting them down properly in their consecrated places. She thought that if even one were put where it should not be, the overall effect of her drawing room would be ruined, and her portrait, placed on a sloping stand draped in plush, would be poorly lit. And so she fervently followed the movements of the ungainly man and reprimanded him sharply when he went too close to two flower stands which she took care to clean herself for fear they would be damaged and which she now went over to examine to see if he had chipped them. She thought all her Chinese knickknacks had "amusing" shapes, as did the orchids, the cattleyas[23] especially, which were, along with the chrysanthemums, her favorite flowers, because they had the great merit of not resembling flowers, but of being made of silk, or satin. "This one looks as though it were cut from the lining of my coat," she said to Swann, showing him an orchid, with a suggestion of respect for this very "chic" flower, for this elegant and unexpected sister which nature had given her, so far removed from her on the scale of living creatures and yet so refined, more deserving than many women of being given a place in her drawing room. As she showed him, first, chimeras with tongues of fire decorating a vase or embroidered on a screen, then the corollas of a bouquet of orchids, then a dromedary of silver inlaid with niello with eyes encrusted with rubies that stood on the mantelpiece next to a jade toad, she affected, first, fear of the wickedness, or laughter at the oddity, of the monsters, then blushes at the indecency of the flowers and then an irresistible desire to go and kiss the dromedary and the toad, which she called "dears." And these affectations contrasted with the sincerity of certain of her devotions, notably to Our Lady of Laghet,[24] who had once, when she lived in Nice, cured her of a fatal illness, and whose gold medal she always wore, attributing to it unlimited powers. Odette made Swann "her" tea, asking him: "Lemon or cream?" and when he answered "Cream," said to him laughing: "A cloud!" And when he found it good: "You see I know what you like." This tea, in fact, seemed as precious a thing to Swann as it did to her, and love has such need to find for itself a justification, a guarantee that it will last, in pleasures which in fact would not be pleasures without it and which end when it ends, that when he left her at seven o'clock to go home and dress, during the whole trip that he made in his coupé, unable to contain the joy which the afternoon had given him, he kept repeating to himself: "How nice it would be to have a little woman like that in whose home one could always find that rare thing, a good cup of tea." An hour later, he received a note from Odette and immediately recognized the large handwriting, in which an affectation of British stiffness imposed an appearance of discipline on ill-formed letters that would perhaps have signified, to less prejudiced eyes, an untidiness of mind, an insufficient education, a lack of frankness and resolution. Swann had forgotten his cigarette case at Odette's. "If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you have it back."

A second visit he made to her was perhaps more important. Going to her house that day, as always when he was to see her, he pictured her to himself beforehand; and his need, if he was to find her face pretty, to limit what he imagined of her cheeks only to her fresh, pink cheekbones since the rest was so often yellow, languid, sometimes marked with little red specks, distressed him, as it seemed to prove that the ideal is inaccessible and happiness mediocre. He had brought her an engraving that she wanted to see. She was a little unwell; she received him in a mauve crepe de chine dressing gown, pulling the richly embroidered material over her chest like a cloak. Standing next to him, allowing her hair, which she had undone, to flow down her cheeks, bending one leg somewhat in the position of a dancer so that without getting tired she could lean over the engraving, which she looked at, inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in a fresco in the Sistine Chapel.[25] Swann had always had this peculiar penchant for amusing himself by rediscovering in the paintings of the masters not only the general characteristics of the real world that surrounds us, but what seems on the contrary the least susceptible to generalization, the individual features of the faces we know: for instance, in the material of a bust of the Doge Loredano by Antonio Rizzo,[26] the jut of the cheekbones, the slant of the eyebrows, altogether the very evident resemblance to his coachman Rémi; under the colors of a Ghirlandaio,[27] M. de Palancy's nose; in a portrait by Tintoretto,[28] the invasion of the cheek's fat by the first implanted hairs of the side-whiskers, the break in the nose, the penetration of the gaze, the congestion of the eyelids of Dr. du Boulbon. Perhaps because he had always continued to feel a touch of remorse that he had limited his life to worldly relationships, to conversation, he believed he could find a sort of indulgent

pardon granted him by the great artists, in the fact that they too had contemplated with pleasure, introduced into their work, faces like these which give it a singular certificate of reality and of truth to life, a modern flavor; perhaps, also, he had allowed himself to be so caught up in the frivolity of the society people that he felt the need to look into an old work of art for these anticipated and rejuvenating allusions to current proper names. Perhaps, on the other hand, he still had enough of an artist's nature so that these individual characteristics gave him pleasure by assuming a more general meaning as soon as he saw them extirpated, emancipated, in the resemblance between an older portrait and an original which it did not represent. Whatever the case, and perhaps because the abundance of impressions that he had been receiving for some time, and even though this abundance had come to him more with his love of music, had enriched even his delight in painting, he now found a deeper pleasure—and this was to exert a permanent influence on Swann—in Odette's resemblance to Zipporah as painted by Sandro di Mariano, whom people call more often by his popular nickname of Botticelli, since that name evokes, not the painter's true work, but the idea of it that is vulgarized, banal, and false. He no longer appraised Odette's face according to the finer or poorer quality of her cheeks and the purely flesh-colored softness he supposed he must find when he touched them with his lips if he ever dared to kiss her, but as a skein of subtle and beautiful lines that his eyes reeled off, following their winding curve, joining the cadence of her nape to the effusion of her hair and the flexion of her eyelids, as in a portrait of her in which her type became intelligible and clear.

He looked at her; a fragment of the fresco appeared in her face and in her body, and from then on he would always try to find it in her again, whether he was with Odette or was only thinking of her, and even though he probably valued the Florentine masterpiece only because he found it again in her, nevertheless that resemblance conferred a certain beauty on her too, made her more precious. Swann reproached himself for having misunderstood the value of a creature who would have appeared captivating to the great Sandro, and he felt happy that his pleasure in seeing Odette could be justified by his own aesthetic culture. He told himself that, in associating the thought of Odette with his dreams of happiness, he had not been resigning himself to a second best as imperfect as he had believed until now, since she satisfied his most refined artistic tastes. He forgot that this did not make Odette any more the sort of woman he desired, since in fact his desire had always been oriented in a direction opposite to his aesthetic tastes. The words "Florentine painting" did Swann a great service. They allowed him, like a title, to bring the image of Odette into a world of dreams to which it had not had access until now and where it was steeped in nobility. And, while the simple view he had had of this woman in the flesh, by perpetually renewing his doubts about the quality of her face, her body, her whole beauty, had weakened his love, these doubts were vanquished, that love confirmed when he had instead, for a foundation, the principles of an unquestionable aesthetic; while the kiss and the possession that would seem natural and ordinary if they had been granted him by damaged flesh, coming as they did to crown the adoration of a museum piece appeared to him necessarily supernatural and delicious.

And when he was tempted to regret the fact that for months now he had done nothing but see Odette, he said to himself that it was reasonable to give a good deal of his time to an inestimable masterpiece, cast just this once in a different and particularly savory material, in a most rare exemplar that he contemplated sometimes with the humility, spirituality, and disinterestedness of an artist, and sometimes with the pride, egotism, and sensuality of a collector.

He placed on his worktable, as if it were a photograph of Odette, a reproduction of Jethro's daughter. He admired the large eyes, the delicate face, which allowed one to imagine the imperfect skin, the marvelous curls of the hair along the tired cheeks, and adapting what he had found aesthetically beautiful up to then to the idea of a living woman, he translated it into physical attractions which he rejoiced to find united in a creature whom he could possess. The vague feeling of sympathy that draws us toward a masterpiece as we look at it became, now that he knew the fleshly original of Jethro's daughter, a desire that henceforth compensated for the desire that Odette's body had not at first inspired in him. When he had looked at that Botticelli for a long time, he would think of his own Botticelli, whom he found even more beautiful, and, bringing the photograph of Zipporah close to him, he would believe he was clasping Odette against his heart.

And yet he strained his ingenuity not only to prevent Odette from becoming tired of him, but also, sometimes, to prevent himself from becoming tired of her; feeling that, ever since Odette had had every opportunity to see him, she did not seem to have much to say to him, he was afraid that the rather banal, monotonous, and more or less permanently predetermined manner she now had when they were together would end by killing the romantic hope he had that one day she would declare her passion, a hope which alone had made him fall in love and stay in love. And in order to work a little transformation in Odette's quite invariable attitude of mind, which he was afraid would make him grow tired of her, he would suddenly write her a letter full of feigned disappointment and simulated anger that he would send round to her before dinner. He knew that she would be dismayed, and would answer him, and he hoped that in the contraction of her soul caused by her fear of losing him, words would spring forth that she had never yet said to him—and in fact it was by doing this that he had obtained the most tender letters she had yet written to him, including one, which she had sent round to him at noon from La Maison Dorée[29] (it was the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, held for the flood victims of Murcia)[30] that began with these words: "My dearest, my hand is trembling so badly I can hardly write," and that he had kept in the same drawer as the dry chrysanthemum flower. Or, if she had not had time to write to him, when he arrived at the Verdurins' she would come up to him quickly, saying, "I have to talk to you," and he would gaze curiously at what he saw in her face and her words that she had until then kept hidden from him, of all that was in her heart.

Even as he approached the Verdurins', when he saw the large lamp-lit windows whose shutters were never closed, he was moved as he thought of the charming creature he was going to see in full bloom in their golden light. Now and then the figures of the guests stood out in silhouette, slender and black, screening the lamps, like those little pictures intercalated at intervals around a translucent lampshade whose other panels are plain light. He would try to distinguish Odette's silhouette. Then, as soon as he arrived, without his realizing it, his eyes would shine with such joy that M. Verdurin would say to the painter: "I think it's getting warm." And for Swann, Odette's presence did indeed add something to this house which none of the others in which he was entertained possessed: a sort of sensory apparatus, a nervous system ramifying through all the rooms and causing constant excitations in his heart.

And so the simple functioning of that social organism, the little "clan," automatically arranged daily meetings with Odette for Swann and allowed him to feign an indifference to seeing her, or even a desire not to see her, which did not make him run any great risks, since, whatever he wrote to her during the day, he would necessarily see her that evening and take her home.

But once when, having glumly contemplated that inevitable ride home together, he had taken his young working girl all the way to the Bois in order to delay the moment of going to the Verdurins', he arrived at their house so late that Odette, thinking he would not be coming, had already left. When he saw that she was no longer in the drawing room, Swann felt a pain in his heart; he trembled at being deprived of a pleasure that he was now measuring for the first time, having had until then that certainty of finding it when he wanted it which in the case of all pleasures diminishes for us, or even prevents us from perceiving at all, their greatness.

"Did you notice the look on his face when he saw she wasn't here?" said M. Verdurin to his wife. "I think one may say he's smitten!"

"The look on his face?" asked Dr. Cottard violently, since, having gone out briefly to see a patient and returned to pick up his wife, he did not know whom they were discussing.

"What, you didn't meet the most handsome of all Swanns at the front door . . ."

"No. M. Swann was here?"

"Oh, just for a moment. We had a very agitated, a very nervous Swann. You see, Odette had already left."

"You mean she and he are thick as thieves? She has given him the key to her city?" asked the doctor, cautiously testing the meaning of the expressions.

"No, no, there's absolutely nothing going on, and just between us, I think she's making a great mistake and behaving like a real idiot, which she is, in fact."

"Tut, tut, tut," said M. Verdurin. "What do you know about it, how do you know there's nothing going on? We haven't gone there to see for ourselves, have we?"

"She would have told me," retorted Mme. Verdurin proudly. "I tell you she lets me know about all her little affairs! As she hasn't anyone just now, I told her she ought to sleep with him. She claims she can't, she says she was certainly rather infatuated with him at first, but that he's shy with her, which makes her shy with him, and then anyway she doesn't love him that way, he's some sort of ideal for her, she's afraid of taking the bloom off the feeling she has for him, what do I know? Yet it would be just what she needs."

"Allow me to disagree with you," said M. Verdurin. "I'm not overly fond of the gentleman's manner; I think he's affected."

Mme. Verdurin froze, assumed an inert expression as if she had turned into a statue, a fiction that allowed it to be assumed that she had not heard that intolerable word *affected,* which seemed to imply that one could "be affected" with them, therefore that one was "better than them."

"Anyway, if there's nothing going on, I don't think it's because the gentleman thinks she's *virtuous,*" M. Verdurin said ironically. "And after all, one can't say anything, since he seems to think she's intelligent. I don't know if you heard what he was declaiming to her the other evening about Vinteuil's sonata; I love Odette with all my heart, but to construct aesthetic theories for her benefit, you'd really have to be quite an imbecile!"

"Now, don't say bad things about Odette," said Mme. Verdurin, playing the child. "She's so charming."

"But she can still be charming. We aren't saying bad things about her, we're saying she's not a saint, she's not a genius. In fact," he said to the painter, "are you really so anxious for her to be virtuous? Who knows—perhaps she would be far less charming."

On the landing Swann had been approached by the butler, who was not there when he arrived and had been instructed by Odette—but this was already an hour before—to tell him, in case he should still come, that she would probably go and have some chocolate at Prévost's[31] before returning home. Swann left for Prévost's, but at every step of the way his carriage was stopped by other carriages or by people crossing the street, loathsome obstacles that he would gladly have knocked down if the policeman and his report would not have delayed him even more than the passage of a pedestrian. He counted the time he was taking, and added a few seconds to all the minutes to be sure of not having made them too short, which would have allowed him to think the chance was greater than it really was that he would arrive early enough and still find Odette. And at one point, like a man in a fever who has just been sleeping and who becomes aware of the absurdity of the dreams he has been contemplating without clearly distinguishing himself from them, Swann suddenly perceived how alien to himself were the thoughts he had been revolving since the moment he had been told at the Verdurins' that Odette had already left, how new the pain he was suffering in his heart, but noted it only as though he had just woken up. What? All this agitation because he would not see Odette till tomorrow, exactly what he had wanted, an hour ago, when he arrived at Mme. Verdurin's! He was obliged to acknowledge that in this same carriage which was taking him to Prévost's he himself was no longer the same, and that he was no longer alone, that a new person was there with him, attached to him, amalgamated to him, one from whom he might not be able to free himself, whom he was going to have to treat with circumspection, like a master or an illness. And yet for a moment now, since he had felt a new person had been added to him in this way, his life had seemed to him more interesting. He hardly said to himself that this possible meeting at Prévost's, however (the expectation of which so disordered, so denuded the moments preceding it that he could no longer find a single idea, a single memory within which he could rest his mind), would probably, if it took place, be like the others, not much of anything. As on every other evening, once he was with Odette, casting on her changing face a furtive glance which he would immediately turn away for fear that she would see in it his mounting desire and no longer believe in his disinterest, he would cease to be able to think about her, too occupied with finding pretexts that would permit him not to leave her right away and to make certain, without seeming to care about it, that he would see her again the next day at the Verdurins': that is, to prolong for the moment and to renew for yet one more day the disappointment and torment that came to him from the pointless presence of this woman whom he saw so regularly without daring to take her in his arms.

She was not at Prévost's; he wanted to look in every restaurant along the boulevards. In order to gain time, while he visited some he sent into the others his coachman Rémi (the Doge Loredano by Rizzo), for whom he then waited—having found nothing himself—at a place he had specified to him. The carriage did not return and Swann pictured to himself the approaching moment, as both the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady is here," and the moment in which Rémi would say to him: "The lady was not in any of the cafés." And so he saw the end of the evening before him, one single outcome and yet an alternative as well, preceded either by a meeting with Odette which would put an end to his agony, or by a forced renunciation of finding her this evening, an acceptance of returning home without having seen her.

The coachman came back, but at the moment he stopped in front of Swann, Swann did not say to him: "Did you find the lady?" but: "Remind me, tomorrow, to order more wood; I think our supply must be almost exhausted." Perhaps he had told himself that if Rémi had found Odette in some café where she was waiting for him, the end of the ill-fated evening would already be canceled out by the fulfillment, which was just beginning, of the blissful end of the evening and that he did not need to rush to seize a happiness that was already captured and held in a safe place, that would not be able to break free. But it was also from the force of inertia; there was in his soul that lack of suppleness which can be seen in the bodies of certain people who, at the moment when they need to avoid a collision, to snatch a flame away from their clothing, to perform some other urgent motion, instead take their time, begin by remaining for a second in their original position, as though to find in it their springboard, their source of momentum. And no doubt, if the coachman had interrupted him by saying: "The lady is there," he would have answered: "Oh yes, of course, the errand I sent you on! Well, well! Is that so?" and would have gone on talking to him about supplies of wood in order to hide the emotion he felt and allow himself time to separate from his uneasiness and give himself up to his happiness.

But the coachman came back to tell him he had not found her anywhere, and added his opinion, old servant that he was:

"I think that all Monsieur can do now is go home."

But the indifference that Swann had no trouble feigning as long as Rémi could do nothing further to change the answer he had brought back fell from him, when he saw Rémi attempt to make him give up hope and abandon his search:

"No, not at all," he cried, "we must find the lady; it's terribly important. She would be extremely annoyed—it's a business matter—she would be extremely offended if she didn't see me."

"I don't see how the lady could be offended," answered Rémi, "since she's the one who left without waiting for Monsieur, and since she said she would go to Prévost's and then she wasn't there."

Lights were beginning to go out all around him. Under the trees on the boulevards, in a mysterious darkness, fewer people wandered past, barely recognizable. Now and then the shadow of a woman coming up to him, murmuring a word in his ear, asking him to take her home, would make Swann start. He brushed anxiously against all those dim bodies as if, among the phantoms of the dead, in the kingdom of darkness, he were searching for Eurydice.

Of all the modes by which love is brought into being, of all the agents which disseminate the holy evil, surely one of the most efficacious is this great gust of agitation which now and then sweeps over us. Then our fate is sealed, and the person whose company we enjoy at the time is the one we will love. It is not even necessary for us to have liked him better than anyone else up to then, or even as much. What is necessary is that our predilection for him should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled when—at a moment like this, when we do not have him with us—the quest for the pleasures that his charm gave us is suddenly replaced in us by an anxious need whose object is this person himself, an absurd need which the laws of this world make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to cure—the senseless and painful need to possess him.

Swann asked to be driven to the last remaining restaurants; it was only the hypothesis of happiness he had been able to envisage calmly; now he no longer hid his agitation, the value he placed on this meeting; and he promised a reward to his coachman if they were successful, as though, by inspiring him with a desire to succeed that would be added to his own, he could make Odette appear, even if she had already gone home to bed, in a restaurant on the boulevard. He pushed on as far as La Maison Dorée, went into Tortoni's[32] twice and, still without having seen her, had just come out of the Café Anglais[33] again, walking fast with a wild look on his face back to his carriage, which was waiting for him at the corner of the boulevard des Italiens, when he bumped into a woman coming in the opposite direction: it was Odette; later, she explained that she had not found a seat at Prévost's and so had gone to have supper at La Maison Dorée in an alcove where he had not noticed her, and she was on her way back to her carriage.

She had so little expected to see him that she recoiled in fear. And he himself had run all over Paris not because he thought it was possible to find her, but because it was too hard for him to give up the search. But the joy which his reason had continued to believe was beyond realization that night only seemed even more real now; for since he had not collaborated with it by foreseeing its probabilities, it remained external to him; he did not need to reach into his mind to furnish it with truth, the truth emanated from it, was projected by it toward him, that truth whose radiance dispelled like a dream the isolation he had so dreaded, that truth on which he now based, on which he now rested, without thinking, his happy reverie. In the same way, a traveler arriving at the Mediterranean shore on a day of fine weather, no longer certain that the lands he has just left behind really exist, allows his vision to be dazzled, rather than looking at them himself, by the rays of light emitted in his direction by the luminous, resistant azure of the waters.

He stepped up with her into the carriage that she had waiting there, and told his own to follow.

She was holding a bunch of cattleyas in her hand and Swann saw, under her lace scarf, that she had flowers of the same orchid in her hair, fastened to a plume of swan feathers. She was dressed, under her mantilla, in a flood of black velvet caught up on one side to reveal in a wide triangle the hem of a skirt of white faille and showing a yoke, also of white faille, at the opening of a low-necked bodice tucked with more cattleyas. She had barely recovered from the fright Swann had given her when some obstacle made the horse shy. They were roughly jolted, she cried out and began trembling all over, breathless.

"It's all right," he said, "don't be afraid."

And he put his arm around her shoulder, supporting her against himself; then he said:

"Now don't talk to me, just answer with a sign so you don't get even more out of breath. It won't bother you, will it, if I straighten the flowers in your bodice? They were knocked out of place when the carriage lurched. I'm afraid you may lose them, I'll push them in a little."

She was not used to seeing a man make such a fuss over her, and said, smiling:

"No, not at all. I don't mind in the least."

But he, intimidated by her answer, and perhaps also so as to appear to have been sincere when he had used that excuse, or even beginning to believe that he had been, exclaimed:

"No, no! Don't talk, you'll get out of breath again, you can answer me perfectly well with a gesture, I'll understand. Tell me sincerely, this doesn't bother you? You see, there's a little . . . I think there's some pollen sprinkled on you; will you let me wipe it off with my hand? I'm not doing it too quickly, I'm not being too rough? Am I tickling you a little, maybe? I don't want to touch the velvet of your dress, I'm afraid I might crush it. But look, it really was necessary to fasten them, they would have fallen; and this way, by pushing them in a little myself . . . Seriously; I'm not annoying you? And what if I just take a little sniff to see if they really have no fragrance? I've never smelled them. May I? Tell the truth."

Smiling, she shrugged her shoulders a little, as though to say "You're quite mad; you can see very well that I like it."

He ran his other hand up along Odette's cheek; she gazed at him steadily, with the grave and languid look of the women by the Florentine master whom he had discovered she resembled; protruding to the edges of her lids, her shining eyes, wide and thin, like theirs, seemed about to well out like two tears. She bent her neck as you see them all do, in the pagan scenes as well as in the religious pictures. And in a position which was no doubt habitual for her, which she knew was appropriate to moments like this and which she took care not to forget to adopt, she seemed to require all her strength to hold her face back, as though an invisible force were drawing it toward Swann. And it was Swann who, before she let her face fall, as though despite herself, onto his lips, held it back for an instant, at a certain distance, between his two hands. He had wanted to give his mind time to catch up, to recognize the dream it had caressed for so long and to be present at its realization, like a relative summoned to witness the success of a child she has loved very much. Perhaps Swann was also fastening upon this face of an Odette he had not yet possessed, an Odette he had not yet even kissed, this face he was seeing for the last time, the gaze with which, on the day of our departure, we hope to carry away with us a landscape we are about to leave forever.

But he was so timid with her that, having ended by possessing her that night, after beginning by arranging her cattleyas, either from dread of offending her, or from fear of appearing in retrospect to have lied, or from a lack of audacity in formulating a greater demand than this one (which he could renew since it had not angered Odette the first time), in the days following he made use of the same pretext. If she had cattleyas tucked in her blouse, he would say: "It's a pity, this evening the cattleyas don't need to be straightened, they haven't been jostled the way they were the other evening; it seems to me, though, that this one isn't quite straight. May I see if these have more fragrance than the others?" Or, if she had none: "Oh! No cattleyas tonight, no way for me to indulge in a little rearranging." So that, for some time, the order he had followed the first night, when he began by touching Odette's throat with his fingers and lips, was not changed, and his caresses still began this way each time; and much later, when the rearrangement (or the ritual simulacrum of rearrangements) of the cattleyas had long since been abandoned, the metaphor "make cattleya," having become a simple phrase they used without thinking about it when they wanted to signify the act of physical possession—in which, in fact, one possesses nothing—lived on in their language, commemorating it, after that forgotten custom. And perhaps this individual way of saying "make love" did not mean exactly the same thing as its synonyms. Even if one is tired of women, even if one believes that the possession of the most various women is always the same and familiar beforehand, this possession becomes a new pleasure if it involves women difficult enough—or believed to be so by us—so that we have to make it happen as a result of some episode in our relationship that is unforeseen, as had been for Swann, the first time, the rearranging of the cattleyas. He tremulously hoped, that night (but Odette, he told himself, if she was fooled by his ruse, would not be able to guess as much), that the possession of this woman was what would emerge from among their broad mauve petals; and the pleasure he felt already and that Odette was perhaps tolerating, he thought, only because she had not recognized it, seemed to him, because of that—as it might seem to the first man who tasted it among the flowers of earthly paradise—a pleasure that had not existed until then, that he was seeking to create, a pleasure—signaled by the special name he gave it—entirely individual and new.

Now, every evening, when he took her home, he had to go in, and often she came back out in a dressing gown and led him to his carriage, kissed him within view of the coachman, saying: "What difference does it make to me, what other people think of me?" On evenings when he did not go to the Verdurins' (which happened sometimes now that he had another way of seeing her), on the increasingly rare evenings when he went into society, she would ask him to come to see her on his way home, whatever the hour. It was spring, a clear and icy spring. Coming out of a party, he would get into his victoria, spread a rug over his legs, tell the friends who were going off at the same time and who had asked him to join them that he could not, that he was not going in the same direction, and the coachman would leave at a fast trot knowing where to go. They would be amazed, and, in fact, Swann was no longer the same. No one ever received a letter from him now asking for an introduction to some woman. He no longer paid any attention to women, avoided going to places where one might meet them. In a restaurant, in the country, his attitude was the opposite of the one by which, just recently, he could be recognized and which had seemed to have been his always. To such an extent does a passion manifest itself in us as a temporary and distinct character that replaces our other character and eliminates the signs, invariable until then, by which it was expressed! Now, however, what was invariable was that, wherever Swann might be, he did not fail to go to meet Odette. The path that separated him from her was the one he inevitably traveled as though it were the slope itself, rapid and irresistible, of his life. In truth, when he had stayed out late, he would often have preferred to go directly home without making that long trip, and not see her until the next day; but the very fact of taking the trouble to go to her house at an unusual hour, of guessing that the friends who were leaving him were saying to themselves: "He is tied hand and foot, some woman must be insisting that he go to her whatever the hour," made him feel he was leading the life of men known to be having a love affair and in whom the sacrifice they are making of their sleep and their other interests to a dream of sensuous pleasure produces an inner charm. Then again, without his realizing it, the certainty that she was waiting for him, that she was not somewhere else with other people, that he would not return without seeing her, neutralized the anguish, forgotten but always ready to be reawakened, which he had felt the night when Odette was not at the Verdurins', and of which the present assuagement was so sweet that it could be named happiness. Perhaps it was to this anguish that he owed the importance which Odette had now assumed for him. Other people usually leave us so indifferent that when we have invested in one of them such possibilities of causing us pain and joy, that person seems to belong to another universe, is surrounded with poetry, turns our life into a sort of expanse of emotion in which that person will be more or less close to us. Swann could not ask himself without anxiety what Odette would mean to him in the years to come. Now and then, as he saw, from his victoria, on those lovely cold nights, the shining moon spreading its brightness between his eyes and the deserted streets, he would think of that other face, bright and tinged with pink like the moon's, which, one day, had appeared in the forefront of his mind and, since then, had cast on the world the mysterious light in which he saw it. If he arrived after the hour when Odette sent her servants to bed, before ringing at the gate of the little garden he would first go into the street onto which looked out, on the ground floor, between the windows, all alike but dark, of the contiguous houses, the only one illuminated, the window of her room. He would rap at the pane, and she, alerted, would answer and go and wait for him on the other side, at the front door. He would find several of her favorite pieces open on the piano: the "Valse des Roses" or "Pauvre Fou" by Tagliafico[34] (which should, according to her wishes, which she had put into writing, be performed at her funeral); he would ask her to play instead the little phrase from Vinteuil's sonata, even though Odette played very badly, but the loveliest vision of a work of art that remains with us is often the one that transcended the wrong notes coaxed by unskillful fingers from an out-of-tune piano. For Swann the little phrase continued to be associated with the love he felt for Odette. He was aware that this love was something that did not correspond to anything external, anything verifiable by others besides him; he realized that Odette's qualities did not justify his attaching so much value to the time he spent with her. And often, when Swann's positive intelligence alone prevailed, he wanted to stop sacrificing so many intellectual and social interests to this imaginary pleasure. But as soon as he heard it, the little phrase had the power to open up within him the space it

needed, the proportions of Swann's soul were changed by it; a margin was reserved in him for a bliss that also did not correspond to any external object, and yet, instead of being purely individual, like the enjoyment of that love, assumed for Swann a reality superior to that of concrete things. The little phrase incited in him this thirst for an unfamiliar delight, but it did not give him anything precise to assuage it. So that those parts of Swann's soul from which the little phrase had erased any concern for material interests, any considerations that were human and valid for all people, it left vacant and blank, and in them he was free to write Odette's name. Moreover, where Odette's affection might seem somewhat limited and disappointing, the little phrase came along to add to it, to amalgamate with it its mysterious essence. From the sight of Swann's face as he listened to the phrase, one would have said he was absorbing an anesthetic that allowed him to breathe more deeply. And the pleasure which the music gave him, and which was soon to create in him a true need, did indeed resemble, at those moments, the pleasure he would have found in testing fragrances, in entering into contact with a world for which we are not made, which seems formless to us because our eyes do not perceive it, meaningless because it evades our understanding, which we can attain only through a single sense. What great repose, what mysterious renewal for Swann—for him whose eyes, though refined lovers of painting, whose mind, though a shrewd observer of manners, bore forever the indelible trace of the aridity of his life—to feel himself transformed into a creature strange to humanity, blind, without logical faculties, almost a fantastic unicorn, a chimerical creature perceiving the world only through his hearing. And since he still searched the little phrase for a meaning to which his intellect could not descend, what strange drunkenness he felt, as he divested his innermost soul of all the help of reason and forced it to pass alone through the sieve, through the dark filter of sound! He began to become aware of all that was painful, perhaps even secretly unappeased in the depths of the sweetness of that phrase, but it could not hurt him. What did it matter if it told him love was fragile, his own love was so strong! He toyed with the sadness it diffused, he felt it pass over him, but in a caress that only deepened and sweetened his sense of his own happiness. He made Odette play it ten times, twenty times, demanding that while she did so she should not stop kissing him. Each kiss summons another. Ah, in those first days of our love, kisses come so naturally! So closely, in their profusion, do they crowd together; and it would be as hard for us to count the kisses we give each other in an hour as the flowers of a field in the month of May. Then she would make as if to stop, saying: "How can you expect me to play if you hold on to me? I can't do everything at once. Now decide what you want—should I play the piano or play with you?," he would become annoyed, she would burst out laughing, and her laughter would change and descend on him in a rain of kisses. Or she would look at him with a sullen expression, once again he would see before him a face worthy of figuring in Botticelli's *Life of Moses,* he would place her in it, he would give her neck the necessary inclination; and when he had well and truly painted her in distemper, in the fifteenth century, on the wall of the Sistine Chapel, the idea that she had nevertheless remained here, by the piano, in the present moment, ready to be kissed and possessed, the idea of her materiality and her life would intoxicate him with such force that, his eyes distracted, his jaw tensed as though to devour her, he would swoop down upon that Botticelli virgin and begin pinching her cheeks. Then, once he had left her, not without going back in to kiss her again because he had forgotten to carry away in his memory some detail of her fragrance or her features, while he was returning home in his victoria, he would bless Odette for allowing him these daily visits, which he felt could not give her very great joy, but which, by saving him from becoming jealous—by relieving him of the occasion for suffering again from the disease that had broken out in him on the evening when he had not found her at the Verdurins'—would help him to arrive, without having any more of those crises of which the first had been so painful and must remain the only one, at the end of this singular period of his life, these hours that were almost enchanted, like those in which he crossed Paris in the light of the moon. And noticing, during his return, that the star had now moved in relation to him and was almost at the edge of the horizon, feeling that his love, too, was obeying immutable and natural laws, he asked himself whether this period he had entered would last much longer, whether, soon, his thoughts would no longer see the dear face except as occupying a distant and diminished place, and nearly ceasing to radiate any charm. For Swann did find charm in things, now that he was in love, just as during the period when, as an adolescent, he had thought he was an artist; but this was no longer the same charm; Odette alone conferred it on them. He felt the inspirations of his youth, which had been dissipated by a frivolous life, reawakening in him, but they all bore the reflection, the mark of a particular being; and, in the long hours which he now found a delicate pleasure in spending at home, alone with his convalescing soul, little by little he became himself again, but possessed by another.

He went to her house only in the evening, and he knew nothing about how she spent her time during the day, any more than about her past, so much so that he lacked even that initial bit of information which, by allowing us to imagine for ourselves what we do not know, makes us want to know it. Thus, he did not ask himself what she might be doing, nor what sort of life she had had. He merely smiled sometimes at the thought that a few years before, when he did not know her, someone had spoken to him of a woman who, if he remembered rightly, must certainly have been she, as being a courtesan, a kept woman, one of those women to whom he still attributed, since he had spent very little time in their company, the willful, fundamentally perverse character with which they were for so long endowed by the imaginations of certain novelists. He would tell himself that often if one simply believes the opposite of the reputation the world has formed one will judge a person accurately, when he contrasted the character of such a woman with that of Odette, good, naive, enamored of idealism, so nearly incapable of not telling the truth that, after he begged her one day, so that he could have dinner alone with her, to write to the Verdurins telling them that she was unwell, the next day he had seen her, face-to-face with Mme. Verdurin, who was asking her if she felt better, blush, stammer, and reveal on her face despite herself what an affliction, what a torment it was for her to lie, and, while in her answer she multiplied the invented details of her alleged indisposition the day before, appear to be asking forgiveness, by her supplicating looks and her sorrowful voice, for the falseness of her words.

On certain days, however, though they were rare, she came to his home in the afternoon, interrupting his daydreams or the study of Vermeer he had resumed lately. His servant would come to tell him that Mme. de Crécy was in his morning room. He would go off to find her there, and when he opened the door, as soon as she saw Swann, a smile would come and settle in Odette's rosy face, changing the shape of her mouth, the look in her eyes, the modeling of her cheeks. Once he was alone, he would see that smile again, he would see the one she had given him the day before, another with which she had greeted him on a different occasion, the smile which had been her answer, in the carriage, when he had asked if it annoyed her that he was straightening her cattleyas; and Odette's life during the rest of the time, since he knew nothing about it, appeared to him, with its neutral and colorless background, similar to those sheets of studies by Watteau[35] in which one sees here and there, in every space, from every angle, drawn in three colors on buff paper, innumerable smiles. But sometimes, in a corner of that life which Swann saw as completely empty, even if his mind told him it was not, because he could not imagine it, some friend, who, suspecting they loved each other, had not dared to tell him anything about her except what was insignificant, would describe to him Odette's form, which he had seen, that very morning, going up the rue Abbatucci[36] on foot in a "visiting cloak" trimmed with skunk, under a "Rembrandt-style" hat, and with a bouquet of violets in her bodice. This simple sketch was greatly disturbing to Swann because it suddenly made him see that Odette had a life which did not belong entirely to him; he wanted to know whom she had been trying to please with that outfit, which he did not know she possessed; he would promise himself to ask her where she had been going, at that moment, as if in the whole of his mistress's colorless life—almost inexistent, because it was invisible to him—there had been only one thing apart from all those smiles directed at him: her walking under a Rembrandt-style hat, with a bunch of violets in her bodice.

Except when he asked her for the little phrase by Vinteuil instead of "The Waltz of the Roses," Swann did not try to make her play things he liked or, any more in music than in literature, to correct her bad taste. He fully realized that she was not intelligent. When she told him she would like it so much if he would tell her about the great poets, she had imagined that she would immediately become familiar with heroic and romantic couplets like those by the Vicomte de Borelli,[37] but even more moving. As for Vermeer of Delft, she asked if he had ever suffered because of a woman, if it was a woman who had inspired him, and when Swann admitted to her that no one knew anything about that, she lost interest in the painter. She often said: "I do believe, of course, that poetry—well, that there would be nothing more beautiful if it was true, if poets really believed everything they said. But quite often, those people are the most calculating of all. I know something about it, because a friend of mine was in love with a poet of sorts. In his poetry all he talked about was love, the sky, the stars. Oh, she was fooled all right! He did her out of more than three hundred thousand francs." If Swann then tried to teach her what artistic beauty was, how one should admire poetry or painting, after a moment she would stop listening, saying: "Yes . . . I didn't imagine it was like that." And he would sense that she was feeling such disappointment that he would prefer to lie, telling her that what he had said was nothing, that it was the least important part, that he did not have the time to go into things more deeply, that there was something else. But she would say to him sharply: "Something else? What? . . . Say it, then," but he would not say it, knowing it would seem feeble to her and different from what she was hoping for, less sensational and less touching, and fearing that, disillusioned by art, she would at the same time be disillusioned by love.

And in fact she found Swann intellectually inferior to what she would have imagined. “You’re always so reserved. I can’t make you out.” She would marvel more at his indifference to money, his kindness to everyone, his refinement. And it often happens, in fact, to greater men than Swann, to a scientist or an artist, when he is not misunderstood by those around him, that the feeling on their part which proves that the superiority of his intelligence has compelled their recognition is not their admiration for his ideas, since these are beyond them, but their respect for his goodness. There was also the respect with which Odette was inspired by Swann’s position in society, but she did not want him to try to secure invitations for her. Perhaps she felt that he might not be successful, or was even afraid that merely by talking about her he would prompt revelations that she dreaded. In any case, she had made him promise never to utter her name. The reason she did not want to go into society, she had told him, was a quarrel she had once had with a friend who, to avenge herself, had then said bad things about her. Swann objected: “But not everyone knew your friend.” “Well, yes, but these things get around. The world is cruel.” Swann did not understand this story, but on the other hand he knew that such precepts—“The world is cruel,” “A slanderous remark spreads like a drop of oil”—were generally held to be true; there must be cases to which they applied. Was Odette’s one of them? He wondered about this, but not for long, because he, too, was subject to the mental torpor that had burdened his father whenever he posed himself a difficult problem. Besides, this world which so frightened Odette did not, perhaps, inspire any great desire in her, because it was too far removed from the one she knew for her to picture it quite clearly. However, while she had remained in certain respects truly simple (for example she had kept as her friend a solitary little seamstress, whose steep, dark, and foul-smelling stair she climbed almost every day), she thirsted after fashion, but did not conceive of it as the fashionable people did. For them, fashion is a thing that emanates from a small number of individuals who project it to a considerable distance—more and more faintly the farther one is from the center of their closest associations—through the circle of their friends or the friends of their friends, whose names form a sort of register. Society people hold this register in their memory, they have an erudition about such matters, from which they have derived a sort of taste, a sort of discernment, so that if Swann, for example, read in a newspaper the names of the people who were at a dinner, he could immediately, without having to call upon his knowledge of the world, tell the exact degree of stylishness of that dinner, the way a literary person, simply by reading a sentence, can judge exactly the quality of its author. But Odette was one of those people (extremely numerous, whatever the fashionable world may think, and the likes of which exist in every class of society) who do not share these notions, who imagine a stylishness that is quite different, that assumes different guises according to the circle to which they belong, but has the particular characteristic—whether it be the sort of stylishness Odette dreamed of, or the sort Mme. Cottard worshiped—of being directly accessible to everyone. The other, the stylishness of the society people, is accessible too, in truth, but only after a certain delay. Odette would say of someone:

“He only goes to the really smart places.”

And if Swann asked her what she meant by that, she would answer him a little scornfully:

“Why, smart places! My goodness! If at your age you need to be taught what the smart places are, I don’t know what to tell you. For example, the avenue de l’Impératrice[38] on Sunday mornings, the Tour du Lac[39] at five o’clock, the Éden Théâtre[40] on Thursdays, the Hippodrome [41] on Friday, the balls . . .”

“Now, what balls?”

“Why, the balls people give in Paris, the smart people, I mean. Well, Herbinger, you know, the one that has a job with a broker? But you must know him, he’s one of the most successful men in Paris, that tall blond young man who’s such a snob, who always has a flower in his buttonhole, a part at the back, light-colored overcoats; he goes about with that old thing who wears so much paint on her face, he takes her out to all the premieres. Well, he gave a ball the other night, and the smartest people in Paris were there. How I would have loved to go! But you had to show your invitation card at the door and I couldn’t get one. Really, I’m just as glad I didn’t go, I would have got killed in the crush, and I wouldn’t have seen a thing. It’s really just to be able to say you were at Herbinger’s. And you know how I like to boast! Anyway, you can bet that out of a hundred girls who tell you they were there, half of them are lying . . . But actually, you’re such a swell, I’m amazed you weren’t there.”

But Swann in no way tried to make her change this conception of fashionable life; thinking that his own was no more real, was also foolish, unimportant, he saw no point in instructing her about it, so that after some months she had no interest in the people whose homes he went to except as a means of obtaining enclosure passes for the horse races or tickets to the premieres. She wanted him to cultivate useful relationships of that kind, but in other respects she was persuaded they were not very smart, after she saw the Marquise de Villeparisis go past her in the street wearing a black woolen dress and a bonnet with strings.

“Why, she looks like a working-class woman, darling,[42] like an old concierge! That was a marquise! I’m no marquise, but you’d have to pay me handsomely to make me go about rigged out like that!”

She could not understand why Swann lived in the house on the quai d’Orléans which, though she did not dare admit it to him, she found unworthy of him.

Of course she claimed she loved “antiques” and assumed a rapturous and discriminating air when she said she adored spending a whole day “collecting curios,” looking for “bric-a-brac,” things “from the past.” Although she persisted in a sort of point of honor (and as though she were obeying some family precept) in never answering questions or “accounting” for how she spent her days, she talked to Swann once about a friend who had invited her to her house, where everything was “period.” But Swann could not manage to make her say what that period was. After some reflection, however, she answered that it was “medieval.” By this she meant that there was wood paneling. Sometime later, she talked to him about her friend again and added, in the hesitant tone and with the knowing look with which you mention someone you have had dinner with the night before and whose name you never heard before, but whom your hosts seemed to consider someone so celebrated that you hope the person you are talking to will know who you are talking about: “Her dining room . . . is . . . eighteenth century!” She had thought the room was hideous, bare, as if the house were not finished, the women looked hideous in it too, and the fashion would never catch on. Finally, a third time, she talked about it again and showed Swann the address of the man who had made that dining room and whom she wanted to send for, when she had the money, to see if he could make one for her, not the same one, of course, but another which she was contemplating and which unfortunately the dimensions of her little house would not allow, one with tall sideboards, Renaissance furniture, and fireplaces like the ones in the Château de Blois.[43] That day, she let slip in Swann’s presence what she thought of his home on the quai d’Orléans; because he had criticized the fact that Odette’s friend preferred, not Louis XVI, for, he said, even though that was not done, it could be charming, but the fake antique: “You wouldn’t want her to live the way you do, with your broken furniture and your threadbare carpets,” she said to him, her bourgeois deference to public opinion prevailing, again, over her cocotte dilettantism.

People who liked collecting curios, were fond of poetry, despised crass calculations, dreamed of honor and love, she saw as an elite superior to the rest of humanity. One did not really have to have these predilections, provided one proclaimed them; of a man who had confessed to her at dinner that he loved to wander about the city, to get his hands dirty in the old shops, that he would never be appreciated by this commercial century, because he did not look after his own interests, and that because of this he belonged to another age, she returned home saying: “Why, he’s a lovely person, so sensitive, I never would have guessed!” and she felt a sudden warm friendship for him. But men who, like Swann, had these tastes, yet did not talk about them, left her cold. No doubt she had to admit that Swann did not value money, but she would add sulkily: “But with him, it’s not the same thing”; and in fact, what spoke to her imagination was not the practice of disinterestedness, but its vocabulary.

Feeling that he often failed to satisfy her dreams, he at least tried to see that she enjoyed being with him, not to oppose the vulgar ideas, the bad taste, which she displayed in all things, and which he loved, moreover, like everything else that emanated from her, which even enchanted him, for they were so many particular traits by which the woman’s essence appeared to him, became visible. And so, when she looked happy because she was going to *La Reine Topaz,*[44] or when her gaze became serious, worried, and petulant, because she was afraid of missing the flower show or merely of not being in time for tea, with *muffins* and *toasts,*[45] at the “Thé de la rue Royale,”[46] regular attendance at which she believed was indispensable in establishing a woman’s reputation for elegance, Swann, enchanted as one is by the naturalness of a child or the truthfulness of a portrait that seems about to speak, sensed so clearly his mistress’s soul rising to the surface of her face that he could not resist going over to touch it with his lips. “Ah! She wants to be taken to the flower show, little Odette, she wants to be admired, well then, we’ll take her, we must obey.” Since Swann’s vision was rather poor, he had resigned himself to wearing glasses for working at home, and to adopting, for going out in the world, a monocle, which was less disfiguring. The first time she saw him with one in his eye, she could not contain her joy: “I really do think for a man it’s very smart! How it suits you! You look like a real gentleman. All you’re missing is a title!” she added, with a touch of regret. He was happy that Odette was like this, just as, if he had been in love with a Breton woman, he would have enjoyed seeing her in a coif and hearing her tell him she believed in

ghosts. Until then, as is true of many men whose taste for the arts develops independently from their sensuality, a bizarre disparity had existed between the satisfactions he conceded to one and those he conceded to the other, as he enjoyed, in the company of increasingly crude women, the seductions of increasingly refined works of art, taking a little housemaid to a closed orchestra box for the performance of a decadent play that he wanted to see or to an exhibition of Impressionist painting, and sure, in any case, that a cultivated woman of the world would not have understood any more about it, but would not have been able to keep quiet so nicely. But now that he loved Odette, to feel what she felt, to try to share but a single soul between the two of them, was so sweet to him that he sought to enjoy the things she liked, and his pleasure, not only in imitating her habits, but in adopting her opinions, was all the more profound because, since they had no roots in his own intelligence, they reminded him only of his love, because of which he preferred them. If he went to more than one performance of *Serge Panine*,[47] if he sought out opportunities to go to see Olivier Métra[48] conduct, it was for the sweetness of being initiated into all of Odette's ideas, of feeling he was sharing equally in all her tastes. This charm of bringing him close to her, which was possessed by the works or places that she liked, seemed to him more mysterious than the charm intrinsic to those that were lovelier but did not remind him of her. What was more, because he had allowed the intellectual beliefs of his youth to weaken, and because his skepticism as a man of the world had, unbeknownst to him, penetrated to them, he thought (or at least he had thought this for so long that he still said it) that the objects of one's preferences do not have an absolute value in themselves, but that they all depend on one's period, one's social class, they are all merely fashions, the most vulgar of which are equal to those that pass for the most distinguished. And just as he believed that the importance Odette attached to having tickets for the opening was not in itself a more ridiculous thing than the pleasure he used to take in lunching at the home of the Prince of Wales, likewise he did not think that the admiration she professed for Monte Carlo or for the Righi[49] was more unreasonable than the fondness he himself felt for Holland, which she imagined to be ugly, or for Versailles, which she found dreary. And so he denied himself those places, taking pleasure in telling himself that it was for her sake, that he chose not to feel things, love things, except with her.

Like everything else that was part of Odette's environment and no more, in some sense, than a means by which he could see her, talk to her, he enjoyed the company of the Verdurins. There, because at the center of all the amusements, meals, music, games, costumed suppers, excursions into the country, theater parties, even the rare "grand soirees" given for the "bores," was the presence of Odette, the sight of Odette, conversation with Odette, of which the Verdurins gave to Swann, by inviting him, the inestimable gift, he was happier among the "little clan" than anywhere else, and sought to attribute real merits to it, for by so doing he could imagine that, out of preference, he would associate with it all his life. For, since he did not dare to say to himself, afraid that he would not believe it, that he would always love Odette, at least by supposing that he would always associate with the Verdurins (a proposition that, a priori, raised fewer objections of principle on the part of his intelligence), he could see himself in the future continuing to meet Odette every evening; this did not perhaps quite amount to the same thing as always loving her, but for the moment, while he loved her, to believe that he would not stop seeing her one day was all that he asked. "What a charming place," he would say to himself. "How fundamentally real their life is! How much more intelligent, more artistic, they are there than high-society people! How sincere, despite some rather absurd little exaggerations, is Mme. Verdurin's love of painting, music—what a passion she has for works of art, and how she longs to please artists! The notion she has formed of society people is not accurate; but then again, society's notion of artistic circles is even more false! Perhaps I have no very great intellectual needs to satisfy in conversation, but I'm perfectly happy with Cottard though he does make inept puns. And as for the painter, his pretentiousness may be unpleasant when he's trying to surprise people, but on the other hand he has one of the finest minds I've ever known. And also, most of all, you feel free there, you do what you like without feeling constrained, without standing on ceremony. What a quantity of good humor is expended every day in that drawing room! Decidedly, apart from a few rare exceptions, I will never go anywhere else. More and more, that is where I will find my companionship and live my life."

And since the qualities that he believed to be intrinsic to the Verdurins were merely the reflection of the pleasures he enjoyed in their house because of his love for Odette, those qualities became more serious, more profound, more vital, along with those pleasures. Because Mme. Verdurin sometimes gave Swann the only thing that could constitute happiness for him; because, on a certain evening when he felt anxious because Odette had been talking to one guest more than another, and when, irritated at her, he did not want to take the initiative of asking her if she would return home with him, Mme. Verdurin brought him peace and joy by saying spontaneously: "Odette, you will take M. Swann home, won't you?"; because, when summer was approaching, and he had at first wondered uneasily if Odette would be going away without him, if he could continue to see her every day, Mme. Verdurin invited them both to spend it at her home in the country—Swann, unconsciously allowing gratitude and self-interest to infiltrate into his intelligence and influence his ideas, went so far as to proclaim that Mme. Verdurin was the soul of high-mindedness. Apropos of a few delightful or eminent people whom one of his old classmates from the École du Louvre might mention to him, he would respond: "I prefer the Verdurins a hundred times over." And, with a solemnity that was new to him: "They are magnanimous people, and magnanimity is, fundamentally, the only thing that matters and that gives us distinction here on earth. You know, there are only two classes of people: the magnanimous ones and all the rest; and when you reach my age you have to choose, you have to decide once and for all whom you intend to like and, whom you intend to despise, stick with the ones you like, and, so as to make up for the time you've wasted with the others, not leave them again until you die. Well!" he added with that slight emotion you feel when, even without fully realizing it, you say something not because it is true, but because you enjoy saying it and you listen to it in your own voice as if it came from somewhere other than from yourself, "my fate is settled, I have chosen to like only magnanimous hearts and to live from now on only in magnanimity. You ask me if Mme. Verdurin is truly intelligent. I assure you that she has given me proof of a nobility of heart, of a loftiness of soul which, you know, can't be attained without an equal loftiness of mind. Certainly she has a profound intelligence where the arts are concerned. But perhaps this is not her most admirable quality; and every small, ingeniously, exquisitely good action that she has performed for me, every genial attention, every gesture of sublime familiarity, reveals a more profound understanding of life than any philosophical treatise."

Yet he could have said to himself that there were old friends of his parents just as simple as the Verdurins, friends of his youth as smitten with art, that he knew other greathearted people, and that nevertheless, now that he had opted for simplicity, the arts, and magnanimity, he never saw them anymore. But these people did not know Odette, and, if they had known her, would never have thought of bringing the two of them together.

And so there was probably not, in the whole Verdurin circle, a single faithful partisan who liked them or thought he liked them as much as did Swann. And yet, when M. Verdurin had said he did not much care for Swann, he was not only expressing his own thoughts, but also guessing his wife's. Doubtless Swann's affection for Odette was too private and he had neglected to make Mme. Verdurin his daily confidante concerning it; doubtless the very discretion with which he had made use of the Verdurins' hospitality, often refraining from coming to dinner for a reason that they did not suspect and in place of which they saw a desire not to turn down an invitation to the home of some "bores"; doubtless, too, and despite all the precautions he had taken to hide it from them, their gradual discovery of his brilliant position in society, all fed their irritation with him. But the deeper reason for it was different. It was that they had very quickly sensed in him a reserved, impenetrable space where he continued to profess silently to himself that the Princesse de Sagan was not grotesque and that Cottard's jokes were not funny, in the end, and, even though he never deviated from his affability and never rebelled against their dogmas, they sensed, too, an impossibility of imposing them on him, of wholly converting him to them, the likes of which they had never encountered before in anyone. They would have forgiven him for associating with bores (to whom, for that matter, in his heart of hearts, he preferred the Verdurins and the whole of the little clan a thousand times over), if he had consented, as a good example, to renounce them in the presence of the faithful. But this was an abjuration they understood could not be wrung from him.

How different from a "newcomer" whom Odette had asked them to invite, though she had not met him more than a few times, and in whom they invested many hopes: the Comte de Forcheville! (It turned out that in fact he was Saniette's brother-in-law, which filled the faithful with surprise: the old archivist's manners were so humble that they had always thought he was from a social rank inferior to theirs and did not expect to learn that he belonged to a world that was rich and relatively aristocratic.) True, Forcheville was grossly snobbish, whereas Swann was not; true, he did not even dream of placing the circle of the Verdurins above all others, as Swann did. But he did not have the natural delicacy that stopped Swann from joining in with the too manifestly false criticisms that Mme. Verdurin leveled against people he knew. As for the vulgar and pretentious tirades the painter launched into on certain days, and as for the traveling-salesman jokes that Cottard ventured, for which Swann, who liked both men, could easily find excuses without having the heart or the hypocrisy to applaud them, Forcheville by contrast was of an intellectual caliber that allowed him to be dumbfounded, awestruck by the first, though he did not understand them, and to delight in the second. And in fact the first dinner at the Verdurins' at which Forcheville was present exposed all these differences, brought out his qualities, and precipitated Swann's fall from grace.

At this dinner there was, besides the regulars, a professor from the Sorbonne, Brichot, who had met M. and Mme. Verdurin at the spa and, if his duties at the university and his scholarly work had not given him very few hours of freedom, would willingly have come to their house often. For he had that curiosity, that excessive interest in life which, when combined with a degree of skepticism concerning the object of their studies, gives certain intelligent men in any profession, doctors who do not believe in medicine, schoolteachers who do not believe in Latin compositions, a reputation for having minds that are broad, brilliant, and even superior. At Mme. Verdurin's, he made a point of seeking his illustrations in whatever was most up-to-date when he spoke of philosophy and history, principally because he thought such subjects were only a preparation for real life and he imagined he would find the little clan putting into practice what he had known before now only from books, and then perhaps also because, having had instilled in him in the past, and having preserved without knowing it, a respect for certain subjects, he believed he was casting off his academic tendencies by taking liberties with them which, on the contrary, appeared such to him only because he had remained an academic.

At the very beginning of the meal, when M. de Forcheville, placed to the right of Mme. Verdurin, who had gone to great trouble over her appearance so as to please the "newcomer," said to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the doctor, who had been steadily observing him, so curious was he to find out what sort of man a "de," as he termed it, would be, and who was looking for a chance of attracting his attention and entering into closer contact with him, seized on the word *"blanche"* and, without lifting his nose from his plate, said: "*Blanche*? Blanche de Castille?,"[50] then, without moving his head, cast his eyes furtively to the right and left with an uncertain, smiling look. Whereas Swann, with his painful and useless attempt at a smile, revealed how stupid he thought the pun was, Forcheville had shown both that he relished its subtlety and that he had good manners, by containing within judicious limits a gaiety whose frankness had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What do you make of our man of science?" she had asked Forcheville. "It's impossible to have even two minutes of serious conversation with him. Is that the sort of thing you say to them at your hospital?" she had added, turning to the doctor. "It must be rather lively there, if that's the case. I see I'll have to get them to admit me as a patient."

"I think I heard the doctor talking about that old termagant, Blanche de Castille, if I dare express myself that way. Am I correct, madame?" Brichot asked Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with laughter, her eyes shut, plunged her face into her hands, from which stifled cries escaped. "My God, madame, I wouldn't want to alarm whatever respectful souls there may be at this table, *sub rosa* . . . And I realize that our ineffable republic, Athenian as it is—how very much so!—might pay homage to that obscurantist Capetian lady as the very first truly authoritarian police prefect. Yes indeed, my dear host, yes indeed, yes indeed," he went on in his sonorous voice, detaching each syllable, in response to an objection of M. Verdurin's. "The *Chronique de Saint-Denis,* whose facts are incontestably reliable, leaves no doubt about this. No better choice of patron could have been made by a secularized proletariat than that mother of a saint to whom, incidentally, she gave a pretty rough time, as we are told by Suger and other Saint Bernards;[51] for with her everyone got hauled over the coals."

"Who is this gentleman?" Forcheville asked Mme. Verdurin. "He seems first-rate."

"What? You haven't heard of the famous Brichot? Why, he's celebrated all over Europe."

"Oh! So that's Bréchot!" cried Forcheville, who had not heard the name clearly. "You must tell me all about him," he added, staring wide-eyed at the famous man. "It's always interesting to have dinner with a prominent person. But I must say, you certainly give your guests some choice dinner mates. No one's likely to get bored in your house."

"Oh you know, the most important thing," Mme. Verdurin said modestly, "is that they know they can trust us. They can talk about whatever they like, and the conversation is off and running. For instance, now, take Brichot. This is nothing: I've seen him, you know, when he's been absolutely dazzling here in my house, you feel you ought to go down on your knees before him. Well, now, at other people's houses, he's not the same man, he hasn't a scrap of wit, you have to force the words out of him, he's actually boring."

"How odd!" said Forcheville, surprised.

A wit like Brichot's would have been considered pure stupidity by the people among whom Swann had spent his youth, even though it might be compatible with real intelligence. And the professor's intelligence, vigorous and well nourished, probably would have been envied by many of the society people whom Swann considered witty. But those people had inculcated him so thoroughly with their own likes and dislikes, at least concerning anything to do with society life, including even that annexed part of it which should, instead, belong to the domain of intelligence—namely, conversation—that Swann could only find Brichot's jokes pedantic, vulgar, and sickeningly coarse. Then, too, being so accustomed to good manners, he was shocked by the rough military tone affected, each time he addressed anyone, by the jingoistic academic. Finally, perhaps he had lost some of his indulgence that evening in particular, seeing the friendliness Mme. Verdurin was displaying toward this man Forcheville whom Odette had had the singular idea of bringing. A little ill at ease with Swann, she had asked him when she arrived:

"What do you think of my guest?"

And he, realizing for the first time that Forcheville, whom he had known for a long time, might be attractive to a woman and was a rather handsome man, had answered: "Disgusting!" Of course, it did not occur to him to be jealous over Odette, but he did not feel as happy as usual, and when Brichot, having begun to tell the story of Blanche de Castille's mother, who "had been with Henry Plantagenet[52] for years before she married him," tried to prompt Swann to ask him what happened next by saying to him: "Isn't that so, Monsieur Swann?" in the martial tone one adopts to make oneself understood by a peasant or instill courage in a soldier, Swann spoiled Brichot's effect, to the fury of their hostess, by answering that they must please excuse him for being so uninterested in Blanche de Castille, but he had something to ask the painter. That afternoon, in fact, the painter had gone to see the show of a friend of Mme. Verdurin's, an artist who had died recently, and Swann wanted to find out from him (for he respected his taste) if there really was even more in these last works than the virtuosity that was already so astounding in the earlier ones.

"In that respect it was extraordinary, but it didn't seem to me to be an art that was, as they say, all that 'elevated,'" said Swann, smiling.

"Elevated . . . to the height of an institution," interrupted Cottard, lifting his arms with mock gravity.

The whole table burst out laughing.

"Didn't I tell you? He won't allow anyone to be serious," said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville. "Just when you least expect it, he comes out with a pun."

But she noticed that Swann alone had not brightened up. What was more, he was not very pleased that Cottard had made fun of him in front of Forcheville. But the painter, instead of answering Swann in an interesting way, which he probably would have done if he had been alone with him, preferred to win the admiration of the guests by contributing a little set piece on the skill of the deceased master.

"I went up to one of them," he said, "just to see how it was done. I stuck my nose into it. Well! Absolute truth! Impossible to say whether it was done with glue, or rubies, or soap, or sunshine, or leaven, or bronze, or caca!"

"And one makes twelve," cried the doctor, too late, so that no one understood his interruption.

"The thing looked as though it were made with nothing at all," the painter went on; "absolutely no way of discovering the trick, any more than in *The Night Watch* or *The Regents,* and the brushwork is even stronger than Rembrandt or Hals.[53] It's got everything in it—no, I swear."

And just as singers who have reached the highest note they can sing continue in falsetto, softly, he confined himself to murmuring, and smiling, as if in fact the painting had been absurdly beautiful:

"It smells good, it goes to your head, it takes your breath away, it tickles you, and you haven't a hope of knowing what it's made with, it's some kind of sorcery, it's a trick, it's a miracle" (bursting fully into laughter): "it's dishonest!" And stopping, gravely lifting his head, adopting a deep bass note which he tried to make harmonious, he added: "and it's so sincere!"

Except at the moment when he had said "stronger than *The Night Watch,*" a blasphemy that had provoked a protest from Mme. Verdurin, who considered *The Night Watch* the greatest masterpiece in the world along with the Ninth and the *Winged Victory,*[54] and at "made with caca," which had caused Forcheville to cast a circular glance at the table to see if the word was acceptable and had then brought to his mouth a prudish and conciliatory smile, all the guests except for Swann had fastened their eyes on the painter with gazes hypnotized by admiration.

"How he amuses me when he gets carried away like that," cried Mme. Verdurin when he was finished, delighted that the table was so interesting on the very day when M. de Forcheville had come for the first time. "And what about you, what's the matter with you, letting your mouth hang open that way like some great dog?" she said to her husband. "You know very well how he can talk; it's as if my husband had never heard you before. If only you could have seen the way he looked while you were talking, he was lapping you up. And tomorrow he'll repeat everything you said without losing a word."

"But it's no joke," said the painter, enchanted with his success, "you seem to think I'm giving you a sales talk, you think it's all a sham; I'll take you there to see for yourself, then you'll decide whether I'm exaggerating. I'll bet your boots you'll come back even more enthusiastic than I was!"

"But we don't think you're exaggerating, we just want you to eat your dinner, and we want my husband to eat too; give Monsieur some more sole normande, you can see that his is cold. We're not in such a hurry as all that, you're serving as if the house were on fire, now wait a little before you bring in the salad."

Mme. Cottard, who was modest and did not talk much, did not lack self-assurance when a happy inspiration caused her to hit upon a suitable remark. She felt that it would have some success, this gave her confidence, and what she did with it was not so much in order to shine as to be useful to her husband's career. And so she did not allow the word *salad* to escape after it was spoken by Mme. Verdurin.

"That wouldn't be Japanese salad, would it?" she said softly, turning to Odette.

And delighted and abashed by the appropriateness and boldness of making this allusion, so discreet, yet so clear, to the new and astonishing play by Dumas,[55] she burst into charming, ingenuous laughter, not very noisy, but so irresistible that for a few moments she could not control it. "Who is that lady? She's a lively one," said Forcheville.

"No, it's not, but we'll have some for you if you'll all come to dine with us on Friday."

"I'm going to seem very provincial to you, monsieur," said Mme. Cottard to Swann, "but I haven't yet seen the famous *Francillon* everyone's talking about. The doctor has already gone (I even recall that he told me he had the very great pleasure of spending the evening with you) and I confess that I didn't find it reasonable that he should pay for seats to go again with me. Obviously, at the Théâtre-Français, one never regrets one's evening, it's always well acted, but as we have very nice friends" (Mme. Cottard rarely uttered a proper name and simply referred to "some friends of ours" or "one of my friends," because it was more "distinguished," speaking in an artificial tone and with the air of importance of a person who names only those she chooses to) "who often have a box and are kind enough to take us to all the new productions that are worth going to, I'm certain to see *Francillon* sooner or later, and then I can form an opinion for myself. Yet I must confess I find I'm a bit embarrassed, for in every drawing room I visit, naturally the only thing they're talking about is that wretched Japanese salad. One even begins to be a little tired of it," she added, seeing that Swann did not seem as interested as she would have thought in so burning a topic. "I must admit, though, that it sometimes provides an excuse for some rather amusing notions. For instance, I have a friend who's most original, though she's a very pretty woman, very popular, very sought after, who claims she got her cook to make that Japanese salad at her house, putting in everything that Alexandre Dumas *fils* mentions in the play. She invited some friends to come and eat it. Unfortunately I wasn't one of the elect. But she told us about it at her next 'at-home'; apparently it was quite horrible, she made us laugh till we cried. But you know, it's all in the way you tell it," she said, seeing that Swann still looked grave.

And imagining that it was perhaps because he did not like *Francillon:* "Anyway, I think I'll be disappointed. I don't think it's as good as *Serge Panine,* which Mme. de Crécy worships so. In that one, at least, there are deep things that make you think; but to give a recipe for salad on the stage of the Théâtre-Français! Whereas *Serge Panine*! But then, it's like everything that comes from Georges Ohnet's pen, it's always so well written. I don't know if you know *Le Maître de Forges,* which I like even better than *Serge Panine*."

"Forgive me," Swann said to her with irony, "but I confess that my lack of admiration is almost equally divided between the two masterpieces."

"Really, what have you got against them? Are you sure you aren't prejudiced? Do you think perhaps they're a little dreary? Anyway, as I always say, one should never argue about novels or plays. Everyone has his own way of looking at things and what you find detestable may be the very thing I like best."

She was interrupted by Forcheville addressing Swann. In fact, while Mme. Cottard was talking about *Francillon,* Forcheville had told Mme. Verdurin how much he admired what he called the painter's little "*speech*."[56]

"The gentleman has a facility for speaking, a memory," he had said to Mme. Verdurin when the painter was finished, "such as I have rarely encountered! By my bootlaces! I'd love to have such a gift. He would make an excellent preacher. One may say that with him and M. Bréchot, you have two real characters, one as good as the other, though for gift of the gab I'm not even sure this one would not in fact ace the professor. It comes out more naturally, it's less studied. Although now and then he does use words that are a bit on the vulgar side, but that's the thing to do nowadays. It's not often that I've seen anyone hold the floor so cleverly —'hold the spittoon,' as we used to say in the regiment, and come to think of it, it was in the regiment that I had a friend the gentleman rather reminded me of. Apropos of anything, I don't know what, this glass, for instance, he could rattle on for hours; no, not about this glass, that's a silly thing to say; but about the Battle of Waterloo, anything you like, and he would throw in things you never would have thought of. Why, Swann was in the same regiment; he must have known him."

"Do you see M. Swann often?" asked Mme. Verdurin.

"Oh no," answered M. de Forcheville, and since in order to approach Odette more easily he wanted to be pleasant to Swann, he attempted to seize this opportunity of flattering him by talking about his distinguished friends, but talking about them as a man of the world, in the tone of an affectionate critic and not as though he were congratulating him as on an unhoped-for success: "Isn't it so, Swann? I never see you. Anyway, how could I ever see him? The man is always hanging about with the La Trémoïlles,[57] with the Laumes, people like that! . . ." An imputation especially false, since, for a year now, Swann had hardly gone anywhere but to the Verdurins'. But the mere name of a person they did not know was greeted by a reproving silence on their part. M. Verdurin, afraid of the painful impression that these names of "bores," especially when tactlessly hurled thus in the faces of all the faithful, must have produced on his wife, secretly cast at her a glance full of worried solicitude. He saw then that in her resolution not to take action, not to have been affected by the news that had just been announced to her, not merely to remain dumb but to have been deaf as well, the way we pretend to be deaf when a friend who has offended us tries to slip into the conversation an excuse which we would seem to accept if we listened to it without protesting, or when someone utters in our presence the forbidden name of an ingrate, Mme. Verdurin, so that her silence would not seem to be a form of consent, but rather the ignorant silence of an inanimate object, had suddenly divested her face of all life, all mobility; her prominent forehead was now merely a lovely study in the round, which the name of those La Trémoïlles at whose house Swann was always hanging about had not been able to penetrate; her slightly wrinkled nose revealed an indentation that seemed copied from life. Her half-open mouth seemed about to speak. She was now merely a lost wax,[58] a plaster mask, a model for a monument, a bust for the Palais de l'Industrie[59] in front of which the public would certainly stop to admire how the sculptor, by expressing the indefeasible dignity of the Verdurins as opposed to that of the La Trémoïlles and the Laumes, whose equals they naturally were, as they were the equals of all the bores on earth, had managed to give an almost papal majesty to the whiteness and rigidity of the stone. But at last the marble came to life and insinuated that one could not be squeamish if one wanted to go to the homes of these people, because the wife was always drunk and the husband so ignorant that he said "collidor" instead of "corridor."

"You'd have to pay me handsomely before I'd let that sort enter my house," concluded Mme. Verdurin, looking at Swann with an imperious air.

She probably did not hope that he would be submissive enough to imitate the saintly simplicity of the pianist's aunt, who had just exclaimed: "You see that? What astonishes me is that there's still people who'll speak to them! I think I would be too afraid: once struck, out of luck! How can there still be folks low enough to go running after them?" But he might at least have answered like Forcheville: "Lord, she's a duchess; some people are still impressed by that," which had at least allowed Mme. Verdurin to reply: "Much good may it do them!" Instead of that, Swann merely laughed with an air that signified that he could not even take such extravagant nonsense seriously. M. Verdurin, continuing to cast furtive glances at his wife, saw with sadness and understood all too well that she was feeling the rage of a grand inquisitor who cannot manage to extirpate the heresy, and in order to try to lead Swann to a recantation, since the courage of one's convictions always seem to be a calculation and an act of cowardice in the eyes of those who do not share them, M. Verdurin challenged him:

"Now tell us frankly what you think of them, we won't repeat it to them."

To which Swann answered:

"Why, it's not in the least out of fear of the duchess (if you're talking about the La Trémoïlles). I assure you everyone likes to visit her. I'm not saying she's 'profound'" (he pronounced *profound* as if it were a ridiculous word, because his language still bore the trace of habits of mind which his recent rejuvenation, marked by a love of music, had temporarily made him lose, so that at times he now expressed his opinions warmly) "but I'm quite sincere when I say that she's intelligent and her husband is truly well read. They're charming people."

Whereupon Mme. Verdurin, feeling that because of this one infidel she would be prevented from creating a complete moral unanimity among the little clan, was unable to stop herself, in her rage against this stubborn man who did not see how much his words pained her, from crying out to him from the bottom of her heart:

"Believe it if you like, but at least don't say it to us."

"It all depends on what you call intelligence," said Forcheville, who felt it was his turn to shine. "Now, Swann, what do you mean by intelligence?"

"There you are!" exclaimed Odette. "That's the sort of big subject I'm always asking him to talk to me about, but he never will."

"But I do . . ." protested Swann.

"What tripe!" said Odette.

"Tripe with onions?" asked the doctor.

"As you see it," Forcheville went on, "does intelligence mean a gift of the gab, does it have to do with how people manage to worm their way in?"

"Finish up so they can take your plate," said Mme. Verdurin sourly, turning to Saniette, who, absorbed in thought, had stopped eating. And perhaps a little ashamed of the tone she had taken: "Never mind, take your time, I only said it for the sake of the others, because it holds up the next course."

"There is," said Brichot, rapping out the syllables, "a very curious definition of intelligence in that gentle anarchist, Fénelon . . ."[60]

"Listen!" said Mme. Verdurin to Forcheville and the doctor. "He's going to give us Fénelon's definition of intelligence. Now that's interesting. It's not often you have a chance of hearing that."

But Brichot was waiting for Swann to give his own definition. Swann did not answer, and by evading them spoiled the brilliant contest that Mme. Verdurin was so delighted to be able to offer Forcheville.

"Of course. He's just like that with me all the time," said Odette sulkily. "I'm glad to see I'm not the only one he doesn't think is up to his level."

"Those de la Trémouailles,[61] who are so little to be recommended, as Mme. Verdurin has shown us," asked Brichot with powerfully clear articulation, "are they descended from the folk whom Mme. de Sévigné, that good snob, admitted she was pleased to know because it was good for her peasants? Of course, the Marquise had another reason, and one that had to be more important to her, for as a woman of letters through and through, she put copy before all else. Now in the journal she used to send regularly to her daughter, it was Mme. de la Trémouaille, kept well informed by her great connections, who supplied the foreign politics."

"Why, no, I don't think it's the same family," ventured Mme. Verdurin.

Saniette, who, after hurriedly giving the butler his plate, which was still full, had plunged back into a meditative silence, emerged from it at last to tell them with a smile the story of a dinner he had attended with the Duc de La Trémoïlle at which it turned out that the Duc did not know George Sand was the pseudonym of a woman. Swann, who was fond of Saniette, thought he ought to supply him with a few particulars about the Duc's culture proving that such ignorance on the latter's part was materially impossible; but suddenly he stopped, realizing that Saniette did not need these proofs and knew the story was untrue for the simple reason that he had just invented it a moment ago. That excellent man suffered from being thought such a bore by the Verdurins; and, aware that he had been even duller than usual at this dinner, he had not wanted to let it end before he succeeded in amusing them. He capitulated so quickly, looked so unhappy at seeing that the effect on which he had counted had failed, and answered Swann in such a pitiful tone so that Swann would not persist in a refutation that was henceforth pointless, "All right, all right; and if I'm mistaken it's not a crime, I hope," that Swann would have liked to be able to say the story was true and delightful. The doctor, who had been listening to them, thought this was the moment to say: *Se non è vero,*[62] but he was not quite sure of the words and was afraid of getting muddled.

After dinner, Forcheville went up to the doctor.

"She must not have been too bad at one time, Mme. Verdurin, and she's a woman you can talk to; for me that's everything. Of course she's beginning to get a bit long in the tooth. But Mme. de Crécy—now there's a little woman who seems intelligent—oh yes, by God; you can see at a glance that she keeps her eyes peeled! We're talking about Mme. de Crécy," he said to M. Verdurin, who was approaching, his pipe in his mouth. "I would imagine that as a specimen of the female figure . . ."

"I'd rather have it in my bed than a slap with a wet fish," Cottard rushed to say, having waited in vain for some moments for Forcheville to pause for breath so that he could insert that old joke, which he feared would not be appropriate again if the conversation changed course, and which he delivered with that excess of spontaneity and assurance which attempts to mask the coldness and anxiety inseparable from a recitation. Forcheville was familiar with the joke, he understood it and was amused by it. As for M. Verdurin, he was unsparing with his mirth, because he had recently discovered a signal for expressing it different from the one used by his wife but equally simple and clear. Scarcely had he begun moving his head and shoulders in the manner of a person shaking with laughter than he would immediately begin coughing as if, in laughing too hard, he had swallowed smoke from his pipe. And still keeping the pipe in one corner of his mouth, he would prolong indefinitely this pantomime of suffocation and hilarity. Thus he and Mme. Verdurin, who, across the room from him, listening to the painter tell her a story, was closing her eyes before dropping her face into her hands, looked like two theater masks each representing merriment in its own way.

M. Verdurin had in fact been wise not to withdraw his pipe from his mouth, for Cottard, who needed to leave the room for a moment, made a joke under his breath that he had learned recently and that he repeated each time he had to go to the same place: "I must absent myself for a moment in aid of the Duc d'Aumale,"[63] so that M. Verdurin's fit began again.

"Take your pipe out of your mouth. Can't you see you're going to choke to death trying not to laugh?" Mme. Verdurin said to him as she came around offering the liqueurs.

"How charming your husband is, he has wit enough for four," declared Forcheville to Mme. Cottard. "Thank you, madame. An old soldier like me never refuses a drop."

"M. de Forcheville thinks Odette is charming," said M. Verdurin to his wife.

"Why, actually she would like to come to lunch with you some time. We're going to contrive to make it happen, but Swann mustn't hear of it. You know, he puts rather a damper on things. That doesn't mean you shouldn't join us for dinner, of course, we hope to have you often. With summer coming, we'll be dining outdoors quite frequently. That won't bore you, will it—little dinners in the Bois? Good, good, it'll be very nice. You! Aren't you going to go do your job now?" she cried out to the little pianist, in order to display, in front of a newcomer as important as Forcheville, both her wit and her tyrannical power over the faithful.

"M. de Forcheville was saying bad things to me about you," said Mme. Cottard to her husband when he returned to the drawing room.

And he, pursuing the idea of Forcheville's noble lineage, which had preoccupied him from the beginning of dinner, said to him:

"I'm treating a baroness just now, Baronne Putbus;[64] the Putbuses took part in the Crusades, didn't they? They have a lake in Pomerania that's so big it must be ten times the size of the place de la Concorde. I'm treating her for rheumatoid arthritis; she's a charming woman. In fact she knows Mme. Verdurin, I believe."

Which allowed Forcheville, finding himself, a moment later, alone with Mme. Cottard, to complete the favorable judgment that he had passed on her husband:

"And he's so interesting, you can tell he's acquainted with more than a few people. Lord, they know such a lot, these doctors!"

"I'm going to play the phrase from the sonata for M. Swann," said the pianist.

"My God! I trust we don't have the 'sonata-snake'[65] in our midst?" asked M. de Forcheville to create an effect.

But Dr. Cottard, who had never heard that pun, did not understand it and thought M. de Forcheville was making a mistake. He went up to them briskly to correct it:

"No, no, one doesn't say *serpent à sonates,* it's *serpent à sonnettes,* 'rattlesnake,' " he said in a tone that was zealous, impatient, and triumphant.

Forcheville explained the pun to him. The doctor blushed.

"Admit that it's funny, Doctor!"

"Oh, I've known it for too long," answered Cottard.

But they fell silent; under the agitation of the violin tremolos which protected it with their quivering extended two octaves above—and as in a mountainous countryside, behind the apparent and vertiginous immobility of a waterfall one sees, two hundred feet down, the minuscule form of a woman walking—the little phrase had just appeared, distant, graceful, protected by the long unfurling of its transparent, ceaseless curtain of sound. And Swann, in his heart, appealed to it as to a confidant of his love, as to a friend of Odette's who certainly should tell her to pay no attention to that Forcheville.

"Ah, you're late!" said Mme. Verdurin to a regular whom she had invited only "for coffee." "Brichot was incomparable—so eloquent! But he's gone. Isn't that right, Monsieur Swann? I believe it was the first time you and he had met," she said in order to point out to him that she was the one to whom he owed the introduction. "Wasn't our Brichot delicious?"

Swann bowed politely.

"No? He didn't interest you?" Mme. Verdurin asked him curtly.

"Why, of course, madame, very much, I was delighted. He is perhaps a little peremptory and a little jovial for my taste. I would like to see some hesitation, some gentleness now and then, but one senses that he knows so many things and he seems like an all-around decent man."

Everyone went home very late. Cottard's first words to his wife were:

"I've rarely seen Mme. Verdurin as spirited as she was this evening."

"What exactly is this Mme. Verdurin of yours, rather a mixed bag of goods?" said Forcheville to the painter, whom he had invited to ride with him.

Odette watched with regret as he went off; she did not dare decline to ride with Swann, but was in a bad mood in the carriage, and when he asked her if he ought to come in, she said, "Of course," shrugging her shoulders impatiently. When all the guests had gone, Mme. Verdurin said to her husband:

"Did you notice how Swann laughed foolishly when we were talking about Mme. La Trémoïlle?"

She had noticed that several times, when saying this name, Swann and Forcheville had omitted the particle. Having no doubt that they did this to show they were not intimidated by titles, she wanted to imitate their pride, but had not fully understood by which grammatical form it was expressed. And so her incorrect way of speaking won out over her republican intransigence, and she still said "the de la Trémoïlles" or rather, using an abbreviation current in the words of the café songs and caricature captions, which swallowed the *de,* "the d'La Trémoïlles," but she made up for it by saying: "Madame La Trémoïlle," "The *Duchesse,* as Swann calls her," she added ironically with a smile which proved she was only quoting and did not accept responsibility for so naive and ridiculous a denomination.

"I must tell you I found him extremely stupid."

And M. Verdurin answered her:

"He's not direct, he's cunning, always betwixt and between. He's a fellow who's always wanting to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. How different from Forcheville! There's a man who at least tells you fair and square what he's thinking. You either agree with him or you don't. He's not like the other, neither fish nor fowl. Anyway, Odette really seems to prefer Forcheville, and I think she's right. And then, also, since Swann wants to play the society man with us, defender of duchesses, at least the other has his own title; he's still the Comte de Forcheville," he added delicately, as if, well informed about the history of that dignity, he was scrupulously weighing its particular value.

"I must tell you," said Mme. Verdurin, "that he felt called upon to direct some venomous and quite ridiculous insinuations against Brichot. Naturally, since he saw that Brichot was well liked in this house, it was a way of attacking us, of disparaging our dinner party. What I suspect is he's the sort of good friend who says nasty things about you on his way out."

"But that's what I told you," answered M. Verdurin. "He's a typical failure, the little fellow envious of anything that's at all big."

In reality there was not one of the faithful who was not more malicious than Swann; but they all took care to season their slander with familiar jokes, with little hints of anxiety and cordiality; whereas the slightest reserve that Swann allowed himself, omitting such conventional formulas as, "Now I don't mean to say anything bad," to which he did not deign to stoop, seemed perfidious. There are authors of true originality in whom the least boldness offends because they have not first flattered the tastes of the public and have not served it the commonplaces which it is used to; it was in the same way that Swann roused M. Verdurin's indignation. In Swann's case as in theirs, it was the novelty of his language that convinced one of the darkness of his intentions.

Swann was still unaware of the disgrace that threatened him at the Verdurins' and continued to regard all their absurdities in a favorable light, with the eyes of his love.

Most of the time, at least, he met Odette only in the evening; but during the day, though he was afraid of causing her to become tired of him by going to her house, he wanted at least not to cease to occupy her thoughts and was always looking for an opportunity of involving himself in them, but in a way that would be pleasant for her. If, in the window of a florist or a jeweler, the sight of a shrub or a jewel charmed him, instantly he would think of sending it to Odette, imagining that the pleasure it had given him would be felt by her too, increasing her affection for him, and he would immediately have it delivered to the rue La Pérouse so as not to delay the moment when, because she was receiving something from him, he would feel he was in some way close to her. He especially wanted her to receive it before she went out so that the gratitude she felt would win him a more tender welcome when she saw him at the Verdurins', or even—who knows?—if the shopkeeper was prompt enough, perhaps a letter which she would send him before dinner, or her arrival in person at his house, in a supplementary visit to thank him. Just as he had once tested Odette's nature for reactions of resentment, so now he sought by reactions of gratitude to extract from her intimate particles of feeling that she had not yet revealed to him.

Often, she had money troubles and, hard-pressed by a debt, would ask him for help. He was happy about that, as about everything that could give Odette a strong impression of the love he had for her, or simply a strong impression of his influence, of how useful he could be to her. No doubt if someone had said to him in the beginning: "It's your position that attracts her," and now: "It's because of your wealth that she loves you," he would not have believed it, and would also not have minded very much that people imagined she was attached to him—that people felt they were joined together—by something as powerful as snobbishness or money. But, even if he had thought it was true, perhaps he would not have been hurt by discovering within Odette's love for him that mainstay more durable than his charm or the good qualities she might find in him: namely, self-interest, a self-interest that would prevent the day ever coming when she would be tempted to stop seeing him. For the moment, by overwhelming her with presents, by doing her favors, he could rely upon advantages extrinsic to his person, his intelligence, to take over from him the exhausting responsibility of pleasing her by himself. And as for the pleasure of being in love, of living by love alone, the reality of which he doubted at times, it was increased in value for him, as dilettante of immaterial sensations, by the price he was paying her for it—as we observe that people who are uncertain whether the sight of the sea and the sound of its waves are delightful convince themselves of it and also of the exceptional quality and disinterest of their own taste, by paying a hundred francs a day for a hotel room that allows them to experience that sight and that sound.

One day when reflections of this kind were leading him back once again to the memory of the time when people had described Odette to him as a kept woman, and when he was amusing himself yet again by contrasting that strange personification, the kept woman—an iridescent amalgam of unfamiliar and diabolical elements, set, like some apparition by Gustave Moreau,[66] among venomous flowers interwoven with precious jewels—with the Odette on whose face he had seen the same feelings of pity for a sufferer, revolt against an injustice, gratitude for a favor, that he had seen in earlier days on his own mother's face and on the faces of his friends, the Odette whose conversation had so often turned on the things he knew best himself, on his collections, his room, his old servant, the banker who looked after his securities, it happened that this last image of the banker reminded him that he would have to call on him soon to draw some money. In fact, if this month he was less liberal when helping Odette out of her material difficulties than he had been the month before when he had given her five thousand francs, and if he did not present her with a diamond rivière that she wanted, he would not reawaken her admiration for his generosity, her gratitude, which made him so happy, and he would even risk making her think that his love for her, as she saw its manifestations become less abundant, had diminished. Then, suddenly, he wondered if this was not precisely what was meant by "keeping" her (as if, in fact, this notion of keeping could be derived from elements not at all mysterious or perverse but belonging to the intimate substance of his daily life, like that thousand-franc bill, domestic and familiar, torn and reglued, which

his valet, after having paid the month's accounts and the quarter's rent for him, had locked in the drawer of the old desk from which Swann had taken it out again to send it with four others to Odette) and if one could not apply to Odette, starting from when he had come to know her (because he did not for a moment suspect that she could ever have received money from anyone before him), those words which he had believed so irreconcilable with her—"kept woman." He could not study this idea in greater depth, because an attack of that mental laziness which in him was congenital, intermittent, and providential, happened at that moment to extinguish all light in his intelligence, as abruptly as, later, when electric lighting had been installed everywhere, one could cut off the electricity in a house. His mind groped for a moment in the darkness, he took off his glasses, wiped the lenses, passed his hand over his eyes, and saw the light again only when he found himself in the presence of an entirely different idea, namely that he ought to try to send six or seven thousand francs to Odette next month instead of five, because of the surprise and pleasure it would give her.

In the evening, when he did not stay at home waiting for the hour when he would meet Odette at the Verdurins' or rather in one of the summer restaurants they favored in the Bois and especially at Saint-Cloud, he would go and dine in one of those elegant houses where he had once been a habitual guest at table. He did not want to lose touch with people who—one never could tell—might perhaps be useful to Odette one day and through whom, in the meantime, he often succeeded in pleasing her. Also, his long habit of society, of luxury, had given him, at the same time as a disdain for them, a need for them, so that by the time he had come to regard the most modest houses as exactly on a par with the most princely, his senses were so accustomed to the latter that he experienced some indisposition at finding himself in the former. He had the same esteem—identical to a degree they could not have believed—for a petit bourgeois family which asked him up to a dance on the fifth floor, Stairway D, left at the landing, as for the Princess of Parma, who gave the finest parties in Paris; but he did not have the feeling of being actually at a ball while standing with the fathers in the bedroom of the mistress of the house and the sight of the washstands covered with towels, of the beds, transformed into cloakrooms, their coverlets piled with overcoats and hats, gave him the same stifling sensation that people today who are used to twenty years of electricity may experience at the smell of a lamp blackening or a night-light smoking. On the days when he dined in town, he would have the horses harnessed for seven-thirty; he would dress while thinking about Odette and so would not be alone, because the constant thought of Odette would give to the moments in which he was away from her the same particular charm as to those in which she was there. He would get into his carriage, but he would feel that this thought had leaped into it at the same time and settled on his knees like a beloved pet which one takes everywhere and which he would keep with him at the table, unbeknownst to the other guests. He would stroke it, warm himself at it, and, experiencing a sort of languor, yield to a light quivering that tensed his neck and his nose, and was new to him, all the while fastening the bunch of columbines in his buttonhole. Having felt unwell and sad for some time, especially from the time that Odette had introduced Forcheville to the Verdurins, Swann would have liked to go and rest a little in the country. But he would not have had the courage to leave Paris for a single day while Odette was there. The air was warm; these were the finest days of spring. And though he might cross a city of stone to immure himself in some town house, what was constantly before his eyes was a park that he owned near Combray, where, from four o'clock on, before reaching the asparagus patch, because of the wind that comes from the fields of Méséglise, one could savor as much coolness under an arbor as at the edge of the pond encircled by forget-me-nots and gladioli, and where, when he dined, it was at a table around which ran red currants and roses intertwined by his gardener.

After dinner, if the appointed meeting time at the Bois or Saint-Cloud was early, he would leave so soon after getting up from the table—especially if rain was threatening to fall and make the "faithful" go home earlier—that once the Princesse des Laumes (at whose home they had dined late and whom Swann had left before coffee was served in order to join the Verdurins on the island in the Bois) had said:

"Really, if Swann were thirty years older and had bladder trouble, one would excuse him for running off like that. But the fact is he doesn't care what people think."

He told himself that the charm of springtime which he could not go down to enjoy at Combray he could at least find on the Île des Cygnes[67] or at Saint-Cloud. But since he could think only about Odette, he did not even know if he had detected the smell of the leaves, if there had been any light from the moon. He was greeted by the little phrase from the sonata played in the garden on the restaurant piano. If there was no piano there, the Verdurins would take great pains to have one brought down from a bedroom or dining room: it was not that Swann had come back into favor with them, on the contrary. But the idea of organizing an ingenious pleasure for someone, even for someone they did not like, fostered in them, during the time required for these preparations, exceptional and ephemeral feelings of warmth and cordiality. Now and then he would say to himself that another spring evening was passing, he would force himself to pay attention to the trees, the sky. But the agitation with which Odette's presence filled him, and also a slight feverish indisposition that had hardly left him for some time now, denied him that sense of calm and well-being which is the indispensable background to the impressions we derive from nature.

One evening when Swann had agreed to dine with the Verdurins, and had just mentioned during dinner that the next day he was going to attend a banquet for old comrades, Odette answered him across the table, in front of Forcheville, who was now one of the faithful, in front of the painter, in front of Cottard:

"Yes, I know you have your banquet, so I won't see you till I get home, but don't be too late."

Even though Swann had never become very seriously offended by Odette's friendliness toward one or another of the faithful, he felt an exquisite pleasure on hearing her thus confess in front of everyone, with such a calm lack of modesty, to their regular meetings every night, his privileged position in her house, and the preference for him which it implied. Of course Swann had often reflected that Odette was in no way a remarkable woman, and the ascendancy he exerted over a creature so inferior to him was not something that ought to appear to him so flattering to see proclaimed to all the "faithful," but from the time he had first noticed that many men found Odette an enchanting and desirable woman, the attraction her body had for them had awoken in him a painful need to master her entirely even in the smallest parts of her heart. And he had begun to set an inestimable price on those times spent in her house at night, when he would sit her on his knees, make her say what she thought of one thing, of another, when he would count up the only goods whose possession he now valued on earth. And so, after this dinner, taking her aside, he did not fail to thank her effusively, endeavoring to teach her according to the degrees of gratitude he displayed to her, the scale of pleasures that she could give him, the highest of which was to guarantee him, during the time that his love should last and make him vulnerable to them, protection from the assaults of jealousy.

When he came away from the banquet the next day, it was pouring rain, all he had was his victoria; a friend offered to drive him home in his coupé, and because Odette, since she had asked him to come, had given him the assurance that she was not waiting for anyone else, it was with a tranquil mind and a happy heart that, rather than set off in the rain like this, he would have gone back home to bed. But perhaps, if she saw that he did not seem anxious to spend the last part of every evening without exception in her company, she might neglect to reserve it for him, precisely the one time when he particularly desired it.

He reached her house after eleven o'clock, and, as he was apologizing for not being able to come earlier, she complained that it was indeed very late, the storm had made her unwell, she had a headache and warned him that she would not keep him more than half an hour, that at midnight she would send him away; and, soon afterward, she felt tired and wanted to go to sleep.

"So, no cattleyas tonight," he said to her, "after I was so hoping for a nice little cattleya."

And, a little sulky and irritable, she answered:

"No, no, darling, no cattleyas tonight, you can see I'm unwell!"

"It might have done you good, but I won't insist."

She asked him to put out the light before he went, he himself closed the curtains of the bed and left. But when he was back at home, the idea came to him abruptly that perhaps Odette had been waiting for someone else that night, had only pretended to be tired, and had asked him to put out the light only so that he would believe she was going to go to sleep, that as soon as he left, she had put the light on again, and let in the man who was going to spend the night with her. He looked at the time. It was about an hour and a half since he had left her, he went back out, took a hackney carriage, and stopped it very close to where she lived, in a little street at right angles to the one which lay behind her house and into which he sometimes went to knock at her bedroom window so that she would come and open the door for him; he got out of the carriage, the neighborhood was dark and deserted, he had only to walk a few steps, and he came out almost opposite her house. Amid the blackness of all the windows in the street in which the lights had long since been put out, he saw just one from which there spilled out—between shutters which pressed its mysterious golden pulp—the light which filled the bedroom and which, on so many other evenings, as soon as he saw it when he came into the street, lifted his spirits and announced to him: "She's there waiting for you" and which now tortured him by saying: "She's there with the man she was waiting for." He wanted to know who it was; he slipped along the wall as far as the window, but between the oblique slats of the shutters he could see

nothing; all he heard in the silence of the night was the murmur of conversation. Certainly it hurt him to see that light and know that in its golden atmosphere, behind the sash, the unseen and detested pair were moving about, to hear the murmur revealing the presence of the man who had come after he left, Odette's duplicity, the happiness she was enjoying with him.

And yet he was glad he had come: the torment that had forced him to leave his house had become less acute as it became less vague, now that Odette's other life, of which he had had, back then, a sudden helpless suspicion, was now in his grasp, fully illuminated by the lamp, an unwitting prisoner in that room into which, when he chose, he could go to surprise it and capture it; or rather he would knock on the shutters as he often did when he came very late; this way at least, Odette would learn that he knew, that he had seen the light and heard the talking, and that, after having just a moment ago pictured her laughing with the other man at his illusions, he would now be the one to see them, confident in their error, actually outwitted by him whom they believed to be so very far away and who, in fact, already knew he was going to knock at the shutters. And perhaps, what he was feeling at this moment, which was almost pleasant, was also something different from the assuaging of a doubt and a distress: it was a pleasure in knowledge. If, ever since he had fallen in love, things had regained for him a little of the delightful interest they had once had for him, but only insofar as they were illuminated by the memory of Odette, now it was another of the faculties of his studious youth that his jealousy revived, a passion for truth, but for a truth that was likewise interposed between him and his mistress, taking its light only from her, a completely individual truth whose sole object, of an infinite value and almost disinterested in its beauty, was Odette's actions, her relationships, her plans, her past. At all other periods of his life, the little everyday words and deeds of a person had always seemed worthless to Swann if someone conveyed them to him as the subject of a bit of gossip, he found such gossip meaningless, and, while he listened to it, only the most vulgar part of his attention was interested; these were the times when he felt himself to be most mediocre. But in this strange phase of love, an individual person assumes something so profound that the curiosity he now felt awakening in him concerning the smallest occupations of this woman, was the same curiosity he had once had about History. And all these things that would have shamed him up to now, such as spying, tonight, outside a window, tomorrow perhaps, for all he knew, cleverly inducing neutral people to speak, bribing servants, listening at doors, now seemed to him to be, fully as much as were the deciphering of texts, the weighing of evidence, and the interpretation of old monuments, merely methods of scientific investigation with a real intellectual value and appropriate to a search for the truth.

On the point of knocking on the shutters, he felt a pang of shame thinking that Odette was going to know he had been suspicious, that he had come back, that he had posted himself in the street. She had often told him what a horror she had of jealous men, of lovers who spied. What he was about to do was very uncouth, and from now on she would detest him, whereas now, for the moment, so long as he had not knocked, perhaps, even while deceiving him, she loved him. How often we sacrifice the fulfillment of a possible happiness to our impatience for an immediate pleasure! But the desire to know the truth was stronger and seemed to him nobler. He knew that the reality of certain circumstances which he would have given his life to reconstruct accurately could be read behind that window striated with light, as under the gold-illuminated cover of one of those precious manuscripts to whose artistic richness itself the scholar who consults them cannot remain indifferent. He felt a delicious pleasure in learning the truth that so impassioned him from this unique, ephemeral, and precious transcript, made of a translucid substance so warm and so beautiful. Then, too, the advantage he felt he had—that he so needed to feel he had—over them lay perhaps less in knowing than in being able to show them he knew. He raised himself on his tiptoes. He knocked. They had not heard, he knocked again more loudly, the conversation stopped. A man's voice which he tried to distinguish from among the voices of those of Odette's friends whom he knew asked:

"Who's there?"

He was not sure he recognized it. He knocked again. The window was opened, then the shutters. Now there was no way to retreat, and since she was going to know everything, so as not to seem too wretched, too jealous and curious, he merely called out carelessly and gaily:

"Please don't go to any trouble. I was just passing by and I saw the light. I wanted to know if you were feeling better."

He looked. Before him, two old gentlemen were standing at the window, one holding a lamp, and then he saw the bedroom, a bedroom unknown to him. Because he was in the habit, when he came to Odette's house very late, of recognizing her window by the fact that it was the only one lit among windows that were all alike, he had made a mistake and knocked at the window after hers, which belonged to the adjoining house. He went away apologizing and returned home, happy that the satisfaction of his curiosity had left their love intact and that after having simulated a sort of indifference toward Odette for so long, he had not given her, by his jealousy, that proof of loving her too much which, between two lovers, exempts forever after, from loving enough, the one who receives it. He did not talk to her about this misadventure, he himself did not think about it further. But now and then his thoughts as they moved about would come upon the memory of it which they had not noticed, bump up against it, drive it further in, and Swann would feel a sudden, deep pain. As if it were a physical pain, Swann's mind could not lessen it; but at least with physical pain, because it is independent of thought, thought can dwell on it, note that it has diminished, that it has momentarily ceased. But with this pain the mind, merely by recalling it, re-created it. To wish not to think about it was still to think about it, still to suffer from it. And when, chatting with friends, he forgot his hurt, all of a sudden a word someone said to him would make him change expression, like a man with an injury whom some clumsy person has just carelessly touched on his sore arm or leg. When he left Odette, he was happy, he felt calm, he recalled her smiles, derisive when speaking of this or that other person, and affectionate toward him, the heaviness of her head which she had shifted from its axis to incline it, let it fall, almost despite herself, onto his lips, as she had done the first time in the carriage, the languishing looks she had cast at him while she was in his arms, as with a shiver she pulled her inclined head in against her shoulder.

But instantly his jealousy, as if it were the shadow of his love, would furnish itself with a duplicate of the new smile she had given him that very evening—and which, inverse now, mocked Swann and was filled with love for another man; with that inclination of her head but reversed toward other lips; with all the marks of affection, now given to another man, that she had given him. And all the sensuous memories he carried away from her house were like so many sketches, "plans" like those a decorator submits to you, that allowed Swann to form an idea of the ardent or swooning attitudes she might adopt with other men. So that he came to regret every pleasure he enjoyed with her, every invented caress whose sweetness he had been so imprudent as to point out to her, every grace he discovered in her, for he knew that a moment later, they would supply new instruments for torturing him.

This torture became still crueler when Swann remembered a brief expression he had surprised, a few days before, and for the first time, in Odette's eyes. It was after dinner, at the Verdurins'. Either because Forcheville, feeling that Saniette, his brother-in-law, was not in favor in their house, wanted to use him as a whipping boy and shine in front of them at his expense, or because he had been irritated by a clumsy remark which Saniette had just made to him and which, in fact, had gone unnoticed by those present, who were not aware of the unpleasant allusion it might contain quite contrary to the intentions of the one who had uttered it without any malice, or finally because for some time now he had been looking for an opportunity to induce them to banish from the house someone who was too well acquainted with him and whom he knew to be so refined that he felt embarrassed at certain moments merely by his presence, Forcheville answered this clumsy remark of Saniette's with such coarseness, hurling insults at him, and emboldened, as he shouted, by Saniette's pain, his dismay, his entreaties, that the wretched man, after asking Mme. Verdurin if he ought to stay, and receiving no answer, had left the house stammering, tears in his eyes. Odette had watched this scene impassively, but when the door closed on Saniette, lowering as it were by several notches her face's habitual expression, so as to be able to find herself, in her baseness, on an equal footing with Forcheville, she had put a sparkle in her eyes with a sly smile of congratulations for the audacity he had shown, of mockery for the man who had been its victim; she had cast him a glance of complicity in evil which was so clearly intended to say: "That finished him off, or I'm very much mistaken. Did you see how pathetic he looked? He was actually crying," that Forcheville, when his eyes met that glance, sobering in a moment from the anger or simulation of anger which still warmed him, smiled and answered:

"He needed only to be friendly, and he would still be here. A good rebuke does a man no harm at any age."

One day when Swann had gone out in the middle of the afternoon to pay a call, not having found the person he wanted to see, it occurred to him to go to Odette's house at an hour when he never went there, but when he knew she was always at home having her nap or writing letters before teatime, and when he would enjoy seeing her for a little while without bothering her. The concierge told him he thought she was there; he rang, thought he heard a noise, heard footsteps, but no one opened the door. Anxious, irritated, he went into the little street on which the other side of the house looked out, stood in front of the window of Odette's bedroom; the curtains prevented him from seeing anything, he knocked hard on the windowpanes, called out; no one opened the window. He saw that some neighbors were watching him. He went away, thinking that after all, perhaps he had been mistaken in believing he heard footsteps; but he remained so preoccupied by it that he could not think about anything else. An hour later, he came back. He found her there; she told him she had been at home earlier

when he rang, but was sleeping; the bell had woken her, she had guessed it was Swann, she had run after him, but he had already left. She had certainly heard the sound of knocking at the windowpanes. Swann immediately recognized this statement as one of those fragments of true fact with which liars, when caught unprepared, console themselves by introducing into the composition of the falsehood they are inventing, believing they can accommodate it there and steal its resemblance to the Truth. Of course when Odette had just done something she did not want to reveal, she would hide it deep inside herself. But as soon as she found herself face-to-face with the man to whom she wanted to lie, she was overcome with uneasiness, all her ideas collapsed, her faculties of invention and reasoning were paralyzed, she found nothing in her head but emptiness, yet it was necessary to say something, and all she would find within reach was the very thing she had wanted to conceal and which, being true, was all that had remained there. She would detach a little piece from it, unimportant in itself, telling herself that after all this was better since the detail was authentic and did not present the same dangers as a false detail. "At least this is true," she would say to herself, "so much is gained, anyway. He may make inquiries and he'll see that it's true, so at least it won't be this that gives me away." She was wrong, it was this that gave her away, she did not realize that the true detail had angles that could fit only into the contiguous details of the true fact from which she had arbitrarily detached it, angles which, whatever the invented details among which she might place it, would always reveal, by the excess material and unfilled empty areas, that it was not from among these that it had come. "She admits that she heard me ring, then knock, and that she thought it was me, that she wanted to see me," Swann said to himself. "But this does not conform with the fact that no one opened the door."

But he did not point out this contradiction to her, because he thought that, left to herself, Odette would perhaps produce some lie that would be a faint indication of the truth; she would talk; he would not interrupt her, he would collect with an avid and painful piety the words she said to him, feeling (precisely because she was hiding it behind them as she talked to him) that, like the sacred veil, they retained the vague imprint, sketched the uncertain features, of that reality so infinitely precious and, alas! undiscoverable—what she had been doing that afternoon at three o'clock, when he came—of which he would never possess more than these lies, illegible and divine vestiges, and which now existed only in the memory of this woman, who would conceal it like stolen goods and contemplate it without being able to appreciate it, but would not hand it over to him. Of course, he fully suspected at times that in themselves Odette's daily actions were not passionately interesting, and that the relationships she might have with other men did not naturally, universally, and for every intelligent creature exhale a morbid sadness capable of infecting one with a feverish desire to commit suicide. He would then realize that this interest, this sadness existed only in him like a disease, and that, once this disease was cured, Odette's actions, the kisses she might have given would become once again as harmless as those of so many other women. But the fact that the painful curiosity which Swann brought to them now had its origin only in himself was not enough to make him think it was unreasonable to consider this curiosity important and to use every possible means to satisfy it. For Swann was reaching an age the philosophy of which—encouraged, in his case, by the current philosophy of the day, and also by that of the circle in which he had spent so much of his life, that of the social set attached to the Princess des Laumes, where one's intelligence was understood to be in direct ratio to one's skepticism and nothing was real and incontestable except the individual tastes of each person—is no longer that of youth, but the positive, almost medical philosophy of men who, instead of externalizing the objects of their aspirations, try to derive from the years they have already lived a stable residue of habits and passions which they can regard as characteristic and permanent and to which, deliberately, they will take care before anything else that the kind of life they adopt may provide satisfaction. Swann thought it prudent to make allowance in his life for the pain he felt at not knowing what Odette had been doing, just as he made allowance for the fresh outbreak which a damp climate might cause in his eczema; to provide in his budget for a sizable sum of available funds for obtaining information about how Odette spent her days, without which he would feel unhappy, just as he reserved the same for other partialities from which he knew he could expect to derive pleasure, at least before he had fallen in love, like his partiality for collections and for good food.

When he tried to say good-bye to Odette in order to leave for home, she asked him to stay longer and even held him back suddenly, by taking his arm, when he was about to open the door to go out. But he took no notice of this, because among the multitude of gestures, remarks, minor incidents that fill a conversation, it is inevitable that we should come close, without detecting anything in them to attract our attention, to those that hide a truth our suspicions are blindly seeking, and that we should stop, on the other hand, at those behind which there is nothing. She kept saying to him: "How unfortunate—you never come in the afternoon, and the one time you do come, I don't see you." He knew very well that she was not sufficiently in love with him to be so keenly distressed at having missed his visit, but, because she was good, desirous of pleasing him, and often sad when she had vexed him, he found it quite natural that she should be sad this time at having deprived him of the pleasure of spending an hour together, a very great pleasure, not for her, but for him. Yet it was a thing unimportant enough so that the pained air she continued to have ended by surprising him. She reminded him even more than usual, when she looked this way, of the faces of the women portrayed by the painter of the Primavera.[68] She had at this moment their downcast and heartbroken expression which seems to be succumbing beneath the weight of a grief too heavy for them, when they are merely letting the child Jesus play with a pomegranate or watching Moses pour water into a trough.[69] He had once before seen the same sadness on her face, but he no longer knew when. And suddenly he remembered: it was when Odette had lied in talking to Mme. Verdurin the day after that dinner to which she had not come on the pretext that she was ill and in reality so that she could stay with Swann. Of course, even if she had been the most scrupulous of women, she might not have felt remorse over a lie as innocent. But the lies Odette generally told were less innocent and served to prevent discoveries that might have created for her, with one person or another, terrible difficulties. And so when she lied, struck by fear, aware that she was feebly armed to defend herself, uncertain of success, she wanted to cry, from exhaustion, like certain children who have not slept. And she also knew that her lie was usually doing serious harm to the man to whom she was telling it, and into whose power she was perhaps going to fall if she lied badly. And so she felt at once humble and guilty in his presence. And when she had to tell an insignificant social lie, the association of sensations and memories would leave her with the faintness that follows overexertion and the regret that follows an act of malevolence.

What depressing lie was she telling Swann that gave her this pained look, this plaintive voice which seemed to falter under the effort she demanded of herself and to ask for forgiveness? He had an idea that it was not merely the truth about the incident in the afternoon that she was endeavoring to hide from him, but something more immediate, that had perhaps not yet transpired and was quite imminent, something that might enlighten him about this truth. At that moment, he heard the bell ring. Odette did not stop talking, but her words were now no more than a long lament: her regret at not having seen Swann in the afternoon, at not having opened the door to him, had turned into true despair.

He could hear the front door closing again and the sound of a carriage, as if someone was going away again—probably the one Swann was not supposed to meet—after being told that Odette was out. Then, when he reflected that merely by coming at an hour when he was not in the habit of coming he had managed to disturb so many arrangements she did not want him to discover, he was overcome with a feeling of discouragement, almost despondency. But because he loved Odette, because he was in the habit of turning all his thoughts toward her, the pity he might have inspired in himself he felt for her instead, and he murmured: "Poor darling!" As he was leaving her, she picked up several letters that she had on her table and asked him if he would put them in the post. He took them away with him and, once he was home, saw that he had kept the letters on him. He returned as far as the post office, drew them from his pocket, and before tossing them into the box looked at the addresses. They were all for tradesmen except one which was for Forcheville. He held it in his hand. He said to himself: "If I saw what was inside it, I would know what she calls him, how she talks to him, if there's anything between them. It may even be that by not looking, I'm behaving with a lack of delicacy toward Odette, because this is the only way to free myself of a suspicion which is perhaps calumnious for her, which is in any case bound to hurt her, and which nothing would be able to destroy, once the letter was gone."

He returned home after leaving the post office, but he had kept that last letter with him. He lit a candle and held up close to it the envelope he had not dared to open. At first he could not read anything, but the envelope was thin and, by making it adhere to the stiff card that was enclosed in it, he could read, through its transparency, the last words. It was a very cold, formal ending. If he had not been the one looking at a letter addressed to Forcheville, but instead Forcheville reading a letter addressed to Swann, Forcheville would have seen words that were far more affectionate! He took firm hold of the card that danced in the envelope, which was larger than it was, then, sliding it with his thumb, brought its different lines one after another under the part of the envelope where the paper was not doubled, the only part through which one could read.

Despite this he could not distinguish anything very well. But it did not matter, because he had seen enough to realize that its subject was a minor, unimportant event that had nothing to do with a love affair; it was something relating to an uncle of Odette's. Swann had read clearly at the beginning of the line: "I was right," but had not understood what Odette had been right in doing, when suddenly, a word he had not at first been able to decipher appeared and illuminated the

meaning of the entire sentence: “I was right to open the door, it was my uncle.” Open the door! So Forcheville had been there that afternoon when Swann rang the bell, and she had made him leave, which was the source of the noise Swann had heard.

Then he read the whole letter; at the end she apologized for having acted so unceremoniously toward him and said he had forgotten his cigarettes at her house, the same sentence she had written to Swann one of the first times he had come. But in Swann’s case she had added: “If you had left your heart here, I would not have let you take it away again.” For Forcheville nothing like that: no allusion that might suggest that they were having an affair. And in fact, Forcheville was more deceived in all this than he, since Odette was writing to him to assure him that the visitor had been her uncle. In the end he, Swann, was the one she considered important, the one for whom she had dismissed the other. And yet, if there was nothing between Odette and Forcheville, why had she not opened the door right away, why had she said, “I did the right thing to open the door, it was my uncle”? if she was doing nothing wrong at that moment, how would Forcheville even be able to explain to himself the fact that she had not opened the door? Swann remained there, disconsolate, embarrassed and yet happy, with this envelope which Odette had handed over to him quite fearlessly, so absolute was her confidence in his discretion, but through the transparent glazing of which was revealed to him, along with the secret of an incident which he would never have believed it possible to discover, a little of Odette’s life, as in a narrow illuminated section cut directly out of the unknown. Then his jealousy rejoiced over it, as if that jealousy had an independent, selfish vitality, voracious for anything that would feed it, even at Swann’s own expense. Now it had something to feed on and Swann was going to be able to begin worrying each day over the visitors Odette might have received at about five o’clock, and begin trying to learn where Forcheville had been at that hour. For Swann’s affection continued to preserve the same character imprinted on it from the very beginning by his ignorance as to how Odette spent her days and by the mental laziness that stopped him from compensating for his ignorance with his imagination. He had not been jealous at first of Odette’s whole life, but only of the times when some circumstances, perhaps wrongly interpreted, led him to suppose that Odette might have deceived him. His jealousy, like an octopus that casts a first, then a second, then a third mooring, attached itself solidly first to that time, five o’clock in the afternoon, then to another, then to yet another. But Swann was not capable of inventing his sufferings. They were merely the memory, the perpetuation of a suffering that had come to him from outside himself.

From outside, however, everything brought him more suffering. He wanted to separate Odette from Forcheville, take her away to spend a few days in the south. But he believed all the men who happened to be in the hotel desired her and that she desired them. And so he who in former days, when traveling, had sought out new people, large groups, now appeared unsociable, appeared to be fleeing the company of men as if it had cruelly wounded him. And how could he not be misanthropic, when he saw every man as a possible lover of Odette’s? And so his jealousy, even more than the sensuous and lighthearted feeling he had at first had for Odette, altered Swann’s character and changed entirely, in the eyes of other people, the very appearance of the external signs by which that character was manifested.

A month after the day on which he had read the letter addressed by Odette to Forcheville, Swann went to a dinner which the Verdurins were giving in the Bois. As they were preparing to leave, he noticed some confabulations between Mme. Verdurin and several of the guests and thought he heard them reminding the pianist to come to a party at Chatou[70] the next day; yet, he, Swann, had not been invited.

The Verdurins had spoken in low voices and in vague terms, but the painter, probably inattentive, exclaimed:

“There must be no lights on and he must play the ‘Moonlight Sonata’ in the dark so we can watch how things become illuminated.”

Mme. Verdurin, seeing that Swann was two steps away, now wore that expression in which the desire to make the person who is talking be quiet and the desire to maintain a look of innocence in the eyes of the person who is hearing neutralize each other in an intense nullity of gaze, in which the motionless sign of intelligence and complicity is concealed beneath an innocent smile, and which in the end, being common to all those who find themselves making a social blunder, reveals it instantly, if not to those making it, at least to the one who is its victim. Odette suddenly had the desperate look of one who has given up fighting the crushing difficulties of life, and Swann anxiously counted the minutes that separated him from the time when, after leaving the restaurant, during the drive home with her, he would be able to ask her for an explanation, persuade her not to go to Chatou the next day or to see that he was invited, and to soothe in her arms the anguish he was feeling. At last the carriages were sent for. Mme. Verdurin said to Swann:

“Well now, good-bye, we’ll see you soon, I trust?” attempting by the amiableness of her gaze and the constraint of her smile to keep him from realizing that she was not saying to him, as she had always done until now: “Tomorrow, then, at Chatou, the day after at my house.”

M. and Mme. Verdurin made Forcheville get in with them, Swann’s carriage had pulled up behind theirs, and he was waiting for theirs to leave so that he could help Odette into his.

“Odette, we’re taking you home,” said Mme. Verdurin, “we have a little spot for you here next to M. de Forcheville.”

“Yes, madame,” answered Odette.

“What? I thought I was driving you home,” cried Swann, saying what had to be said without dissembling, because the carriage door was open, the seconds were numbered, and he could not go home without her in his present state.

“But Mme. Verdurin asked me . . .”

“Now, you can certainly go home alone, we’ve let you have her to yourself often enough,” said Mme. Verdurin.

“But I had something important to say to Madame.”

“Well, you can write it to her in a letter . . .”

“Good-bye,” Odette said, holding out her hand.

He tried to smile but looked utterly crushed.

“Did you see the way Swann permits himself to behave with us now?” said Mme. Verdurin to her husband when they were back at home. “I thought he was going to eat me alive because we were taking Odette with us. It’s quite unseemly, really! Let him just say right out that we’re running a house of assignation! I don’t understand how Odette can tolerate such behavior. He absolutely seems to be saying: You belong to me. I’m going to tell Odette what I think, I hope she’ll understand.”

And she also added, a moment later, angrily:

“No, really, the vile creature!” using, without realizing it, and perhaps responding to the same obscure need to justify herself—like Françoise at Combray when the chicken did not want to die—the same words which the last twitches of an inoffensive animal in its death throes wring from the countryman who is killing it.

And when Mme. Verdurin’s carriage had left and Swann’s came forward, his coachman looked at him and asked if he was not ill or if there had not been an accident.

Swann sent him away, he wanted to walk, and he returned home on foot through the Bois. He talked to himself out loud, in the same slightly artificial tone he had always used when he enumerated the charms of the little clan and extolled the magnanimity of the Verdurins. But just as Odette’s conversation, smiles, kisses became as odious to him as he had once found them sweet, if they were addressed to another man, in the same way the Verdurins’ salon, which only recently had still seemed to him amusing, inspired with a real enthusiasm for art and even a sort of moral nobility, now that a man other than himself was the one Odette was going there to meet, to love without restraint, exhibited to him its absurdities, its foolishness, its ignominy.

He pictured to himself with disgust the next day’s soiree at Chatou. “The idea of going to Chatou anyway! Like drapers after shutting up shop! These people really are sublimely bourgeois, they can’t really exist, they must have come out of a Labiche comedy!”[71]

The Cottards would be there, maybe Brichot. “It’s quite grotesque, the lives of these nonentities, always in each other’s pockets like this. They would feel utterly lost, I swear, if they didn’t all meet up again tomorrow *at Chatou*!” Alas! the painter would be there too, the painter who enjoyed “matchmaking,” who would invite Forcheville to come to his studio with Odette. He could see Odette in clothes far too formal for this country outing, “because she’s so vulgar and worst of all, poor little thing, such a fool!!!”

He could hear the jokes that Mme. Verdurin would make after dinner, jokes which, whoever the bore might be at whom they were aimed, had always amused him because he saw Odette laughing, laughing with him, almost inside him. Now he felt that perhaps they would be making Odette laugh at him. “What fetid humor!” he said, twisting his mouth into an expression of disgust so powerful that he felt the muscular sensation of his grimace even in his neck, flung back

against the collar of his shirt. “And how can a creature whose face is made in the image of God find anything to laugh about in those nauseating jokes? Any nose of any delicacy at all would turn away with horror so as not to allow itself to be offended by such musty odors. It’s really incredible to think that a human being could fail to understand that, by permitting herself to smile at the expense of a fellow human being who has loyally reached out his hand to her, she is sinking down into a mire from which it will be impossible, even with the best will in the world, to rescue her. I live too many miles above the swamp in which these vermin are gabbling and wallowing to be splattered by the jokes of a Verdurin,” he cried, lifting his head, proudly throwing back his shoulders. “As God is my witness, I have honestly tried to pull Odette up out of there, and lift her into a nobler and purer atmosphere. But no human being has more than just so much patience, and mine is exhausted,” he said to himself, as if this mission to tear Odette away from an atmosphere of sarcasm dated from further back than the last few minutes and as if he had not taken it upon himself only when he thought perhaps these sarcasms were aimed at him and were attempting to separate Odette from him.

He could see the pianist preparing to play the “Moonlight Sonata” and the faces Mme. Verdurin would make as she grew dismayed at the harm that Beethoven’s music was going to do to her nerves: “Idiot, liar!” he exclaimed. “And the woman pretends to love *Art*!” She would tell Odette, after having adroitly insinuated a few words of praise for Forcheville, as she had so often done for him: “Make a little room next to you for M. de Forcheville.” “In the dark! The pimp, the procuress!” *Procuress* was also the name he applied to the music that would invite them to be quiet, to dream together, to look at each other, to take each other by the hand. He found there was some good to be said for the severity toward the arts displayed by Plato, by Bossuet,[72] and by the old school of French education.

In fact, the life one led at the Verdurins’ and which he had so often called “real life” seemed to him the worst of all, and their little clan the lowest of social circles. “It really is,” he said, “the lowest thing on the social ladder, Dante’s last circle.[73] No doubt about it, the venerable text refers to the Verdurins! Really, the fashionable folk, whom one may vilify, but who all the same are different from these gangs of riffraff, show a most profound sagacity in refusing to know them, or even to dirty the tips of their fingers with them! What sound intuition there is in the Faubourg Saint- Germain’s *Noli me tangere*!”[74] He had long since left the avenues of the Bois, he had nearly reached his house, and still, not yet sobered from his pain and from the insincere exuberance with which the deceitful intonations, the artificial sonority of his own voice, pouring into him more abundantly every minute, had intoxicated him, he continued to perorate out loud in the silence of the night: “Society people have their faults, as no one knows better than I do, but all the same really these are people for whom certain things are out of the question. For instance, one fashionable woman I knew was far from perfect, but all the same really she had a basic decency, a sense of honor in her dealings that would have made her incapable, whatever the circumstances, of any sort of treachery and which is quite sufficient to put a vast gulf between her and a vixen like Verdurin. Verdurin! What a name! Oh, one may truly say they are the ultimate, perfect specimens of their kind! Thank God—it was high time I stopped condescending to mix in utter promiscuousness with such infamy, such excrement.”

But, just as the virtues he had attributed that same afternoon to the Verdurins would not have been enough, had they even really possessed them but had not encouraged and protected his love, to provoke in Swann that intoxication in which he was moved by their magnanimity and which, even if it was propagated through other people, could only come to him from Odette—in the same way, the immorality that he now saw in the Verdurins, had it been real, would have been powerless, had they not invited Odette with Forcheville and without him, to unleash his indignation and cause him to vilify “their infamy.” And no doubt Swann’s voice was more perceptive than he was himself, when it refused to pronounce these words filled with disgust for the Verdurin social circle and joy at being done with it, otherwise than in an artificial tone and as if they were chosen to appease his anger rather than to express his thoughts. The latter, in fact, while he was indulging in these invectives, were probably, without his noticing it, occupied with a completely different object, for, once he reached home, scarcely had he closed the carriage gate behind him than suddenly he struck himself on the forehead, and, opening the gate again, went out exclaiming in a natural voice this time: “I think I know a way of getting invited to the dinner at Chatou tomorrow!” But the way must have been a poor one, for Swann was not invited: Dr. Cottard, who, summoned to the country on a serious case, had not seen the Verdurins for several days and had not been able to go to Chatou, said, the day after that dinner, as he sat down at the table at their house:

“Why, won’t we be seeing M. Swann this evening? He is certainly what you would call a personal friend of . . .”

“Why, I should hope not!” cried Mme. Verdurin. “May the Lord preserve us from him, he is deadly dull, stupid, and ill-mannered.”

At these words Cottard showed surprise and submission at the same time, as though confronted with a truth contrary to everything he had believed up to then, but irresistibly obvious; and, lowering his nose nervously and timidly into his plate, confined himself to answering: “Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!,” traversing along a descending scale, in his forced but orderly retreat into the depths of himself, the entire register of his voice. And at the Verdurins’, Swann was never mentioned again.

So the salon which had brought Swann and Odette together became an obstacle to their meetings. She no longer said to him as she had in the early days of their love: “We’ll see each other tomorrow night anyway, there’s a supper at the Verdurins’,” but: “We won’t be able to see each other tomorrow night, there’s a supper at the Verdurins’.” Or else the Verdurins were to take her to the Opéra-Comique to see *Une Nuit de Cléopatre*[75] and Swann would read in Odette’s eyes a fear that he would ask her not to go, which once upon a time he would not have been able to keep himself from kissing as it passed over his mistress’s face, and which now exasperated him. “It’s not anger, however,” he said to himself, “that I feel when I see that she wants to go and scratch about in that excremental music. It’s sorrow, not for myself certainly, but for her; sorrow at seeing that after more than six months of living in daily contact with me, she has not managed to change enough to eliminate Victor Massé spontaneously! Especially for not having come to understand that there are evenings when a person of any subtlety must know how to give up a pleasure, when one asks it of her. She ought to know how to say ‘I won’t go,’ if only by using her intelligence, since it is on the basis of her answer that one will rate once and for all the quality of her soul.” And having persuaded himself that it really was only in order to be able to pass a more favorable judgment on Odette’s spiritual value that he wanted her to stay with him that evening instead of going to the Opéra-Comique, he presented her with the same reasoning, with the same degree of insincerity as he had presented it to himself, and even with one degree more, for now he was also responding to a desire to capture her through her self-love.

“I swear,” he said to her a few moments before she left for the theater, “that in asking you not to go out, my every wish, if I were selfish, would be for you to refuse me, because I have a thousand things to do this evening and I will find myself trapped and thus quite annoyed if against all expectations you answer me that you won’t go. But my own occupations, my own pleasures, aren’t everything, I have to think of you. There may come a day when, seeing me gone from you forever, you will be justified in reproaching me for not having warned you in the crucial moments when I sensed that I was going to bring down upon you one of those severe judgments against which love cannot resist for long. You see, *Une Nuit de Cléopatre* (what a title!) doesn’t really matter. What we must find out is whether you are really that creature which ranks lowest in mentality, and even in charm, the contemptible creature who is incapable of giving up a pleasant thing. Now, if this is what you are, how could anyone love you, for you’re not even a person, a clearly defined entity, imperfect, but at least perfectible? You’re only a formless stream of water running down whatever slope one offers it, a fish without memory or reflection which, as long as it lives in its aquarium, continuing to mistake the glass for water, will bump against it a hundred times a day. Do you understand that your answer will have the effect—I won’t say of making me stop loving you immediately, of course, but of making you less attractive in my eyes when I realize that you’re not a person, that you’re lower than all other things, that I can’t place you above any of them? Obviously I would have preferred to ask you as a thing of no importance to give up *Une Nuit de Cléopatre* (since you oblige me to soil my lips with that despicable name) in hopes that you would go anyway. But since I’ve decided to tally such an account, to derive such consequences from your answer, I thought it would be more honest to let you know.”

For some time, Odette had shown signs of agitation and uncertainty. Although she failed to grasp the meaning of this speech, she did understand that it might belong to the category of “scoldings” and scenes of reproach or supplication, and her familiarity with men enabled her, without paying attention to the details of what they said, to conclude that they would not make such scenes if they were not in love, that since they were in love it was pointless to obey them, that they would be only more in love afterward. And so she would have listened to Swann with the utmost calm if she had not seen that time was passing and that if he talked much longer, she would, as she told him with a smile that was tender, obstinate, and abashed, “end by missing the overture!”

On other occasions he told her that the one thing that was more likely than anything else to make him stop loving her was that she would not give up lying. “Even from the point of view of your desire to be attractive,” he told her, “don’t you understand how much of your charm you lose when you stoop to lying? With one confession, think how many faults you could redeem! Really you are much less intelligent than I thought!” But it was in vain that Swann expounded for her thus all the reasons she had for not lying; they might have undermined some general and systematic approach to lying; but Odette had none; she merely contented herself, whenever she wanted Swann not to know about something she had done, with not telling him about it. And so lying was for her an expedient of a particular order; and the only thing that could decide whether she ought to make use of it or confess the truth was a reason of a particular order too, the greater or lesser likelihood that Swann might discover she had not told the truth.

Physically, she was going through a bad phase: she was growing stout; and the expressive and doleful charm, the surprised and dreamy glances she had once had seemed to have disappeared with her first youth. So that she had become so dear to Swann at the moment, as it were, when he found her in fact much less pretty. He would look at her for a long time trying to recover the charm he had once seen in her, and he would not find it. But knowing that under the new chrysalis, what lived on was still Odette, still the same will, evanescent, elusive, and guileful, was enough to make Swann continue to put the same passion into trying to capture her. Then he would look at a photograph from two years before, he would remember how exquisite she had been. And that would console him a little for taking such pains over her.

When the Verdurins carried her off to Saint-Germain, Chatou, Meulan, often, if it was the warm season, they would propose, on the spot, staying there to sleep and not coming back until the next day. Mme. Verdurin would try to quiet the scruples of the pianist, whose aunt had remained in Paris.

“She’ll be delighted to be rid of you for a day. And how could she worry, she knows you’re with us; anyway, she can put the blame on me.”

But if she was not successful, M. Verdurin would spring into action, find a telegraph office or a messenger, and inquire as to which of the faithful had someone they needed to inform. But Odette would thank him and say that she did not need to send anyone a telegram, because she had told Swann once and for all that by sending him one in front of everybody, she would be compromising herself. Sometimes she would be gone for several days, the Verdurins would take her to see the tombs at Dreux, or, on the advice of the painter, to Compiègne to admire sunsets as viewed from inside a forest, and then they would push on as far as the Château de Pierrefonds.[76]

“To think that she could visit real historic buildings with me. I’ve studied architecture for ten years and I’m forever being implored to take people of the highest standing to Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud [77] and would do it only for her, and instead she goes with the lowest of simpletons to wax ecstatic first over the dejecta of Louis-Philippe and then over those of Viollet-le-Duc! It seems to me you don’t need to be an artist for that and even without a particularly delicate nose, you don’t choose to go holiday making in latrines in order to be closer to the smell of excrement.”

But when she had left for Dreux or Pierrefonds—without, alas, allowing him to go too, as though by chance, on his own account, because “that would make a deplorable impression,” she said—he would plunge into that most intoxicating of romances, the railway timetable, which would present him with all the ways he might join her, in the afternoon, in the evening, that same morning! Not only the ways, but even more, almost: the authorization. Because after all, the timetable and the trains themselves were not meant for dogs. If one informed the public, via printed matter, that at eight o’clock in the morning a train left which arrived in Pierrefonds at ten o’clock, it was because going to Pierrefonds was a lawful act, for which permission from Odette was superfluous; and it was also an act that could have a motive completely different from the desire to meet Odette, since people who did not know her performed it each day, in large enough numbers for it to be worth the trouble of stoking the locomotives.

So she really couldn’t stop him from going to Pierrefonds if he wanted to! Now, in fact, he felt that he did want to, and that, if he had not known Odette, he certainly would have gone. For a long time now he had wanted to form a clearer idea for himself of Viollet-le-Duc’s restoration work. And in this weather, he was moved by an imperious desire for a walk in the forest of Compiègne.

It was truly hard luck that she was forbidding him the only spot that tempted him today. Today! If he went despite her prohibition, he might see her *today*! But whereas, if at Pierrefonds she had met someone who did not matter, she would have said joyfully: “Imagine finding you here!” and would have asked him to come see her at the hotel where she was staying with the Verdurins, if she met him, Swann, there, she would be offended, she would say to herself that she was being followed, she would love him less, perhaps she would turn away angrily when she saw him. “So, I no longer have the right to travel!” she would say to him when they returned, whereas really he was the one who no longer had the right to travel!

For a while he had had the idea, so as to be able to go to Compiègne and Pierrefonds without appearing to be doing it in order to meet Odette, of contriving to be taken there by one of his friends, the Marquis de Forestelle, who had a château in the vicinity. The Marquis, to whom he had communicated his plan without letting him know the reason for it, was beside himself with joy and marveled that Swann, for the first time in fifteen years, was at last consenting to come see his estate and, since he did not want to stay there, as he had told him, at least promised to take walks and go on excursions with him for a few days. Swann pictured himself already down there with M. de Forestelle. Even before seeing Odette there, even if he did not manage to see her, what happiness it would give him to step on that earth where, not knowing the exact location, at any given moment, of her presence, he would feel palpitating everywhere the possibility of her sudden appearance: in the courtyard of the château, now beautiful to him because it was for her sake that he had gone to see it; in every street of the town, which seemed to him romantic; on every road in the forest, rosy in the deep and tender sunset—numberless alternative asylums, where, in the uncertain ubiquity of his hopes, his multiplied heart simultaneously came to take refuge, happy and vagabond. “Whatever we do,” he would say to M. de Forestelle, “let’s take care we don’t stumble on Odette and the Verdurins; I’ve just learned they’re in Pierrefonds today, in fact. There’s time enough for us to see one another in Paris, it wouldn’t be worth the trouble of leaving Paris if they couldn’t take a step without me or I without them.” And his friend would not understand why, once he was there, Swann would change a plan twenty times, inspect the dining rooms of all the hotels in Compiègne without making up his mind to sit down in any of them even though no trace of the Verdurins had been seen, looking as though he were searching for the very thing he had said he wanted to avoid and then avoiding it as soon as he found it, because if he had encountered the little group, he would pointedly have gone off, glad he had seen Odette and that she had seen him, especially that she had seen him not bothering about her. But no, she would certainly guess that it was for her sake he was there. And when M. de Forestelle came to pick him up so that they could set off, he said to him: “Alas, no, I can’t go to Pierrefonds today, Odette is there, as it turns out.” And Swann was happy despite everything to feel that, if alone of all mortals that day he was not allowed to go to Pierrefonds, it was because for Odette he was someone different from the others, her lover, and that this restriction which was applied in his case alone to the universal right to freedom of movement was merely one of the forms of that slavery, of that love which was so dear to him. Decidedly it was better not to risk quarreling with her, to be patient, to wait for her to come back. He spent his days bent over a map of the Compiègne forest as if it were the Map of Love,[78] and surrounded himself with photographs of the château at Pierrefonds. As soon as the day arrived on which it was possible that she would be coming back, he opened the timetable again, calculated which train she must have taken and, if she had been delayed, those that were still available to her. He did not go out for fear of missing a telegram, did not go to bed in case, having returned on the last train, she wanted to surprise him by coming to see him in the middle of the night. In fact he heard the bell at the carriage gate, it seemed to him they were slow opening it, he wanted to wake up the concierge, went to the window to call out to Odette if it was she, for despite the instructions he had gone downstairs to give the servants himself more than ten times, they were still capable of telling her he was not there. It was a servant coming home. He noticed the incessant stream of passing carriages, to which he had never paid attention in the past. He listened to each one come from far off, draw near, pass his gate without stopping, and go on into the distance bearing a message that was not for him. He waited all night, quite uselessly, because the Verdurins had decided to return early, and Odette had been in Paris since noon; it had not occurred to her to tell him; not knowing what to do, she had gone and spent her evening alone at the theater and long ago, by now, had returned home to bed and gone to sleep.

The fact was that she had not even thought of him. And occasions such as this when she forgot Swann’s very existence were more useful to Odette, did more to attach Swann to her, than all her coquetry. Because in this way Swann was kept in that state of painful agitation which had already been powerful enough to make his love blossom on the night when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins’ and had searched for her all evening. And he did not have, as I had at Combray in my childhood, happy days during which to forget the sufferings that will return at night. Swann spent his days without Odette; and now and then he said to himself that to allow such a pretty woman to go out alone in Paris like that was as imprudent as to put a case full of jewels in the middle of the street. Then he would become indignant at all the people passing by as at so many thieves. But their faces, formless, collective, escaped the grasp of his imagination and did not

feed his jealousy. Swann's mind would become exhausted, until, passing his hand over his eyes, he would exclaim: "We must trust in God," like those who, after having persisted in embracing the problem of the reality of the external world or the immortality of the soul, grant their tired brains the relief of an act of faith. But always the thought of the absent woman was indissolubly mingled with the simplest actions of Swann's life—having lunch, receiving his mail, leaving the house, going to bed—by the very sadness he felt over performing them without her, like the initials of Philibert le Beau, which, in the church at Brou,[79] because of the longing she felt for him, Margaret of Austria intertwined everywhere with her own. On certain days, instead of staying at home, he would go and have his lunch in a restaurant not far from his house whose good cooking he had appreciated once upon a time and to which he now went only for one of those reasons, at once mystical and preposterous, that we call romantic; in fact this restaurant (which still exists) bore the same name as the street in which Odette lived: *Lapérouse*.[80] Sometimes, when she had gone away briefly, it was only after several days that she thought of letting him know she had returned to Paris. And she would say to him quite simply, no longer taking the precaution as she once had of covering herself, just in case, with a little fragment borrowed from the truth, that she had just returned that moment by the morning train. These words were mendacious; at least for Odette they were mendacious, insubstantial, not having, as they would have had if they had been true, a basis in her memory of arriving at the station; in fact, she was even prevented from picturing them herself at the moment she uttered them, by the contradictory image of what she had been doing that was quite different at the moment she was claiming she had stepped off the train. But in Swann's mind it was just the opposite, these words, encountering no obstacle, encrusted themselves and assumed the immobility of a truth so indubitable that if a friend told him he had come by that train and had not seen Odette, Swann would be convinced it was the friend who was mistaken about the day or the hour, since his account did not agree with Odette's. Her words would have seemed to him false only if he had suspected beforehand that they were. For him to believe she was lying, a previous suspicion was a necessary condition. In fact it was also a sufficient condition. Then everything Odette said to him would appear suspect. If he heard her mention a name, it was certainly the name of one of her lovers; the supposition once forged, he would spend weeks grieving; he even contacted a private investigation agency once in order to find out the address and the daily routine of the stranger who would not let him breathe easy except when he went off on a trip, and who, he learned in the end, was an uncle of Odette's dead for the past twenty years.

Even though in general she did not permit him to meet her in public places, saying that people would talk, sometimes at an evening party to which he and she both had been invited—at Forcheville's, at the painter's, or at a charity ball in one of the ministries—he would find himself there at the same time as she. He would see her but did not dare stay for fear of irritating her by appearing to spy on the pleasures she was enjoying with other people, pleasures which—as he drove home alone, went to bed as anxious as I myself was to be some years later on the evenings when he would come to dine at the house, at Combray—seemed unlimited to him because he had not seen them come to an end. And once or twice on such evenings he experienced the sort of happiness which, had it not been so violently affected by the recoil from the abrupt cessation of anxiety, one would be tempted to call a tranquil happiness, because it consisted of a return to a peaceful state of mind: he had dropped in on a party at the painter's home and was preparing to go off again; behind him he was leaving Odette transformed into a brilliant stranger, surrounded by men to whom her glances and her gaiety, which were not for him, seemed to speak of some sensuous pleasure that would be enjoyed there or elsewhere (maybe at the "Bal des Incohérents,"[81] where he trembled at the idea that she would go afterward) and that caused Swann more jealousy than the carnal act itself because he had more difficulty imagining it; he was already on the point of passing through the studio door, when he heard himself being called back with these words (which, by cutting off from the party that end which had terrified him so, made the party seem in retrospect innocent, made Odette's return a thing no longer inconceivable and terrible, but sweet and familiar and abiding next to him, like a bit of his everyday life, in his carriage, and divested Odette herself of her too brilliant and too gay appearance, showed that it was only a disguise which she had put on for a moment, for its own sake, not with a view to mysterious pleasures, and that she was already tired of it), with these words that Odette tossed at him, as he was already on the threshold: "Wouldn't you wait five minutes for me? I'm leaving, we'll go back together, you can take me home."

True, one day Forcheville had asked to be taken back at the same time but, when they had arrived at Odette's door and he had asked permission to come in too, Odette had answered him, pointing to Swann: "Ah! That depends on this gentleman here, ask him. Well, all right, come in for a moment if you want, but not for long because I warn you he likes to talk quietly with me, and he doesn't much like having visitors when he comes. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him! Isn't that so, *my love,*[82] I'm the only one who really knows you?"

And Swann was perhaps even more touched to see her addressing him thus, in front of Forcheville, not only these tender words of predilection, but also certain criticisms such as: "I'm sure you haven't answered your friends yet about that dinner on Sunday. Don't go if you don't want to, but at least be polite," or: "Now, have you left your essay on Vermeer here so that you can do a little more on it tomorrow? How lazy you are! I'll make you work—you'll see!," which proved that Odette kept up with his social engagements and his literary work, that the two of them really had a life together. And as she said this she gave him a smile in whose depths he felt she was entirely his.

And so at these moments, while she was making orangeade for them, suddenly, as when a poorly adjusted reflector at first casts on the wall around an object large fantastic shadows which then fold and disappear into it, all the terrible shifting ideas he had formed for himself about Odette would vanish, would rejoin the charming body that stood there in front of him. He would have the sudden suspicion that this hour spent at Odette's house, in the lamplight, was perhaps not an artificial hour, invented for his own use (intended to mask that dismaying and delightful thing which he thought about endlessly without being able really to picture it, an hour in Odette's real life, in Odette's life when he himself was not there), with stage-set accessories and cardboard fruit, but was perhaps a real hour in Odette's life, that if he had not been there, she would have set out the same armchair for Forcheville and poured him not some unfamiliar drink, but that very same orangeade, that the world inhabited by Odette was not that other frightful and supernatural world where he spent his time locating her and which perhaps existed only in his imagination, but rather the real world, radiating no special sadness, comprising that table where he was going to be able to write and that drink which he would be permitted to taste, all those objects which he contemplated with as much curiosity and admiration as gratitude, for if by absorbing his dreams they had delivered him from them, they in return had been enriched by them, they showed him the palpable realization of his dreams, and they interested his mind, they assumed substance and shape before his eyes at the same time that they soothed his heart. Ah! If fate had permitted him to have but a single home with Odette so that in her house he would be in his own, if when he asked the servant what was planned for lunch, it was Odette's menu that he had learned in answer, if when Odette wanted to go out in the morning to walk down the avenue du Bois de Boulogne, his duty as a good husband had obliged him, even if he did not want to go out, to accompany her, carrying her coat when she was too warm, and at night after dinner if she wanted to stay at home informally dressed, if he had been forced to stay there with her, to do what she wanted; then how completely all those trifles in Swann's life which seemed to him so sad, would, on the contrary, because they were at the same time part of Odette's life, have taken on, even the most familiar of them—like that lamp, that orangeade, that armchair which contained so much of his dreams, which materialized so much desire—a sort of superabundant sweetness and mysterious density.

Yet he actually suspected that what he thus longed for was a calm, a peace that would not have been a favorable atmosphere for his love. When Odette ceased to be for him a creature always absent, longed for, imaginary, when the feeling he had for her was no longer the same mysterious disturbance caused in him by the phrase from the sonata, but affection, gratitude, when normal relations were established between them that would put an end to his madness and his gloom, then no doubt the actions of Odette's daily life would appear to him of little interest in themselves—as he had several times already suspected they were, for example on the day he had read through its envelope the letter addressed to Forcheville. Considering his disease with as much discernment as if he had inoculated himself with it in order to study it, he told himself that when he had recovered his health what Odette might be doing would leave him indifferent. But, from within his morbid state, in truth he feared death itself no more than such a recovery, which would in fact have been the death of all that he was at present.

After these peaceful evenings, Swann's suspicions would be calmed; he would bless Odette and the next day, first thing in the morning, he would send around to her house the most beautiful jewels, because those kind attentions the night before had excited either his gratitude, or the desire to see them repeated, or a paroxysm of love that needed to expend itself.

But at other times his pain would seize him again, he would imagine that Odette was Forcheville's mistress and that when the two of them had seen him, from the depths of the Verdurins' landau, at the Bois, the day before the Chatou party to which he had not been invited, entreat her vainly, with that look of despair which even his coachman had noticed, to go back with him, then return home on his own, alone and defeated, she must have had, as she pointed him out to Forcheville and said to him: "Look! How furious he is!" the same expression in her eyes, glittering, malicious, haughty, and sly, as on the day when Forcheville had driven Saniette from the Verdurins'.

Then Swann detested her. "But also, I'm too stupid," he would tell himself, "I'm paying with my own money for other people's pleasures. All the same, she ought to take care and not pull too hard on her bowstring, because I might very well not give anything more at all. In any case, let's forgo the supplementary favors for the time being! To think that only yesterday, when she said she wanted to attend the season at Bayreuth,[83] I was stupid enough to propose renting for the two of us one of the King of Bavaria's pretty castles in the vicinity. And anyway she did not seem all that delighted, she hasn't yet said either yes or no; let's hope she will decide against it. Good Lord! To spend two weeks listening to Wagner with her when she cares as much for it as a fish for an apple—what fun that would be!" And because his hatred, like his love, needed to manifest itself and to act, he took pleasure in pursuing his evil fantasies further and further, since, because of the perfidies he imputed to Odette, he detested her still more and could, if—something he tried to picture to himself—they were found to be true, have an occasion for punishing her and for satiating on her his increasing rage. Thus he went so far as to suppose that he was going to receive a letter from her in which she would ask him for money to rent that castle near Bayreuth, but warning him that he could not go there himself, because she had promised Forcheville and the Verdurins that she would invite them. Ah! How he would have liked her to be so bold! What joy he would feel as he refused, as he drafted the vengeful answer, the terms of which he took satisfaction in choosing, in uttering out loud, as if he had actually received the letter!

Yet this was in fact what happened the very next day. She wrote that the Verdurins and their friends had expressed a desire to attend these performances of Wagner and that, if he would be so good as to send her the money, she would at last, after having so often been entertained at their home, have the pleasure of inviting them in her turn. About him, she said not a word, it was implied that their presence would exclude his own.

And so that terrible answer, whose every word he had determined the day before without daring to hope that it would ever be used, he could now have the joy of sending off to her. Alas! He was quite aware that, all the same, with the money she had, or that she might easily find, she could rent something at Bayreuth since she wanted to, she who was incapable of telling the difference between Bach and Clapisson.[84] But still, she would live there more frugally. There would be no way, as there would have been had he sent her a few thousand-franc bills this time, of organizing every evening, in a castle, those exquisite suppers after which

she would perhaps have indulged the whim—which it was possible she had never yet had—of falling into Forcheville's arms. And then at least he, Swann, was not the one who would be paying for this detested journey! Oh, if only he could have prevented it! If only she could have sprained her ankle before she left, if the coachman of the carriage that would take her to the station had agreed, whatever the price, to drive her to a place where for some time she would remain sequestered—this perfidious woman, her eyes glittering with a smile of complicity addressed to Forcheville, which Odette had become for Swann in the past forty-eight hours!

But she was never that for very long; after a few days the gleaming hypocritical gaze would lose some of its luster and duplicity, the image of a despised Odette saying to Forcheville: "How furious he is!" would begin to grow pale, fade away. Then, gradually the face of the other Odette would reappear and rise up, shining softly, the Odette who also offered a smile to Forcheville, but a smile in which there was nothing but affection for Swann, when she said: "Don't stay long, because this gentleman does not much like me to have visitors when he wants to be with me. Oh, if you knew this fellow as well as I know him!," the same smile she wore when thanking Swann for some instance of his courtesy, which she prized so highly, for some advice she had asked of him in one of those serious circumstances in which she had confidence only in him.

Then, thinking of this Odette, he would ask himself how he could have written her that outrageous letter of which no doubt until now she had not thought him capable, and which must have brought him down from the high, the unique rank which by his goodness, his honesty, he had won in her esteem. He would now become less dear to her, because it was for those particular qualities, which she did not find in either Forcheville or any other man, that she loved him. It was because of them that Odette so often showed a graciousness toward him that he counted for nothing when he was jealous, because it was not a sign of desire, and even gave proof of affection rather than love, but whose importance he began to feel again in proportion as the spontaneous relaxation of his suspicions, a relaxation often increased by the distraction he found in reading about art or talking to a friend, caused his passion to become less demanding of reciprocities.

Now that, after this oscillation, Odette had naturally returned to the place from which Swann's jealousy had for a time removed her, to the angle from which he found her charming, he pictured her as full of tenderness, with a look of consent, and so pretty thus that he could not help offering her his lips as if she had been there and he had been able to kiss her; and he felt as strong a gratitude toward her for this enchanting, kindly glance as if she had really given it to him, as if it were not merely his imagination that had just portrayed it in order to satisfy his desire.

How he must have hurt her! Of course he could find valid reasons for his resentment against her, but they would not have been enough to make him feel that resentment if he had not loved her so much. Had he not had grievances of equal gravity against other women, for whom he would nevertheless readily have done favors now, feeling no anger toward them because he no longer loved them? If someday he was ever to find himself in the same state of indifference toward Odette, he would understand that it was his jealousy alone that had made him find something atrocious, unpardonable, in this desire of hers, fundamentally so natural, arising from a touch of childishness and also a certain delicacy in her nature, to be able in her turn, since an occasion presented itself, to repay the civilities of the Verdurins, to play the mistress of the house.

He returned to this point of view—which was opposed to that of his love and his jealousy, and in which he placed himself sometimes through a sort of intellectual equity so as to allow for the various probabilities—from which he tried to judge Odette as if he had never loved her, as if to him she were a woman like any other, as if Odette's life had not been, as soon as he was no longer there, different, contrived in hiding from him, plotted against him.

Why should he believe that there, she would enjoy with Forcheville or with other men intoxicating pleasures which she had never experienced with him and which his jealousy alone had fabricated out of nothing? In Bayreuth as in Paris, if Forcheville happened to think of him at all, it might be merely as of someone who mattered a great deal in Odette's life, to whom he was obliged to yield his place, when they met at her house. If Forcheville and she gloated over being there despite him, it was he who would be to blame by trying in vain to keep her from going, whereas if he had approved of her plan, which was in fact defensible, she would have appeared to be there on his recommendation, she would feel she had been sent there, housed there by him, and for the pleasure she felt in entertaining those people who had entertained her so often, it was to Swann that she would have been grateful.

And—instead of letting her go off on bad terms with him, without having seen him again—if he sent her this money, if he encouraged her to take this trip and went out of his way to make it pleasant for her, she would come running to him, happy, grateful, and he would have the joy of seeing her, a joy which he had not experienced for almost a week and which nothing could replace. Because as soon as Swann could picture her without horror, as soon as he once again saw kindness in her smile, and as soon as the desire to take her out of reach of all other men was not added by jealousy to his love, that love again became above all a predilection for the sensations that Odette's person gave him, for the pleasure he took in admiring like a spectacle or questioning like a phenomenon the dawn of one of her glances, the evolution of one of her smiles, the emission of an intonation of her voice. And this pleasure, different from all the others, had ended by creating in him a need for her that she alone could satisfy by her presence or her letters, a need almost as disinterested, almost as artistic, as perverse, as another need that characterized this new period in Swann's life, in which the dryness, the depression of earlier years had been succeeded by a sort of spiritual superabundance, without his knowing to what he owed this unhoped-for enrichment of his inner life any more than a person in delicate health who from a certain moment grows stronger, stouter, and seems for a time to be on the road to a complete recovery: that other need which was also developing apart from the real world was the need to hear, and to understand, music.

And so, with the very chemistry of his disease, after he had created jealousy with his love, he began once more to manufacture affection, and pity, for Odette. She had turned back into the Odette who was charming and good. He felt remorse at having been severe toward her. He wanted her to come to him, and, before that, he wanted to procure for her some sort of pleasure, so as to see gratitude mold her face and shape her smile.

And Odette, sure of seeing him come back after a few days, as tender and submissive as before, to ask her for a reconciliation, acquired the habit of no longer being afraid to displease or even to provoke him, and she refused him, when it was convenient for her, the favors he valued most.

Perhaps she did not realize how sincere he had been with her during the quarrel, when he had told her he would not send her any money and would try to hurt her. Perhaps she also did not realize how sincere he was, if not with her, at least with himself, on other occasions when for the sake of the future of their relationship, so as to show Odette he was capable of doing without her, that a break was always possible, he decided to let some time pass without going to see her.

Sometimes this was after several days during which she had not given him any new reason to worry; and since, from the next few visits he would make to her, he knew he would not derive any very great joy but more probably some vexation that would put an end to his present state of calm, he would write to her that since he was very busy he would not be able to see her on any of the days on which he had said he would. Then a letter from her, crossing his, would ask him to change one of those very meetings. He would wonder why; his suspicions, his anguish would take hold of him again. He would no longer be able to abide, in the new state of agitation in which he found himself, by the commitment he had made in his earlier state of relative calm, he would hurry to her house and demand to see her on all the following days. And even if she had not written to him first, if she merely answered, with an acquiescence, his request for a brief separation, this would be enough to make him unable to go on without seeing her. For, contrary to Swann's calculations, Odette's consent had entirely changed his attitude. Like all those who enjoy the possession of a thing, in order to know what would happen if he ceased for a moment to possess it he had removed that thing from his mind, leaving everything else in the same state as when it was there. But the absence of a thing is not merely that, it is not simply a partial lack, it is a disruption of everything else, it is a new state which one cannot foresee in the old.

But there were other occasions—Odette was about to go off on a trip—when, after some little dispute for which he had chosen the pretext, he would resolve not to write to her and not to see her again before she returned, thus giving the appearance, and expecting the reward, of a more serious quarrel, which she would perhaps believe was final, to a separation the greater part of which was unavoidable because of the trip and which he was merely allowing to begin a little earlier. Already he imagined Odette uneasy, distressed at having received neither visit nor letter, and this image, by calming his jealousy, made it easy for him to break himself of the habit of seeing her. No doubt, at times, at the far end of his mind where his resolution had thrust her because of the entire interposed length of the three weeks of separation he had accepted, it was with pleasure that he contemplated the idea of seeing Odette again when she returned; but it was also with so little impatience that he began to ask himself if he would not readily double the duration of an abstinence that was so easy. It had lasted as yet only three days, a period of time much shorter than he had often spent without seeing Odette and without having as now planned it in advance. And yet at this point a slight irritation or physical discomfort—by making him consider the present moment an exceptional one, outside the rules, one in which even common wisdom would

agree that he could accept the appeasement afforded by a pleasure and allow his will, until it might be useful to resume the effort, to rest—would suspend the action of the latter, which would cease to exert its pressure; or, less than that, the memory of something he had forgotten to ask Odette, whether she had decided which color she wanted to have her carriage repainted, or, with regard to a certain investment, whether it was common or preferred shares that she wanted to buy (it was all very well to show her that he could live without seeing her, but if, after that, the painting had to be done all over again or the shares paid no dividends, a lot of good it would have done him), and like a stretched piece of elastic that is let go or the air in a pneumatic machine that is opened, the idea of seeing her again, from the far distance where it had been kept, would come back in a single leap into the field of the present and of immediate possibilities.

It came back without encountering any further resistance, in fact so irresistible that Swann had had much less difficulty feeling the approach one by one of the fifteen days he was going to be separated from Odette than he had waiting the ten minutes which his coachman took to harness the carriage that was going to take him to her house and which he spent in transports of impatience and joy as he recaptured a thousand times in order to lavish his tenderness on it that idea of meeting her again which, by so abrupt a return, at a moment when he thought it was so far away, was once again with him in his most intimate consciousness. For this thought no longer encountered the obstacle of Swann's desire to attempt forthwith to resist it, a desire which had ceased to have any place in Swann's mind since, having proved to himself—at least this was what he believed—that he was so easily capable of it, he no longer saw any disadvantage in deferring an attempt at separation that he was now certain he could put into execution whenever he wished. And, too, this idea of seeing her again returned to him adorned with a novelty, a seductiveness, endowed with a virulence which habit had dulled, but which had been retempered in that privation not of three days but of fifteen (for a period of renunciation must be calculated, by anticipation, as having lasted already until the final date assigned to it), and had converted what had been until then an expected pleasure which could easily be sacrificed into an undreamed-of happiness which he was powerless to resist. Finally, the idea returned to Swann embellished by his ignorance of what Odette might have thought, perhaps done, seeing that he had given her no sign of life, so that what he was now going to find was the impassioning revelation of an Odette almost unknown to him.

But she, just as she had believed that his refusal to send her money was only a sham, saw nothing but a pretext in the information that Swann came to ask of her about the carriage to be repainted or the shares to be purchased. For she could not reconstruct the various phases of these crises through which he was passing and, in the idea she formed of them, she failed to understand the mechanism by which they worked, believing only in what she knew beforehand, in their necessary, infallible, and always identical outcome. An idea that was incomplete—all the more profound, perhaps—if one judged it from the point of view of Swann, who would no doubt have thought he was misunderstood by Odette, just as a morphine addict or a consumptive, persuaded that they have been prevented, one by an outside event just when he was about to free himself of his inveterate habit, the other by an accidental indisposition just when he was about to be restored to health at last, feel misunderstood by the doctor who does not attach the same importance they do to these alleged contingencies, mere disguises according to him, assumed, so as to make themselves perceptible again to his patients, by the vice and the morbid condition which, in reality, have not ceased to burden them incurably while they were feeding their dreams of reformation or recovery. And in fact, Swann's love had reached the stage where the doctor and, in certain affections, even the boldest surgeon, ask themselves if ridding a patient of his vice or relieving him of his disease is still reasonable or even possible.

Certainly, of the extent of this love Swann had no direct awareness. When he tried to measure it, it sometimes seemed to him diminished, reduced to almost nothing; for example, the lack of pleasure, the displeasure, almost, inspired in him, before he loved Odette, by her expressive features, her faded complexion, came back to him on certain days. "Really, I'm making some progress," he would say to himself the next day. "When I think about it carefully, I hardly enjoyed myself at all yesterday when I was in bed with her: it's odd, I actually found her ugly." And of course, he was sincere, but his love extended well beyond the realms of physical desire. Odette's body itself no longer had a large place in it. When his eyes fell upon Odette's photograph on the table, or when she came to see him, he had trouble identifying the figure of flesh or cardboard with the painful and constant disturbance that inhabited him. He would say to himself almost with surprise: "It's she!" as if suddenly someone were to show us in a separate, external form one of our own diseases and we found that it did not resemble what we were suffering. "She"—he tried to ask himself what that was; for one thing love and death have in common, more than those vague resemblances people are always talking about, is that they make us question more deeply, for fear that its reality will slip away from us, the mystery of personality. And this disease which was Swann's love had so proliferated, was so closely entangled with all his habits, with all his actions, with his thoughts, his health, his sleep, his life, even with what he wanted after his death, it was now so much a part of him, that it could not have been torn from him without destroying him almost entirely: as they say in surgery, his love was no longer operable.

By this love Swann had been so far detached from all other interests that, when by chance he reappeared in society telling himself that his connections, like an elegant setting that she would not in fact have been able to appreciate with much accuracy, could restore a little of his value in Odette's eyes (and this would perhaps indeed have been true had these connections not been lowered in value by that love itself, which for Odette depreciated all the things it touched by seeming to proclaim them less precious), what he experienced there, along with the distress of being in places and among people whom she did not know, was the disinterested pleasure he would have taken in a novel or a painting which depicted the amusements of a leisured class, just as, in his own house, he enjoyed contemplating the functioning of his domestic life, the elegance of his wardrobe and livery, the proper placement of his stocks, in the same way that he enjoyed reading in Saint-Simon, who was one of his favorite authors, about the "mechanics" of the daily life, the menus of the dinners of Mme. de Maintenon,[85] or the well-advised avarice and grand style of Lully.[86] And to the small extent that this detachment was not absolute, the reason for this new pleasure that Swann was enjoying was that he could emigrate for a while into the rare parts of himself that had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain. In this respect the personality which my great-aunt attributed to him, of "young Swann," distinct from his more individual personality of Charles Swann, was the one in which he was now happiest. One day when, for the birthday of the Princess of Parma (and because she could often please Odette indirectly by making it possible for her to have seats at galas, jubilees, and other occasions), he had wanted to send her some fruit and was not sure how to order it, he had entrusted the task to a cousin of his mother's, a lady who, delighted to do an errand for him, had written to him, when sending him the account, that she had not got all the fruit at the same place, but the grapes at Crapote's, whose specialty they were, the strawberries at Jauret's, the pears at Chevet's, where they were the loveliest, etc., "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me." And indeed, from the Princess's thanks, he had been able to judge the flavor of the strawberries and the mellowness of the pears. But more important, that "each piece of fruit inspected and examined individually by me" had soothed his pain, by taking his consciousness away into a region where he rarely went, even though it was his by right as the heir to a rich and solid bourgeois family in which there had been preserved by heredity, quite ready to be put at his service whenever he wished, a knowledge of the "best addresses" and the art of placing a proper order.

Certainly, he had forgotten for too long that he was "young Swann" not to feel, when he became that person again briefly, a keener pleasure than those he could have felt the rest of the time and to which he had grown indifferent; and if the friendliness of the bourgeoisie, for whom he had remained that person more than anything else, was less animated than that of the aristocracy (but in fact more flattering, for with them at least it is always inseparable from respect), a letter from a royal personage, whatever princely entertainment it offered, could never be as pleasant to him as a letter asking him to be a witness, or merely to be present, at a wedding in the family of old friends of his parents, some of whom had continued to see him—like my grandfather, who, the year before, had invited him to my mother's wedding—while certain others barely knew him personally but believed they were obligated to be polite to the son, to the worthy successor, of the late M. Swann.

But, because of the long-standing close ties he had among them, the nobility, to a certain extent, were also part of his house, his household, and his family. He felt he possessed, when contemplating his distinguished friendships, the same support from outside, the same comfort, as when looking at the fine lands, the fine silverware, the fine table linen, that had come to him from his own people. And the thought that if he were to collapse at home from the effects of a sudden illness it would quite naturally be the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Reuss, the Duc de Luxembourg, and the Baron de Charlus whom his valet would run off to find, brought him the same consolation as to our old Françoise the knowledge that she would be wrapped in a shroud of her own fine sheets, marked, not mended (or so finely that it gave only a loftier idea of the care of the seamstress), a shroud from the frequent image of which in her mind's eye she derived a certain satisfying sense, if not of material well-being, at least of self-respect. But most important, since in every one of his actions and thoughts that referred to Odette, Swann was constantly governed and directed by the unavowed feeling that he was, perhaps not less dear, but less welcome to her than anyone else, than the most boring faithful of the Verdurins—when he returned to a world in which he was the highest example of excellence, whom one would do anything to attract, whom one

was sorry not to see, he began to believe again in the existence of a happier life, almost to feel an appetite for it, as an invalid may feel who has been bedridden for months, on a strict diet, and who sees in a newspaper the menu for an official luncheon or an advertisement for a cruise to Sicily.

If he was obliged to give his excuses to the society people for not visiting them, it was precisely for his visits to her that he sought to excuse himself to Odette. He even paid for them (asking himself at the end of the month, supposing he had abused her patience somewhat and gone to see her many times, if it was enough to send her four thousand francs), and for each one found a pretext, a present to bring her, a piece of information she needed, M. de Charlus whom he had met going to her house and who had demanded that he accompany him. And, lacking one, he would ask M. de Charlus if he would please run over to her house, remark to her as though spontaneously, in the course of the conversation, that he remembered he had something to say to Swann, would she kindly send for him to come to her house right away; but most often Swann would wait in vain and M. de Charlus would tell him in the evening that his plan had not succeeded. So that if she was often away from Paris now, even when she stayed there she saw very little of him, and she who, when she was in love with him, used to say: "I'm always free" and "What do I care what others think?" would now, each time he wanted to see her, invoke social conventions or plead other engagements. When he mentioned that he might be going to some charity ball, opening, premiere where she would be, she would tell him that he was trying to flaunt their affair, that he was treating her like a prostitute. It reached such a point that, in order to try not to be debarred from meeting her anywhere, Swann, knowing that she was acquainted with and had considerable affection for my great-uncle Adolphe and having once been a friend of his himself, went to see him one day in his little apartment in the rue de Bellechasse to ask him to use his influence with Odette. Since she always adopted poetical airs when speaking to Swann of my uncle, saying: "Ah, yes, he's not like you, his friendship with me is a lovely thing, so grand, so handsome! He would never think so little of me as to want to show himself with me in every public place," Swann was perplexed and did not know quite how lofty his tone ought to be in talking about her to my uncle. He first posited Odette's a priori excellence, her axiomatic and seraphic superhumanity, the revealed truth of her virtues, which could be neither demonstrated nor derived from experience. "I must talk to you. You know that Odette is a woman superior to all other women, an adorable creature, an angel. But you know what life in Paris is like. Not everyone sees Odette in the same light as you and I. And so there are people who think the role I'm playing is rather ridiculous: she can't even allow me to meet her outside, at the theater. She has such confidence in you—couldn't you say a few words to her for me, assure her that she's exaggerating the harm I would do her by greeting her in public?"

My uncle advised Swann to let a little time go by without seeing Odette, who would only love him all the more for it, and Odette to allow Swann to meet her wherever he liked. A few days later, Odette told Swann she had just had the disappointment of discovering that my uncle was the same as every other man: he had just tried to take her by force. She quieted Swann when at first he wanted to go off and challenge my uncle, but he refused to shake his hand the next time he met him. He especially regretted this quarrel with my uncle Adolphe since he had hoped, had he seen him again from time to time and been able to chat with him in complete confidence, to try to shed some light on certain rumors relating to the life Odette had once led in Nice. For my uncle Adolphe spent his winters there. And Swann thought that perhaps it was even there that he had met Odette. The little that had been let slip by someone in his presence, relating to a man who was said to have been Odette's lover, had greatly disturbed Swann. But the things he would have regarded, before knowing them, as the most frightful to learn and the most impossible to believe, once he knew them were incorporated forever after into his sadness, he accepted them, he would no longer have been able to understand that they did not exist. Only each one indelibly revised the idea he was forming of his mistress. He was even given to understand, at one point, that this laxness in Odette's morals, which he would not have suspected, was fairly well known, and that in Baden and in Nice, when she used to spend a few months there, she had had a degree of amorous notoriety. He sought out certain philanderers in order to question them; but they were aware that he knew Odette; and besides, he was afraid of reminding them of her, of putting them on her track. But he to whom before then nothing could have appeared as tedious as anything relating to the cosmopolitan life of Baden or Nice, learning that Odette had perhaps led a rather riotous life in those pleasure towns, though he could never manage to find out if it had been only to satisfy a need for money which thanks to him she no longer had, or from some capricious desire which might return, now leaned with an impotent, blind, and dizzying anguish over the bottomless abyss that had swallowed up those early years of the Septennate[87] during which one spent winters on the Promenade des Anglais, summers under the lime trees of Baden, and in them he saw a painful but magnificent profundity such as a poet might have lent them; and he would have devoted to the reconstruction of the petty events of the chronicle of the Côte d'Azur of that time, if that chronicle could have helped him understand something of Odette's smile or the look in her eyes—honest and simple though they were—more passion than an aesthete examining the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence in order to try to penetrate further into the soul of Botticelli's Primavera, bella Vanna, or Venus.[88] Often, without saying anything to her, he would gaze at her, he would daydream; she would say to him: "How sad you look!" It was not as yet very long since he had moved on from the idea that she was a good person, comparable to the best he had ever known, to the idea that she was a kept woman; inversely he had sometimes since then returned from Odette de Crécy, perhaps too well known among the fast crowd, among ladies' men, to this face whose expression was at times so gentle, to this nature so human. He would say to himself: "What does it matter that at Nice everyone knows Odette de Crécy? Reputations of this sort, even if true, are created out of other people's ideas"; he would reflect that this legend—even if it was authentic—lay outside Odette, was not inside her like an irreducible and baneful personality; that the creature who might have been led to do wrong was a woman with kind eyes, a heart full of pity for suffering, a submissive body which he had held, which he had clasped in his arms and handled, a woman whom one day he might come to possess entirely, if he succeeded in making himself indispensable to her. She was there, often tired, her face emptied for a moment of that feverish, joyful preoccupation with the unknown things that made Swann suffer; she would push back her hair with her hands; her forehead, her face would appear broader; then, suddenly, some ordinary human thought, some good feeling such as may be found in all individuals when in a moment of rest or reclusion they are left to themselves, would spring from her eyes like a beam of yellow sunlight. And immediately her whole face would brighten like a gray countryside covered with clouds which suddenly part, transfiguring it, at the moment the sun goes down. The life that was in Odette at that moment, even the future she seemed so dreamily to be watching, Swann could have shared with her; no evil disturbance seemed to have left its residue there. Rare though they became, these moments were not entirely useless. In memory Swann joined these fragments together, eliminated the intervals, cast, as though in gold, an Odette formed of goodness and calm for whom (as will be seen in the second part of this story) he later made sacrifices which the other Odette would never have won from him. But these moments were so rare, and he saw her so little now! Even in regard to their evening meeting, she would tell him only at the last minute if she could grant it to him, for, since she could count on his always being free, she first wanted to be certain that no one else would suggest coming around. She would maintain that she had to wait for an answer of the greatest importance, and if after she had sent for Swann friends asked her, when the evening had already begun, to meet them at the theater or at supper, she would give a joyful leap into the air and dress quickly. As she progressed in her preparations, each movement she made would bring Swann closer to the moment when he would have to leave her, when she would fly off with an irresistible force; and when ready at last, plunging into her mirror a final glance strained and brightened by attention, she put a little more red on her lips, settled a lock of hair on her forehead, and asked for her sky-blue evening cloak with gold tassels, Swann looked so sad that she could not suppress a gesture of impatience and said: "So that's how you thank me for letting you stay here till the last minute. And I thought I was being nice. I'll know better next time!" Now and then, at the risk of angering her, he would promise himself to try to find out where she had gone, he would dream of an alliance with Forcheville, who would perhaps have been able to enlighten him. In any case, when he knew who it was she had spent the evening with, it was very seldom that he could not discover among all his own acquaintance someone who knew, if only indirectly, the man with whom she had gone out and could easily obtain this or that piece of information about him. And while he was writing to one of his friends to ask him to try to clear up some point or other, he would feel how restful it was to stop asking himself his unanswerable questions and to transfer to someone else the fatigue of interrogation. True, Swann was scarcely better off when he had certain information. Knowing a thing does not always allow us to prevent it, but at least the things we know, we hold, if not in our hands, at any rate in our minds, where we can arrange them as we like, which gives us the illusion of a sort of power over them. He was happy each time M. de Charlus was with Odette. Between M. de Charlus and her, Swann knew that nothing could happen, that when M. de Charlus went out with her it was for the sake of his friendship with Swann and he would have no reluctance about telling him what she had done. Sometimes she had declared so categorically to Swann that it was impossible for her to see him on a certain evening, she seemed so keen on going out, that Swann attached real importance to M. de Charlus's being free to go with her. The next day, though he did not dare ask many questions of M. de Charlus, he would compel him, by appearing not quite to understand his first answers, to give him further answers, after each of which he would feel more relieved, because he very soon learned that Odette had occupied her evening with the most innocent of pleasures. "But what do you mean, my dear Mémé? I don't quite understand . . . You didn't go straight from her house to the Musée Grévin? You had gone somewhere else first. No? Oh!

How funny! You don't know how much you amuse me, my dear Mémé. But what a funny idea of hers to go on to the Chat Noir afterward, that's certainly her sort of idea . . . No? It was you? How strange. But in fact it's not such a bad idea; she must have known a good many people there? No? She spoke to no one? That's extraordinary. So you stayed there like that just the two of you all by yourselves? I can just picture it. You are kind, my dear Mémé, I'm very fond of you." Swann felt relieved. For him, to whom it had occasionally happened, when chatting casually with people to whom he was barely listening, that he sometimes heard certain remarks (as, for example: "I saw Mme. de Crécy yesterday; she was with a gentleman I don't know"), remarks which, as soon as they entered Swann's heart, solidified, hardened like an encrustation, cut into him, never moved from there again, how sweet by contrast were these words: "She knew no one, she spoke to no one," how they circulated comfortably in him, how fluid they were, easy, breathable! And yet after a moment he would say to himself that Odette must find him quite tiresome if these were the pleasures she preferred to his company. And their insignificance, though it reassured him, nevertheless pained him like a betrayal.

Even when he could not find out where she had gone, it would have been enough to soothe the anguish which he felt at these times, and for which Odette's presence, the sweetness of being close to her was the only specific (a specific that in the long run aggravated the disease, like many remedies, but at least momentarily soothed his pain), it would have been enough for him, if only Odette had permitted it, to remain in her house while she was out, to wait for her there until the hour of her return, into whose stillness and appeasement would have flowed and melted the hours which some magical illusion, some evil spell had made him believe were different from the rest. But she did not want this; he returned home; he forced himself, on the way, to make various plans, he stopped thinking about Odette; he even succeeded, while he was undressing, in turning over some fairly cheerful thoughts in his mind; and it was with a light heart, full of the hope of going to see some great painting the next day, that he got into bed and put out his light; but, no sooner, as he prepared to go to sleep, did he cease to exert upon himself a constraint of which he was not even aware because it was by now so habitual, than at that very instant an icy shiver would run through him and he would begin to sob. He did not even want to know why, dried his eyes, said to himself with a smile: "Delightful—I'm turning into a real neurotic." Then he could not think without a feeling of great weariness that the next day he would again have to begin trying to find out what Odette had been doing, use all his influence to attempt to see her. This compulsion to an activity without respite, without variety, without results was so cruel to him that one day, seeing a lump on his abdomen, he felt real joy at the thought that he might have a fatal tumor, that he was no longer going to have to take charge of anything, that it was the disease that would manage him, make him its plaything, until the impending end. And indeed if, during this period, he often desired death though without admitting it to himself, it was to escape not so much the acuteness of his sufferings as the monotony of his struggle.

And yet he would have liked to live on until the time came when he no longer loved her, when she would have no reason to lie to him and he could at last learn from her if, on the day when he had gone to see her in the afternoon, she was or was not in bed with Forcheville. Often for several days, the suspicion that she loved someone else would distract him from that question about Forcheville, would make it a matter almost of indifference to him, like those new developments in a continuing state of ill health which seem momentarily to have delivered us from the preceding ones. There were even days when he was not tormented by any suspicion. He thought he was cured. But the next morning, when he woke up, he felt in the same place the same pain, the sensation of which, in the course of the preceding day, he had diluted in a flood of different impressions. But it had not moved from its place. And in fact, it was the sharpness of this pain that had woken Swann.

Since Odette never gave him any information about these very important things which occupied her so fully each day (although he had lived long enough to know that these things are never anything else but pleasures), he could not try to imagine them for very long at a time, his brain was working with nothing in it; then he would pass his finger over his tired eyelids as he would have wiped the glass of his lorgnon, and stop thinking altogether. Yet floating up from that great unknown were certain occupations which reappeared from time to time, vaguely connected by her with some obligation toward distant relatives or friends from an earlier time, who, because they were the only ones she regularly mentioned to him as preventing her from seeing him, seemed to Swann to form the stable, necessary framework of Odette's life. Because of the tone in which she referred from time to time to "the day I go to the Hippodrome with my friend," if, having felt ill and thought: "Perhaps Odette would be kind enough to come round to the house," he recalled abruptly that this was in fact that very day, he would say to himself: "Oh no! It's not worth the trouble of asking her to come, I should have thought of it earlier, this is the day she goes to the Hippodrome with her friend. We must confine ourselves to what's possible; it's pointless wearing oneself out proposing things that are unacceptable and have already been refused in advance." And the duty incumbent upon Odette of going to the Hippodrome, to which Swann thus yielded, did not appear to him merely unavoidable; but the mark of necessity with which it was stamped seemed to make plausible and legitimate everything that was closely or distantly related to it. If, after a man passing in the street had greeted Odette and aroused Swann's jealousy, she answered his questions by associating the stranger with one of the two or three paramount duties of which she had spoken to him, if, for example, she said: "That was a gentleman who was in the box of the friend with whom I go to the Hippodrome," this explanation would calm Swann's suspicions, since he did indeed find it inevitable that the friend would have other guests besides Odette in her box at the Hippodrome, but had never tried or managed to picture them. Ah! how he would have liked to know her, the friend who went to the Hippodrome, and how he would have liked her to take him there with Odette! How gladly he would have given up all his connections in exchange for any person Odette was in the habit of seeing, even a manicurist or a shop assistant! He would have gone to more trouble for that person than for a queen. Wouldn't she have given him, with what she contained of Odette's life, the only effective calmative for his pain? How happily he would have hurried to spend the days at the home of one of those humble people with whom Odette kept up friendly relations out of either self-interest or true simplicity! How willingly he would have taken up residence forever on the fifth floor of a certain sordid and coveted house to which Odette did not take him and in which, if he had lived there with the little retired dressmaker whose lover he would willingly have pretended to be, he would have had a visit from her almost every day! In these almost working-class neighborhoods, what a modest life, abject, but sweet, nourished with calm and happiness, he would have agreed to live indefinitely!

It also sometimes happened that when, after meeting Swann, she saw some man approaching her whom he did not know, he could observe on Odette's face the sadness she had shown the day he had come to see her while Forcheville was there. But this was rare; for on the days when, despite everything she had to do and her fear of what other people would think, she managed to see Swann, what now predominated in her attitude was self-assurance: a great contrast, perhaps an unconscious revenge or a natural reaction to the timorous emotion which, in the early days when she had known him, she had felt with him, and even far away from him, when she would begin a letter with these words: "My dear, my hand is shaking so hard I can scarcely write" (at least so she claimed, and a little of that emotion must have been sincere for her to want to feign more of it). She liked Swann then. We do not tremble except for ourselves, except for those we love. When our happiness is no longer in their hands, what calm, what ease, what boldness we enjoy in their company! When speaking to him, when writing to him, she no longer used any of those words with which she had sought to give herself the illusion that he belonged to her, creating occasions for saying "my," "mine," when she referred to him—"You are my property, this is the fragrance of our friendship, I'm keeping it"—and for talking to him about the future, about death even, as a single thing that would be shared by the two of them. In those days, to everything he said, she would answer admiringly: "You—you will never be like anyone else"; she would look at his long face, his slightly bald head, about which the people who knew of Swann's successes with women would think: "He's not conventionally handsome, granted, but he is smart: that quiff of hair, that monocle, that smile!" and, perhaps with more curiosity to know what he was than desire to become his mistress, she would say: "If only I could know what is in that head!"

Now, to all of Swann's remarks she would reply in a tone that was at times irritated, at times indulgent: "Oh, you really never will be like anyone else!" She would look at that head, which was only a little more aged by worry (but about which now everyone thought, with that same aptitude which enables you to discover the intentions of a symphonic piece when you have read the program, and the resemblances of a child when you know its parents: "He's not positively ugly, granted, but he is absurd; that monocle, that quiff of hair, that smile!" creating in their suggestible imaginations the immaterial demarcation that separates by several months' distance the head of an adored lover from that of a cuckold), she would say: "Oh, if only I could change what's in that head, if only I could make it reasonable."

Always prepared to believe what he hoped for, if Odette's behavior toward him left any room at all for doubt, he would fling himself avidly on her words:

"You can if you want to," he would say to her.

And he would try to show her that to soothe him, direct him, make him work, would be a noble task to which many other women might ask nothing better than to devote themselves, though it would only be fair to add that in their hands the noble task would have appeared to him merely an indiscreet and intolerable

usurpation of his freedom. “If she did not love me a little,” he would say to himself, “she would not want to transform me. In order to transform me, she will have to see more of me.” Thus he regarded this reproach of hers as a sort of proof of interest, of love perhaps; and indeed, she now gave him so few that he was obliged to regard as such the various prohibitions she imposed on him. One day, she declared that she did not like his coachman, that he was perhaps turning Swann against her, that in any case he did not show the punctuality and the deference to Swann that she wanted. She felt that Swann wanted to hear her say: “Don’t use him anymore when you come to see me,” as he would have wanted a kiss. Since she was in a good mood, she said it; he was touched. That evening, chatting with M. de Charlus, with whom he had the comfort of being able to talk about her openly (for the least bit of conversation he had, even with people who did not know her, always somehow related to her), he said to him: “Yet I believe she loves me; she is so kind to me, what I do is certainly not a matter of indifference to her.” And if, when he was setting off for her house, getting into his carriage with a friend whom he was to drop along the way, the friend said: “Why, that’s not Lorédan on the box,” with what melancholy joy Swann would answer him: “Oh Lord no! I tell you I can’t use Lorédan when I go to the rue La Pérouse. Odette doesn’t like me to use Lorédan, she doesn’t think he suits me. Well, what do you expect! Women, you know, women! I tell you she wouldn’t like it at all. Oh, Lord, yes; if I’d used Rémi, there’d be no end of trouble!”

This new manner, indifferent, distracted, irritable, which was now Odette’s manner with him, certainly caused Swann to suffer; but he was not aware of his suffering; since it was only gradually, day by day, that Odette had cooled toward him, it was only by comparing what she was now to what she had been in the beginning that he would have been able to fathom the depth of the change that had taken place. Yet that change was his deep, his secret wound which hurt him day and night, and as soon as he felt that his thoughts were straying a little too close to it, he would quickly guide them in another direction for fear of suffering too much. He would certainly say to himself in an abstract way: “There was a time when Odette loved me more,” but he would never look back at that time. Just as there was a bureau in his office which he took pains not to look at, which he made a detour to avoid as he came and went, because in one of its drawers he had locked away the chrysanthemum she had given him that first evening on which he had driven her home, and the letters in which she had said: “If you had forgotten your heart here too, I would not have let you take it back,” and “At whatever hour of the day or night you need me, send word and my life will be yours to command,” so too there was a place inside him which he never let his thoughts approach, forcing them if necessary to make the detour of a lengthy argument so that they would not have to pass in front of it: this was the place where his memory of the happy days resided.

But his meticulous prudence was foiled one evening when he had gone out into society, to a party.

It was at the home of the Marquise de Saint-Euverte, on the last, for that year, of the evenings on which she invited people to hear the musicians whom she would afterward use for her charity concerts. Swann, who had wanted to go to each of the preceding evenings in turn and had not been able to resolve to do so, had received, while he was dressing for this one, a visit from the Baron de Charlus, who was coming with an offer to return with him to the home of the Marquise, if his company would help him to be a little less bored there, a little less sad. But Swann had answered:

“You can’t doubt how much pleasure I would take in being with you. But the greatest pleasure you could give me would be to go to see Odette instead. You know what an excellent influence you have on her. I believe she’s not going out this evening before she goes to see her old dressmaker, and I’m sure she’d be delighted to have you accompany her there. In any case you’ll find her at home before that. Try to amuse her and also to talk some sense to her. If you could arrange something for tomorrow that she enjoys and that we could all three do together . . . Also, try to begin planning for this summer, see if there’s something she might want to do, a cruise we might all three take, I don’t know. I’m not counting on seeing her tonight myself; still, if she wanted to see me or if you were to find a way, you would only need to send me word at Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s up to midnight, and afterward at home. Thank you for all that you do for me—you know how fond I am of you.”

The Baron promised to go and pay the visit that Swann wanted after he had driven him to the door of the Saint-Euverte house, where Swann arrived soothed by the thought that M. de Charlus would be spending the evening in the rue La Pérouse, but in a state of melancholy indifference to everything that did not concern Odette, and in particular to the accoutrements of fashionable life, which gave them the charm that is to be found in anything which, being no longer an object of our desire, appears to us in its own guise. As soon as he descended from the carriage, in the foreground of that fictitious summary of their domestic life which hostesses like to offer their guests on ceremonial occasions and in which they seek to respect accuracy of costume and setting, Swann enjoyed the sight of those descendants of Balzac’s “tigers,”[89] the grooms, who normally followed along on the daily outing, now hatted and booted and posted outside in front of the house on the soil of the avenue, or in front of the stables, like gardeners lined up at the entrances to their flower beds. The particular tendency he had always had to look for analogies between living people and portraits in museums was still active but in a more constant and general way; it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him as a series of pictures. In the hall which in the old days, when he went out regularly into society, he would walk into wrapped in his overcoat and leave in his tails, but without knowing what had happened there, his mind having been, during the few moments he had stayed there, either still at the party he had just left, or already at the party he was about to be shown into, for the first time he noticed, woken by the unexpected arrival of the late guest, the scattered pack of magnificent, tall, idle footmen sleeping here and there on benches and chests who, raising their sharp, noble, greyhound profiles, stood up and gathered in a circle around him.

One of them, of a particularly ferocious aspect and rather like the executioner in certain Renaissance paintings which depicts scenes of torture, advanced upon him with an implacable air to take his things. But the hardness of his steely gaze was compensated by the softness of his cotton gloves, so that as he approached Swann he seemed to be showing contempt for his person and consideration for his hat. He took it with a care to which the exactness of his balance gave something meticulous, and with a delicacy rendered almost touching by the evidence of his strength. He then passed it to one of his assistants, new and timid, who expressed the terror he felt by casting wild glances in all directions and displayed the agitation of a captive animal in the first hours of its domestication.

A few steps away, a sturdy fellow in livery mused motionless, statuesque, useless, like the purely decorative warrior one sees in the most tumultuous paintings by Mantegna,[90] lost in thought, leaning on his shield, while others beside him rush forward and slaughter one another; detached from his group of companions as they pressed around Swann, he seemed as resolved to take no part in this scene, which he followed vaguely with his cruel sea-green eyes, as if it were the Massacre of the Innocents or the Martyrdom of Saint John. He seemed in fact to belong to that race which has vanished—or which perhaps never existed except in the altarpiece of San Zeno and the frescoes of the Erimitani, where Swann had encountered it and where it dreams on still—and which issued from the impregnation of an ancient statue by one of the Master’s Paduan models or some Albrecht Dürer Saxon.[91] And the locks of his red hair, crimped by nature but glued by brilliantine, were treated broadly as they are in the Greek sculpture which the painter from Mantua studied so constantly and which, if out of all creation it depicts only man, is at least able to derive from his simple forms richnesses so varied, as though borrowed from all of living nature, that a head of hair, in the smooth rolls and sharp beaks of its curls, or in the superimposition of the threefold flowering diadem of its tresses, looks at once like a bundle of seaweed, a nestful of doves, a band of hyacinths, and a coil of snakes.

Still others, also colossal, stood on the steps of a monumental staircase to which their decorative presence and marmoreal immobility might have induced one to give the same name as the one in the Ducal Palace—“Staircase of the Giants”—and which Swann began to climb with the sad thought that Odette had never ascended it. Oh, with what joy by contrast would he have gone up the dark, evil-smelling, and rickety flights to the little retired dressmaker’s, in whose “fifth floor” he would have been so happy to pay more than the price of a weekly stage box at the Opéra for the right to spend the evening when Odette came there, and even on the other days, so as to be able to talk about her, to live among the people she was in the habit of seeing when he was not there and who because of that seemed to him to harbor something, of his mistress’s life, that was more real, more inaccessible, and more mysterious. Whereas in the old dressmaker’s pestilential and longed-for staircase, since there was no second, service stair, one saw in the evening in front of each door an empty, dirty milk can set out in readiness on the mat, on the magnificent and disdained staircase which Swann was mounting at that moment, on either side, at different levels, in front of each anfractuosity formed in the wall by the window of the lodge or the entrance to a set of rooms, representing the domestic service which they directed and paying homage to the guests on their behalf, a concierge, a majordomo, a steward (good people who lived the rest of the week somewhat independent in their domains, dined there at home like small shopkeepers, and by tomorrow would perhaps be in the bourgeois service of a doctor or manufacturer), heedful not to fail to carry out the instructions they had been given before being allowed to put on the dazzling livery which they wore only at rare intervals and in which they did not feel very much at ease, stood under the arcature of their portals with a stately glitter tempered by common good nature, like saints in their niches, and an enormous usher, dressed as though he were in church, struck the flagstones with his staff as each new arrival passed. Having reached the top of the staircase up the length of

which he had been followed by a wan-faced servant with a little bunch of hair tied in a cadogan[92] at the back of his head, like a Goya[93] sexton or a scrivener in an old play, Swann passed in front of a desk where valets, seated like notaries in front of great registers, stood up and inscribed his name. He then crossed a little vestibule which—like certain rooms arranged by their owners to serve as the setting for a single work of art, from which they take their name and, deliberately bare, contain nothing else—displayed at its entrance, like some precious effigy by Benvenuto Cellini[94] representing a watchman, a young footman, his body bent slightly forward, lifting from his red gorget a face even redder from which burst forth torrents of fire, timidity, and zeal, and who, piercing with his impetuous, vigilant, distracted gaze the Aubusson tapestries hung before the drawing room where people were listening to music, appeared, with a military impassivity or a supernatural faith—an allegory of alarm, an incarnation of alertness, a commemoration of the call to arms—to be watching, angel or sentinel, from the tower of a castle or cathedral, for the appearance of the enemy or the hour of Judgment. Now Swann had only to enter the concert room, whose doors an usher loaded with chains was opening for him with a bow, as he would have handed over to him the keys to a city. But he thought of the house in which he might have been at this very moment, if Odette had permitted it, and the memory he glimpsed of an empty milk can on a doormat wrung his heart.

Swann rapidly recovered his sense of how ugly men could be, when, beyond the tapestry hangings, the spectacle of the servants was followed by that of the guests. But even the ugliness of these faces, though he knew it so well, seemed new to him since their features—instead of being signs usable in a practical way for the identification of a certain person who had until then represented a cluster of pleasures to pursue, worries to avoid, or courtesies to pay—now remained coordinated only by aesthetic relations, within the autonomy of their lines. And of these men in whose midst Swann found himself hemmed in, even the monocles which many wore (and which, formerly, would at the very most have allowed Swann to say that they wore a monocle), having now been released from signifying a habit, the same for everyone, appeared to him each with a sort of individuality. Maybe because he did not regard Général de Froberville and the Marquis de Bréauté, who were talking to each other just inside the door, as more than two figures in a painting, whereas for a long time they had been useful friends who had introduced him to the Jockey Club and supported him in duels, the general's monocle, stuck between his eyelids like a shell splinter in his vulgar, scarred, overbearing face, in the middle of a forehead which it blinded like the Cyclops' single eye, appeared to Swann like a monstrous wound that might have been glorious to receive, but was indecent to show off; whereas the one that M. de Bréauté added, as a badge of festivity, to the pearl-gray gloves, the opera hat, and the white tie, and substituted for the familiar lorgnette (as Swann himself did) for going out in society, bore, glued to its other side, like a natural history specimen under a microscope, an infinitesimal gaze teeming with friendliness that smiled constantly at the loftiness of the ceilings, the beauty of the preparations, the interest of the programs, and the excellence of the refreshments.

"Well now, here you are! Why, it's been an eternity since we last saw you," said the general to Swann and, noticing his drawn features and concluding from this that it was perhaps a grave illness that had kept him away from society, he added: "You look quite well, you know!" while M. de Bréauté asked: "My dear, what in the world are you doing here?" of a society novelist who had just positioned in the corner of his eye a monocle which was his only organ of psychological investigation and pitiless analysis and who answered with an air of mystery and self-importance, rolling the *r:*

"I am observing!"

The Marquis de Forestelle's monocle was minuscule, had no border, and, requiring a constant painful clenching of the eye, where it was encrusted like a superfluous cartilage whose presence was inexplicable and whose material was exquisite, gave the Marquis's face a melancholy delicacy, and made women think he was capable of great sorrows in love. But that of M. de Saint-Candé, surrounded by a gigantic ring, like Saturn, was the center of gravity of a face which regulated itself at each moment in relation to it, a face whose quivering red nose and thick-lipped sarcastic mouth attempted by their grimaces to equal the unceasing salvos of wit sparkling from the disk of glass, and saw itself preferred to the handsomest eyes in the world by snobbish and depraved young women in whom it inspired dreams of artificial charms and a refinement of voluptuousness; and meanwhile, behind his own, M. de Palancy, who, with his big, round-eyed carp's head, moved about slowly in the midst of the festivities unclenching his mandibles from moment to moment as though seeking to orient himself, merely seemed to be transporting with him an accidental and perhaps purely symbolic fragment of the glass of his aquarium, a part intended to represent the whole, reminding Swann, a great admirer of Giotto's *Vices* and *Virtues* at Padua, of Injustice, next to whom a leafy bough evokes the forests in which his lair is hidden.

Swann had walked on into the room, at the insistence of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, and, in order to hear a melody from *Orphée*[95] that was being performed by a flautist, had placed himself in a corner where unfortunately his only view was of two mature ladies seated next to each other, the Marquise de Cambremer and the Vicomtesse de Franquetot, who, because they were cousins, spent their time when attending a party, clutching their bags and followed by their daughters, looking for each other as though in a railway station, and did not rest easy until they had reserved, with a fan or a handkerchief, two seats side by side: Mme. de Cambremer, since she had very few acquaintances, being all the happier to have a companion, Mme. de Franquetot, who was in contrast extremely well connected, believing there was something elegant, something original, about showing all her fine friends that she preferred, to their company, an obscure lady with whom she shared memories of her youth. Full of a melancholy irony, Swann watched them listen to the piano intermezzo (*Saint Francis Speaking to the Birds* by Liszt)[96] which had come after the flute melody, and follow the vertiginous playing of the virtuoso, Mme. de Franquetot anxiously, her eyes wild as if the keys over which he ran with such agility were a series of trapezes from which he might fall from a height of eighty yards, and at the same time casting at her neighbor looks of astonishment, of denial which signified: "This is not to be believed, I would never have thought a man could do this," while Mme. de Cambremer, being a woman who had received a strong musical education, marked time with her head transformed into the arm of a metronome whose amplitude and rapidity of oscillations from one shoulder to the other had become such (with that sort of frenzy and abandon in the eyes characteristic of a kind of suffering which is no longer aware of itself nor tries to control itself and says "I can't help it!") that she kept snagging her solitaires in the straps of her bodice and was obliged to straighten the black grapes she had in her hair, though without ceasing to accelerate her motion. On the other side of Mme. de Franquetot, but a little in front, was the Marquise de Gallardon, occupied with her favorite thought, her alliance with the Guermantes, which in the eyes of the world and in her own was the source of a good deal of glory along with some shame, the most brilliant of them keeping her a bit at a distance, perhaps because she was tiresome, or because she was spiteful, or because she was from an inferior branch, or perhaps for no reason. When she found herself next to someone she did not know, as at this moment Mme. de Franquetot, it would pain her that her own awareness of her kinship with the Guermantes could not be manifested outwardly in visible characters like those which, in the mosaics of the Byzantine churches, placed one below another, inscribe in a vertical column, next to a holy personage, the words he is supposed to be uttering. At this moment she was pondering the fact that she had never received an invitation or a visit from her young cousin the Princesse des Laumes, in the six years the Princesse had been married. This thought filled her with anger, but also with pride; for, by dint of saying to people who were surprised not to see her at the home of Mme. des Laumes, that it was because she would have risked meeting Princesse Mathilde[97] there—for which her ultra-Legitimist[98] family would never have forgiven her—she had ended by believing this actually was the reason she did not go to her young cousin's house. Yet she recalled having asked Mme. des Laumes several times how she might contrive to meet her, but recalled it only confusedly and also more than neutralized this slightly humiliating memory by murmuring: "After all it's not up to me to make the first move, I'm twenty years older than she." Fortified by the efficacy of these unspoken words, she proudly threw back her shoulders, which seemed detached from her bust and on which her head was positioned almost horizontally so that one was reminded of the "restored" head of a haughty pheasant brought to the table in all its feathers. It was not so much that she was not stocky, mannish, and plump by nature; but the insults she had received had straightened her up like those trees which, born in a bad position at the brink of a precipice, are forced to grow backward to keep their balance. Obliged as she was, in order to console herself for not being altogether the equal of the other Guermantes, to keep telling herself that it was because of the intransigence of her principles and her pride that she did not see them very often, this thought had ended by shaping her body and by giving her an imposing sort of presence that passed in the eyes of bourgeois women for a sign of breeding and sometimes disturbed with a fleeting desire the clubmen's weary glances. If Mme. de Gallardon's conversation had been subjected to those analyses which, by recording the greater or lesser frequency of each word, permit one to discover the key to a language in code, one would have realized that no expression, even the most ordinary, recurred in it as often as "at the home of my cousins the Guermantes," "at the home of my aunt de Guermantes," "the health of Elzéar de Guermantes," "my cousin de Guermantes's baignoire."[99] When anyone spoke to her about a famous personage, she would answer that without knowing him personally she had met him a thousand times at the home of her aunt de Guermantes, but she would answer this in a tone so icy and in a voice so low that it was clear that, if she did not know him personally, it

was by virtue of all the ineradicable and stubborn principles which her shoulders touched behind her, like those ladders on which gymnastics instructors make you stretch out in order to develop your chest.

Now as it happened, the Princesse des Laumes, whom one would not have expected to see at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, had just arrived. In order to show that she was not trying to advertise, in a drawing room to which she had come only out of condescension, the superiority of her rank, she had entered with her shoulders turned sideways even where there was no crowd to cleave through and no person attempting to get past her, staying deliberately at the back, with the air of being in her proper place, like a king who stands in line at the door of a theater so long as the management has not been informed that he is there; and, merely confining her gaze—so as not to seem to be signaling her presence and demanding attention—to a consideration of the design in the carpet or in her own skirt, she stood in the spot that had seemed to her the most modest (and from which she was well aware she would be drawn by a delighted exclamation from Mme. de Saint-Euverte as soon as the latter noticed her), next to Mme. de Cambremer, whom she did not know. She observed the pantomime of her music-loving neighbor, but did not imitate it. It was not that, the one time she came to spend five minutes at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's, the Princesse des Laumes would not have wished, so that the courtesy she was showing her might count double, to prove as friendly as possible. But by nature, she had a horror of what she called "exaggerations" and was anxious to show that she "did not have to" indulge in displays of emotion which were not in keeping with the "style" of the circle she moved in, but which still, on the other hand, could not help but impress her, by virtue of that spirit of imitation akin to timidity which is developed in the most confident persons by the atmosphere of a new environment, even if it is an inferior one. She began to wonder if this gesticulation was not perhaps a necessary response to the piece being played, which did not come quite within the scope of the music she had heard up to now, if to refrain was not to give proof of incomprehension with respect to the work and impropriety toward the lady of the house: so that, in order to express both of her contradictory inclinations by a compromise, she first merely straightened up her shoulder straps or put a hand to her blond hair to secure the little balls of diamond-flecked coral or pink enamel which formed her simple and charming coiffure, while at the same time examining her ardent neighbor with cold curiosity, then with her fan she beat time for a moment, but, so as not to forfeit her independence, on the offbeat. When the pianist ended the piece by Liszt and began a prelude by Chopin, Mme. de Cambremer gave Mme. de Franquetot a tender smile full of knowledgeable satisfaction and allusion to the past. When she was young she had learned to caress the phrases of Chopin with their sinuous and excessively long necks, so free, so flexible, so tactile, which begin by seeking out and exploring a place for themselves far outside and away from the direction in which they started, far beyond the point which one might have expected them to reach, and which frolic in this fantasy distance only to come back more deliberately—with a more premeditated return, with more precision, as though upon a crystal glass that resonates until you cry out—to strike you in the heart.

Living in a provincial family that had few friends, scarcely ever going out to a ball, she had intoxicated herself in the solitude of her manor house, with all those imaginary dancing couples, now slowing them, now speeding them, now scattering them like flowers, now leaving the ball for a moment to hear the wind blow in the pine trees, at the edge of the lake, and suddenly seeing, as he came toward her there, more unlike anything anyone had ever dreamed of than an earthly lover could be, a slender young man in white gloves whose voice had a strange, false lilt to it. But nowadays the old-fashioned beauty of that music seemed stale. Having fallen in the esteem of the discriminating public over the past several years, it had lost its position of distinction and its charm, and even those whose taste is bad no longer took more than an unacknowledged and moderate pleasure in it. Mme. de Cambremer cast a furtive glance behind her. She was aware that her young daughter-in-law (full of respect for her new family, except regarding the things of the mind about which, since she knew a little harmony and even some Greek, she was especially enlightened) despised Chopin and suffered when she heard it played. But far away from the surveillance of that Wagnerian who was off in the distance with a group of people her own age, Mme. de Cambremer abandoned herself to her delightful impressions. The Princesse des Laumes was enjoying them too. Though without a natural gift for music, she had had lessons fifteen years earlier from a piano teacher of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a woman of genius who at the end of her life had been reduced to poverty and had returned, at the age of seventy, to giving piano lessons, to the daughters and granddaughters of her old pupils. She was dead now. But her method, her lovely sound, came back to life sometimes under the fingers of her pupils, even those who had become in other respects ordinary people, had abandoned music, and almost never opened a piano anymore. And so Mme. des Laumes could shake her head, with expert knowledge, with a just appreciation of the way the pianist was playing this prelude, which she knew by heart. The end of the phrase he had begun already sang on her lips. And she murmured, "It's always *ch*arming," with a double *ch* at the start of the word which was a mark of refinement and which, she felt, pursed her lips so romantically, like a beautiful flower, that she instinctively brought her eyes into harmony with them by giving them an expression just then of sentimentality and vague yearning. Meanwhile, Mme. de Gallardon was saying to herself how annoying it was that she only very rarely had the opportunity to meet the Princesse des Laumes, for she wanted to teach her a lesson by not responding to her greeting. She did not know her cousin was there. A movement of Mme. de Franquetot's head revealed the Princesse to her. Immediately she hurried toward her, disturbing everyone; but though she wanted to preserve a haughty and glacial manner which would remind everyone that she did not wish to be on friendly terms with a person in whose house one might find oneself coming face-to-face with Princesse Mathilde, and to whom it was not for her to make advances since she was not "of her generation," still she wanted to offset this air of haughtiness and reserve by some remark that would justify her overture and force the Princesse to engage in conversation; and so when she came near her cousin, Mme. de Gallardon, with a hard expression and a hand outthrust like a "forced" card, said to her: "How is your husband?" in the concerned tone she would have used if the Prince had been gravely ill. The Princesse, bursting into a laugh which was peculiar to her and which was intended at once to show others that she was making fun of someone and also to make herself look prettier by concentrating her features around her animated lips and sparkling eyes, answered:

"Why, he's never been better!"

And she laughed again. Whereupon Mme. de Gallardon, drawing herself up and contriving an even chillier expression, yet still concerned about the Prince's condition, said to her cousin:

"Oriane" (here Mme. des Laumes looked with an air of surprise and merriment at an invisible third party in whose presence she seemed anxious to attest that she had never authorized Mme. de Gallardon to call her by her first name), "I would be so pleased if you could stop in at my house for a moment tomorrow evening to hear a clarinet quintet by Mozart. I would like to have your opinion."

She seemed not to be offering an invitation, but to be asking a favor, and to need the Princesse's assessment of the Mozart quintet as if it were a dish composed by a new cook about whose talents it was valuable to her to obtain the opinion of a gourmet.

"But I know that quintet. I can tell you right now . . . I like it!"

"You know, my husband isn't well; it's his liver . . . It would give him great pleasure to see you," resumed Mme. de Gallardon, now placing the Princesse under a charitable obligation to appear at her soiree.

The Princesse never liked to tell people she did not want to go to their homes. Every day she would write notes expressing her regrets at having been prevented—by an unexpected visit from her mother-in-law, an invitation from her brother-in-law, the opera, an expedition to the country—from attending a soiree to which she would never have dreamed of going. In this way she gave many people the joy of believing that she was one of their friends, that she would readily have gone to visit them, that she had been kept from doing so only by princely inconveniences which they were flattered to see enter into competition with their soiree. Then, too, since she was part of that witty circle of the Guermantes in which something survived of the alert mentality unburdened by platitudes and conventional feelings which was handed down from Mérimée[100] and had found its latest expression in the theater of Meilhac and Halévy,[101] she adapted it even to social relations, transposed it even into her politeness, which endeavored to be positive and precise, and to approximate the plain truth. She would never develop at any length to a hostess the expression of her desire to be present at her party; she thought it friendlier to put to her a few little facts on which it would depend whether or not it was possible for her to come.

"The thing is," she said to Mme. de Gallardon, "tomorrow evening I have to go see a friend who has been asking me to make a date with her for ages. If she takes us to the theater, even with the best will in the world there won't be any chance of my coming to you; but if we stay in the house, since I know we'll be alone, I'll be able to leave her."

"Oh, by the way, did you see your friend M. Swann?"

"Why no! My beloved Charles, I didn't know he was here, I must try to attract his attention."

“It’s funny that he should go to old Saint-Euverte’s,” said Mme. de Gallardon. “Oh, I know he’s intelligent,” she added, meaning he was a schemer, “but still and all, a Jew in the home of the sister and sister-in-law of two archbishops!”

“I confess to my shame that I’m not shocked,” said the Princess des Laumes.

“I know he’s a convert, and even his parents and grandparents before him. But they do say converts remain more attached to their religion than anyone else, that it’s all just a pretense. Is that true?”

“I don’t know a thing about that.”

The pianist, who was to play two pieces by Chopin, after finishing the prelude had immediately attacked a polonaise. But now that Mme. de Gallardon had told her cousin that Swann was there, Chopin himself might have risen from the dead and played all his pieces in succession without Mme. des Laumes paying the slightest attention. She belonged to that half of the human race in whom the curiosity the other half feels about the people it does not know is replaced by an interest in the people it does. As with many women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the presence in a place where she happened to be of someone from her set, though she had nothing in particular to say to him, monopolized her attention at the expense of everything else. From that moment on, in the hopes that Swann would notice her, the Princesse, like a tame white mouse when a bit of sugar is offered to it and then taken away, kept turning her face, which was filled with a thousand signs of complicity unrelated to the feeling in Chopin’s polonaise, in Swann’s direction, and if he moved, she would shift in a corresponding direction her magnetic smile.

“Oriane, don’t be angry,” resumed Mme. de Gallardon, who could never stop herself from sacrificing her greatest social ambitions and highest hopes of someday dazzling the world to the immediate, obscure, and private pleasure of saying something disagreeable, “but people do claim that M. Swann is someone whom one can’t have in one’s house, is that true?”

“Why . . . you ought to know,” answered the Princesse des Laumes, “since you’ve invited him fifty times and he hasn’t come once.”

And leaving her mortified cousin, she burst into laughter again, scandalizing the people who were listening to the music, but attracting the attention of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, who had stayed near the piano out of politeness and only now noticed the Princesse. Mme. de Saint-Euverte was especially delighted to see Mme. des Laumes because she had thought she was still at Guermantes looking after her sick father-in-law.

“Why, Princesse, I didn’t know you were here!”

“Yes, I tucked myself away in a little corner, and I’ve been hearing such lovely things.”

“What! Have you been here for a long time?”

“Why yes, a very long time which seemed very short to me—it was long only because I couldn’t see you.”

Mme. de Saint-Euverte tried to give her chair to the Princesse, who answered:

“Oh, please, no! Why should you? I’m comfortable wherever I sit!”

And, intentionally selecting, the better to display her simplicity, great lady though she was, a low seat without a back:

“Here, this hassock is all I need. It’ll make me sit up straight. Oh, my Lord, I’m making too much noise again, if I’m not careful they’ll turn on me and throw me out.”

Meanwhile, the pianist having redoubled his speed, the musical emotion was at its height, a servant was passing refreshments on a tray and making the spoons clink, and, as happened every week, Mme. de Saint-Euverte signaled to him without his seeing her, to go away. A newlywed, who had been taught that a young woman must not appear bored, smiled with pleasure, and tried to catch the hostess’s eye in order to send her a look of gratitude for having “thought of her” for such a treat. However, although she remained calmer than Mme. de Franquetot, it was not without some uneasiness that she followed the music; but the object of her uneasiness was, not the pianist, but the piano, on which a candle jumping with each fortissimo risked, if not setting its shade on fire, at least spotting the Brazilian rosewood. In the end she could not bear it any longer and, scaling the two steps of the dais on which the piano was placed, swooped down to remove the sconce. But her hands were just about to touch it when, with a final chord, the piece ended and the pianist stood up. Nevertheless the young woman’s bold initiative, the resulting brief promiscuity between her and the instrumentalist, produced a generally favorable impression.

“Did you see what that young woman did, Princesse?” said Général de Froberville to the Princesse des Laumes, whom he had come up to greet and whom Mme. de Saint-Euverte had left for a moment. “Odd, wasn’t it? Is she a performer?”

“No, she’s just some young Mme. de Cambremer,” answered the Princesse without thinking and then added hurriedly: “I’m only repeating what I heard, I haven’t the slightest idea who she is; someone behind me was saying they were country neighbors of Mme. de Saint-Euverte, but I don’t think anyone knows them, really. They must be ‘country folk’! Anyway, I don’t know if you’re intimate with the brilliant society here, but I can’t put a name to any of these astonishing people. What do you think they spend their time doing when they’re not at Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s evenings? She must have ordered 373 them along with the musicians, the chairs, and the refreshments. You must admit these ‘guests from Belloir’s’[102] are magnificent. Does she really have the heart to rent the same ‘extras’ every week? It isn’t possible!”

“Ah! But Cambremer is quite a good name, and an old one too,” said the general.

“I see no harm in the fact that it’s old,” answered the Princesse dryly, “but still, it’s not *euphonious,*” she added, isolating the word *euphonious* as though between quotation marks, a little affectation in delivery that was peculiar to the Guermantes set.

“You think so? She’s pretty enough to eat, though,” said the general, who had not let Mme. de Cambremer out of his sight. “Don’t you agree, Princesse?”

“She thrusts herself forward too much, I think; in so young a woman, that’s not nice—because I don’t believe she’s of my generation,” answered Mme. des Laumes (this expression being common to both the Gallardons and the Guermantes).

But then the Princesse, seeing that M. de Froberville was continuing to gaze at Mme. de Cambremer, added half out of spite against her, half out of friendliness toward the general: “Not nice . . . for her husband! I’m sorry I don’t know her, since you’ve set your heart on her; I would have introduced you,” she continued, although she probably would have done nothing of the kind had she known the young woman. “I will have to say goodnight to you, because it’s the birthday of a friend of mine and I must go and pay my respects,” she said in a tone of modesty and sincerity, reducing the fashionable party to which she was going to the simplicity of a ceremony which was tiresome but which it was obligatory and also rather touching to attend. “Besides, I’m supposed to meet Basin there; while I’ve been here, he has been seeing friends of his—people you know, I believe. They have the same name as a bridge: the Iénas.”

“Before that it was the name of a victory, Princesse,” said the general. “What do you expect—an old soldier like me,” he went on, removing his monocle and wiping it, as he would have changed a bandage, while the Princesse instinctively looked away. “The nobility of the Empire, it’s different of course, but really, for what it is, it’s very fine of its kind. Those were men who fought, really, like heroes.”

“But I have the deepest respect for heroes,” said the Princesse, in a slightly ironic tone: “if I don’t go with Basin to see this woman, the Princesse d’Iéna, it’s not because of that, not at all, it’s quite simply because I don’t know them. Basin knows them, he loves them dearly. Oh no, it’s not what you may think, they’re not having an affair, I have no reason to object! Anyway, what use is it when I do try to object?” she added in a melancholy voice, because everyone knew that the very day after the Prince des Laumes married his ravishing cousin, he had deceived her, and he had not stopped deceiving her since. “But this is not the same, these are people he used to know, he’s happy as a pig in clover, I think it’s very nice. But I can tell you that even what he has told me about their house . . . Can you imagine, all their furniture is ‘Empire’!”[103]

“Well, naturally, Princesse; it was their grandparents’ furniture.”

“Well, I’m not saying it wasn’t, but it’s no less ugly for all that. I understand perfectly well that one can’t always have pretty things, but at least one’s things should not be ridiculous. What do you expect? I can’t think of anything more conventional, more bourgeois, than that horrible style—cabinets with swans’ heads, like bathtubs.”

“Actually I do believe they have some beautiful things, they must have that famous mosaic table that was used for the signing of the Treaty of . . .”

“Oh, I’m not saying they don’t have things that are interesting from a historical point of view. But things like that can’t ever be beautiful . . . because they’re simply horrible! I’ve got things like that myself which Basin inherited from the Montesquious. Only they’re in the attics of Guermantes where no one can see them. Anyway, really, that’s not the point, I would rush around to their house with Basin, I would see them even in the midst of their sphinxes and their brass if I

knew them, but . . . I don't know them! I was always told when I was little that it wasn't polite to go to the homes of people one didn't know," she said, assuming a childish tone. "So I'm just doing what I was taught. Can't you see those good people if someone they didn't know were to come bursting into the house? They might make me feel quite unwelcome!" said the Princesse.

And she coquettishly enhanced the smile which this supposition had brought to her lips by giving her blue eyes, which were fixed on the general, a dreamy, gentle expression.

"Ah, Princesse, you know very well they wouldn't be able to contain themselves for joy . . ."

"Not at all. Why?" she asked him with the utmost vivacity, either so as not to seem to know that it was because she was one of the foremost ladies in France, or so as to have the pleasure of hearing the general say it. "Why? What do you know about it? It might be the most disagreeable thing in the world for them. I don't know, but judging by myself, it already bores me so much to see people I know, I believe that if I had to see people I didn't know, even if they had 'fought like heroes,' I would go mad. Besides, you see, except when it's an old friend like you whom one knows quite apart from that, I don't know if heroism would take one very far in society. I often find it quite boring enough as it is to give a dinner party, but if I had to offer my arm to Spartacus going in to the table . . . No, really, Vercingétorix would never be the one I would send for, to make a fourteenth. I think I would save him for the large parties. And since I never give any . . ."

"Ah, Princesse, you're not a Guermantes for nothing. You have your share of it all right, the wit of the Guermantes family!"

"They always say 'the wit of the Guermantes *family*.' I've never been able to understand why. Do you know *other* Guermantes who have it?" she added in a bubbly, joyful burst of laughter, her features concentrated, interconnected in a web of animation, her eyes sparkling, blazing with a radiant sunshine of gaiety that could be kindled only by remarks, even if made by the Princesse herself, in praise of her wit or her beauty. "Wait, there's Swann. He seems to be speaking to your young Cambremer. There . . . he's next to old mother Saint-Euverte, don't you see him? Ask him to introduce you. But hurry up, he's trying to walk away!"

"How frightfully ill he's looking—did you notice?" said the general.

"My dear Charles! Ah! At last he's coming, I was beginning to think he didn't want to see me!"

Swann liked the Princesse des Laumes very much, and the sight of her also reminded him of Guermantes, the estate next to Combray, the whole countryside which he loved so much and had ceased to visit so as not to be away from Odette. Using the half-artistic, half-courtly formulae which he knew were pleasing to the Princesse and which he resumed quite naturally whenever he reimmersed himself for a moment in his old social milieu—and wanting anyway for his own sake to express the yearning he felt for the country:

"Ah," he said to some vague general audience, in order to be heard both by Mme. de Saint-Euverte, to whom he was speaking, and by Mme. des Laumes, for whom he was speaking, "here's the charming Princesse! See, she has come up from Guermantes expressly to hear Liszt's *Saint Francis of Assisi* and has only just had time, like a pretty titmouse, to go and pluck a little fruit from the wild plums and hawthorns and put them on her head; there is even a bit of dew on them still, a bit of the hoarfrost that must be making the duchess groan so. It's very pretty indeed, my dear Princesse."

"What, the Princesse has come up expressly from Guermantes? But that's too much! I didn't know, I'm embarrassed," exclaimed Mme. de Saint-Euverte naively, not being used to Swann's wit. Then, looking more closely at the Princesse's headgear: "Why you're quite right, it's meant to look like . . . what shall I say, not chestnuts, no—oh, what a ravishing idea! But how could the Princesse have known what was going to be on my program! The musicians didn't even tell me."

Swann, who was accustomed, when he was in the company of a woman whom he had kept up the habit of addressing in gallant language, to say things so delicately nuanced that many society people could not understand them, did not condescend to explain to Mme. de Saint-Euverte that he had merely been speaking metaphorically. As for the Princesse, she began laughing heartily, because Swann's wit was highly appreciated in her set and also because she could not hear a compliment addressed to her without finding it most exquisitely subtle and irresistibly droll.

"Well! I'm delighted, Charles, if you like my little hawthorn fruits. Why did you speak to that Cambremer woman? Are you her neighbor in the country too?"

Mme. de Saint-Euverte, seeing that the Princesse appeared happy to chat with Swann, had moved off.

"But you are too, Princesse."

"I! But then those people have country places everywhere! How I would like to be in their place!"

"It's not the Cambremers, it's her own family; she's a Legrandin daughter and used to come to Combray. I don't know if you know you're the Comtesse de Combray and the chapter owes you a due?"

"I don't know what the chapter owes me, but I know that I'm dunned a hundred francs every year by the curé, which I could do without. Really those Cambremers have a most astonishing name.[104] It ends just in time, but it ends badly!" she said, laughing.

"It doesn't begin any better," Swann answered.

"Really, the two abbreviations together! . . ."

"Someone very angry and very proper didn't dare finish the first word."

"But since he couldn't stop himself from beginning the second, he should have finished the first—then he'd be done with it once and for all. Our jokes are in charming taste, my little Charles, but how tiresome it is not to see you anymore," she added in a caressing tone, "I so much like talking to you. Just think, I wouldn't even have been able to make that idiot Froberville understand that the name Cambremer is astonishing. Admit that life is a dreadful thing. It's only when I see you that I stop feeling bored."

This was probably not true. But Swann and the Princesse had the same way of looking at the small things of life, the effect of which—unless it was the cause—was a great similarity in their ways of expressing themselves and even in their pronunciation. No one noticed the resemblance because their two voices were so utterly unlike. But if in one's imagination one managed to divest Swann's remarks of the sonority in which they were enveloped, of the mustache from under which they issued, one realized that these were the same sentences, the same inflections, that these turns of phrase belonged to the Guermantes set. When it came to the important things, Swann and the Princesse did not have the same ideas about anything. But now that Swann had become so sad, always in the sort of tremulous condition that precedes the moment one is going to cry, he felt as compelled to talk about grief as a murderer is to talk about his crime. When he heard the Princesse say that life was a dreadful thing, he felt as comforted as if she had been talking about Odette.

"Oh, yes! Life is a dreadful thing. We must see each other soon, my dear friend. What's so nice about being with you is that you're not cheerful. We could spend an evening together."

"What a good idea! Why don't you come down to Guermantes? My mother-in-law would be wild with joy. It's supposed to be so ugly thereabouts, but I must say I don't dislike that countryside at all; I loathe 'picturesque' spots."

"I agree, it's wonderful," answered Swann, "it's almost too beautiful, too alive for me just now; it's a place to be happy in. Perhaps it's because I've lived there, but the things there speak to me so! As soon as a breath of wind comes up, when the wheat begins to move, it seems to me that someone is about to arrive, I'm going to hear some news; and those little houses by the edge of the water . . . I would be quite miserable!"

"Oh, my dear Charles, watch out, there's that dreadful Rampillon woman. She's seen me; please hide me. Remind me what it was that happened to her; I'm getting it all mixed up; she's just married off her daughter, or her lover, I can't remember which; maybe both of them . . . and to each other! . . . Oh no! I remember now, she's been dropped by her prince . . . Pretend to be talking to me, so that Bérénice woman won't come over and invite me to dinner. Anyway, I must fly. Listen, my dear Charles, now that I've seen you for once, won't you let me steal you away and take you to the Princess's? She'd be so pleased to see you, and Basin, too—he's meeting me there. If we didn't get news of you from Mémé . . . Just think, I never see you at all now!"

Swann declined; having told M. de Charlus that when he left Mme. de Saint-Euverte's he would go directly back home, he did not want to run the risk, by going on to the Princess of Parma's, of missing a note that he had been hoping all evening would be handed to him by a servant during the party, and that perhaps he would find in his concierge's keeping. "Poor Swann," said Mme. des Laumes that night to her husband, "he's always kind, but he appears quite unhappy. You'll see, because he has promised to come to dinner one of these days. I do find it absurd that a man of his intelligence should suffer over a person of that sort, who isn't even interesting—because they say she's an idiot," she added with the wisdom of people not in love who believe a man of sense should be unhappy only over a person who is worth it; which is rather like being surprised that anyone should condescend to suffer from cholera because of so small a creature as the comma bacillus.

Swann wanted to leave, but just when he was at last about to escape, Général de Froberville asked him for an introduction to Mme. de Cambremer and he was obliged to go back into the drawing room with him to look for her.

"Now, Swann, I'd rather be the husband of that woman than slaughtered by savages, what do you say?"

The words *slaughtered by savages* pierced Swann's heart painfully; and at once he felt the need to continue the conversation:

"Well, you know," he said to him, "some really fine men have lost their lives that way . . . For instance, if you remember . . . That navigator whose ashes were brought back by Dumont d'Urville, La Pérouse . . ." (And Swann was immediately happy, as if he had spoken Odette's name.) "He was a fine character, La Pérouse was, and one who interests me very much," he added with a melancholy air.

"Ah! Indeed yes. La Pérouse," said the general. "The name is well known. It's got its own street."

"You know someone in the rue La Pérouse?" asked Swann in some agitation.

"I know only Mme. de Chanlivault, the sister of that good fellow Chaussepierre. She gave us a nice theater party the other day. Her salon will be very elegant one of these days, you'll see!"

"Ah, so she lives in the rue La Pérouse. It's an appealing street, very pretty, and so melancholy."

"Why, not at all, in fact you haven't been there in some time; it's not melancholy these days, they're beginning to build there, they've got buildings going up in the whole neighborhood."

When at last Swann introduced M. de Froberville to young Mme. de Cambremer, since it was the first time she had heard the general's name she ventured the smile of joy and surprise she would have given him if no other name but that one had ever been uttered in her presence, for as she did not know the friends of her new family, each time a person was presented to her, she believed he was one of them, and thinking it would be tactful of her to look as though she had heard such a lot about him since she was married, she would put out her hand with a hesitant air meant as proof of the inculcated reserve she had to conquer and the spontaneous congeniality that succeeded in overcoming it. And so her parents-in-law, whom she still believed to be the most brilliant people in France, declared that she was an angel; especially since they preferred to appear, in marrying their son to her, to have responded to the attraction of her fine qualities rather than of her great wealth.

"One can see that you have the soul of a musician, madame," the general said to her, unconsciously alluding to the incident of the sconce.

But the concert was beginning again and Swann realized he would not be able to leave before the end of this new number. He was suffering at having to remain shut up among these people whose stupidity and absurd habits struck him all the more painfully since, being unaware of his love, incapable, had they known about it, of taking any interest in it or doing more than smile at it as at some childish nonsense or deplore it as utter madness, they made it appear to him as a subjective state which existed only for him, whose reality was confirmed for him by nothing outside himself; he suffered most of all, to the point where even the sound of the instruments made him want to cry out, from prolonging his exile in this place to which Odette would never come, where no one, where nothing knew her, from which she was entirely absent.

But suddenly it was as though she had appeared in the room, and this apparition caused him such harrowing pain that he had to put his hand on his heart. What had happened was that the violin had risen to a series of high notes on which it lingered as though waiting for something, holding on to them in a prolonged expectancy, in the exaltation of already seeing the object of its expectation approaching, and with a desperate effort to try to endure until it arrived, to welcome it before expiring, to keep the way open for it another moment with a last bit of strength so that it could come through, as one holds up a trapdoor that would otherwise fall back. And before Swann had time to understand, and say to himself: "It's the little phrase from the sonata by Vinteuil; don't listen!" all his memories of the time when Odette was in love with him, which he had managed until now to keep out of sight in the deepest part of himself, deceived by this sudden beam of light from the time of love which they believed had returned, had awoken and flown swiftly back up to sing madly to him, with no pity for his present misfortune, the forgotten refrains of happiness.

In place of the abstract expressions *the time when I was happy, the time when I was loved,* which he had often used before now without suffering too much, for his mind had enclosed within them only spurious extracts of the past that preserved nothing of it, he now recovered everything which had fixed forever the specific, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he saw everything again, the snowy curled petals of the chrysanthemum that she had tossed to him in his carriage, that he had held against his lips—the embossed address of the "Maison Dorée" on the letter in which he had read: "My hand is shaking so badly as I write to you"—the way her eyebrows had come together when she said to him with a supplicating look: "It won't be too long before you send word to me?"; he smelled the fragrance of the hairdresser's iron by which he would have his "brush cut" straightened while Lorédan went to fetch the young working girl, the stormy rains that fell so often that spring, the icy drive home in his victoria, by moonlight, all the meshes formed from habits of thinking, impressions of the seasons, reactions on the surface of his skin, which had laid over a succession of weeks a uniform net in which his body was now recaptured. At that time, he was satisfying a sensual curiosity by experiencing the pleasures of people who live for love. He had believed he could stop there, that he would not be obliged to learn their sorrows; how small a thing Odette's charm was for him now compared with the astounding terror that extended out from it like a murky halo, the immense anguish of not knowing at every moment what she had been doing, of not possessing her everywhere and always! Alas, he recalled the accents in which she had exclaimed: "But I will always be able to see you, I am always free!"—she who was never free now!—the interest, the curiosity she had shown in his own life, the passionate desire that he should do her the favor—which he in fact dreaded in those days as a cause of tiresome inconveniences—of allowing her to enter it; how she had been obliged to beg him to let her take him to the Verdurins'; and when he had allowed her to come to him once a month, how she had had to tell him over and over again, before he would let himself give in to her, how delightful it would be to have the habit of seeing each other every day, a habit which she dreamed of whereas to him it seemed only a tedious bother, which she had then grown tired of and broken once and for all, while for him it had become such an irresistible and painful need. He did not know how truthfully he was speaking when, the third time he saw her, as she said to him yet again: "But why don't you let me come more often?" he had said to her with a laugh, gallantly: "for fear of being hurt." Now, alas, she still wrote to him occasionally from a restaurant or hotel on paper that bore its printed name; but now the letters of that name burned him like letters of fire. "It's written from the Hôtel Vouillemont?[105] What can she have gone there to do? And with whom? What has been going on there?" He remembered the gas jets being extinguished along the boulevard des Italiens when he had met her against all hope among the wandering shades on that night which had seemed to him almost supernatural and which indeed—since it belonged to a time when he did not even have to ask himself if he would vex her by looking for her, by finding her, so sure was he that her greatest joy was to see him and go home with him—was truly part of a mysterious world to which one can never return once its doors have closed. And Swann saw, motionless before that relived happiness, a miserable figure who filled him with pity because he did not recognize him right away, and he had to lower his eyes so that no one would see that they were full of tears. It was himself.

When he realized this, his pity vanished, but he was jealous of the other self she had loved, he was jealous of those of whom he had often said to himself without suffering too much "maybe she loves them," now that he had exchanged the vague idea of loving, in which there is no love, for the petals of the chrysanthemum and the letterhead of the Maison d'Or, which were full of it. Then his pain became too sharp, he passed his hand over his forehead, let his monocle drop, wiped its glass. And no doubt, if he had seen himself at that moment, he would have added to the collection of those which he had singled out for distinction the monocle he was removing like an importunate thought and from whose clouded face, with a handkerchief, he was trying to wipe off his worries.

There are tones in a violin—if we cannot see the instrument and therefore cannot relate what we hear to our image of it, which changes the sound of it—so similar to those of certain contralto voices that we have the illusion a singer has been added to the concert. We lift our eyes, we see only the bodies of the instruments, as precious as Chinese boxes, but at times we are still fooled by the deceptive call of the siren; at times too we think we hear a captive genie struggling deep inside the intelligent, bewitched, and tremulous box, like a devil in a holy-water basin; sometimes, again it is like a pure and supernatural being that passes through the air uncoiling its invisible message.

As if the instrumentalists were not so much playing the little phrase as performing the rituals it required in order to make its appearance, and proceeding to the incantations necessary for obtaining and prolonging a few moments the wonder of its evocation, Swann, who could no more see it than if it had belonged to an ultraviolet world, and who was experiencing something like the refreshing sense of a metamorphosis in the momentary blindness with which he was struck as he approached it, felt it to be present, like a protective goddess, a confidante of his love, who in order to be able to come to him in the midst of the crowd and take

him aside to talk to him, had assumed the disguise of this body of sound. And while it passed, light, soothing, murmured like a perfume, telling him what it had to tell him, as he scrutinized every word, sorry to see them fly off so quickly, he involuntarily made the motion with his lips of kissing the harmonious fleeting body as it passed. He no longer felt exiled and alone since the little phrase was addressing him, was talking to him in a low voice about Odette. For he no longer felt, as he once had, that the little phrase did not know him and Odette. It had so often witnessed their moments of happiness! True, it had just as often warned him how fragile they were. And in fact, whereas in those days he read suffering in its smile, in its limpid and disenchanted intonation, he now found in it instead the grace of a resignation that was almost gay. Of those sorrows of which it used to speak to him and which, without being affected by them, he had seen it carry along with it, smiling, in its rapid and sinuous course, of those sorrows which had now become his own, without his having any hope of ever being free of them, it seemed to say to him as it had once said of his happiness: "What does it matter? It means nothing." And for the first time Swann's thoughts turned with a stab of pity and tenderness to Vinteuil, to that unknown, sublime brother who must also have suffered so; what must his life have been like? From the depths of what sorrows had he drawn that godlike strength, that unlimited power to create? When it was the little phrase that spoke to him about the vanity of his sufferings, Swann found solace in that very wisdom which, just recently, had seemed to him intolerable when he thought he could read it on the faces of the indifferent people who considered his love an insignificant aberration. For the little phrase, unlike them, whatever its opinion of the brief duration of the conditions of the soul, did not see in them, as these people did, something less serious than the events of everyday life, but on the contrary, something so superior that it alone was worth expressing. These charms of an intimate sadness—these were what it sought to imitate, to re-create, and their very essence, even though it is to be incommunicable and to seem frivolous to everyone but the one who is experiencing them, had been captured by the little phrase and made visible. So much so that it caused their value to be acknowledged, and their divine sweetness savored, by all those same people sitting in the audience—if they were at all musical—who would afterward fail to recognize these charms in real life, in every individual love that came into being before their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified them could not be resolved into reasoned arguments. But ever since, more than a year ago now, the love of music had, for a time at least, been born in him, revealing to him many of the riches of his own soul, Swann had regarded musical motifs as actual ideas, of another world, of another order, ideas veiled in shadows, unknown, impenetrable to the intelligence, but not for all that less perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and significance. When, after the Verdurin evening, he had had the little phrase played over for him, and had sought to disentangle how it was that, like a perfume, like a caress, it encircled him, enveloped him, he had realized that it was to the closeness of the intervals between the five notes that composed it, and to the constant repetition of two of them, that was due this impression of a frigid and withdrawn sweetness; but in reality he knew that he was reasoning this way not about the phrase itself but about simple values substituted, for the convenience of his intelligence, for the mysterious entity he had perceived, before knowing the Verdurins, at that party where he had first heard the sonata played. He knew that even the memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the elements of the music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable scale of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard still almost entirely unknown on which, here and there only, separated by shadows thick and unexplored, a few of the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity which compose it, each as different from the others as one universe from another universe, have been found by a few great artists who do us the service, by awakening in us something corresponding to the theme they have discovered, of showing us what richness, what variety, is hidden unbeknownst to us within that great unpenetrated and disheartening darkness of our soul which we take for emptiness and nothingness. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians. In his little phrase, although it might present an obscure surface to one's intelligence, one sensed a content so solid, so explicit, to which it gave a force so new, so original, that those who had heard it preserved it within themselves on the same plane as the ideas of the intelligence. Swann referred back to it as to a conception of love and happiness whose distinctive character he recognized at once, as he would that of *La Princesse de Clèves* or of *René,*[106] when their titles returned to his memory. Even when he was not thinking of the little phrase, it existed latent in his mind in the same way as certain other notions without equivalents, like the notion of light, of sound, of perspective, of physical pleasure, which are the rich possessions that diversify and ornament the realms of our inner life. Perhaps we will lose them, perhaps they will fade away, if we return to nothingness. But as long as we are alive, we can no more eliminate our experience of them than we can our experience of some real object, than we can for example doubt the light of the lamp illuminating the metamorphosed objects in our room whence even the memory of darkness has vanished. In this way Vinteuil's phrase had, like some theme from *Tristan,* for example, which also represents to us a certain emotional acquisition, espoused our mortal condition, taken on a human quality that was rather touching. Its destiny was linked to the future, to the reality of our soul, of which it was one of the most distinctive, the best differentiated ornaments. Maybe it is the nothingness that is real and our entire dream is nonexistent, but in that case we feel that these phrases of music, and these notions that exist in relation to our dream, must also be nothing. We will perish, but we have for hostages these divine captives who will follow us and share our fate. And death in their company is less bitter, less inglorious, perhaps less probable.

Swann was therefore not wrong to believe that the phrase of the sonata really existed. Of course, although human from this point of view, it belonged to an order of supernatural creatures whom we have never seen, but whom despite this we recognize with delight when some explorer of the invisible manages to capture one, to bring it, from that divine world to which he has access, to shine for a few moments above ours. This was what Vinteuil had done for the little phrase. Swann sensed that the composer had merely unveiled it, made it visible, with his musical instruments, following and respecting its sketched form with a hand so tender, so prudent, so delicate, and so sure that the sound altered at every moment, fading away to indicate a shadow, revivified when it had to follow a bolder contour. And one proof that Swann was not mistaken when he believed in the real existence of that phrase was that any lover of music with the least discernment would at once have noticed the imposture if Vinteuil, having had less capacity to see and to render its forms, had sought to conceal, by adding lines of his own invention here and there, the lacunae in his vision or the failures of his hand.

It had disappeared. Swann knew that it would reappear at the end of the last movement, after a whole long passage that Mme. Verdurin's pianist always skipped. There were marvelous ideas in it which Swann had not distinguished at his first hearing and that he perceived now, as if they had divested themselves, in the cloakroom of his memory, of the uniform disguise of novelty. Swann listened to all the scattered themes which would enter into the composition of the phrase, like premises in the necessary conclusion; he was attending its birth. "O audacity as inspired, perhaps," he said to himself, "as that of a Lavoisier, of an Ampère[107]—the audacity of a Vinteuil experimenting, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force, guiding and urging on, across a region unexplored, toward the only possible goal, the invisible team in which he has placed his trust and which he may never discern!" The beautiful dialogue which Swann heard between the piano and the violin at the beginning of the last passage! The suppression of human speech, far from letting fantasy reign there, as one might have believed, had eliminated it; never had spoken language been such an inflexible necessity, never had it known such pertinent questions, such irrefutable answers. First the solitary piano lamented, like a bird abandoned by its mate; the violin heard it, answered it as from a neighboring tree. It was as at the beginning of the world, as if there were only the two of them still on the earth, or rather in this world closed to all the rest, constructed by the logic of a creator, this world in which there would never be more than the two of them: this sonata. Was it a bird, was it the soul of the little phrase, not yet fully formed, was it a fairy—this creature invisibly lamenting, whose plaint the piano afterward tenderly repeated? Its cries were so sudden that the violinist had to leap to his bow to collect them. Marvelous bird! The violinist seemed to want to charm it, tame it, capture it. Already it had passed into his soul, already the violinist's body, truly possessed, was shaking like a medium's with the summoned presence of the little phrase. Swann knew it was going to speak one more time. And he had so completely divided himself in two that the wait for the imminent moment when he would find himself confronting it again made him shudder with the kind of sob which a beautiful line of verse or a sad piece of news wrings from us, not when we are alone, but if we repeat it to friends in whom we can see ourselves as another person whose probable emotion moves them. It reappeared, but this time to hang in the air and play for a moment only, as though motionless, and afterward expire. And so Swann lost nothing of this very brief extension of its life. It was still there like an iridescent bubble floating by itself. Like a rainbow, whose brilliance weakens, fades, then rises again, and before dying away altogether, flares up a moment more brilliant than ever: to the two colors it had so far allowed to appear, it added others, variegated chords of every hue in the prism, and made them sing. Swann did not dare move and would have made all the other people be still too, as if the slightest motion might compromise the fragile, exquisite, and supernatural magic that was so close to vanishing. No one, in fact, dreamed of speaking. The ineffable word of one man who was absent, perhaps dead (Swann did not know if Vinteuil was still alive), breathing out above the rites of these officiants, was enough to hold the attention of three hundred people, and made of this dais, where a soul had thus been summoned, one of the noblest altars on which a supernatural ceremony could be performed. So that, when the phrase came unraveled at last, floating in shreds in the motifs which followed and had already taken its place, if at first Swann was irritated to see the Comtesse de Monteriender, famous for her naive remarks, lean toward him to confide her impressions even

before the sonata had ended, he could not help smiling, and perhaps also found a deeper meaning that she did not see in the words she used. Awestruck by the virtuosity of the performers, the Comtesse exclaimed to Swann: “It’s amazing, I’ve never seen anything so powerful . . .” But a scruple for accuracy causing her to correct her first assertion, she added this reservation: “anything so powerful . . . since the table turning!”

From that evening on, Swann understood that the feeling Odette had had for him would never revive, that his hopes of happiness would not be realized now. And on the days when she happened to be kind and affectionate toward him again, if she showed him some thoughtful attention, he would note these apparent and deceptive signs of a slight movement back toward him, with the loving, skeptical solicitude, the desperate joy of those who, caring for a friend in the last days of an incurable illness, relate as precious facts: “Yesterday, he did his accounts himself, and he was the one who spotted a mistake in addition that we had made; he ate an egg and enjoyed it—if he digests it easily we’ll try a cutlet tomorrow,” although they know these facts are meaningless on the eve of an unavoidable death. No doubt Swann was sure that if he had now been living far away from Odette, she would in the end have become unimportant to him, so that he would have been glad if she had left Paris forever; he would have had the courage to stay there; but he did not have the courage to leave.

He had often thought of it. Now that he had resumed his study of Vermeer, he needed to return at least for a few days to The Hague, Dresden, Brunswick. He was convinced that a *Diana with Her Companions* which had been bought by the Mauritshuis at the Goldschmidt sale as a Nicolas Maes, was in reality a Vermeer.[108] And he wished he could study the painting on the spot, in order to support his conviction. But to leave Paris while Odette was there, or even when she was absent—for in new places where our sensations are not dulled by habit, we retemper, we revive an old pain—was for him so cruel a plan that he was able to think about it constantly only because he knew he was resolved never to execute it. But sometimes, while he was asleep, the intention of taking the trip would revive in him—without his remembering that it was impossible—and in his sleep he would take the trip. One day he dreamed he was leaving for a year; leaning out the door of the railway car toward a young man on the platform who was saying good-bye to him, weeping, Swann tried to convince him to leave with him. The train began to move, his anxiety woke him, he remembered that he was not leaving, that he would see Odette that evening, the next day, and almost every day after. Then, still shaken by his dream, he blessed the particular circumstances that had made him independent, because of which he could remain near Odette, and also succeed in getting her to allow him to see her now and then; and, recapitulating all these advantages—his position; his fortune, from which she was too often in need of assistance not to shrink from contemplating a definite break with him (having even, people said, an ulterior plan of getting him to marry her); his friendship with M. de Charlus, which in truth had never helped him obtain much from Odette, but gave him the comfort of feeling that she heard flattering things about him from this mutual friend for whom she had such great esteem; and lastly even his intelligence, which he employed entirely in contriving a new intrigue every day that would make his presence, if not agreeable, at least necessary to Odette—he thought about what would have become of him if he had not had all this, he thought that if, like so many other men, he had been poor, humble, wretched, obliged to accept any sort of work, or tied to relatives, to a wife, he might have been forced to leave Odette, that that dream, the terror of which was still so close to him, might have been true, and he said to himself: “You don’t know it when you’re happy. You’re never as unhappy as you think.”[109] But he calculated that this existence had already lasted for several years, that all he could hope for now was that it would last forever, that he would sacrifice his work, his pleasures, his friends, finally his whole life to the daily expectation of a meeting that could bring him no happiness, and he wondered if he was not deceiving himself, if the circumstances that had favored his love affair and kept it from ending had not been bad for the course of his life, if the desirable outcome would not in fact have been the one which, to his delight, had taken place only in a dream: for him to have gone away; he told himself that you don’t know it when you’re unhappy, that you are never as happy as you think.

Sometimes he hoped she would die in an accident without suffering, she who was outside, in the streets, on the roads, from morning to night. And when she returned safe and sound, he marveled that the human body was so supple and so strong, that it continued to ward off, to outwit all the perils which surrounded it (and which Swann found innumerable now that his secret desire had computed them) and so allowed people to abandon themselves daily and almost with impunity to their work of mendacity, their pursuit of pleasure. And Swann felt very close in his heart to Mohammed II, whose portrait by Bellini he liked so much, who, realizing that he had fallen madly in love with one of his wives, stabbed her in order, as his Venetian biographer ingenuously says, to recover his independence of mind. Then he would be filled with indignation that he should be thinking thus only of himself, and the sufferings he had endured would seem to him to deserve no pity since he himself had placed so low a value on Odette’s life.

Since he was unable to separate from her irrevocably, if he had at least been able to see her without any separations, his pain would in the end have abated and perhaps his love would have died. And if she did not want to leave Paris forever, he would have liked her never to leave Paris. At least since he knew that her only long absence was the yearly one in August and September, he had ample opportunity several months in advance to dissolve the bitter idea of it in all the Time to come which he carried within him in anticipation and which, composed of days identical with those of the present, flowed through his mind transparent and cold, sustaining his sadness, but without causing him too sharp a pain. But that interior future, that colorless free-flowing river, was suddenly assaulted by a single remark of Odette’s which entered Swann and, like a piece of ice, immobilized it, hardened its fluidity, made it freeze entirely; and Swann suddenly felt he was filled with an enormous infrangible mass that pressed on the inner walls of his being till it nearly burst: what Odette had said, observing him with a sly smiling glance, was: “Forcheville is going to be taking a lovely trip, at Pentecost. He’s going to Egypt,” and Swann had immediately understood that this meant: “I’m going to Egypt at Pentecost with Forcheville.” And in fact, if several days after, Swann said to her: “Look, about this trip you told me you would be taking with Forcheville,” she would answer thoughtlessly: “Yes, my dear boy, we’re leaving the nineteenth, we’ll send you a view of the Pyramids.” Then he would want to know if she was Forcheville’s mistress, would want to ask her directly. He knew that, superstitious as she was, there were certain perjuries she would not commit, and, too, the dread, which had restrained him up to this point, of irritating Odette by questioning her, of causing her to hate him, had vanished now that he had lost all hope of ever being loved by her.

One day he received an anonymous letter telling him that Odette had been the mistress of countless men (several of whom it mentioned, among them Forcheville, M. de Bréauté, and the painter), and of women too, and that she frequented houses of ill repute. He was tormented by the thought that among his friends there was an individual capable of sending him this letter (because certain details revealed that the person who had written it had an intimate knowledge of Swann’s life). He wondered who it could be. But he had never had any feelings of suspicion about the unknown actions of other people, those which had no visible connection with what they said. And when he tried to find out whether it was beneath the apparent character of M. de Charlus, or M. des Laumes, or M. d’Orsan, that he ought to situate the unknown region in which this ignoble act must have been conceived, since none of these men had ever spoken in praise of anonymous letters in his presence and since everything they had said to him implied that they condemned them, he saw no reason for connecting this infamy with the character of one rather than another. That of M. de Charlus was a little deranged but basically good and affectionate; that of M. des Laumes, a little hard, but sound and straightforward. As for M. d’Orsan, Swann had never met anyone who in even the most dismal circumstances would approach him with a more heartfelt remark, a more discreet or appropriate gesture. So much so that he could not understand the rather indelicate role people ascribed to M. d’Orsan in the love affair he was having with a rich woman, and that each time Swann thought of him, he was obliged to thrust to one side that bad reputation which was so irreconcilable with the many clear proofs of his discretion. For a moment Swann felt his mind was darkening and he thought about something else in order to recover a little light. Then he had the courage to return to these reflections. But now, after being unable to suspect anyone, he had to suspect everyone. True, M. de Charlus was fond of him, had a good heart. But he was a neurotic, tomorrow he might weep at the news that Swann was ill, and today, out of jealousy, out of anger, acting under the influence of some sudden idea, he had wanted to hurt him. Really, that kind of man was the worst of all. Of course, the Prince des Laumes was not nearly as fond of Swann as M. de Charlus. But for that very reason he did not have the same susceptibilities with regard to him; and then although his was undoubtedly a cold nature, he was as incapable of base actions as of great ones. Swann regretted that in his life he had not formed attachments exclusively to such people. Then he mused that what prevents men from doing harm to their fellowmen is goodness of heart, that really he could answer only for men whose natures were analogous to his own, as was, so far as the heart was concerned, that of M. de Charlus. The mere thought of causing such pain to Swann would have revolted him. But with an insensitive man, of another order of humanity, as was the Prince des Laumes, how could one foresee the actions to which he might be led by motives that were so different in essence? To have a kind heart is everything, and M. de Charlus had one. M. d’Orsan was not lacking in heart either and his cordial but not very close relationship with Swann, arising from the pleasure which, since they thought the same way about everything, they found in talking together, was more secure than the excitable affection of M. de Charlus, capable of committing acts of passion, good or bad. If there was anyone by whom Swann had always felt himself understood and liked in a discriminating way, it was by M. d’Orsan. Yes, but what about this dishonorable life he was

leading? Swann regretted never having taken it into account properly, having often confessed as a joke that he had never experienced such keen feelings of sympathy and respect as in the company of a scoundrel. It is not for nothing, he said to himself now, that when men judge another man, it is by his actions. They alone mean something, and not what we say, or what we think. Charlus and des Laumes may have their faults, but they are still honest men. Orsan perhaps has none, but he is not an honest man. He may have acted badly yet again. Then Swann suspected Rémi, who, it was true, could merely have inspired the letter, but for a moment he felt he was on the right track. In the first place Lorédan had reasons for resenting Odette. And then how can we help but imagine that our servants, living in a situation inferior to ours, adding to our fortunes and our faults imaginary wealth and vices for which they envy and despise us, will find themselves inevitably led to act in a way different from people of our own class? He also suspected my grandfather. Each time Swann had asked a favor of him, had he not always refused? And then with his bourgeois ideas he might have thought he was acting for Swann's own good. Swann also suspected Bergotte, the painter, the Verdurins, admired once more in passing the wisdom of society people in not wanting to mix in those artistic circles in which such things are possible, perhaps even openly admitted as good pranks; but he recalled certain honest traits in those bohemians, and contrasted them with the life of expediency, almost of fraudulence, into which the lack of money, the craving for luxury, the corrupting influence of their pleasures so often drive members of the aristocracy. In short, this anonymous letter proved that he knew an individual capable of villainy, but he could see no more reason why that villainy should be hidden in the bedrock—unexplored by any other person—of the character of an affectionate man rather than a cold one, an artist rather than a bourgeois, a great lord rather than a valet. What criterion should one adopt for judging men? Really there was not a single person among those he knew who might not be capable of infamy. Was it necessary to stop seeing all of them? His mind clouded over; he passed his hands across his forehead two or three times, wiped the lenses of his lorgnon with his handkerchief, and thinking that after all men as good as himself associated with M. de Charlus, the Prince des Laumes, and the others, he said to himself that this meant, if not that they were incapable of infamy, at least that it is a necessity of life to which each of us submits, to associate with people who are perhaps not incapable of it. And he continued to shake hands with all of those friends whom he had suspected, with the one purely formal reservation that they had perhaps tried to drive him to despair. As for the actual substance of the letter, he did not worry about it, because not one of the accusations formulated against Odette had a shadow of likelihood. Swann, like many people, had a lazy mind and lacked the faculty of invention. He knew very well as a general truth that people's lives are full of contrasts, but for each person in particular he imagined the whole part of his life that he did not know as being identical to the part that he knew. He imagined what he was not told with the help of what he was told. During the times when Odette was with him, if they were talking about some indelicate act committed or some indelicate feeling experienced by someone else, she would stigmatize them by virtue of the same principles that Swann had always heard professed by his parents and to which he had remained faithful; and then she would arrange her flowers, she would drink a cup of tea, she would worry about Swann's work. And so Swann extended these habits to the rest of Odette's life, he repeated these gestures when he wanted to picture to himself the times when she was away from him. If anyone had portrayed her to him as she was, or rather as she had been with him for so long, but in the company of another man, he would have suffered, because that image would have appeared to him quite likely. But to think that she went to procuresses, took part in orgies with other women, that she led the dissolute life of the most abject of creatures—what an insane aberration, for the realization of which, God be thanked, the imagined chrysanthemums, the successive teas, the virtuous indignation left no room! Only from time to time, he would insinuate to Odette that, out of spite, someone had been reporting to him about everything she did; and, making use, in connection with this, of an insignificant but true detail, which he had learned by chance, as if it were the sole fragment among many others that he had allowed to slip out despite himself, of a complete reconstruction of Odette's life which he kept hidden inside himself, he would lead her to suppose that he was well informed about things that in reality he did not know or even suspect, for if quite often he adjured Odette not to alter the truth, it was only, whether he realized it or not, so that she would tell him everything she did. Undoubtedly, as he said to Odette, he loved sincerity, but he loved it as a procuress who could keep him in touch with his mistress's life. And so his love of sincerity, not being disinterested, had not made him a better person. The truth he cherished was the truth Odette would tell him; but he himself, in order to obtain that truth, was not afraid to resort to falsehood, that very same falsehood which he constantly portrayed to Odette as leading every human creature down to utter degradation. And so he lied as much as Odette because, while unhappier than she, he was no less selfish. And she, hearing Swann tell her the things she had done, would gaze at him with a look of mistrust, and, just to be on the safe side, of vexation, so as not to seem to be humiliating herself and blushing at her actions.

One day, during the longest period of calm he had yet been able to go through without suffering renewed attacks of jealousy, he had agreed to go to the theater that evening with the Princesse des Laumes. Having opened the newspaper, in order to find out what was being played, the sight of the title, *Les Filles de Marbre* by Théodore Barrière,[110] struck him such a painful blow that he recoiled and turned his head away. Illuminated as though by footlights, in the new spot where it had appeared, the word *marble,* which he had lost the ability to distinguish because he was so used to seeing it before his eyes, had suddenly become visible again and had immediately reminded him of the story Odette had told him once long ago, about a visit she had made to the Salon du Palais de l'Industrie with Mme. Verdurin, where the latter had said to her: "Watch yourself, now! I know how to make you melt. You're not made of marble, you know." Odette had sworn to him it was only a joke, and he had attached no importance to it. But he had had more confidence in her at that time than he did now. And in fact the anonymous letter mentioned love affairs of that kind. Without daring to lift his eyes to the newspaper again, he unfolded it, turned a page in order not to see the words *Les Filles de Marbre,* and mechanically began reading news from the provinces. There had been a storm on the Channel, damage was reported at Dieppe, Cabourg, Beuzeval. Immediately he recoiled again.

The name Beuzeval had reminded him of the name of another place in the same area, Beuzeville, whose name is joined by a hyphen to another, Bréauté, which he had often seen on maps, but without ever noticing before that it was the same as that of his friend M. de Bréauté, whom the anonymous letter mentioned as having been Odette's lover. In fact, in the case of M. de Bréauté, the accusation was not unlikely; but so far as Mme. Verdurin was concerned, it was a sheer impossibility. From the fact that Odette sometimes lied, one could not conclude that she never told the truth, and in the remarks she had exchanged with Mme. Verdurin and which she herself had described to Swann, he had recognized those pointless and dangerous jokes made, from inexperience of life and ignorance of vice, by women whose innocence they merely reveal and who—like Odette for example—are least prone to feel passionate love for another woman. Whereas on the contrary, the indignation with which she had denied the suspicions she had involuntarily aroused in him for a moment by her story squared with all he knew about his mistress's tastes and temperament. But at this moment, through one of those inspirations common to jealous men, analogous to that which reveals to a poet or scientist who has still only one rhyme or one observation the idea or law that will give them all their power, Swann recalled for the first time a remark Odette had made to him fully two years before: "Oh, Mme. Verdurin! All she can think about these days is me. I'm her little pet. She kisses me, and she wants me to go shopping with her, and she wants me to call her *tu*."[111] Far from seeing, at the time, any sort of connection between this comment and the absurd remarks meant to simulate some sort of depravity which Odette had reported to him, he had welcomed it as proof of a warm friendship. Now the memory of Mme. Verdurin's affection had suddenly come to join the memory of her unseemly conversation. He could no longer separate them in his mind and saw them mingled in reality too, the affection lending something serious and important to the jokes which in return caused the affection to lose some of its innocence. He went to Odette's house. He sat down at a distance from her. He did not dare kiss her, not knowing whether it would be affection or anger that a kiss would provoke, either in her, or in himself. He said nothing, he watched their love die. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Odette," he said to her, "my dear, I know I'm being hateful, but there are a few things I must ask you. Do you remember the idea I had about you and Mme. Verdurin? Tell me, was it true, with her or with anyone else?"

She shook her head while pursing her lips, a sign people often use to answer that they will not go, that it bores them, if someone asks: "Would you like to come watch the cavalcade go past, will you be at the review?" But a shake of the head thus usually assigned to an event in the future, for this reason colors with some uncertainty the denial of an event that is past. What is more, it suggests only reasons of personal propriety rather than reprobation, a moral impossibility. When he saw Odette make this sign to him that it was untrue, Swann understood that it was perhaps true.

"I've already told you. You know perfectly well," she added, looking irritated and unhappy.

"Yes, I know, but are you sure? Don't say, 'You know perfectly well'; say, 'I have never done anything of that sort with any woman.' "

She repeated, as though it were a lesson, ironically, and as if she wanted to get rid of him:

"I have never done anything of that sort with any woman."

"Can you swear it on your medal of Our Lady of Laghet?"

Swann knew Odette would never swear a false oath on that medal.

"Oh, you make me so unhappy!" she exclaimed, abruptly dodging the grasp of his question. "Aren't you done? What's the matter with you today? Are you determined to make me hate you, to make me detest you? You see? I wanted to have a nice time with you again, the way we used to, and this is how you thank me!"

However, not letting her go, like a surgeon waiting for a spasm to subside that has interrupted his operation but will not make him abandon it:

"You're quite wrong to imagine I would hold it against you in the least, Odette," he said to her with a persuasive and deceptive gentleness. "I only talk to you about what I know, and I always know much more about it than I say. But you are the only one who can mitigate by your confession what makes me hate you as long as it has been reported to me only by other people. My anger toward you does not come from your actions, I forgive you everything because I love you, but from your duplicity, the absurd duplicity which makes you persist in denying things I know already. How can you expect me to go on loving you when I see you insisting upon something, swearing to something I know is untrue? Odette, don't prolong this moment, which is agony for both of us. If you want to, you can end it in a second, you'll be free of it forever. Tell me on your medal, yes or no, if you have ever done these things."

"But I have no idea," she exclaimed angrily, "maybe a very long time ago, without realizing what I was doing, maybe two or three times."

Swann had envisaged all the possibilities. Reality is therefore something that has no relation to possibilities, any more than the stab of a knife in our body has any relation to the gradual motions of the clouds overhead, since those words *two or three times* carved a kind of cross in the tissue of his heart. Strange that the words *two or three times,* no more than words, words spoken into the air, at a distance, can lacerate the heart this way as if they had really touched it, can make you as sick as if you had swallowed poison. Involuntarily Swann thought of the remark he had heard at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's: "That's the most powerful thing I've seen since the table turning." The pain he was now experiencing resembled nothing he had imagined. Not only because in the hours when he most entirely distrusted her he had rarely imagined such an extremity of evil, but because, even when he did imagine this thing, it remained vague, uncertain, not clothed in the particular horror that had issued from the words *maybe two or three times,* not armed with that specific cruelty as different from everything he had known as a disease with which one is stricken for the first time. And yet Odette, from whom all this harm came to him, was no less dear to him, quite the contrary, more precious, as if at the same rate that his suffering increased, the value of the sedative increased, of the antidote which only this woman possessed. He wanted to devote more care to her, as to a disease which one suddenly discovers is more serious. He wanted the frightful thing she had told him she had done "two or three times" not to be repeated. For this, he had to watch over Odette. People often say that when we inform a friend of his mistress's wrongdoings, we succeed only in attaching him to her more closely because he places no faith in them, but how much more so if he does place faith in them! But, said Swann to himself, how could he manage to protect her? He could perhaps keep her safe from a particular woman, but there were hundreds of others, and he realized what madness had come over him when he had begun, on the evening when he had not found Odette at the Verdurins', to want something that was always impossible—to possess another person. Happily for Swann, beneath the new sufferings that had just entered his soul like hordes of invaders, there lay a natural substratum, older, gentler, and silently industrious, like the cells of an injured organ that immediately set about preparing to restore the damaged tissues, like the muscles of a paralyzed limb that try to resume their former movements. These older, more autochthonous inhabitants of his soul employed, for a moment, all of Swann's strength in this dim recuperative work that gives the illusion of repose to a convalescent, to a surgical patient. This time it was not so much, as it usually was, in Swann's brain that this relaxation induced by exhaustion took effect, it was rather in his heart. But all the things in life that have once existed tend to recur, and like a dying animal shaken one last time by the throes of a convulsion which seemed to have ended, upon Swann's heart, spared for a moment, the same suffering returned of its own volition to carve the same cross again. He remembered those moonlit evenings when, lying back in the victoria that was taking him to the rue La Pérouse, he would voluptuously cultivate within himself the emotions of a man in love, without knowing the poisoned fruit they would necessarily bear. But all these thoughts did not last more than the space of a second, the time he took to bring his hand to his heart, catch his breath, and manage a smile to hide his agony. Already he was beginning to ask his questions again. For his jealousy, which had taken pains an enemy would not have taken to strike this blow, to introduce him to the most intense suffering he had yet known, did not believe he had suffered enough and sought to expose him to a wound that was deeper still. Thus, like a wicked deity, his jealousy inspired Swann and pushed him to his ruin. It was not his fault but only Odette's if at first his torment did not grow worse.

"My dear," he said to her, "it's in the past now. Was it with anyone I know?"

"No, of course not, I swear it wasn't. And anyway, I think I exaggerated, I don't think I went that far."

He smiled and went on:

"As you like. It doesn't really matter, but it's too bad you can't tell me the name. If I could picture the person it would keep me from ever thinking about her again. I say this for your own sake, because then I wouldn't be bothering you about it anymore. It's such a relief to be able to picture a thing! The truly horrifying things are the ones you can't imagine. But you've already been so kind, I don't want to tire you. I do thank you with all my heart for all the good you've done me. I'm quite finished now. Only this last question: How long ago was it?"

"Oh, Charles! Don't you see you're killing me? It's all so long ago. I never gave it another thought. And now it's as if you're positively trying to put those ideas in my head again. A lot of good it'll do you," she said, with unthinking foolishness and deliberate spite.

"Oh, I only wanted to know if it had happened since I've known you! It would be natural enough. Did it happen here? Could you tell me which particular evening, so that I could picture what I was doing at the time? I'm sure you realize it isn't possible that you don't remember who it was with, Odette, my love."

"Oh, I don't know, really I don't, I think it was in the Bois one evening when you came to meet us on the island. You had been to the Princesse des Laumes's for dinner," she said, happy to give him a specific detail that would attest to her truthfulness. "There was a woman at the next table; I hadn't seen her for ages. She said to me: 'Come around behind that little rock there and see the moonlight on the water.' At first I just yawned and said: 'No, I'm tired and I'm quite comfortable where I am.' She swore there had never been such moonlight. I said: 'What a joke!' I knew quite well what she was after."

Odette told this almost with a smile, either because it seemed to her quite natural, or because she thought she would thereby make it seem less important, or so as not to appear humiliated. At the sight of Swann's face, she changed her tone:

"You're a scoundrel, you like tormenting me, making me invent lies which I only tell you so you'll leave me in peace."

This second blow which Swann suffered was even more agonizing than the first. Never had he supposed the thing had been so recent, hidden from his eyes, which had not been able to discover it, not in a past which he had not known, but among evenings which he recalled so clearly, which he had experienced with Odette, which he had believed he knew so well, and which now assumed in retrospect an appearance that was false and atrocious; among them suddenly there opened up this wide gap, this moment on the island in the Bois. Odette, without being intelligent, had the charm of naturalness. She had described, she had mimed this scene with such simplicity that Swann, breathless, saw everything: Odette's yawn, the little rock. He heard her respond—gaily, alas: "What a joke!" He felt she would say nothing more this evening, there was no new revelation to expect just now; he said to her: "My poor dear, forgive me, I feel I'm hurting you, it's over and done with, I'm not thinking about it anymore."

But she saw that his eyes were still dwelling on the things he did not know and on that past era of their love, monotonous and sweet in his memory because it was vague, which was now being torn open like a wound by that minute on the island in the Bois, in the moonlight, after the dinner with the Princesse des Laumes. But he was so much in the habit by now of finding life interesting—of admiring the curious discoveries one can make—that even while suffering to the point of believing he could not endure such pain for long, he said to himself: "Life is really astonishing; it really has great surprises in store for us; immorality is actually more common than one would think. Here's a woman I trusted, who seemed so simple, so honest in any case, even if she was rather flighty, who seemed quite normal and healthy in her tastes; after an unlikely denunciation I question her, and the little she admits reveals much more than what one would have suspected." But he could not confine himself to these disinterested remarks. He tried to estimate the exact value of what she had told him, in order to know if he ought to conclude that she had done these things often, that they would happen again. He repeated to himself the words she had said: "I knew quite well what she was after," "Two or three times," "What a joke!" but they did not reappear in Swann's memory disarmed, each of them held a knife and with it struck him another blow. For a very long time, just as an invalid cannot stop himself from trying over and over again to make the motion that is painful to him, he repeated these words to himself: "I'm quite comfortable here," "What a joke!" but the pain was so intense he had to stop. He marveled that acts which he had always judged so lightly, so cheerfully, had now become as serious as a disease from which one may die. He certainly knew some women he could have asked to keep an

eye on Odette. But how could he hope they would adopt the same point of view he now had and not hold on to the point of view he had had for so long, that had always guided him in love affairs, would not say to him, laughing: "You nasty jealous man—trying to rob others of a little pleasure"? By what trapdoor, suddenly opened, had he (who in the past had derived only refined pleasures from his love for Odette) been roughly dropped into this new circle of hell from which he could not see how he would ever get out? Poor Odette! He did not hold it against her. She was only half guilty. Didn't people say it was her own mother who had handed her over to a rich Englishman in Nice when she was hardly more than a child? But what painful truth was now contained for him in those lines from *Journal d'un Poète* by Alfred de Vigny[112] which he had read with indifference in the past: "When you feel you are falling in love with a woman, you ought to say to yourself: Who are her friends? What sort of life has she had? All one's future happiness depends upon it." Swann was surprised that simple statements spelled out by his mind, like "What a joke!," "I could see very well what she was after," could hurt him so. But he realized that what he believed to be simple statements were merely the pieces of the framework that still contained, and could give back to him, the pain he had felt during Odette's story. For it was indeed the same pain which he was feeling again. Though he now knew, though he had even, as time passed, forgotten a little, forgiven, the moment he said these words to himself again the old suffering made him once again what he had been before Odette spoke: ignorant, trustful; his cruel jealousy placed him once again, so that he might be wounded by Odette's confession, in the position of a man who does not yet know, and after several months this old story still upset him like a revelation. He admired the terrible re-creative power of his memory. It was only by the weakening of that generator, whose fecundity diminishes with age, that he could hope for an easing of his torment. But as soon as the power of any one of Odette's remarks to make him suffer seemed nearly exhausted, then one of those on which Swann's mind had dwelt less until then, a remark that was almost new, would come to relieve the others and strike at him with undiminished vigor. The memory of the evening he had dined with the Princesse des Laumes was painful to him, but it was only the center of his disease. The latter irradiated confusedly on all sides through the days before and after it. And whatever point in it he tried to touch in his memories, it was the whole of that season, during which the Verdurins had dined so often on the island in the Bois, that hurt him. Hurt him so badly that gradually the curiosity which his jealousy kept provoking in him was neutralized by his fear of the new torments he would inflict on himself by satisfying it. He realized that the entire period of Odette's life that had elapsed before she met him, a period he had never tried to picture, was not the abstract expanse which he could vaguely see, but had consisted of specific years, each filled with concrete incidents. But if he came to know them, he was afraid that that past of hers, colorless, fluid, and tolerable, might assume a body that was tangible and loathsome, a face that was individual and diabolical. And he continued to refrain from trying to imagine it, no longer from laziness of mind, but from fear of suffering. He hoped that one day he might at last be able to hear the name of the island in the Bois, of the Princesse des Laumes, without feeling the old tearing at his heart, and thought it would be imprudent to provoke Odette into supplying him with new remarks, names of places, different circumstances which, when his illness was still scarcely abated, would reawaken it again in another form.

But often the things he did not know, that he now was afraid of knowing, were revealed spontaneously by Odette herself, and without her realizing it; in fact the distance that depravity put between Odette's real life and the relatively innocent life which Swann had believed, and quite often still believed, his mistress led, was a distance whose extent Odette did not realize: a depraved person, still affecting the same virtue in front of the people by whom he does not want his vices to be suspected, has no gauge by which to recognize how far the latter, whose continuous growth is imperceptible to himself, are drawing him little by little away from normal ways of living. As they cohabited, deep in Odette's mind, with the memory of the acts she was hiding from Swann, other actions were gradually colored by them, infected by them, without her being able to see anything strange about them, without their seeming out of place in the particular surroundings where she kept them inside her; but if she described them to Swann, he was horrified by the revelation of the environment they betrayed. One day he was trying, without hurting Odette, to ask her if she had ever had any dealings with a procuress. Actually he was convinced she had not; reading the anonymous letter had introduced the conjecture into his mind, but in a mechanical way; it had met with no credence there, but had in fact remained there, and Swann, in order to be rid of the purely material but nonetheless awkward presence of the suspicion, wanted Odette to remove it. "Oh, no! Not that they don't pester me," she added, revealing by her smile a self-satisfied vanity which she no longer noticed could not seem justified to Swann. "There was one here yesterday who stayed more than two hours waiting for me, offered me any amount I liked. It seems some ambassador had said to her: 'I'll kill myself if you don't get her for me.' They told her I'd gone out. In the end I went and talked to her myself so she would leave. I wish you could have seen the way I spoke to her; my maid heard me from the next room and told me I was shouting at the top of my voice. I said, 'Haven't I told you I don't want to? It's a poor idea, I don't like it. Really, I should hope I'm still free to do what I want! If I needed the money, I could understand . . .' The concierge has orders not to let her in again. He'll tell her I'm in the country. Oh, I wish you had been hiding somewhere. I think you would have been pleased, my dear. You see, your little Odette has some good in her, all the same, even though some people find her so detestable."

Moreover her very admissions, when she made them, of faults that she supposed he had discovered, served Swann as points of departure toward new doubts rather than put an end to the old. For her admissions were never of exactly the same proportions as his doubts. Though Odette might subtract from her confession all the essential part, there remained in the accessory part something Swann had never imagined, that crushed him with its newness, and would permit him to change the terms of the problem of his jealousy. And these admissions he could no longer forget. His soul bore them along, cast them aside, cradled them, like dead bodies. And it was poisoned by them.

One time she told him about a visit Forcheville had paid her on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete. "What? You already knew him back then? Yes, of course, that's right," he said, catching himself so as not to show that he had not known. And suddenly he began to tremble at the thought that on the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, on which he had received from her the letter he had kept so carefully, she had perhaps been having lunch with Forcheville at the Maison d'Or. She swore she had not. "Yet the Maison d'Or does remind me of something or other that I knew at the time wasn't true," he said in order to frighten her. "Yes, that I hadn't actually been there at all that evening when I told you I had just come from there and you had been looking for me at Prévost's," she answered (thinking from his expression that he knew this), with a decisiveness in which there was, not cynicism, but rather timidity, a fear of vexing Swann, which out of self-respect she wanted to hide, and also a desire to show him that she could be frank. Thus she struck with an executioner's neatness and energy though quite without cruelty, for Odette was not conscious of the harm she was doing Swann; and she even began to laugh, perhaps, it is true, chiefly so as not to seem humiliated, embarrassed. "It's quite true that I hadn't been to the Maison Dorée; I was coming away from Forcheville's house. I actually had been to Prévost's, I didn't make that up, and he ran into me there and asked me to come and look at his engravings. But someone else came to see him. I told you I was coming from the Maison d'Or because I was afraid you would be annoyed. See? That was rather kind of me, wasn't it? Even if I was wrong, at least I'm telling you all about it now quite frankly. What would I gain by not telling you I had lunch with him the day of the Paris-Murcia fete, if it was true? Especially since at the time we didn't know each other very well yet, you and I, dear." He smiled at her with sudden cowardice, changed by these crushing words into a creature without strength. So, even during the months which he had never dared to think about again because they had been too happy, during those months when she had loved him, she was already lying to him! Besides that time (the first evening they had "made cattleya") when she had told him she was coming from the Maison Dorée, how many others there must have been, each of them also harboring a lie which Swann had not suspected. He remembered that one day she had said to him: "I would simply tell Mme. Verdurin my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." From him too, probably, many times when she had murmured the sorts of words which explain a delay, justify a change in the hour of a meeting, they must have concealed, without his suspecting it then, something she was going to do with some other man, with some other man to whom she had said: "I'll simply tell Swann my dress wasn't ready, or my cab came late. There's always a way to manage it." And under all of Swann's sweetest memories, under the simplest words Odette had said to him in the old days, which he had believed like the words of the gospel, under the daily actions she had recounted to him, under the most ordinary places, her dressmaker's house, the avenue du Bois, the Hippodrome, he sensed, concealed within the surplus time which even in the most thoroughly itemized days still leaves some play, some room, and can serve as hiding places for certain actions, he sensed insinuating itself the possible subterranean presence of lies which made something ignoble out of all that had remained most dear to him (his best evenings, the rue La Pérouse itself, which Odette must always have left at other hours than those she had reported to him), propagating everywhere a little of the dark horror he had felt when he heard her admission about the Maison Dorée, and, like the loathsome beasts in the Desolation of Nineveh,[113] toppling stone by stone his entire past. If he now turned away each time his memory spoke the bitter name of the Maison Dorée, it was no longer, as still quite recently at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because it recalled to him a happiness he had long since lost, but because it recalled to him an unhappiness he had only just discovered. Then the same thing happened to the name of the Maison Dorée as to that of the island in the Bois, it gradually ceased to hurt

Swann. For what we believe to be our love, or our jealousy, is not one single passion, continuous and indivisible. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, which are ephemeral but by their uninterrupted multitude give the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The life of Swann's love, the faithfulness of his jealousy, were formed of the death, the faithlessness, of numberless desires, numberless doubts, all of which had Odette as their object. If he had remained for a long time without seeing her, those that died would not have been replaced by others. But the presence of Odette continued to sow Swann's heart with affection and suspicion by turns.

On certain evenings she would suddenly be full of kindness toward him again, and she would warn him severely that he ought to take advantage of it right away, under penalty of not seeing it repeated for years to come; they had to go back to her house immediately to "make cattleya," and this desire which she claimed to feel for him was so sudden, so inexplicable, so imperious, the caresses she lavished on him at these times so demonstrative and so unusual that this rough and improbable affection made Swann as unhappy as a lie or an unkindness. One evening when he had gone home with her thus after she commanded it, and she was kissing him and murmuring to him with a passion quite unlike her usual coldness, he suddenly thought he heard a noise; he stood up, looked everywhere, found no one, but did not have the courage to go back to his place next to her, whereupon she, in a paroxysm of rage, broke a vase and said to Swann: "One can never do anything right with you!" And he remained uncertain whether she had not hidden someone there with the desire of provoking the man's jealousy or inflaming his senses.

Sometimes he visited brothels hoping to learn something about her, though without daring to say her name. "I have a nice little one I know you'll like," the madam would say. And he would stay there for an hour chatting gloomily to some poor girl who was astonished that he did nothing more. One who was very young and beautiful said to him one day: "What I'd like would be to find a man who would be a real friend to me: then he could be quite certain I'd never go with another man again." "Really, do you believe it's possible for a woman to be touched that a man loves her, and never be unfaithful to him?" Swann asked her anxiously. "Well, of course! But it would depend on her character, wouldn't it now?" Swann could not help saying to these girls the same sorts of things that would have pleased the Princesse des Laumes. To the one who was looking for a friend, he said, smiling: "How nice—you've put on blue eyes to match the color of your belt." "And you too; you've got blue cuffs on." "What a lovely conversation we're having, for this sort of a place! I'm not boring you, am I? Perhaps you've got something else you have to do?" "No, I have plenty of time. If you were boring me, I would have told you. Actually, I like listening to you talk." "I'm very flattered. Aren't we having a nice chat?" he said to the madam, who had just come in. "Why yes, that's just what I was saying to myself. How well they're behaving! There! Now they come to my house to talk. The Prince said it himself, the other day, it's much nicer here than at his wife's house. It seems that in high society these days all the women put on such airs, it's a real scandal! But I'll leave you alone, I know when to be discreet." And she left Swann with the blue-eyed girl. But soon he stood up and said good-bye, she did not matter to him, she did not know Odette.

Because the painter had been ill, Dr. Cottard had advised him to go to sea for a while; several of the regulars talked about going along with him; the Verdurins could not reconcile themselves to being left alone, rented a yacht, then purchased it and so Odette went on frequent cruises. Each time she had been gone for a little while, Swann felt he was beginning to separate from her, but as if this mental distance were proportional to the physical distance, as soon as he knew Odette was back, he could not rest without seeing her. Once, having gone off for only a month, as they thought, either because they were tempted along the way, or because M. Verdurin had cunningly arranged things beforehand to please his wife and had informed the regulars only as they proceeded, from Algiers they went to Tunis, then to Italy, then to Greece, to Constantinople, to Asia Minor. The voyage had lasted close to a year. Swann felt absolutely calm, almost happy. Even though Mme. Verdurin had tried to persuade the pianist and Dr. Cottard that the aunt of the one and the patients of the other did not need them at all and that in any case it was imprudent to let Mme. Cottard return to Paris, which M. Verdurin assured them was in the midst of a revolution, she was obliged to give them back their freedom at Constantinople. And the painter left with them. One day, shortly after the three travelers[114] returned, Swann, seeing an omnibus go by headed for the Luxembourg, where he had business, had jumped inside and found himself sitting across from Mme. Cottard, who was making the rounds of the people whose "day" it was in full dress uniform, ostrich feather in hat, silk dress, muff, combination umbrella-sunshade, calling-card case, and freshly cleaned white gloves. Clothed in these insignia, when it was dry out she would go on foot from one house to the next in the same neighborhood, but for proceeding into a different neighborhood would use the omnibus with connection service. During the first few minutes, before the woman's native kindness perforated the starch of the petty bourgeoise, and also not very sure if she ought to talk about the Verdurins to Swann, she produced quite naturally, in her awkward, slow, soft voice which at times the omnibus drowned out completely with its rattling, remarks chosen from among those she heard and repeated in the twenty-five houses whose stories she climbed during one day:

"I don't need to ask you, monsieur, if a man in the swim such as yourself has gone to the Mirlitons,[115] to see the portrait by Machard[116] which the whole of Paris is rushing to see? Well, and what do you think of it? Whose camp are you in, those who approve or those who don't? It's the same in every house now, all they talk about is the portrait by Machard; you aren't fashionable, you aren't really cultured, you aren't up-to-date, unless you can give your opinion of Machard's portrait."

Swann answered that he had not see the portrait, and Mme. Cottard was afraid she had offended him by obliging him to confess it.

"Well, good, at least you admit it frankly, you don't think you're disgraced because you haven't seen Machard's portrait. I think that's admirable. Well now, I have seen it. Opinion is divided, you know, some people think there's too much polish in it, too much whipped cream, but I think it's just right. Of course she's not like the blue-and-yellow women by our friend Biche. But I must confess to you frankly, though you will not find me very fin-de-siècle, but I do say what I think—I don't understand his work. Good Lord, I can see the good points in his portrait of my husband, it's not as strange as what he usually does, but even so he had to go and put a blue mustache on him. Whereas Machard! Imagine, the husband of the friend I'm on my way to see at this moment (giving me the great pleasure of riding with you) has promised her that, if he's elected to the Academy (he's one of the doctor's colleagues), he'll have her portrait done by Machard. Obviously they're dreaming! I have another friend who claims she likes Leloir[117] better. I'm just a poor layman and perhaps Leloir is even superior technically. But I think the most important quality in a portrait, especially when it's going to cost ten thousand francs, is that it should be a good likeness, and pleasant to look at."

Having made these remarks, which were inspired by the loftiness of her plume, the monogram on her card case, the little number inked inside her gloves by the dry cleaner, and the difficulty of talking to Swann about the Verdurins, Mme. Cottard, seeing that they were still far away from the corner of the rue Bonaparte where the driver was to let her off, listened to her heart, which counseled other words.

"Your ears must have been burning, monsieur," she said, "during the voyage we made with Mme. Verdurin. We talked of nothing else but you."

Swann was very surprised; he had assumed that his name was never mentioned in the presence of the Verdurins.

"Anyway," added Mme. Cottard, "Mme. de Crécy was there, and that says it all. Wherever Odette is, she can never go for very long without mentioning you. And as you may expect she does not speak ill of you. What! You doubt it?" she said, seeing Swann make a gesture of skepticism.

And carried away by the sincerity of her conviction, and imputing no unfavorable meaning to the word, which she used only in the sense in which one employs it to speak of the affection between friends:

"Why, she adores you! Oh, I'm sure one couldn't say anything against you in front of her! One would be soundly scolded! Apropos of anything at all, if we saw a painting, for instance, she would say: 'Now, if he were here, he'd be able to tell us whether it was genuine or not. There's nobody like him for that.' And she was constantly asking: 'What can he be doing right now? If only he would do a little work! It's dreadful that a fellow with such gifts should be so lazy.' (You'll forgive me, won't you?) 'I can see him right now, he's thinking about us, he's wondering where we are.' She even made a remark that I found quite charming: M. Verdurin said to her: 'How in the world can you see what he's doing right now, since you're eight hundred leagues away?' And Odette answered: 'Nothing is impossible for the eye of a friend.' No, I swear, I'm not saying it just to flatter you, you have a true friend in her such as you don't often find. I can tell you besides, that if you don't know it, you're the only one who doesn't. Mme. Verdurin told me as much herself on our very last day (you know, when you're about to leave you always have the best talks): 'I'm not saying Odette doesn't care a great deal for us, but whatever we might say to her wouldn't have much weight compared to what M. Swann might say.' Oh, my Lord! The driver's stopping for me—here I've been chatting away with you and I nearly went right past the rue Bonaparte . . . Would you be so kind as to tell me if my plume is straight?"

And Mme. Cottard withdrew from her muff and held out to Swann a hand gloved in white from which escaped, along with a transfer ticket, a vision of upper-class life that filled the omnibus, mingling with the smell of the dry cleaner. And Swann felt himself overflowing with affection for her, as much as for Mme. Verdurin (and almost as much as for Odette, since the feeling he now had for the latter, being no longer mingled with pain, was hardly love anymore), while from the platform of the omnibus he followed her with his newly affectionate eyes as she courageously made her way up the rue Bonaparte, her plume high, lifting her skirt with one hand, holding in the other her sunshade and her card case with its monogram displayed, while her muff danced in front of her.

To compete with the morbid feelings that Swann had for Odette, Mme. Cottard, a better healer than her husband would have been, had grafted alongside them other feelings, normal ones, of gratitude, friendship, feelings which in Swann's mind would make Odette more human (more like other women, because other women too could inspire these feelings in him), would hasten her final transformation into the Odette who was loved with a peaceful affection, who had brought him back one evening after a party at the painter's home to drink a glass of orangeade with Forcheville and with whom Swann had glimpsed the possibility of living in happiness.

In the past having often thought with terror that one day he would cease to be in love with Odette, he had promised himself to be vigilant and, as soon as he felt his love was beginning to leave him, to cling to it, to hold it back. But now to the weakening of his love there corresponded a simultaneous weakening of his desire to remain in love. For one cannot change, that is to say become another person, while continuing to acquiesce to the feelings of the person one has ceased to be. Now and then the name, glimpsed in a newspaper, of one of the men he thought could have been Odette's lovers, restored his jealousy to him. But it was very mild and as it proved to him that he had not yet completely emerged from the time when he had suffered so much—but also when he had experienced such voluptuous feelings—and that the hazards of the road ahead might still permit him to catch a furtive, distant glimpse of its beauties, this jealousy actually gave him a pleasant thrill just as to the sad Parisian leaving Venice to return to France a last mosquito proves that Italy and the summer are not yet too remote. But most often, when he made the effort, if not to remain in this quite distinctive period of his life from which he was emerging, at least to have a clear view of it while he still could, he would notice that already he no longer could; he would have liked to observe, as though it were a landscape about to disappear, that love which he had just left behind; but it is so difficult to duplicate oneself and give oneself a truthful display of a feeling one no longer has that soon, darkness gathering in his brain, he could no longer see anything, gave up looking, took off his lorgnon, wiped its lenses; and he said to himself that it would be better to rest a little, that there would still be time later on, and would settle back with the incuriosity, the torpor of the drowsy traveler who pulls his hat down over his eyes in order to sleep in the railway carriage which he feels carrying him faster and faster away from the country where he has lived for so long and which he had promised himself not to let slip past without giving it a last farewell. Indeed, like the same traveler if he does not wake until he is back in France, when Swann happened upon proof close at hand that Forcheville had been Odette's lover, he observed that he felt no pain, that his love was far away by now, and he was sorry not to have been warned of the moment when he was about to leave it behind forever. And just as before kissing Odette for the first time he had tried to imprint on his memory the face which had been familiar to him for so long and which was about to be transformed by the memory of that kiss, so he would have wanted, in his thoughts at least, to have been able to make his farewells, while she still existed, to the Odette who had inspired him with love, jealousy, to the Odette who had made him suffer and whom he would now never see again. He was mistaken. He did see see her again, one more time, a few weeks later. It was while he was asleep, in the twilight of a dream. He was walking with Mme. Verdurin, Dr. Cottard, a young man in a fez whom he could not identify, the painter, Odette, Napoleon III, and my grandfather, along a path that followed the sea and overhung it steeply sometimes very high up, sometimes by a few yards only, so that one climbed and descended again constantly; those who were descending again were already no longer visible to those who were still climbing, what little daylight remained was failing, and it seemed then as though a profound darkness was going to spread over them at any moment. Now and again the waves leaped right up to the edge and Swann felt sprays of icy water on his cheek. Odette told him to wipe them off, he could not and was embarrassed by this in front of her, as he was embarrassed to be in his nightshirt. He hoped that in the darkness no one would realize, but Mme. Verdurin stared at him with a look of surprise for a long moment during which he saw her face change shape, her nose lengthen, and that she had a large mustache. He turned away to look at Odette, her cheeks were pale, with little red spots, her features drawn, ringed with shadows, but she was looking at him with eyes full of tenderness that were about to separate from her like teardrops and fall on him, and he felt he loved her so much that he wanted to take her away at once. Suddenly Odette turned her wrist, looked at a little watch, and said: "I have to go," she said good-bye to everyone, in the same manner, without taking Swann aside, without telling him where she would see him again that evening or another day. He did not dare ask her, he would have liked to follow her and was obliged, without turning back toward her, to answer with a smile some question of Mme. Verdurin's, but his heart was pounding horribly, he felt he hated Odette, he would have liked to cut out those eyes of hers that he had loved so much just a moment ago, crush those pallid cheeks. He continued to climb with Mme. Verdurin, which meant that with each step he moved farther away from Odette, who was descending in the opposite direction. After one second, it was many hours ago that she had left them. The painter remarked to Swann that Napoleon III had vanished an instant after she had. "They certainly must have arranged it together," he added. "They must have met at the bottom of the hill, but they didn't want to say good-bye at the same time for the sake of appearances. She's obviously his mistress." The unknown young man began to cry. Swann tried to comfort him. "Really, she's doing the right thing," he told him, drying his eyes and taking off his fez so that he would be more comfortable. "I told her a dozen times she should do it. Why be sad about it? He above all would understand her." Thus did Swann talk to himself, for the young man he had not been able to identify at first was also himself; like certain novelists, he had divided his personality between two characters, the one having the dream, and another he saw before him wearing a fez.

As for Napoleon III, it was to Forcheville that some vague association of ideas, then a certain modification in the Baron's usual physiognomy, lastly the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor on his chest, had induced him to give this name; but in reality, and in everything which the character in the dream represented to him and recalled to him, it was indeed Forcheville. For, from incomplete and changing images the sleeping Swann drew false deductions, having for the moment as well such creative power that he reproduced himself by simple division like certain lower organisms; with the warmth that he felt in his own palm he modeled the hollow of a strange hand which he thought he was clasping, and from feelings and impressions of which he was not yet conscious, devised peripeteias of a sort which, through their logical linking, would produce at just the right moment in Swann's sleep the person required to receive his love or prompt his awakening. Utter darkness descended on him in an instant, an alarm sounded, inhabitants of the place ran past, escaping from houses in flames; Swann heard the sound of the waves leaping and his heart, with the same violence, pounding with anxiety in his chest. Suddenly the palpitations of his heart redoubled in speed, he felt an inexplicable pain and nausea; a countryman covered with burns flung at him as he passed: "Come ask Charlus where Odette ended up this evening with her friend, he used to go about with her in the old days and she tells him everything. It's them that started the fire." It was his valet who had come to wake him and who said:

"Monsieur, it's eight o'clock and the hairdresser is here, I've told him to come by again in an hour."

But these words, penetrating the swells of sleep in which Swann was plunged, had reached his consciousness only by suffering that deflection which causes a ray of light in the depths of water to appear to be a sun, just as a moment earlier the sound of the doorbell, assuming in the depths of those abysses the sonority of an alarm, had begotten the episode of the fire. Meanwhile the scene before his eyes turned to dust, he opened his eyes, heard one last time the sound of a wave of the sea as it receded. He touched his cheek. It was dry. And yet he could recall the sensation of the cold water and the taste of the salt. He got up, dressed. He had asked the hairdresser to come early because he had written to my grandfather the night before that he would be going to Combray in the afternoon, having learned that Mme. de Cambremer—Mlle. Legrandin—was spending a few days there. Associating in his memory the charm of that young face with the charm of a countryside he had not visited in such a long time, he found that together they offered him an attraction that had made him decide to leave Paris for a few days at last. Because the different chance events which bring us into contact with certain people do not coincide with the time during which we are in love with them, but, extending beyond it, may occur before it begins and repeat themselves after it has ended, the earliest appearances in our lives of a person destined later to captivate us assume retrospectively in our eyes the significance of a warning, a presage. This was how Swann had often looked back at the image of Odette when he met her at the theater, that first evening when he did not dream he would ever see her again—and how he now recalled the party at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's where he had introduced Général de Froberville to Mme. de Cambremer. We have such numerous interests in our lives that it is not uncommon, on a single occasion, for the foundations of a happiness that does not yet exist to be laid down alongside the intensification of a grief from which we are still suffering. And undoubtedly this could have happened to Swann elsewhere than at Mme. de Saint-Euverte's. Who knows, even, had he found himself elsewhere, that evening, if

other happinesses, other griefs would not have come to him, which afterward should have appeared to him to have been inevitable? But what did seem to him to have been inevitable was what had taken place, and he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte's party, because his mind, wanting to admire life's richness of invention and incapable of posing itself a difficult question for very long, such as to determine what would have been most desirable, believed that in the sufferings he had experienced that evening and in the pleasures still unsuspected that were already germinating—between which the balance was too difficult to establish—there was a sort of necessary connection.

But while, an hour after he had woken, he was giving instructions to the hairdresser so that his brush cut would not become disordered on the train, he thought about his dream again, and saw once again, as he had felt them close beside him, Odette's pale complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, everything which—in the course of the successive expression of tenderness which had made of his abiding love for Odette a long oblivion of the first image he had formed of her—he had ceased to notice since the earliest days of their acquaintance, days to which no doubt, while he slept, his memory had returned to search for their exact sensation. And with the intermittent coarseness that reappeared in him as soon as he was no longer unhappy and the level of his morality dropped accordingly, he exclaimed to himself: "To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I felt my deepest love, for a woman who did not appeal to me, who was not my type!"

PART III

Place-Names: The Name

AMONG THE BEDROOMS whose images I summoned up most often in my nights of insomnia, none resembled less the rooms at Combray, dusted with an atmosphere that was grainy, pollinated, edible, and devout, than the room at the Grand-Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec, whose enamel-painted walls contained, like the polished sides of a swimming pool which tints the water blue, a pure azure salt sea air. The Bavarian decorator commissioned to furnish the hotel had varied the design schemes of the rooms and on three sides, along the walls, in the one I was occupying, had placed low bookcases, with glass panes, in which, depending on the spot they occupied, and by an effect he had not foreseen, one part or another of the changing picture of the sea was reflected, unfurling a frieze of bright seascapes, which was interrupted only by the solid pieces of mahogany. So much so that the whole room had the look of one of those model dormitories presented in "*modern style*"[1] furniture shows, where they are hung with works of art assumed to be likely to delight the eyes of the person who will be sleeping there, and representing subjects in keeping with the type of site where the room will be found.

But nothing resembled less this real Balbec, either, than the one I had often dreamed of, on stormy days, when the wind was so strong that Françoise as she took me to the Champs-Élysées warned me not to walk too close to the walls or the tiles might fall on my head and moaned to me about the great disasters and shipwrecks reported in the newspapers. I had no greater desire than to see a storm at sea, not so much because it would be a beautiful spectacle as because it would be a moment of nature's real life unveiled; or rather for me there were no beautiful spectacles except the ones which I knew were not artificially contrived for my pleasure, but were necessary, unchangeable—the beauties of landscapes or of great art. I was curious, I was avid to know only those things which I believed to be more real than myself, which had for me the value of showing me a little of the mind of a great genius, or of the force or grace of nature as it is manifested when left to itself, without the interference of men. Just as the lovely sound of her voice, reproduced in isolation by the phonograph, would not console us for having lost our mother, so too a storm mechanically imitated would have left me as indifferent as the illuminated fountains at the Exposition.[2] And so that the storm would be absolutely real, I also wanted the shore itself to be a natural shore, not a pier recently built by some municipality. In fact, because of all the feelings it awakened in me, nature seemed to me the thing most opposite to the mechanical productions of men. The less it bore their imprint the more room it offered in which my heart could expand. Now, I had remembered the name Balbec, which had been mentioned to us by Legrandin, as that of a seaside resort very close to "those funereal cliffs, famous for their many wrecks, wrapped six months of the year in a shroud of fog and the foam of the waves."

"In that place you can still feel beneath your feet," he said, "far more so than at Finistère itself[3] (and even though hotels are being superimposed upon it now without, however, the power to change the more ancient skeleton of the land), you can still feel the true end of the land of France, of Europe, of the Ancient World. And it's the last encampment of fishermen, precisely like all the fishermen who have ever lived since the beginning of the world, facing the eternal realm of the mists of the sea and the shadows of the night." One day when, at Combray, I had mentioned this seaside resort of Balbec in the presence of M. Swann in order to find out from him if it was the choicest spot for seeing the most powerful storms, he had answered me: "Yes indeed I certainly know Balbec! The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, still half Romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example of our Norman Gothic, and so singular! It's almost Persian in style." And that region, which until then had seemed to me similar in nature to the immemorial, still contemporaneous great phenomena of geology—and just as completely outside human history as the Ocean itself or the Great Bear,[4] with those wild fishermen for whom no more than for the whales had there been any Middle Ages—it had been a great delight for me to see it suddenly take its place in the sequence of the centuries, now that it had experienced the Romanesque period, and to know that the Gothic trefoil had come at the proper time to pattern those wild rocks too, like the frail but hardy plants which, when spring comes, spangle here and there the polar snow. And if the Gothic brought to those places and to those men a definition which they lacked, they too conferred one upon it in return. I tried to picture how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected attempt at social relations which they had made there, during the Middle Ages, clustered on a point along the shores of hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and the Gothic seemed to me more alive now that, having separated it from the towns in which until then I had always imagined it, I could see how, in one particular case, on those wild rocks, it had germinated and flowered into a delicate steeple. I was taken to see reproductions of the most famous of the statues at Balbec—the fleecy snub-nosed apostles, the Virgin in the porch—and my breathing stopped in my chest for joy when I thought that I could see them modeled in relief against the eternal briny mist. Then, on the sweet stormy evenings of February, the wind—blowing into my heart, which trembled under its gusts no less powerfully than my bedroom chimney, the plan of a trip to Balbec—mingled in me a desire for Gothic architecture with my desire for a tempest at sea.

I would have liked to leave the very next day on the handsome, generous 1:22 train whose hour of departure I could never read without a palpitating heart, in the railway company's advertisements or in announcements for circular tours: it seemed to me to incise at a precise point in the afternoon a delectable notch, a mysterious mark from which the diverted hours, though they still led to the evening, to the next morning, led to an evening and morning which one would see, not in Paris, but in one of those towns through which the train passes and among which it permitted us to choose; for it stopped at Bayeux, at Coutances, at Vitré, at Questambert, at Pontorson, at Balbec, at Lannion, at Lamballe, at Benodet, at Pont-Aven, at Quimperlé, and moved on magnificently overloaded with proffered names so that, among them all, I did not know which one I would have preferred, so impossible was it to sacrifice any of them. But without even waiting for it, I could have, by dressing quickly, left that very evening, if my parents had allowed me, and arrived at Balbec when the morning twilight was rising over the furious sea, from whose volleys of foam I would take refuge in the Persian-style church. But at the approach of the Easter holidays, when my parents promised to let me spend them for once in the north of Italy, now, in place of those dreams of tempests by which I had been so entirely occupied, wanting to see only waves running in from all sides, higher and higher, on the wildest coast, near churches as steep and rugged as cliffs, from whose towers the seabirds would shriek, now suddenly erasing them, taking away all their charm, excluding them because they were its opposite and could only have weakened it, the converse dream now occupied me, of the most dappled spring, not the spring of Combray which still pricked us tartly with all the needles of the frost, but the spring which was already covering the fields of Fiesole with lilies and anemones and dazzling Florence with golden grounds like those of Fra Angelico. From then on, only sunlight, perfumes, colors seemed to me of any value; for this alternation of images had brought about a change of direction in my desire, and—as abrupt as those that occur now and then in music—a complete change of tone in my sensibility. Thus it came about that a simple variation in the atmosphere was enough to provoke this modulation in me without any need to wait for the return of a season. For often, in one season, we find a day that has strayed from another and that immediately evokes its particular pleasures, lets us experience them, makes us desire them, and interrupts the dreams we were having by placing, earlier or later than was its turn, this leaf detached from another chapter, in the interpolated calendar of Happiness. But soon, like those natural phenomena from which our comfort or health can derive only an accidental and rather slender benefit until the day when science seizes hold of them, and producing them at will, puts into our hands the possibility of their appearance, withdrawn from the guardianship and exempted from the consent of chance, in the same way the production of those dreams of the Atlantic and of Italy ceased to be subjected solely to the changes of the seasons and of the weather. I needed only, to make them reappear, to pronounce those names—Balbec, Venice, Florence—in the interior of which had finally accumulated the desire inspired in me by the places they designated. Even in spring, finding the

name of Balbec in a book was enough to awaken in me the desire for storms and Norman Gothic; even on a stormy day the name of Florence or Venice gave me a desire for the sun, for lilies, for the Palace of the Doges, and for Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers.[5]

But if these names absorbed forever the image I had of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subjecting its reappearance in me to their own laws; in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but also more different from what the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could be in reality, and, by increasing the arbitrary joys of my imagination, aggravated the future disappointment of my travels. They exalted the idea I was forming of certain places on the earth, by making them more particular, consequently more real. I did not at the time represent to myself cities, landscapes, monuments as more or less pleasant pictures, cut out here and there from the same material, but each of them as an unknown thing, different in essence from the others, a thing for which my soul thirsted and which it would profit from knowing. How much more individuality still did they assume from being designated by names, names that were theirs alone, proper names like the names people have. Words present us with little pictures of things, clear and familiar, like those that are hung on the walls of schools to give children an example of what a workbench is, a bird, an anthill, things conceived of as similar to all others of the same sort. But names present a confused image of people—and of towns, which they accustom us to believe are individual, unique like people—an image which derives from them, from the brightness or darkness of their tone, the color with which it is painted uniformly, like one of those posters, entirely blue or entirely red, in which, because of the limitations of the process used or by a whim of the designer, not only the sky and the sea are blue or red, but the boats, the church, the people in the streets. Because the name of Parma, one of the towns I had most wanted to visit ever since I had read *La Chartreuse,*[6] seemed to me compact, smooth, mauve, and soft, if anyone mentioned a certain house in Parma in which I would be staying, he gave me the pleasure of thinking I would be living in a house that was smooth, compact, mauve, and soft, that bore no relation to the houses of any real town in Italy, since I had composed it in my imagination with the help only of that heavy syllable, *Parme,* in which no air circulates, and of all that I had made it absorb of Stendhalian softness and the tint of violets. And when I thought of Florence, it was of a town miraculously fragrant and like the petals of a flower, because it was called the City of Lilies and its cathedral Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers. As for Balbec, it was one of those names in which, as on a piece of old Norman pottery that retains the color of the earth from which it was taken, one can still see depicted the representation of some outmoded custom, of some feudal right, of some locality in an earlier condition, of an abandoned habit of pronunciation which had formed its heteroclite syllables and which I did not doubt I would rediscover spoken there even by the innkeeper who would serve me coffee with milk on my arrival, taking me down to watch the furious sea in front of the church, and to whom I would ascribe the disputatious, solemn, and medieval aspect of a character from a fabliau.[7]

If my health improved and my parents allowed me, if not to go stay in Balbec, at least to take just once, in order to acquaint myself with the architecture and landscapes of Normandy or Brittany, that one-twenty-two train which I had boarded so many times in my imagination, I would have wished by preference to stop in the most beautiful towns; but compare them as I might, how could I choose, any more than between individual people, who are not interchangeable, between Bayeux, so lofty in its noble red-tinged lace, its summit illuminated by the old gold of its last syllable; Vitré,[8] whose acute accent barred its ancient glass with black wood lozenges; gentle Lamballe, whose whiteness goes from eggshell yellow to pearl gray; Coutances, a Norman cathedral, which its final, fat, yellowing diphthong crowns with a tower of butter; Lannion with the sound, in its village silence, of the coach followed by the fly;[9] Questambert, Pontorson, naive and ridiculous, white feathers and yellow beaks scattered along the road to those poetic river spots; Benodet, a name scarcely moored, which the river seems to want to carry away among its algae; Pont-Aven, a pink-and-white flight of the wing of a lightly poised coif reflected trembling in the greeny waters of a canal; Quimperlé, more firmly attached, ever since the Middle Ages, among the streams about which it babbles as they bead it with a pearly grisaille like that which is sketched, through the spiderwebs of a stained-glass window, by rays of sunlight which have turned into blunted points of burnished silver?

These images were false for another reason also; namely that they were necessarily quite simplified; doubtless whatever it was that my imagination aspired to and that my senses took in only incompletely and without any immediate pleasure, I had enclosed in the sanctuary of a name; doubtless because I had accumulated there a store of dreams, these names now magnetized my desires; but names themselves are not very spacious; the most I could do was include in them two or three of the towns' principal curiosities, which would be juxtaposed there with nothing to connect them; in the name Balbec, as in the magnifying glass of the penholders you buy at a seaside resort, I saw waves rising around a Persian-style church. Perhaps indeed the simplification of these images was one of the reasons for the hold that they had over me. When my father decided, one year, that we would go spend the Easter holidays in Florence and Venice, not having enough room to insert into the name Florence the elements that usually make up a town, I was forced to produce a supernatural city from the fecundation, by certain springtime fragrances, of what I believed to be, in its essence, the spirit of Giotto. At the very most—and because one cannot attach to a name much more time than space—like certain of Giotto's paintings themselves which show us the same figure at two different moments in the action, here lying in his bed, there getting ready to mount his horse, the name Florence was divided into two compartments. In one, under an architectural canopy, I was contemplating a fresco on part of which was superimposed a curtain of morning sunlight, dusty, oblique, and gradually spreading; in the other (for, since I did not think of names as an inaccessible ideal but as a real atmosphere in which I was going to immerse myself, the life not yet lived, the pure and intact life that I enclosed in them gave to the most material pleasures, to the simplest scenes, the attraction they have in the works of the primitives), I was walking quickly—the sooner to reach the lunch that was waiting for me with fruits and wine from Chianti—across a Ponte Vecchio crowded with jonquils, narcissus, and anemones. That (even though I was in Paris) was what I saw, and not what was actually around me. Even from a simple realistic point of view, the countries we long for occupy a far larger place in our actual life, at any given moment, than the country in which we happen to be. Doubtless, had I myself paid more attention at the time to what was in my mind when I pronounced the words "go to Florence, to Parma, to Pisa, to Venice," I would have realized that what I saw was not a town at all, but something as different from anything I knew, something as delightful, as might be, for a human race whose whole life had been spent in the late afternoons of winter, that unknown marvel: a spring morning. These images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling my nights and my days, differentiated this period of my life from those that had gone before it (and might have been confused with it in the eyes of an observer who sees things only from outside, that is to say who sees nothing), as in an opera a melodic motif introduces something new that one could not have suspected if one had only read the libretto, still less if one had remained outside the theater only counting the quarter hours as they passed. And besides, even from this point of view, of mere quantity, in our lives the days are not all equal. As they travel through the days, temperaments that are slightly nervous, as mine was, have available to them, like automobiles, different "speeds." There are arduous mountainous days which one spends an infinite time climbing, and downward-sloping days which one can descend at full tilt singing. During that month—in which I replayed over and over like a melody, without ever becoming sated, those images of Florence, Venice, and Pisa for which the desire they excited in me retained something as profoundly individual as if it had been love, love of a person—I did not cease to believe that they corresponded to a reality independent of me, and they introduced me to a hope as beautiful as that which a Christian of the earliest era might have nourished on the eve of entering Paradise. Thus without my worrying about the contradiction of wanting to look at and touch with the organs of my senses what I had created in a daydream and not perceived with my senses—though all the more tempting to them in consequence, more different from anything they knew—it was whatever reminded me of the reality of these images that most inflamed my desire, because it was a sort of promise that my desire would be gratified. And although the motive for my exhilaration was a desire for artistic delights, the guidebooks sustained it even more than the books on aesthetics and, more than the guidebooks, the railway timetable. What moved me was the thought that if this Florence which I could see near but inaccessible in my imagination was separated from me, in myself, by a tract which I could not cross, I could reach it indirectly, by a detour, by taking the land route. Certainly when I repeated to myself, thus giving such a high value to what I was going to see, that Venice was "the school of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of medieval domestic architecture," [10] I felt happy. Yet I was even happier when, out on an errand and walking quickly because of the weather, which, after a few days of precocious spring, had turned back into winter (like the weather we usually found at Combray in Holy Week)—seeing on the boulevards that the chestnut trees, though plunged in an atmosphere as icy and as liquid as water, were nonetheless beginning, punctual guests, already in formal dress, and not allowing themselves to be discouraged, to chisel out of their frozen masses the round shapes of the irresistible greenery whose steady growth the abortive power of the cold might hinder but could not succeed in restraining—I thought that already the Ponte Vecchio was abundantly strewn with hyacinths and anemones and the spring sunshine was already dyeing the waves of the Grand Canal with so dark an azure and such noble emeralds that when they came to break at the feet of Titian's paintings, they might rival them in richness of color. I could no longer contain my joy when my father, even as he consulted the barometer and deplored the cold, began to seek out which would be the best trains, and when I realized

that by making one's way, after lunch, into the coal-blackened laboratory, the magic chamber charged with working the complete transmutation of everything around it, one could wake the next morning in the city of marble and gold "bossed with jasper and paved with emeralds."[11] So that it and the City of Lilies were not merely fictive pictures which one could set up at will before one's imagination, but existed at a certain distance from Paris that one absolutely had to cross if one wanted to see them, at a certain determined place on the earth, and at no other, in a word were quite real. They became even more so for me, when my father, by saying: "So you could stay in Venice from the twentieth of April until the twenty-ninth and arrive in Florence on Easter morning" made them both emerge no longer merely from abstract Space, but from that imaginary Time in which we situate, not one journey at a time but others simultaneously and without too much emotion since they are only possibilities—that Time which re-creates itself so effectively that we can spend it again in one town after we have spent it in another—and devoted to them some of those particular days which are the certificate of authenticity of the objects on which one employs them, for those unique days are consumed by use, they do not come back, one cannot live them here when one has lived them there; I felt that it was toward the week which began on the Monday when the washerwoman was to bring back the white waistcoat I had covered with ink that the two Queen Cities were heading, to absorb themselves in it as they emerged from that ideal time in which they did not yet exist—those two Queen Cities the domes and towers of which I was soon going to be able, by the most moving kind of geometry, to inscribe on the map of my own life. But I was still merely on the way to the last degree of bliss; I reached it finally (for only then did the revelation come to me that on those wave-splashed streets, reddened by reflections from Giorgione's frescoes,[12] it was not, as I had, despite so many admonitions, continued to imagine, men "majestic and terrible as the sea, bearing armour that gleamed with bronze beneath the folds of their blood-red cloaks"[13] who would be walking through Venice next week, on the eve of Easter, but that I myself might be the minuscule figure, in a large photograph of St. Mark's that had been lent to me, whom the illustrator represented, in a bowler hat, in front of the porches), when I heard my father say: "It must be quite cold, still, on the Grand Canal; you would do well to put your winter overcoat and your heavy jacket in your trunk just in case." At these words I was lifted into a kind of ecstasy; I felt myself to be truly making my way, as I had until then thought impossible, between those "rocks of amethyst like a reef in the Indian Ocean";[14] by a supreme feat of gymnastics beyond my strength, divesting myself, as of a useless carapace, of the air of my bedroom that surrounded me, I replaced it by equal parts of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere as indescribable and particular as the atmosphere of dreams, which my imagination had enclosed in the name of Venice; I felt myself undergoing a miraculous disincarnation; it was immediately accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has come down with a severe sore throat, and they had to put me to bed with a fever so tenacious that the doctor declared they would not only have to give up the idea of allowing me to leave for Florence and Venice now but, even when I was entirely well again, spare me for at least a year any plans for traveling and any cause of excitement.

And also, alas, he forbade them absolutely to allow me to go to the theater to hear La Berma; the sublime artist whom Bergotte had regarded as a genius would have, by introducing me to something that was perhaps as important and as beautiful, consoled me for not having been to Florence and Venice, for not going to Balbec. They had to confine themselves to sending me to the Champs-Élysées every day under the supervision of someone who would keep me from tiring myself out, and that person was Françoise, who had entered our service after the death of my aunt Léonie. To go to the Champs-Élysées was unbearable to me. If only Bergotte had described it in one of his books, I probably would have wanted to get to know it, like all the things whose "double" someone had begun by putting into my imagination. It would warm them, bring them to life, give them a personality, and I would want to find them again in reality; but in this public garden nothing formed a part of my dreams.

One day, because I was bored in our usual spot, next to the merry-go-round, Françoise had taken me on an excursion—beyond the frontier guarded at equal intervals by the little bastions of the barley-sugar sellers—into those neighboring but foreign regions where the faces are unfamiliar, where the goat cart passes: then she had gone back to get her things from her chair, which stood with its back to a clump of laurels; as I waited for her I was pacing the broad lawn, sparse and shorn, yellowed by the sun, at the far end of which a statue stands above the pool, when, from the path, addressing a little girl with reddish hair playing with a shuttlecock in front of the basin, another girl, while putting on her cloak and stowing her racket, shouted to her in a sharp voice: "Good-bye, Gilberte, I'm going home, don't forget we're coming to your house tonight after dinner." The name Gilberte passed close by me, evoking all the more forcefully the existence of the girl it designated in that it did not merely name her, as one speaks of someone who is absent, but addressed her directly; thus it passed close by me, in action so to speak, with a force that increased with the curve of its trajectory and the approach of its target;—transporting along with it, I felt, the knowledge, the notions concerning her to whom it was addressed that belonged not to me, but to the friend who was calling her, everything that, as she uttered it, she saw again or at least possessed in her memory, of their daily companionship, of the visits they paid to each other, of the whole of that unknown existence which was all the more inaccessible and all the more painful to me for being conversely so familiar and so malleable for that happy girl who brushed me with it without my being able to penetrate it and hurled it up in the air in a shout;—letting float in the air the delicious emanation it had released, by touching them so precisely, from several invisible points in the life of Mlle. Swann, from the evening that was to come, such as it might be, after dinner, at her house;—forming, in its celestial passage among the children and the nursemaids, a little cloud of precious color, like that which, billowing over a lovely garden by Poussin,[15] reflects minutely like a cloud in an opera, full of horses and chariots, some manifestation of the life of the gods;—casting, finally, on that bald grass, at the spot where it was at once a patch of withered lawn and a moment in the afternoon of the blond shuttlecock player (who did not stop launching the shuttlecock and catching it again until a governess wearing a blue ostrich feather called her), a marvelous little band the color of heliotrope as impalpable as a reflection and laid down like a carpet over which I did not tire of walking back and forth with lingering, nostalgic, and desecrating steps, while Françoise cried out to me: "Come on now, button up your coat and let's make ourselves scarce," and I noticed for the first time with irritation that she had a vulgar way of speaking, and alas, no blue feather in her hat.

But would she come back to the Champs-Élysées? The next day she was not there; but I saw her there on the following days; I spent all my time circling around the spot where she played with her friends, so that once when they found they were short of players for their game of prisoners' base, she sent to ask if I wanted to make up the number on their side, and after that I played with her each time she was there. But this was not every day; there were days when she was kept from coming by her lessons, by the catechism, a tea, that whole life separate from mine which twice, condensed in the name of Gilberte, I had felt pass so painfully close to me, on the steep path at Combray and on the lawn at the Champs-Élysées. On those days, she would announce in advance that we would not be seeing her; if it was because of her studies, she would say: "It's an awful bore, I won't be able to come tomorrow; you'll all be having fun without me," with a sorrowful air that consoled me a little; but when she was invited to a party and I, not knowing, asked her if she would be coming out to play, she would answer: "I should certainly hope not! I certainly hope Mama will let me go to my friend's." At least on those days, I knew I would not see her, whereas other times, it was quite unexpectedly that her mother would take her shopping, and the next day she would say: "Oh yes! I went out with Mama," as though it were a natural thing and not, for someone else, the greatest possible misfortune. There were also the days of bad weather when her governess, who herself could not endure the rain, did not want to take her to the Champs-Élysées.

And so if the sky was dubious, from early in the morning I would question it constantly, taking every omen into account. If I saw the lady opposite, near the window, putting on her hat, I would say to myself: "That lady is going to go out; so it's the sort of weather one can go out in: why wouldn't Gilberte do the same as that lady?" But the weather would darken, my mother would say it could lift again, that a ray of sunlight would be enough, but that more probably it would rain; and if it rained what was the good of going to the Champs-Élysées? And so from lunch on my anxious eyes never left the unsettled, cloudy sky. It remained dark. Before the window, the balcony was gray. Suddenly, on its gloomy stone I did not see a color that was less dull, but I felt a sort of effort toward a color less dull, the pulsation of a hesitant ray that wished to discharge its light. A moment later, the balcony was as pale and reflective as a pool at dawn, and a thousand reflections of its ironwork lattice had alighted on it. A breath of wind dispersed them, the stone had darkened again, but, as though tamed, they returned; it began imperceptibly to whiten again and, in one of those continuous crescendos like those which, in music, at the end of an overture, carry a single note to the highest fortissimo by making it pass rapidly through all the intermediary degrees, I saw it reach that fixed, unalterable gold of fine days, against which the cutout shadow of the elaborate support of the balustrade stood out in black like a whimsical vegetation, with a delicacy in the delineation of its slightest details that seemed to betray a painstaking consciousness, an artistic satisfaction, and with such sharp relief, such velvet in the restfulness of its dark and happy masses that in truth those broad and leafy reflections resting on that lake of sun seemed to know they were pledges of calm and happiness.

Instantaneous ivy, fleeting wall flora! The least colorful, the saddest, in the opinion of many, of those that clamber over the wall or decorate the casement; for me, the dearest of them all since the day it appeared on our balcony, like the very shadow of the presence of Gilberte, who was perhaps already in the Champs-

Élysées and, as soon as I arrived there, would say to me: “Let’s start playing prisoners’ base right away, you’re on my side”; fragile, carried off by a breath, but also in harmony, not with the season, but with the hour; a promise of the immediate happiness which the day will deny or fulfill, and thereby of the highest sort of immediate happiness, the happiness of love; softer, warmer on the stone even than moss; hardy, for it needs only a ray of light to come into being and blossom into joy, even in the heart of winter.

And even on those days when all other vegetation has disappeared, when the handsome green leather that wraps the trunks of the old trees is hidden under snow, when the snow had stopped falling, but the weather was still too overcast to hope that Gilberte would go out, then suddenly, making my mother say: “Well now, it’s actually nice out, perhaps you might try going to the Champs-Élysées after all,” on the mantle of snow that covered the balcony the sun that had appeared was weaving gold threads together and embroidering black glimmers. That day we found no one, or one solitary girl about to leave, who assured me that Gilberte was not coming. The chairs, deserted by the imposing but chilly assembly of governesses, were empty. Alone, near the lawn, sat a lady of a certain age who came in all weathers, always dressed in the same clothing, magnificent and dark, to make whose acquaintance I would at that time have sacrificed, had the exchange been allowed me, all the greatest future advantages of my life. For Gilberte went up to greet her every day; she asked Gilberte for news of “her love of a mother”; and it seemed to me that, had I known her, I would have been someone quite different for Gilberte, someone who knew her parents’ friends. While her grandchildren played farther off, she always read *Les Débats,*[16] which she called “my old *Débats,*” and with an aristocratic affection would say, when speaking of the policeman or the woman who rented the chairs:[17] “my old friend the policeman,” “the chair warden and I who are old friends.”

Françoise was too cold to sit still; we walked to the pont de la Concorde to see the frozen Seine, which everyone including the children approached without fear as though it were a beached whale, immense, defenseless and about to be cut up. We returned to the Champs-Élysées; I was growing sick with misery between the motionless merry-go-round and the white lawn caught in the black web of paths from which the snow had been cleared and above which the statue had in its hand an added jet of ice which seemed to explain its gesture. Even the old lady, after folding her *Débats,* asked a passing nanny what time it was and thanked her by saying: “How kind of you!” then begged the man tending the paths to tell her grandchildren to come back, because she was cold, adding: “You are infinitely good. I am overwhelmed!” Suddenly the air was torn apart: between the puppet theater and the circus, on the clearing horizon, against the opening sky, I had just spied, as though it were a fabulous sign, Mademoiselle’s blue feather. And already Gilberte was running as fast as possible in my direction, sparkling and red under a square fur hat, animated by the cold, the lateness, and her desire to play; a little before reaching me, she let herself slide along the ice, and either to help keep her balance, or because she thought it more graceful, or pretending to move like a skater, her arms opened wide as she came forward smiling, as if she wanted to take me into them. “Brava! Brava! That was very good. I would say, as you do, that it was champion, first-rate, if I were not from another age, if I did not belong to the Ancien Régime,” cried the old lady, speaking on behalf of the silent Champs-Élysées to thank Gilberte for having come without letting herself be intimidated by the weather. “You’re like me, faithful to our old Champs-Élysées despite everything; we’re two brave souls, you and I. I tell you I love it, even this way. This snow—you’ll laugh at me—reminds me of ermine!” And the old lady began to laugh.

The first of these days—to which the snow, image of the forces that could stop me from seeing Gilberte, imparted the sadness of a day of separation and even the aspect of a day of departure because it changed the appearance and almost prevented the use of the customary site of our only encounters, now changed, all wrapped in dustcovers—this day, however, caused my love to progress, for it was like a first sorrow that she had shared with me. There were only the two of us out of all our gang, and to be thus the only one there with her was not only like a beginning of intimacy, but also on her part—as though she had come out only for me, in such weather—it seemed to me as touching as if on one of those days when she was invited to a party she had given it up to come to find me in the Champs-Élysées; I gained more confidence in the vitality and the future of our friendship, which remained hardy in the midst of the numbness, loneliness, and ruin of the things around us; and while she put snowballs down my neck, I smiled with emotion at what seemed to me both a preference she was showing me by tolerating me as her traveling companion in this new and wintry land, and also a sort of loyalty she was cherishing for me in the midst of misfortune. Soon one after the other, like hesitant sparrows, her friends arrived all black against the snow. We began to play, and since this day so sadly begun was to end in joy, when I went up, before playing prisoners’ base, to the friend with the sharp voice whom I had heard the first day shouting the name Gilberte, she said to me: “No, no, we know perfectly well you’d rather be on Gilberte’s side, besides look, she’s signaling to you.” She was indeed calling me over to join her camp on the snowy lawn, which the sun, giving it glimmers of pink, the metallic worn surface of an old brocade, was turning into a Field of the Cloth of Gold.[18]

That day which I had so dreaded was, in fact, one of the only ones on which I was not too unhappy.

For, although I no longer thought, now, of anything else but of not allowing a single day to pass without seeing Gilberte (so much so that once when my grandmother had not returned by dinnertime, I could not help saying to myself immediately that if she had been run over by a carriage, I would not be able to go to the Champs-Élysées for a long time; we no longer love anyone else when we are in love), yet those moments when I was with her and which since the day before I had been awaiting so impatiently, for which I had trembled, for which I would have sacrificed everything else, were in no way happy moments; and I knew it very well for they were the only moments in my life on which I concentrated a meticulous, fierce attention, and that attention did not discover in them one atom of pleasure.

All the time I was away from Gilberte, I needed to see her because, constantly trying to form a picture of her for myself, in the end I could not do it, and no longer knew precisely to what my love corresponded. And then she had never yet told me she loved me. Quite the contrary, she had often claimed there were boys she liked better than me, that I was a good enough friend she was always willing to play with, though too distracted, not involved enough in the game; finally, she had often given me apparent signs of coldness that might have shaken my belief that for her I was someone different from the others, if the source of that belief had been the love Gilberte might feel for me, and not, as was the case, the love I felt for her, which rendered it far more resistant, since this made it depend entirely on the manner in which I was obliged, by an inner necessity, to think of Gilberte. But the feelings I had for her, I myself had not yet declared to her. Certainly, on every page of my notebooks I copied out her name and address endlessly, but at the sight of those indeterminate lines which I wrote without inducing her to think any more about me because of that, which made her take up so much apparent space around me without being any more involved in my life, I felt discouraged because they spoke to me not of Gilberte, who would not even see them, but of my own desire, which they seemed to show me as something purely personal, unreal, tedious, and impotent. The most urgent thing was that we should see each other, Gilberte and I, and that we should be able to make a reciprocal avowal of our love, which until then would not so to speak have begun. No doubt the various reasons that made me so impatient to see her would have been less imperious for a grown man. When we are older, more skilled in the cultivation of our pleasures, we are sometimes content with the enjoyment of thinking about a woman as I thought about Gilberte, without worrying about whether that image corresponds to the reality, and also with the pleasure of loving her without needing to be certain that she loves us; or we forgo the pleasure of confessing our warm feelings for her, in order to encourage the hardiness of hers for us, imitating those Japanese gardeners who, to obtain one lovelier flower, sacrifice several others. But during the period when I loved Gilberte, I still believed that Love really existed outside of us; that, allowing us at the very most to remove obstacles in our way, it offered its joys in an order which we were not free to alter; it seemed to me that if I had, on my own initiative, substituted for the sweetness of confession the simulation of indifference, I would not only have deprived myself of one of the joys of which I had dreamed most often but that I would have fabricated for myself in my own way a love that was artificial and without value, without any connection to the real one, whose mysterious and preexisting paths I would have had to forgo following.

But when I reached the Champs-Élysées—and when, before anything else, I would be able to confront my love, so as to subject it to the necessary corrections, with its living cause, independent of me—as soon as I was in the presence of that Gilberte Swann on the sight of whom I had counted to refresh the images that my tired memory could no longer recapture, of that Gilberte Swann with whom I had played yesterday, and whom I had just been moved to greet and recognize by a blind instinct like that which, when we are walking, sets one of our feet in front of the other before we have had time to think, immediately it was as if she and the little girl who was the object of my dreams had been two different creatures. For example if, since the day before, I had been carrying in my memory two blazing eyes in full and shining cheeks, Gilberte’s face now presented me insistently with something that quite specifically I had not recalled, a certain sharp tapering of the nose, which, instantaneously associating itself with certain other features, assumed the importance of those characteristics which in natural history define a whole species, and transmuted her into a little girl of the type that have pointed snouts. While I was preparing to take advantage of this longed-for moment in order to devote myself to submitting the image of Gilberte which I had prepared before coming, and which I could no longer find again in my mind, to an amendment that would allow me, in the long hours when I was alone, to be sure it was truly she whom I was recalling, that it was truly my love for her that I

was augmenting little by little like a book as it is being written, she would pass me a ball; and, like the idealist philosopher whose body makes allowances for the external world in the reality of which his intelligence does not believe, the same self who had made me greet her before I identified her, hastened to make me take the ball she was holding out to me (as if she were a friend with whom I had come here to play, and not a sister soul with whom I had come to be united), made me exchange with her, for the sake of decorum, until the hour when she went off, a thousand friendly and meaningless remarks and thus kept me both from preserving a silence during which I could at last have laid hands once more on the urgent truant image and from uttering the words that might have brought about the decisive progress in our love, the hope of which I was obliged each time to postpone until the following afternoon. It did, however, make some progress. One day when we had gone off with Gilberte to the booth of the vendor who was particularly nice to us—for it was to her that M. Swann sent for his spice cake,[19] and for health reasons, he consumed a great deal of it, suffering from ethnic eczema and the Prophets' constipation—Gilberte showed me with a smile two little boys who were like the little artist and the little naturalist in children's storybooks. For one of them did not want a stick of red barley sugar because he preferred violet, and the other, tears in his eyes, was refusing the plum his nanny wanted to buy for him because, he finally said with passion: "I like the other plum better, because it has a worm!" I bought two one-sou marbles. I gazed with admiration at the agates, luminous and captive in their separate wooden bowl, precious in my eyes because they were as blond and beaming as young girls and because they cost fifty centimes apiece. Gilberte, who was given a great deal more money than I was, asked me which I thought was the most beautiful. They had the molten transparency of life itself. I did not want to make her sacrifice a single one of them. I would have liked her to be able to buy them, liberate them, all. Yet I pointed to one which was the same color as her eyes. Gilberte took it, looked for its golden ray of light, stroked it, paid its ransom, but immediately handed her captive over to me saying: "Here, it's for you, I'm giving it to you, keep it as a souvenir."

Another time, still preoccupied by the desire to hear La Berma in a classical play, I had asked her if she happened to own a little book in which Bergotte talked about Racine, and which one could no longer find. She had asked me to remind her of its exact title and that evening I had addressed an express letter to her, writing on the envelope that name, Gilberte Swann, which I had so often copied out in my notebooks. The next day she brought me a packet tied up in mauve ribbons and sealed with white wax containing the little book, which she had asked someone to find for her. "You see? It really is the one you asked for," she said, taking from her muff the letter I had sent her. But on the address of this *pneumatique*[20]—which, only yesterday, was nothing, was merely a *petit bleu* which I had written, and which, now that a telegraph boy had delivered it to Gilberte's concierge and a servant had carried it to her room, had become this priceless thing, one of the *petits bleus* she had received that day—it was hard for me to recognize the insignificant, solitary lines of my handwriting under the printed circles apposed to it by the post office, under the inscriptions added in pencil by one of the telegraph messengers, signs of actual realization, stamps from the outside world, violet bands symbolizing life, which for the first time came to espouse, sustain, uplift, delight my dream.

And there was also one day when she said to me: "You know, you can call me Gilberte, I'm going to call you by your first name anyway. It's too tiresome otherwise." Yet for a while she went on simply calling me *vous*[21] and when I pointed this out to her, she smiled, and composing, constructing a sentence like the ones in grammar books of foreign languages whose only aim is to make us use a new word, she ended it with my given name. And remembering later what I had felt then, I could distinguish within it the impression that I had been held for a moment in her mouth, I myself, naked, without any of the social terms and conditions that also belonged, either to her other friends, or, when she said my family name, to my parents, and of which her lips—in the effort she made, rather like her father, to articulate the words she wanted to emphasize—seemed to strip me, undress me, as one removes the skin from a fruit of which only the pulp can be eaten, while her gaze, adopting the same new degree of intimacy as her words, reached me more directly also, while at the same time showing its awareness of this, its pleasure and even its gratitude, by accompanying itself with a smile.

But in the moment itself, I could not appreciate the value of these new pleasures. They were given, not by the little girl I loved, to me who loved her, but by the other, the one I played with, to my other self who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the inalienable heart which alone could have known the price of such a happiness, because it alone had desired it. Even after returning home I did not savor them, for, each day, the same need which made me hope that the next day I would be able to enjoy a clear, calm, happy contemplation of Gilberte, that she would at last confess her love for me, explaining why she had to hide it from me until now, also forced me to regard the past as nothing, to look ahead of me only, to consider the small attentions she had shown me not in themselves and as if they were enough, but as new rungs on which to set my foot, new rungs which would permit me to take another step up and at last attain the happiness I had not yet found.

If she gave me these signs of friendliness from time to time, she also hurt me by seeming not to be pleased to see me, and this often happened on the very days I had most counted on for the realization of my hopes. I was sure that Gilberte would come to the Champs-Élysées and I felt an elation that seemed to me only the vague anticipation of a great happiness when—entering the drawing room first thing in the morning to kiss Mama, who was already dressed to go out, the tower of her black hair fully constructed, and her lovely plump white hands still smelling of soap—I learned, seeing a column of dust standing by itself above the piano and hearing a barrel organ playing "En Revenant de la Revue"[22] under the window, that until nightfall winter would be receiving the unexpected and radiant visit of a day of spring. While we were eating lunch, the lady opposite, by opening her casement, had sent flying in the blink of an eye, from next to my chair—streaking the entire width of our dining room in a single bound—a beam of light that had settled there for its afternoon rest and returned to continue it a moment later. At school, during the one o'clock class,[23] the sun made me languish with impatience and boredom by trailing a glimmer of gold over my desk, like an invitation to a party I would not be able to attend before three o'clock, the hour when Françoise came to pick me up at the school gate and we made our way toward the Champs-Élysées through streets decorated with light, choked with crowds, where the balconies, unsealed by the sun and vaporous, floated before the houses like clouds of gold. Alas, in the Champs-Élysées I did not see Gilberte, she had not arrived yet. Motionless on the lawn fed by the invisible sun which here and there ignited the tip of a stalk of grass, while the pigeons that had landed on it looked like ancient sculptures which the gardener's pick had brought back up to the surface of the venerable soil, I stood with my eyes fixed on the horizon, expecting at any moment to see the image of Gilberte following her governess appear behind the statue, which seemed to hold out the child it was carrying, streaming with rays of light, to the benediction of the sun. The old lady who read *Les Débats* was sitting in her seat, still in the same spot; she hailed a park keeper, to whom she made a friendly gesture with her hand, calling out to him: "What fine weather!" And when the chair attendant approached to collect the price of the seat, she smirked and simpered as she put the ten-centime ticket away in the opening of her glove, as if it were a bouquet for which she was seeking, out of kindness toward the giver, the most flattering place possible. When she had found it, she performed a circular motion with her neck, straightened her boa, and fastened upon the attendant, showing her the bit of yellow paper sticking out over her wrist, the beautiful smile with which a woman, showing her bodice to a young man, says to him: "Recognize your roses?"

I led Françoise out as far as the Arc de Triomphe hoping to meet Gilberte, we did not find her, and I was returning to the lawn convinced that now she would not be coming, when, in front of the merry-go-round, the little girl with the sharp voice flung herself at me: "Quick, quick, Gilberte's already been here for a quarter of an hour. She's going soon. We were waiting for you to make up a game of prisoners' base." While I was going up the avenue des Champs-Élysées, Gilberte had come by way of the rue Boissy-d'Anglas, Mademoiselle having taken advantage of the fine weather to do some shopping for her; and M. Swann was coming to pick up his daughter. So it was my fault; I should not have left the lawn; for one never knew for certain which way Gilberte would come, if it would be later or earlier, and in the end this waiting caused me to be more deeply moved, not only by the whole of the Champs-Élysées and the entire extent of the afternoon, a sort of immense expanse of space and time at each point and at each moment of which it was possible that Gilberte's image would appear, but even by that image itself, because behind that image I felt there lay concealed the reason why it had been fired into my heart at four o'clock instead of two-thirty, topped by a hat for paying calls rather than a beret for playing, in front of the "Ambassadeurs"[24] and not between the two puppet theaters, I could divine one of those occupations in which I could not follow Gilberte and which forced her to go out or stay at home, I touched the mystery of her unknown life. It was this mystery, too, that disturbed me when, running on orders from the little girl with the sharp voice to begin our game of prisoners' base right away, I saw Gilberte, so brusque and lively with us, curtsying to the lady with *Les Débats* (who was saying to her: "What lovely sunshine, it's like a burning fire"), talking to her with a shy smile, with a formal air which called to my mind the different young girl that Gilberte must be at home with her parents, with the friends of her parents, when paying calls, in the whole of her other existence which eluded me. But of that existence no one gave me so strong an impression as did M. Swann, who came a little later to find his daughter. For he and Mme. Swann—because their daughter lived in their home, because her studies, her games, her friendships depended on them—contained for me, like Gilberte, perhaps even more than Gilberte, as was proper for gods all-powerful with respect to her, in whom it must have had its

source, an inaccessible strangeness, a painful charm. Everything that concerned them was the object of a preoccupation so constant on my part that on the days when, as on these, M. Swann (whom I had seen so often in the past without his having aroused my curiosity, when he was on friendly terms with my parents) came to pick Gilberte up in the Champs-Élysées, once the pounding of my heart that had been excited by the appearance of his gray hat and traveling cape had subsided, his appearance still impressed me like that of a historical character about whom we have just been reading a series of books and whose least peculiarities impassion us. His relations with the Comte de Paris, which, when I heard them discussed at Combray, had left me indifferent, now assumed for me something wonderful, as if no one else had ever known the Orléans; they caused him to stand out vividly against the vulgar background of people of different classes out for a walk who were crowding that path of the Champs-Élysées, and in the midst of whom I admired his consenting to appear without demanding of them any special consideration, which none of them dreamed of giving him anyway, so profound was the incognito in which he was wrapped.

He responded politely to the greetings of Gilberte's friends, even to mine although he had quarreled with my family, but without appearing to know me. (This reminded me that he had, however, seen me quite often in the country; a memory I had retained, but somewhere in a dim place, because ever since I had seen Gilberte again, for me Swann was preeminently her father, and no longer Swann of Combray; as the ideas with which I now linked his name were different from the ideas which had once formed the network in which it was included and which I no longer ever used when I wanted to think about him, he had become a new person; I did attach him, however, by an artificial, secondary, and transversal line to our guest of earlier times; and since nothing had any value for me anymore except to the extent that my love could profit from it, it was with a burst of shame and regret at not being able to erase them that I returned to the years when, in the eyes of this same Swann who was at this moment before me in the Champs-Élysées and to whom, happily, Gilberte had perhaps not mentioned my name, I had so often in the evenings made myself ridiculous by sending word asking Mama to come up to my room and say goodnight to me, while she was having coffee with him, my father, and my grandparents at the table in the garden.) He told Gilberte he would let her play one game, that he could wait a quarter of an hour, and sitting down like anyone else on an iron chair, paid for his ticket with the same hand which Philippe VII[25] had so often held in his own, while we began playing on the lawn, putting to flight the pigeons whose beautiful heart-shaped iridescent bodies, like the lilacs of the bird kingdom, went to seek refuge as though in so many sanctuaries, one on the large stone vase to which its beak, by disappearing into it, imparted the gesture, and assigned the purpose, of offering in abundance the fruits or seeds which the bird seemed to be pecking from it, another on the forehead of the statue, which it seemed to crown with one of those enameled objects whose polychrome varies the monotony of the stone in certain ancient works of art, and with an attribute which, when the goddess carries it, earns her a particular epithet, and makes her, as does for a mortal woman a different first name, a new divinity.

On one of those sunny days that had not fulfilled my hopes, I did not have the courage to hide my disappointment from Gilberte.

"I had so many things to ask you," I said to her. "I thought that today was going to mean such a lot to our friendship. And as soon as you get here, you have to leave again! Try to come early tomorrow, so I can finally talk to you."

Her face shone and she was jumping with joy as she answered me:

"Tomorrow, you may depend upon it, my dear friend, I won't be coming at all! I've got a big tea party; nor the day after tomorrow, either, I'm going to a friend's house to watch the arrival of King Theodosius [26] from her windows, it will be splendid, and then the day after we're going to *Michel Strogoff*[27] and then after that, Christmas will be coming soon and the New Year's holidays. Maybe they'll take me to the Midi.[28] How nice that would be! Though it will mean I won't have a Christmas tree; anyway, if I stay in Paris, I won't be coming here because I'll be paying calls with Mama. Good-bye, there's Papa, he's calling me."

I returned home with Françoise through streets that were still bedecked with sunlight, as on the evening of a holiday that is over. I could scarcely drag my legs along.

"It's not a bit surprising," said Françoise. "This weather is not right for the time of the year, it's far too hot. Alas! My Lord, think of all the folk around and about that must be ill today. It makes one think that things are all awry in the heavens above, as well!"

I repeated to myself, stifling my sobs, the words in which Gilberte had exploded with joy at the prospect of not coming back to the Champs-Élysées for such a long time. But already the charm with which, by the mere act of thinking, my mind was filled as soon as I thought about her, and the special, unique position—painful though it was—in which I was inevitably placed in relation to Gilberte by the internal constraint of a mental habit had begun to add, even to this sign of indifference, something romantic, and in the midst of my tears a smile formed that was simply the timid adumbration of a kiss. And when it was time for the mail to come, I said to myself that evening as on every evening: "I'm going to get a letter from Gilberte, she's going to tell me at last that she has always loved me, and explain the mysterious reason why she has been forced to hide it from me until now, to pretend she could be happy without seeing me, the reason why she has disguised herself as the other Gilberte who is merely a playmate."

Every evening I liked to imagine this letter, I would believe I was reading it, I would recite each sentence of it to myself. All of a sudden I stopped in alarm. I realized that if I were to receive a letter from Gilberte, it could not be that one anyway since I was the one who had just written it. And from then on, I forced myself to turn my thoughts away from the words I would have liked her to write to me, for fear that by articulating them, I would exclude precisely those—the dearest, the most desired—from the field of all possible compositions. Even if through an improbable coincidence it had been precisely the letter that I had invented that Gilberte on her own account addressed to me, recognizing my work in it I would not have had the impression of receiving something that did not come from me, something real, new, a happiness external to my mind, independent of my will, truly given by love.

Meanwhile I reread a page which had not been written to me by Gilberte, but which at least came to me from her, that page by Bergotte on the beauty of the old myths that inspired Racine, and which, next to the agate marble, I kept near me always. I was moved by the goodness of my friend who had had someone find it for me; and because everyone needs to discover reasons for his passion, so much so that he is happy to recognize in the person he loves qualities which literature or conversation have taught him are among those worthy of inspiring love, so much so that he assimilates them by imitation and makes them new reasons for his love, even if these qualities were the most diametrically opposed to those his love would have sought so long as it remained spontaneous—as Swann had done once upon a time, with the aesthetic nature of Odette's beauty—I, who had at first loved Gilberte, back in Combray, because of all that was unknown about her life, into which I would have liked to hurl myself, become incarnated, abandoning my own life which was no longer anything to me, I now thought, as of an inestimable advantage, that of this life of mine, too well known, disdained, Gilberte might one day become the humble servant, the companionable and comfortable collaborator who in the evening, helping me in my work, would compare and collate pamphlets for me. As for Bergotte, that infinitely wise and almost divine old man because of whom I had first loved Gilberte, even before I saw her, now it was above all because of Gilberte that I loved him. With as much pleasure as the pages he had written on Racine, I looked at the paper closed with great seals of white wax and tied with a cascade of mauve ribbons in which she had brought them to me. I kissed the agate marble which was the best part of my friend's heart, the part that was not frivolous, but faithful, and which even though adorned with the mysterious charm of Gilberte's life remained close to me, lived in my bedroom, slept in my bed. But as for the beauty of that stone, and the beauty also of those pages by Bergotte, which I was so pleased to associate with the idea of my love for Gilberte, as if in the moments when that love appeared to me to be nothing at all they gave it a sort of substance, I saw that they were anterior to that love, that they did not resemble it, that their elements had been determined by talent or by the laws of mineralogy before Gilberte knew me, that nothing in the book or in the stone would have been different if Gilberte had not loved me and that consequently nothing entitled me to read in them a message of happiness. And while my love, ceaselessly expecting from the next day an avowal of Gilberte's love, annulled and undid each evening the badly done work of the day, in the darkness inside me an unknown seamstress did not leave the pulled threads in the scrap heap but arranged them, with no concern for pleasing me or working for my happiness, in the different order to which she gave all her work. Showing no particular interest in my love, nor beginning by deciding that I was indeed loved, she gathered up those of Gilberte's actions which had seemed inexplicable to me, along with her faults, which I had excused. Then the first and the second acquired a meaning. It seemed to say, this new order, that when I saw that Gilberte, instead of coming to the Champs-Élysées, attended a party, went shopping with her governess, and prepared to be away over the New Year's holidays, I was wrong to think: "It's because she's frivolous or submissive." For she would have ceased to be either if she had loved me, and if she had been forced to obey it would have been with the same despair that I felt on the days when I did not see her. It told me further, this new order, that I must after all know what it was to love since I loved Gilberte; it pointed out to me the perpetual concern I felt to show myself to advantage in her eyes, because of which I tried to persuade my mother to buy Françoise a waterproof coat and a hat with a blue ostrich feather, or better still not to continue sending me to the Champs-Élysées with that maid who made me blush (to which my mother answered that I was unfair to Françoise, that she was a good woman and devoted to us), and also that

exclusive need to see Gilberte because of which months in advance I thought only of trying to learn at what time of the year she would be leaving Paris and where she would be going, finding even the most pleasant countryside a place of exile if she was not going to be there, and wanting only to stay in Paris all the time as long as I could see her at the Champs-Élysées; and it had no difficulty showing me that I would not find that concern, or that need, behind Gilberte's actions. She on the contrary appreciated her governess, without worrying about what I thought of her. She found it natural not to come to the Champs-Élysées, if she was going to make some purchases with Mademoiselle, pleasant if she was going out with her mother. And even supposing she would have allowed me to spend the holidays in the same place as she, at least in choosing that place she considered her parents' desires, the thousand amusements she had heard about, and not in the least that this was the place where my family was intending to send me. When she assured me from time to time that she liked me less than one of her other friends, less than she had liked me the day before because I had made her lose the game through my carelessness, I would ask her to forgive me, I would ask her what I should do so that she would begin to like me again as much as the others, so that she would like me more than them; I wanted her to tell me that it was already done, I begged her for it as if she could change her affection for me as she wished, as I wished, in order to please me, merely by the words that she would say, depending on my good or my bad behavior. Did I not know, then, that what I myself felt, for her, depended neither on her actions nor on my own will?

And, finally, this new order designed by the invisible seamstress showed me that if we may wish that the actions of a person who has hurt us up to now were not sincere, they are followed by a clarity against which our wishes are powerless and to which, rather than to them, we must address ourselves in asking what that person's actions will be tomorrow.

These new words were heard by my love; they persuaded it that the next day would not be different from what all the other days had been; that Gilberte's feeling for me, already too old to be able to change, was indifference; that in my friendship with Gilberte, I was the only one who loved. "It's true," my love answered, "there's nothing more to be done with this friendship, it won't change." And so, the very next day (or waiting for a public holiday if there was one coming up soon, or an anniversary, or the New Year perhaps, one of those days which are not like the others, when time makes a fresh start by rejecting the heritage of the past, by not accepting the legacy of its sorrows) I would ask Gilberte to give up our old friendship and lay the foundations of a new one.

I always had within reach of my hand a map of Paris which, because one could distinguish on it the street where M. and Mme. Swann lived, seemed to me to contain a treasure. And for pleasure, out of a sort of chivalrous loyalty also, apropos of anything at all, I would say the name of that street, until my father would ask, not being, as were my mother and grandmother, fully informed about my love:

"Now why do you talk about that street all the time, there's nothing extraordinary about it, it's a very pleasant street to live on because it's two steps from the Bois, but there are ten others quite like it."

I contrived at every turn to make my parents say the name Swann; of course I repeated it to myself in my own mind incessantly; but I also needed to hear the delicious sound of it and to have someone else play me this music the silent reading of which was not enough. The name Swann, which I had known for such a long time, was for me also, now, as happens for certain aphasics with the most everyday words, a new name. It was always present in my mind and yet my mind could not grow accustomed to it. I took it apart, I spelled it, its orthography was a surprise to me. And at the same time that it had ceased to be familiar, it had ceased to appear innocent. The joy I felt at hearing it I believed was so guilty that it seemed to me others guessed my thoughts and changed the conversation if I tried to lead it there. I resorted to subjects that still touched upon Gilberte, I recited the same words endlessly, and although I knew they were only words—words spoken far away from her, which she could not hear, words without potency that repeated what was, but could not modify it—yet it seemed to me that by dint of thus feeling, handling everything that touched Gilberte I would perhaps make something happy emerge from it. I told my parents again that Gilberte liked her governess very much, as if that proposition enunciated for the hundredth time were at last going to result in the sudden entrance of Gilberte, coming to live with us forever. I resumed my praise of the old lady who read *Les Débats* (I had hinted to my parents that she was an ambassadress or perhaps a royal highness) and I continued to celebrate her beauty, her magnificence, her nobility, until the day I said that from what I had heard Gilberte call her, her name must be Mme. Blatin.

"Oh, now I know who she is!" exclaimed my mother while I felt myself blushing from shame. "On guard! On guard! as your poor grandfather would have said. So she's the one you find so beautiful! Why, she's horrible and always has been. She's the widow of an usher. You don't remember when you were little the lengths I went to to avoid her at the gymnastics class where, though she didn't know me, she would come up to me and try to talk with the excuse of wanting to tell me you were 'too nice looking for a boy.' She always had a mania for getting to know people and she must indeed be rather mad as I always thought, if she really knows Mme. Swann. For though her background is quite common, at least there was never anything said against her so far as I know. But she always had to cultivate a new acquaintance. She's horrible, frightfully vulgar, and a troublemaker into the bargain."

As for Swann, in order to try to resemble him, I would spend all my time at the table pulling on my nose and rubbing my eyes. My father would say: "The child has no sense, he'll make himself quite hideous." I would especially have liked to be as bald as Swann. He seemed to me a person so extraordinary that I found it amazing that people I knew actually knew him too and that the chance events of an ordinary day might bring one face-to-face with him. And one time, my mother, in the course of telling us, as she did every evening at dinner, about the errands she had run that afternoon, merely by saying: "Speaking of which, guess who I ran into in Trois Quartiers,[29] at the umbrella counter: Swann," caused the center of her story, so very dry for me, to blossom with a mysterious flower. What a delectable melancholy pleasure, to learn that that very afternoon, profiling his supernatural form against the crowd, Swann had gone to buy an umbrella! Among the great and tiny events, equally unimportant, this one alone awoke in me those peculiar vibrations by which my love for Gilberte was perpetually stirred. My father said I was not interested in anything because I did not listen when they talked about the political consequences that might follow from the visit of King Theodosius, at this moment the guest of France and, it was claimed, its ally. But how keenly, on the other hand, I wanted to know if Swann was wearing his traveling cape!

"Did you say hello to each other?" I asked.

"Why, naturally," answered my mother, who always seemed to be afraid that, were she to admit there was any coolness between them and Swann, people would have tried to bring about a reconciliation closer than she wished, because of Mme. Swann, whom she did not want to know. "It was he who came up and spoke to me, I didn't see him."

"Then you haven't quarreled?"

"Quarreled? Now what makes you think we might have quarreled?" she answered briskly, as if I had assaulted the fiction of her good relations with Swann and tried to effect a "rapprochement."

"He might be cross with you for not inviting him anymore."

"One isn't obliged to invite everyone; does he invite me? I don't know his wife."

"But at Combray he used to come."

"Well, yes! He came at Combray, and now in Paris he has other things to do and so have I. But I promise you we didn't look in the least like two people who had quarreled. We stood there together for a moment because they hadn't yet brought him his parcel. He asked after you, he told me you played with his daughter," added my mother, stunning me with the prodigious fact that I existed in Swann's mind, even more, that I existed there in so complete a manner that, when I trembled with love there before him in the Champs-Élysées, he knew my name, who my mother was, and could amalgamate around my qualifications as playmate of his daughter certain facts about my grandparents, their family, the place where we lived, certain details of our past life which were perhaps unknown even to me. But my mother did not seem to have found any particular charm in that counter at Trois Quartiers where she had represented for Swann, at the moment when he saw her, a definite person with whom he had memories in common that had inspired the impulse to approach her, the gesture of greeting her.

Nor did she or my father either seem to find, in talking about Swann's grandparents, about the title of honorary stockbroker, a pleasure that surpassed all others. My imagination had singled out and sanctified one particular family from within the social Paris just as it had from within the Paris of stone one particular house whose carriage entrance it had sculpted and whose windows it had made precious. But I was the only one who could see these ornaments. In the same way that my father and mother regarded the house that Swann lived in as similar to the other houses built at the same time in the neighborhood of the Bois, so Swann's family seemed to them of the same sort as many other families of stockbrokers. They judged it more favorably or less depending on the degree to which

it shared in merits common to the rest of the universe and did not see in it anything unique. On the contrary, what they appreciated in it they encountered to an equal, or higher, degree elsewhere. And so, after having agreed that the house was well situated, they would talk about another that was better situated, but that had nothing to do with Gilberte, or about financiers a cut above her grandfather; and if they had seemed for a moment to be of the same opinion as me, it was because of a misunderstanding that would soon be dispelled. For, in order to perceive in everything that surrounded Gilberte an indefinable quality analogous in the world of emotions to what infrared may be in the world of colors, my parents would have needed that supplementary and ephemeral sense with which I had been endowed by love.

On the days when Gilberte had let me know she would not be coming to the Champs-Élysées, I would try to go for a walk that brought me a little closer to her. Sometimes I would lead Françoise on a pilgrimage before the house where the Swanns lived. I would make her repeat endlessly what, through the governess, she had learned relating to Mme. Swann. "It seems she puts a good deal of trust in her medals. You won't find her going off on a trip if she's heard an owl hooting, or something ticking like a clock inside the wall, or if she's seen a cat at midnight, or if the wood furniture creaks. Oh, yes! She's a person of great faith!" I was so in love with Gilberte that if, along the way, I saw their old butler walking a dog, my emotion would force me to stop, I would stare at his white whiskers with eyes full of passion. Françoise would say:

"What's wrong with you?"

Then we would continue on our way until we reached their carriage entrance, where a concierge different from any other concierge, and steeped even to the braid of his livery in the same painful charm I had felt in the name Gilberte, seemed to know that I was one of those people whom a primordial unworthiness would prohibit forever from penetrating into the mysterious life that he was charged with guarding and on which the windows of the entresol seemed conscious of being closed, resembling far less, between the stately fall of their muslin curtains, any other windows than they did Gilberte's own eyes. At other times, we would go down the boulevards and I would take up a position at the corner of the rue Duphot; I had been told that here one could often see Swann going past on his way to the dentist; and my imagination so differentiated Gilberte's father from the rest of humanity, his presence in the midst of the real world introduced into it such magic, that, even before I reached the Madeleine, I was moved at the thought of approaching a street where I might suddenly encounter that supernatural apparition.

But most often—when I was not going to see Gilberte—since I had learned that Mme. Swann went for a walk almost every day in the allée des Acacias, around the Grand Lac, and in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite,[30] I would steer Françoise in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. For me it was like those zoological gardens in which one sees diverse flora and contrasting landscapes brought together in one place; where, after a hill, one finds a grotto, a meadow, rocks, a stream, a ditch, a hill, a marsh, but knows they are there only to provide the frolicking of the hippopotamus, zebras, crocodiles, albino rabbits, bears, and heron with an appropriate environment or a picturesque setting; the Bois too, equally complex, bringing together as it does diverse enclosed little worlds—first a farm planted with red trees, American oaks, like an agricultural estate in Virginia, then a stand of firs at the edge of the lake, or a forest from which would rise suddenly in her supple fur, with the lovely eyes of an animal, some woman walking quickly—it was the Garden of Woman; and—like the Alley of the Myrtles in *The Aeneid*[31]—planted for their sake with trees of a single species, the allée des Acacias was a favorite spot of the most famous Beauties. Just as, from a long way off, the top of the rock from which it will dive into the water thrills the children who know they are about to see the sea lion, so, well before reaching the allée des Acacias, first their fragrance, which, radiating all around, allowed one to sense from a distance the approach and the singularity of a powerful, soft, vegetative entity, then, when I drew near, the glimpsed crest of their greenery, light and childishly graceful, with its easy elegance, its coquettish cut, its thin material, on which hundreds of flowers had swooped down like vibratile winged colonies of precious parasites, and, finally, even their name, feminine, indolent, and sweet—all of this made my heart pound, but with a worldly desire, like those waltzes which remind us only of the names of the beautiful guests whom the usher announces as they enter the ballroom. I had been told that in the avenue I would see certain fashionable women who, even though they were not all married, were habitually mentioned along with Mme. Swann, but most often by their professional name; their new name, when they had one, was only a sort of incognito which those who wanted to talk about them took care to remove in order to make themselves understood. Thinking that Beauty—in the order of feminine elegance—was governed by occult laws into the knowledge of which these women had been initiated, and that they had the power to bring it into being, I accepted in advance as a revelation the vision of their clothes, their carriages and horses, a thousand details deep within which I placed my belief as in an interior soul which gave the cohesiveness of a masterpiece to that ephemeral and shifting tableau. But it was Mme. Swann whom I wanted to see, and I waited for her to pass, as moved as if she were Gilberte, whose parents, steeped like all that surrounded her in her charm, excited in me as much love as she did, indeed a disturbance that was even more painful (because their point of contact with her was that domestic part of her life which was forbidden to me), and lastly (because I soon knew, as will be seen, that they did not like my playing with her) that feeling of veneration which we always have for those who wield unrestrained power to do us harm.

I assigned the first place to simplicity, in the order of aesthetic merits and social grandeur, when I saw Mme. Swann on foot, wearing a cloth polonaise, on her head a little toque trimmed with a pheasant wing, a bouquet of violets at her bodice, hurrying down the allée des Acacias as if it were merely the shortest way to return home and answering with a wink the gentlemen in carriages who, recognizing her figure from far away, bowed to her and said to themselves that no one was as smart. But in place of simplicity, it was ostentation that I put on the highest rank, if, after I had forced Françoise, who was exhausted and said her legs were "folding up," to walk back and forth for an hour, at last I would see, emerging from the avenue that comes from the Porte Dauphine—the picture for me of royal dignity, of a sovereign's arrival, an impression such as no real queen has since been able to give me, because my notion of their power was less vague and more founded upon experience—borne along by two flying fiery horses as slender and smoothly turned as in the drawings of Constantin Guys,[32] carrying an enormous coachman settled on his seat and wrapped in furs like a Cossack, next to a little groom who recalled the "tiger" of "the late Baudenord"[33] I would see—or rather I would feel it imprint its form on my heart with a neat and exhausting wound—a matchless victoria, in its design a little high and with allusions to the old forms showing through its "dernier cri" opulence, in the depths of which Mme. Swann lay back carelessly, her hair now blond with a single gray lock and girded with a thin band of flowers, most often violets, from which descended long veils, in her hand a mauve parasol, on her lips an ambiguous smile in which I saw only the beneficence of a monarch and in which there was, more than anything else, a cocotte's provocativeness, and which she inclined gently on the people who bowed to her. That smile in reality said to some of them: "I remember it very well—it was exquisite!"; to others: "How I would have loved to! What bad luck!"; to others: "Why yes, if you like! I'll stay in line for a moment longer and cut out as soon as I can." When strangers passed, she would still allow an idle smile to linger around her lips, as though it were turned toward the expectation or the memory of a friend, which made people say: "How beautiful she is!" And for certain men only she had a smile that was sour, stiff, reticent, and cold, and meant: "Yes, you beast, I know you have the tongue of a viper, that you can't keep from talking! But do I care about you? Do I?" Coquelin[34] went past holding forth among a group of attentive friends, and with his hand gave a broad theatrical hello to the people in the carriages. But I was thinking only about Mme. Swann and I pretended I had not seen her yet, for I knew that once she drew level with the Tir aux Pigeons[35] she would tell her coachman to cut out of the line and stop so that she could come back down the avenue on foot. And on the days when I felt I had the courage to pass close to her, I would drag Françoise in that direction. At a certain moment, in fact, in the footpath, walking toward us, I would see Mme. Swann letting the long train of her mauve dress spread out behind her, clothed, as the common people imagine queens, in fabrics and rich finery that other women did not wear, lowering her eyes now and then to the handle of her parasol, paying little attention to the people passing, as if her great business and her goal were to take some exercise, without thinking that she was being observed and that all heads were turned toward her. But now and then when she had looked back to call her greyhound, she would imperceptibly cast a circular gaze around her.

Even those who did not know her were alerted by something singular and excessive—or perhaps by a telepathic radiation like those that triggered bursts of applause from the ignorant crowd at moments when La Berma was sublime—that this must be some well-known person. They would ask one another: "Who is she?," or sometimes question a passing stranger, or promise themselves they would remember the way she was dressed as a reference for some better-informed friend who would immediately enlighten them. Others, half stopping in their walk, would say:

"Do you know who that is? Mme. Swann! That means nothing to you? Odette de Crécy?"

"Odette de Crécy? Why in fact I was just wondering . . . Those sad eyes . . . But you know she can't be as young as she once was! I remember I slept with her the day MacMahon resigned."

"You'd better not remind her of it. She's now Mme. Swann, wife of a gentleman in the Jockey Club who's a friend of the Prince of Wales. But she's still superb."

"Yes, but if only you'd known her then—how pretty she was! She lived in a very strange little house filled with Chinese bric-a-brac. I remember we were bothered by the newsboys shouting outside, in the end she made me get up."

Though I could not hear these comments, I did perceive all around her the indistinct murmur of celebrity. My heart raced with impatience at the thought that yet another instant was going to pass before the moment when all these people, among whom I was disconsolate not to find a certain mulatto banker by whom I felt I was despised, would see the young stranger to whom they had paid no attention bow (without knowing her, in fact, but I felt I was authorized to do so because my parents knew her husband and I was her daughter's playmate) to that woman whose reputation for beauty, improper behavior, and elegance was universal. But I was already very close to Mme. Swann, so I raised my hat to her with a motion so large, so extended, so prolonged, that she could not help smiling. People laughed. As for her, she had never seen me with Gilberte, she did not know my name, but for her I was—like one of the keepers of the Bois, or the boatman or the ducks on the lake to which she threw bread—one of those secondary, familiar, anonymous figures, as lacking in individual character as an "extra" onstage, of her outings in the Bois. On certain days when I had not seen her in the allée des Acacias, I would sometimes find her in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, where women go who want to be alone, or to appear to want to be alone; she would not remain alone for long, soon joined by some friend, often wearing a gray "topper," whom I did not know and who would talk to her for a long time, while their two carriages followed.

That complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which makes it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I discovered again this year as I was crossing it to go to Trianon,[36] on one of the first mornings of this month of November when, in Paris, inside the houses, we are so close to the autumn spectacle, and yet denied it, as it rapidly comes to an end without our witnessing it, that we are filled with a yearning, a veritable fever for the dead leaves that may go so far as to stop us from sleeping. In my closed room, they had been coming for a month now, summoned by my desire to see them, between my thoughts and any object to which I applied myself, and they eddied like those yellow spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, dance in front of our eyes. And that morning, no longer hearing the rain fall as on the days before, seeing the fine weather smile at the corners of the drawn curtains as at the corners of a closed mouth that betrays the secret of its happiness, I had felt that I might be able to look at those yellow leaves as the light passed through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to keep myself from going to see the trees than in earlier days, when the wind blew too hard in my chimney, from departing for the seaside, I had left to go to Trianon, by way of the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and it was the season when the Bois seems perhaps most multiform, not only because it is more subdivided, but also because it is subdivided in a different way. Even in the open parts where one embraces a great space, here and there, in front of the dark distant masses of the trees that had no leaves or still had their summer leaves, a double row of orange chestnut trees seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted so far by the scene painter, who had not put any color on the rest, and it offered its avenue in full light for the episodic walk of figures that would be added later on.

Farther off, at a place where the trees were still covered in all their green leaves, one alone, small, squat, lopped, obstinate, shook in the wind a homely head of red hair. Elsewhere, again, there was a first awakening of this May of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis as marvelous and smiling as a pink winter hawthorn had since that same morning been all in flower. And the Bois had the temporary and artificial look of a tree nursery or a park, where for botanical purposes or in preparation for a festival, they have just placed, among the trees of a common sort that have not yet been transplanted, two or three precious species with fantastic foliage which seem to be reserving an empty space around themselves, giving air, creating light. Thus it was the season when the Bois de Boulogne reveals the most numerous different varieties and juxtaposes the most numerous distinct parts in a composite aggregation. And it was the hour, as well. In the places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to be undergoing a change in substance starting from the point where they were touched by the light of the sun, almost horizontal in the morning as it would be again a few hours later at the moment when in the early twilight it flames up like a lamp, projects over a distance onto the foliage a warm and artificial glow, and sets ablaze the topmost leaves of a tree that remains the dull and incombustible candelabrum of its burning tip. Here, it thickened the leaves of the chestnut trees like bricks and, like a piece of yellow Persian masonry patterned in blue, crudely cemented them against the sky, there on the contrary detached them from it as they clutched at it with their fingers of gold. Halfway up a tree clothed in Japanese ivy, it had grafted and brought into bloom, too dazzling to discern clearly, an immense bouquet as though of red flowers, perhaps a variety of carnation. The different parts of the Bois, merging more completely in summer in the thickness and monotony of their green, were now separated. Open spaces made visible the entrance to almost every one of them, or a sumptuous bit of foliage marked it like a banner. One could distinguish, as on a colored map, Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, Madrid, the Race Course, the shores of the lake. From time to time there would appear some useless construction, a fake grotto, a mill for which the trees parted to make room or which a lawn carried forward on its soft platform. One sensed that the Bois was not merely a wood, that it fulfilled a purpose foreign to the life of its trees, the exhilaration I was experiencing was not caused merely by an admiration for autumn, but by some desire. The great source of a joy which the soul feels at first without recognizing its cause, without understanding that it is motivated by nothing outside. And so I looked at the trees with an unsatisfied tenderness that passed beyond them and went on without my knowing it toward that masterpiece of lovely strolling women which they enclose each day for several hours. I went toward the allée des Acacias. I passed through old groves where the morning light imposed new divisions, pruning the trees, joining together the different stems, and composing bouquets. Deftly it drew toward itself a pair of trees; using the powerful scissors of a ray of light and a shadow, it cut off from each of them half its trunk and branches and, weaving together the two halves that remained, made of them either a single pillar of shadow, delimited by the sunshine around it, or a single phantom of brightness whose tremulous artificial contour was ringed by a net of black shadow. When a ray of sun gilded the highest branches, they seemed, steeped in a sparkling dampness, to emerge alone from the liquid emerald-colored atmosphere in which the entire forest was plunged as though under the sea. For the trees continued to live their own life and, when they had no more leaves, that life shone more brightly on the sheath of green velvet that wrapped their trunks or in the white enamel of the spheres of mistletoe that spangled the tops of the poplars, as round as the sun and the moon in Michelangelo's *Creation*. But forced as they have been for so many years by a sort of grafting to live a life shared with women, they conjured up for me the wood nymph, the lovely quick and colorful worldly beauty whom they cover with their branches as she passes beneath them, obliging her to feel as they do the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy time of my believing youth, when I would avidly come to the places where masterpieces of feminine elegance were created for a few moments among the unconscious and complicitous leaves. But the beauty which the pines and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me desire, trees more disturbing because of this than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon that I was going to see, was not fixed outside me in the mementos of some historic period, in works of art, in a little temple to the god of Love whose base is piled with golden palmate leaves. I reached the shores of the lake, I went on as far as the Tir aux Pigeons. The idea of perfection which I carried inside me I had conferred at that time upon the height of a victoria, upon the slenderness of those horses, as furious and light as wasps, their eyes bloodshot like the cruel steeds of Diomedes,[37] which now, filled as I was with a desire to see again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me down these same paths many years before, I wanted to see before my eyes again at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, watched over by a little groom as fat as a fist and as childlike as Saint George, tried to control those wings of steel as they thrashed about quivering with fear. Alas, now there were only automobiles driven by mustached mechanics with tall footmen by their sides. I wanted to hold in front of my bodily eyes, so as to know if they were as charming as they appeared in the eyes of my memory, women's little hats so low they seemed to be simple crowns. All the hats were now immense, covered with fruits and flowers and varieties of birds. In place of the lovely dresses in which Mme. Swann looked like a queen, I now saw Greco-Saxon tunics with Tanagra[38] folds, and sometimes in the style of the Directoire, made of liberty-silk chiffons sprinkled with flowers like wallpaper. On the heads of the gentlemen who could have walked with Mme. Swann in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, I did not find the gray hats of earlier times, nor any others. They went out bare-headed. And I no longer had any belief to infuse into all these newelements of the spectacle, to give them substance, unity, life; they went past scattered before me, randomly, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have tried as they had in earlier times to form into a composition. These were ordinary women, in whose elegance I had no faith and whose dress seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief disappears, there survives it—more and more vigorous so as to mask the absence of the power we have lost to give reality to new things—a fetishistic attachment to the old things which our belief once animated, as if it were in them and not in us that the divine resided and as if our present lack of belief had a contingent cause, the death of the Gods.

How awful! I said to myself: can anyone think these automobiles are as elegant as the old carriages and pairs? I'm probably too old now—but I'm not meant for a world in which women hobble themselves in dresses that aren't even made of cloth. What's the use of walking among these trees, if nothing is left of what used to gather under the delicate reddening leaves, if vulgarity and idiocy have taken the place of the exquisite thing they once framed? How awful! My consolation is to think about the women I once knew, now that there is no more elegance. But how could anyone contemplating these horrible creatures under their hats topped with a birdcage or a vegetable patch even perceive what was so charming about the sight of Mme. Swann in a simple mauve hood or a little hat with a single stiff, straight iris poking up from it? Could I even have made them understand the emotion I felt on winter mornings when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in a sealskin coat, wearing a simple beret with two blades of partridge feathers sticking up from it, but enveloped also by the artificial warmth of her apartment, which was conjured by nothing more than the bouquet of violets crushed at her breast whose live blue flowering against the gray sky, the icy air, the bare-branched trees, had the same charming manner of accepting the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had, in the vases and flower stands of her drawing room, close to the lit fire, before the silk sofa, the flowers that looked out through the closed window at the falling snow? But it would not have been enough for me anyway for the clothes to be the same as in those earlier times. Because of the dependence which the different parts of a recollection have on one another, parts which our memory keeps balanced in an aggregate from which we are not permitted to abstract anything, or reject anything, I would have wanted to be able to go spend the last part of the day in the home of one of these women, over a cup of tea, in an apartment with walls painted in dark colors, as Mme. Swann's still was (in the year after the one in which the first part of this story ends) and in which the orange flares, the red combustion, the pink and white flame of the chrysanthemums would gleam in the November twilight, during moments like those in which (as we will see later) I was not able to discover the pleasures I desired. But now, even though they had led to nothing, those moments seemed to me to have had enough charm in themselves. I wanted to find them again as I remembered them. Alas, there was no longer anything but Louis XVI apartments all white and dotted with blue hydrangeas. Moreover, people no longer returned to Paris until very late. Mme. Swann would have answered me from a country house that she would not be back until February, well after the time of the chrysanthemums, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt belonged to a distant year, to a vintage to which I was not allowed to go back, the elements of that desire which had itself become as inaccessible as the pleasure it had once vainly pursued. And I would also have needed them to be the same women, those whose dress interested me because, at the time when I still believed, my imagination had individualized them and given them each a legend. Alas, in the avenue des Acacias—the Alley of the Myrtles—I did see a few of them again, old, now no more than terrible shadows of what they had been, wandering, desperately searching for who knows what in the Virgilian groves. They had fled long since as I still vainly questioned the deserted paths. The sun had hidden itself. Nature was resuming its rule over the Bois, from which the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman had vanished; above the artificial mill the real sky was gray; the wind wrinkled the Grand Lac with little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds swiftly crossed the Bois, like a real wood, and uttering sharp cries alighted one after another in the tall oaks which under their druidical crowns and with a Dodonean[39] majesty seemed to proclaim the inhuman emptiness of the disused forest, and helped me better understand what a contradiction it is to search in reality for memory's pictures, which would never have the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from not being perceived by the senses. The reality I had known no longer existed. That Mme. Swann did not arrive exactly the same at the same moment was enough to make the Avenue different. The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years.

Notes

Most of the information for the following notes was taken from the commentary in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987) and from Maxine Arnold Vogely's *A Proust Dictionary* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Co., 1981).

PART I: *Combray 1*

1 **the *Débats roses:*** An evening edition of the *Journal des débats* begun in 1893.

2 **schoolroom:** Room in which children had their lessons or did their homework.

3 **Bressant-style:** Jean-Baptiste Prosper Bressant (1815-86) was a well-known actor who introduced a new hairstyle, which consisted of wearing the hair in a crew cut in front and longer in the back.

4 **Jockey Club:** One of the most exclusive and elegant of the Parisian clubs, founded in 1834.

5 **Comte de Paris:** Louis-Philippe-Albert d'Orléans (1838-94), grandson of King Louis-Philippe.

6 **Prince of Wales:** The future Edward VII, Prince of Wales from 1841 to 1901.

7 **marrons glacés:** Candied chestnuts traditionally presented on New Year's Day, especially in Paris.

8 **to Lyon:** The warehouse was situated near the Gare de Lyon, terminal station for the trains to Lyon.

9 **Twickenham:** Until 1871, the residence of the Comte de Paris, exiled in England.

10 **Sacré-Coeur:** A religious boarding school run by the nuns of Sacré-Coeur, a church in Paris.

11 **de Bouillon:** Branch of the de La Tour d'Auvergne family. Basin de Guermantes's mother, Oriane de Guermantes's mother, and Mme. de Villeparisis were sisters in the Bouillon family.

12 **Sévigné:** The Marquise de Sévigné (1626-96) is famous for her letters (over 1,500 have been published). Most of them written to her daughter, in a natural, racy, and picturesque style, they reveal her opinionated and spirited character and describe the life of the nobility at court and in the country, as well as historical and cultural events of her time. She was Proust's grandmother's favorite author.

13 **Maréchal de MacMahon:** Edmé Patrice, Comte de MacMahon, Duc de Magenta, Maréchal de France (1808-93). In 1873, he was elected President of the Republic by a monarchist coalition for a term of seven years. He resigned on January 30, 1879, before the end of his term.

14 **most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis-Philippe:** The statesmen mentioned are probably the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier (1823-1905) and the Marquis d'Audiffret (1787-1878), who served respectively as president of the Chamber of Peers and as senator. Louis-Philippe, King of France, ascended the throne following the 1830 Revolution and abdicated following the 1848 Revolution.

15 **like Molé, the Duc Pasquier, the Duc de Broglie:** Louis Mathieu, Comte Molé (1781-1855), was prime minister under Louis-Philippe and a member of the Chamber of Peers. He was elected to the Académie Française after writing *Essais de morale et de politique*. Étienne-Denis Pasquier (1767- 1862) was named president of the Chamber of Peers by Louis-Philippe, who made him a duke in 1841. Duc Achille de Broglie (1785-1870) was a member of the Chamber of Peers under the Restoration, then, under Louis-Philippe, president of the council and minister.

16 **Corot:** Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1876), French painter especially known for his pastoral subjects and the serenity of his interpretations.

17 **Flora:** Proust inadvertently attributes both remarks to Flora.

18 **Maubant:** Henri-Polydore Maubant (1821-1902), a member of the Comédie-Française, specialized in the roles of noble father, king, and tyrant. He retired in 1888.

19 **Mme. Materna:** Amalie Materna (1844-1918), German opera star who created some of the great Wagnerian roles. She retired in 1897.

20 **Saint-Simon:** Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755), French author of the *Mémoires,* which cover the period 1675-1723 and give a detailed picture of the life of the court at that time.

21 **Spain:** Saint-Simon was sent to Spain as *ambassadeur-extraordinaire* to negotiate the royal marriage of the Infanta of Spain to Louis XV.

22 **Maulévrier:** Jean-Baptiste-Louis Andrault, Marquis de Maulévrier-Langeron (1677-1754), Marshal of France. He is described in Saint-Simon's *Mémoires* of the year 1721.

23 **"'What virtues . . . abhor'":** The line is from Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée,* act III, scene 4, and actually reads, *"Ô ciel, que de vertus vous me faites haïr."*

24 **"against my heart":** *À contrecœur,* "reluctantly."

25 **the miracle of Saint Théophile or the four sons of Aymon:** The *Miracle de Théophile,* composed by Rutebeuf, a thirteenth-century troubador, relates the adventures of Théophile d'Adana, who was not in fact a saint but a simple cleric, and who signed a pact with the devil, repented, and was saved through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The story of the four sons of Aymon who offended Charlemagne, fled his wrath, and were finally reconciled with him is told in the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *chanson de geste, Renaud de Montauban*.

26 **mouth-rinsing bowls:** Bowls containing warm, flavored water presented at the end of the meal for rinsing the mouth and the fingers.

27 ***"granité":*** A grainy water ice or granita served as dinner course or dessert.

28 **Benozzo Gozzoli:** Florentine painter (1420-97), one of the creators of the frescoes of the Campo Santo at Pisa badly damaged during World War II. One scene depicts the sacrifice of Isaac, but there is no gesture of dismissal directed at Sarah.

29 ***Indiana:*** A novel by George Sand published in 1832.

30 **Hubert Robert:** Hubert Robert (1733- 1808), French painter of landscapes and architecture, especially garden statues, porticos, ruins, and fountains; precursor of the Romantics.

31 **Turner:** Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1858), English painter, precursor of the Impressionists and of lyrical abstraction, much admired by Ruskin.

32 **Morghen:** Raphael Morghen (1758-1833), engraver commissioned by the Duke of Tuscany to make an engraving of Leonardo da Vinci's fresco of the Last Supper.

PART I: *Combray 2*

1 **ten leagues:** One league is equal to two to three miles. Proust refers to both leagues and kilometers.

2 **King Charles VI:** Charles VI *le Bien-Aimé* (1328-1422), King of France (1380-1422), experienced alternating periods of lucidity and madness. A tarot game was invented to entertain him.

3 **Saint Eloi:** (*c.* 588-660) Treasurer and goldsmith of Clotaire II and Dagobert I, King of the Franks in 632.

4 **Louis the Germanic:** King of the Franks (817-43). He had three sons who conspired constantly against him. The tomb of the sons of Louis in the church at Combray is a fiction.

5 **Sigebert's:** Sigebert was the name of three early kings of Austrasia—a part of the Merovingian kingdom of the Franks—in the sixth and seventh centuries.

6 **Second Empire:** The empire of Napoleon III, 1852-70, a period of financial and industrial expansion; its positivist and materialistic spirit was reflected in the pursuit of money and pleasure and its brilliant social life.

7 **Morris column:** The name given to columns on Paris streets on which plays and other entertainments are advertised. Named for the printer, Morris, who was the first concession holder.

8 ***Le Testament de César Girodot . . . Le Domino Noir:*** *Le Testament de César Girodot* was a comedy by A. Belot and E. Villetard. *Oedipe-Roi* was the French translation by Jules Lacroix of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex. Les Diamants de la Couronne* and *Le Domino Noir* were comic operas with lyrics by Eugène Scribe and music by Daniel Auber.

9 ***gentleman:*** "Gentleman" is in English in the original, as is "a cup of tea."

10 **" 'blue' ":** *Bleu*, an express letter transmitted by pneumatic tube within Paris. (See note 20, p. 461.)

11 **Vaulabelle:** Achille de Vaulabelle (1799-1879), a French journalist and historian.

12 **Virtues and Vices of Padua:** Frescoes by Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padua; seven virtues—Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, Faith, Charity, Hope—face seven vices—Folly, Inconstancy, Anger, Injustice, Infidelity, Envy, Despair.

13 **"La Nuit d'Octobre":** *October* (1837), Poem by Alfred de Musset (1810-57), one of the series entitled *Les Nuits (Nights).*

14 " '**The white Oloossone' . . . 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë' ":** The first line is *La blanche Oloossone et la blanche Camyre*. The actual line, from "La Nuit de Mai," is *La blanche Oloossone à la blanche Camyre*. The second line is *La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë.* From Racine's *Phèdre,* act I, scene 1, line 36.

15 " **'Bhagavat' and 'Le Lévrier de Magnus' ":** Both poems by Leconte de Lisle. "Bhagavat" is from the collection *Poèmes antiques* (1852), and "Le Lévrier de Magnus" from *Poèmes tragiques* (1884).

16 ***La Juive:*** Opera by Fromental Halévy first performed in 1835 at the Paris Opéra.

17 **"Israel, break thy bond":** A line from the opera *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns.

18 **Archers . . . without sound:** In the original, *Archers, faites bonne garde! / Veillez sans trêve et sans bruit.*

19 **Let you . . . Israelite:** In the original, *De ce timide Israelite/Quoi, vous guidez ici les pas!*

20 **Fields of our fathers . . . Hebron:** In the original, *Champs paternels, Hébron, douce vallée.*

21 **Yes, I am of the chosen race:** In the original, *Oui je suis de la race élue.*

22 **Malay kris:** A dagger with a ridged serpentine blade.

23 ***Athalie* or *Phèdre:*** Dramas by Jean Racine (1639-99). Their dates are respectively 1691 and 1677.

24 ***dolce . . . lento:*** Musical indications in Italian meaning "sweet and soft" and "slow."

25 **portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini:** Mohammed II, Sultan of the Ottoman empire from 1451 to 1481, was painted in Constantinople by the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini (*c.* 1429-1507).

26 ***Le Cid:*** 1636 tragedy by Pierre Corneille (1606-84), part of the classic repertory of the Comédie-Française.

27 "**the Queens of Chartres":** Statues on the western portal of Chartres Cathedral, for a long time assumed to be kings and queens of France but in fact representing characters from the Bible.

28 **The happiness . . . stream:** Racine, *Athalie*, act II, scene 7, line 688. The actual line is *Le bonheur des méchants comme un torrent s'écoule*.

29 **"theater in bed":** Allusion to Alfred de Musset's *Theater in an Armchair,* i.e., a play meant to be read to oneself from a book.

30 **proud as Artaban:** Expression derived from the novel *Cléopâtre* by Gauthier de la Calprenède (1614-63). The character Artaban has become proverbial for his pride.

31 **the "mechanics" of life at Versailles:** The phrase recurs several times in Saint-Simon's *Mémoires.*

32 **The woods are dark, the sky still blue:** *Les bois sont déjà noirs, le ciel est encor bleu*. A line by Paul Desjardins (1859-1940), French writer and thinker.

33 **Fall in love . . . plum:** In the original, *Qui du cul d'un chien s'amourose, Il lui parait une rose*. Literally, "He who falls in love with a dog's bottom/Will think it's a rose."

34 **Fabre:** Jean-Henri Fabre (1823-1915), French teacher and entomologist who retired in 1871 to devote himself to the study of insect life, one of his special interests being the Hymenoptera. He published ten volumes of studies, *Souvenirs entomologiques,* from 1879 to 1907.

35 **Balzac's flora:** The plant, sedum, appears in at least two of the novels in Balzac's *La Comédie humaine.*

36 **"for wounded hearts . . . shadow and silence":** *Aux coeurs blessés l'ombre et le silence.* Epigraph from a novel by Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne* (The Country Doctor).

37 **Jacobin:** Member of a society of revolutionary democrats in France during the Revolution of 1789; hence, a political radical.

38 **Andromedas:** In Greek mythology, Andromeda was the daughter of Cassiopeia, who boasted that Andromeda was more beautiful than the daughter of Nereus, the Sea God. The daughter was punished for the mother's arrogance and, chained to a rocky cliff by the sea, was rescued by Perseus.

39 **Ar-mor, the Sea:** Ar-mor is the Celtic name for Brittany, meaning "on the sea."

40 **Anatole France:** French novelist, critic, and literary figure (1844-1924). He wrote about the Cimmerians in *Pierre Nozière* (1899).

41 **country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey:*** The Cimmerians were an ancient people from the north shore of the Black Sea who invaded Lydia in Asia Minor in the seventh century. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes them as living in darkness.

42 **that erudite crook:** The crook in question is most likely Vrain-Lucas, who forged signatures which he attributed to Rabelais, Pascal, Joan of Arc, Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra. His story was told by Alphonse Daudet in *L'Immortel* (1888).

43 **burdened . . . across my brow:** Indirect quotation from Racine's *Phèdre,* act I, scene 3: *Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent! / Quelle importune main en formant tous ces noeuds / A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?*

44 **some novel by Saintine:** Joseph Xavier Boniface, known as Saintine (1798-1865), French novelist best known for his novel *Picciola*.

45 **some landscape by Gleyre:** Charles-Gabriel Gleyre (1806-74), Swiss academic painter.

46 **the little hooded monk in the optician's window:** A figure in a box that predicted weather changes.

47 ***Chanson de Roland:*** *Song of Roland,* most famous of the *chansons de geste* of the Middle Ages.

48 **kith and kindred:** The humor of Françoise's mistake is more evident in the original. Instead of *parenté,* "family," "relations," she says *parentèse,* "parenthesis."

49 **Viollet-le-Duc:** Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79), French architect and writer who restored many monuments of the Middle Ages, including the Sainte- Chapelle, Notre-Dame, and the feudal château of Pierrefonds.

50 **that painting by Gentile Bellini . . . Saint Mark's:** The reference must be to Gentile Bellini's *Procession in St. Mark's Square,* valued especially for its quality as documentary evidence of the appearance of St. Mark's Cathedral in the fifteenth century.

51 **their pretty name:** *Boutons d'or,* or "gold buttons."

52 "**vacation house":** The irony is lost in translation, since the French *maison de plaisance,* though it means "country house," translates literally as "pleasure house" (as in "pleasure boat").

53 ***Lohengrin:*** Opera by Richard Wagner (1813-83), who was immensely popular in Europe in the late nineteenth century.

54 **Carpaccio:** Vittore Carpaccio (*c.* 1455-1525), Venetian painter.

55 **Baudelaire:** Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), French poet and critic.

56 **flowery Delos:** Greek island; in Greek mythology, the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.

PART II: *Swann in Love*

1 **Planté:** Francis Planté (1839-1934), a French pianist and composer whose concerts were very successful beginning in 1872.

2 **Rubinstein:** Anton Grigorievitch Rubinstein (1829-94) was, along with Liszt, the most illustrious pianist of his time.

3 **Potain:** Pierre-Charles-Édouard Potain was elected to the Académie de Médecine in 1882, and to the Institute in 1893.

4 **the ride from *The Valkyrie* or the prelude from *Tristan:*** *The Valkyrie* (1854-56) and *Tristan and Isolde* (1865) are both operas by Richard Wagner.

5 ***fishing for compliments:*** In English in the original.

6 **conclave:** A meeting of Roman Catholic cardinals to choose a new pope. Proust is probably referring to the conclave of 1878.

7 **What is then . . . understand:** A quotation from the end of act 1 of *La Dame blanche,* an opera by François-Adrien Boieldieu. In the original, *Quel est donc ce mystère? / Je n'y puis rien comprendre.*

8 **Fleeting vision:** An allusion to Herod's aria in act II of *Hérodiade,* an opera by Jules Massenet. In the original, *Vision fugitive.*

9 **In these affairs . . . blind:** A quotation from the end of *Amphitryon,* a comic opera by André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry. In the original, *Dans ces affaires / Le mieux est de ne rien voir.*

10 **home:** In English in the original.

11 **Vermeer of Delft:** Jan Vermeer (1632-75), Dutch painter.

12 **Areopagus:** The ancient tribunal of Athens; used figuratively to indicate an assembly of virtuous, wise people. The reference seems to be to some fable, but its identity remains unclear.

13 ***"Patronne's":*** Feminine form of *patron,* "boss" or "manager."

14 **Reichstag:** German legislative assembly.

15 **Ninth . . . *The Meistersingers:*** The reference is to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Wagner's opera *The Meistersingers.*

16 ***di primo cartello:*** Italian term indicating singers of highest quality, who have "top billing."

17 **Academy:** Potain was elected to the Académie de Médecine in 1882. The Académie was founded (in 1880) primarily to advise the government on questions of public health.

18 **Gambetta's funeral:** Léon Gambetta, an important political leader and deputy to the National Assembly, was buried in January 1883.

19 ***Les Danicheff:*** Play by Pierre de Corvin-Koukowsky in collaboration with Dumas *fils* (see note 55 below).

20 **M. Grévy's:** Jules Grévy was president of the Republic from 1879 to 1887.

21 ***gentleman:*** In English in the original.

22 **Pieter de Hooch:** Dutch painter (1629-83?) known for his handling of light and perspective.

23 **cattleyas:** Orchids with large, richly colored flowers developed by the English horticulturist W. Cattley.

24 **Our Lady of Laghet:** Notre-Dame de Laghet is a place of pilgrimage situated in the Alpes-Maritimes, to the north of Turbie and close to Nice.

25 **Zipporah . . . Sistine Chapel:** The figure of Zipporah appears in the Sistine Chapel in a series of frescoes by Botticelli depicting the life of Moses, her husband.

26 **Antonio Rizzo:** The Correr Museum in Venice possesses a bronze bust of Andrea Loredan (who, unlike Pietro Loredan, was never a doge) attributed to the Paduan sculptor Andrea Briosse (1471-1532), known as Riccio or Rizzo.

27 **Ghirlandaio:** Ghirlandaio (1449-94), Florentine painter, one of the best of the Italian primitives. The reference here is to his *Portrait of an Old Man and His Grandson,* which hung in the Louvre in Proust's day. The old man in the picture, a nobleman, has a large prominent nose covered with warts.

28 **Tintoretto:** Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto (1518-94), Venetian painter whose self-portrait hung in the Louvre in Proust's day.

29 **La Maison Dorée:** An elegant restaurant opened in 1840 and situated at 1, rue Lafitte, at the corner of the boulevard des Italiens.

30 **the Paris-Murcia fete . . . Murcia:** A fete given on December 18, 1879, in aid of the victims of the flooding that occurred in the Murcia province of Spain on October 14 and 15, 1879.

31 **Prévost's:** Tearoom at 39, boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, which opened in 1825 and owed its reputation to its chocolate.

32 **Tortoni's:** A café at 22, boulevard des Italiens.

33 **Café Anglais:** A café at 13, boulevard des Italiens.

34 **the "Valse des Roses" or "Pauvre Fou" by Tagliafico:** Both pieces in "bad taste." The "Valse des Roses" was the best-known composition of Olivier Métra, conductor at the Châtelet and the Folies Bergères; Joseph Dieudonné Tagliafico was a French opera singer who made his debut in 1844 at the Théâtre Des Italiens. He wrote a ballad whose correct title is "Pauvres Fous" (Poor Lunatics).

35 **Watteau:** Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), French painter said to have spent hours in the Luxembourg Gardens sketching the faces and figures of the passersby.

36 **the rue Abbatucci:** Former name, from 1868 to 1879, of part of the rue de La Boétie, in the eighth arrondissement.

37 **the Vicomte de Borelli:** Raymond de Borelli (1827-1906) was a society poet.

38 **the avenue de l'Impératrice:** In the sixteenth arrondissement, it runs from the place de l'Étoile to the Porte Dauphine. It was created in 1854 and called by this name until the 1870s, when, with the fall of the Empire, it was renamed avenue du Bois de Boulogne, finally becoming avenue Foch in 1929.

39 **the Tour du Lac:** The *lac* in question is the lake (in fact two lakes) in the Bois de Boulogne. In Proust's day, the favorite promenade routes led from the avenues to the lake. *Tour du Lac* must refer to a road around the lakes.

40 **Éden Théâtre:** Theater erected in 1882 for the performance mainly of ballets; it was located on the rue Boudreau near the Opéra.

41 **Hippodrome:** A stadium located, from 1875 to 1892, between the avenue de l'Alma and the avenue Marceau. It held ten thousand spectators and presented races, ballets, horse shows, and other performances.

42 **darling:** In English in the original.

43 **Château de Blois:** Historic castle on the Loire River, and a favorite residence of the French kings during the sixteenth century. It combines styles from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries and is in fact remarkable for its elaborate Renaissance chimney pieces, which rise to the ceiling.

44 ***La Reine Topaz:*** *The Topaz Queen,* a comic opera with music by Victor Massé first performed in 1856.

45 ***muffins*** **and** ***toasts:*** In English in the original, including the eccentric plural of "toasts."

46 **"Thé de la rue Royale":** Ancient establishment which at the turn of the century was located at 3 and 12, rue Royale and served afternoon tea in the English style.

47 ***Serge Panine:*** 1881 novel by Georges Ohnet first produced as a play in 1882. Ohnet (1848-1918) was a dramatist and the author of sentimental novels immensely popular with the public and disparaged by the critics. His *Le Maître de Forges,* mentioned elsewhere, was a novel and play produced with great success during the 1884 season.

48 **Olivier Métra:** Métra (1830-89) was a French composer and conductor best known for his waltzes.

49 **the Righi:** Mountain in Switzerland, with villages at its foot and hotels at intervals on the way to the summit, from which there is a wonderful panorama. The Riviera and Switzerland, along with the English things one could find there, were very much in vogue at the time.

50 "***Blanche?*** **Blanche de Castille":** "White"; Blanche de Castille (1188- 1252) was the wife of Louis VIII and mother of Louis IX.

51 **Suger and other Saint Bernards:** *The Chronicle of Saint-Denis,* a history of the kings of France, was begun by Abbot Suger in the twelfth century and continued at the Abbey of Saint-Denis until 1286.

52 **Henry Plantagenet:** Henry II of England (1133-89) married Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152. The latter was not the mother of Blanche de Castille, but her grandmother.

53 **Rembrandt or Hals:** *The Night Watch* by Rembrandt (1606-69) is an open-air scene depicting militia and a variety of other types of faces; *The Regents* by Franz Hals (1580-1666) is a group portrait of lady governors of the Almshouse of Haarlem. It hangs in the museum of Haarlem.

54 **the Ninth and the** ***Winged Victory:*** The reference is to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and *The Winged Victory of Samothrace,* a Greek statue of a draped and winged woman found on the island of Samothrace in 1863 and now standing at the top of the Daru Staircase in the Louvre.

55 **play by Dumas:** Alexandre Dumas, known as Dumas *fils* (1824-95), French dramatist and novelist. The Japanese salad appears in his play *Francillon*.

56 ***"speech":*** In English in the original.

57 **the La Trémoïlles:** A celebrated family whose duchy was one of the oldest in France.

58 **lost wax:** The wax model from which a metal sculpture is cast.

59 **the Palais de l'Industrie:** The Palais de l'Industrie (Hall of Industry) was built for the Exposition of 1855 on the site of the present Grand Palais and Petit Palais beside the Seine. It housed the annual salons of painting and sculpture.

60 **Fénelon:** François de Salgnac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651-1715), French theologian who was in charge of the education of the grandsons of Louis XIV. In his *Treatise on the Existence and Attributes of God,* he defines God as "universal intelligence" and "infinitely intelligible." He posits that nothing is intelligent except through God, but intelligence is "real in His creatures"; our ideas "are a perpetual mingling of God's infinite being which is our object, and of the limits He gives always and essentially to each creature."

61 **Trémouailles:** Brichot is pronouncing the name incorrectly; it should be "Trémoïlles."

62 ***Se non è vero:*** First words of the adage *Se non è vero, è ben trovato:* "If it isn't true, it's still a happy thought."

63 **the Duc d'Aumale:** A pun on the name of the fourth son of King Louis-Philippe and the word *mâle,* "male."

64 **Baronne Putbus:** According to *Gotha's Almanac,* the Putbus family dated back to the twelfth century, at which time it owned a château and fifteen villages in Pomerania.

65 **" 'sonata-snake' ":** The Marquise Diane de Saint-Paul, a brilliant pianist and a scandalmonger, was known in Proust's circle as the *"serpent à sonates,"* or "sonata-snake." The nickname is a play on the word for rattlesnake, s*erpent à sonnettes*.

66 **Gustave Moreau:** French painter (1826-98), whose subjects were products of imagination and fantasy and whose refined and sensual aestheticism interested Proust.

67 **the Île des Cygnes:** "Island of the Swans," an island in the larger of the two lakes in the Bois de Boulogne.

68 **the Primavera:** Painting by Botticelli which hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

69 **Moses pour water into a trough:** Botticelli depicted the child Jesus playing with a pomegranate in his *Madonna della Melagrana;* in the Sistine Chapel, one of the scenes from Botticelli's *Trials of Moses* shows the prophet drawing water for the flocks of the daughters of Jethro.

70 **Chatou:** A village on the banks of the Seine ten miles from Paris, a popular spot, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, with fishermen, boaters, and Impressionist painters.

71 **Labiche comedy:** Eugène Labiche (1815-88) was a French dramatist and author of comedies of manners and vaudevilles.

72 **Bossuet:** Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), theologian, moralist, and one of the great orators of French history.

73 **Dante's last circle:** The last book of *The Divine Comedy* places the greatest sinners in the ninth circle of Hell.

74 ***Noli me tangere:*** "Do not touch me"—words attributed by John to Jesus Christ addressing Mary Magdalen.

75 ***Une Nuit de Cléopatre:*** "A Night with Cleopatra," a work by Victor Massé (1822-84), composer of *La Reine Topaze* and *Paul et Virginie. Une Nuit de Cléopatre* was first performed in 1885.

76 **the tombs at Dreux . . . the Château de Pierrefonds:** The royal chapel of Dreux contains the tombs of the princes of Orléans. The château of Pierrefonds, at the edge of the forest of Compiègne, was originally built by Louis d'Orléans in the fifteenth century, fell into ruins, was bought by Napoleon I, and was eventually entrusted to the care of Viollet-le-Duc by Napoleon III in 1857. Restoration work was completed in 1884.

77 **Beauvais or Saint-Loup-de-Naud:** The Cathedral of Saint-Pierre de Beauvais, built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, is famous for its Gothic choir. The Roman church of Saint-Loup-de-Naud, in the *département* of Seine-et-Marne, is one of the oldest in France.

78 **the Map of Love:** An allegorical map devised by the novelist Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) and introduced in her novel *Clélie* (1654-60). The Map of Love shows three different roads leading to true love.

79 **the church at Brou:** The church at Brou, near Bourg-en-Bresse, was built by the order of Margaret of Austria in memory of her husband, Philibert le Beau (1480-1504), Duke of Savoie.

80 ***Lapérouse:*** This restaurant lies outside Odette's "smart" territory, on the quai des Grands-Augustins quite close to the quai d'Orléans, where Swann lives.

81 **"Bal des Incohérents":** "Ball of the Incoherents." The Incoherents were artists who mocked the official salons and organized highly successful exhibitions of their own starting in 1882. They celebrated the opening day with a costume ball.

82 ***my love:*** In English in the original.

83 **the season at Bayreuth:** Inaugurated in 1876, the Festspielhaus, Wagner's model theater at Bayreuth, became the international center of the cult of Wagner beginning in 1882. The five castles of Louis II of Bavaria (1845-86) were inspired by Versailles or by the German legends that Wagner used in his operas.

84 **Clapisson:** Antonin-Louis Clapisson (1808-66), whose music had already gone out of fashion in 1880, was a French composer of comic operas.

85 **Mme. de Maintenon:** Françoise d'Aubigné de Maintenon (1635-1719) secretly married Louis XIV in 1684. Saint-Simon entitled one section of his *Mémoires* "Mechanics, private life and conduct of Mme. de Maintenon," and detailed the items of her table.

86 **Lully:** Jean Baptiste Lully (1632-87), Italian-born French composer.

87 **Septennate:** Seven-year term of a French president. The term Proust is most probably referring to is that of Edmé Patrice, Comte de MacMahon, which began in 1873 and ended with his resignation in 1879.

88 **Botticelli's Primavera, bella Vanna, or Venus:** Primavera, the goddess of spring, is depicted in Botticelli's *Spring;* the "bella Vanna" in *Giovanna Tomabuoni and the Three Graces;* and Venus in *The Birth of Venus.*

89 **Balzac's "tigers":** In both French and English a "tiger" was a gentleman's groom, either a boy or a small man. In his pastiche of Balzac (in *Pastiches et mélanges*), Proust refers to "Paddy, the famous tiger of the late Baudenord."

90 **paintings by Mantegna:** Mantegna, an Italian painter and engraver (*c.* 1430-1506), was part of a team that decorated the Church of the Erimitani at Padua between 1449 and 1456. In the Ovetari Chapel of that church are the *Scenes from the Life of Saint John and Saint Christopher*. In *The Martyrdom of Saint John* a warrior meditates, leaning on his shield. Mantegna painted the *Altarpiece of San Zeno,* at Verona, between 1456 and 1459.

91 **some Albrecht Dürer Saxon:** Dürer (1471-1528) was influenced by Mantegna, whose engravings he copied.

92 **cadogan:** Hairstyle in which a bunch of hair is folded twice at the back of the head and tied with a ribbon.

93 **Goya:** Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), Spanish painter several of whose paintings hung in the Louvre in Proust's day, though it is unclear which painting Proust is referring to.

94 **Benvenuto Cellini:** Florentine goldsmith, sculptor, and writer (1500-1571). It is not clear which work by Cellini Proust has in mind here.

95 ***Orphée:*** *Orphée et Eurydice* (1762) by Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-87), a German-born composer whose music is considered French. The flute solo occurs in act 2, as Orpheus is searching the Elysian Fields in the Underworld for his lost beloved, Eurydice.

96 **Liszt:** Franz Liszt (1811-86), Hungarian pianist and composer who lived in Paris for some years (*c.* 1840). One of the two *légendes* he wrote for piano solo is titled *St. François prédicant aux oiseaux.*

97 **Princesse Mathilde:** Daughter of Jérôme Bonaparte. Princesse Mathilde (1820-1904) entertained the most brilliant members of the artistic and literary world. Among her guests were Taine, Renan, the Goncourts, and Flaubert.

98 **Legitimist:** In French history, a supporter of claims to the monarchy based on the rights of heredity.

99 **baignoire:** Literally, "bathtub"—a ground-floor theater box, projecting and rounded like a bathtub.

100 **Mérimée:** Prosper Mérimée (1803-70), widely traveled French writer noted for his exoticism.

101 **Meilhac and Halévy:** Henri Meilhac (1831-97) was a French author of drawing-room comedies and opera libretti; Ludovic Halévy (1834-1908), French librettist, was his collaborator.

102 **"'guests from Belloir's"':** Belloir's, in the rue de la Victoire in Paris, rented supplies for dances and parties.

103 **" 'Empire' ":** The style of furniture which became popular during the Empire (1804-15) favored mahogany and was cubic and massive, with gilded or antique green and bronze trim and dark marble tops. Common decorative devices were sphinxes, laurel wreaths, Winged Victories, sheaves, and cornucopias. Napoleon's symbol, the bee, replaced the royal fleur-de-lis.

104 **most astonishing name:** The joke here, on the name Cambremer, sees it as being made up of abbreviations of *Cambronne* and *merde* (shit). *Le mot de Cambronne*, "Cambronne's word," said to have been uttered by Cambronne, a general at Waterloo, is the traditional euphemism for *merde*.

105 **the Hôtel Vouillemont:** The Hôtel Vouillemont was in the rue Boissy d'Anglas. In an 1863 guide to Paris it was described as a quiet first-class hotel.

106 ***La Princesse de Clèves* or of *René:*** *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), a novel by Mme. de La Fayette, tells the tragic story of the frustrated love of a young married noblewoman for a gallant young duke; *René* (1805) is a tale by Chateaubriand recounting the passion between a brother and sister.

107 **of a Lavoisier, of an Ampère:** Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier (1743-94), a French chemist, one of the fathers of modern chemistry, to which he contributed the law of conservation of matter; André Marie Ampère (1775-1836), French mathematician and physicist who propounded the theory of electromagnetism.

108 **Nicolas Maes . . . Vermeer:** Nicolas Maes (*c.* 1634-93), Dutch painter. It is unclear who painted *Diana with Her Companions* and Maes was once considered as a possible candidate.

109 **You're never as unhappy as you think:** The allusion here is to the forty-ninth maxim of François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-80), French moralist and author of *Maximes* (1665): "One is never either as happy or as unhappy as one imagines."

110 ***Les Filles de Marbre* by Théodore Barrière:** The play (literally, "Girls of Marble") (1853) is about courtesans who are cold and unfeeling.

111 **to call her *tu:*** In French, the distinction is still made between the formal "you," *vous*, and the informal *tu*; and in the period in which this novel is set, the formal "you" was far more prevalent even among children and within families.

112 ***Journal d'un Poète* by Alfred de Vigny:** A journal written by Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863), French poet, novelist, and dramatist. The passage quoted is dated April 22, 1833, and is an exact quotation.

113 **the Desolation of Nineveh:** An allusion to Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens,* which appeared in Proust's translation in 1904. Ruskin points out the beasts of Nineveh on the facade of the cathedral of Amiens crawling "among the tottering walls and peeping out of their rents and crannies."

114 **the three travelers:** Four, actually.

115 **the Mirlitons:** An annual art show held each February by the Cercle de l'Union Artistique, a club created by the merger of the Cercle des Champs-Élysées and Les Mirlitons.

116 **Machard:** Jules-Louis Machard (1839-1900) first showed in the Salon of 1863. He was a fashionable portrait painter for many years.

117 **Leloir:** Probably Jean-Baptiste-Auguste Leloir (1809-92), a French academic historical and religious painter who also did occasional portraits.

PART III: *Place-Names: The Name*

1 ***"modern style":*** In English in the original.

2 **Exposition:** These illuminated fountains were installed on the Champsde-Mars for the Exposition of 1889.

3 **at Finistère itself:** *Département* at the western extreme of Brittany; the name derives from the Latin, *finis terrae*, "land's end."

4 **the Great Bear:** Name of the constellation also called the Plow or the Big Dipper.

5 **Saint-Mary-of-the-Flowers:** Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral of Florence which Proust refers to by its French name, Sainte-Marie-des-Fleurs.

6 ***La Chartreuse:*** "The Charterhouse," referring to *La Chartreuse de Parme* (The Charterhouse of Parma, 1839), a novel by Stendhal (Henri Beyle; 1783-1842).

7 **fabliau:** A short, usually comic, frankly coarse, and often cynical tale in verse popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

8 **Vitré:** *Vitré* is also an adjective meaning "glazed," "having windowpanes."

9 **the coach followed by the fly:** A play on the expression *faire la mouche du coche,* literally be the fly in the coach, i.e., buzz around, be a busybody.

10 **the school of Giorgione . . . medieval domestic architecture:** Here and elsewhere in this passage Proust is quoting or adapting John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *Stones of Venice*. Giorgio de Castelfranco, known as Giorgione (*c.* 1478-1510), was an Italian painter who spent his life in the vicinity of Venice. He and Titian frescoed the outside walls of certain buildings during the period when they worked as housepainters.

11 **"bossed with jasper and paved with emeralds":** Variation of quotation from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*.

12 **reddened by reflections from Giorgione's frescoes:** Modified quotation from Ruskin. In his *Modern Painters,* he says, "I saw the last traces of the greatest works of Giorgione yet glowing like a scarlet cloud on the Fondaco de' Tedeschi."

13 **"majestic . . . blood-red cloaks":** Modified quotation from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*.

14 **"rocks of amethyst like a reef in the Indian Ocean":** Modified quotation from Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*.

15 **Poussin:** Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), French classic painter. The reference is probably to *L'Empire de Flore,* which shows the chariot of the sun driven over the clouds behind four horses. The scene below is a garden.

16 ***Les Débats:*** *Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (Journal of Political and Literary Debates), founded in 1789 and published until August 1944. It styled itself "republican conservative" in 1890, then "republican and liberal" in 1895. There were two editions each day, the evening edition being called the *édition rose* or "pink edition."

17 **who rented the chairs:** In French public gardens, folding chairs of wood and iron were set up and available for use by the public for a price; old women would come around from time to time collecting the "rent," the equivalent of about one penny. The chairs are still there, but rent is no longer charged.

18 **Field of the Cloth of Gold:** An allusion to the ostentatious camp (including a tent of gold cloth) that François I set up in 1520, between Guines and Ardres (in the *département* of Pas-de-Calais), to receive Henry VIII of England, whom he hoped to turn into an ally against Charles V. Proust, here, is making a pun that is lost in translation: in the French, the same word, *camp,* means both "side" or "team" in a game, and also a military "camp" or, in this case, "field" in the phrase *camp du drap d'or,* Field of the Cloth of Gold. In addition, the name Champs-Élysées means, literally, Elysian Fields.

19 **spice cake:** The French *pain d'épices* is defined in dictionaries as "gingerbread." But unlike our gingerbread and our spice cake, it is a rather heavy and not very sweet breadlike cake made of rye flour, honey, sugar, and spices, including anise, and is mildly laxative.

20 ***pneumatique:*** Express letter sent by pneumatic tube. This delivery system existed in Paris as late as the 1970s or 1980s; as the telephone system was very slow to develop, casual appointments were made and messages transmitted by *pneumatique,* also know as a *petit bleu,* literally "little blue."

21 **vous:** The formal "you"; the informal is *tu*.

22 "**En Revenant de la Revue":** A popular song with political significance sung for the first time by Paulus at the Alcazar in 1886.

23 **At school, during the one o'clock class:** During the period in which the novel takes place, it was usual—and not only in France—for children and working parents to come home for lunch and then return to school and work.

24 **"Ambassadeurs":** A restaurant with a fine terrace which in Proust's day was on the Champs-Élysées near the place de la Concorde.

25 **Philippe VII:** Title assumed by the Comte de Paris, who became head of the royal house and claimant to the throne in 1883.

26 **King Theodosius:** Probably an allusion to the visit of Czar Nicholas II in 1896.

27 ***Michel Strogoff:*** The very successful theater adaptation by Jules Verne and A. Dennery of Verne's novel (1876), performed for the first time at the Châtelet in 1880.

28 **Midi:** The south of France (from *midi,* "noon").

29 **Trois Quartiers:** One of the great stores of Paris at the time, located in the first arrondissement at the corner of the boulevard de la Madeleine and the rue Duphot.

30 **allée des Acacias . . . allée de la Reine-Marguerite:** The allée des Acacias, also called the allée de Longchamp, was one of the most important streets in the Bois de Boulogne, and the scene of elegant promenades until the 1920s. The allée de la Reine-Marguerite was another large avenue in the Bois and was probably named for Marguerite de Valois, sister of François I.

31 **the Alley of the Myrtles in *The Aeneid:*** In book 6, lines 440-44 of Virgil's *Aeneid,* Aeneas, having descended into the Underworld, encounters in a forest of myrtles the mythological heroines who have died of love: "Those consumed by the wasting torments of merciless love / Haunt the sequestered alleys and myrtle groves that give them / Cover; death itself cannot cure them of love's disease" (*Aeneid of Virgil,* trans. C. Day Lewis, Oxford University Press, 1952).

32 **Constantin Guys:** French black-and-white and watercolor artist and draftsman (1805-82), famous for his sketches of the Parisian life of pleasure under the Second Empire.

33 **the "tiger" of "the late Baudenord":** Baudenord and his groom, or "tiger," are characters in two volumes of Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*.

34 **Coquelin:** Actor (1841-1909) who for twenty-six years was highly successful as *premier comique* at the Comédie-Française.

35 **Tir aux Pigeons:** Literally "pigeon shoot," a shooting club in the Bois whose buildings were visible from the allée des Acacias.

36 **Trianon:** Name of two châteaux in the park of Versailles.

37 **the cruel steeds of Diomedes:** The allusion is a mythological one to Diomedes, the King of Thrace, who fed his horses on human flesh.

38 **Tanagra:** Simple terra-cotta statuettes and figurines dating from about 300 B.C. found in the Greek village of Tanagra, mostly of young women and children in costumes with graceful draperies. They were much in vogue at the turn of the century, and the fashion inspired by them reached its height in about 1908.

39 **Dodonean:** In Dodona, in Epirus, the priests of Zeus' sanctuary gave oracles by interpreting the sound of the wind in the sacred oaks.

Synopsis

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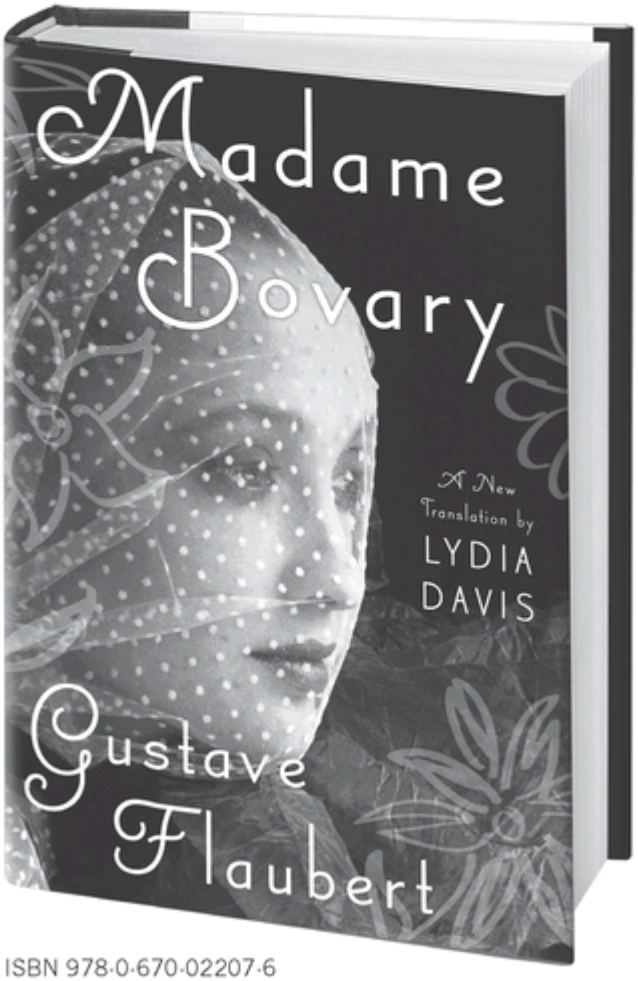

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VIKING

BOOK II

In the Shadow of Young Girls in Blossom

PART I
At Mrs Swann's

When it was first suggested we invite M. de Norpois to dinner, my mother commented that it was a pity Professor Cottard was absent from Paris and that she herself had quite lost touch with Swann, either of whom the former ambassador would have been pleased to meet; to which my father replied that although a guest as eminent as Cottard, a scientific man of some renown, would always be an asset at one's dinner-table, the Marquis de Norpois would be bound to see Swann, with his showing-off and his name-dropping, as nothing but a vulgar swank, 'a rank outsider', as he would put it. This statement of my father's may require a few words of explanation, as there may be some who remember Cottard as a mediocrity and Swann as the soul of discretion and modesty in all things social. As regards Swann, it turns out that our old family friend was now no longer only 'young Swann' and 'Swann of the Jockey Club'; to these personalities he had added a new one, which was not to be his last, that of Odette's husband. Adapting to her humble ambitions all the flair, desires and industry which he had always possessed, Swann had contrived to construct a new position for himself, albeit far below the one he had formerly occupied, but suited to the wife with whom he must now share it. And in this position he had turned into a new man. Since this was the beginning of a second life for both of them, among a circle of new people (except for personal friends from his bachelor days whom he went on seeing alone, and whom he did not wish to burden with the acquaintance of Odette, unless they themselves expressed the wish to meet her), it would have been understandable if, in judging the social standing of these new people, and thereby gauging the degree of self-esteem that their company might afford him, his standard of comparison had been based at least on Odette's former associates, if not on the exalted individuals among whom he himself had moved before his marriage. However, even when one knew that the people he now wished to associate with were unrefined civil servants, or the sort of dubious women who were fixtures of the annual ball at certain ministries, one could still be astounded to hear this man (who in former days, and even now, could show such exquisite tact in not advertising an invitation to Twickenham[1] or Buckingham Palace) braying out the fact that the wife of an under-secretary's under-secretary had returned Mme Swann's visit. It may be thought that this was because the simplicity of manners in the fashionable Swann was only a finer form of vanity and that, after the manner of certain Jews, our old family friend had passed through the successive phases of a development observable in the breed he belonged to, going from the most guileless snobbery, the crassest caddishness, to the politest of refinements. The main reason, however, was (and it is one which holds good for all of humanity) that even our virtues are not extraneous, free-floating things which are always at our disposal; in fact they come to be so closely linked in our minds with the actions we feel they should accompany that, if we are required to engage in some different activity, it can take us by surprise, so that we never even think that it too might entail the use of those very virtues. In his gushing ways with these new friends and his boastful citing of their exploits, Swann was like the great artist who takes up cooking or gardening late in life and who, though modest enough to be untroubled by criticism of his masterpieces, cannot bear to hear faint praise of his recipes or flower-beds, and basks naïvely in the delight of hearing them lauded; or who, though generous enough to let a canvas go for nothing, will be put out by losing a few pence at dominoes.

As for Professor Cottard, we shall meet him again eventually, and at some length, at La Raspelière, the château of the Patronne. For the moment, let the following remark suffice. The change in Swann may well be surprising, since it had already come about, albeit without my knowledge, by the time I had become familiar with him as the father of Gilberte, at the Champs-Élysées; and then, of course, as he never spoke to me, he could not brag about his connections in the political world. (And even if he had done so, I might well not have been immediately aware of his vanity, as one's long-standing mental image of others deprives one of sight and hearing in their presence – my mother took three years to notice the lip-stick that one of her nieces was using; for all she could see, it might have been totally and invisibly dissolved, till the day when either an extra dab of it or some other cause brought about the reaction known as supersaturation: all the unseen lip-stick crystallized and, in the face of this sudden splash of colour, my mother declared, after the manner of Combray, that it was a disgrace, and all but broke off relations with the girl.) With Cottard, however, the days when we saw him witnessing Swann's introduction to the Verdurins were long past. Honours and official titles come with the years. Also, it is possible to be unread, and to like making silly puns, while having a special gift which outweighs any general culture, such as the gift of the great strategist or the great clinician. So Cottard was seen by his medical colleagues not just as an obscure practitioner who had eventually risen to celebrity throughout Europe. The cleverest of the younger doctors declared – for a few years at any rate, since all fashions, having arisen from a desire for change, eventually pass away for the same reason – that if ever they should fall ill, Cottard was the only eminent man to whom they would entrust their persons. Obviously, for conversation, they preferred the company of certain other senior colleagues who were more cultivated or more artistically minded, and with whom they could discuss Nietzsche or Wagner. At Mme Cottard's musical evenings, to which she invited students and colleagues of her husband's in the hope that he would one day become Dean of the Faculty, Cottard himself never listened to a note, preferring to play cards in one of the other rooms. But he was renowned for his diagnostic skill, for the unhesitating acuity and accuracy of his eye. In addition, in considering the general effect that Cottard's manners made on someone like my father, it should be noted that the nature we display in the second part of our life may not always be, though it often is, a growth from or a stunting of our first nature, an exaggeration or attenuation of it. It is at times an inversion of it, a garment turned inside out. In youth, everyone except the Verdurins, who had taken a great fancy to him, had mercilessly mocked him for his hesitant air, his excessive diffidence and affability. Did some kind friend suggest he adopt an icy demeanour? The eminence of his position certainly made it easy for him to comply. Except at the Verdurins', where he instinctively became himself again, he now made a show of being cold and taciturn; when speech was required, he was brusque and made a point of saying unpleasant things. He first tried his new manner on patients who had no prior acquaintance with him, who could therefore make no comparisons and who would have been amazed to learn that he was not a man to whom such abruptness came naturally. He aimed first and foremost at being impassive; and even when he made some of his puns doing the rounds in the hospital, making everyone laugh, from the medical superintendent to the newest student, he would always do it without moving a muscle in his face, which, since he had shaved off his beard and moustache, was also quite unrecognizable.

Of the Marquis de Norpois it can be said that, having been a plenipotentiary of Napoleon III before the Franco-Prussian War, he had been briefly elevated to an ambassadorship during the constitutional crisis of 16 May 1877. Despite this, and to the great astonishment of many, he had also been appointed several times since then as an extraordinary representative of France, accomplishing special missions and even acting as Comptroller of Public Monies in Egypt, where his great financial ability enabled him to render important services, at the behest of Radical cabinets, on whose behalf a mere middle-class reactionary would have declined to act, and to which M. de Norpois's past, connections and opinions should have made him suspect. But these progressive ministers seemed to realize that, in making such an appointment, they were demonstrating the breadth of vision of which they were capable when the higher interests of France required it – so outclassing the average politician that they might expect to be called 'statesmen' by the *Journal des débats* itself! – while basking in the prestige afforded by the man's noble name and title, and in the interest created by a dramatically unforeseeable choice. They knew too that, in having recourse to M. de Norpois, they could enjoy these advantages without fear of political disloyalty on his part, as the Marquis's breeding, rather than giving them grounds to suspect him of any such thing, ensured against it. In this, the government of the Republic was not mistaken, for the good reason that a certain aristocracy, bred from childhood to see their name as an intrinsic benefit which nothing can take away (and the value of which is fairly well gauged by their peers and by those of even higher birth), know they can spare themselves the efforts made by many a commoner to profess only opinions seen as sound, and to mix only with people seen as proper, as these efforts would be of no profit to them. However, wishing to magnify themselves in the eyes of the princely or ducal families which are their immediate superiors, these

aristocrats also know that they can do this only if they enhance their name with something extraneous to it, something which, other names being equal, will make theirs prevail: a political influence, a literary or artistic reputation, a large fortune. So they lavish their attentions not on the futile squireen who is courted by the commoner, or on a fruitless friendship which will never impress a prince, but on the politicians who, though they may be freemasons, can get someone appointed to a plum job in an embassy or elected to a safe seat, on the artists or academics who can pull a string or two in the area which they dominate, on anyone who might be able to lend some distinction, or help in the making of a rich marriage.

In the case of M. de Norpois, however, the most important thing was that, through long practice of diplomacy, he had deeply imbued himself with the spirit known as 'government mentality', that negative, ingrained conservative spirit which informs not just the mentality of all governments, but in particular, inside all governments, that of the Foreign Office. The career of the diplomatist had given him an aversion, a dread and a disdain for the more or less revolutionary, or at least improper, ways which are those of oppositions. Apart from some uncouth members of the working and the fashionable classes, who are incapable of making such subtle distinctions, what brings people together is not shared opinion but a latent propensity of mind. Despite his fondness for the classics, an Academician of the likes of Legouvé may still approve Maxime Du Camp's or Mézières's eulogy of the Romantic Victor Hugo more than Claudel's of the classical Boileau. Though a shared jingoism may be enough to endear Barrès to those who vote for him, and who probably see little difference between him and M. Georges Berry, more would be required to endear him to those of his colleagues in the Académie française who, despite sharing his political opinions, have a different cast of mind, and will thus prefer adversaries such as M. Ribot and M. Deschanel; and the latter pair of Republicans may be favoured by staunch monarchists over Maurras and Léon Daudet, despite the fact that these two are also in favour of a restoration of the throne. M. de Norpois was a man of few words, not only in virtue of the diplomatist's habits of prudence and reserve, but also because words have a greater worth, and more subtle shades of meaning, for men whose efforts over a decade to bring together two countries may amount to a single adjective in a speech or a protocol, but in which, unremarkable though it may appear, they can read volumes. At the Select Committee, on which M. de Norpois was one of my father's fellow members, and where the others saw him as very stand-offish, they constantly congratulated my father on the friendliness shown towards him by the former ambassador. My father was as surprised as they were by this friendliness. Being himself of a less than sociable disposition, he was used to having few relationships outside his immediate circle, and made no secret of it. He was aware that the diplomatist's good opinion of him was no more than an effect of that personal idiosyncrasy which biases each of us for or against those we like or dislike, against which no qualities of intellect or sensitivity in a person who irritates or bores us will outweigh the straightforwardness and the light-heartedness we enjoy in someone else whom others would see as vacuous, flippant and insignificant. 'It's quite remarkable – Norpois is taking me out to dinner again! It's the talk of the Select Committee! A man who doesn't cultivate personal relations with anybody! I expect he'll pass on some more of his revelations about the Franco-Prussian War. ' My father was aware that M. de Norpois had been perhaps the only one to warn Napoleon III about Prussia's growing power and warlike intentions, and that Bismarck had a high regard for his intelligence. And quite recently, during the state visit of King Theodosius, the newspapers had commented on the sovereign's lengthy conversation with M. de Norpois at the command performance at the Opéra. 'I must find out whether that state visit was really important,' said my father, who was greatly interested in foreign affairs. 'I know old Norpois is very tight-lipped. But he has a nice way of opening up with me.'

As for my mother, the ambassador's intelligence may not, of itself, have been quite the kind to which she would have been most attracted. I must say M. de Norpois's conversation was such a complete catalogue of outmoded speech-forms belonging to the style of a particular career, class and period – a period which, for that career and class, may not have quite ended yet – that I sometimes regret not having simply written down statements which I heard him utter. It would have been an easy way of achieving an outdated effect, rather like the actor from the Théâtre du Palais-Royal who, when asked where on earth he found such bizarre hats, replied, 'I don't find 'em – I keep 'em.' To tell the truth, I think my mother saw M. de Norpois as rather behind the times; not that this irked her in a man's manners; but it certainly would have been less to her taste in his ways of expressing himself, if not in the ideas he voiced, those of M. de Norpois being actually quite up to the minute. However, she felt that she was subtly pleasing her husband by expressing admiration of the diplomat who had so singled him out. By strengthening in my father's mind the high opinion he had of M. de Norpois, and thereby also fostering in him a higher opinion of himself, she felt she was fulfilling the wifely duty of making life sweet for her husband, just as she did when she saw to the excellence of the cooking and the quietness of the servants. Being incapable of lying to my father, she did her best to admire the ambassador, so as to be able to praise him in all sincerity. She did, in any case, take an honest pleasure in his kind manner, his slightly old-fashioned courtesy (which made him such a stickler for ceremony that, if he caught sight of my mother passing in a carriage while he was striding along with his upright gait, he would even throw away a cigar which he had just lit, before doffing his hat to her), his deliberate manner in conversation, referring as seldom as possible to himself, and always attending to whatever might please his hearer, and his punctuality in sending off a reply to a letter, which was so striking that if my father, having just written to him, recognized M. de Norpois's hand on an envelope, his impulse was to believe that their letters had unfortunately crossed in the post – it was almost as if the Post Office arranged extra collections for his special convenience. It never occurred to my mother, who marvelled that a man could be so punctilious though so busy, so attentive though so widely connected, that every *although* hides an unrecognized *because*, and that (just as the old are always 'remarkable for their age', kings never lose 'the common touch' and provincials are always 'up with everything that's going on') M. de Norpois's different abilities – to have so many irons in the fire, yet to be so orderly in his replies, to be all things to all men, yet still be nice to us – were rooted in common habits. Furthermore, as with all those who are too modest, my mother's mistake came from the fact that she always ranked her own interests below those of others, and thus saw them as quite separate from others'. In seeing proof of considerateness in the letter dashed off by my father's friend, a man who wrote so many letters in a day, she failed to see that it was only a single one among those many; just as it did not enter her head that for him to dine at our table was no more than one act among the countless acts making up his social life, that the ambassador had long been accustomed by the diplomatic career to seeing the honouring of invitations to dinner as part of his functions, and to displaying to that end an ingrained graciousness which he should not be expected to put aside just because for once he was dining with us.

The first occasion when M. de Norpois came to dinner, at a time when I was still playing at the Champs-Élysées, has stayed in my memory because that very afternoon I had at last been to see La Berma, in a matinée performance of *Phèdre*; and also because, in chatting with M. de Norpois, I realized suddenly and in a new way how different were the feelings aroused in me by everything connected to Gilberte Swann and her parents from the feelings aroused by the same family in all other people.

One day my mother, who had presumably noticed my dejection at the imminence of the New Year holidays, during which, as Gilberte herself had told me, it would be impossible for me to see her, said to me, 'If you're still so keen on seeing La Berma, I think your father might allow you to go. Grandma could take you.'

It was because M. de Norpois had urged my father, who till then had been quite opposed to my wasting my time and possibly even falling ill just for the sake of what he called, giving umbrage to my grandmother, 'stuff and nonsense', to let me go and see La Berma, as it would be something for a young man to remember, that he had almost come to see the outing to the theatre, now that it was advised by the ambassador, as a sort of prescribed activity among certain others deemed vaguely essential for anyone hoping to achieve a brilliant career. My grandmother, who had forgone on my behalf the benefit which she believed I would have derived from seeing La Berma, and who saw this great sacrifice as justified in the interest of my health, was astonished to learn that, at a single word from M. de Norpois, this interest turned out to be of no significance. Rationalist that she was, she placed invincible trust in the regimen of fresh air and early bedtimes which had been prescribed for me; and, seeing my intended departure from it as a disaster, she said sadly to my father, 'How irresponsible you can be.' To which he barked, 'What! You mean you don't want him to go now? Well, that's rich! You were the one who kept saying how much good it would do him!'

My father's ambitions for me had been altered by M. de Norpois in another particular, of much greater importance to me. My father had always looked forward to seeing me enter the diplomatic corps; and I could not bear the thought that, even if I was to remain in Paris for a while attached to the Ministry, I must

risk being packed off one day to serve as an ambassador in capital cities where Gilberte would never live. I would have preferred to take up again the literary ambitions which I had once cherished, then given up, during my walks along the Guermantes way. But my father had constantly opposed the idea of my embarking upon a career in writing, which he saw as far inferior to diplomacy, even denying that it could count as a career, until the day when M. de Norpois, who rather looked down on the newer generation of diplomats, assured him that it was perfectly possible for a writer to enjoy as much esteem, and to exercise as much influence, as any diplomat, while retaining more independence.

'Well, who'd have believed it!' my father said. 'Old Norpois's got nothing against the idea that you might make a career in literature.' Being himself quite influential, he believed there was nothing which could not be sorted out and favourably resolved by a chat between important men. 'I'll bring him home to dinner one of these nights after a session at the Select Committee. You can have a chat with him and he'll be able to form some opinion of you. So just write something nice that you can show him. He's a great friend of the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, you know. He could get you in there, he could look after it for you, he's a pretty sharp old chap. I must say, he doesn't sound greatly enamoured of the diplomatic career nowadays.'

The blissful prospect of not being parted from Gilberte made me eager, but not able, to write a fine piece that could be shown to M. de Norpois. From sheer boredom, the pen dropped from my hand after a few preliminary pages; and I dissolved in tears of rage at the thought that I would never have any talent, that I was not gifted, that I could not even turn M. de Norpois's imminent visit to the advantage of remaining for ever in Paris. The only thing that cheered me a little was the knowledge that I was going to be allowed to see La Berma. But, just as the only storms I longed to see were those which raged along the wildest shores, so I wished to see the great actress only in one of those classical parts in which Swann had assured me she rose to the sublime. When our wish to be touched by nature or art is prompted by the hope of a grandiose revelation, we are loth to let it be replaced by lesser impressions, which might mislead us as to the true value of Beauty. La Berma in Racine's *Andromaque* or *Phèdre*, in *Les Caprices de Marianne* by Musset, these were the stirring things that I had gloated on in imagination. I knew that if I could ever hear La Berma deliver the speech beginning:

> On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous,
> Seigneur, etc.[2]

my delight would be the same as when I could step out of a gondola, to stand in front of the Titian in the Frari or the Carpaccios in San Giorgio dei Schiavoni. My acquaintance with these lines of Racine's was in black and white, as mere print on the pages of books; but now my heart beat faster at the thought that I would soon see them in the warm sunny glow shed on them by the Golden Voice. A Carpaccio in Venice, La Berma in *Phèdre*, were master-works of pictorial or dramatic art; and the glamour that surrounded them gave them such vital force, and made them so indivisible into their parts, that if I had had to look at Carpaccios in a room at the Louvre, or see La Berma in a play that I had never heard of, I would never have felt that delight of amazement at being face to face at last with the unique and ungraspable object of so many thousands of dreams. Also, in my expectation that La Berma's acting would give me a revelation about nobility and grief, I had the impression that everything great and true in her acting was bound to become greater and truer if she put it into a work of genuine worth, instead of embroidering Truth and Beauty on the coarse cloth of some valueless vulgarity.

In any case, seeing her in a new play would make it difficult for me to appreciate her skill and diction, as I would be unable to distinguish between the unfamiliar text and all the intonations and gestures which, although she had added them, would seem to belong inseparably to it; whereas the classical texts which I knew by heart were like broad surfaces, already designated and prepared, awaiting only the fluent frescoes that La Berma would lavish upon them and the unconstrained appreciation with which I would greet the inexhaustible felicities of her inspiration. Unfortunately, she had abandoned the classical stage and its repertoire years before, and was now the star and mainstay of a more popular theatre; and however often I went to look at the posters, the only plays they ever advertised were recent ones, tailor-made for her by modish authors. Then one morning, as I scanned the Morris column for the matinées being given during the first week in January, I saw for the first time a programme which, after a presumably insignificant curtain-raiser, the title of which seemed opaque because it was full of the proceedings of a plot which was unknown to me, promised as the final item on the programme Mme Berma in two acts of *Phèdre*; and for the following matinées, it specified Dumas's *Le Demi-Monde* and Musset's *Les Caprices de Marianne*, titles which to my eye, like *Phèdre*, were transparent, full of nothing but illumination, because the works were so well known to me, glowing through and through with the smile of Art. They seemed to add nobility to La Berma herself, once I had read in the newspapers, after the programmes for these matinées, a mention that it was she herself who had decided to make a public appearance once again in some of her time-honoured parts. Clearly, the artiste knew that in certain roles there is an interest which outlasts the novelty of their first appearances, or the success of their revivals, and that her own interpretation made them into museum-pieces, which it might be instructive to display again to a generation who had once admired her in them, or to reveal to another which had not. By having *Phèdre* advertised among other plays which were intended only to while away an evening, its title neither printed in special characters nor occupying more space than the others, she gave it a touch of the understatement used by a hostess who, as she introduces you to your fellow guests just as you are all about to go in to dinner, includes among the names which are merely names, and in the same tone of voice in which she has announced all the others, 'M. Anatole France'.

My doctor, the one who had forbidden me all travel, advised my parents against letting me go to the theatre: afterwards and possibly for a long time, I would be sure to be ill; the net result for me would be more pain than pleasure. I might have been dissuaded by such a fear, if what I expected from the matinée had been a mere pleasure which could be cancelled by the counter-balance of subsequent pain. But what I did expect from it – as from the journeys I had longed to make to Balbec and Venice – was something far beyond a pleasure: it was access to truths which dwelt in a realer world than I did, truths which, once glimpsed, could never be taken from me by any of the nugatory incidents making up my futile existence, however painful they might be to my body. Any pleasure to be had from the performance seemed to me no more than the possibly inevitable form which the glimpsing of these truths must take; and this was enough for me to hope the predicted sickness would hold off until the end of the matinée, so that the pleasure might not be jeopardized or vitiated. I badgered my parents, who, since the doctor's pronouncement, no longer wanted me to go to see *Phèdre*. I kept reciting the speech

> On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous …

trying to put all possible intonations into it, the better to enjoy the unexpected one that La Berma would be sure to employ. By day and by night my mind was haunted by the knowledge of the divine Beauty which her acting would be bound to reveal, hidden like the Holy of Holies by the impenetrable veil, behind which I imagined it in constantly changing guises, according to whichever of Bergotte's images recurred to my mind from his little study of Racine, which Gilberte had managed to find for me: 'her noble plasticity', 'the white garb of Christian penitence', 'her Jansenist pallor', 'this Princess of Clèves and of Troezen', 'this Mycenæan melodrama', 'a Delphic symbol', 'a solar myth'; and it was the reckless severity of my parents which was to decide whether or not in this mind of mine, where her altar was perpetually lit, the perfections of the Goddess would stand unveiled for ever at the very spot where now stood her invisible form. With my gaze fixed on the unimaginable figure, I had to struggle all day long against the obstacles raised by my family. Then, once these obstacles had fallen and once my mother, despite the fact that the matinée was on the very day of the Select Committee session after which my father was to bring M. de Norpois home to dinner, had said to me, 'Look, we don't want you to be sad. If you really think you'll enjoy it so much, you'd better go,' now that it was up to me to decide on the outing to the theatre which had previously been forbidden, now that I was free of the need to make sure it should cease to be impossible, I began to wonder whether it was desirable, whether reasons other than my parents' prohibition should not perhaps make me choose to stay at home. For one thing, having hated their cruelty to me, I now loved them so much for their kindness that the idea of saddening them saddened me; the point of existence seemed no longer to be the seeking for truth, but the finding of fondness; and life as a good or a bad thing could only be judged by whether my parents were happy or unhappy. 'If you're going to worry

about it,' I said to my mother, 'I'd really rather not go.' She, however, did her best to scotch the notion that she might be unhappy, saying that it could spoil my enjoyment of *Phèdre*, which had been their main consideration in changing their minds about the outing. But now that I seemed to be under an obligation to enjoy myself, I found it rather irksome. What if I did fall ill afterwards? Would I get better by the end of the holidays, and be able to go back to the Champs-Élysées as soon as Gilberte returned? In the hope of deciding which to choose, I weighed against all these reasons the veiled invisibility of La Berma's perfections. On one side of the scales, I put 'knowing Mama's worrying, me not being able to go to the Champs-Élysées'; and on the other, 'her Jansenist pallor' and the 'solar myth'. But the words themselves gradually grew darker in my mind, and lost all weight and meaning for me; my hesitations became so painful that the only reason I could have had now for choosing to go to the theatre would have been to put an end to them, to be rid of them for good. And by going so as to cut short my sufferings, rather than to seek perfection and derive intellectual benefit, I would have been going not to the gentle Goddess once imagined, but to some implacable, faceless, nameless Divinity who had surreptitiously taken the other's place behind the veil. Then all at once everything changed, and my longing to see La Berma act was revived by something that made me look forward to the matinée with joy and impatience. As though turned into a stylite, I had gone to my Morris column, a daily activity which of late had become very painful, and there I had seen the first detailed poster for *Phèdre* itself, still damp with paste, which, though the other members of the cast offered nothing that could help me decide whether to go or not to go, did give to one of the rewards of my contending urges a more concrete form, and a kind of imminence that made it seem on the very point of becoming a reality: as the poster showed the date not of the day when I stood there reading it, but of the day when the matinée would be performed, and even the time when the curtain would rise, I was suddenly inspired by the happy thought that, on that day, at that very hour, I would be sitting in my seat ready to see La Berma; and in the fear that there might not be time now for my parents to book two good seats for my grandmother and myself, I ran all the way home, full of the magic of the words which had displaced 'her Jansenist pallor' and the 'solar myth' in my imagination: *Ladies wearing hats may not sit in the stalls. The doors will be closed at two o'clock sharp.*

This first matinée was, alas, a great disappointment. My father had suggested giving my grandmother and myself a lift to the theatre, which was on his way to the Select Committee. As he left the house, he said to my mother, 'You'll make sure it's a nice dinner tonight, won't you? Remember, Norpois's coming home with me.' She had not forgotten. Since the day before, Françoise, glad to be practising the cook's art for which she had a definite gift, inspired by the coming of a new guest, and knowing she was required to compose, in accordance with methods known only to herself, a dish of beef in aspic, had been living in a flurry of artistic creativity. Like Michelangelo spending eight months in the mountains of Carrara, selecting the most perfect blocks of marble for the tomb of Pope Julius II, Françoise, who attached extreme importance to the inherent quality of the materials out of which her masterpieces were to be wrought, had been down to Les Halles in person more than once to choose the finest slabs of rump steak, the best shin of beef and calf's foot. She threw herself so strenuously into this pursuit that my mother, seeing our old servant turn red in the face, feared that, as the sculptor of the Medici tombs had sickened in the quarries at Pietrasanta, she might make herself ill from overwork. The day before, Françoise had sent down to the oven of the local baker what she called 'a Nev York ham', looking like pink marble inside its coating of breadcrumbs. In the belief that the language was poorer than it is, and her own ears less reliable than they were, the first time Françoise had heard of 'York ham', she must have deduced that the lexicon could not possibly be so abundant as to allow for both York and New York, that she had misheard and that the right name was the one she already knew. Hence, ever since, the name of York was always preceded, for Françoise's ears and eyes, by the word *New*, which she pronounced 'Nev'. So it was with total sincerity that she would say to her scullery-maid, 'Go down to Olida's and get some ham. Ma'am particularly said she wants the Nev York.' On the day in question, while Françoise's state of mind was the burning certainty of the great creators, my own was the thankless anxiety of the seeker after truth. To be sure, right up until the moment when I saw La Berma act, I enjoyed the day. I enjoyed it in the little garden outside the theatre, where two hours later, the gas-lamps, once lit, would cover the leafless horse-chestnuts in a metallic sheen and illuminate the details of their branches; I enjoyed it in the foyer, faced with the box-office staff, whose selection, promotion and fate all depended on the great artiste whose word was law in that theatre, in which there was an obscure succession of temporary and purely nominal managers; I enjoyed it as they took our tickets without a glance at us, in their anxiety to be sure that each and every requirement of Mme Berma's had been definitely made known to the new employees, that the hired clappers must never applaud her, that windows had to stay open till she was on stage, but that every single door must then be closed, that a pitcher of hot water must be concealed near her, so as to keep down the dust – and sure enough, any moment now her carriage and long-maned pair would draw up in front of the theatre, she would step down wrapped in her furs, favour those who greeted her with a moody wave of the hand, then send one of her ladies-in-waiting to check that her friends had been allotted the proper stage-box, to see that the house temperature was right, find out who was in the best boxes tonight, inspect the attendants, for the theatre and the audience were no more than an outer garment which she put on, the medium of greater or lesser conductivity through which her talent had to pass. I even enjoyed it inside the auditorium; since learning that all the spectators looked at the same stage, unlike what my childish imagination had long pictured, I had supposed that so many people must make it as difficult for each of them to see as it is when one stands among a crowd; but now I realized that, because of the layout of the theatre, which is in a way symbolic of perception itself, each person has the impression of being at the centre; and this explained why Françoise, having been treated to a seat in the gods at a melodrama, had told us hers had been the best seat in the house and that, instead of feeling remote from the stage, she had been intimidated by the proximity of the curtain, which had seemed a mysterious living thing. I enjoyed it even more when, from behind the curtain, I began to hear sounds as vague and strange as those heard from inside the shell of an egg when a chick is about to emerge; they soon grew louder, until suddenly, from that world which our eye could not penetrate but which could see us, they became three portentous strokes,[3] clearly intended for us and as thrilling as a message from Mars. The curtain having risen, my enjoyment continued at the sight of a writing-table and a fireplace, both of them quite nondescript actually, which obviously meant that any individuals who might come in would not be actors turning up to speak lines, like some I had once seen at a party, but just people in their own home, engaged in living a day of their lives, on which I happened to be eavesdropping. My pleasure was interrupted by a moment's unease: just as I was looking forward to the beginning of the play, a couple of bad-tempered men came walking across the stage, raising their voices enough for everyone in that thousand-strong audience to make out every word, whereas when two customers start scuffling and shouting in a small café, you have to ask the waiter what they are saying; but at that same instant, in my surprise that everyone else was paying polite attention to them, all sitting submerged in unanimous silence, the surface of which was now and then broken by a ripple of laughter, I realized that this rude pair of intruders were the actors, and that the short play called a curtain-raiser had just begun. It was followed by an interval which went on for so long that the audience, having come back in, began to express their impatience by stamping their feet on the floor. I was alarmed at this; for, just as when I read in a report of a trial that a man of courage and honour was to jeopardize his own interests by giving evidence in defence of an innocent man,[4] I dreaded the thought that people might not treat him well, that his act might not be properly acknowledged, that he might not be handsomely rewarded and that in his disgust he might even join the forces of injustice; so, equating genius with virtue, I was afraid that La Berma might take umbrage at the bad manners of such an uncouth audience (among whom I would have much preferred her to be able to recognize and draw comfort from a few celebrities whose good judgment she valued) and express her displeasure and disdain for them by acting badly. I gazed about me as though to implore these stamping savages not to trample underfoot the fragile, precious impression which had brought me there. The final vestiges of my enjoyment lasted until the opening scenes of the performance of *Phèdre*. The character of Phèdre does not appear in those early scenes of Act II; and yet no sooner had the curtain gone up, and the red velvet of another curtain had been partly opened, so as to double the depth of the stage, as was done in all the star's performances, than there entered upstage an actress who looked and sounded exactly as I had been led to believe La Berma would. They must have changed the cast! All my careful study of the part of Theseus's wife was pointless! But then a second actress engaged in a dialogue with the first one – I must have been mistaken in thinking *she* was La Berma, as this new-comer looked even more like the star and came much closer to her diction! Both of them now enhanced their speeches with noble gestures – which were clear and recognizably relevant to the text, as they lifted the folds of their fine robes – and with ingenious intonations, fraught with passion or irony, which showed me shades and depths in lines which I had read at home without paying enough attention to what they meant. Then suddenly a woman appeared

between the parted curtains of the inner sanctum, standing there as though within a frame, and instantly – from the fear that filled me, much more acute than any La Berma might have felt, at the prospect of someone opening a window, spoiling her delivery of a line by rustling a programme, upsetting her by applauding her fellow actors, or by not applauding her enough, and from the effort of concentration, also greater than hers, which forced me from that moment on to sense the auditorium, the audience, the actors, the play and even my own person as nothing but an acoustical medium, of importance only insofar as it might enrich the modulations of that voice – I realized that the pair of actresses whom I had been admiring for some minutes past bore not the slightest resemblance to the one I was there to see and hear. But at the same time, all my enjoyment had dissipated: however hard I strained towards her with my eyes, ears and mind, so as not to miss a single scrap of the incentives she would offer me to admire her, I could not manage to find any. I could not even perceive in her diction or use of movement, as I had with the other actresses, any sensitivity of tone or delicacy of gesture. I sat there and listened to her as I might have read *Phèdre*, or as though at that moment Phèdre herself was saying the things I was hearing, without La Berma's talent seeming to add anything at all to them. I wished I could arrest and hold motionless before me each of her intonations, freeze each of the changing expressions on her face, so as to study them in depth and find out what was beautiful in them; at least I tried, by using all my mental agility, by having my whole attention at the ready and focussed on a line just before its delivery, not to waste in preliminaries any iota of the time taken by each word or gesture, in the hope of being able, by sheer intensity of attention, to absorb each of them as I might have done if I had been able to hold them before me for hours on end. But the time they occupied was so short! My ear had barely registered each sound when it was replaced by the following one. In one scene, where La Berma stands still for a moment against a backdrop of the sea, with one arm raised to face level, and her whole figure given a greenish tint by an effect of the lighting, the audience had no sooner burst into applause than she had changed position and the tableau I wished I could study closely had disappeared. I told my grandmother I could not see very well and she lent me her opera-glasses. But when you believe in the reality of things, using an artificial means to see them better is not quite the same as feeling closer to them. I felt it was not La Berma that I was seeing, but only an enlarged picture of her. I put the glasses down – but what if the image received by the naked eye was no more accurate, given that it was an image reduced by distance? Which was the true Berma? When she reached Phèdre's declaration of desire for Hippolyte, a part I had been specially looking forward to, because the diction of Oenone and Aricie kept revealing unsuspected subtleties in parts which were not as fine as it, I was sure her intonations would be more striking than any I had contrived to imagine while reading the play at home: but she did not even rise to the effects that the other two actresses would have managed; she blurred the whole speech into a toneless recitative, blunting the keen edges of contrasts which any semi-competent performer, even a girl in a school production, could hardly have failed to bring out; and she gabbled through it at such speed that it was not until she reached the closing line that my mind became aware of the deliberate monotone in which she had delivered the opening ones.

At length I felt a first surge of admiration within me – it was brought on by a sudden outburst of frantic clapping from the other members of the audience. I clapped and clapped too, keeping on as long as possible, in the hope that La Berma might excel herself out of gratitude, and I could then be certain of having seen her on one of her best days. The remarkable thing is that the moment when that storm of applause broke out was, as I later learned, one of those when her acting was at its most inspired. Certain transcendent realities seem to give off a sort of radiation which the crowd can pick up. From the unclear reports of certain great events, such as a danger threatening an army on a national frontier, a defeat or a great victory, the educated man may be unable to make much sense, but the crowd thrills with an excitement which surprises him and which, once he has been authoritatively informed of the military situation, he recognizes as their perception of that 'aura' surrounding events of great moment and visible from hundreds of miles away. We learn of a victory either after the war is over or at once from the janitor's jubilation. A touch of genius in the acting of La Berma is revealed to us by the reviews a week after we have seen her on stage, or by the cheers from the back stalls. But as this immediate communal responsiveness also expresses itself in many mistaken outbursts, here people usually applauded at the wrong moments; and the waves of clapping were often mechanical consequences of previous applause, just as in a gale the waves may go on rising, once the surface of the sea is disturbed enough, even though the wind is no stronger. So the longer I went on clapping, the better La Berma's acting seemed to have become. 'Say what you like,' a rather common woman sitting near by said, 'you've got to admit she throws herself into it. She really hits herself, you know. And she runs about! That's real acting!' Relieved to learn of these grounds for believing in the genius of La Berma – though suspecting they were as inadequate to account for it as were the words of the peasant on seeing the *Mona Lisa* or Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus*: 'Well, it's pretty good, eh? It's all gold! Good stuff, eh? A lot of work went into that!' – I let the cheap wine of this popular enthusiasm go to my head. Even so, once the curtain had fallen, I was aware of being disappointed that the enjoyment I had longed for had not been greater, but also of wishing that, such as it was, it would continue, and that I was not obliged to leave behind me for ever, as I walked out of the auditorium, this life of the theatre in which I had just shared for a few hours. To part from it and go straight home would have been as heart-rending as going into exile, had I not looked forward to learning a lot about La Berma from the admirer of hers to whom I owed the fact of having been allowed to go and see *Phèdre*, M. de Norpois. To introduce me, my father called me into his study before dinner. When I entered the room, the former ambassador stood up, bowed from his full height, gave me his hand and the careful scrutiny of his blue eyes. During his period as France's representative abroad, with each passing stranger introduced to him (all of them, not excluding well-known singers, being people of more or less note, of whom he knew as he met them that he would be able to say, if he should happen in the future to hear mention of their names in Paris or St Petersburg, that he well remembered the evening spent in their company in Munich or Sofia), he had cultivated the habit of making a show of affability, so as to let them see how pleased he was to make their acquaintance; and, in his belief that life in capital cities, where one is thrown into constant contact both with the personalities of interest who pass through and with the customs of the local population, affords one a thorough knowledge of history, of geography, of the ways of different peoples and of the intellectual life of Europe, which no book can give, he also turned upon every new-comer his acute proficiency in observation, so as to see for himself what manner of man he was dealing with. It was a long time since the government had appointed him to a posting in a foreign capital; but when people were introduced to him, his eyes, as though they had not been notified of his removal from the active list, still took up their work of profitful observation, while his whole demeanour set about assuring such persons that their names were not unknown to him. So as M. de Norpois spoke to me with the kindly and important air of the man who is aware of his own vast experience, he examined me with a perceptive curiosity calculated to derive all possible benefit from me, as though I was some outlandish custom, an instructive landmark or a star on a foreign tour. In this, he treated me with both the majestic considerateness of wise Mentor and the studious curiosity of young Anacharsis.

However, he made me no promise of good offices with the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, although he did ask me certain questions on my past life and studies, as well as on the things I liked, this being the first time anybody had mentioned such things in a way which, rather than giving me the idea that it was my duty to resist them, suggested they might be perfectly respectable. Seeing that I was inclined towards literature, M. de Norpois, rather than try to put me off it, spoke of it with deference, as though it was a charming dowager whose select company one remembers well from having been admitted to it in Rome or Dresden, and whom one would be glad to see more of, were it not for the unavoidable impediments of life. More favoured and freer than himself, I could be sure of having a good time with her, or so a hint of envious naughtiness in his smile seemed to suggest. But the very words he used showed me that Literature was utterly different from the image I had had of it in Combray; and I realized how right I had been to abandon all notion of it. Until that moment, my only thought had been that I had no gift for writing; but M. de Norpois now freed me of the very urge to write. I tried to explain what my dreams had been; I was trembling with emotion, in my anxiety to find the most accurate words to express what I had felt but had never before tried to put into words; and that was why what I did say was so garbled. It may have been a professional habit with him, it may have been the acquired composure of any important man being asked for advice who, knowing that control of the conversation remains in his hands, lets you meander about and exhaust yourself looking for the best words, or it may have been so as to display at its best the style of his head, which he saw as Grecian notwithstanding his great muttonchop whiskers, but M. de Norpois, while you held forth, kept as straight a face as if you were haranguing an ancient (and stone deaf) bust in the Glyptothek at Munich or Copenhagen. Then, as conclusive as an auctioneer's gavel or the Oracle at

Delphi, his voice as he replied struck you with unexpected force, nothing in his expression having let you guess at the effect you had been making, or what view he would give.

'Quite,' he said suddenly, as though the matter was closed, having let me flounder about under his unmoving stare. 'I know of the case of the son of a friend of mine who, *mutatis mutandis*, is just like you.' (His tone, as he spoke of our shared hankerings after the writing life, was reassuring, as though we had a predisposition towards rheumatism rather than literature, and he wanted me to know it was not fatal.) 'So, he preferred to leave the Quai d'Orsay, despite the fact that, thanks to his father, his career path was clear, and then, without caring so much as a fig for any views which others might have on the matter, he started to publish. He is not likely to repine at having done so, believe you me. Two years ago now he wrote a book – he's a fair bit older than yourself, of course – on the Sentiment of the Infinite on the western shore of Lake Victoria-Nyanza, and then this very year a work of lesser scope, but still written with a nimble, nay sometimes a sharp nib, on the repeating rifle in the Bulgarian army, and these two productions have really put him in a class all his own. So he has already gone a fair way. He's not a man to do things by halves, and I can assure you that, though no firm nomination of him for the Académie des sciences morales is yet being envisaged, his name has cropped up once or twice in conversation, and that in a manner which was far from disadvantageous to him. In a word, though it would be untrue to say he has yet scaled the highest peak, it must be said that, by dint of meritorious endeavour, he has contrived to make a pretty fine position for himself, and that his worthy efforts have been duly crowned by success – for success, you know, does not always go to the muddle-pates and scatter-brains of this world, nor indeed to the upsetters of apple-carts, who usually turn out to be in it for show, anyway.'

By this time, my father had no doubt I would be a member of the Académie in a very few years; and his satisfaction was increased when M. de Norpois, after a momentary pause, in which he appeared to ponder the consequences of such an act, handed me a card and said, 'Go and see him, tell him I sent you – I warrant he'll have some good advice to give you,' words which caused me as much heartache and alarm as if he had told me I was to be taken on the very next day as a cabin-boy on a clipper.

I had inherited from my Aunt Léonie, as well as many more objects and furniture than I knew what to do with, almost the whole of her money, the posthumous display of an affection for me which I had never noticed while she lived. My father, who was charged with managing this money until I came of age, sought M. de Norpois's advice on a certain number of investments. M. de Norpois recommended certain low-yield shares which he looked on as rock-solid, notably English Consolidated and the Russian four per cents: 'With first-rate stock like those, though the return may not be very high, at least you are sure that your capital will never suffer.' My father told him succinctly about the other stock he had bought. M. de Norpois's smile of congratulation was all but imperceptible: like all *rentiers*, he saw money as a desirable thing, but deemed it tactful to restrict his compliments on what anyone owned to a veiled glance of understanding; as well as which, being himself hugely wealthy, he believed good taste required him to appear impressed by the lesser incomes of others, while enjoying a quiet reminder of the superiority of his own. However, he did not hesitate to congratulate my father on the 'composition' of his portfolio, 'very stylish, very neat, very handsome'. It sounded as though he endowed the differences between the market values of shares, and even the shares themselves, with something like aesthetic merit. When my father mentioned one of these securities, quite a new one, not very well known, M. de Norpois, like the man who has read a book that you thought you were the only one to have read, said, 'Yes, yes! I enjoyed following it in the Share List – good buy, wasn't it?' And he smiled with the reminiscent appreciation of the subscriber to a review who has read its latest serialized novel, instalment by instalment. 'I would not advise you against buying up some of the issue to be floated in the coming days. It's very tempting, they're offering the shares at attractive prices.' My father, referring to certain older shares but not quite remembering their names, which were easily confused with other similar ones, opened a drawer and showed the ambassador the certificates themselves. I was delighted by the appearance of them, all decorated with cathedral spires and allegorical figures, looking like old publications from the Romantic period which I had once looked at. All the productions of a particular time look alike; the artists who illustrate the poems of a certain period are the same ones who are employed by its banking houses. There is nothing more evocative of certain episodes of Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, or works by Gérard de Nerval, as I used to see them displayed outside the grocer's shop in Combray, than the river divinities wielding the beflowered rectangle which frames a share certificate issued by the Compagnie des Eaux.

My father's attitude to my type of mind was scorn sufficiently diluted by affection for his reaction to whatever I did to be, on the whole, blind indulgence. So he had no hesitation in sending me to fetch a little prose poem I had written one year at Combray on the way home from an outing. I had written it in a state of exhilaration which I felt it must directly convey to anyone who read it. But my exhilaration must have failed to touch M. de Norpois; and he handed it back to me without a word.

My mother, who was full of respect for any of my father's occupations, came in to ask shyly whether it was time for her to have dinner served. She was reluctant to interrupt any conversation in which she was not supposed to be participating. So my father went on reminding the Marquis of some useful measure or other which they had decided to support at the next meeting of the Select Committee, in that special tone of voice used by two professional colleagues (or two class-mates) who, though out of their usual element, and in the presence of others who are not privy to the shared experiences of their other life, speak of these, while apologizing for doing so.

The state of total independence from his facial muscles in which M. de Norpois lived enabled him to listen while not seeming to hear. My father, having stumbled through a longish preamble, eventually had to grope for a word: 'So I had been thinking I might just ask for, you know, the views of the Select Committee …' Whereupon, from the countenance of the aristocratic virtuoso, who had been sitting as still as an instrumentalist awaiting his turn to play, there came, with perfect attack and a smooth delivery, in a sharpened pitch and sounding as though finishing a phrase just begun, but in a different tone-colouring, the words, ' … of which, of course, you will not hesitate to convene a meeting, given that each and every one of its members is personally known to you and can come in at any moment.' In itself, this completion was hardly remarkable. But the unmoving posture which had preceded it gave it the sudden crystal clarity, the almost mischievous surprise of the phrases by which the piano, after its silent rests, makes its punctual little replies to the cello, in a concerto by Mozart.

As we went through to dinner, my father asked me, 'So, did you enjoy the matinée?' so as to give me a chance to shine, and in the hope that my enthusiasm would find favour in the eyes of M. de Norpois; then with the technical and conspiratorial tone of retrospective allusiveness which he used for referring to the sessions of the Select Committee, he added for the benefit of the diplomat, 'He's just been to see La Berma, you know. You remember we spoke of it.'

'You must have been delighted,' M. de Norpois said; 'especially if you were seeing her for the first time. Your good father here was inclined to be anxious about the repercussions your little escapade might have on your state of health – I understand you're rather delicate, not in the best of health. However, I reassured him. Theatres nowadays are not what they used to be, even just twenty years ago. I mean, one has more or less comfortable seats to sit in; and the air circulates a bit – though we still have a long way to go to equal Germany and England, which in that respect (as in many another!) have far outstripped us. I have never seen Mme Berma in *Phèdre*, but I have been told she is outstanding. It must, of course, have been a great thrill for you.'

M. de Norpois, being incomparably cleverer than I was, must be in possession of the truth that I had been unable to derive from La Berma's acting! He would be able to reveal it to me. In answer to his question, I was going to beg him to tell me where that truth lay; and in so doing he would vindicate the desire which had urged me to go and see her. I had no more than a moment to take advantage of, to focus my inquiries on the salient points. But what *were* they? Concentrating my whole attention on my impressions, which were hopelessly confused, with no thought of shining or finding favour, but in the hope of getting from him the truth I sought, I made no effort to substitute set phrases for the words which failed me, I made no sense and eventually, so as to have him say straight out what was so admirable about La Berma, I owned up to my disappointment.

‘What’s that?’ exclaimed my father, appalled at the poor impression my ineptness might make on M. de Norpois. ‘How can you say you didn’t enjoy it? Your grandmother told us you didn’t miss a word, that you just stared and stared at her, that nobody else in the whole audience lapped it up the way you did!’

– Well, yes, I was listening as hard as I could, to see what was so great about her. I mean, she’s very good …

– Well then, if she’s very good, what more do you want?

– One of the things which contribute most definitely to the success of Mme Berma,’ said M. de Norpois, taking care to turn towards my mother, so as to bring her into the conversation and to fulfil punctiliously the duty of being courteous towards one’s hostess, ‘is the impeccable taste she exercises in her choice of parts, and which always ensures her a clear success, one which is thoroughly deserved. She rarely plays mediocre parts – I mean, here she is now as Phèdre. And one can see the same good taste in her costumes and in her acting. Even though she has made frequent and profitable tours to England and to America, the vulgarity – I won’t say of John Bull, that would be quite an unfair thing to say of the England of this Victorian era of ours – but the vulgarity of Uncle Sam seems not to have affected her. Never any colours that are too flagrant, never any exaggerated vocal effects. Just that wonderful voice, which serves her so well, which she uses to such good effect, which she plays on, I might almost say, like a musician on an instrument!’

My interest in La Berma’s acting, being no longer subject to the compression and constraints of reality, had gone on growing since the end of the performance. But I felt the need to find explanations for this interest which, while she was on stage, had sated itself with equal intensity on all the rich complexities of real life, as she offered them to my eyes and ears, but without separating any of them or distinguishing anything. So there was some relief to be had in finding a reasonable cause for it in these praises of her as an unspoiled and tasteful artiste; it attracted them to itself by its own power of absorption; it latched on to them, as the drunk man in his bonhomie is moved to maudlin by the actions of a passer-by. ‘He’s right, you know!’ I thought. ‘What a lovely voice, what simple costumes! How clever of her to think of doing *Phèdre*! Of course I’m not disappointed!’

The cold beef with carrots now made its appearance, laid out by the Michelangelo of our kitchen on great crystals of aspic that looked like blocks of transparent quartz.

‘You have a chef of superlative quality, Madame,’ said M. de Norpois. ‘And that is a thing worthy of note. Speaking as one who has had to keep up a certain standard of such things in foreign parts, I know how difficult it can often be to find the perfect Vatel.[5] I see you have prepared a sumptuous repast for your guest.’

It was true that Françoise, inspired by the challenge offered by a guest of such quality to create a dinner fraught with difficulties which for once were worthy of her, had taken pains of a sort which she no longer took when we dined among ourselves, and had become once more the incomparable cook she had been in Combray days.

‘Now, that is something you can’t get in any public eating establishment, not excluding the very best: a dish of braised beef, with aspic that doesn’t smell like glue, in which the meat has absorbed the flavour of the carrots – quite magnificent! Do allow me to have a little more,’ he added, with a gesture that requested another helping of the aspic. ‘I would be interested to see how your Vatel would acquit himself of quite a different dish, beef Stroganoff for example.’

So as to contribute his fair share to the enjoyment of the meal, M. de Norpois now served up for us several stories which his diplomatic colleagues were familiar with, some of them featuring the sesquipedalianism of a certain politician known for his preposterous utterances larded with mixed metaphors, others featuring the epigrammatic brevity of a diplomat who was a master of elegant atticism. It was clear that M. de Norpois’s judgment of these two types of sentence was based on a criterion which was utterly unlike the one I applied to literature. I missed many niceties in his stories: I could see little difference between the clumsy sentences which he accompanied with guffaws, and the others which he thought were so fine. He was the kind of man who would have said of the books I liked, ‘So you fancy this sort of stuff, do you? Personally, I have to say I don’t see much in it, I’m not one of the initiated.’ But I could have said the same thing to him: in a statement or a speech, I could not see what he saw as witty or what he thought was stupid, what was eloquence and what was bombast; and the lack of any apparent reason why one was good and the other bad meant that these literary standards struck me as most mysterious and obscure. The only deduction I could draw was that, in politics, it was a mark of superiority rather than inferiority to repeat what everybody else thought. Each time M. de Norpois used certain expressions, which were as trite as the newspapers in which he read them, and which he spoke with emphasis, one could sense that, by virtue of having been uttered by him, they became an act, and that this act would not go unnoticed.

My mother had been expecting the pineapple-and-truffle salad to be a great success. But the ambassador, after having spent a moment exercising his penetrating gift of observation on the dish, ate the salad with complete diplomatic discretion and vouchsafed no opinion on it. My mother urged him to have some more; and as he did so, instead of offering the expected compliment, he said, ‘I cannot refuse, Ma’am, since you have clearly issued an ukase.

– We read in the ‘public prints’, my father said, that you had a long conversation with King Theodosius.

– Quite. His Majesty, whose memory for faces is remarkable, was gracious enough to recall, when he noticed me in the front stalls, that I had had the honour of seeing him over a period of a few days at the Court of Bavaria, at a time when he had no thought of his Eastern throne – as you know, it fell to him as a result of a European congress; and he even had some serious hesitation about whether to accept it or not, as he saw it as not quite up to his lineage, which is the noblest in the whole of Europe, heraldically speaking. So an equerry brought me the command to go and greet His Majesty, and naturally I lost no time in complying.

– And do you find the results of his visit satisfactory?

– Completely and entirely! Mind you, one might well have harboured some misgivings about how well such a young monarch might comport himself in such difficult circumstances, especially given the delicate times we live in. Personally, I must say I had no qualms whatsoever about the sovereign’s political instincts. However, even my expectations were more than borne out. The toast he proposed at the Élysée – which wholly reliable sources have assured me was entirely his own work, from the first word to the last – was in every way worthy of the universal interest it has aroused. It can only be called a master-stroke. A daring one, I grant you, but one which events have fully vindicated. The traditions of diplomacy undoubtedly have their value, but in this case they had managed to create between his country and our own a staleness in the atmosphere, which was unhealthy for both of us. And, of course, one way to get a breath of fresh air – a way which one would obviously be loth to recommend, but which King Theodosius could afford to adopt – is to break windows! He did it with a fine humour, which delighted everyone, and an accuracy in the choice of words which showed he is the worthy descendant of that lineage of highly literate princes to which he belongs through his mother. Certainly, when he spoke of the ‘affinities’ linking his country to France, he used a word which, though it may not be of common currency in the lexicon of the chancellery, was singularly apt. As you can see, he said, aiming the remark at me, literature never goes amiss, even in diplomacy, even on a throne. I admit that the state of affairs had been recognized for a long time; and the relations between the two powers had become excellent. But still, it needed to be said. We had been hoping for some such word; the one used was selected with perfect taste; and you can see what an effect it has had. I for one applaud it wholeheartedly.

– Your friend, M. de Vaugoubert, must have been very happy. He had been working at the rapprochement for years.

– Yes, especially since His Majesty made a point of springing it on him by surprise, the sort of thing he is in the habit of doing, I may add. And it was a *complete* surprise for everybody, not excluding his own Minister for Foreign Affairs, who, as I have been told, did not find it entirely to his taste. He is reported to have said quite unambiguously to someone who broached the matter with him, and in a loud enough voice to be heard by others, ‘I was neither consulted nor warned,’ giving clearly to understand that he took no share of responsibility for the event. It must be admitted that it has stirred up quite a fuss; and I should not care to wager, he went on with a mischievous smile, that certain colleagues of mine, who appear to make a virtue of sloth, have not been disturbed in their repose. As for Vaugoubert, you know he had been roundly attacked for his policy of rapprochement, which must have cut the man to the quick – and he’s so

sensitive, he's the soul of delicacy. I know what I'm saying, you know, for though he's very much my junior, I have had a great deal to do with him, we have been friends for many a year and I know him well. Who *wouldn't* know him, I ask you? The man's soul is as clear as crystal. Actually, that's the only fault one could find with him – it's not necessary for a diplomatist to have a heart as transparent as his. Despite which, there's talk of sending him to Rome, which would be a great step forward for him, but also a very great challenge. Between ourselves, I suspect that Vaugoubert, though he's utterly devoid of ambition, would be very pleased if it were true, and has no desire to let *that* cup pass from him. If he does go to Rome, he may well turn out to be very successful. He's the candidate favoured by the Consulta; and I for one can see him being well suited, with that artistic bent of his, to the setting of the Farnese Palace and the Carracci gallery.[6] One might think that nobody could dislike such a man, though it must be said there is a clique who are close to King Theodosius, who are little more than the creatures of the Wilhelmstrasse,[7] always acting in response to its suggestions, and who have definitely attempted to put a spoke in Vaugoubert's wheel. He has had to contend not only with backstairs intrigues, but with the insults of hired scribblers who, with the cowardice of all stipendiary journalists, and though later they were the first to cry 'Pax', had no objection to broadcasting the paltry accusations made against our representative by unprincipled men. Yes, for more than a month, the enemies of Vaugoubert were like a scalping party doing the *war-dance*, M. de Norpois said, stressing this word. 'But forewarned, as we know, is forearmed, and he just kicked the insults aside,' he said, with even greater force, and a glare that made us stop eating for a moment. 'As a fine old Arabian proverb puts it: "The dogs bark, the caravan moves on." ' M. de Norpois paused, watching us to see what effect this quotation would have on us. It had a great effect: his proverb was well known to us. All worthy men had been using it that year instead of 'Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind,' which was in need of a rest, not being a hardy annual like 'To labour and to seek for no reward'. The culture of these eminent men was of the alternating variety, usually triennial in its cycle. Not that the articles M. de Norpois wrote for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* would have appeared less than sound and well informed, had he not deftly sprinkled these sayings throughout them. Even without the ornamentation which they added to his prose, the lay reader could instantly identify and acknowledge the career diplomat in the other type of expression which M. de Norpois could always be relied upon to place aptly in his articles: 'The Court of St James was not slow to perceive the danger'; or 'At Pevchesky Bridge, where an anxious eye was kept on the selfish yet astute policy of the Double-Headed Eagle, excitement now reached fever pitch'; or 'A cry of alarm sounded in the Montecitorio'; or 'This predictable double game carries the hallmark of the Ballhausplatz.'[8] But what had led some to see in M. de Norpois not just the career diplomat but the man of higher culture was his studied way of using certain quotations, of which the unquestionable paradigm in those days was: 'Show me sound policies and I'll show you sound finances, as Baron Louis was fond of saying.' (This was before the time when we imported from the Far East: 'Victory goes to him who can hold out for a quarter of an hour longer than his opponent, as the Japanese say.') It was this reputation as a man of letters, as well as a real genius for intrigue concealed behind a mask of indifference, which had got M. de Norpois elected to the Académie des sciences morales. There were those who became convinced that his rightful place was actually in the Académie française on the day when, in his conviction that it was by strengthening our ties with Russia that we could reach an understanding with England, he did not hesitate to pen the following sentence: 'Let this be well understood at the Quai d'Orsay, let it figure in all school geography-books which do not make a point of saying so today, let every candidate at the *baccalauréat* who cannot repeat it be failed out of hand: All roads may lead to Rome, but the road which goes from Paris to London must of necessity pass through St Petersburg.'

'As a matter of fact, M. de Norpois went on, talking to my father, Vaugoubert has made a great success of this, one which really goes further than he had been hoping. He had expected a formal toast, nothing more, which, given the coldness of recent years, would actually have been a good sign. Several people who were among those present have assured me that, if one merely reads the text of the toast, it is not possible to realize the effect which it had when it was proposed and so brilliantly expounded by the King, who, being the master he is in the art of public speaking, brought out so well each and every intent, each and every shade of it. In that connection, a rather choice detail has been brought to my attention, one which shows to advantage, yet again, the youthful good-heartedness which so many find endearing in King Theodosius. I have been assured that at the very moment when he spoke that word "affinities", which was after all the great novelty of the speech, one which, mark my words, will lend itself to much comment in the chancelleries, His Majesty, foreseeing the joy it would cause our ambassador, who would see it as the fulfilment of his every effort, the realization of his dream, one might say, in a word his marshal's baton, His Majesty half-turned towards Vaugoubert, rested that engaging eye of the Oettingens on him and carefully enunciated that word "affinities", so well chosen, such a felicitous expression, in a tone of voice which let everyone know it was being used quite deliberately and with intent. It appears that Vaugoubert was quite unmanned for a moment; and I must say that, to a certain extent, I sympathize with him. After the banquet, when His Majesty had gathered about him a more restricted circle – I have this from a person whose word is utterly unimpeachable, you understand – it is said the King even approached Vaugoubert and murmured to him, "Well, Marquis, are you satisfied with your pupil?" It is indubitable that a toast of that sort has done more than twenty years of negotiations to strengthen our two countries' *affinities*, as Theodosius II so vividly put it. You may say it's only a word, but it's certainly one to conjure with – look at the echoes it has awakened throughout Europe, the press everywhere have taken it up, people have sat up and taken notice, it has struck a new note! And that's quite typical of this particular sovereign. I won't pretend that he produces such gems of genius every day, but in his prepared speeches, indeed even in the most impromptu conversation, it is very rare for him not to leave his distinguishing mark – I almost said, not to inscribe his signature – by the coining of some trenchant phrase. No one can suspect me of bias in this, as I am utterly opposed to innovation in such things. Nineteen times out of twenty it is pernicious.

– Yes, I was pretty sure the Kaiser's recent telegram would not be very much to your taste,' my father said.

As much as to say, 'That man!' M. de Norpois cast his eyes heavenwards: 'For one thing, it was an act of arrant ingratitude. It was worse than a crime – it was a mistake![9] And as for the stupidity of it, the only word for that is monumental. For another thing, if someone doesn't put a stop to it, the man who gave Bismarck his marching orders is quite capable of repudiating each and every one of Bismarck's policies. And when that happens, we'll see a fine how-d'ye-do!

– My husband tells me, Monsieur, that you're thinking of taking him off to Spain with you one of these summers. I'm sure he would enjoy that.

– Yes, I must say it's a most engaging prospect, Madame, I'm looking forward to it very much. I really would relish such a trip in your company, my dear fellow. But what about yourself, dear lady, have you any plans for the holidays?

– My son and I may be going to Balbec, but it's not quite certain.

– Ah, Balbec! A lovely spot, I took a look at it not so many years ago. Lots of very smart houses going up. I'm sure you will find the place to your liking. How, may I inquire, did you come to choose Balbec?

– My son has a great desire to see some of the churches in the area, especially the church of Balbec itself. I had been a little apprehensive about his health, what with the strains of the journey, and especially inconveniences with accommodation. But I have been told they've just built a first-class hotel, which will mean he can have the kind of comfort required by his state of health.

– Well, I really must pass on that information to a certain person. She will be glad to know of it.

– The church at Balbec is a fine one, isn't it, Monsieur?' I asked, despite the displeasure of knowing that one of Balbec's attractions lay in its smart houses.

'Well, it's not bad. But it can't bear comparison with delicately worked gems such as the cathedrals of Rheims and Chartres, or that jewel in our crown, the Sainte-Chapelle here in Paris.

– But the church of Balbec is partly Romanesque, isn't it?

– Absolutely. It is in the Romanesque manner, which is of course one reason among others why it is so frigid. It's a style which in no way seems to foreshadow the elegance, the delicate inventiveness of the Gothic architects, who could work the stone like lace. No doubt the church of Balbec is worth a visit, if one

happens to be in the vicinity – you could while away a rainy afternoon if you had nothing better to do, take a look inside, see the tomb of Admiral de Tourville.[10]

– Did you happen to go to the dinner at Foreign Affairs last night? my father asked. I couldn't manage to attend.

– No, smiled M. de Norpois. I must confess I sacrificed that pleasure to a very different way of passing the evening. I dined at the house of a lady of whom you may have heard – the beautiful Madame Swann.'

My mother all but trembled. Being of a readier responsiveness than my father, she was often alarmed on his behalf by something which would not affect him until a moment later. She was the first to notice things which would cause him displeasure, much as bad news for France is known about sooner abroad than at home. However, she was curious to know what sort of people went to the Swanns', and inquired of M. de Norpois about his fellow guests.

'Well now …, to tell you the truth … I must say it's a house at which most of the guests appear to be … gentlemen. There were certainly several married men present – but their wives were all indisposed yesterday evening, and had been unable to go,' the ambassador replied, with a crafty glance masked by joviality, his eyes full of a demure discretion that pretended to moderate their mischievousness while making it more obvious.

'To be completely fair, he added, I must also say that there are women who go there. But they … belong – how shall I put it? – let's say to the world of Republican sympathies, rather than to the world of Swann himself. (This name he pronounced Svann.) Who can tell? One day it may turn out to be a literary or political salon. Although they do appear to be quite satisfied with the present state of affairs. Swann himself actually makes it rather too obvious, if you ask me. I was taken aback that a man of such delicacy should be so brash and tactless, not to say tasteless, about dropping the names of people who've invited him and his wife to dinner next week – yet I can assure you they were not people one would be proud to be invited by! He kept on saying, "We're not free on a single evening!" as though this was something to boast about, as though he was a vulgar outsider, which of course he isn't. Once upon a time, after all, he did have many friends both male and female, and no doubt not all of the latter, perhaps not even most of them, but I do know for a fact that one of them – I believe one can go so far as to say this, without risking being indiscreet – who is a very great lady indeed, might not have evinced total reluctance at the suggestion of frequenting Mme Swann. And if that had happened, then very likely some more of Panurge's sheep[11] would have followed suit. However, it would appear that Swann put out no feelers in that direction. Ah, what's this now? What, another Nessel-rode pudding! After such a feast of Lucullus, it will behove me to take the waters at Karlsbad! Mind you, Swann may well have sensed that it would have all been far too difficult. What's clear is that the marriage was thoroughly deplored. Mention has been made of the wife's money, but nothing could be further from the truth. However, people did think the whole thing was too unsavoury. And not only that but there was Swann's aunt, a woman who's hugely rich and very highly thought of, the wife of a man who, financially speaking, is a force to be reckoned with. Well, not only did she close her doors to Mme Swann, but she even conducted an all-out campaign to make sure all her friends and acquaintances did the same. I don't mean to imply that anyone in the best Paris society actually cut her dead. No, no, of course not! The husband being, in any case, quite capable of sending round his seconds! Anyway, the strange thing about all of this is that Swann, with all his connections in the best society, lavishes such attention on company of which the best that can be said is that it is extremely mixed. I used to know him quite well, and I must say I was both astounded and amused to see such a man, a man who's so well bred, so much at home in the most fashionable and exclusive circles, falling over himself to thank the chief under-secretary of the Postmaster General's for gracing him with a visit, asking him whether Mme Swann might *feel free* to call on his wife! He must feel out of his element. It's so clearly not his world. And yet, you know, I don't think the man's unhappy. It's true that the woman stooped to some pretty nasty things in the years before the marriage, some quite unsavoury emotional blackmail – if he ever declined to satisfy her on something or other, she just forbade him access to the child. And poor old Swann, who's really as naïve as he's refined, assumed each time that the disappearance of his daughter was mere coincidence, and would not see the truth of the matter. Also, she made him so miserable with her non-stop scenes that everyone thought that, if she ever had her way and got him to marry her, she would lead him a dog's life, and the marriage would be a disaster. Then lo and behold, what happened was the very opposite! People take great pleasure in laughing behind Swann's back at the way he goes on about his wife. Not that anyone expects a man who's more or less aware of the fact that he's a … – Molière's word, you understand[12] – to go about proclaiming it *urbi et orbi*. But still, people think he's going a little too far when he tells you what a wonderful wife he's got. Yet, you know, it's not as far-fetched as they think. The way she behaves towards him, which is not the way all husbands would prefer – and, mind you, between you and me, it strikes me as improbable that Swann, who's nobody's fool and who had known her for years, didn't have a shrewd suspicion about you-know-what – there can be no denying that she seems fond of him. I'm not saying she's not still a bit flighty, and certainly Swann himself doesn't let the grass grow under his feet in that regard, at least if one listens to what people say – and as you can imagine, people *do* say. But she's grateful for what he has done for her; and notwithstanding all the dire forebodings voiced by everyone, she seems to have become as mild as can be.' This change in Odette may not have been such an extraordinary thing as M. de Norpois thought. She had never believed that Swann would eventually marry her. Every time she informed him in a meaning tone that a certain fashionable gentleman had just married his mistress, she had been met with an icy silence; and if she went so far as to say to him straight out, 'So, don't you think that was a nice thing to do? Don't you think it's the decent thing for him to make an honest woman of someone that's given him the best years of her life?' the most she ever got was the tart reply, 'I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it – he can please himself.' In fact, Odette had come close to believing that he would do what he sometimes threatened to do in a fit of temper, and leave her for good, for she had not long since heard a sculptress declare, 'There's nothing men won't stoop to, there's not a good one among them'; and the pessimism of this profound verity had so struck her that she had taken to uttering it in all sorts of situations, accompanying it with a defeated air which seemed to mean, 'Well, what would you expect, it'd be just my luck!' As a consequence, all efficacy had gone from the optimistic maxim which had hitherto guided Odette's steps through life: 'You can treat men that are in love with you any way you like, they're such fools,' to which she always gave the twinkle of the eye which might accompany a statement like, 'Don't worry – he's quite house-trained!' Meanwhile, Odette was mortified to think how Swann's conduct must appear to one of her friends, who had recently managed to marry a man whom she had been 'with' for a shorter time than Swann and Odette had been together, although she did not even have a child by him, and who was relatively accepted now, receiving invitations to balls at the Élysée Palace. A more perceptive clinician than M. de Norpois could no doubt have made a different diagnosis: that it was this feeling of humiliation and shame that had embittered Odette, that the shrewish character which came out in her was neither integral to her nor an incurable malady; and he might have easily foreseen what had in fact taken place, that a new regimen, marriage, would bring about an almost magical remission of these painful attacks which, though of daily occurrence, were in no way organic. The marriage came as a surprise to almost everybody, which is itself a surprise. No doubt, few people understand either the purely subjective nature of the phenomenon of love, or how it creates a supplementary person who is quite different from the one who bears our beloved's name in the outside world, and is mostly formed from elements within ourselves. So there are few who see anything natural in the disproportionate dimensions which we come to perceive in a person who is not the same as the one they see. In the case of Odette, however, it should have been possible to notice that, though she had admittedly never fully appreciated the quality of Swann's mind, at least she was acquainted with the titles and the details of his writings, that the name of Vermeer was as familiar to her as the name of her dressmaker, that she knew by heart certain traits of Swann, the kind which all other people either mock or do not know, the true fond likeness of which reposes only in a mistress's or a sister's heart; and these traits in ourself we cling to so much, even the ones we would most like to see changed, that when a woman comes to have an indulgent and banteringly amicable attachment to them, seeing them rather as they are seen by ourselves and by our close relatives, a long-standing liaison can come to have something of the mildness and strength of affections within the family. The feelings we share with another are sanctified when, in judging one of our faults, that person adopts the same point of view as we do. However, there were certain aspects of Swann's mind which Odette had in fact appreciated, since they too were in part outcomes of his character. She lamented the fact that when Swann did produce a study or some other piece of writing, these aspects were not as perceptible as in his letters or in his conversation, where they abounded. She suggested that he should give them greater scope. Her reason for this was that it was these features she herself preferred in the man; but since this preference meant only that these

things were more 'him' than others, she may have been right to wish they might be more visible in his writings. Perhaps she thought too that if these writings could have more vitality in them, they might be more successful, which might then have enabled her to aspire to the thing which in her time with the Verdurins she had come to see as the greatest of all achievements – a salon of her own.

Twenty years earlier, those who thought such a marriage quite outlandish, people who, if the question had ever arisen for themselves, would have wondered, 'What ever will M. de Guermantes think, what will Bréauté have to say, when I marry Mlle de Montmorency?', the people who maintain that sort of social ideal, would have included Swann himself: in those days he had gone to great trouble to be elected to membership of the Jockey Club, and had fully expected that, by eventually making a brilliant marriage, he would consolidate his position and become one of the most notable men about town. However, if they are not to wither and fade, such imaginings of a future marriage must be constantly revivified by external stimuli. Your dearest dream may be to humiliate the man who spurned you. But if you go to live in another country and hear no more of him, your enemy will come in time to have no importance for you. If you have lost touch with all the people because of whom, twenty years ago, you longed to become a member of the Jockey Club or the Institut de France, the prospect of belonging to one or other of these bodies will have lost all its power of attraction. A long-standing relationship can do as much as illness, retirement or a religious conversion to replace old images with new. When Swann married Odette, he did not go through a process of renunciation of his former social ambitions – she had long since brought him to a state of detachment from them, in the spiritual sense of the word. And had he not been detached from them, it would have been all the more to his credit. In general, marriages which degrade one of the partners are the worthiest of all, because they entail the sacrifice of a more or less flattering situation to a purely private satisfaction – and, of course, marrying for money must be excluded from the notion of a degrading match, as no couple of whom one partner has been sold to the other has ever failed to be admitted in the end to good society, given the weight of tradition, the done thing and the need to avoid having double standards. In any case, the idea of engaging in one of those cross-breedings common to Mendelian experiments and Greek mythology, and of joining with a creature of a different race, an archduchess or a good-time girl, someone of blue blood or no blood at all, might well have titillated the artist, if not the pervert, in Swann. On the occasions when it occurred to him that he might one day marry Odette, there was only one person in society whose opinion he would have cared for, the Duchesse de Guermantes, and snobbery had nothing to do with this. Odette herself was all but indifferent to the Duchesse de Guermantes, thinking only of the people who were immediately above her, rather than of those who inhabited such a remote and exalted sphere. But at moments when Swann sat day-dreaming about what it might be like to be the husband of Odette, he always saw the moment when he would introduce her, and especially their daughter, to the Princesse des Laumes, or the Duchesse de Guermantes as she had become upon the death of her father-in-law. He had no desire to present them to anyone else; but as he imagined the Duchesse talking about him to Odette and Odette talking to Mme de Guermantes, and the tenderness the latter would show to Gilberte, making much of her, making him proud of his daughter, he could be so moved that he spoke aloud the words they would say. The circumstances which made up this fancied presentation scene were as detailed and concrete as those invented by people who set about drawing up ways to spend some huge imaginary lottery prize. To the extent that a decision may be motivated by a mental image coinciding with it, it can be said that the purpose of Swann's marrying Odette was to introduce her and Gilberte, even though no one else might be present, even though no one else might ever know of it, to the Duchesse de Guermantes. As will be seen, the fulfilment of this social ambition, the only one he had ever harboured for his wife and child, was the very one which was to be denied him; and the veto preventing it was to be so absolute that Swann was to die without imagining that the Duchesse would ever meet them. It will be seen too that the Duchesse de Guermantes did come, after Swann's death, to be acquainted with Odette and Gilberte. He might well have been wise, given that he saw so much importance in something so trivial, not to see the future as too dark in that respect, and not to exclude the possibility that the meeting he longed for might take place, if only at a time when he was no longer there to enjoy it. The mills of causality, which eventually bring to pass more or less all possible effects, including even those which had been believed to be the least likely, can at times grind slowly. Their workings can be slowed even more by our own desire, which impedes them through trying to hasten them, or even by our very existence; and they may produce nothing until long after the exhaustion of that desire, or even the end of our life. Swann could really be said to have known this already from his own experience – for, when he eventually married the Odette whom he had not found to his taste to begin with, whom he had then loved so distractedly, but whom he did not marry until he had stopped loving her, until the man who had once longed to spend his whole life with Odette, and who had despaired of ever being able to do so, had long since died within him, did not this mode of posthumous happiness somehow foreshadow what was to happen after his death?

Fearing that the conversation might turn away from the subject of the Swanns, I now broached the subject of the Comte de Paris,[13] to ask M. de Norpois whether *he* was not a friend of Swann's. 'Absolutely,' M. de Norpois replied, turning towards me and staring at my modest person through the blue of his eyes, in which his great capacity for intellectual toil and his powers of assimilation could be seen floating as though in their natural element. Then he added, turning back to address my father, 'And if I may say so, without overstepping the bounds of the respect which I profess for His Highness – albeit I do not entertain personal relations with him of a sort which would conflict with my position, however unofficial it is – I permit myself to retail to you a rather choice little incident which, as recently as four years ago, took place in a small railway-station in a certain country of Central Europe, where His Highness had occasion to set eyes on Mme Swann. Now of course, no one in his entourage saw fit to ask His Highness what he thought of her. Such a thing would not have been seemly. But when the vagaries of conversation happened subsequently to bring up her name, His Highness appeared not averse to letting it be divined, by means of certain signs, you understand, which though they may verge on the imperceptible, are withal quite unambiguous, that his impression of the lady had been far from, in a word, unfavourable.

– But it would surely have been quite out of the question, my father said, to present her to the Comte de Paris?

– Well now, who can say? M. de Norpois replied. One never knows, with princes! Some of the most illustrious, some of those who are most adept at having rendered unto themselves what must be rendered, are also on occasion those who ride roughshod over even the most inviolable decrees of public opinion, if in so doing they can reward certain good and faithful servants. And what's certain is that the Comte de Paris has always noted with the greatest good-will the devotion evinced by Swann, who is also, be it remembered, a fellow of fine wit.

– And what was your own impression, Excellency?' asked my mother, as much from politeness as from curiosity.

M. de Norpois's reply, delivered with all the energy of the old connoisseur, was at variance with the moderation with which he was accustomed to express himself:

'Absolutely first-rate!'

Then, knowing that owning up to having been strongly impressed by a woman, as long as one announces it in a waggish manner, is consistent with a highly regarded notion of table-talk, the old diplomat laughed quietly to himself for a few moments, bringing water to his blue eyes and a little quiver to nostrils finely veined with red, and added:

'Why, she is quite, quite charming!

– And was there a writer by the name of Bergotte at the dinner, sir?' I asked, in a diffident attempt to keep the conversation focussed on the Swanns.

'Yes, Bergotte was there,' M. de Norpois replied, inclining a courteous head towards me, as though in his good-will towards my father he attached real importance to anything connected with him, including the questions of a boy as young as myself, who was unaccustomed to be shown such deference by men as old as himself. 'Do you know him?' he added, gazing at me with the bright eyes which Bismarck admired for their acuity.

'My son doesn't know Bergotte, said my mother. But he admires him very much.

– Well now, I'm afraid that's not a view I can share, M. de Norpois said (and when I realized that the thing I set far above myself, the one thing I saw as the highest in the world, was the least of his admirations, the doubts this planted in my mind about my own intelligence were much more crippling than those which usually assailed me). Bergotte is what I call a flute-player. It must of course be admitted that he tootles on his flute quite mellifluously, albeit with more than a modicum of mincing mannerism and affectation. But when all's said and done, tootling is what it is, and tootling does not amount to a great deal. His works are so flaccid that one can never locate in them anything one could call a framework. There's never any action in 'em, well, hardly any, and especially no scope. It's their base which is their weak point – or rather, they have no base. In this day and age, when the increasing complexity of modern life leaves one barely any time for reading, when the map of Europe has undergone a profound recasting, and may well be on the point of undergoing another which may prove to be even more profound, when so many new and threatening problems are cropping up on all sides, you will allow that one may fairly claim the right to expect that a writer might aspire to be something higher than a glib wit, whose futile hair-splittings on the relative merits of merely formal matters distract us from the fact that we may be overrun at any moment by a double wave of barbarians, those from within and those from without! Now, I know that to speak thus is to utter blasphemies against the sacrosanct school of what certain gentlemen call Art for Art's Sake – but in our day and age there are more urgent tasks than stringing jingles of words together. I must admit that Bergotte's jingles can at times be quite pretty, but all in all they add up to something which is pretty jejune, pretty precious – and pretty unmasculine, if you ask me! Now that I'm aware of your quite excessive admiration for Bergotte, I can appreciate better that little thing you showed me before dinner, about which, by the way, the less said the better – I owe it to you to say so, for did you not say yourself, quite openly, that it was mere childish scribbling? (It was true, I *had* said so – but I had not meant it.) All sins shall be forgiven, especially the sins of our youth, what? Many another man could own up to something similar. You're not the only young fellow who has ever fancied himself as a poet. But in that piece you showed me, one can detect Bergotte's pernicious influence. Now, clearly, it will come as no surprise to you to learn that it contained none of his better qualities, he being a past master in the art of a certain phrase-making – though one should add, mind you, that it's a shallow art – and you being a boy who cannot be expected to have grasped even the rudiments of that. Still, young as you are, it's exactly the same defect, the aberration of stringing together a few fine-sounding words, and not finding any substance to put into them until afterwards. That's what's known as putting the cart before the horse. And even in Bergotte's own stuff, all these finicking futilities, all that rancid and insubstantial Mandarin manner that he goes in for, none of that is to my taste. Nowadays, a chap sets off a few verbal fireworks and everyone acclaims him as a genius. But masterpieces aren't as easy to come by as that! Among all of Bergotte's stuff, I should have to say he hasn't got to his credit a single novel that aspires to anything above the mundane, one of those books that one keeps in a special place on the shelf – not one, if you ask me, in the man's whole output. Though, mind you, in his case it must be said that the work is a cut above the man himself. Believe you me, he's the perfect illustration of the idea of that clever fellow who once said that the only acquaintance one should have with writers is through their books.[14] I defy you to find an individual who is more unlike his books than Bergotte – he's so pretentious, so solemn, so uncongenial! At times he's vulgar, at other times he talks like a book – not like one of his own books, mind you, but like a boring book, for say what you like, at least his aren't boring. If ever there was a mind that was woolly and convoluted, it's his! He's what an earlier generation was wont to call a trader in fustian. And the things he says are made even more displeasing by the way he speaks. Much the same thing was said of Alfred de Vigny by Loménie – or was it Sainte-Beuve?[15] But unlike Vigny, Bergotte has never written anything of the calibre of *Cinq-Mars* or *Le Cachet rouge*, whole passages of which deserve to figure in any self-respecting anthology.'

I was devastated by what M. de Norpois had said about the piece I had given to him to read; and, at the thought of the difficulties I encountered whenever I tried to write an essay, or even just engage in some consecutive thinking, I became once more acutely aware of my own intellectual poverty and of the fact that I had no gift for writing. It was true that once upon a time in Combray certain impressions of humble things, or a page of Bergotte, had moved me to thoughts and feelings which seemed important and valuable. But it was those very thoughts and feelings that my prose poem expressed; and there could be no doubt that a mere mirage had misled me into thinking something was good in it, whereas M. de Norpois, who was no fool, had seen through it at a glance. What he *had* done was inform me of the microscopic insignificance of myself when judged by an outside expert, who was not only objective, but also highly intelligent and well disposed to me. I felt deflated and dumbfounded; and just as my mind, like a fluid whose only dimensions are those of the container into which it is poured, had once expanded so as to fill the vast vessel of my genius, so now it shrank and fitted exactly into the exiguous confines of the mediocrity to which M. de Norpois had suddenly consigned it.

'The bringing together of Bergotte and myself, M. de Norpois said to my father, did have its potentially prickly side – though even prickles, of course, may tickle the fancy, if I may say so. You see, some years back, during my time as ambassador in Vienna, Bergotte turned up there on his travels. He was introduced to me by the Princess Metternich, subsequently signed the book at the embassy and let it be known that he wished to be invited to the ambassador's table. Now, I being the representative abroad of France, and he being a man whose writings do honour in some measure to our country (to be quite accurate, an inconsiderable measure), I should have been quite prepared to forget the poor opinion I have formed of his private life. However, he was not travelling alone; and what's more, he insisted on not being invited without his … travelling companion. I believe I can honestly lay claim to being no more of a prude than the next man; and being a bachelor, I might have been able to open the doors of the Embassy a little wider than if I had been a husband and father. None the less, I avouch that there is a degree of ignominy at which I draw the line, and which is made even more revolting by the high moral tone, or rather the frankly moralistic tone, which he adopts in print. For the books are just chock-full of incessant analysis (which, between you and me, is actually quite sickly), with agonizing scruples and morbid remorse and a veritable deluge of preachifying over the merest peccadilloes – and we all know what that's worth! – when all the time, in his private life, the man behaves with the most out-and-out cynicism and lack of conscience. So, to cut a long story short, I did not commit myself. And when the Princess gave me a reminder about it, she got no more satisfaction. With the result that I must suppose I am in no very good odour with the gentleman in question; and I can only wonder whether he greatly appreciated Swann's delicacy in inviting him and myself at the same time – unless, of course, it was Bergotte himself who suggested it. No way of knowing, though, as the man's ill. That's the real explanation – indeed, it's his only excuse.

– And was Mme Swann's daughter present at the dinner, sir?' I asked, glad to be able to broach this matter as we went through to the drawing-room, and thus conceal my excitement more easily than I might have at the table, sitting up there in full view.

M. de Norpois seemed for a moment to search his memory:

'Ah, yes. A young lady of fourteen or fifteen? Yes, I do recall her being presented to me before dinner as the daughter of Mine Host. I must say, though, that I saw little of her and she went off to bed at an early hour. Or perhaps she went out to the house of a friend, I'm afraid I can't remember. But look here, I see you are very well informed about the house of Swann.

– I play with Mlle Swann at the Champs-Élysées. I think she's lovely.

– Ahah! Yes, I see how the land lies! Well, yes, I must tell you I thought she was charming. Mind you, I do feel it incumbent upon me to say that I doubt whether she will ever have the looks of her mother – if I may so put it without in any way intending to wound your own feelings.

– I prefer Mlle Swann's face, but I also admire her mother very much. I go for walks in the Bois just in the hope of seeing her pass by.

– Really? Well, I must tell them! They'll be delighted!'

As he spoke these words and for a few seconds longer, M. de Norpois was in the position of anyone else who, on hearing me speak of Swann as an intelligent man, of his respectable family firm of stockbrokers, of his fine house, assumed that I would speak in identical terms of any other equally intelligent man, of other just as respectable stockbrokers, of any other fine house; he was at the stage when the sane man has not quite realized that the man he is chatting with is insane. Also, he was perfectly aware that it is natural to enjoy the sight of pretty women, and that when a man speaks warmly of a pretty woman it is good form to

pretend to believe he is in love with her, to share a little joke with him about it, and promise to put in a good word for him. But when he said he would mention me to Gilberte and her mother (which would enable me, like one of the gods of Olympus taking on the fluidity of a breath of air, or rather the appearance of the old man impersonated by Minerva, to be an invisible visitor to the salon of Mme Swann, there to capture her attention, be thought about by her, earn her gratitude for my admiration, and stand revealed as the friend of an important man, a worthy future guest at her house, someone who could be admitted to her family circle) I was suddenly so overcome by tender feelings for this important man, who was going to exercise on my behalf the great prestige he must enjoy in the eyes of Mme Swann, that I had to restrain myself from kissing his soft hands, so white and wrinkled that they looked as though they had spent too long steeped in water. I thought no one noticed how close I came to doing this. But it is difficult for any of us to gauge the scale on which others register our acts and words; for fear of seeing ourselves as over-important, and by magnifying hugely the dimensions to which other people's memories must stretch if they are to cover a lifetime, we imagine that all the peripheral aspects of our speech and gestures make little imprint in the consciousness of the people we talk to, let alone stay in their memory. It is this sort of assumption which makes criminals retrospectively emend statements they have made, in the belief that no one will ever be able to compare the new variant with an older version. However, it is quite possible that, even in relation to the immemorial march of humanity, the newspaper columnist's philosophy that everything passes away into oblivion may be less reliable than the opposite prediction, that all things will last. In a newspaper, in which the author of the leading article, a moralist commenting on some event, a masterpiece, or more likely just a songstress who has 'had her hour of fame', laments, 'But who will remember any of this ten years from now?', page three of the very same issue will carry an account of a session at the Academy of Antiquities concerning something which is of less intrinsic importance, a piece of doggerel, say, dating from the time of the Pharaohs, yet which is still known in its entirety. In a short human lifespan, of course, things may not happen quite like that. Nevertheless, some years later when I was a guest at a house, where among the other guests M. de Norpois seemed to be my surest ally, since he was not only a friend of my father's and an indulgent man, well disposed to our family, but also inclined by profession and nature to be discreet, I was told after he left that he had spoken of an incident long ago 'when I had been on the point of kissing his hand'. This not only made me blush to the roots of my hair; it also astounded me with the knowledge that both the ambassador's way of speaking of me and the very stuff of his memory were very different from what I would have expected. This piece of gossip, by enlightening me on the make-up of human consciousness, and its unexpected potential for absent-mindedness and presence of mind, for memory and forgetfulness, was as much a wonder and a revelation to me as it had been to read in a book by Maspero, the Egyptologist, that the exact names of the huntsmen invited by Assurbanipal[16] to his *battues*, ten centuries before Christ, were known to us.

'Oh, if you would do that, sir,' I exclaimed to M. de Norpois when he said he would mention to Gilberte and Mme Swann my admiration for them, 'if you did mention me to Mme Swann, I would be indebted to you for life – my life would be yours! However, I should just point out that I don't know Mme Swann and have never been introduced to her.'

This final statement I added only out of a punctilious concern not to be thought to be boasting improperly of an acquaintance to which I could lay no claim. But even as I spoke the words, I could sense there was now no purpose for them to serve. The warmth of my thanks was so chilling in its effect that, from the first syllable, I caught a glimpse of hesitancy and annoyance flitting across the ambassador's face, and saw in his eyes that cramped, vertical, averted expression (like the obliquely receding line of one side of a figure, in a projection) meant for the invisible listener one carries within, and to whom one addresses a remark that one's other listener, the person one has been talking to – in this case, me – is not supposed to catch. I realized at once that the words I had uttered, quite inadequate as they were to express the huge rush of gratitude that swept through me, and though it had seemed to me they could not fail to touch M. de Norpois, and must succeed in persuading him to act in a way which would afford him so little trouble while affording me so much joy, were perhaps the very ones (among all the potentially evil words that might have been spoken by people wishing to harm me) which would make him decide not to. And just as when a stranger with whom we have been agreeably exchanging what appear to be shared opinions on passers-by, who we both think are vulgar, suddenly shows the real pathological distance separating us by patting his pocket and saying casually, 'Mmm, pity I didn't bring my revolver with me – I could have picked 'em all off,' so, when he heard me speak these words, M. de Norpois, knowing that nothing was easier or less prized than to be recommended to Mme Swann and to join her circle, but seeing also that for me this represented something of such value that it must be assumed to be out of my reach, decided that the seemingly unexceptionable wish which I had expressed must actually conceal some quite different ulterior motive, a dubious intent or the memory of a *faux pas*, which must be the reason why no one had ever wished to offend Mme Swann by undertaking to put in a word for me. I realized then that M. de Norpois would never put in such a word, that even if he saw Mme Swann daily for years on end, he would never once mention my name in her hearing. However, a few days after this he did find out from her some information I had asked for and passed it on to me via my father. He had not seen fit to tell her on whose behalf he was seeking the information. She would therefore not learn that I was acquainted with M. de Norpois or that I longed to visit her house. This was perhaps less of a disaster than I thought; for even if she had learned of this longing, it would probably have done little to increase the effect of my being acquainted with M. de Norpois, as this acquaintance was itself of doubtful benefit to me. Since the notion of her own life and house caused no mysterious agitation in Odette's heart, she did not see the people of her acquaintance, the people who visited her house, as the fabulous beings they were to one who, like me, would have been glad to throw a stone through the Swanns' front window, if only I could have written on it that I knew M. de Norpois – I was sure that such a message, even if delivered in such a startling fashion, would do more to recommend me to the lady of the house than it would to prejudice her against me. But even if I had been able to comprehend that M. de Norpois's unaccomplished mission would in any event have been useless, or that it might actually have biassed the Swanns against me, even if M. de Norpois had been willing to comply with my request, I would never have had the courage to withdraw it and forgo the ecstasy, however baneful its consequences might be for me, of knowing that my name and person were, just for a moment, in the presence of Gilberte, inside her unknown house and life.

After M. de Norpois's departure, my father glanced at the evening paper, while I sat thinking over my experience of La Berma. The pleasure I had taken in seeing her act was so far from the pleasure I had been looking forward to, and was in such acute need of sustenance, that it immediately assimilated whatever might nourish it, such as the qualities M. de Norpois had identified in her acting, which my mind had absorbed as easily as a parched meadow soaks up water. My father now handed me the newspaper, pointing to a review of the matinée: 'The performance of *Phèdre* given today before an enthusiastic audience, distinguished by the presence of the foremost personalities in the world of the arts and criticism, afforded Mme Berma in the title part the opportunity to score a triumph than which, in the whole course of her illustrious career, she has rarely had a greater. We shall have more, much more, to say on another occasion about this production, which marks a veritable milestone in the theatre. Suffice it for the moment to note that the best qualified judges are as one in pronouncing that such an interpretation will stand not only as a landmark in our appreciation of the character of Phèdre, one of the greatest and the most searching parts ever produced by Racine, but also as the finest, highest achievement in the realm of art that any of us have been privileged to witness in this day and age.' This new concept of 'the finest, highest achievement in the realm of art' had no sooner entered my mind than it located the imperfect enjoyment I had had at the theatre, and added to it a little of what it lacked; this made such a heady mixture that I exclaimed, 'What a great artiste she is!' It may be thought I was not altogether sincere. Think, however, of so many writers who, in a moment of dissatisfaction with a piece they have just written, may read a eulogy of the genius of Chateaubriand, or who may think of some other great artist whom they have dreamed of equalling, who hum to themselves a phrase of Beethoven's for instance, comparing the sadness of it to the mood they have tried to capture in their prose, and are then so carried away by that perception of genius that they let it affect the way they read their own piece, no longer seeing it as they first saw it, but going so far as to hazard an act of faith in the value of it, by telling themselves, 'It's not bad, you know!' without realizing that the sum total which determines their ultimate satisfaction includes the memory of Chateaubriand's brilliant pages, which they have assimilated to their own but which, of course, they did not write. Think of all the men who go on believing in the love of a mistress in whom nothing is more flagrant than her infidelities; of all those torn between the hope of something beyond this life (such as the bereft widower who remembers a beloved wife, or the

artist who indulges in dreams of posthumous fame, each of them looking forward to an after-life which he knows is inconceivable) and the desire for a reassuring oblivion, when their better judgment reminds them of the faults which they might otherwise have to expiate after death; or think of the travellers who are uplifted by the general beauty of a journey they have just completed, although during it their main impression, day after day, was that it was a chore – think of them before deciding whether, given the promiscuity of the ideas that lurk within us, a single one of those which afford us our greatest happiness has not begun life by parasitically attaching itself to a foreign idea with which it happened to come into contact, and by drawing from it much of the power of pleasing which it once lacked.

My mother did not seem very happy that my father had given up all thought of a diplomatic career for me. I think she lived in the hope of seeing my nervous susceptibility subjected to the discipline of an ordered way of life, and that her real regret was not so much that I was abandoning diplomacy as that I was taking up literature. 'Oh, look, give over,' my father exclaimed. 'The main thing is to enjoy what one does in life. He's not a child any more, he knows what he likes, he's probably not going to change, he's old enough to know what'll make him happy in life.' These words of my father's, though they granted me the freedom to be happy or not in life, made me very unhappy that evening. At each one of his unexpected moments of indulgence towards me, I had always wanted to kiss him on his florid cheeks, just above the beard-line; and the only thing that ever restrained me was the fear of annoying him. On this occasion, rather as an author, to whom his own conceptions seem to have little value, because he cannot think of them as separate from himself, may be alarmed at seeing his publishers putting themselves to the trouble of selecting an appropriate paper for them and setting them in a type-face which he may think too fine, I began to doubt whether my desire to write was a thing of sufficient importance for my father to lavish such kindness upon it. But it was especially what he said about my likings probably never changing, and what would make me happy in life, that planted two dreadful suspicions in my mind. The first was that, though I met each new day with the thought that I was now on the threshold of life, which still lay before me all unlived and was about to start the very next day, not only had my life in fact begun, but the years to come would not be very different from the years already elapsed. The second, which was really only a variant of the first, was that I did not live outside Time but was subject to its laws, as completely as the fictional characters whose lives, for that very reason, had made me feel so sad when I read of them at Combray, sitting inside my wickerwork shelter. Theoretically we are aware that the earth is spinning, but in reality we do not notice it: the ground we walk on seems to be stationary and gives no cause for alarm. The same happens with Time. To make its passing perceptible, novelists have to turn the hands of the clock at dizzying speed, to make the reader live through ten, twenty, thirty years in two minutes. At the top of a page, we have been with a lover full of hope; at the foot of the following one, we see him again, already an octogenarian, hobbling his painful daily way round the courtyard of an old people's home, barely acknowledging greetings, remembering nothing of his past. When my father said, 'He's not a child any more, he's not going to change his mind, etc.,' he suddenly showed me myself living inside Time; and he filled me with sadness, as though I was not quite the senile inmate of the poorhouse, but one of those heroes dismissed by the writer in the final chapter with a turn of phrase that is cruel in its indifference: 'He has taken to absenting himself less and less from the countryside. He has eventually settled down there for good, etc.'

My father, in an attempt to forestall any criticism we might have to make about his guest, said to my mother:

'I must say old Norpois *was* rather "old hat", as you two say. When he said it would "not have been seemly" to ask a question of the Comte de Paris, I was afraid you might burst out laughing.

– Not at all, my mother replied. I'm full of admiration for a man of his calibre and his age who hasn't lost that simple touch. All it shows is a fundamental honesty and good breeding.

– But of course! And that doesn't prevent him from being acute and intelligent either, as I know from my dealings with him at the Select Committee, where he's quite different from how he was here tonight,' my father said, very pleased to see that Mama appreciated M. de Norpois, and trying to persuade her that he was even more admirable than she thought, for cordiality magnifies merit as gladly as pettiness minimizes it. 'How did he put it again: "One never knows, with princes …"?

– Yes, that was it. I thought it was very clever when I heard it. Anyone can see he's a man with a broad experience of life.

– Isn't it remarkable that he dined at the Swanns', though? And that the people he met there are really quite normal, I mean civil service types. Where on earth can Mme Swann have dug up people like that, I wonder?

– Did you notice the mischievous way he phrased his remark about "a house at which most of the guests appear to be … men"?'

Both of them tried to imitate M. de Norpois's delivery of this comment, as though it had been a line spoken by Bressant or Thiron in *L'Aventurière* or *Le Gendre de M. Poirier*.[17] But the person who most enjoyed one of M. de Norpois's *obiter dicta* was Françoise: years later, she could still not 'keep a straight face' if you reminded her that she had once been called 'a chef of superlative quality', an accolade which my mother had relayed to her down in the kitchen, as the Minister for War passes on the congratulations of a visiting Head of State after the review of the troops. (I had been down to the kitchen before her, having earlier extracted from Françoise, the bloodthirsty pacifist, a promise not to inflict too much pain on the rabbit she had had to kill and wishing to know how it had met its death. Françoise assured me that everything had gone off perfectly, very quickly: 'I never seen any animal like that. It just died without as much as saying a word. Maybe it was dumb …' Unversed in the speech-habits of animals, I suggested that perhaps rabbits do not screech quite like chickens. 'Oh, what a thing to say! Françoise gasped in indignation at such ignorance. As if a rabbit wouldn't screech as loud as a chicken! They've actually got much louder voices!') Françoise accepted M. de Norpois's compliments with all the simple pride, the joyous and (albeit momentarily) intelligent look of the artist listening to talk of his art. My mother had once sent her to certain celebrated restaurants to see how they did the cooking. I was as pleased to hear Françoise call some of the most famous ones 'just feeding places' as I had once been to learn that, with respect to actors, the reputed order of their merits was different from the real one. 'The ambassador insisted,' my mother said, 'that one can't get cold beef or soufflés like yours anywhere!' Françoise agreed with this, as though accepting in all modesty a simple statement of fact, and without being in the slightest impressed by the title of ambassador. She said of M. de Norpois, with the fellow-feeling due to somebody who had thought she was a chef, 'He's a good old chap, just like me.' She had of course tried to catch a glimpse of him as he arrived; but, knowing that Mama detested any spying at doors or windows, and being convinced that, if she did try to look out for him, the other servants or else the concierge and his wife would 'tell on her' (Françoise lived surrounded by 'backbitings' and 'tell-talings', which in her imagination played the same unchanging sinister role as others believe is played by the machinations of the Jesuits or the Jews), she had been satisfied to risk a glance at him through the kitchen hatch 'so as her upstairs wouldn't have a bone to pick'; and in that summary glimpse of M. de Norpois she had concluded he was 'the spit of M. Legrandin' because of his 'nimbliness' (and despite the fact that the two men had not a single feature in common). 'But look, my mother asked her, how do you explain that nobody can make beef jelly like you – when you feel like it, that is? – Well now, I don't know as I know how that becomes about, Madame,' replied Françoise, who made no clear distinction between the verbs *come*, in some of its usages, and *become*. This was the truth, of course, at least in part, as Françoise was no more able (or willing) to reveal the mystery behind the superiority of her jellies and custards than a fine fashionable lady would have been to divulge the secret of her elegance in dress, or a great prima donna the secret of her singing. Such explanations never reveal much in any case; and the same held true for our cook's recipes. 'They always cook everything in too much of a hurry, she said of the famous restaurateurs whose establishments she had visited. And they don't do the things together, like. I mean, the beef has got to turn into a sort of sponge, so it soaks up all the gravy. Though I must say there *was* one of them cafés where I thought they knew a thing or two about cooking. Mind you, I'm not saying they could manage *my* jelly, but it was done nice and slow, nice and gentle, like, and the soufflés had plenty of cream in. – Was that at the Henry?' asked my father, who had just come in and who had a high opinion of the restaurant in the place Gaillon, where he and his colleagues dined at regular intervals. 'Oh no, sir, Françoise replied, concealing her deep disdain in a mild tone. I was talking about a little restaurant. At that Henry's, it's all very good of course, but

it's not really a restaurant, is it? More like a … soup-kitchen! – Do you mean Weber's,[18] then? – Oh no, sir! I'm talking about a *good* restaurant! Weber's is in the rue Royale and it's not a real restaurant, it's only a flashy big café. And I'm sure they don't even serve you properly. I don't think they've even got table-cloths! They just bring it along and plunk it down in front of you, just like that. – Was it Cirro's? – Well now, Françoise said smiling, I'm pretty sure that as far as cookery, what *they* go in for is ladies of virtue. (To Françoise, 'virtue' meant 'easy virtue'.) Well, I mean, it's for the young ones, isn't it?' In her views of famous chefs, we could see that, for all her air of simplicity, Françoise was as devastating a 'colleague' as the most envious and self-centred actress towards her peers. But we felt she had a proper sense of her art and a respect for tradition when she added, 'No, it was a restaurant where the cooking looked nice, like right and proper, home cooking sort of thing. But still a big sort of a place. You should see the business they do, the money they make, the pennies they rake in! (The economical Françoise always spoke in pennies, leaving the golden *louis* to the bankrupt.) *You* know, Madame, up on the big boulevards, along on the right there, set back a little bit …' The restaurant of which she was speaking with such fair-mindedness mingled with pride and nonchalance turned out to be the Café Anglais![19]

When New Year's Day came round, my first occupation was to accompany Mama on visits to family. So as not to tire me, she had my father map out an itinerary for us; and she arranged our calls according to which part of town our relatives lived in, rather than in any order of family precedence. But we had hardly set foot in the drawing-room of a rather distant cousin – the lack of distance to her house being the reason why she was first on the list – when my mother was horrified to see, among the bringers of seasonal offerings of *marrons glacés* and *marrons déguisés*, the best friend of the touchiest of my uncles, who would therefore be informed that we had seen fit to make our first visit of the morning to someone other than himself. My uncle would be sure to be offended, as he would no doubt have taken it for granted that we should go all the way down from the Madeleine to his house near the Jardin des Plantes, then come all the way back to Saint-Augustin before crossing the river again to go to the rue de l'École-de-Médecine.

When these visits were finished, my grandmother having excused us from making one to her as we were to dine with her that evening, I dashed to the Champs-Élysées with a letter for Gilberte which I wanted to give to our woman in the booth, who would pass it on to the servant of the Swanns' who bought the spice-cake from her several times a week. This letter was a New Year's Day message which I had decided to write to Gilberte on the day when she had made me so unhappy, in which I told her that our former friendship had died with the old year, that I was going to forget my grievances and disappointments and that, from 1 January, we were going to build together a new friendship, which would be so sound that nothing could destroy it, and so wonderful that I hoped she would try to take pride in it, keep it beautiful and warn me in good time, as I promised to do for her too, of anything that might jeopardize its well-being. On the way home, Françoise made me stop at an open-air stall on the corner of the rue Royale, where she spent her New Year gratuity on two photographs, one of Pius IX and the other of Raspail,[20] and where I bought one of La Berma. The artiste's face, her only one, seemed a meagre gratification to offer to so many admirers: as unvarying and precarious as the coat worn by people who have no more than one to wear, all it could ever display was the same soft little groove on the upper lip, the high-set eyebrows and a few other physical features, always the same ones, always vulnerable to a chance burn or blow. It was a face which of itself would not have seemed beautiful; but because of all the kissing it must have had, kissing which its flirtatiously tender looks and archly innocent smile still seemed to invite from the surface of the 'album copy', it gave me the idea and consequently the desire to kiss it myself. After all, the desires that La Berma confessed through the disguise of Phèdre she must often experience for young men in real life; and everything, including the prestige of her name, which enhanced her beauty and extended her youth, must make it easy for her to satisfy those desires. In the gathering dusk, I stood beside a Morris column with its posters announcing La Berma's New Year's Day performance. There was a mild, damp wind blowing. It was weather I was quite familiar with; and a sudden feeling and presentiment ran through me: that New Year's Day was not a day that differed from any other, not the first day of a new life when I could remake the acquaintance of Gilberte with the die still uncast, as though on the very first day of Creation when no past yet existed, as though the sorrows she had sometimes caused me had been wiped out, and with them all the future ones they might portend, as though I lived in a new world in which nothing remained of the old except one thing: my wish that Gilberte would love me. I realized that, since my heart yearned in this way for the redesign of a universe which had not satisfied it, this meant that my heart had not changed; and I could see there was no reason why Gilberte's should have changed either. I sensed that, though it was a new friendship for me, it would not be a new friendship for her, just as no years are ever separated from each other by a frontier, and that though we may put different names to them, they remain beyond the reach of our yearnings, unaware of these and unaffected by them. Though I might dedicate this year to Gilberte, though I might try to imprint upon New Year's Day the special notion I had made up for it, as a religion is superimposed on the blind workings of nature, it was in vain: I was aware that this day did not know it was called New Year's Day, and that it was coming to an end in the twilight in a way that was not unknown to me. What I recognized, what I sensed in that mild wind blowing about the Morris column with its posters, was the reappearance of former times, with the never-ending unchangingness of their substance, their familiar dampness, their ignorant fluidity.

I went home. I had just experienced the New Year's Day of older men, who differ on that day from the young, not because nobody brings them presents, but because they no longer believe in the New Year. I had received presents; but they had not included the only one which could have brought me any pleasure: a note from Gilberte. However, I was still young, as I had been capable of writing one to her, full of the forlorn yearning for tenderness which I had hoped would inspire the same in her. The sadness of the man who has grown old is that, having learned how pointless they are, he does not even think of writing such letters.

I lay in bed, prevented from sleeping by the street-noises, which went on later than usual because of the celebrations. I thought of all the people who would end the day in pleasure, the lover or possibly the band of rakes who must have waited at the stage-door for La Berma, after the performance I had seen advertised for this evening. To soothe the agitation I suffered from during the sleepless night, I could not even tell myself that La Berma probably gave no thought to love, since the lines she spoke, and which she had studied at great length, reminded her incessantly that love is full of delights, which she knew anyway, as was clear from her ability not only to reproduce its notorious pangs – albeit fraught with a fresh violence and an unsuspected sweetness – but to strike new wonder into spectators, though each of them had felt these pangs to the full. I lit my candle again to gaze once more at her face. At the thought that at this very moment it was being caressed by the men whom I could not prevent myself from seeing with her, from drawing superhuman but imprecise pleasures from her person, the passion I felt was a cruel rather than a sensuous yearning, exacerbated now by the note of the hunting-horn one hears in the night at Mid-Lent and often at other public holidays, which, because it is devoid at such times of poetry, sounds more mournfully from a drinking-den than when it 'haunts the heart of the evening woods'.[21] At that moment, a note from Gilberte might not have been what I most needed. Our desires interweave with each other; and in the confusion of existence, it is seldom that a joy is promptly paired with the desire which longed for it.

On fine days, I continued to go to the Champs-Élysées, through streets of elegant pink houses which, because there were a great many exhibitions of water-colourists at that time, were washed by the subdued and variable light of pastel skies. It would not be true to say that in those days the palaces of Gabriel in the place de la Concorde seemed to me things of greater beauty than the adjoining buildings, or even that they dated from a different period.[22] To my eye there was greater style and even greater age if not in the Palais de l'Industrie, at least in the Palais du Trocadéro.[23] My adolescence, wherever it walked, deep in its fevered sleep, saw whole districts through the same waking dream; and I had never suspected that there might be an eighteenth-century building in the rue Royale, just as I would have been astonished to learn that the Porte Saint-Martin and the Porte Saint-Denis, masterpieces dating from the days of Louis XIV, were not of the same period as the most recent constructions in the squalid areas which now surround them. Only once did one of the palaces of Gabriel make me stop and gaze for a longish moment: it was after nightfall, and the columns of stone had been desolidified by the moonlight, which, by turning them into cardboard cut-outs, and reminding me of a stage set for *Orpheus in the Underworld*,[24] gave me my very first glimpse of beauty.

Gilberte had still not come back to the Champs-Élysées. Yet I very much needed to set eyes on her, as I could not even remember her face. When we look at the person we love, our inquisitive, anxious, demanding gaze, our expectation of the words which will make us hope for (or despair of) another meeting tomorrow and, until those words are spoken, our obsession fluctuating between possible joy and sorrow, or imagining both of these together, all this distracts our tremulous attention and prevents it from getting a clear picture of the loved one. Also, it may be that this simultaneous activity of all the senses, striving to discover through the unaided eyes something that is out of their reach, is too mindful of the countless forms, all the savours and movements of the living person, all those things which, in a person with whom we are not in love, we immobilize. But the beloved model keeps moving; and the only snapshots we can take are always out of focus. I could not really say what the features of Gilberte's face were like, except at those heavenly moments when she was there, displaying them to me. All I could remember was her smile. Unable to picture the loved face, however strenuously I tried to make myself remember it, I was for ever irritated to find that my memory had retained exact replicas of the striking and futile faces of the roundabout man and the barley-sugar woman, just as the bereaved, who each night search their dreams in vain for the lost beloved, will find their sleep is peopled by all manner of exasperating and unbearable intruders, whom they have always found, even in the waking world, more than dislikable. Faced with the impossibility of seeing clearly the object of their grief, they come close to accusing themselves of not grieving, just as I was tempted to believe that my inability to remember the features of Gilberte's face meant that I had forgotten her and had stopped loving her. Eventually, she came back to the Champs-Élysées to play almost every day. Each time she came, she left me with new things to desire for the following day, new things to ask her; and this did have the effect of transforming my love for her into a new love every day. But then something happened to alter once again the way in which, about two o'clock every afternoon, I was faced with the problem of my love. Had M. Swann intercepted the letter I had sent to Gilberte? Or was she perhaps alluding to a state of affairs of long standing, meaning that I should be more careful? As I was telling her how much I admired her father and mother, her features started to take on that unfocussed look, full of secrecy and unspoken things, which she always put on when anyone mentioned the things she had to do, visits she had to pay, shopping to be done; and suddenly she said, 'They don't fancy *you* very much, you know!' Then, slipping away like a water-nymph – that was how she was – she burst out laughing. There were times when her laughter was at variance with her words, and appeared to be translating an invisible surface into another dimension, as music does. Her parents were not demanding that she give up coming to play with me; but she thought they would have preferred our relationship never to have begun. They frowned upon my having any dealings with her, thought I was quite untrustworthy and assumed that I was bound to have a bad influence on their daughter. I could imagine the type of unscrupulous young man that M. Swann thought I was: hating the parents of the girl he loves, flattering them to their faces but scoffing about them when with her, enticing her into disobedience of them and finally, once he has had his way with her, preventing them from seeing her. Against these characteristics (which are never those which the most hardened villain sees in himself) my innocent heart protested vehemently, alleging the true nature of the feelings it held for M. Swann, which were so passionate that, if he could only know of them, I was convinced he would come to see his assessment of me as a miscarriage of justice crying out to be put right! I went so far as to set out everything I felt for him in a long letter, which I asked Gilberte to take to him. She agreed to do this – but alas, it turned out that he took me for an even greater fraud than I had thought! He was sceptical about my sixteen pages of protestations and truth! And so the letter, which contained no less passion and sincerity than the words I had spoken to M. de Norpois, met with no more success than they had. Gilberte told me the following day, after having taken me round to a secluded little pathway behind a clump of laurel, where we sat on chairs, that as her father had read the letter, which she had brought to give back to me, he had shrugged his shoulders and said, 'This whole thing is pointless. It just goes to show how right I was!' To me, knowing the innocence of my intentions, the purity of my conscience, it was galling that my words had had not the slightest effect on M. Swann's absurd misconception. For at that moment I had no doubt that it was a misconception. I was convinced that my delineation of certain unimpeachable features of my sincerest self had been so accurate that the only explanation of M. Swann's inability to recognize them through my words, as of his failure to seek me out, beg my forgiveness and admit to his mistake, was that he had never had such noble feelings himself, and consequently that he was incapable of appreciating them in others.

Of course, Swann may well have known that magnanimity is often nothing more than the outward appearance of a selfish impulse, which we have not yet seen as such or named. In my protestations of good will towards him, perhaps he recognized a mere effect, as well as a resounding confirmation, of my love for his daughter; and he may have foreseen that my subsequent acts would be inevitably governed by this love, and not by my secondary veneration for himself. This was not a view I could share, as I had not managed to isolate my love from my self, to see it as belonging to the same general category as any other love, and to hazard an experimental deduction about its likely consequences. I was in despair. I had to leave Gilberte for a moment, as Françoise had called me. She wanted me to go with her to a little green-trellissed pavilion that looked rather like one of the disused Paris toll-booths from former times, in which had recently been installed what the English call a *lavabo*[25] and the French, in their misguided anglomania, water closets. In the entrance, where I stood waiting for Françoise, the smell of the old damp walls, which was cool and musty, instantly freed me from the worries I had contracted from M. Swann's words as told to me by Gilberte, filling me with a pleasure which was of a different essence from all others; for they leave us more unstable, unable to grasp them or possess them, whereas this one was of a denser consistency, reliable, delightful, peaceful, pregnant with a lasting truthfulness, which was as inexplicable as it was undeniable. I would have liked to try, as I had done before, on our walks along the Guermantes way, to fathom the charm of the impression which had come over me, to pause for a moment's investigation of this old-fashioned redolence, which invited me not just to enjoy the pleasure, offered as a mere bonus, but to see through it to a reality which it had not quite revealed. But the woman in charge of the establishment, an old dame with plastered cheeks and a ginger wig, struck up a conversation with us. Françoise was convinced the woman came from 'her parts of the country'. Her eldest had married what Françoise called 'a posh young man', that is someone who in her view differed as much from a worker as in Saint-Simon's[26] view a duke differed from a man 'belonging to the dregs of the people'. No doubt this woman, before becoming what she was, had been better off. But Françoise was convinced she was a countess, of the Saint-Ferréol family. The countess urged me not to stand about in the inclement air; she even opened one of her cubicles for me: 'Wouldn't you like to step inside? Here's one that's nice and clean – and you can use it free of charge!' This may have been nothing more than the sort of offer I sometimes received from the sales assistants in Gouache's, who when Mama and I were placing an order, would urge me to have one of the sweets under the glass covers standing on the counter, which my mother, to my chagrin, would never allow me to accept; or it may have been the slightly less innocent sort of suggestion made by an old florist from whom Mama bought blooms for her ornamental flower-stands, who would make eyes at me and give me a rose. But if the fancy of Françoise's countess did run to youths for whom she opened the hypogean portal into her stone cubes, where men crouch like sphinxes, the aim of this kindness towards them must have been less the chance of seducing them than the unrequited pleasure of being indulgent towards a loved one, as I never saw her being visited by anyone other than one of the old park-keepers.

Having taken leave of the 'countess', I soon left Françoise to her own devices and went back to Gilberte. I saw her sitting on a chair behind the clump of laurels, so as to be invisible to her friends, with whom she was playing hide-and-seek. I sat beside her. She was wearing a flat toque, which almost covered her eyes and gave them the sly, unfocussed, evasive expression I remembered from the first time I had seen it at Combray. I asked her whether there might not be a way for me to talk this thing over with her father. Gilberte said she had already suggested this, and that he could see no point in it. 'Anyway, look,' she said, 'here's your letter back. We'd better go back to the others now since nobody's found me.'

If M. Swann had come upon us before I had managed to retrieve the letter whose sincerity he had been unreasonable enough to doubt, he might well have concluded that his doubt was fully justified. As I came close to Gilberte, who was leaning back in her chair, telling me to take the letter, but not handing it to me, I felt so attracted by her body that I said:

'You try to stop me getting it and we'll see who wins.'

She held it behind her back and I put my hands behind her neck, lifting the long plaits which hung on her shoulders, either because it was a hair-style which suited her age, or because her mother wanted her to appear younger than she was, so as not to age too rapidly herself; and in that strained posture, we tussled with

each other. I kept trying to draw her closer to me; she kept resisting. Flushed with the effort, her cheeks were as red and round as cherries; she laughed as though I was tickling her. I had her pinned between my legs as though she was the bole of a little tree I was trying to climb. In the middle of all my exertions, without my breathing being quickened much more than it already was by muscular exercise and the heat of the playful moment, like a few drops of sweat produced by the effort, I shed my pleasure, before I even had time to be aware of the nature of it, and managed to snatch the letter away from her. Gilberte said in a friendly tone:

'If you like, we could wrestle a bit more.'

Perhaps she had obscurely sensed that my antics had an ulterior motive, though she may have been unable to notice that my aim was now fulfilled. However, fearing that she might have detected it (a slight movement that she made a moment later, hinting at restraint or withdrawal, as though her sense of delicacy was offended, made me suspect I was right), I agreed to wrestle with her again, in case she might think my only purpose, now achieved, had been the pleasure which left me feeling no desire other than to sit quietly beside her.

On the way home, I suddenly recognized the hitherto hidden memory of the impression which I had been drawn towards by the cool, almost sooty air of the little trellised booth, but without being able to glimpse it or identify it. It was the memory of my uncle Adolphe's little room in the house at Combray, which was full of the same dampish redolence. I could not understand, and I postponed the effort of finding out, why the memory of such an insignificant impression should have filled me with such bliss. This made me feel that I really did deserve the disdain of M. de Norpois: not only was my favourite writer someone he dismissed as a 'flute-player', but I had experienced a moment of genuine rapture, not from some idea of importance, but from a musty smell.

For some time, if a visitor chanced to mention the gardens of the Champs-Élysées in certain family circles, the name had been greeted by the mothers with the jaundiced look with which they might deprecate a mention of a highly regarded doctor who they claim has made too many mistakes of diagnosis for them to place any trust in him – these gardens, it was said, were not good for children, and were responsible for too many cases of sore throats, measles and different sorts of fevers. When my mother did not forbid my visits to the Champs-Élysées, some of her friends, though not openly questioning her love for me, did at least doubt her wisdom.

Neurotics are perhaps, *pace* accepted wisdom, those who 'coddle themselves' the least: they are so used to detecting disorders in themselves, which they later come to realize were quite harmless, that they reach the stage of paying no attention to any of them. Their nervous system has so often cried wolf, as though it is faced with a serious illness, when it has nothing more untoward to contend with than a fall of snow or a move to a new flat, that they come to ignore these warnings, as easily as a soldier in the heat of battle can avert his mind from them and, for another few days, even though he is dying, go on leading the life of a healthy man. One forenoon, with my habitual disorders in their usual state of coordination, my mind paying as little attention to their constant circulation within me as to the circulation of my blood, I ran cheerfully into the dining-room to join my parents at the table and sat down, with the customary thought that feeling cold may mean, not that you should try to get warm, but only that you have been told off for something, and that not feeling hungry may mean it is going to rain, rather than that you should avoid eating. As soon as I started to swallow my first mouthful of an appetizing chop, I was overcome by a wave of vertigo and nausea, the feverish response of my body to an illness which had already begun, to which my indifference had turned a blind eye, masking and delaying the symptoms, but which was now adamantly refusing the food which I was in no state to absorb. At the same instant, like a wounded man's instinct of self-preservation, the thought that, if I was seen to be unwell, I would not be allowed out, gave me the strength to drag myself to my room, take my temperature (it was 104) and get ready to go to the Champs-Élysées. My smiling soul, through the permeable and sickly body that surrounded it, was already there, insisting on the sweet pleasure of a game of prisoners' base with Gilberte; and an hour later, barely able to stand, but happy to be with her, I still had enough strength left to enjoy it.

When we got back home, Françoise announced that I had 'had a turn', that I must have caught 'a touch of the chill'; and the doctor, who was immediately summoned, announced that he 'preferred' the 'fierce onset' and the 'virulence' of the attack of fever accompanying my congestion of the lungs, which he said would turn out to be nothing but a 'flash in the pan', to a more 'insidious' or 'lurking' form of it. For years I had suffered from attacks of shortness of breath; and our doctor, despite the disapproval of my grandmother, who was convinced I would go to an alcoholic's early grave, had recommended that, in addition to the caffeine already prescribed as an aid to my breathing, I should have a drink of beer, champagne or brandy each time I felt an attack coming on. The 'euphoria' brought on by the alcohol would, he said, 'nip it in the bud'. Rather than conceal the state of breathlessness I was in, I was often obliged almost to exaggerate it, before my grandmother would allow me to have such a drink. Also, as soon as I felt an attack coming on, my uncertainty about how serious it might or might not be became a more acute anxiety because of my grandmother's sorrow, which always upset me more than the fit itself. However, my body, whether because it was too infirm to bear the stress of keeping this secret to itself, or because it feared that someone unaware of the imminence of the attack might require me to make an effort that would prove impossible or harmful to it, made me need to inform my grandmother of my discomfort with a degree of accuracy which I eventually came to invest with a sort of physiological realism. If I noticed within me a bothersome symptom which I had never before identified, my body remained distressed until I could let my grandmother know. If she pretended not to pay attention, my body required me to persevere. Sometimes I went too far; and wincing with pain, the loved face, which was not as skilled as it had once been at concealing its emotions, showed an expression of pity. The sight of her grief cut me to the quick, and I fell into her arms, as though my kisses might take the grief away, as though my love for her could cause her as much joy as my being well and happy. My anxiety being now lessened by the knowledge that she was aware of the discomfort I had been in, my body had no objection to my reassuring her. I told her there was nothing distressing in the discomfort, that she must not feel sorry for me, that she could be sure I was happy. My body had been trying to receive as much sympathy as it deserved; and as long as it was known that it had a pain in its right side, it did not mind if I stated that the pain was neither severe nor an impediment to my happiness. My body did not take itself for a philosopher; philosophy was not its province. During my convalescence, I had fits of breathlessness like this almost every day. On one occasion, when my grandmother had seen me quite well earlier in the evening, she came back into my room much later; and when she saw how short of breath I was, her face was stricken with grief and she moaned, 'Oh dear, oh dear! You're so ill!' She went straight out, I heard the *porte cochère* and she came back in a little while with a bottle of brandy which, as we had none in the house, she had gone out to buy. I soon started to feel better. My grandmother was rather flushed and looked embarrassed; and her eyes were full of an expression of weariness and discouragement.

'I think I'll leave you, now that it's doing you a little good,' she said, turning quickly away. I had time to kiss her and to feel something wet on her cool cheek, which I thought might have been a trace of the damp night air out of doors. The following day she did not come in to see me till the evening, as she had had to go out, I was told. I thought to myself that this showed a fairly indifferent attitude towards my well-being; and I had a good mind to tell her so.

When my attacks of breathlessness went on inexplicably, long after my pleurisy had cleared up, my parents called in Dr Cottard. A doctor consulted in a case like this must be more than just well versed. In the face of symptoms which may be those of three or four different illnesses, the thing that enables him to decide which of them he is most likely to be dealing with, behind appearances which are very similar, is ultimately his flair, the sharpness of his eye. This mysterious gift implies no superiority in other aspects of the mind, and may be found even in a person of the utmost vulgarity, someone who is devoid of intellectual curiosity and who enjoys the most dreadful painting or music. In my case, what was externally observable might have been caused by nervous spasms, the early stages of tuberculosis, asthma, a toxi-alimentary dyspnœea with renal insufficiency, chronic bronchitis or even a complex condition comprising several of these factors. The nervous spasms needed to be treated with disdain, the tuberculosis with great care and a form of over-nutrition, which could have been bad for an arthritic condition like asthma, and possibly dangerous for a toxi-alimentary dyspnœea, which in its turn requires a regimen quite harmful to a patient suffering from tuberculosis. But Dr Cottard barely hesitated before issuing the imperious command: 'Drastic, violent purgatives. Milk and nothing but milk for several days. No meat. No alcohol.' My mother murmured that I really needed building up, that I was highly strung enough as it was, that this draconian purging and such a regimen would be hard on me. From Dr Cottard's eyes, which looked as anxious as though he was afraid of missing a train, I could see he was wondering whether

he might not have behaved with his natural mildness of manner. He was trying to remember whether he had made sure of putting on his mask of frigidity, the way one looks for a mirror to see whether one has not neglected to knot one's tie. In this uncertainty, and so as to compensate just in case, he barked rudely, 'I am not in the habit of repeating my prescriptions. Get me a pen. Milk, milk, that's the main thing. After a while, once we've dealt with the breathless attacks and the insomnia, we can start taking some clear soup, then some broth, but always and still with milk in – milk, that's the thing! You'll like that, because Spain is fashionable these days – *olé! au lait*![27] (His students were familiar with this pun, which he trotted out whenever he prescribed a milk diet for a cardiac case or a patient with a liver disorder.) Then we can gradually come back to the ordinary family diet. But if ever the cough and the breathlessness come back, purgatives, enemas, bed and milk!' With an icy demeanour, he heard out my mother's final objections, saying nothing in return, then took his leave without so much as a word to explain why he had chosen this treatment. My parents, taking the view that it was irrelevant to my condition and needlessly debilitating, decided not to try it. They naturally sought to keep the Professor in ignorance of their lack of compliance; and to make sure of this, they stayed away from any of the houses where they might have run the risk of meeting him. Then, my condition having worsened, they decided to follow Dr Cottard's instructions to the letter: three days later, all the rattling in my chest had gone, my cough had cleared up and I could breathe properly. We came to understand that Cottard, though, as he said later, he had thought I was asthmatic and especially 'not quite right in the head', had seen clearly that what predominated in me at that moment was a toxic reaction, that the liver and kidneys had therefore to be washed out, thus decongesting the bronchial tubes and enabling me to breathe and sleep again, and regain my strength. So it was we realized that Cottard the buffoon was a great doctor. At length I was able to get up. But the talk now was of not allowing me to go back to the Champs-Élysées. The reason given was the unhealthy air. But I was sure this was just an excuse for them to keep me away from Mlle Swann; and I made myself say over and over the name of Gilberte, as though it was a native tongue and I one of those captives in exile who endeavour to keep it alive, so as not to forget the homeland they will never see again. Sometimes my mother would stroke my forehead and say:

'Don't little boys tell their sorrows to their Mamas any more?'

Every day, Françoise would come in and say: 'Ooh, young master don't look so good! You should take a look at yourself, you should – you're like death warmed up!' Of course, if I had had the merest cold, Françoise would have been just as lugubrious. Her lamentations were inspired by her 'class' rather than by my ill-health. At that time I could not be sure whether Françoise was a pessimist more in sorrow than in satisfaction. I decided provisionally that she was a social and professional pessimist.

One day, when the postman had just been, my mother laid a letter on my bed. I opened it, my mind elsewhere, as it could not possibly contain the only signature which would have made me happy, that of Gilberte Swann, because I never had any contact with her away from the Champs-Élysées. Yet, there at the bottom of the page, which was stamped with a silver seal in the form of a helmeted knight surmounting a scrolled motto *Per viam rectam*, at the end of a letter in an expansive hand, which seemed to have underlined nearly all the sentences, because the cross-bar of every *t* was dashed above the letter and not through it, thus scratching a line under the corresponding word in the line above, the signature I read *was* Gilberte's! However, because I knew this signature to be impossible in a letter addressed to me, the sight of it, unaccompanied as it was by any belief in it, brought me no happiness. For a moment, all it did was cast an unreal light on everything around me. At dizzying speed, the improbable signature jumbled the things in my room, the bed, the fireplace, the walls. Everything I looked at was wobbling, as though I had had a fall from a horse; and I wondered whether there might not be some other mode of existence quite different from the one known to me, at variance with it but more real than it, which in the glimpse I had just caught of it had filled me with the hesitancy which sculptors depicting the Last Judgment show on the faces of the awakened dead, who stand already on the threshold of the Other World. The letter said: 'Dear Friend, I hear you have been very ill and are not going to the Champs-Élysées now. I've almost stopped going there too, because of everybody falling ill. But my girl-friends come to tea with me every Monday and Friday. My mother wants you to know we should be very pleased if you could come too, as soon as you are well again. We could have nice chats at home the way we used to at the Champs-Élysées! So, in the hope that your parents will allow you to come to afternoon tea very soon, I say good-bye and send you all my best wishes. Gilberte.'

While I was reading these words, my nervous system, with admirable diligence, was receiving the news that a great joy was descending upon me. But my inner self, the one most closely concerned after all, was still in ignorance of it. Happiness, happiness from Gilberte, was something I had constantly thought about, something that existed only in thought, something which was like what Leonardo da Vinci said about painting, *cosa mentale*. And thought cannot instantly assimilate a sheet of paper covered in letters. But as soon as I had finished reading it, I thought about it, and it became an object of reflection; it too became *cosa mentale*, and I felt such love for it that every five minutes I had to read it again and kiss it. It was then that I became aware of my happiness.

Such miracles lie in wait for the lover, who may expect one at any time. This particular one may have been arranged by my mother, who, seeing that for some time past I had lost all pleasure in living, had perhaps had a message transmitted to Gilberte, asking her to write to me, much as, in earlier days, when I was learning to swim in the sea, she would, unknown to me, to make me enjoy swimming under water, which I hated, as it prevented me from breathing, give wonderful boxes covered in sea-shells and branches of coral to my swimming-instructor, so that when I came upon them lying on the sea-bed, I could believe they were my own discoveries. In any case, it is best not to inquire into how life, with all its contrasting developments, can impinge upon our love: the laws which govern such things, whether their workings are inexorable or just unexpected, seem to be those of magic rather than of rationality. When a woman who is plain and without money of her own leaves a multimillionaire with whom she has been living, a man of charm despite his wealth, and when he in his despair summons up all the powers of his wealth and sets in motion all the influences of this world, but fails to have her come back to him, rather than seeking a logical explanation, it is better to assume, in the face of the wilful mistress's resolve, that Destiny wishes to crush him and make him die of a broken heart. The obstacles against which such a lover has to struggle, and which his imagination, over-stimulated by suffering, tries vainly to identify, may lie in a singularity of character of the wayward woman, in her stupidity, in the influence now exercised on her by people whom the lover does not know, in fears they may have put into her mind, in appetites she is briefly bent on satisfying, which may be of the sort that her lover, with all his fortune, cannot satisfy. Moreover, the lover who seeks to know the nature of such obstacles is handicapped: the woman's guile will hide it from him; and his own judgment, biassed by his love, prevents him from assessing it accurately. Obstacles of this kind are like the tumours which a doctor may succeed at last in reducing, without ever knowing what caused them: though temporary, they remain mysterious. However, such obstacles generally last longer than love. And as love is not a disinterested passion, the erstwhile lover no longer strives to find out why, in her need and obstinacy, the flighty woman whom he once loved declined for years to let him go on keeping her.

In love, it is not only the causes of catastrophe which may lie for ever beyond our grasp: just as often we remain in ignorance of the whys and wherefores of sudden outcomes which are happier – such as the one that Gilberte's letter brought to me – or rather, outcomes which appear to be happy, as there are few truly happy outcomes in the life of a feeling which can generally look for no better reward than a shift in the site of the pain it entails. At times, however, a temporary remission is granted, and for a while one may have the illusion of being cured.

As for the letter itself (on which Françoise refused to recognize the name *Gilberte*, because the *G* leaning against an undotted *i* was so embellished that it looked more like an *A*, while the last part of the name ran on into a fancy elongated flourish), if it is deemed that a rational explanation is required for the change of heart which it signalled, and which brought me such joy, perhaps it will be said I owed it in part to an incident which I had actually expected would be the sort of thing to damn me for ever in the sight of the Swanns. Not long before, at a moment when Professor Cottard happened to be with me – now that I was following his instructions, my parents had called him in again –, Bloch had come up to see me. The consultation was over and, since Dr Cottard, who was staying to dine with my parents, was sitting with me like any visitor, Bloch too was allowed in. In the course of conversation, Bloch having told how he had heard from someone whom he had met at dinner the previous night, someone who was very close to Mme Swann, that she was very fond of me, I knew I should tell him he was quite certainly mistaken, and thus, in accordance with the scruple which had moved me to speak of the same thing to M. de Norpois, and in case Mme Swann should think I was a liar, have it acknowledged once for all that I did not know her, and had never so much as spoken to her. But I did not have the courage to correct Bloch's error, because I could see well enough it was a deliberate one, and because I knew that, in inventing something that Mme Swann could never in fact have said, he was trying to show himself in a flattering light by saying another thing which was untrue: that he had dined with a lady who was a friend of Mme Swann's. However, whereas M. de Norpois, on learning that I did not know Mme Swann but would very much like to, had been careful not to mention me to her, Cottard, who was her doctor, having deduced from Bloch's statement that she knew me very well and liked me, said to himself that, if he told her the next time he saw her that I was a charming fellow and that he knew me well, he would not be pushing me forward but would be putting himself in a good light, two reasons which persuaded him to put in a good word for me with Odette at the first opportunity.

And so that flat opened to me, sending the perfume used by Mme Swann down the stairs to greet me, and welcoming me with an even more fragrant charm, which was the specific and forlorn flavour of the life led by Gilberte. Before long, when I asked the once implacable concierge, now transformed into a benevolent Eumenid, whether I could go upstairs, he took to raising his cap with an auspicious hand which showed my wish was granted. Soon, when I had spent a whole summer afternoon in Gilberte's room, it fell to me to open the very windows which, from the outside, had once interposed between me and treasures not meant for me a gleaming, haughty and superficial glance, which had seemed like the gaze of the Swanns themselves; yet now I was the one to let some fresh air in or even, if it was her mother's at-home day, to lean out alongside Gilberte and see the ladies as they arrived, stepping out of a carriage and sometimes glancing up to wave to me, as though thinking I was a nephew of their hostess. At such moments, Gilberte's plaits would touch my cheek. Her hair seemed to me, in the delicacy of its grain, both natural and supernatural; and in the power of its artful foliations I saw a masterwork crafted from grasses grown in Paradise. If I could have had even the tiniest sample of it, a heavenly herbarium would have been the only fitting repository for it. But since I could not hope to possess a real length of her hair, if I could have had just a photograph of it, how much more precious it would have been than any picture of little flowers drawn by Leonardo! To this end, I made compromising overtures to family friends of the Swanns and even to photographers, which did not get me what I wanted, but made me the victim of not a few veteran bores.

Whenever I stepped into the Swanns' dim ante-room, where the atmosphere thrilled with the perpetual possibility of meeting one or other of Gilberte's parents, who had for so long prevented me from seeing her, an encounter more awesome but more longed-for than a glimpse of the King would have been at Versailles (and where I would trip over a huge seven-branched coat-stand like the Candlestick in Scripture,[28] before effusively greeting a footman who sat in his long grey frock-coat on the firewood chest and whom I mistook in the half-dark for Mme Swann), if she or her husband did happen to cross my path at that moment, my hand was shaken, I was smiled upon and spoken to in an unirritated voice:

'Good afternoon! Gilberte knows you're here, does she? Good, good, that's fine, then.' Both of her parents, by the way, said 'Good aft'noon,' pronouncing *afternoon* without the middle syllable, which of course, as soon as I was back at home, it became my incessant pastime and pleasure to omit too.

But the most important thing was that the tea-parties to which Gilberte's girl-friends were invited, and which had for such a long time seemed the most impregnable of the many barriers separating her from me, had now become an opportunity for being with her. To these functions I was summoned, as a still quite recent acquaintance, on a variety of different notepapers. One of them was embossed with a blue poodle over a humorous English motto ending in an exclamation-mark; another was stamped with a ship's anchor. Once, the monogram *G.S.*, hugely magnified and elongated, was bounded by a rectangle running right down the page from top to bottom; on other occasions, it would be the name *Gilberte* either scrawled across one corner in golden letters imitating her signature and final flourish, and sheltering under an open umbrella printed in black, or else enclosed inside a motif in the shape of a Chinaman's hat, on which the name figured in capital letters none of which was individually legible. And as her range of note-papers, though extensive, was not inexhaustible, after a few weeks I would receive an invitation written on the one she had sent first, with the motto *Per viam rectam* under the helmeted knight on his seal of burnished silver. In those days, I assumed her choice of this one or that one on particular days was determined by certain rites. But now I think she just tried to remember the ones

she had already sent, so as to be sure of letting the longest possible time elapse before sending another of the same to any of the recipients, or at least to anyone for whom she did not mind taking a little trouble. Because some of the friends invited to her teas attended different lessons at different times of the afternoon, and had to leave just as others were arriving, on my way up the stairs I could hear the murmur of voices from the ante-room; and this, combined with the emotional disturbance created by the awe-inspiring ceremony which was about to be enacted before me, suddenly severed the links that joined me to my former life and, long before I reached the Swanns' floor, deprived me of the ability to remember to take off my scarf as soon as I was indoors in the warmth, and to keep an eye on the time so as not to be late home. The staircase itself, entirely of wood and of the style favoured at the time by certain speculative builders who liked imitation Renaissance, so long Odette's ideal but soon to be abandoned by her, was adorned with a notice saying *It is Forbidden to Use the Lift for Coming Down*, the like of which had never been seen in the house we lived in; and it impressed me as a thing of such magnificence that I told my parents it was a genuine antique staircase, acquired by M. Swann and brought there by him from somewhere very far away. My respect for the truth was so great that, even if I had known this information to be untrue, I would still have said the same thing, for this was the only way to have my family share the esteem inspired in me by the dignity of the Swanns' staircase. It was a reasoning akin to that which advises one, when dealing with an ignoramus who cannot see the genius of a great doctor, to say nothing of his inability to cure the common cold. But since I was very inobservant, being generally ignorant of the names and species of the most everyday things, knowing only that if they had anything to do with the Swanns they must be quite out of the ordinary, it did not strike me as a certainty that, in assuring my parents of the aesthetic value and distant origin of this staircase, I was telling a lie. Not a certainty; but perhaps a probability, as I felt myself turn very red when my father interrupted me with the words: 'I know those kind of houses, and if you've seen one, you've seen them all. Swann just rents a few floors – they were all built by Berlier.'[29] He added that he had at one time thought of renting a flat in one of them, but had changed his mind because they were not really comfortable, and the main entrance was badly lit. Thus spake my father; but, knowing instinctively that my mind must make whatever sacrifices might be necessary to the prestige of the Swanns and my own happiness, I exercised the authority of my inner self and, despite what I had just heard, put behind me once and for all, as a true Catholic might shun Renan's *Life of Jesus*,[30] the corrosive notion that the Swanns' flat was a perfectly ordinary flat, a flat that we ourselves might have lived in.

So on Gilberte's afternoon-tea days, I climbed that staircase, step by step, divested already of memory and the power of thought, reduced to a creature of the crudest reflexes, and came at last to the level where the fragrance of Mme Swann's perfume floated. My mind was full of the majestic chocolate-cake set in the circle of side-plates and little grey damask napkins, required by etiquette and peculiar to the Swanns. But the workings of this regulated and unchanging arrangement, like those of Kant's necessary universe, seemed to depend on a supreme act of free will. That is, once we were all gathered in Gilberte's little sitting-room, she would dart a glance at the clock and say:

'Look here, it's been hours since lunch-time, dinner's not till eight, and I'm feeling quite peckish. Would anyone care to join me?'

Whereupon, she would show us through to the dining-room, which was as dim as an Asian temple interior as Rembrandt might have painted it, and was dominated by the architectural splendour of a cake, as cheerful and familiar as it was imposing, which seemed to be standing there as though this day was an ordinary day, just in case Gilberte might have felt a passing urge to demolish its chocolate battlements and lay waste the slopes of its steep, dark ramparts, baked like the bastions of Darius' palace. The best thing was that, in setting about the destruction of her Ninevite cake-castle, Gilberte was motivated not only by the urges of her own appetite; she inquired also about mine, as she salvaged for me from the crumbling ruins a whole wall varnished and studded with scarlet fruit, in the Oriental style. She even asked me what time my parents dined, as though I knew something about it, as though the emotional upset from which I was suffering could enable any sensation such as lack of appetite or hunger, any notion of dinner or family, to survive in my vacant memory and paralysed stomach. Unfortunately this paralysis was only temporary; and there would come a time when cakes which I consumed without noticing them would have to be digested. But that moment was still in the future; and in the present, Gilberte made 'my tea'. I drank huge quantities of it, although normally a single cup of tea would keep me awake for twenty-four hours. So it was that my mother had come to remark, 'It's a worry – as sure as that boy goes to the Swanns' he comes home sick.' But while I was at the Swanns' I would have been unable to say whether or not it was really tea I was drinking. And even if I had known, I would have gone on drinking it; for even if I had been restored momentarily to proper awareness of the present, this would not have given me back the ability to remember the past or foresee the future. My imagination was incapable of stretching to the remote moment when I might feel tired or think of going to bed.

Not all of Gilberte's other guests were so tipsy with excitement that making up their minds was impossible. Some of these girls actually declined the offer of tea! At which, Gilberte would say a thing that people said a lot at that time, 'Well, my tea doesn't seem to be a great winner, does it?' Then, in an effort to make the occasion look less ceremonial, she shifted a few of the chairs set at regular intervals about the table, adding, 'For goodness sake, we look as though we're at a wedding breakfast! Aren't servants stupid!'

She nibbled her cake, sitting sideways on an X-shaped seat which stood at an awkward angle to the table. And if Mme Swann, having just seen one of her visitors out – her at-homes were usually on the same days as Gilberte's tea-parties – should look in quickly, sometimes in blue velvet, often in a dress of black satin covered in white lace, she would say in a tone of surprise, that suggested Gilberte might have had all those little cakes to eat without her mother knowing about it:

'What's this! Doesn't that look scrumptious! It makes my mouth water to see you all sitting here eating cake.

– Well, please join us, Mama, Gilberte would reply.

– You know I can't, my precious. Whatever would all my ladies say? I've still got Mme Trombert, Mme Cottard and Mme Bontemps – you know how the visits of dear Mme Bontemps are never very brief, and she's just arrived. What *would* these good ladies have to say if I left them in the lurch? But when they've gone, if nobody else comes, then I'll come back and have a nice chat with you all. That would be so much more to my liking! I think I deserve a little rest – I've had forty-five visitors today, and of those forty-five at least forty-two have talked about Gérôme's new painting![31] Then, turning to me as she made ready to return to her ladies, she added, Look, why don't you drop in one of these days? You could have your cup of tea with Gilberte. She knows how you like it, the way you have it at home in your own little studio.' She made it sound as though what I was seeking in this world of mystery was something as familiar to me as my own habits (if my supposed liking for tea could be called that; and as for the alleged 'studio', I was unclear whether I had one or not). 'So, when will you come? Tomorrow? We'll have toast for you that's as good as you can get at Colombin's.[32] No, you really can't? Well, you're a selfish thing!' She delivered this last statement in tones reminiscent of the mincing tyranny of Mme Verdurin, for Odette, now that she was beginning to have a salon of her own, had started to ape some of that lady's ways. Since both 'Colombin' and the English word 'toast' were utterly obscure to me, her promise could not make her house more attractive to me. As for the eulogy she then delivered of our old 'nurse', my momentary inability to understand whom she was referring to may appear somewhat stranger, given that the word is now used by everyone, possibly even in Combray. Despite my ignorance of English, I soon grasped that it meant Françoise. Whereas at the Champs-Élysées I had been so anxious about the bad impression Françoise must have made, I now learned from Mme Swann that what had predisposed her and her husband in my favour was everything Gilberte had told them about my 'nurse': 'It's pretty clear that she's devoted to you, that she's just perfect!' (My opinion of Françoise changed instantly, one effect of which was that it no longer seemed so essential to me to have a governess equipped with a waterproof and a hat with a feather in it.) I deduced too, from certain words that Mme Swann spoke about Mme Blatin, whose kindness she praised and whose visits she dreaded, that to have been on friendly terms with the lady would have been of less value to me than I had thought, and would in no way have improved my standing with the Swanns.

Though I had begun, full of this tremulous respect and joy, to explore the enchanted domain which had just given me the freedom of its hitherto forbidden avenues, it was only in my capacity as a friend of Gilberte. The realm in which I was now welcomed was itself encompassed by another even more mysterious one, in which Swann and his wife had their supernatural being, and which, if we chanced to meet, going through the ante-room in our different directions, closed behind them again, as soon as they had shaken my hand. However, soon I too had access to their Inner Sanctum. For instance, if Gilberte was not at home but her parents were, they would ask who it was at the door; and having been told it was me, they would have me sent in to see them, with the aim of asking me to influence their daughter towards a certain course of action in some matter or other. I remembered the exhaustive, persuasive screed which I had not long since sent to M. Swann, and to which he had never deigned to reply. I was struck by the impotence of the mind, the reason and the heart in bringing about the slightest change in people, in reducing a single one of the difficulties which life, left to its own devices and in ways that escape us, manages to resolve so easily. My new status as friend of Gilberte, capable of influencing her for the better, put me in the favourable position of someone who happened to be the school-friend of a king's son, as well as being always top of the class, and who, because of those fortuitous facts, now has the run of the Palace and private audiences in the Throne-room: with infinite kindness, and as though he was not much occupied with lofty considerations, Swann would usher me into his study and speak to me for an hour about things which my state of emotional turmoil prevented me from understanding a single word of, and to which I could reply only with stammerings, diffident dumbness and sudden daring outbursts of short-winded incoherence; thinking they might interest me, he showed me books and finely wrought objects, the beauty of which, I was prospectively convinced, must infinitely surpass all the holdings of the Louvre and the Bibliothèque nationale, impossible though it was for me to view these. At such moments, the Swanns' butler would have endeared himself to me had he asked me to hand over my watch, my tie-pin and my boots, or if he had begged me to sign a deed recognizing him as my heir. The state I was in is described perfectly by a fine colloquialism – *I didn't know whether I was coming or going!* – the coiner of which is as unknown as the author of the greatest epic poems, but which, like them, and *pace* the theory of Wolf,[33] must have had an originator, one of those modest creative spirits who turn up every now and then to enrich the rest of us with a felicitous expression like 'putting a name to a face', but whose own face we can never put a name to. However long I was closeted with Swann, all I ever got from these moments was a feeling of surprise at the utter non-achievement they led to, the total lack of satisfying outcome I derived from the hours spent in the enchanted dwelling. Not that my disappointment came from any deficiency in the masterpieces he showed me, or the impossibility of forcing my distracted eye to focus on them. It was not the intrinsic beauty of these things which made it miraculous for me to be in Swann's study; it was that, adhering to the things (which could have been the ugliest imaginable), there was the special, sad, thrilling emotion which I had invested in this place for so many years, and of which it was still redolent. Nor was it Mme Swann's multitude of mirrors, silver brushes and little shrines to Saint Anthony of Padua, painted or sculpted by friends of hers who counted among the finest artists, which filled me with the knowledge of my unworthiness and her own regal graciousness, whenever she received me for a moment in her room, where three beautiful and imposing creatures, her first, her second and her third maids, were smiling and laying out wonderful garments, and to which I wended my way, when the footman in breeches and hose had conveyed to me the injunction that Madame wished to speak to me, along a winding corridor that was remotely perfumed by the precious essences wafting the constant current of their sweet scents all the way from her dressing-room.

When Mme Swann had gone back to her visitors, we could still hear her talking and laughing; for even in the presence of only two people, as though commanding the attention of the full complement of 'chums', she raised her voice, she held forth, as she had so often seen the 'Patronne' do among the 'little clan' so as to 'keep the conversation going'. The expressions which we have most recently borrowed being those we most like to use, at least for a time, Mme Swann sometimes chose the ones she had picked up from the few distinguished people whom her husband had not managed to avoid introducing to her (such as the mannerism of dropping the article or the demonstrative pronoun before an adjective describing a person), and sometimes more vulgar ones (for instance, 'Isn't it ducky!', which one of her close friends was always saying); and these she tried to work into whatever stories she told, as was her wont since the days of the 'little clan'. At the end of her stories, she would sometimes add, 'I'm *very* fond of that story,' or 'Now, you must admit, that's a *lovely* story!', a habit which she had acquired, via her husband, from the Guermantes, whom she did not know.

After Mme Swann had left the dining-room, her husband, who had just come home, might then look in. 'Is your mother alone now, Gilberte, do you happen to know? – No, she's still got some of her ladies with her. – What? At seven o'clock in the evening! How dreadful! The poor dear must be exhausted. It's quite odious. (At home I had been accustomed to hearing "odious" with a long *o*; but both Mme Swann and M. Swann gave the word a short one, making it into "oddious".) Just think, he went on, turning to me, she's been going since two this afternoon! And Camille tells me that there must have been twelve of them just between four and five! What am I saying, twelve? I think it was *fourteen* he said! I tell a lie, it was twelve – or was it? Anyway, when I came home just now, I had quite forgotten it was her at-home day, and when I saw all the carriages outside, I thought there must be a wedding in the house! And for the last few minutes, sitting in my study, I've heard nothing but the door-bell ringing. Given me quite a headache, I can tell you. Has she still got many of them with her? – No, just two now. – And who might they be, do you know? – Mme Cottard and Mme Bontemps. – Ah, yes, the wife of the private secretary to the Minister for Works. – Well, I know her hubby works in a big minister's office, like, but I don't know what he is, Gilberte said, putting on a silly voice.

– Silly girl! You sound like a two-year-old. Works in a big office, indeed! He's actually the *private secretary* to the Minister – that means he's the boss of the whole thing! Or wait, no, what am I saying? I'm as silly as you are – he's not just the private secretary, he's the *principal* private secretary!

– Well, I dunno, do I? So a principal private secretary, that's good, is it?' Gilberte said, always ready to show indifference to whatever her parents took pride in, or possibly thinking to enhance the effect of their acquaintance with such an exalted personage by appearing not to attach much importance to it.

'Good, is it?' Swann exclaimed, preferring plainer speech to such modesty, which might have left me in some doubt. 'I'll have you know he's next in importance to the Minister himself! Or actually he's *more* important than the Minister, because he's the one who's in charge of everything. I'm told he's a man of calibre, too, a first-rate man, a really distinguished person. Officer of the Legion of Honour. A fine fellow in all respects, and actually very handsome too.'

In fact, his wife had married him, against much opposition from within her family, because he was a 'charmer'. The general effect of this person of superlative refinement may be judged from the fact that he had a silky fair beard, a pretty face, an adenoidal pronunciation, bad breath and a glass eye.

'I don't mind telling you,' Swann said to me, that it's really quite funny to see people like that in government circles these days. You see, they're the Bontemps of the Bontemps-Chenut family, the epitome of your narrow-minded middle classes, priest-ridden reactionaries. Your late grandfather was very familiar, at least by sight and repute, with old Chenut – who never tipped a cabman more than twopence in his life, though he was wealthy for those days – and Baron Bréau-Chenut. They lost everything in the collapse of the *Union Générale*,[34] which you're too young to remember anything about, and since then they've had to pick up whatever pieces they can.

– He's the uncle of a girl that used to go to my school. She was in one of the classes well below mine – 'that Albertine', everybody used to call her. I'm sure she'll be very 'fast' one of these days, but at the moment she's the funniest-looking thing.

– What an amazing daughter I've got! She knows everyone!

– No, I don't know her. I just used to see her about and hear everybody shouting 'Albertine, Albertine' all the time. But Mme Bontemps I do know, and I can tell you I don't fancy her much either.

– Well, you're quite wrong there, my girl. Mme Bontemps is charming, pretty and intelligent. Witty, too. I'll just pop in and say hello to her, ask her whether her husband thinks there's going to be a war, and whether we can rely on King Theodosius. He's very much in the know, so he must know a thing or two about that, wouldn't you say?'

In earlier days, Swann would never have spoken in this way. But a similar change can be seen in the once unpretentious princess of royal blood who, ten years later, having eloped with a footman, then tries to re-enter society, only to sense that people are not very willing to frequent her; so she spontaneously adopts the conversational habits of boring old women who, when the name of a fashionable duchess is spoken in their hearing, instantly say, 'She looked in to see me only yesterday' and 'I lead a very sheltered life these days, you know.' Which shows how pointless it is to study human manners; they can be deduced from the laws of human psychology.

The Swanns were not immune from this foible, common to people whose circle of acquaintance is not as wide as they would like. A visit, an invitation, even a friendly word spoken by anyone who was at all noted they took to be an event which should be bruited abroad. If by some ill chance the Verdurins were in London when Odette happened to hold a dinner-party which was at all remarkable, there was always some way of making sure that a mutual friend would telegraph the news to them. The merest letter or even just a telegram which Odette might receive, if it was in any sense flattering, the Swanns were incapable of keeping to themselves. Friends were told about it; the document itself was circulated. The Swanns' salon was reminiscent of those hotels in seaside resorts where they pin up messages on a notice-board.

Also, the people who had known the former Swann not just in a private capacity, as I had, but also in society, in the world of the Guermantes – where the highest standards of wit and charm were expected of everyone, except duchesses and Highnesses, and where even eminent men might be unwelcome if they were seen to be boring or vulgar – might have been surprised to discover that not only had the former Swann turned into someone whose ways of referring to people he was acquainted with were indiscreet, but that his criteria for choosing such people were also quite lax. How was it possible for him not to be exasperated by Mme Bontemps, who was so common and nasty? How could he possibly say she was a pleasant person? His memories of the Guermantes set should surely have prevented it. But in fact they abetted it. The Guermantes, unlike three-quarters of the world's social sets, certainly had taste, and exquisite taste at that. But they also had snobbery, which makes for the possibility of momentary failures in the functioning of taste. In the case of someone who was not an indispensable member of their set, a Minister for Foreign Affairs, say, rather too full of his own Republicanism, or a garrulous Academician, their taste discriminated against him; Swann would commiserate with Mme de Guermantes at her having had to dine with such commensals at an embassy; and the whole Guermantes set infinitely preferred a fashionable man, a man of their own world, that is, devoid of any special talent, but with the Guermantes cast of mind. However, a grand-duchess or a princess of royal blood, by dining frequently at the house of Mme de Guermantes, would also be seen as being in the set, although by her lack of the Guermantes cast of mind she was not *of* it. But with the naïvety of the fashionable, since she was one of their number, they did their best to think she was good company, rather than knowing that it was because she was good company that she was one of their number. 'She's actually quite a nice woman,' Swann would say in support of Mme de Guermantes, after H.R.H. had left. 'And she's even got a touch of comedy in her. I must say I doubt whether she has ever read the *Critique of Pure Reason* from cover to cover! Still, she's not too bad.

– I agree entirely, the Duchesse de Guermantes would reply. Mind you, today she was a little bit shy. But you'll see, she can be quite charming. – She's much less of a bore than Mme XJ (this being the wife of the garrulous Academician, a quite outstanding woman) who keeps spouting books at you. – Oh, there's no comparison!' It was at the Duchesse de Guermantes's that Swann had acquired his facility in saying such things, which he said in all sincerity; and it was an ability he had kept. It served him now with the people who visited his wife. He tried hard to see in them, and to like, the qualities which any human being shows if examined with a favourable bias, and not with the disdain of the fastidious; and nowadays he stressed the merits of Mme Bontemps as he had once stressed those of the Princess of Parma, who would really have been unacceptable to the Guermantes set, had not certain Highnesses benefited from preferential treatment – and even if the ones admitted had been expected to possess wit and a little charm. As has been seen, Swann had once enjoyed exchanging his social position for one which, in certain circumstances, suited him better; and all he was doing at present was adapting this practice to a more lasting situation. It is only people who are incapable of perceiving the composite nature of what seems at first sight indivisible who think that person and position are one. The same man, seen on different rungs of the social ladder at consecutive moments of his life, belongs to separate worlds, each of which is not necessarily more elevated than the previous one; and every time a new phase of living brings us into, or back into, a certain social circle which welcomes us with open arms, we quite naturally start to put down roots and become attached to it.

As for Mme Bontemps, when Swann spoke of her in such glowing terms, I think he was also quite pleased by the thought that my parents would know she was on visiting terms with his wife. It must be said, however, that the identity of the people with whom Mme Swann gradually came to be on such terms aroused more curiosity in my family than admiration. On hearing the name of Mme Trombert, my mother said:

'Now *there's* a new recruit! And she'll bring in others.'

And she added, as though Mme Swann's brisk and impetuous conquest of new acquaintances was a colonial war:

'Now that the Tromberts are subdued, the neighbouring tribes will not hold out much longer.'

If she happened to pass Mme Swann in the street, she would tell us about it that evening:

'I saw Mme Swann today in full battle order. She must have been launching an incursion into the lands of the Massechuto, the Singhalese or the Tromberts.'

When I mentioned all the new people I had seen at the Swanns', a somewhat mixed and artificial society, many of whom had been rather unwilling to belong to it, and who derived from very different backgrounds, my mother could tell at once how they came to be there, and spoke of them as though they were spoils of war:

'Brought back from an Expedition to Mme de This's or Mme de That's.'

In the case of Mme Cottard, my father was amazed that Mme Swann should think there was kudos to be got from the company of such a dowdy middle-class person: 'Even allowing for the Professor's position, I must say it's beyond me.' To my mother, on the other hand, it was quite clear: she knew that a woman could miss much of the pleasure to be got from graduating to circles different from those she moved in before, if she cannot inform her old acquaintances about the relatively more conspicuous acquaintances with whom she has replaced them. For this purpose, a witness is required, who shall be allowed into the world of new delights, as the blundering insect plunders a flower then flies off to visit others, to spread the news, or so it is hoped, sprinkling its random pollens of envy and admiration. Mme Cottard, perfect for this role, belonged to that special category of guests whom Mama, who had some of her father's style of wit, called 'Strangers to Speak in Sparta'.[35] Besides, – apart from another reason which did not come to light until many years later – in inviting this friend, who was demure, reserved and well-meaning, to her splendid at-homes, Mme Swann had no need to fear she might be harbouring a traitor or a competitor. She knew the great number of middle-class blooms that this tireless worker, armed with her plumed hat and her little card-case, could pollinate in one busy afternoon. She knew how prolific this form of seeding could be; and, allowing for the law of averages, she was right to expect that, by the next day but one, this or that 'regular' of the Verdurins' would have heard of the card left on her by the Commanding Officer of the Paris region, or even that M. Verdurin in person would be told that none other than the Chairman of the Turf Club, M. Le Hault de Pressagny, had included the Swanns in his party for the grand ball in honour of King Theodosius. She imagined that these two events, both of them flattering for herself, would be the only ones the Verdurins would learn of, for the particular concrete manifestations of fame which we like to picture and to which we aspire are few, given our penury of mind and our inability to imagine simultaneously more than one of the many blessings of fame, though we still harbour the vague hope of seeing them all descend upon us at once.

Besides, Mme Swann's only successes so far had been in what is known as 'the world of officialdom'. Fashionable ladies did not frequent her house. It was not that they were deterred by the presence of the Republic's representatives. During the early years of my childhood, all who belonged to conservative society

belonged also to fashionable society; no self-respecting salon would have countenanced admitting a Republican. Those who constituted this set were convinced that the impossibility of ever inviting an Opportunist,[36] let alone an unspeakable Radical, was something which would last for ever, like oil-lamps and horse-trams. But after the manner of kaleidoscopes which are turned from time to time, society composes new designs by jumbling the order of elements which once seemed immutable. By the time I had taken my first communion, prim and proper ladies were being confronted, to their astonishment, with elegant Jewesses in some of the houses they frequented. These new designs in the kaleidoscope are made by what a philosopher would call a change of criterion. Another of these was to come with the Dreyfus Affair, at a time which was slightly later than my first entry into the world of Mme Swann, and again the kaleidoscope shuffled its little tinted shapes. All things Jewish were displaced, even the elegant lady, and hitherto nondescript nationalists came to the fore. The most brilliant salon in Paris was that of an ultra-Catholic Austrian prince. If instead of the Dreyfus Affair there had been a war with Germany, the kaleidoscope would have turned in a different direction. The Jews, who would have shown to everyone's astonishment that they were patriotic, could have kept their position; and no one would have wished to go, or even admit to ever having gone, to the Austrian prince's. Even so, each time society is briefly stable, those who make it up imagine that further change is ruled out, just as, having seen the advent of the telephone, they now wish to disbelieve in aeroplanes. And the philosophers of the daily press damn the former time, not only in its modes of pleasure, which they see as the epitome of decadence, but even in the work of its artists and thinkers, which they now see as worthless, as though it was inseparably linked to the constant inconstancies of the fashionable and the frivolous. The only thing that never changes is that there always appears to be 'something changing in France'. In the days when I started frequenting Mme Swann's world, the Dreyfus Affair had not yet happened, and certain notable Jews were very influential, none more so than Sir Rufus Israels, whose wife was an aunt of Swann's. Lady Israels did not enjoy the same fashionable connections as her nephew once had; and he, though he must presumably have been her heir, had little enough contact with her, as he disliked her. However, she was the only relative of Swann's who knew something of his real standing in the elegant world, the others being as ignorant in that respect as my own family had been for years. When one member of a family emigrates to high society – something which at the time seems to him a unique occurrence, but which with ten years' hindsight he can see has been managed by more than one of the young men with whom he was brought up, albeit in a different way and for different reasons – he lives inside a twilight zone, a *terra incognita*, which is quite visible in its finest detail for all those who inhabit it, but which is dark and empty for all who do not have access to it, who may live alongside it without ever suspecting that it exists. No Reuter's newsagency ever having informed Swann's cousins about the people he mixed with, these ladies would exchange stories at family dinners about how they had – before the man's wretched marriage, of course – 'dutifully' devoted their Sunday afternoon to visiting 'cousin Charles', who they thought was somewhat given to the poor relation's envy of his betters and whom, with a pun on the title of Balzac's *Cousine Bette*, they wittily dubbed 'Cousin Batty'. If envy there was, it was on the part of Lady Israels, who knew perfectly well the identity of the people who lavished their friendship on him. Her husband's family, who were as rich as the Rothschilds, had for some generations managed the affairs of the princes of Orléans. Lady Israels, who was hugely wealthy and very influential, had contrived to make sure that no one of her acquaintance would ever be at home to Odette. Only one person, the Comtesse de Marsantes, had disobeyed, and that secretly. One day, as Odette arrived to visit this lady, by an ill chance in swept Lady Israels. Mme de Marsantes, who was on tenterhooks, plucked up the cowardice of those who could just as well choose to be brave, and said nothing to Odette for the duration of her visit. This occurrence did nothing to inspire Odette to venture further into a zone of society which in any case was not the one to which she wished to belong. In her utter disregard for the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Odette remained the untutored light-o'-love, quite different from the middle-class people who are minutely informed on the finer points of genealogy and whose longing for aristocratic connections, unrequited by life, can be assuaged only by perusal of an older generation's memoirs. As for Swann, no doubt he went on being the lover who turns a blind and indulgent eye to a former mistress's idiosyncrasies; and I would often hear Odette utter the most flagrant howlers about things social while Swann, moved either by a lingering fondness, or by the low esteem in which he now held her, or perhaps because he could no longer be bothered trying to improve her, sat by and did nothing to correct them. This may also have been a mode of the simplicity of manner which had had us fooled for so many years at Combray, and which, since he had kept up his separate connection with some of the most outstanding members of the Faubourg, made him reluctant to mar the conversation in his wife's drawing-room by seeming to attach any importance to such people. In fact for Swann himself they were of less importance than ever, the centre of gravity of his life having shifted. So Odette, in her complete ignorance of society, went on saying, whenever a passing mention was made of the Princesse de Guermantes just after a mention of her cousin, the Duchesse de Guermantes, 'I see! They're princes now, are they? *They've* gone up in the world!' If people referred to the Duc de Chartres as 'the Prince', she would put them right: 'No, no, he's not a prince, he's a duke.' Of the Duc d'Orléans, the son of the Comte de Paris, she would say, 'It's odd, isn't it, the son being above the father like that.' Then, like the anglophile she was, she would add, 'All these "Royals"! Isn't it confusing!' And once when someone asked her which of France's old provinces the Guermantes family hailed from, she gave the name of a *département*, 'From the Aisne.'

In any case, Swann was blind not only to the gaps in Odette's education, but also to her poverty of mind. Indeed, when she told one of her silly stories, he would listen to her full of an obliging, cheerful, even admiring attentiveness, which could only be explained by his finding her still sexually arousing; whereas, in the same conversation, Odette's inveterate way was to lend a perfunctory ear, bored or impatient, to anything subtle or even profound that he might say, to half-ignore and at times sharply contradict him. It must be supposed that, in many marriages, such subservience of the outstanding to the vulgar is the rule, for one need only think of the opposite case, that of the gifted wives who smilingly defer to their crass boor of a husband as he crushes their nicest conceits, then gush with loving indulgence at the inept buffoonery which he thinks is humour. Among the other reasons which at that time prevented Odette from being accepted in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, it must be said that a series of scandals had lately caused another shift in the patterns of the social kaleidoscope. Certain women, with whom people had been mixing without suspecting anything untoward, turned out to be common prostitutes and English spies. For a while, it was going to be expected, or so it was believed, that the only acceptable people would be those who were of unimpeachable respectability. Odette stood for everything which had just been shunned, but which (as people do not change overnight, but seek to continue a former state of affairs in the guise of a new one) was soon going to be welcomed back with open arms, having slightly altered its forms, thus enabling society to fool itself into believing it was no longer the same as it had been before the scandal. However, at that time Odette bore too close a resemblance to society's lately exposed ladies. The elegant are nothing if not short-sighted – at the very moment when, having ostracized all the Jewish ladies of their acquaintance, they are looking about for other ladies with whom to replace them, they suddenly notice a new-comer who turns up like an orphan in the storm, but who happens to be Jewish too; it is the novelty of her which prevents them from seeing in her what they had seen, but chosen to abhor, in her predecessors. She requires no one to have no other gods before hers; and she is adopted. In the days when I was making my first entry into the world of Mme Swann, though the problem was not anti-Semitism, she was of a kind with those who were to be kept at a distance, for a time.

As for Swann, he would often visit some of his former set, all of whom belonged of course to the most elegant society. However, if he ever spoke to us of the people he had been to see, I noticed that his choice among his former acquaintances was influenced by the same semi-artistic, semi-historical sense which informed his taste as a collector. When I realized that the reason why he was particularly fond of this or that great lady who had come down in the world was that she had been Liszt's mistress, or that Balzac had dedicated a novel to her grandmother, just as he would buy a drawing if it was mentioned in Chateaubriand, I began to suspect that we had substituted for the misleading Combray Swann, the middle-class man without social connections, another Swann who was just as misleading, the man about town who belonged to the best circles. To be on friendly terms with the Comte de Paris means nothing. Plenty of men who are the friends of princes will never be accepted in self-respecting drawing-rooms. Princes know they are princes, are not snobbish and in any case see themselves as being so far above anyone who is not of their blood that those beneath them, the middle classes and peers of the realm, appear to be almost of the same rank.

However, the pleasure Swann derived from his social contacts was not just the straightforward kind enjoyed by the cultivated man with an artistic bent who restricts himself to society as it is constituted, and enjoys his familiarity with the names engraved in it by the past and still legible now. He also took a rather

vulgar enjoyment in making as it were composite posies out of disparate elements, bringing together people from very different backgrounds. These experiments in the sociology of entertainment, which is how he saw them, did not have exactly the same effect – or rather did not have a constant effect – on all the ladies who visited his wife. He would say with a laugh to Mme Bontemps, 'I'm thinking of having the Cottards to dinner with the Duchesse de Vendôme,' looking like a gourmet whose mouth waters at the novel undertaking of adding Cayenne pepper to a particular sauce instead of the usual cloves. But this design of Swann's, though it would certainly strike the Cottards as entertaining, was calculated to appear quite outrageous to Mme Bontemps. She, having herself only recently been introduced by the Swanns to the Duchesse de Vendôme, and having deemed this occurrence to be as pleasing as it was natural, had found that impressing the Cottards by telling them all about it had been not the least of the pleasures it afforded her. But like those who, as soon as their own names figure in the latest Honours List, would like to see the supply of such decorations run dry, Mme Bontemps would have been better pleased if, after she had been presented to the Duchesse de Vendôme, nobody else from her circle could be. She secretly cursed Swann for the warped taste with which, merely to satisfy a misplaced aesthetic curiosity, he had wantonly squandered all the kudos she had seen reflected in the eyes of the Cottards as she told them about the Duchesse de Vendôme. Would she even have the heart to tell her own husband that Professor Cottard and his wife were now to partake of the very pleasure which she had assured him was unique to themselves? If the Cottards could only learn that their invitation was not seriously meant, but had been sent just for fun! The fact was that the Bontemps had been sent their invitation for exactly the same reason; but then Swann, who had borrowed from the aristocracy Don Juan's undying gift for fooling each of two commonplace women into believing she is the only one he really loves, had assured Mme Bontemps that to dine with a woman such as the Duchesse de Vendôme, no one could be better qualified than herself. 'Yes' Mme Swann said some weeks later, 'we're thinking of having the Duchesse de Vendôme with the Cottards. My husband thinks it's a conjugation that might produce some quite entertaining results' Though Odette had retained from her days in 'the little clan' some habits dear to Mme Verdurin, like shouting so as to be heard by all the 'regulars', she had also picked up words such as 'conjugation' dear to the Guermantes set, which, as the moon does to the sea, exercised its power on her from a distance without her knowing it – and without her coming any closer to it, either. 'Yes,' Swann said, 'the Cottards with the Duchesse de Vendôme – that should be good fun, don't you think?' To which Mme Bontemps replied tartly, 'I think it's quite preposterous! It's playing with fire, nothing good will come of it and it will serve you right!' In fact, she and her husband[37] were also invited to the dinner in question, as was the Prince d'Agrigente; and both Mme Bontemps and Dr Cottard took to describing the event in two different ways, depending on the identity of those to whom they described it. To the first group, Mme Bontemps on the one hand and Dr Cottard on the other both replied casually when asked who else had been there, 'Oh, just the Prince d'Agrigente. It was very restricted, you know, very select.' The other group were those who might be better informed than the first – one of them had even asked Cottard, 'But surely the Bontemps were there as well? – Ah, yes, I'd forgotten them,' Cottard replied, with a blush and a mental note to classify this person as a pernicious gossip. For the benefit of this second group, both Mme Bontemps and Dr Cottard, quite independently of each other, had a version which was identical in plot, but in which their names featured in reverse order. Dr Cottard's version ran like this: 'Well, there were our hosts, of course, then the Vendômes, the Duc and Duchesse, don't you know, and (here he gave a smug smile) Professor and Mme Cottard. Oh yes, and there was another couple there too, though nobody could work out why – M. and Mme Bontemps, sticking out like the proverbial sore thumb!' Mme Bontemps rattled off exactly the same speech, except that the gloating intonation stressed the place of her husband and herself between the Duchesse de Vendôme and the Prince d'Agrigente, while the disreputables who she went so far as to say had gate-crashed the event, and who were such flagrant outsiders, were the Cottards.

When Swann came home from his afternoon out, it was often shortly before dinner-time. At six in the evening, which had once been the hour of such sadness for him, he no longer wondered what Odette might be up to; he was now almost indifferent to whether she had someone with her or whether she had gone out somewhere. Now and again it did occur to him that there had been a time, many years before, when he had tried to decipher a letter from Odette to Forcheville through its envelope. But he found this memory irksome; and to avoid the full sense of the shame it brought, he preferred to twitch the corners of his mouth, or even give a little shake of the head, as though to say, 'Well, so what?' He had, however, come to see as unfounded the notion which he had often entertained in those former days, that Odette's daily doings were quite innocent, and that it was only the dark figments of his jealousy which sullied them (a beneficent notion, in fact, since it had soothed his anguish, for the duration of his love-sickness, by whispering that it was imaginary); and he now believed that it was the jealousy which had been right all along, that though she might well have loved him more than he had given her credit for, she had also been much more often unfaithful to him than he had liked to believe. In those days, wallowing in his grief, he had promised himself that when he had stopped loving her, when he would no longer care about annoying her, or making her feel importuned by being loved too much, he would enjoy sitting down with her and finding out, in a spirit of simple respect for the truth, as a mere point of historical fact, whether or not Forcheville had been in bed with her on the day when Swann had rung her doorbell, then banged on her window, and she had not come to the door at first but had later sent the note to Forcheville saying it was an uncle of hers who had turned up. But this fascinating problem, which Swann was looking forward to solving as soon as his jealousy had abated, stopped fascinating him when he stopped being jealous. This did not happen instantly. There was a time when, though Odette herself no longer aroused his jealousy, he could still be plunged back into its throes by the thought of that afternoon when he had stood outside the little *hôtel* in the rue La Pérouse banging on the door.[38] It was as though his jealousy, after the manner of those illnesses which seem to have their seat or source of contagion more in certain places, certain houses, than in certain individuals, had not focussed so much on Odette as on that past day, that long-lost moment when Swann had stood knocking at all the entrances of her house. It was as though that single day, or that evening hour, had had the power of fossilizing a few last particles of the loving personality which had once been his, and which he could only ever retrieve at that point in time. He had long since ceased to care whether Odette had been unfaithful to him, and even whether her infidelities continued to this day. Yet over a period of some years, attempting to assuage those persistent pangs of unrequited curiosity, he had gone on seeking out former servants of Odette's, in the hope of learning whether at six o'clock on that day,[39] so long ago, she had been in bed with Forcheville. Then even the curiosity had faded; but his investigations continued. He persisted in trying to find out something in which he no longer had any interest, because his former self, albeit now in the final stages of its senility, went on functioning mechanically, at the urge of a preoccupation so extinct that Swann could no longer even imagine his former anguish, though it had once been so acute that he could not imagine ever being rid of it, and the death of the woman he loved had seemed the only thing capable of clearing a way for him through the grief-encumbered years ahead. (Yet the pain of jealousy, as a cruel counter-demonstration will show in a later part of this book, is proof even against death.)

To know the truth of what it was in Odette's life that had caused him such pain had not been Swann's only longing. He had nursed another deep desire: to avenge that pain at a time when, having survived his love for Odette, he would no longer live in fear of her. The opportunity of enjoying this revenge was now to hand, since Swann was in love with another woman, a woman who, though she gave him no grounds for jealousy, made him jealous all the same, since in his inability to find new ways of loving he put to use again with the other woman the way that had once served him with Odette. For his jealousy to revive, it was not necessary for this woman to be unfaithful; all that was required was that for some reason she had been away from him, at a dinner perhaps, and had apparently enjoyed herself. This roused all his old anguish, the sad counter-productive excrescence of his love, and deflected Swann away from the real woman into a compulsion to find out the truth about her feelings for him, the concealed cravings that made up her daily life, the secrets of her heart; for, between him and the woman he loved, the anguish set a solid, irreducible mass of once-harboured suspicions originating in Odette, or possibly in some other woman who had preceded Odette, and which obliged the ageing lover to relate to his present mistress through the ancient collective figment in which he arbitrarily embodied his new love: The Woman Who Made Him Jealous. Swann often suspected that this jealousy misled him into believing in non-existent infidelities; but then he would remember that he had once been misled into giving Odette the benefit of this very doubt. So, whenever the young woman he loved was away from him, whatever it was she happened to be doing came to lose all semblance of innocence. But whereas long ago, foreseeing a possible day when he might have stopped loving the woman who he did not know would one day become his wife, he had sworn to flaunt the full sincerity of his indifference to her, to avenge the self-esteem which she had for so long humiliated, now that he could slake this thirst for vengeance with impunity (since what did it matter to him if Odette took him at his word and

deprived him of her company, which had once been so necessary to him?), he could not be bothered taking his revenge. When his love for her had ended, the desire to show her that his love for her had ended had also disappeared. And the Swann who, when he suffered because of Odette, had wished for the day when he might let her see him in love with someone else, took ingenious precautions, now that this was possible, to keep his wife in ignorance of his new affair.

These invitations to tea, to those events which had once caused me the sadness of seeing Gilberte leave me to go home early, were not the only way in which I was now included in her life. M. and Mme Swann allowed me to be part of Gilberte's outings with her mother, either a carriage drive or a matinée at the theatre, which had prevented her from coming to the Champs-Élysées and so deprived me of her on those days when I hung about alone on the lawns or near the merry-go-round; not only did I have my place in her parents' landau but I was the one they asked whether I preferred to go to a play, a dancing lesson at the house of one of Gilberte's friends, a social gathering at the house of one of the Swanns' own friends (what Mme Swann called in her English a little 'meeting') or to see the Tombs of the Kings at Saint-Denis.

On days when I was going out with the Swanns, I was also invited to what Mme Swann called 'the lunch'. As the Swanns' invitation was for half-past twelve and my parents lunched at a quarter-past eleven, it was after they had left the table that I would set off for the Swanns' luxurious district, which was rather deserted at any hour of the day but especially so at this time when everybody else was indoors. Even on frosty days in winter, if it was fine, adjusting from time to time the knot in my magnificent tie from Charvet's, and making sure the gloss on my patent-leather boots remained unsullied, I loitered about the broad avenues, in the hope that it would soon be twenty-seven minutes past twelve. From a distance, I could see the leafless trees in the Swanns' little front garden, sparkling in the sunshine as though white with frost. There were only two of these trees; but the untoward hour made it a novel spectacle for me. Such pleasures from the natural world, sharpened for me by the departure from habit and even by hunger, were mixed with the overwhelming prospect of lunch at Mme Swann's; this prospect, though it dominated those other pleasures, did not diminish them; it exploited them, turned them into fashionable accessories. So although that time of day, when I did not normally notice fine weather, cold air and winter light, gave me the feeling of having just discovered them, they also felt like a mere preface to the eggs Béchamel, a sort of patina, an icy pink glaze added to the outside of that mysterious sanctum, the house where Mme Swann lived, inside which all would be warmth, perfumes and flowers.

By half-past twelve, I would have plucked up the courage to enter the house which, like a great Christmas stocking, seemed to promise supernatural delights. The French word *Noël*, by the way, was never heard from the lips of Mme Swann or Gilberte. They had replaced it by the English word and spoke of *le pudding de Christmas*, of the *présents de Christmas* which they had been given, of going away (which gave me an unbearable pang) *pour Christmas*. At home, it would have been beneath my dignity to speak of *Noël*; and I went about talking of *le Christmas*, in the teeth of my father's ridicule.

Once inside, my sole encounter at first was with a footman, who walked me through a series of spacious drawing-rooms, before putting me into a little one, which was uninhabited and was beginning to bask in the blue afternoon from its windows; there I was left in the company of orchids, roses and violets which, like people who stand waiting beside you but do not know you, did not break the silence, which their individuality as live things only made the more striking, while they looked shiveringly glad of the warmth of a fire of glowing coals, preciously laid behind a pane of clear crystal, in a trough of white marble, into which now and then crumbled its dangerous rubies.

Having sat down, I jumped up each time I heard the door open – but it was just a second footman, then a third; and the only outcome of these pointlessly thrilling toings and froings was a few coals added to the fire or a drop of water to the vases. The footmen went away and I was left alone again, behind the closed door that Mme Swann was bound to come and open soon. I would have been in less trepidation in an enchanter's cavern than in this little ante-room with its fire, which might, I felt, have been working Klingsor's magic transmutations.[40] At the sound of more footsteps, I sat where I was, it must be just another footman – it was M. Swann! 'My dear fellow, what's this! All by yourself? Ah, that wife of mine, you know, she's never been very good at knowing what time it is. Ten to one already. Getting later every day. You mark my words – she'll come drifting in here, thinking she's got plenty of time to spare.' Since he was still subject to neuro-arthritis and had become rather ridiculous, the fact of having such an unpunctual wife, who came home inordinately late from the Bois de Boulogne, wasted hours at her dressmaker's and was never in time for lunch, worried Swann for his stomach but flattered his self-esteem.

He would show me his latest acquisitions and explain their interesting features; but in the heat of such a moment, on an unusually empty stomach, my mind, though agitated, was a vacuum, and though I was capable of talking, I was incapable of hearing. And anyway, for me the main thing about the works he owned was that they lived with him and belonged to this thrilling time just before lunch. Even if the *Mona Lisa* had figured among them, it would not have given me more joy than one of Mme Swann's tea-gowns or her bottles of smelling-salts.

I sat waiting, either alone or with Swann, but often with Gilberte, who came in to sit with us. I was sure that the arrival of Mme Swann, foreshadowed by so many majestic entrances, would have to be a stupendous event. I expected it at each creak of a floorboard. But our expectations are always higher than the tallest cathedral, the mightiest wave in a storm, the highest leap of a dancer; and after all these liveried footmen, whose comings and goings were like those of extras on the stage preparing the climactic coming of the Queen, but thereby making it something of an anticlimax, when Mme Swann did slip in, wearing her short otter-skin coat, her veil lowered over her nose which glowed from the cold outside, she broke all the promises that the wait had made to my imagination.

However, if she had spent all morning at home, she would come into the drawing-room wearing a tea-gown in a light shade of crêpe de Chine, which to my eye was more sophisticated than any evening gown.

On certain days, the Swanns would decide to stay at home all afternoon. So, as we had been so late having lunch, I could watch the sunlight quickly dwindle up the wall of the little garden, drawing with it the end of this day, which earlier had seemed to me destined to be different from other days. And despite the lamps of all shapes and sizes, glowing on their appointed altars all about the room, brought in by the servants and set on sideboards, teapoys, corner shelves, little low tables, as though for the enactment of some mysterious rite, our conversation produced nothing out of the ordinary, and I would go off home, taking with me that feeling of having been let down which children often experience after Midnight Mass.

However, that disappointment was really only in the mind. I was usually radiant with joy in the Swanns' house, for if Gilberte had not yet joined us, she might come in at any moment and for hours on end let me enjoy her words, her attentive gaze and smile, as I had first seen them at Combray. The greatest of my displeasures was a touch of mild jealousy if she disappeared, as she quite often did, up an inner staircase leading to large rooms on the floor above. Unable to leave the drawing-room, like an actress's lover who has his seat in the stalls, but can only imagine the disquieting things that may be happening in the wings or the green-room, I sat with Swann and, in a voice which was not without a trace of anxiety, asked cunningly disguised questions about that other part of the house. He explained that the room where she sometimes went was the linen-room, offered to show it to me and promised that, whenever she had to go there, he would make sure she took me with her. With these words and the relief they brought me, he suddenly bridged for me one of those dreadful chasms within the heart, which put such a distance between us and the woman we love. It was a moment when I believed my affection for him was even stronger than my affection for Gilberte. For Swann was the master of his daughter, and it was he who gave her to me; whereas, left to her own devices, she could at times withhold herself from me; I did not have the direct power over her that I could exercise indirectly through him. And since I loved her, I could only ever see her through the confused desire for more of her, which when you are with the person you love, deprives you of the feeling of loving.

Mostly, though, we did not stay in; we went for a drive. Sometimes, before going to change, Mme Swann would sit down at the piano. The fingers of her lovely hands, emerging from the sleeves of her tea-gown in crêpe de Chine, pink, white or at times in brighter colours, wandered on the keyboard with that wistfulness of which her eyes were so full, and her heart so empty. It was on one of those days that she happened to play the part of the Vinteuil sonata with the little phrase

that Swann had once loved so much. Listening for the first time to music that is even a little complicated, one can often hear nothing in it. And yet, later in life, when I had heard the whole piece two or three times, I found I was thoroughly familiar with it. So the expression 'hearing something for the first time' is not inaccurate. If one *had* distinguished nothing in it on the real first occasion, as one thought, then the second or the third would also be first times; and there would be no reason to understand it any better on the tenth occasion. What is missing the first time is probably not understanding, but memory. Our memory-span, relative to the complexity of the impressions which assail it as we listen, is infinitesimal, as short-lived as the memory of a sleeping man who has a thousand thoughts which he instantly forgets, or the memory of a man in his dotage, who cannot retain for more than a minute anything he has been told. Our memory is incapable of supplying us with an instantaneous recollection of this multiplicity of impressions. Even so, a recollection does gradually gather in the mind; and with pieces of music heard only two or three times, one is like the schoolboy who, though he has read over his lesson a few times before falling asleep, is convinced he still does not know it, but can then recite it word for word when he wakes up the following morning. Except that, in my case, I had heard nothing of the sonata until that moment; and whereas Swann and his wife could make out a distinct phrase, it was as ungraspable to my perception as someone's name that you try to remember, when the mind retrieves nothing but a vacuum, into which, without your assistance, an hour after you stop thinking about them, the complete set of syllables that you have been vainly groping about for suddenly leaps. Not only does one not immediately discern a work of rare quality; but even within such a work, as happened to me with the Vinteuil sonata, it is always the least precious parts that one notices first. So not only was I wrong in my belief that, since Mme Swann had played over for me the most celebrated phrase, the work had nothing more to reveal to me (the result of which was that, for a long time afterwards, showing all the stupidity of those who expect that their first sight of Saint Mark's in Venice will afford them no surprise, because they have seen the shape of its domes in photographs, I made no further attempt to listen to it); but more importantly, even after I had listened to the whole sonata from beginning to end, it was still almost entirely invisible to me, like those indistinct fragments of a building which are all one can make out in the misty distance. Therein lies the source of the melancholy that accompanies our discovery of such works, as of all things which can come to fruition only through time. By the time I had come to have access to the most secret parts of Vinteuil's sonata, everything in it which I had noticed and preferred at first was already beginning to be lost to me, carried away by habit out of the reach of my sensibility. Because it was only in successive stages that I could love what the sonata brought to me, I was never able to possess it in its entirety – it was an image of life. But the great works of art are also less of a disappointment than life, in that their best parts do not come first. In the Vinteuil sonata, the beauties one discovers soonest are also those which pall soonest, a double effect with a single cause: they are the parts which most resemble other works with which one is already familiar. But when those parts have receded, we can still be captivated by another phrase which, because its shape had been too novel to let our mind see anything there but confusion, had been made undetectable and kept intact; and the phrase we passed by every day unawares, the phrase which had withheld itself, which by the sheer power of its own beauty had become invisible and remained unknown to us, is the one which comes to us last of all. But it will also be the last one we leave. We shall love it longer than the others, because we took longer to love it. This length of time that it takes someone to penetrate a work of some depth, as it took me with the Vinteuil sonata, is only a foreshortening, and as it were a symbol, of all the years, or even centuries perhaps, which must pass before the public can come to love a masterpiece which is really new. This is why the man of genius, wishing to avoid the discontents of being unrecognized in his own day, may persuade himself that, since his contemporaries lack the necessary hindsight, works written for posterity should be read only by posterity, rather as there are certain paintings which should not be looked at too close up. However, any craven urge to avoid being misjudged is pointless, as misjudgment is unavoidable. What makes it difficult for a work of genius to be admired at once is the fact that its creator is out of the ordinary, that hardly anyone is like him. It is his work itself which, by fertilizing the rare spirits capable of appreciating it, will make them grow and multiply. It was the quartets of Beethoven (numbers 12, 13, 14 and 15) which, over fifty years, created and expanded the audience of listeners to the quartets of Beethoven, thus achieving, as all masterpieces do, progress if not in the quality of artists, at least in the company of minds, which is largely composed these days of what was missing when the work appeared: people capable of liking it. What is known as posterity is the work's own posterity. The creator of the work of genius must make no compromises with, must take no account of, other geniuses who may at the same period be following their own course towards creating for the future a more aware public, which will reward other geniuses but not himself; the work has to create its own posterity. So if this work were to be held back, in the hope of its being known only to posterity, it would be greeted not by posterity, but by an assembly of its contemporaries who simply happened to be living fifty years later. Which is why the artist who wishes his work to find its own way must do what Vinteuil had done, and launch it as far as possible towards the unknown depths of the distant future. There lies the masterpiece's true element; and yet, though poor judges can make the mistake of taking no account of the time to come, better judges can at times be tempted by the perilous precaution of taking too much account of it. It is no doubt easy to suffer from an illusion analogous to the one which cancels the differences between all things when seen on a distant horizon, and to entertain the notion that all the revolutions which have ever taken place in painting or music actually had in common a respect for certain rules, and that whatever is right under our nose – Impressionism, dissonance for dissonance's sake, the exclusive use of the Chinese scale, Cubism, Futurism – shows a flagrant dissimilarity with everything that has gone before. However, when we look at what has gone before, we fail to reflect that a long-drawn-out process of assimilation has turned it all into a substance which, though it is varied, we see as homogeneous, in which Hugo rubs shoulders with Molière. Imagine a youth reading a horoscope forecasting his own middle age, with all the preposterous incongruities he would see in it, in his ignorance of the years to come and the changes they must bring about in him. However, not all horoscopes turn out to be true; and the obligation to take into account the factor of the future, when devising the sum of a work of art's beauties, must affect our judgment with something as unpredictable, and therefore as devoid of real interest, as any other prophecy which is never fulfilled, an outcome which implies no intellectual mediocrity in the prophet, since whatever it is that gives or denies existence to the possible may not necessarily lie within the scope of the genius. It is possible that even a genius may have disbelieved that railways or aeroplanes had a future, as it is possible to be an acute psychologist, yet disbelieve in the infidelity of a mistress or the deceit of a friend, whose betrayals can be foreseen by someone much less gifted.

Though I did not understand the sonata, I was delighted to hear Mme Swann play. Her touch on the keyboard, like her tea-gown, like her perfume drifting down the stairs, like her coats, like her chrysanthemums, seemed to me to belong to a mysterious and individual whole, that existed in a world far above the one in which the mind can analyse talent. 'That sonata of Vinteuil's is nice, isn't it? Swann said to me. That moment of nightfall under the trees, when the violin arpeggios make everything feel cool. You must admit, it's very pretty. It's captured the whole static quality of moonlight, which is moonlight's most basic quality. It's not surprising that a sunlight-treatment such as my wife is taking at the moment should act on the muscles, given that moonlight prevents leaves from moving. That's what's so neatly caught by that little phrase – the Bois de Boulogne in a catatonic trance. It's even more striking by the seaside, because then you've got the muted responses of the waves, and they can be heard quite distinctly of course, since nothing else can move. In Paris it's just the opposite: merely a strange glow, barely noticeable, on the fronts of the great buildings, and that faint glare in the sky, like the reflection from a house on fire, colourless and dangerless, that hint of some immense but banal happening somewhere … I must say, though, that the little phrase, the whole sonata, for that matter, does take place in the Bois de Boulogne – I mean, in the *gruppetto* you can clearly hear someone's voice saying, "There's almost enough light to read the paper by!" ' Swann's words might have had the result of distorting my eventual understanding of the sonata, as music is so versatile, too prone to suggestion to reject entirely whatever somebody hints we might hear in it. But I realized, from other things he said, that the leaves at night in their dense stillness were none other than the ones under which, on many an evening, dining in restaurants on the outskirts of Paris, he had sat listening to the little phrase. Instead of the depth of meaning which he had so often sought in it, what it now brought back to him was all that serried foliage, leafy motifs winding and painted all about it, leaves that the phrase made him yearn to go and see, because it seemed to live on inside them like a soul; it brought back the whole springtime of that past year which, in a fever of sorrow, he had been too hapless to savour, and which it had kept for him, as one keeps for an invalid the nice things he has been too unwell to eat. The Vinteuil sonata could tell Swann of the charm of certain nights in the Bois de Boulogne, about which it would have been pointless to ask Odette, although she had been no less with him on those nights than the little phrase. But she had only been sitting beside him (whereas the theme by Vinteuil was inside him); and even if she had been gifted with vastly greater

understanding, she would have been unable to see what cannot be externalized for anyone (at least, I believed for a long time that this was a rule to which there were no exceptions). 'But I mean, it *is* rather a neat touch, isn't it, Swann said, that there can be reflections from sound as there are from water or from a mirror? Mind you, the only things that phrase of Vinteuil's shows me now are all the things I didn't pay attention to at the time. It's swapped them for my worries and my love-affairs, which it has completely forgotten. – Charles! If you ask me, it sounds as though what you're saying is not very complimentary to me! – Not complimentary! Aren't women wonderful! I'm merely trying to point out to this young fellow here that what music shows, to me at any rate, is nothing like "The Will-in-Itself" or "The Synthesis of the Infinite", but something like the palm house at the Zoo in the Bois de Boulogne, with old Verdurin in his frock-coat. I'll have you know, that little phrase has come and taken me out to dine dozens of times at Armenonville. God knows it's far nicer than going out there to dine with Mme de Cambremer.' 'That's a lady who was said to have lost her heart to Charles,' said Mme Swann, laughing, and in the same tone of voice in which she had just said of Vermeer of Delft, whom I was surprised to see she knew of, 'Well, you see, that gentleman over there was greatly interested in that painter at the time when he was courting me. Isn't that so, Charles my love? – Please do not take the name of Mme de Cambremer in vain, said Swann, who was really quite flattered. – I'm only repeating what I've heard said. Actually, she's supposed to be very clever, though I've never met her. I believe she's very *pushing* (here Mme Swann lapsed again into English), which really surprises me in a woman who's clever. Anyway, everyone says she was head over heels in love with you – there's nothing in that to take offence at.' Swann turned a very obvious deaf ear, which served both to confirm the suggestion and to show his smugness. 'Well,' said Mme Swann, with mock peevishness, 'since my playing reminds you of the Zoo, perhaps we could go there this afternoon, if this young man feels like an outing? It's a nice day and you, my love, could relive your memories! Speaking of the Zoo, do you know that this young fellow was under the apprehension that we were very fond of someone that I cut dead as often as I can – Mme Blatin, can you imagine! I think it's degrading for people to think she's a friend of ours. Even nice Dr Cottard, who wouldn't speak evil of a soul, says the woman's a pest. – Isn't she ghastly! Her sole redeeming feature is that she's the image of Savonarola. She's exactly the portrait of Savonarola by Fra Bartolommeo.' There was nothing implausible in this quirk of Swann's, of seeing likenesses of real people in paintings: even what we call an individual expression is something general (as we discover to our chagrin when we are in love, and wish to believe in the unique reality of the individual), something which may well have manifested itself at different periods. If Swann was to be believed, the *Journey of the Magi*, anachronistic enough when Benozzo Gozzoli painted the faces of the Medici brothers into it, was even more in advance of its time, as it contained, he said, the portraits of a host of people, contemporaries not of Gozzoli but of Swann, dating not just from fifteen centuries later than the Nativity, but from four centuries after the time of the painter himself. According to Swann, not one notable Parisian was missing from the retinue of the Magi, as in that scene from a play by Sardou in which, for the sake of their friendship with the playwright and the leading lady, so as to be in the fashion, but also for fun, all the men about town, the most famous doctors, politicians and lawyers took turns in playing a tiny non-speaking part, each of them being on stage at a different performance.[41] 'But I don't see Mme Blatin's connection with the Zoo. – Oh, it's obvious! – You mean she's got a sky-blue backside like a monkey? – Charles, you're being indecent! No, I was remembering what that Singhalese chap said to her that time. Tell him, it's really such a *lovely* little story. – It's too stupid. You see, Mme Blatin likes to address people in a way which she thinks is friendly, but which gives the impression that she's talking down to them. – What our neighbours across the Channel call *patronizing*, Odette interrupted. – So recently she went to the Zoo, where there was this exhibition being given by black fellows, from Ceylon, I think, or so I'm told by my wife, who's much better at ethnography than I am. – Charles, do stop being facetious. – I'm not being facetious in the slightest. So, there she is, saying to this black fellow, "Good morning, blackie!" – Isn't it just ducky? – Well, this form of speech was not to the black fellow's liking – "Me blackie," he bellowed at Mme Blatin, "you camel!" – I think that's a very funny story! I just love that story! Isn't it *lovely*? Can't you just see Mme Blatin's face: "Me blackie, you camel!" ' I expressed a strong desire to go and see the Singhalese, one of whom had called Mme Blatin a camel. Not that I had the slightest interest in them. But I knew that, in going to and from the Zoo in the Bois de Boulogne, we would cross the allée des Acacias, where I had once distantly doted on Mme Swann; and I hoped that Coquelin's[42] half-caste friend, to whom I had always hoped in vain to show off by bowing to Odette as she passed, would see me now sitting by her side in the victoria.

While Gilberte had gone off to get ready to go out, M. and Mme Swann would sit with me in the drawing-room and enjoy telling me about the rare virtues of their daughter. Everything I could see of her for myself seemed to prove they spoke nothing but the truth. I noticed little acts of thoughtful kindness, which confirmed what her mother had said about how she treated not only her friends but the servants and the poor, and a desire to please, premeditated considerateness, a reluctance to give offence, all of which meant she often put herself out so as to do inconspicuous favours. She had done some embroidery for our barley-sugar woman at the Champs-Élysées, and made a point of taking it to her, though it was snowing, wanting to deliver it in person and without a day's delay. Her father said, 'I can tell you, that girl has a heart of gold, but she keeps it well hidden.' Young as she was, she seemed much more sensible than her parents. When Swann spoke about his wife's grand acquaintances, Gilberte would turn away and say nothing. But she did this without appearing to disapprove, as she felt it would be impossible to criticize her father in any way. Once when I mentioned Mlle Vinteuil, Gilberte said:

'She's a person I'll never have anything to do with. Because she wasn't nice to her father – I've heard she made him unhappy. You do agree, don't you? You'd be just as incapable as I am of wanting to outlive your father by a single day, wouldn't you? It's quite natural – I mean, how could anyone ever forget someone they've always loved?'

And on another occasion when she had been more than usually loving with Swann, and I had referred to this after he had left us alone together, she replied:

'Yes, poor Papa. It will soon be the anniversary of the death of his father. So you can appreciate what he must be feeling. You understand what it's like. We feel the same about things like that, you and I, don't we? I'm just trying to be less of a bother to him than usual. – But he doesn't think you're a bother! He thinks you're perfect! – Dear Papa, it's just because he's so kind-hearted.'

Her parents did not sing the virtues only of Gilberte, the girl who in my imagination, long before I had even set eyes on her, used to appear standing in front of a church, in a landscape somewhere in the Île-de-France,[43] until the day when my dreams were replaced by memories and I saw her always in front of a hedge of pink hawthorn, beside the steep little lane that led up to the Méséglise way. There came a day when I asked Mme Swann, taking great care to speak in the casual tone of a family friend asking about a child's likes and dislikes, whether Gilberte had a particular favourite among her friends; to which her mother replied:

'Well, I'm sure you must be more privy to these secrets than I am! Aren't you the great confidant, after all? Aren't you the great "crack", as our English friends say?'

When reality coincides at last with something we have longed for, fitting perfectly with our dreams, it can cover them up entirely and become indistinguishable from them, as two symmetrical figures placed against one another seem to become one; whereas, so as to give our joy its full intensity of meaning, we would actually prefer every detail of our desires, even at the instant of their fulfilment, to retain the prestige of still being immaterial, so as to be more certain that this really is what we desired. The mind is not even at liberty to remake its own earlier state, so as to compare it with the present one: the new acquaintance we have just made, the memory of those first unexpected moments, the words we have heard spoken, blocking the entrance to our consciousness, and commanding the exits from memory much more than those from imagination, act backwards against our past, which we can no longer see without their presence in it, rather than acting forwards on the still unoccupied shape of our future. For years I had been convinced that to go to the house of Mme Swann was a vague pipe-dream that would never come to pass; a quarter of an hour after first stepping into her drawing-room, it was all the former amount of time I had spent not knowing her which had become the pipe-dream, as insubstantial as a mere possibility that the fulfilment of a different possibility has abolished. How could I have gone on dreaming of her dining-room as an inconceivable place, when I could not make the slightest movement in my mind without seeing it shot through by the unbreakable beams of light, radiating to infinity, illuminating the farthest nooks and crannies of my past life, given off by the lobster *à l'américaine* which I had just eaten? Something

similar must have happened to Swann's way of seeing things, too: these rooms in which he sat as my host could be seen as the place where two fancied dwellings had come together and become one, not just the ideal place which my imagination had created, but another one which his jealous love, as inventive as my dreams, had so often pictured: the home which he and Odette might one day share, but which, on nights such as the one when she had invited him to her house with Forcheville to have orangeade, he had despaired of ever being able to inhabit. For Swann, what had become amalgamated into the design of the dining-room where we lunched was that inaccessible paradise, which in former years he could never imagine without being beset by a thrilling qualm at the prospect of being able to say one day to *their* butler the very words I could hear him speak now in a voice of slight impatience touched with a certain self-satisfaction, 'Is Madame ready yet?' I could never grasp my happiness, any more than he could, no doubt; and when Gilberte herself exclaimed, 'You could never have imagined, could you, that the little girl you used to watch playing prisoners' base, without being on speaking terms with her, would one day be a great friend, whose house you can visit any day you like?', she spoke of a change which I could not help registering from the outside, but on which I had no inner purchase, as it was composed of two states which I could not focus on at the same time, without them becoming a single one.

And yet my own experience told me that, because Swann had subjected that flat to such an intensity of purposeful desire, he must surely have found in it something of its former charm, just as it had not lost all its mystery for me. By entering their house, I had not completely banished from it the strange, fascinating element in which I had for such a long time imagined the Swanns having their being; I had tamed it a little, I had made it retreat in the face of the outsider I had been, the outcast to whom Mlle Swann now graciously offered a delightful, hostile and scandalized armchair; and that charm, through memory, I can still feel close to me. Is this perhaps because, while I sat waiting on those days when M. and Mme Swann invited me to have lunch and then share their afternoon outing with Gilberte, my eyes reproduced – all over the carpet, the armchairs, the sideboards, the screens and the paintings – the idea which was deeply imprinted in me, that Mme Swann, or her husband, or Gilberte were just about to come into the room? Was it because these objects have gone on living beside the Swanns in my memory and have at length absorbed something of them? Was it because, knowing the Swanns spent their lives among them, I had come to see all these things as the emblems of their special existence and of their habits, from which I had been too long excluded for their furniture not to go on seeming alien to me, even after I had been granted the boon of using it? For whatever reason, nowadays when I remember that drawing-room which Swann, without his objection to it implying in any way an intention to go against the wishes of his wife, saw as such a jumble of styles (because though its design was still based on the concept of the greenhouse-cum-workshop which had been the guiding principle of Odette's house when he had first known her, she had begun to weed out of this medley some of the Chinese items, which she thought now a little 'sham', quite 'stale', but replacing them with a clutter of little pieces upholstered in old Louis XVI silks, to which of course were added the masterpieces brought by Swann himself from his old *hôtel* on the quai d'Orléans), I see its disparities in retrospect as forming a homogeneous, unified whole, as giving it an individual charm; and these are features one can never see in even the most coherent and uniform compilations left to us from the past, or in those most vividly marked by the imprint of a single person, for it is only ever we ourselves, through our belief that things seen have an existence of their own, who can impart to some of them a soul which lives in them, and which they then develop in us. All the fancies I had formed about the hours spent by the Swanns, different from those which other people experience, in that house which, by being to the daily tissue of their existence in time what the body is to the soul, was bound to express the unique quality of their life, were shared by whatever I saw, absorbed into the positioning of the furniture, the thickness of the carpets, the outlook from the windows, the attentions of the servants, equally thrilling and indefinable in them all. After lunch, when we went through into the drawing-room to have coffee, sitting in the broad and sunny bay-window, and Mme Swann asked me how many lumps of sugar I took, it was not just the silk-covered footstool that she moved towards me which gave off both the painful charm I used to sense in the name of Gilberte (through the pink hawthorn, then near the clump of laurels) and also the suspicion with which her parents had viewed me, and which this little footstool had apparently known of and shared so vehemently that I now felt unworthy and a little cowardly in placing my feet on its defenceless upholstery; a personal soul made it secretly one with the light of two o'clock in the afternoon, light which was unique to this bay, as it dappled our feet with its golden waves and lapped about the enchanted islands of the bluish sofas and hazy tapestries; and even the Rubens hanging above the mantelpiece glowed with the same kind of charm, almost the same potency of charm, as M. Swann's lace-up boots and Inverness cape, the like of which I had longed to wear, and which Odette now asked him to go and change for another overcoat, so as to look more elegant when I did them the honour of going out with them. She too went to change, despite my protests that no walking-dress could possibly become her as much as the superb crêpe de Chine or silk tea-gown, in old rose or cherry, Tiepolo pink, white, mauve, green, red or yellow, self-coloured or with a design, in which she had sat with us having lunch and was now about to remove. When I told her she should wear it for going out, she would laugh, either in mockery of my naïvety or pleasure at my compliment. She apologized for having so many tea-gowns, saying they were the only garments in which she felt comfortable, then went to put on one of those breathtaking outfits that made all heads turn, after having invited me at times to choose the one I preferred to see her wear.

Once we had left the carriage, how proud I was to walk through the Zoological Gardens beside Mme Swann! Her easy step gave a loose, lazy sway to her coat, and she rewarded my admiring glances with a slow, flirtatious smile. If we met any of Gilberte's friends, girls or boys, they would greet us as we passed; and now I was looked upon by them as one of those blessed beings whom I had envied so much, those friends who also knew her parents and who belonged to the other part of her life, the part which took place away from the Champs-Élysées.

Quite often as we walked along the paths of the Bois de Boulogne or the Zoological Gardens, some grand lady, one of Swann's friends, might greet us in passing; and if he had not noticed, his wife would draw his attention, 'Charles, haven't you seen Mme de Montmorency?' Though his casual smile bespoke years of friendly familiarity, he would sweep off his hat with an elegant flourish that was all his own. Sometimes the grand lady would pause, glad of the chance to be inconsequentially polite to Mme Swann, who, she knew, was well enough schooled by Swann in such things not to try taking undue advantage of it in the future. For all that, Mme Swann had acquired all the manners of the fashionable; and however elegant and dignified the grand lady might be, Odette was always her equal in them. As she stood for that moment beside the friend of her husband's, introducing Gilberte and myself with such a serene and nonchalant air, she had such affable, unaffected poise that it would have been difficult to tell whether it was Swann's wife or the aristocratic passer-by who was the great lady. On the day when we had been to view the Singhalese, we saw an old but still beautiful lady coming towards us, followed by two others who seemed to be escorting her; she was wrapped in a dark overcoat and wearing a little bonnet with its strings tied under the chin. 'Now here's someone you'll find interesting,' Swann told me. The old lady, now only a few feet away, was gazing at us with a smile that was all warmth and gentleness. Swann took off his hat to her, and Mme Swann, in a low curtsey, tried to kiss the hand of the lady who, looking as though she had stepped out of a portrait by Winterhalter,[44] drew her up and kissed her. 'Look, for goodness sake, will you put that hat back on,' she said to Swann in a deepish voice that was full of a gruff friendliness. 'I'll present you in a moment to Her Imperial Highness,' Mme Swann said to me. Swann took me briefly aside, while Mme Swann chatted with the Princesse about the fine weather and the animals newly arrived in the Gardens. 'It's Princesse Mathilde,' he said. 'You know, the friend of Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve and Dumas. Just think, a niece of Napoleon I! Both Napoleon III and the Tsar of Russia wanted to marry her. Isn't that interesting? Have a little talk with her. I do hope, though, that she's not going to keep us standing about here for an hour.' 'I met Taine[45] the other day,' Swann said to her. 'He tells me Princesse Mathilde is no longer his friend. – He behaved like a pig,' she growled, pronouncing *cochon* as though it was the name of the bishop who tried Joan of Arc.[46] 'After that article of his on the Emperor, I left my card at his house with P.P.C. on it.'[47] I was as surprised as one might be on reading the correspondence of Charlotte-Elizabeth, the Princess Palatine. Princesse Mathilde, full of very French sentiments, was given to feeling them with a forthright bluntness reminiscent of Germany as it once was, a trait which may well have come to her from her mother, who was from Württemberg. She was outspoken in a rather uncouth or mannish way; but as soon as she smiled, this was softened by a languid Italian manner. These impressions were complemented by her costumes, which were so Second Empire in style that, though her reason for wearing them was no doubt only because she was attached to the fashions she had loved when young, she seemed to have made a point of wearing nothing that was historically

discrepant, so as not to disappoint those who expected her to remind them of a bygone era. I prompted Swann to ask her whether she had ever known Alfred de Musset.[48] 'Hardly at all, sir,' she told him in a voice that feigned ill-temper, the 'sir' being her little joke with someone she knew very well. 'I invited him once to dinner. Seven o'clock, the invitation said. At half-past, he still not having turned up, we went in to dine. He presented himself at eight, gave me a bow, then sat there without uttering a word, and made himself scarce when dinner was done. I hadn't so much as heard the sound of the man's voice. Dead-drunk. Not the sort of thing to make one want to have him again.' Swann and I were standing a little to one side. 'I do hope this isn't going to take too long,' he said to me. 'The soles of my feet are killing me. I can't understand why my wife is keeping the conversation going like that. She'll be the one to complain afterwards of feeling tired; but I'm the one who can't take all this standing about.' Mme Swann was in the process of telling Princesse Mathilde something she had learned from Mme Bontemps: that the government, having at last admitted how churlish its recent behaviour towards the Princesse had been, had decided to send her a ticket admitting her to the stands for the visit of Tsar Nicholas to the Invalides two days later. But, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, despite having surrounded herself with artists and men of letters, whenever action was called for, the Princesse was still very much the niece of Napoleon. 'Exactly, Madame,' she said. 'I received their invitation this morning and sent it straight back to the Minister, who must have received it by now. I have told him I have no need of any invitation to go to the Invalides. If the government wishes me to attend, I shall not be in any stands, but in our family vault, where the Emperor lies. And for that I need no ticket – I've got my keys. I come and go as I please. The government need only inform me whether it desires my presence or not. But if I do go, that's where I shall be, and nowhere else.' At that moment Mme Swann and I were greeted by a young man who, having said his 'Good afternoon', did not stop, and whom I did not know she knew: Bloch. When I asked her about him, she said he had been introduced to her by Mme Bontemps and that he was on the Minister's staff, which was news to me. However, she must not have seen much of him, or else she had wanted to avoid pronouncing the name Bloch, perhaps thinking it not 'chic' enough, as she said his name was M. Moreul. I assured her she was mixing him up with someone else and that his name was Bloch. The Princesse noticed Mme Swann's admiring glances at her coat and straightened the train of it, which was twisted. 'This is actually made from a fur that the Tsar sent me, she said, so, since I've just been to see him, I decided to wear it and let him see how it looks when it's made up into a coat. – I hear that Prince Louis[49] has taken a commission in the Russian army, said Mme Swann, not noticing her husband's signs of impatience. Your Highness will be very sad at not having him here at home. – Much good it'll do him, I'm sure! As I said to him, "You shouldn't feel obliged to, just because we've had a soldier in the family already!" the Princesse replied, referring in her simple blunt way to the Emperor Napoleon. Swann was more and more impatient. 'Madame, I am afraid I must be the one to behave like a Highness and request your permission for us to take our leave. My wife has been quite unwell and I am reluctant for her to remain standing in one spot.' Mme Swann curtseyed once more and the Princesse gave us all the blessing of a beautiful smile which she seemed to summon out of the past, from the gracious days of her youth and the evenings at Compiègne,[50] and which all at once smoothed out and softened the brief grumpiness of the face. Then she walked away, followed by her two ladies-in-waiting who, like interpreters, children's nannies or sick-nurses, had done no more than punctuate the conversation with insignificant verbiage and unnecessary explanations. 'One day this week you should go and sign the book at her house,' Mme Swann said to me. 'It's not every *Royal*, as the English say, on whom you can leave a card. But with this one, if you sign, you'll get an invitation.'

On occasion, before our outing we would go and look at one or other of the small exhibitions which were opening during those late winter days; and in the galleries where they were held, Swann, a noted collector, was always greeted with marked deference by the dealers. The weather being still cold, all my old desire to go to the south, to Venice, was reawakened by those rooms in which spring was already well in, where hot sunlight slashed the pink Alpilles with glowing purples and deepened a dark transparency of emerald in the Grand Canal. If the weather was unpleasant, we went on to a concert or the theatre; and we finished the afternoon in a tea-room. When Mme Swann had something to say to me which she wished to keep from people sitting at tables near ours, or even just from the waiters, she addressed me in English, as though we were the only ones who could speak the language. But of course everybody could speak English, except me that is, as I had not yet learned the language; and this I had to point out to Mme Swann, so as to make her desist from passing remarks on those who were drinking the tea, and those who brought it to them, remarks which I could tell were insulting, albeit every word of them was lost on me, if not on the people insulted.

Once, in connection with an outing to the theatre, Gilberte gave me a great surprise. It was the day she had referred to before, the anniversary of her grandfather's death. She and I were supposed to be going with her governess to hear a programme of operatic extracts; and Gilberte, who had already changed into the outfit she was to wear to the performance, was showing her usual expression of indifference towards the event of the afternoon, saying she did not mind what we did, as long as I wanted to do it and her parents agreed to it. Just before lunch, her mother took us aside to say that Gilberte's father was quite put out by our intention of going to a concert on such a day. To me, this seemed quite understandable. Gilberte's face was expressionless, though she turned pale with anger that she could not conceal; and she said not another word. When M. Swann came home, his wife took him down to the other end of the drawing-room, where they stood murmuring to each other. He eventually asked Gilberte to come with him into the next room. We could hear voices raised. I could not believe that Gilberte, who was so dutiful, so loving, so biddable, would refuse a request of her father's on such a day, and for such an unimportant reason. Swann said, going towards the door:

'Well, you've heard what I had to say. Now you must do as you see fit.'

Throughout lunch, Gilberte's face was pinched with irritation. We had no sooner gone to her room afterwards than she exclaimed, as though nothing had been further from her mind than the notion of cancelling our outing, 'Look at the time, will you! Two o'clock! It starts at half past!' And she told her governess to hurry up.

'But, look, I said, isn't your father annoyed about this?

– Not in the least.

– But didn't he think it would appear odd for us to be going out, because of the anniversary?

– Look, what do I care about what people think! I think it's preposterous to worry about other people when feelings are involved. You feel things for yourself, not for an audience. My governess, who hardly gets out at all, has been looking forward to this concert, and I'm not going to spoil her pleasure just to please the gallery!'

She started putting on her hat.

'But, Gilberte, I said, taking her arm, it's not to please the gallery, it's to please your father.

– Oh look! she snapped, snatching her arm away. Don't *you* start!'

An even greater boon than to be taken to the Zoo in the Bois, or to a concert, was to be included in the Swanns' friendship with Bergotte, the thing which had been one of the sources of their charm, long before I came to know Gilberte, in the days when I had dreamed that to be friends with such a girl, who was a friend of the divine old man, would be a thrilling experience, if only the disdain which she must feel for me had not made it for ever futile for me to hope I might one day accompany them on their excursions to the towns he loved. Then one day Mme Swann sent me an invitation to a special luncheon. I did not know who the other guests were to be. And as I arrived, I was disconcerted and intimidated by a small incident which happened just inside the Swanns' front door. Mme Swann rarely failed to adopt any of the short-lived customs which are supposed to be smart, which last for a season, then disappear – for instance, many years before, she had had her *hansom cab*,[51] and had her dinner invitations printed with the English words to *meet* immediately preceding the name of some guest of any importance. Many of these customs were quite unmysterious, even to the uninitiated. Such a one at that time was a little fad imported from England, which led

Odette to have her husband's visiting-cards printed with the title of *Mr* before the name Charles Swann. After my very first visit to their house, Mme Swann had called on me and left one of these 'pasteboards', as she termed them. It was the first time in my life that anyone had ever left a card on me! I had been seized with such a fit of pride, excitement and gratitude that I scraped together all the money I possessed in the world, ordered a magnificent basket of camellias and had them sent to her. I also begged my father to go and leave a card on her, but to be sure first to get some with *Mr* in front of his name. He did neither of these things, which first plunged me into despair for a few days, then made me wonder whether he had not been right. Futile though it was, this fad for *Mr* was at least not misleading. However, the same could not be said for another one, which was revealed to me, without its meaning, on the day of Mme Swann's special luncheon. Just as I was about to step from the ante-room into the drawing-room, the butler handed me a long, thin envelope on which my name was written. Such was my surprise that I thanked him, while I cast a glance at the envelope. I had no more notion of what I was supposed to do with it than a foreigner has about the purpose of the little implements given to guests at Chinese dinners. I could see it was sealed; so, rather than be thought indiscreet by opening it there and then, I slipped it into my pocket with a knowing air. The note Mme Swann had sent me a few days before had mentioned a lunch 'for a select few'. Despite which, it was a party of sixteen; and I had no idea that among us was Bergotte. Mme Swann, who had just 'named' me, as she put it, to several of the guests, suddenly appended to my name, in exactly the same voice as she had used for pronouncing it, and as though he and I were merely two guests of hers who must be equally glad to make each other's acquaintance, the name of my soft-voiced bard with the white hair. The name 'Bergotte' startled me as though it was a shot fired from a gun; but I was already bowing, going through the motions of polite behaviour. There in front of me, bowing back at me, like the conjuror in his tails emerging unscathed, while a dove flies up, from the smoke and dust of a detonation, I saw a stocky, coarse, thick-set, short-sighted man, quite young, with a red bottle-nose and a black goatee. I was heartbroken: it was not only that my gentle old man had just crumbled to dust and disappeared, it was also that for those things of beauty, his wonderful works, which I had once contrived to fit into that infirm and sacred frame, that dwelling I had lovingly constructed like a temple expressly designed to hold them, there was now no room in this thick-bodied little man standing in front of me, with all his blood-vessels, his bones, his glands, his snub nose and his little black beard. The whole Bergotte I had slowly and painstakingly constructed for myself, a drop at a time, like a stalactite, out of the limpid beauty of his books, had suddenly been rendered useless by the need to include the bottle-nose and the black goatee, just as our perfect solution to a mathematical problem turns out to be useless, because we have misread the terms of it and ignored the fact that the total should add up to a certain number. The presence of the nose and the beard loomed so large and were so bothersome that they not only forced me to rebuild from scratch the character of Bergotte, but also seemed to imply, to create, to be secreting non-stop a certain type of busy and self-satisfied mentality, all of which was quite unfair, as it was a mentality which had nothing in common with the type of mind that informed the books I knew so well, steeped in their mild and divine wisdom. Starting from the books, I could never have foreseen the bottle-nose; but starting from the nose – which looked quite unworried by all of this, and was rather full of itself, like a false nose – I was on a quite different course, which would never lead me to the works of Bergotte, it seemed, but towards the attitudes of some engineer who is always pressed for time, the kind of man who, when you greet him, thinks it is the thing to answer, 'Fine, thanks, and yourself?' though you haven't asked him anything yet, who, when you say you are delighted to make his acquaintance, replies with an abbreviation he thinks is stylish, clever and up-to-the-minute, because it avoids wasting time in empty chat: 'Likewise.' Names are of course fanciful designers; the sketches they draw of people and places are such poor likenesses that we are often struck dumb when, instead of the world as we have imagined it, we are suddenly confronted by the world as we see it (which is not the real world, of course, as the senses are not much better at likenesses than the imagination; so we end up with approximate drawings of reality, which are at least as different from the seen world as the seen world was different from the imagined world). But with Bergotte, the embarrassment of the name, laden with its disconcerting preconceptions, was insignificant compared to the chagrin I felt at the prospect of tying this man with his goatee to the work I knew, as though to a balloon, and wondering whether it might still have the power to become airborne. However, it did appear that he was the man who had written the books I was so fond of, for when Mme Swann made a point of mentioning my liking for one of them, he did not appear taken aback that this had been said to him rather than to some other guest, and gave no hint of thinking there must be some misunderstanding: he just stood there, his body, which was looking forward to lunch, filling the frock-coat he had put on in honour of all these guests, his attention taken up by other important things, and gave a reminiscent smile, as though thinking back to some fleeting incident from former years, as though what had been mentioned was the hose and doublet of the Duc de Guise costume he had worn one year to a fancy-dress ball, rather than his books, which instantly collapsed (dragging down with themselves the whole point and glory of Beauty, of the universe, of life itself) and showed that they had never been anything but a trite pastime for a man with a little beard. It occurred to me that he must have put a great effort into this pastime, but also that, if he had lived on an island surrounded by oyster-banks, he would have engaged just as successfully in the buying and selling of pearls. His work no longer seemed as inevitable as before. I began to wonder whether originality really shows that great writers are gods, each of them reigning over a kingdom which is his alone, whether misleading appearances might not play a role in this, and whether the differences between their books might not be the result of hard work, rather than the expression of a radical difference in essence between distinct personalities.

We went into dinner. Lying beside my plate was a carnation, its stem wrapped in silver paper. It bothered me less than the envelope given to me in the ante-room and which I had completely forgotten. Though also new to me, the meaning of this custom soon became clearer, when I saw all the other men at the table pick up carnations lying beside their plates and slip them into the buttonholes of their frock-coats. I did the same, with the casual air of the atheist in church, who, though knowing nothing about the service, stands up when the others stand, and kneels with only a moment's delay when everybody else kneels. Another custom, just as unfamiliar to me but more lasting, was less to my taste. Just to the right of my plate was a smaller dish full of a blackish substance which, unknown to me, was caviar. I had no idea what one was supposed to do with it; but I was determined not to eat any of it.

As Bergotte's place at the table was not far from mine and I could hear everything he said, I soon realized why his way of speaking had struck M. de Norpois. He did have a most singular voice. It is the fact that they have to convey thought that, more than anything else, alters the physical properties of a voice: not only the resonance of the diphthongs and the power of the labials are affected by it, so is the delivery itself. To my ear, Bergotte's way of speaking was completely different from his way of writing; and even the things he said differed from the things that fill his books. A voice emerges from a mask; unaided, it is not up to showing us immediately a face we have glimpsed naked in a style. During conversation, at moments when Bergotte took to talking in a way which M. de Norpois was not the only one to find affected and obnoxious, it took me a long time to discover any close parallel with those parts of his books where his form became so poetic and musical. At such times, Bergotte could see in what he was saying a beauty of form unrelated to the meaning of his sentences; and as human speech is in communication with the soul, albeit not expressing it as style does, Bergotte sounded almost as though he was speaking without meaning, droning on certain words and, if he was following through a single image under the words, running them together as though they were a single sound, in a way which was fatiguing in its monotony. The fact was that a toneless, turgid and pretentious delivery was a sign of the aesthetic value of his words; it was the manifestation in his conversation of the power which gave to his books their harmonies and sequences of images. The reason why I had such difficulty in noticing this was that what he said at such moments, for the very reason that it was from Bergotte, did not seem to be by Bergotte. It was composed of a rich flow of exact ideas, quite foreign to the 'Bergotte manner' as misappropriated by reviewers; and that dissimilarity was probably another reflection of the fact – glimpsed vaguely through the spoken word, like something seen through smoked glass – that, when one read a page of real Bergotte, it never resembled what would have been written by any of the insipid imitators who kept touching up their prose, in newspapers and books, with pseudo-Bergottisms in imagery and ideas. This difference in style came from the fact that the real thing was first and foremost some precious, genuine element lying concealed within each object, waiting to be drawn out by the great writer with his genius; and it was this drawing-out that was the aim of the soft-voiced Bard, not to toss off a page or two in the manner of Bergotte. He did of course write in the manner of Bergotte, given that that was who he was; and also in the sense that each new touch of beauty in his work was the particle of Bergotte hidden inside a thing, which he had drawn out of it. However, though each of these beauties had something recognizable to it, something in common

with the others, it kept its own special quality, like the discovery which had brought it to light; and because it was new, it remained different from the so-called 'Bergotte manner', that vague composite of earlier Bergottes already found, drawn out and written up by the man himself, none of which enabled men unendowed with genius to guess at what he might go on to discover in other things. All the great writers are like that: the beauty of their sentences, like the beauty of a woman one has not yet met, is unforeseeable; it is a creation, since its object is an external thing rather than themselves, something in their minds, but not yet put into words. A memoirist trying unobtrusively to write like Saint-Simon nowadays, might well hit on a line like the opening one in the portrait of the Duc de Villars: 'Quite a tall man, dark of complexion, and with a physiognomy which was bright, open, outgoing' – but no determinism could possibly make him say in the next line, of this same physiognomy, 'and in truth a trifle mad'.[52] The real thing smacks of that fullness of genuine and unexpected ingredients, of the branch crammed with blue flowers dangling unexpectedly from the springtime hedge, which already looked unable to bear more blossom; whereas the purely formal replica of the real thing (one could say the same of every other feature of style) is full of vacancy and sameness, full, that is, of what least resembles the real thing and, in the hands of an imitator, can pass for the real thing only in the minds of those who have never seen it in the words of the master.

Hence, just as the spoken manner of Bergotte might well have been pleasing if he had been some mere admirer quoting pseudo-Bergotte (whereas it was inseparable from the active workings of his mind, organically linked to it in ways which the ear did not pick up at once), so the reason why there was something too matter-of-fact and over-rich in his speech was because he applied that mind with precision to any aspect of reality which pleased him, thereby disappointing those who expected him to speak only of 'the headlong torrent of fair forms' and 'Beauty's thrilling enigma'. And then, his constant originality when he wrote became, when he spoke, a way of approaching topics that was so subtle in its avoidance of anything already familiar in them that it always sounded as though he was trying to come at it from some petty angle, taking it the wrong way on purpose, or being smart for smartness's sake; and in this way, his ideas usually sounded confused, each of us having the habit of seeing clarity in ideas which show the same measure of confusion as our own. Besides, as anything new must first do away with the stereotype we are so used to that we have come to see it as reality itself, any new style of conversation, just like any originality in painting or music, will always seem convoluted and wearisome. We find its structuring figures so unwonted that the talker seems to be nothing more than a metaphor-monger, which fatigues the ear and hints at a lack of truthfulness. (Of course, the earlier speech-forms themselves were once images, which a listener unfamiliar with the world they described had difficulty in grasping. But they have long since come to be taken as the real world, the reliable world.) So, when one heard Bergotte say of Cottard that he was 'a Cartesian devil forever trying to remain in equipoise' – it seems such an unremarkable thing to say nowadays – or of Brichot that 'He was even more concerned than Mme Swann with the care of his hair, because in his dual preoccupation with his profile and his reputation, the lie of his locks had to give him the constant appearance of being both a lion and a philosopher,' one soon tired of it and wished for the firmer footing of something more concrete, by which one meant something one was more used to. The unrecognizable words emitted by the mask in front of me had to be attributed to the writer whom I admired, yet could not have been fitted like spare pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle into spaces in any of his books; they existed on a different plane, and required to be transposed in a way like the one I discovered on the day when, having repeated aloud some phrases which I had recently heard from Bergotte, I recognized in them the whole structure of his written style, which in spoken form had sounded so different that I had been unable to see and identify its component parts.

A more superficial thing, the special, intense and more than punctilious pronunciation he used with certain words, certain adjectives which often recurred in his conversation, and which he slightly overemphasized, bringing out every single syllable and making the stressed one ring (as in the word 'visage' which he invariably used instead of 'face', cramming it with extra *v*s, *s*s and *g*s, all of which seemed to burst out of his gesturing hand as he spoke them) was the exact correlative of those fine and special places in his prose where he would set such favoured words, which were always preceded by a sort of margin, and so precisely designed within the sentence's intricate balance that, so as to avoid spoiling the rhythm of it, one was obliged to give each of them its full quantity. However, in Bergotte's spoken words there was no sign of that particular lighting which in his books, as in the books of some other writers, often alters the appearance of words in a written sentence. That form of light comes no doubt from great depths, and its rays cannot reach our words at those times when, by being open to others through conversation, we are partly closed to ourselves. In that sense, one could hear in his books more intonations and more accent than in his speech; for this is an accent which is unrelated to the beauty of a style, which a writer himself may not even have noticed, as it is inseparable from his most private self. This was the accent which always marked its rhythm in the words Bergotte wrote when he was being entirely natural, however insignificant in themselves these words might be. It is an accent which is marked by no sign on the page, indicated by nothing in the text; and yet it clings to the sentences, which cannot be spoken in any other way; it was the most ephemeral but the most profound thing in the writer, the thing which will bear definitive witness to his nature, which will enable one to tell whether, despite all the harsh things he uttered, he was a gentle man, whether despite all the sensuality, he was a man of sentiment.

Certain idiosyncrasies of elocution which could be faintly detected in the speech of Bergotte were not peculiar to him; and when I later came to know his brothers and sisters, I noticed that their speech was much more marked by them than his was. It had something to do with a sharp, hoarse fall to the last words of a cheerful statement, or a faint and fading voice at the end of a sad one. Swann, who had known the Master as a child, once told me that in those days Bergotte's voice was as full as his brothers' and sisters' of these more or less family inflections, outbursts of violent glee alternating with slow melancholy murmurs, and that when they were all together in the play-room, the young Bergotte could be heard holding his own amid a chorus scored for the deafening and the forlorn. However personal they may be, all these human sounds are transitory, and do not outlive the beings who emit them. But that was not the case with the Bergotte family pronunciation. It may be difficult to understand, even in *Die Meistersinger*, how any artist can ever invent music by listening to birdsong; but Bergotte had transposed and set in prose those ways of drawing out words which ring repetitively with the sounds of joy, or keep dropping away to the saddest sigh. In some of his books, there are sentence-endings in which the long-drawn-out chords resound like those dying notes of an operatic overture which, in its reluctance to close, keeps murmuring its final sublime harmonies, until the conductor at last lays down his baton, which I came to see later as a musical equivalent of the Bergotte family's phonetic brasses. But Bergotte himself, as soon as he started to transpose them into his writing, unconsciously gave up using them in speech. His voice, from the day when he started to write (and all the more by the later time when I came to know him), had for ever lost the power to orchestrate them.

In wit or delicacy of mind, these young Bergottes, the future writer and his brothers and sisters, were no doubt not the equals of other young people, who thought them very rowdy, and actually rather vulgar, with their irritating jokes which were typical of the household's partly pretentious, partly puerile style. But genius, or even great talent, lies less in elements of mind and social refinement superior to those of others than in the ability to transform and transpose them. To heat a liquid with an electric torch, what is required is not the strongest possible torch, but one in which the current can be diverted from the production of light and adapted to the production of heat. To fly through the air, it is not necessary to have the most powerful motor-car, but a motor which, by turning its earth-bound horizontal line into a vertical, can convert its speed along the ground into rising force. Likewise, those who produce works of genius are not those who spend their days in the most refined company, whose conversation is the most brilliant, or whose culture is the broadest; they are those who have the ability to stop living for themselves and make a mirror of their personality, so that their lives, however nondescript they may be socially, or even in a way intellectually, are reflected in it. For genius lies in reflective power and not in the intrinsic quality of the scene reflected. It was when the young Bergotte became capable of showing to the world of his readers the tasteless drawing-room where he had spent his childhood, and the rather unamusing exchanges it had witnessed between himself and his brothers, that he rose above his wittier and more distinguished family friends. They could be driven home in their fine Rolls-Royces, sneering a little at the Bergottes and their vulgarities. But he, with his much less impressive flying-machine, had at last taken off and soared over their heads.

Other features of his diction he shared not with members of his family but with certain writers of his day. Certain younger writers who were beginning to outgrow him, and who claimed to have no intellectual affinity with him, showed their debt to him unawares in their use of certain adverbs or prepositions which he was always using, in the sentences they spoke modelled on his, in the same dawdling and almost toneless manner of speech, which had been his reaction against the facile grandiloquence of a previous generation. It may be that these young men had never known Bergotte (this was certainly the case, as will be seen,

with some of them). But having been inoculated with his way of thinking, they had developed those modifications of syntax and accent which bear a necessary relation to intellectual originality. This is a relation which requires some interpretation. The fact was that, though Bergotte's way of writing owed nothing to anyone, he was indebted for his speaking style to one of his old friends, a wonderful talker who had had a great influence on him, whom he imitated unintentionally in conversation but who, being less gifted than Bergotte, had never written a book that was in any way out of the ordinary. Thus, if judged only on originality of spoken delivery, Bergotte would have been properly deemed to be a mere disciple, a purveyor of hand-me-downs; whereas, despite having been influenced in speech-habits by his friend, he had still been original and creative as a writer. His impulse to set himself apart from that previous generation, which had been too fond of grand abstractions and commonplaces, could probably also be seen in the fact that when he wanted to praise a book, the thing he would single out or quote was always a scene giving a graphic glimpse of something, a picture without thematic relevance. 'Oh, yes, he would say. That's pretty good. That little girl wearing the orange shawl. It's really nice.' Or else, 'Yes, that's right! That part where there's a regiment marching through a town! Yes, that's a good bit!' On matters of style, he was not quite of his own period (though very much of his own country, abhorring Tolstoy, George Eliot, Ibsen and Dostoevsky); and the word one always heard from him whenever he praised a writer's style was 'smooth': 'Well, actually the Chateaubriand I prefer is the one in *Atala* rather than the one in *Rancé* – yes, he's smoother there.' He used the word as a doctor might to soothe a patient complaining that milk was not good for his stomach: 'Oh, but it's very smooth.' And it is a fact that in his own style there was a type of harmony, the like of which made the ancients praise some of their orators in ways which seem all but inconceivable to us, accustomed as we are to our modern languages, in which no one would try for such effects.

If anyone praised a piece of his own, he would say of it with a shy smile, 'I think it's all right, it's not bad, it's worth saying'; but this was mere modesty, after the manner of the woman who, on being told that her dress or her daughter is lovely, replies, 'Well, it's nice and comfortable' or 'Well, she's a good-natured girl.' But the artisan's instinct ran too deep in Bergotte for him to be unaware that the sole proof of his having worked to good purpose, and in accord with truth, lay in the joy to be derived from his own work, by himself in the first place, and then by others. Unfortunately, many years later, when his talent had run out, whenever he wrote something that dissatisfied him, rather than scratching it out as he should have done, he talked himself into publishing it with the words he had once spoken to others: 'Well, yes, it's all right, it says something that's worth saying, for the sake of my country …' The phrases his feigned modesty had murmured for an admirer were later spoken, in the sincerity of his most secret self, to allay the misgivings of pride; the words which had been his unnecessary apology for the quality of his first works became his futile consolation for the mediocrity of his last.

In his urge never to write anything of which he could not say, 'It's smooth,' there was a kind of strictness of taste which, though it had caused him to be seen for so many years as an artist of sterile preciosity, a finicking minimalist, was actually the secret of his strength. For habit is style-forming as well as character-forming; and the writer who, in the expression of his thought, becomes used to aiming only at a certain facility, sets bounds beyond which his talent will never go, just as surely as, by repeated recourse to a pleasure, to idleness or the fear of suffering, we pencil in, on a character which it is eventually impossible to touch up, the contours of our vices and the limits of our virtue.

However, though I was later to note many things common both to the writer and to the man, perhaps my very first impression of Bergotte was not quite wrong, that day at Mme Swann's, when I doubted that the person standing in front of me could be the author of so many divine books, for he himself 'disbelieved' it too, in the true meaning of the word. He disbelieved it each time he fawned on fashionable people (not that he was a snob), or toadied to other writers or journalists, all of whom were clearly inferior to him. By now of course he knew about his genius from the plaudits of other people; and that knowledge is something beside which social position and official recognition are negligible. He knew all about his genius; but he disbelieved in it, going on feigning deference to mediocre writers, in the hope of being elected before long to the Académie française, although neither the Académie nor the Faubourg Saint-Germain have anything more to do with that share of the eternal Spirit which writes the books of a Bergotte than they have to do with the principle of causality or the idea of God. Bergotte was aware of that too, of course; but his awareness was as ineffectual as that of the kleptomaniac who knows that stealing is wrong. Like a lord who cannot help pocketing the cutlery, the man with the goatee and the bottle-nose had to creep up on the coveted seat in the Académie, by courting the duchess who commanded several votes in each of the elections, but in such a way as to prevent anyone who might think this aim unworthy of him from noticing what he was about. In this, he was only partly successful; and when he spoke, one could always hear, in among the real Bergotte's words, other words spoken by the self-seeker, the man of ambition who was forever trying to impress people by dropping the names of the influential, the noble or the rich, despite having depicted in the books which he wrote when he was truly himself, as limpid as a spring, the charm of the poor.

As for the other vices mentioned by M. de Norpois, the semi-incestuous affair, allegedly further complicated by some indelicacy about money, though they did flagrantly contradict the tendency of his latest novels (which were marked by such a painfully scrupulous care for all that is good that their heroes' slightest joys were poisoned by it, and that even the reader got from it an anguished feeling which made the easiest life seem hard to bear), they did not prove, even if they could be said to be well founded, that his works were a tissue of falsehoods and his great sensitivity mere play-acting. In pathology, certain states of similar appearance may have different causes, some being due to high blood-pressure and others to low, some to an excess of secretion, others to not enough; and in the same way, a single vice can derive either from hypersensivity or from a deficient sensitivity. It may only be in a life deeply steeped in its vice that the moral question can arise with the full power of its anxiety. This question the artist answers not on the plane of his individual life, but in that mode of existence which represents his true life; and there the answer given is a literary one, of general application. Just as the Fathers of the Church, good as they were, first had to practise the sins of all men, through which they found their own sanctity, so great artists, immoral as they are, often derive from their own vices a definition of the moral rule that applies to us all. It is usually on paper that writers inveigh against the vices (or just the foibles and follies) of their own small world, the prattle or scandalous frivolity of their daughters, the treachery of their wives, or even their own failings, while doing nothing to reform these regrettable or unseemly features of their family life. This disparity was once less noticeable than in Bergotte's day, partly because the drift of society towards its own corruption was matched by a growing refinement of moral ideas, and partly because the reading public had become better informed than before about the private lives of writers; and on certain evenings at the theatre, people would point out the author whom I had so admired in Combray days, sitting back in a box with people whose company, in relation to the idea he had advocated in his latest book, was tantamount to a flippant disclaimer, a singularly derisive or abject disparagement. His goodness or wickedness was never much clarified for me by any of the informants who spoke to me of the man himself. Someone who knew him well would attest to how harsh he could be; someone else would give an instance (touching, because clearly designed to remain a secret) of his deeply sympathetic nature. He had treated his wife callously. But then in a country inn where he was spending the night, he had stayed on so as to look after a poor woman who had tried to drown herself; and when he could stay no longer, he had left a large sum of money so that the landlord would not turn her out, but take care of her. The more the great writer grew in Bergotte at the expense of the man with the goatee, the more his individual life was taken over by all the other lives he imagined, which seemed to relieve him of the obligation of performing real duties, replacing it with the duty of imagining those other lives. But at the same time, because he imagined the feelings of others as vividly as if they had been his own, when circumstances brought him into at least temporary contact with someone much less fortunate than himself, rather than adopt his own point of view, he always put himself in the position of the person who was suffering; and this was a position in which he would have been horrified by the language of people who, when faced with the distress of others, go on being engrossed in their own petty concerns. In this way, he gave grounds for many a justified grudge and for enduring gratitude.

Most importantly, Bergotte was a man who took his greatest pleasure in certain images, in composing and painting them in words, like a miniature in the bottom of a casket. In response to some trifling gift, if it afforded him the opportunity of devising some of these images, he would be lavish in expressing his appreciation, though he might well have nothing to say in return for an expensive present. If he had ever been on trial in a court of law, despite himself he would have chosen his words not for the effect they might have on the judge, but for the sake of imagery which the judge would not even have noticed.

On that occasion when I first met Bergotte at the house of Gilberte's parents, I told him I had recently been to see La Berma in *Phèdre*, to which he replied that in the scene where she stood with one arm outstretched at shoulder-height – one of the scenes which the audience had acclaimed – the nobility of her acting had managed to call to mind masterpieces which she might actually never have seen, a Hesperid making that very gesture on a metope at Olympia and the beautiful maidens from the older Erechtheum.

'It may be a sort of second sight on her part. Though I suspect she frequents museums. That would be an interesting thing to educe, wouldn't it? ("Educe" was one of those words Bergotte was always using; and it had been taken up by certain young men who, though they had never met him, spoke like him as though under the influence of remote hypnotism.)

– Do you mean the Caryatids? Swann asked.

– No, I don't mean that, Bergotte replied. Or rather, yes, but only in the scene where she confesses her love to Oenone, gesturing with exactly the hand movement of Hegeso on the stele in the Ceramicus. No, usually she brings back to life a form of art that's much more ancient. I was referring to the Korai from the old Erechtheum – and I fully accept that it's a form of art which is the antithesis of Racine. But then, there are so many things in *Phèdre* that one extra … Even so, I must agree, that pretty little Phèdre straight out of the sixth century BC is very nice, the perpendicularity of the arm, the curl of hair looking like marble, there's no doubt about it, it all adds up to a real brain-wave. There's much more antiquity in it than in many of this year's books about so-called antiquity.'

As one of Bergotte's books contained a celebrated address to these archaic statues, his words were full of interest for me, as well as giving me a further reason for my interest in La Berma as an actress. I tried hard to remember what she had looked like in that scene where she raised her arm to shoulder-height; and I assured myself, 'It's the Hesperid from Olympia! It's the sister of one of those admirable praying figures on the Acropolis! What a noble art-form!' The trouble was, though, that these assurances could have convinced me of the beauty of La Berma's gesture only if Bergotte had primed me with them before the performance. Then, while the actress's posture was in actual existence before my eyes, during that instant when a thing taking place is still pregnant with reality, I could have attempted to draw a notion of archaic sculpture from it. But the memory I had kept of La Berma in that scene was by now indelible, an image as thin as any that lacks those depths full of present time which one can plumb, in which something genuinely new can be found, an image on which I could impose no retrospective interpretation verifiable by comparison with its objective counterpart. Mme Swann, wishing to be part of the conversation, asked me whether Gilberte had ever remembered to let me have Bergotte's piece on *Phèdre*, adding, 'That daughter of mine, you know, she's such a scatter-brain!' Bergotte gave his modest smile and said it was just a little thing of no consequence. 'No, no! It's such a delightful little piece! Your little *screed*,' Mme Swann insisted, to show she was the perfect hostess, and hinting that she had read the little essay, so as to enjoy not just complimenting Bergotte but discriminating among the things he had written, and being an intellectual influence on him. The fact is she did inspire him, but not in the way she thought. Between the elegance that was once the salon of Mme Swann and a whole aspect of the work of Bergotte, there are connections which make it possible, for men who are now grown old, to read each of them in terms of the other.

I was glad to tell Bergotte of my impressions of La Berma. Though he thought many of them were not quite sound, he let me speak. I told him how much I had liked the greenish lighting effect at the moment when Phèdre held out her arm. 'Well now! The designer, who is a great artist in his own right, would be delighted to know that. I'll certainly tell him, because he's very proud of that lighting effect. Mind you, I must say I don't fancy it very much myself. It floods everything with a sort of glaucous glow and makes poor little Phèdre look rather too much like a bit of coral decorating an aquarium. I know what you're going to say: that it brings out the cosmic aspect of the drama being played out – and I agree, it does. But it would still be preferable in a play set in Neptune's realm. Of course, *Phèdre* does have something to do with Neptune's vengeance. Goodness knows, I'm not one to say that Port-Royal with its Jansenism is the be-all and end-all of Racine. But I mean, Racine's play isn't about the love of a couple of sea-urchins, is it? However, that lighting effect was exactly what my friend was aiming at, it's really first-rate, and one can't deny it's quite pretty. So, yes, you liked it, you saw the point of it, and when all's said and done we think alike, you and I. His idea was just a little daft, wouldn't you say, but really very clever.' When Bergotte's view on something differed in this way from my own, it never reduced me to silence, or deprived me of a possible rejoinder, as M. de Norpois's opinion would have done. Not that Bergotte's opinions were any less valid than the former ambassador's. The fact is that a sound idea transmits some of its force even to its contradictor. With its share of the universal value of all mind, it takes root among other adjacent ideas, growing like a graft even in the mind of someone whose own idea it rebuts; and this latter person, drawing some advantage from the new juxtaposition, may round the idea out or adapt it, so that the final judgment on a matter is in some measure the work of the two people who were in disagreement. But the ideas which leave no possibility of a rejoinder are those which are not properly speaking ideas, those which, by being supported by nothing, find nothing to attach to in the other's mind: on one side, no brotherly branch is held out, and on the other, there is nothing but a vacuum. The arguments advanced by M. de Norpois (on questions of art) were indisputable because they were devoid of reality.

As Bergotte had not dismissed my objections, I went on to tell him of the disdain with which M. de Norpois had treated them. 'Look, he's just an old parrot, Bergotte said; he took a peck at you because he always thinks whatever's under his nose is bird-seed or a cuttle-bone. – What's that? Swann asked me. You know Norpois? – Oh, isn't he a dreadful old bore!' Mme Swann said. She had great faith in Bergotte's judgment and was probably anxious in case M. de Norpois had said something to her detriment. 'I tried to have a conversation with him after dinner and, possibly because of his age, or perhaps poor digestion, I thought the man was quite, quite inane. One had the impression that he had been drugged to the eyeballs! – True, true, Bergotte said, he is obliged to observe frequent silences, so as to reach the end of the evening without using up the supply of starchy stupidities that keep his white waistcoat stiff. – I do think Bergotte and my dear wife are being rather hard on M. de Norpois,' said Swann, whose job at home was to be the man of sound common sense. 'I can appreciate that one may not think he's all that interesting, but from another point of view' (Swann being something of a 'collector' of life's little curios) 'he really is rather a noteworthy man. Noteworthy in his capacity as great lover, I mean.' He added, with a glance to make sure that Gilberte could not hear him, 'In the days when he was an attaché at the embassy in Rome, he had left behind in Paris a mistress whom he adored to distraction. So, twice a week, he would find a pretext to dash back and see her for a couple of hours. Mind you, she *was* a very clever and beautiful woman at that time. A dowager nowadays, of course. And he's had plenty more since then. I must say that if it had been me, obliged to live in Rome while the woman I loved had to stay in Paris, it would have driven me mad. Highly strung people should always choose objects of their affections who are "beneath them", as the saying goes, so that the self-interest of the woman one loves ensures that she will always be available.' At that moment, Swann realized the connection I might make between this verity and his own love for Odette. This gave him a great fit of pique against me, for even the high-minded, at moments when one seems to be sharing in their higher things, are still capable of the pettiness of self-esteem. This grudge of Swann's was apparent only in an uneasy look in his eye; and he said nothing about it at that moment. Not that there is anything very surprising in that – a story, which is apocryphal, but which is re-enacted every day of the week in Paris, has it that when Racine spoke the name of Scarron in the presence of Louis XIV, the most powerful monarch on earth said nothing about it to his poet at the time; and he did not fall from favour until the following day.[53]

However, any theory likes to be fully expounded; and so Swann, after his momentary irritation, wiped the lens of his monocle and rounded off his idea in words which I later came to remember as a prophecy, a warning which I would be unable to heed: 'But the danger of such liaisons is that, though the subjection of the woman may briefly allay the jealousy of the man, it eventually makes it even more demanding. He reaches the point of treating his mistress like one of those prisoners who are so closely guarded that the light in their cell is never turned off. The sort of thing that usually ends in alarums and excursions.'

I reverted to M. de Norpois. 'I wouldn't trust him – he's always saying things behind people's backs,' Mme Swann said in a way which, partly because Swann gave her a quick glance of disapproval, as though to warn her against saying anything more, made me suspect that M. de Norpois must have had something to say behind hers.

Gilberte, who had already been asked twice to go and make her preparations for going out, was still standing there between her parents listening to us, leaning her loving head on her father's shoulder. At first sight, there could have been no greater contrast between Mme Swann, who was dark, and the golden-skinned girl with the fairish hair. Then one began to recognize in Gilberte many features, such as the nose, neatly shortened by a stroke from the sculptor whose unerring chisel models several generations, the expression of her mother, her ways of moving; or to draw a comparison from another art, Gilberte resembled a portrait of her mother, verging on a good likeness, but done by a fanciful colourist who had made her pose in semi-disguise, dressed for a fancy dress party as a woman of Venice. It was not just the blonde wig she was wearing, but the fact that every last atom of her dark complexion had faded, making it look more naked when stripped of its browner veils, covered only by the glow of an inner sun, as though the make-up was not just superficial but ingrained. Gilberte looked as though she represented some creature out of a fable, or as though she was costumed as a mythological character. Her fair complexion was so clearly her father's that Nature, in order to create Gilberte, seemed to have been faced with the problem of imitating Mme Swann, while being able to use as its sole material the skin of M. Swann. Nature had solved the problem to perfection, as a master cabinet-maker tries to exploit the visible grain of a wood, even turning to advantage the knots in it. In Gilberte's face, just to one side of its perfect reproduction of Odette's nose, the skin rose slightly to show the two moles of M. Swann. In her, as she stood there with her mother, a new variety of Mme Swann had been achieved, like a white lilac growing beside a purple one. The line separating Gilberte's twin likenesses was not hard and fast, though. Now and then, as she laughed, you suddenly glimpsed the oval of her father's cheek in her mother's face, as though they had been put together to see what such a mixture might look like; the oval took firmer shape, after the manner of an embryo forming, lengthened obliquely, swelled, then disappeared almost at once. In her eyes, one could see the frankness of her father's fine open gaze on the world, the one I had seen there on the day when she gave me the agate marble and said, 'This is for you, as a memento of our friendship.' Then, if you inquired about what she had been doing, those same eyes filled with the devious, forlorn embarrassment and perplexity which used to cloud Odette's as, in answer to a question from Swann about where she had been, she told one of those lies which had once reduced her lover to despair, but which now made her husband, a prudently uninquiring man, quickly change the subject. In the days when we used to meet at the Champs-Élysées, this expression of Gilberte's had often worried me. Usually, however, I need not have worried, as that particular look in her eyes was a mere physical inheritance, and had nothing else of Odette left in it. It was when Gilberte had been to her class, or when she had to be back home in time for a lesson, that her eyes went through the motions which Odette's had once gone through because she feared letting it slip that one of her lovers had visited her during the day, or because she was anxious to be on her way to meet another of them. In this way the two natures of Swann and Mme Swann, each of them predominating by turns, could be seen to ripple and flow across the features of this Mélusine.[54]

Children do take after their parents, of course. But the rearrangement of the inherited qualities and defects is done so strangely that only one of a pair of qualities which seemed inseparable in a parent may turn up in the child; and it may be blended with one of the defects of the other parent which had once seemed incompatible with it. One of the laws of filial resemblance is that a moral quality will often manifest itself even through a bodily defect which is quite out of keeping with it. One of two sisters will combine the petty-mindedness of her mother with the fine upright stance of the father, while the other one will receive the father's intelligence, but the mother's appearance; and so the latter's big nose, her graceless waistline and even her voice turn into the outer semblance of gifts which one used to meet in a much finer form. It can be rightly said that either of such daughters takes more after either of the parents. Gilberte was, of course, an only child; but there were at least two of her. Her father's nature and her mother's did not just mingle in her: it would be truer to say they were in rivalry within her, although even that is an inaccurate description, since it implies there might be a third Gilberte who found it irksome to be the periodic victim of the other two. But Gilberte was alternately one of the two and then the other, and never more than that single self at any given moment: that is, when she was the less good of the two, she was unable to regret it, since the better of the two Gilbertes, being momentarily absent, could have no knowledge of the lapse. Thus the less worthy Gilberte was free to enjoy unworthy pleasures. When it was the better one speaking from her father's heart, her views were broad, inspiring one to engage with her in some fine uplifting enterprise; but when you had told her this, and it was time to launch into it, you found that her mother's heart had taken her over and was speaking through her; and a petty remark or a sly little snigger, in which she took pleasure as an expression of who she was at that moment, would disappoint you, irritate you, almost fascinate you, as though you were faced with an impostor. The disparity between these two Gilbertes could be so great that one would wonder, quite fruitlessly, what one had done to her that might explain the change. Not only did she not keep the appointment which she herself had suggested, not only did she not apologize for this, but whatever the reason for her change of heart, her later behaviour was so different that you could almost have believed it was a case of mistaken identity, like the one which shapes the plot of the *Menaechmi*,[55] and that you were no longer dealing with the person who had so demurely asked to see you, were it not that her present bad mood showed that she knew she was at fault, but wanted to avoid having to talk about it.

'Come on, please, her mother said to her. You'll just make us all have to wait for you.

– But I'm so happy here with my nice old pater. I just want to stay here for a bit longer,' Gilberte replied, nestling her head into her father's shoulder, as he combed his fingers through her long fair hair.

Swann was one of those men whose lives have been spent in the illusions of love, who, having afforded comforts and, through them, greater happiness to many women, have not been repaid by gratitude or tenderness towards themselves; but in their child they believe they can sense an affection which, by being materialized in the name they bear, will outlive them. A time would come when Charles Swann would have ceased to exist, but there would still be a Mlle Swann or a Mme X, née Swann, who would go on loving her dead father. Swann may even have thought Gilberte would love him too much, for he said to her now, in that emotional voice full of misgiving about the future of someone whose love for us is too passionate, and who is bound to live on after our death, 'What a good girl you are.' To conceal the fact that he was moved, he joined in the conversation about La Berma, pointing out to me, albeit in a detached, bored tone that sounded as though he was trying to remain at a distance from what he was saying, the actress's percipience, the unexpected aptness of the way she had spoken to Oenone the words: 'You knew about it!' He was right: that intonation at any rate did convey a genuine and manifest effect, and should therefore have satisfied my desire to find irrefutable reasons for admiring La Berma. But it did not satisfy it, because of its very transparency. Her intonation had been so perceptive, so clear in its meaning and intent, that it seemed to exist in its own right, and any clever actress should have been able to think of it. It certainly was an inspired piece of acting; but anybody capable of grasping it so clearly would also have been capable of producing it. The fact remained that it was La Berma who had thought of it – but could she really be said to have 'invented' it, when the thing supposedly invented would have been no different if she had merely acquired it, a thing bearing no essential relation to her self, since it could be reproduced by someone else?

'Goodness me!' Swann said to me. 'Doesn't your presence among us "raise the tone" of the conversation?' It sounded like a discreet apology to Bergotte from the man who had borrowed from his friends the Guermantes their simple ways of entertaining great artists, inviting them as friends to one's table, serving them their favourite dish, playing parlour-games to please them or, in the country, arranging for them to practise the sport of their choice. 'We do seem to be talking about "Art", don't we?' Swann added. – I should think so too! I think it's very nice,' Mme Swann said, thanking me with a glance in which I read kindness towards myself and a reminder of her former hankerings after more intellectual conversation. Bergotte turned to talk with some of the others, in particular Gilberte. I was surprised to realize how freely I had spoken to him of my thoughts and feelings. But over so many years, for so many private hours of reading and solitude, during which he had been simply the best part of myself, I had been so accustomed to relating to him in total sincerity, frankness and trust that I was less shy with him than if I had been talking with someone else for the first time. And yet, for that very reason, I was full of qualms about the impression I must have made on him, as my expectation that he would scorn my ideas was no recent thing, but dated from the time long ago when I had first read him, sitting out in the garden at Combray. Perhaps it should have occurred to me that, since both my great attraction to the works of Bergotte and the unaccountable disappointment I had experienced at the theatre were sincere, spontaneous reactions of my own mind, these two instinctive and irresistible responses could not be very different from each other, but must be governed by the same laws; and that therefore the spirit of Bergotte, which I had admired so much in his books, was very likely not

so utterly alien and hostile to my disappointment, or to my inability to articulate it. For after all, my mind had to be a single thing; or perhaps there is only a single mind, in which everybody has a share, a mind to which all of us look, isolated though each of us is within a private body, just as at the theatre where, though every spectator sits in a separate place, there is only one stage. No doubt the ideas which Bergotte was in the habit of investigating in his books were not those I enjoyed trying to disentangle; but if it was true that he and I were bound to have recourse to the same mind, then it followed that, hearing me try to expound those ideas, he must recall them, like them and smile on them, while probably keeping his inner eye, despite whatever else I thought he might be doing, fixed on an area of mind remote from the one which had left a remnant of itself in his books, and which had been the origin of all I had imagined about his mental universe. Just as the priests with the broadest knowledge of the heart are those who can best forgive the sins they themselves never commit, so the genius with the broadest acquaintance with the mind can best understand ideas most foreign to those which fill his own works. I should have thought of all this, unpleasant though its implications are: for the benevolence one encounters in the person of broad vision has its sorry counterpart in the obtuse and churlish ways of the petty; and the happiness one may derive from the kindly encounter with a writer through his books counts for much less than the unhappiness caused by the animosity of a woman whom one has not chosen for her qualities of mind, but whom one cannot help loving. I should have thought of all this; but it did not occur to me, and I was convinced that Bergotte thought I was stupid. Then Gilberte whispered to me:

'I'm so happy! You've really bowled over my great friend Bergotte! He's just told my mother that he thought you were highly intelligent.'

'Where are we going? I asked her.

– Well, you know me, I don't really mind where we go …'[56]

But ever since what had happened on the anniversary of her grandfather's death, I had been wondering whether Gilberte's character was not different from what I had believed, whether her equable indifference to our outings, her pleasing, mild manner, her unfailing biddableness, might not actually conceal intense desires, which pride made her disguise, and which she did not reveal until some chance event thwarted them and brought out a sudden obstinacy in her.

As Bergotte lived not far from my parents' house, he and I shared a carriage. On the way, he spoke about my health: 'The Swanns tell me you're not in the best of health. I am sorry to hear it. Although I must say I am not *too* sorry for you, as I can see you must enjoy the pleasures of the intellectual life. I daresay that's what really counts for you, as it does for anybody who's familiar with such pleasures.'

Bergotte could not know how untrue this was, how indifferent I was to discussion, however elevated it might be, how happy I became with mere mental idleness, with simple contentment; but I was uneasily aware of how material were the things I looked for in life, of how unnecessary the intellectual life seemed to me. In my inability to distinguish between the disparate origins of certain pleasures, some of them deeper and more durable than others, it occurred to me, as I answered him, that the life I would enjoy would be one in which I could be on friendly terms with the Duchesse de Guermantes and have frequent opportunities of being reminded of Combray, as in the disused toll-booth at the Champs-Élysées, by a cool smell. And in that ideal way of life which I did not dare to speak of, intellectual pleasures had no part.

'Well actually, no, sir. Intellectual pleasures don't mean very much to me. I'm not at all fond of them. I'm not even sure I know what they are.

– Really, is that so? he replied. No, look, honestly, you *must* be fond of them! Bound to be! I suspect you really are.'

I remained unpersuaded; but I did feel happier, less cramped. M. de Norpois's words had made me see my moments of idle reflection, enthusiasm and self-confidence as being purely subjective, devoid of reality. Yet Bergotte, who seemed quite familiar with the situation I found myself in, seemed to be implying that the symptoms to ignore were actually my self-disgust and doubts about my abilities. What he had said about M. de Norpois in particular had already done much to lessen the force of what had appeared to be a categorical judgment.

'Tell me, have you got sound medical advice? Bergotte asked. Who's looking after you?' I told him I had been seeing Dr Cottard and would probably go on seeing him. 'But, look here, my dear fellow, he said, I'm sure he's not at all the right man. I must say I don't know the chap as a doctor. But I have seen him at Mme Swann's – and he's a prize idiot! Even if we accept that a man can be an idiot *and* a good doctor – which I do find hard to swallow – no one can be an idiot and a proper doctor for intelligent people, artistically inclined people. People like you need appropriate doctors and, I might even add, individually designed regimens and medications. Cottard will bore you, and boredom alone will prevent his treatment from working. In any case, such treatment can't possibly be the same for you as for any average individual. With intelligent people, three-quarters of the things they suffer from come from their intelligence. The thing they can't do without is a doctor who's aware of that form of illness. How on earth could Cottard cure you? He can foresee the ill effects of sauces on the digestion, he can predict the bilious attack, but he can't conceive of the effect of reading Shakespeare! And so all his calculations are thrown out, the little Cartesian devil can't remain stationary, and up he pops to the surface again. He'll say what you've got is distension of the stomach! He doesn't even need to examine you for that, because it's already in his eye. You'll see it if you look – it's reflected from his monocle.' I was bewildered by this way of speaking; and I thought, with the ineptitude of common sense: 'But there's no more distension of the stomach reflected from Cottard's monocle than there are stupidities inside M. de Norpois's white waistcoat!' 'If I were you, Bergotte went on, I'd go and see Dr du Boulbon. He's a very clever man. – He's a great admirer of your books,' I said. I could see this was not news to Bergotte and decided that like minds seek each other out, that one has few 'unknown' admirers. What he said about Dr Cottard struck me, though it contradicted everything I believed. That my doctor might be a crashing bore did not bother me; all I required of him was that his art, the laws of which were beyond me, should enable him to examine my entrails and utter an infallible oracle on my health. My own intelligence was good enough for both of us, and I saw no need for him to understand it, as I saw it only as a possible means, of no great significance in itself, to the attainment of truth about the world. I was acutely sceptical of the notion that clever people have sanitary requirements which differ from those of fools, and I did not mind having to make do with theirs. 'I'll tell you someone who needs a good doctor,' said Bergotte. 'Our friend Swann.' I asked him whether Swann was ill. 'No, but here we have the man who married a trollop, who accepts being snubbed every day of the week by women who choose not to know his wife, or looked down on by men who have slept with her. You can see it in that twisted smile of his. Have a look, one evening when he comes back to the house, at the way he raises his eyebrows as he wonders who's with his wife.' The malice with which Bergotte spoke to a stranger about friends of long standing was as remarkable to me as the honeying manner he adopted with the Swanns when at their house. A person like my great-aunt, for instance, would have been incapable of treating any of us with the fulsome amiability of Bergotte towards the Swanns; and she could take pleasure in saying unpleasant things even to people she liked. But when they were absent, she would never have spoken a word about them that they would have been hurt to hear. Our little world of Combray was as remote as possible from smart society. The world of the Swanns was a first step closer to it, towards its untrustworthy waves. Though not quite the open sea, it was just inside the harbour bar. 'This is just between you and me, of course,' murmured Bergotte as he left me outside my parents' house. A few years later, I would have said, 'Of course, I never repeat anything I hear.' This is the ritual statement of people in society, serving as a false reassurance for the scandalmonger. I might even have said it to Bergotte on that occasion, since one does not invent everything one says, especially when one is acting a social role; but I had not yet come across it. In similar circumstances, my great-aunt's reply would have been: 'Well, if you don't want me to repeat it, why are you saying it?' That is the reply of the unsociable, of those who do not mind being thought 'awkward'. Not being one of those, I quietly acquiesced.

Literary people who to me were personages of note had to scheme for years before succeeding in establishing a relationship with Bergotte; and even then their contacts were restricted to vaguely literary things, and never went beyond the walls of his study. Whereas, without ado, I had quietly stepped into the circle of the great writer's friends, like a spectator who, instead of having to queue up with everyone else so as to get one of the worst seats in the house, is ushered into one of the very best, having been let in by a side door which is generally closed to the public. It had been opened for me by Swann, after the manner of a king who will naturally offer his children's friends a seat in the royal box, or take them for a cruise on the royal yacht; so Gilberte's parents admitted their daughter's friends among the precious things they owned, letting them share in the even more precious moments of the private life which took place in that setting. But at that time I suspected, possibly rightly, that Swann's kindness to me was indirectly aimed at my parents. Long before, in Combray, I had formed the impression that, because of my admiration for Bergotte, Swann had suggested to my parents that I should meet the writer over dinner at his house; this invitation my parents had declined, saying I was too young and too highly strung to attend such a function. The impression some people had of my parents, in particular those on whom I looked with great awe, was no doubt very different from my own impression of them; which was why, as on the occasion when the lady in pink had sung such praises of my father, who had then shown himself unworthy of them, I now wished my parents could appreciate the priceless compliment I had received, and longed for them to show proper gratitude to Swann, who in his kind, courteous way had done this for me – or rather for them! – without seeming to have any more sense of how great a gift he was bestowing than the charming King in Bernardino Luini's[57] fresco *The Three Kings*, the fair-haired one with the aquiline nose, who I believe had once been said to look exactly like Swann.

Unfortunately, this great boon of Swann's, which I announced as soon as I stepped inside, before I had even taken off my overcoat, in the hope that it would warm my parents' hearts as it had warmed mine, and inspire them to some grand and decisive overture towards Swann and his family, did not appear to enthral them. 'So, Swann has introduced you to Bergotte, has he? my father said in an ironic tone. Well, that's a fine thing, I must say! Nice company you keep! What next?' Then, when I told him Bergotte had nothing good to say about M. de Norpois, he added:

'Well, of course! Which just goes to show what a nasty and bogus mind the man has! My dear boy, we already knew you weren't gifted with a great deal of common sense. But it's a shame to see you fall among people who can only make things much worse in that department.'

My parents were already irked by the fact that I was on visiting terms with the Swanns. They now saw my introduction to Bergotte as an understandably adverse consequence of an initial fault, their own weakness, what my grandfather would have called their 'unheedfulness'. I sensed that, to complete their ill-humour, all I had to say was that the immoral man who had such a low opinion of M. de Norpois had also concluded that I was highly intelligent. The fact was that, whenever my father was convinced that someone, for instance one of my school-friends or myself in this case, was not only risking perdition, but also enjoyed the good esteem of a third person whom he did not respect, he took that esteem as mere confirmation of his own adverse diagnosis. The danger he foresaw was only aggravated by it. I knew perfectly well what he would exclaim: 'But what do you expect? It's all of a piece!' This was a statement which, by the imprecision and immensity of the changes it suggested were about to be visited on my quiet little life, could strike terror into my heart. However, since not telling them of what Bergotte had said about me could in no way alter the poor impression my parents already had, it did not matter much if they ended up with a poorer one. I was so sure, too, that they were being unfair, so convinced they were mistaken, that I had not only no hope of making them take a more balanced view, but almost no desire to. So, though sensing even as I spoke the words how alarmed my parents would be to learn that I had earned the approval of a man who said intelligent men were stupid, who was roundly despised by all solid citizens, and whose praise was likely to lead me astray in the hope of receiving more of the same, I finished my account by delivering this last straw in a rather shamefaced mutter: 'And then he told the Swanns he thought I was highly intelligent.' As a poisoned dog in a field bites, without knowing why, at the herb which is the very antidote it requires to the toxin in its system, I had just uttered unawares the only possible statement which could counter my parents' prejudice against Bergotte, when nothing else I could have said, no argument in his favour, however admirable, no praise of him, however lavish, would have prevailed against it. At once the situation changed:

'Really? my mother said. He said you were intelligent? Well, that's good to hear, from such a talented man.

– Did he really say that? my father asked. Well, I've got nothing to say against him at all on literary things – nobody has. It's just rather a pity about those dubious goings-on of his that old Norpois hinted at.' My father did not notice that, against the power of the magic words I had just spoken, Bergotte's moral depravity could not hold out much longer than his nasty and bogus mind had.

'But, my dear, my mother said, nothing proves there's any truth in any of that. People say all sorts of things. And of course, although M. de Norpois is extremely nice, he's not always full of good-will, particularly towards people who are not quite his cup of tea.

– True, true, said my father. I've noticed that about him too.

– Anyway, my mother said, stroking my hair and gazing dreamily at me, if Bergotte likes my little boy, we'll not judge him too harshly.'

Without knowing Bergotte's opinion of me, she had already told me that, the next time I had friends to tea, I could invite Gilberte. There were two reasons why I did not dare do this. One was that, at the Swanns', the only thing to drink was tea; whereas my mother insisted that, in addition to tea, we should have hot chocolate. I dreaded the thought that Gilberte would think this was common of us, and despise us for it. The other reason was a difficulty of protocol that I was never able to resolve. Each time I arrived at Mme Swann's, my hostess would ask:

'And how is your dear mother?'

To me, whether Mama would agree to follow suit when Gilberte came to tea was a more serious matter than Louis XIV's insistence that at Versailles only the Dauphin should be addressed as *Monseigneur*; and so I had broached it with her. She would hear nothing of it.

'Well, no, she said, because I don't know Madame Swann.

– Yes, but she doesn't know you either.

– That may be. But we're not obliged to be exactly the same as each other. I can be nice to Gilberte in ways which are different from the ways her mother is nice to you.'

But I was unconvinced and preferred not to invite Gilberte to tea.

Having gone to my room, I was changing my clothes when I suddenly discovered in my pocket the envelope which the Swanns' butler had handed me just before showing me into the drawing-room. Being no longer under the butler's eye, I opened it – inside was a card on which was written the name of the lady whom I was expected to take in to lunch.

It was about this time that Bloch disturbed my conception of the world and opened before me new vistas of possible happiness (which were later to turn into possibilities of great unhappiness): contradicting what I had believed about women in the days when I used to go for walks along the Méséglise way, he assured me that they were always on the look-out for opportunities to make love. This good turn he complemented with another, which I did not fully appreciate till much later: he it was who took me for the first time to a brothel. He had of course told me there were many pretty women in the world to be slept with. But the faces I had imagined for them were devoid of detail; and these brothels were to enable me to see that each of them had an individual face. So it was that, on the one hand, because of Bloch's 'good news' – that happiness and the possession of beauty are not unattainable, and that we are misguided if we despair of ever enjoying them – I was as indebted to him as one is to the optimistic doctor or philosopher who gives one grounds for expecting a long life in this world, or a continued contact with it even after we pass into another world; and on the other hand, the brothels I frequented some years later (by giving me samples of happiness, and enabling me to enhance the beauty of women with that element which we can never invent, which is not just an amalgam of types of beauty familiar to us, but the truly divine gift, the only one we cannot receive from ourselves, the one beside which all the logical figments of our mind fade away, and which can be acquired only from reality: the charm of the individual) deserve to stand beside those other benefactors, more recent in origin but equal in utility, thanks to whom we can now revel in the full glory of Mantegna, Wagner and Siena, without having to invent pale, imagined versions of them based on other painters, other composers and other towns: the publishers of illustrated volumes on the history of painting, producers of symphony concerts and the compilers of those series on 'Cities of the Arts'. But the first hotel Bloch took me to, which he himself had not frequented for some time, was of a rather inferior sort; its women were too nondescript, and they were not renewed often enough, for me to gratify familiar urges or contract unfamiliar ones. The madam did not know any of the women one asked her for, and kept suggesting others that one had no desire for. There was one woman in particular whom she praised to the skies, saying with a suggestive smile, as though talking about a treat or a rarity, 'She's a Jewess! Eh? Couldn't you fancy that?' (That was presumably why she called the girl Rachel.) And she added, filling her voice with a vacuous, affected rapturousness, which she hoped would be infectious, and dropping it almost to a moan of sensuous delight, 'Just think, dearie! A Jewess! I mean! That must be a bit of all right, wouldn't you say? Eh? Yer!' I was able to look at Rachel without her seeing me: she was dark, not pretty but with an intelligent look, and as she licked her lips with the tip of her tongue, she smiled pertly at the different customers who were being introduced to her, and whom I could hear striking up conversation with her. Her face was thin and narrow, framed by black curly hair, which looked so irregular as to have been cross-hatched in an Indian ink wash-drawing. At each visit I assured the madam, who kept urging me to have the girl, stressing her high intelligence and level of education, that I would be sure to come back one day for the express purpose of meeting Rachel, for whom my private nickname was 'Rachel, when of the Lord'.[58] But the fact was that on the very first evening, I had overheard the girl say to the madam as she was leaving:

'So that's agreed, all right? I'm available tomorrow and if you've got somebody you'll be sure to send round for me?'

These words had instantly prevented me from seeing her as a person, by making her indistinguishable from the ordinary run of those women whose common practice was to turn up there in the evening in the hope of earning a few francs. This statement of Rachel's rarely varied: sometimes she said, 'If you need me';

and sometimes it was, 'If you need anyone'.

The madam, being unfamiliar with Halévy's opera, had no idea why I had taken to calling the girl 'Rachel, when of the Lord'. But an inability to understand a joke has never been an impediment to being amused by it, and she always greeted me with a great laugh and the words:

'So is tonight the night when I can fix you up with "Rachel, when of the Lord"? Let's hear the way you say it now: "Rachel, when of the Lord"! It's very funny, you know! I'm going to betroth you to her. You won't be sorry, you'll see!'

On one occasion I had almost decided to accept the offer; but the girl was 'on the job'. Then another time she was with the 'hairdresser' (this was an old gentleman whose hairdressing consisted solely of oiling the women's hair, once they had let it down, and then combing it for them). I tired of waiting for her, although several denizens of the establishment, of very humble charms, allegedly working-class women but always out of work, came up to make me a cup of *tisane* and engage me in a lengthy conversation to which, despite the seriousness of the subjects we talked about, their partial or total nakedness gave a piquant simplicity. However, I gave up going to that house, because in my desire to do the madam a good turn, she being rather short of furniture, I made her a present of some pieces, notably a large couch, which had been left to me by my Aunt Léonie. I rarely saw these things, since my parents, having no room to accommodate them, had put them into storage. But as soon as I set eyes on them again in that brothel, put to use by those women, I was assailed by all the virtues which had perfumed the air in my aunt's bedroom at Combray, now defiled by the brutal dealings to which I had condemned the dear, defenceless things. I could not have suffered more if it had been the dead woman herself being violated. So I stopped going to that procuress's establishment, as they seemed to be living creatures, crying out silently to me, like those apparently inanimate objects inside which, as a Persian tale has it, souls are imprisoned, subjected to constant torture and begging for ever to be freed. Moreover, given that memory does not usually produce recollections in chronological order, but acts more like a reflection which inverts the sequence of parts, it was not until much later that I remembered this was the couch on which, many years before, I had been initiated into the pleasures of love by one of my cousins, a girl whose presence embarrassed and excited me to distraction, and who had urged me to take perilous advantage of an hour when our Aunt Léonie was out of the room.

Another large lot of Aunt Léonie's furniture, including especially a magnificent set of old silverware, I sold, against the express wishes of my parents, so as to have more money with which to send more flowers to Mme Swann. When she received my huge baskets of orchids, she would say, 'Young man, if I was your father, I'd have your allowance stopped!' But could I imagine that a day would come when I would regret having parted with that silver, a day when the greatest pleasure in my life, paying respects to Gilberte's parents, would have become absolutely worthless? Similarly, it was because of Gilberte, so as not to part from her, that I had decided not to undertake a career as a diplomat. Our farthest-reaching resolutions are always made in a short-lived state of mind. I could barely conceive that the strange substance inhering in Gilberte, and radiating from her parents and the house where she lived, making me feel indifferent to everything else, could detach itself from her person and migrate into another. The very same substance, yet destined to have completely different effects on me. The same illness can evolve; and a sweet poison comes to be less tolerated, when with the years the heart's resistance has weakened.

Meanwhile, my parents would have preferred it if the intelligence which had so impressed Bergotte could have been made manifest in some achievement. As long as I had been excluded from the Swanns' acquaintance, I was convinced that my inability to get down to work was caused by the state of emotional disturbance to which I was reduced by the impossibility of seeing Gilberte as and when I wished to. But then, once I had free access to their house, I could hardly sit down at my desk before I had to jump up again and be off there to visit them. And when I had left the Swanns' and gone back home, it was only in appearance that I sat alone; my own thoughts could not withstand the torrent of words on which for hours past I had let myself be carried along: I went on turning out words and sentences which might have impressed the Swanns; to make the game more enjoyable, I even played the parts of the absent others, asking myself fictitious questions so designed that, in answering them, I could show off the brilliance of my banter. Silent as it was, this exercise was a real conversation and not a form of reflection; my solitude was a mental drawing-room scene, in which imaginary interlocutors and not myself were in charge of my speech, in which by producing not ideas which I believed to be true, but ideas that came to me without trouble, without any action of the outer world on the inner, I enjoyed the same sort of pleasure as is enjoyed, in utter passivity, by the person who has nothing better to do after dinner but sit quietly, lulled into a dull somnolence by poor digestion.

If I had not been so determined to set seriously to work, I might have made an effort to start at once. But given that my resolve was unbreakable, given that within twenty-four hours, inside the empty frame of tomorrow where everything fitted so perfectly because it was not today, my best intentions would easily take material shape, it was really preferable not to think of beginning things on an evening when I was not quite ready – and of course the following days were to be no better suited to beginning things. However, I was a reasonable person. When one has waited for years, it would be childish not to tolerate a delay of a couple of days. In the knowledge that by the day after tomorrow I would have several pages written, I said no more about my decision to the family: much better to wait for a few hours, then once I had a piece of work in progress to show, my grandmother would be consoled and convinced. Unfortunately, tomorrow turned out not to be that broad, bright, outward-looking day that I had feverishly looked forward to. When it had ended, my idleness and hard struggle against my inner obstacles had just lasted for another twenty-four hours. After a few days, when my projects had still not come to anything, when some of my hope that they would very soon come to something had faded, and with it some of the courage I required in order to subordinate everything to my coming achievement, I went back to staying up late, as I now also lacked my incentive (the certain knowledge that the great work would be begun by the following morning) to go to bed early on any given evening. Before regaining my impetus, I was in need of a respite of several days; and on the only occasion when my grandmother hazarded a reproach in a tone of mild disenchantment – 'So is anything happening about this writing?' – I was aggrieved at her, and I concluded that, by her inability to see the staunchness of my purpose, by the anguish which her gross unfairness caused me, an utterly unsuitable state of mind in which to undertake such a work as mine, she had just succeeded in putting off once again (and possibly for a long time!) the moment when its accomplishing would be begun. She sensed that her sceptical air had offended an unsuspected but genuine resolve. She apologized with a kiss: 'I'm sorry. I won't say another word about it.' So that I would not lose heart, she added her assurance that a day would come when I would feel well again, and that, of its own accord, my work would then start to flow smoothly.

Anyway, I thought, what if I do spend a lot of time at the Swanns? So does Bergotte! My family's view on this might almost have been that, though I was lazy, the life I was leading was actually the best suited to a developing talent, since I was frequenting the same drawing-room as a great writer. Yet, to acquire talent from someone else, to bypass the need to create it out of oneself, is as impossible as it would be to lead a healthy life by dining out frequently with a doctor, while flouting all the rules of hygiene and indulging in every sort of excess. The person who was most taken in by this illusion, shared by myself and my family, was Mme Swann. If I told her I could not accept one of her invitations, that I had to stay at home and work, she looked at me as though I was making difficulties for the sake of it, as though I had said something rather silly and pretentious:

'But, look here, Bergotte keeps coming, doesn't he? And you don't think *his* stuff isn't well written, surely now, do you? You'll see, he'll be even better soon – since he's taken up journalism, he's actually sharper, and there's more to him than in his books, where he tends to be a bit thinnish. I've managed to get him into the *Figaro*, he's going to do their "leader article".' She used the English expression, to which she added another:

'You'll see, it'll be a perfect case of "the right man in the right place". So, do come! Just think of the tips you can pick up from him about writing!'

It sounded as though she was inviting a private to meet his colonel: it was so as to further my career, as though knowing 'the right people' could help produce a masterpiece, that she urged me not to miss dinner with Bergotte at her house the following evening.

So it was that my new sweet life with Gilberte was now untroubled both by the Swanns and by my family, the two sources which at different times had appeared likely to make a difficulty; and I could go on seeing her at will, with delight though not with peace of mind. Peace of mind is foreign to love, since each new fulfilment one attains is never anything but a new starting-point for the desire to go beyond it. For as long as I had been prevented from going to her house,

my gaze had been riveted to that unattainable happiness, and it had been impossible for me even to imagine the new sources of emotional disturbance that awaited me in it. Once her parents' resistance had been overcome, the problem which had thus been solved was to go on being reformulated, but each time in different terms. In that sense, it really was a new relationship that began with Gilberte each day. Back at home each evening, I realized there were things of paramount importance that I had to say to her, things on which the future of our friendship depended; and yet from one day to the next they were never the same things. Still, I was happy and there was no sign of any threat to my continuing happiness. A threat was to materialize, however, coming from a source which I had never seen as a potential danger, that is from Gilberte and myself. I should really have been disturbed by what reassured me, by what I took for happiness. In love, happiness is an abnormal state, capable of instantly conferring on the pettiest-seeming incident, which can occur at any moment, a degree of gravity which in other circumstances it would never have. What makes one so happy is the presence of something unstable in the heart, something one contrives constantly to keep in a state of stability, and which one is hardly even aware of as long as it remains like that. In fact, though, love secretes a permanent pain, which joy neutralizes in us, makes virtual and holds in abeyance; but at any moment, it can turn into torture, which is what would have happened long since, if one had not obtained what one desired.

Now and then I had the feeling that Gilberte would have been glad to see me rather less often. The fact was that, when the desire to see her got the better of me, all I had to do was get myself invited to the house by her parents, who were more and more convinced I was an improving influence on her. Because of them, I thought, my love is in no danger: as long as they are for me, I needn't worry about anything, since Gilberte is in their hands. Unfortunately, occasional signs of impatience from her, at times when her father had me to the house more or less without her agreement, made me wonder whether the thing I had seen as a protection for my happiness might not be the secret reason why it could not last.

The last time I went to see her, it was raining and she had been invited to a dancing-class at the house of some people who were not close enough friends for her to be able to take me with her. Because it was wet, I had taken more caffeine than usual. As Gilberte was about to leave, Mme Swann, perhaps because of the bad weather, perhaps because of some slight ill-will she may have harboured towards the people in whose house the lesson was to take place, called out 'Gilberte!' in a very sharp voice, and made a gesture in my direction, meaning that I was there to see her and that she should stay at home. It was for my sake that she had snapped 'Gilberte!' or rather shouted the name; but from the shrugging of the shoulders with which Gilberte took off her outdoor things, I realized that, without intending to, her mother had hastened the process – which until then it might still have been possible to arrest – whereby my sweetheart was gradually being separated from me. 'One doesn't have to go dancing every day,' Odette said to her daughter, possibly passing on a lesson in self-discipline once taught to her by Swann. Then, becoming Odette again, she broke into English; and it was instantly as though part of Gilberte's life was hidden behind a wall, as though some evil genie had kidnapped her. In a language which we understand, we have replaced opacity of sound by transparency of idea. But a language we do not speak is a palace closed against us, inside which our beloved may deceive us, while we, left outside to the impotent devices of our own desperation, can see nothing and prevent nothing. A month earlier this conversation would have made me smile; but now, with the few French proper names I could hear among the English words, it increased my disquiet, gave focus to suspicion, and though conducted by two motionless people standing beside me, it left me as cruelly isolated and abandoned as if Gilberte had been abducted. At length, Mme Swann left us alone together. That day, perhaps from a sense of grievance against me for having been the unwitting cause of her being deprived of an amusement, perhaps also because, sensing and hoping to avoid her ill-humour, I myself may have been stiffer than usual, Gilberte's face was devoid of all joy, laid waste, a blank, melancholy mask which for the rest of the afternoon seemed to grieve privately for those foursome reels being danced without her, because of my presence here, and to defy all beings, especially me, to comprehend the subtle reasons which had produced in her a sentimental inclination to do the Boston dip. She did no more than contribute occasional comments – on the weather, the fact that the rain was coming on again, or that the clock was a little fast – to a conversation of silences and monosyllables, during which I too, in a sort of rage of despair, outdid her in trying to destroy the moments in which we could have been close and happy. All the words we exchanged were stamped with a sort of stark hardness, by the crushing paradox of their crassness, an effect in which there was nevertheless something consoling, since it meant that Gilberte could not possibly be deceived by the banality of what I was saying and the indifference in my voice. Even though I said, 'And yet the other day I had the impression the clock was actually a little slow,' she translated this directly as, 'How nasty you're being!' Even though I persisted throughout the rainy afternoon with my succession of pointless words without sunny intervals, I knew my cold manner was not as steadfast as I pretended, and that Gilberte must be well aware that, if I had dared to repeat for the fourth time what I had already said three times – that the evenings were drawing in now – I would have had difficulty in not bursting into tears. When she was like that, when a smile was not filling her eyes and revealing her face, how inexpressibly desolate and monotonous were the sadness in her eyes and the gloom of her sulky features. At such moments, her face would turn almost ugly and resembled those bare, boring stretches of beach which, when the tide has receded almost out of sight, tire the eye with their unchanging glare bounded by the fixed and inhibiting horizon. Eventually, not having seen in Gilberte the comforting change of mood I had been hoping to see for hours past, I told her she was not nice. 'You're the not nice one! she said. – Me? I *am* nice!' I wondered what I had done and, being unable to think of anything, I asked her what I had done. 'Naturally, you think you're so nice!' she replied with a long laugh. I was struck at that moment by what was so painful to me in being unable to have access to that other more elusive reach of her mind described by her laughter. The laugh seemed to mean: 'I'm not taken in by a single thing you say, you know! I know perfectly well you're madly in love with me, but it makes no difference, because I don't care for you at all!' But I reminded myself that laughter is not so determinate a form of speech that I could definitely assume I knew what Gilberte's meant. And her words had been spoken with a tone of affection. 'Well, how am I not nice? I asked. Tell me. I'll do anything you ask me to. – No, that would be useless. I can't explain …' For a moment I was afraid she believed I did not love her; and this was a new pain, no less sharp, but requiring to be reasoned with in a different way. 'You would tell me if you knew how unhappy you make me.' But the unhappiness I spoke of, which if she had doubted my love for her should have overjoyed her, only irritated her. So, realizing my mistake, determined to ignore whatever she might say, and even disbelieving her when she asserted, 'I did love you, really I did. You'll find that out one day' (that day when, according to the guilty, their innocence will be established, which is never, for some mysterious reason, the day when they are being asked about it), I found the courage to take the sudden resolution never to see her again, and to do this without letting her know about it yet, because she would not have believed me.

A sadness caused by somebody one loves may be bitter, even when it happens amid a round of pastimes, joys and preoccupations which are extraneous to that person and which, except for brief moments, divert our mind from it. But when such a sadness comes right at the moment when we are basking in the full delight of being with that person, as was my case with Gilberte, the sudden depression which replaces the broad, tranquil sunlight of our inner summer sets off within us a storm so wild that we may doubt our ability to weather it. As I went home that evening, my heart was buffeted and bruised with such violence that I felt I could only get my breath back by retracing my steps, by making up some excuse to return to Gilberte. But she would only have thought: 'Him again! Obviously I can treat him like dirt! The more unhappy I make him, the easier he'll be to manage!' In my mind, however, I was irresistibly drawn back to her; and these alternating urges, the crazy fluctuations of my inner compass, persisted after I reached home, where they turned into the drafts of incoherent letters which I wrote to her.

I was on the threshold of one of those difficult junctures which most of us encounter several times in our lives; and on each of those different occasions, we do not meet them in the same way, although in the mean time, despite having grown older, we have not altered our character, our nature (which of itself creates not only the loves we experience but almost the women we love, and even their defects). At such moments, our life is divided, as though apportioned in its entirety between the two sides of a pair of scales. On one of the scales lies our wish not to give offence, by appearing too docile, to the woman whom we love, albeit without completely understanding her; but this wish we think it advisable to leave to one side, to prevent her from feeling she is indispensable to us, and thus wearying of our devotion. But on the other lies pain – though not a localized and separate pain – which could be abated only if we were to ignore our desire to be liked, put aside our pretence of being able to live without her, and seek her out. If we lighten the scale containing our pride, by removing from it a little of the

will-power which we have been remiss enough to wear away with age, and if we add to the scale containing our unhappiness an acquired physical pain which we have allowed to become worse, it is not the courageous side which outweighs the other, as would have happened at twenty; it is the craven side which, having become too ponderous and lacking a counterweight, unbalances us at fifty. Also, since situations can change as well as repeat themselves, there is the possibility that, by the middle of life or towards the end of it, one's self-indulgence may have had the unfortunate effect of complicating love with an element of habit, which adolescence, preoccupied by too many other obligations and lacking personal freedom, has not yet acquired.

I had just dashed off a furious letter to Gilberte, being sure to place in it the life-buoy of a few apparently casual words to which she could cling if she wanted us to make up; but then in a quite different mood, I dashed off another full of loving words, in which I savoured the touching sweetness of certain forlorn expressions such as *Never again*, so moving for the one who writes, yet so boring for the one who reads, either because she suspects them of being false and translates *Never again* as *This very evening, please*, or because she thinks they are true and sees in them the promise of the sort of lifelong separation which we accept with utter indifference when dealing with people we do not love. But since we are unable, while we love, to act as the worthy predecessor to the next person we are going to be, the one who will no longer be in love, how could we accurately imagine the state of mind of a woman who, even though we knew we meant nothing to her, has always figured in our sweetest day-dreams, a figment of our illusive wish to fancy a future with her, or of our need to heal the heart she has broken, whispering to us things she would have said only if she had been in love with us? Faced with the thoughts or actions of a woman we love, we are as incapacitated as the very first physicians when faced with natural phenomena (in the time before science had come into being and shed a little light into the unknown); or even worse, we are like a being for whom the principle of causality hardly exists, who is incapable of perceiving a connection between one phenomenon and another, for whom the spectacle of the world is as unreliable as a dream. Of course I tried to escape from such chaos and find causes. I even tried to be 'objective', to remain aware of the disparity between the importance of Gilberte to me and not only my importance to her, but hers to all people other than myself, since otherwise I might have seen what was a mere civility on her part as a declaration of ungovernable passion, and an unseemly and degrading act on my own part as the pleasing spontaneity that impels a man towards a pretty face. But I was also wary of going to the other extreme, of reading a mere moment's unpunctuality or bad temper as meaning that Gilberte had an implacable hostility towards me. Somewhere between these two points of view, each of them making for distortion, I tried to find a way of seeing things which was more accurate; the mental efforts this required distracted me a little from my pain; and whether from trust in the answers I arrived at, or whether I had biassed these answers towards what I wanted, I decided the following day to go back to the Swanns', a resolution which left me happy, but happy after the manner of the man who, having worried for a long time about a journey he wishes he did not have to take, goes only as far as the station, before going back home to unpack his trunk. And since, during the period one has spent in hesitations, the merest glimpse of a possible determination to end them (unless one has precluded such a thought by resolving not to make such a determination) is like a sturdy seed out of which grow first the broad lines, then all the details of the feelings one could have once the act is accomplished, I reproached myself for having been so absurd, for having allowed my own notion of never seeing Gilberte again to make me suffer as much as if I had really been going to carry it out, telling myself that since the long and the short of it was that I was going back to see her, I might as well have saved myself so many agonizing changes of heart and dispiriting resolves. This renewal of my relationship with Gilberte lasted as long as it took me to reach her house. It ended, not because the butler, who liked me, said she was out (which was true, as I learned that evening from people who had met her), but because of the way he said it: 'Mademoiselle is out, Monsieur. I swear to Monsieur I am telling the truth. If Monsieur would like to check what I am saying, I can fetch the maid. As Monsieur well knows, I would do anything for him, and if Mademoiselle was in, I would take Monsieur straight to her.' These words of the butler's, as important as only spontaneous words can be, because they give us at least a summary X-ray of an inscrutable reality which a rehearsed speech would conceal, proved that the household suspected my attentions were irksome to Gilberte; and as soon as he had finished speaking them, they aroused in me a gust of hatred, which I preferred to direct against him rather than against her; they focussed on him whatever feelings of anger I had harboured against her; they cleansed my love of these feelings, and it lived on without them; but they also taught me that for some time I should not try to see Gilberte again. She would be writing to me, no doubt, to apologize. Even so, I would make a point of not going round to see her straight away, just to show her I could live without her. And of course, once I had received her letter, to see her again would be something I could more easily postpone for a time, since I would be certain of being able to be with her whenever I wanted to. To be able to bear that self-imposed separation from her without too much sorrow, all I needed was to feel that my heart had been freed from the dreadful uncertainty of not knowing whether we had fallen out for ever, whether she might not be engaged to be married, or have left Paris, or eloped with somebody. The following days were somewhat like the New Year holiday I had once had to spend without a sight of Gilberte. But in those earlier days, I had been sure that, once the week was over, she would come back to the Champs-Élysées, and that I could see her as usual; and equally sure that there was no point in going to the Champs-Élysées until the New Year holiday had ended. Which was why, for the whole of that sad week, long past, it was with an untroubled mind that I had borne my sorrow, because it had neither fear nor hope in it. But this time my pain was unbearable, because I was tormented by a hope that was almost as strong as my fear. Not having received a letter from her by the afternoon post, I reminded myself of how remiss she could be in such things, of how busy she was, and I had no doubt there would be one by the morning. I awaited the postman each morning with a beating heart, a state which turned into dejection each time I found the post to consist either of letters from people who were not Gilberte or of no letters at all, an eventuality which was not harder to bear, since a token of friendship from someone else only made the evidence of her indifference to me the more wounding. Then each day I would start looking forward again to the afternoon post. Even between the delivery times I did not dare leave the house, since she might be sending the letter round by hand. Each evening the moment eventually came when neither the postman nor the Swanns' footman could be expected, and I had to postpone the hope of possible consolation till the following morning; in this way, because I believed my pain could not last, I was obliged to keep on renewing it, so to speak. The sorrow I felt may have been the same sorrow all the time; but unlike my earlier sadness, it was not just a uniform continuation of an initial emotion; it started up several times each day, being at first an emotion which was so often renewed that, though it was a wholly physical state and quite momentary, it ended up at a stable level; and as the disturbance provoked by expectation barely had time to settle before a new reason for expectation arose, there was no moment of the day when I was not in the grip of that form of anguish which it is so difficult to bear even for an hour. So it was that my suffering was much crueller than it had been on that previous New Year's Day, because this time, I was full not of a simple acceptance of it but of the hope, recurring at every instant, that it would end. I did eventually reach that state of acceptance. I reached too the realization that it was to be definitive, and so I gave up Gilberte for ever, in the interest of my love itself, but also because I hoped more than anything that she might remember me without contempt. In the future, if she ever sent me an invitation or a suggestion that we meet, I even made a point of accepting some of these, so as to prevent her from suspecting I was acting on anything like lover's pique, and then at the last moment I wrote to cry off, with the sort of great protestations of disappointment that you send to someone you have no real desire to see. It seemed to me that these expressions of regret, usually reserved for people to whom one is indifferent, would be more successful in convincing Gilberte of my indifference towards her than the tone of feigned indifference that one uses with somebody one loves. Once I had proved to her, not just with words, but more effectively with reiterated actions, that I could see nothing pleasing in her company, perhaps she would come to realize there was something pleasing in my mine. Sadly, this was not to be: trying to make her discover something pleasing in my company by not seeing her was the surest way to lose her for ever. For one thing, if she ever did come to this discovery, I would want its effects to last, and so I would have to be careful not to enjoy them too soon; besides, the worst of my torment would be over by then; it was *now* that she was necessary to me; I wished I could warn her that, before long, the only purpose of her seeing me again would be to soothe a pain that would have faded so much as to no longer be, as it still was at this moment, a reason for her to allay it by giving in, and for both of us to make up and see each other again. And in the future, when Gilberte's liking for me had once again become so strong that I could at last safely confess mine for her, I foresaw that mine would not have survived such a long absence, and that I would have come to feel indifferent to her. All this I knew; but if I had said so, she would just have assumed that, in saying I would stop loving her if I had to live without her for too long, my real purpose was to make her ask me to come back to her at once. Meanwhile, a thing that made it easier for me to condemn myself to this separation was that (with the

purpose of making Gilberte clearly aware that, for all my statements to the contrary, it really was by choice, and not because of ill-health, or some such thing beyond my control, that I was staying away from her), if I knew in advance that she was not going to be at home, was going out with a friend and would not be back for dinner, I took to visiting Mme Swann, who thus once more became the person she had been in the days when it had been so hard to see her daughter, when if Gilberte did not turn up at the Champs-Élysées I would take a walk along the avenue des Acacias. In this way not only could I hear about Gilberte, but I was sure she would hear about me too, and in a way which would make it plain I had lost interest in her. Also, like all those in pain, I had the feeling that my sorry situation could have been worse. Since I had open access to her house, I lived with the knowledge (even though I was resolved never to avail myself of the possibility) that, if ever my suffering became too much for me, I could always bring it to an end. So I was only unhappy for one day at a time. And even that is an overstatement. How many times per hour (but now free of the fever of expectation that had so anguished me in the first weeks after we had fallen out, before I started going back to the Swanns' house) did I read to myself the letter that Gilberte would definitely send me one day – which she might even bring to me herself! The constant vision of this imaginary happiness helped me to bear the ruining of my real happiness. With a woman who does not love us, as with someone who has died, the knowledge that there is nothing left to hope for does not prevent us from going on waiting. One lives in a state of alertness, eyes and ears open; a mother whose son has gone on a dangerous sea voyage always has the feeling, even when she has long known for certain that he has perished, that he is just about to come through the door, saved by a miracle, unscathed. This waiting, depending on the strength of her memory and her bodily resistance, may enable her to last out the years which will eventually bring her to an acceptance of the death of her son, so that she gradually forgets and goes on living – or it may kill her. Also, my sorrow drew some slight comfort from the knowledge that it benefited my love. Every visit I made to Mme Swann without seeing Gilberte was hurtful to me; but I sensed that it served me by bettering Gilberte's image of me.

In always making sure, before I went to Mme Swann's, that Gilberte would be away, I may have been responding not just to my determination to have fallen out with her, but as much to that hope for a reconciliation which overlaid my wish to forgo happiness (few of such wishes are absolute, at least not continuously so, one of the laws of human make-up being intermittence, which is further affected by the unpredictable recurrence of different memories) and masked from me some of its worst pain. I knew perfectly well how illusive that hope was. I was like a poor man who will wet his dry crusts with fewer tears if he imagines that a stranger is about to leave him a fortune. If we are to make reality endurable, we must all nourish a fancy or two. My hope was more unqualified, while at the same time my severance from Gilberte was more effectively achieved, if we did not meet. If I had happened to see her while visiting her mother, we might have said something irreparable, which would have made our estrangement definitive and annihilated all hope, while setting off new anguish in me, reawakening my love and making my resignation harder to bear.

Mme Swann had been saying to me for ages, since long before this falling out with Gilberte, 'It's very nice of you to come to see her, you know. But I'd love it if you would come to see me for a change. I don't mean at my afternoon jamborees – there's always too much of a multitude, and you wouldn't like it one bit – but on any other day. I'm always here, you know, towards the end of the day.' So when I went to her house, it appeared as though I was just belatedly complying with a request of long standing. It was in the late afternoon, sometimes after dark, at a time when my parents would soon be dining, that I set off for the Swanns' house, where I was sure of never seeing Gilberte, but where I would think of nothing but her. In those days, in that part of Paris, which was seen as rather remote (indeed the whole city was darker then than nowadays, none of the streets, even in the centre of town, being lit by electricity, and very few of the houses), lamps glowing inside a drawing-room on a ground floor or a mezzanine, which was where Mme Swann's receiving-rooms were, could light up the street and draw the glance of passers-by, who saw in these illuminations a manifest but veiled relation to the handsome horses and carriages waiting outside the front doors. The passer-by, seeing one of these carriages move off, might think, not without a certain thrill, that there had been a change in this mysterious relation; but it would only be because a coachman, fearing his horses might catch a chill, was taking them for a turn round the block, their hooves striking sharp and clear against the background of silence laid down by the rubber-rimmed wheels.

The 'winter garden', which the passer-by would also generally glimpse, whichever street the house was in, and as long as the rooms were not situated too high above the pavement, can be seen now only in the photogravure illustrations of P.-J. Stahl's giftbooks; because of the profusion of indoor plants that people had then, and the total lack of stylishness in their arrangement, such a winter garden gives the impression, in contrast to the sparse floral ornamentation of today's Louis XVI drawing-rooms (a single rose or Japanese iris in a long-necked crystal vase which could not contain one more flower), of having been the expression of some headlong and delectable passion among ladies for botany, rather than a frigid fixation with still life. In the large houses of that time, it brought to mind, on a much larger scale, the tiny portable greenhouses sitting in the lamplight on the morning of the 1st of January (the children having been too impatient to wait for daybreak) among the other New Year's Day presents, the loveliest of them all because the thought of the plants you were going to able to grow in them consoled you for the bareness of the winter-time; or rather, instead of resembling these actual diminutive greenhouses, the winter garden looked more like the one you could see right beside them in a lovely book, another of the New Year's Day presents, and which despite not being for the children but for Mademoiselle Lili, the heroine of the story,[59] delighted them so much that, though they are now almost in their old age, they wonder whether in those dear days winter was not the best of seasons. The passer-by who stood on tip-toe might well see in the depths of this winter garden, through the branching foliage of the various species, which made the lamplit windows look like the panes of children's glass-houses, real or drawn, a gentleman in a frock-coat, with a gardenia or a carnation in his buttonhole, standing in front of a lady who was sitting, neither of them very clear, as though intaglioed in topaz, amid the drawing-room atmosphere hazily ambered by the fumes from the samovar, a recent importation of that period, fumes which may still be given off nowadays but which, because of habit, nobody ever sees. Mme Swann was very attached to this tea-time of hers; she thought she was showing originality and charm when she said to a man: 'I'm always in towards the end of the day. Do come and take tea with me,' words to which she gave a gentle, subtle smile and a brief touch of English accent, and which her listener duly noted as he gave her his most sober bow, as though they were an important and singular message, demanding deference and attentiveness. In addition to those mentioned above, there was another reason why flowers were not mere ornaments in Mme Swann's drawing-room, a reason that had nothing to do with the period but in part with the life which, as Odette de Crécy, she had once lived. The life of a high-class courtesan, such as she had been, being much taken up by her lovers, is largely spent at home; and this can lead such a woman to live for herself. Things one may see on or about a faithful wife, which may well have some importance for the faithful wife, are the very things which have the most importance for the courtesan. The climax of her day is not the moment when she dresses for society, but when she undresses for a man. She has to be as elegant in a house-coat or a night-gown as in a walking-out dress. Other women show off their jewels; she shares her private life with her pearls. It is a type of life which demands, and eventually gives a taste for, the enjoyment of secret luxury, that is, a life which is almost one of disinterest. This taste Mme Swann extended to flowers. Near her armchair there always stood an immense crystal bowl filled to the brim with Parma violets or the plucked petals of marguerites in water, which to the eyes of someone arriving in the room made it seem as though she had been disturbed in a favourite pastime, such as quietly enjoying the private pleasure of a cup of tea; but the spread flowers made it seem a more private pastime even than that, a mysterious one, and seemed to hint that one should apologize for an indiscretion, as one might on inadvertently glimpsing the title of a book lying open and divulging the secret of what she had just read, or perhaps even the thought in her mind at that very moment. But the flowers were more alive than a book: so notable and enigmatic was their presence that one felt embarrassed, if one came to visit Mme Swann, to find she was not alone, or if one came home with her, to find the drawing-room already occupied. They suggested long hours of her life that one knew nothing of, not seeming to have been set out in expectation of visitors, but looking as though just left there by her, after sharing intimate moments with her which would come again soon, secret moments which one was loth to disturb, but which one yearned to be privy to, as one gazed at the wanton mauves, moist and faded, of her Parma violets. By the end of October, Odette would come home as regularly as possible to take tea – a ceremony which was still known in those days by the English expression 'five o'clock tea' – because she had once heard it said, and enjoyed repeating, that the real origin of Mme Verdurin's salon had been the knowledge in people's minds that their

hostess could always be found at home at the same time each day. She now prided herself on having built up a salon of her own, similar in design but freer in spirit, or as she liked to put it, *senza rigore*. She saw herself as a latter-day Julie de Lespinasse[60] whose rival salon had succeeded in attracting away from the little set's Mme du Deffand her most desirable men, especially Swann, who, according to a legend which Odette had understandably sown as truth in the minds of new-comers who knew nothing of her past, but not quite in her own mind, had supported her secession and been a companion to her in her retreat. But we play certain favourite parts so often for the eyes of others, and we rehearse them so much in our hearts, that we come to rely more readily on the fictions of their evidence than on a reality which we have all but forgotten. On days when she had not been out, one found oneself in the presence of a Mme Swann sitting in a tea-gown of crêpe de Chine, as white as newly fallen snow, with which she sometimes wore one of those long garments in fluted chiffon, which made her look as though she was wearing nothing but a sprinkle of pink or white petals and which people nowadays would think, wrongly, was quite inappropriate for the winter. In the drawing-rooms of that period, draped with door-curtains and over-heated, for which the fashionable novelists of the time could find no smarter epithet than 'cosily upholstered', these flimsy clothes in their soft shades made women look as though they must feel as cold as the roses that stood beside them, braving the winter in their flesh-tinted nakedness, as though it was already spring. As the carpets muffled all sounds and as she often sat secluded in an alcove, one's hostess, not having been told of one's arrival as she would be these days, might be still deep in her book as one stood before her; and this enhanced the impression of a romantic moment, the charm of having uncovered a secret, brought back to us nowadays by the memory of those dresses which, though already out of date then, were still worn by Mme Swann alone, perhaps, and which to our minds suggest that their wearer must be the heroine of a novel, since most of us have only ever glimpsed them in the romances of Henry Gréville.[61] In those days, in the early winter, Odette's drawing-room would harbour chrysanthemums, which were enormous and in a range of colours that Swann could never have seen in earlier times. No doubt my liking for them – during those sad visits I made to her, when my sorrow had given her back all the mysterious poetry of being the mother of Gilberte, to whom she would say after I had left, 'Your young man's been to see me' – came from the fact that their pale pink matched the Louis XV silk of her armchairs, their snowy white her crêpe de Chine tea-gown, their burnished red her samovar, and that the decoration of the drawing-room was enhanced by this extra colour scheme, which was quite as rich in its range, just as refined, gifted with life, though lasting only a few days. But, short-lived as they were, I was touched by something more durable in these shades than their pinkish and coppery counterparts which the afterglow of the sunset spreads so gorgeously across misty late afternoons in November, when I arrived at Mme Swann's, and which, as they faded from the sky, were taken up again and transposed into the blushing palette of the blooms. As though a master of colour had snatched their fleeting incandescence from the sunlit evening air so as to brighten a human place, these chrysanthemums at tea-time invited me, despite all my woe, to savour the short joys of November, which glowed beside me in their strange, secret splendour. Such splendour, however, was sadly lacking in the conversations going on about me. Even with Mme Cottard, and though time was getting on, Mme Swann would put on her most cajoling voice: 'No, no, it's not late! You mustn't pay any attention to that clock, that's not the right time, it's stopped. You can't be in that much of a hurry, surely?' And she urged the Professor's wife, who still held her card-case in her hand, to have another little tart.

'Really,' Mme Bontemps would say to Mme Swann, 'this is a *very* difficult house to get out of!' at which Mme Cottard exclaimed, in her surprise at hearing someone else say exactly what she was thinking, 'Yes! That's exactly what *I* always say to myself! Me with my little brain! In my own mind, you know …' And all the gentlemen of the Jockey Club nodded their approval of her, much as their eager bowing and scraping had earlier given the impression that Mme Swann had done them a signal honour by introducing them to this charmless woman of no social distinction, who when faced with Odette's fine friends was always reserved, or as she put it herself, being inclined to use inflated language to speak of the simplest things, 'adopted a defensive posture'. 'Well, it certainly doesn't look like it,' Mme Swann said in answer to Mme Cottard. 'This is the first Wednesday for three weeks that you've actually come to see me!' 'Oh, I know, Odette, I do know! I haven't seen you for ages – centuries in fact! I plead guilty to the charge, but I must tell you' (and here Mme Cottard's manner became vague and prudish, for though a doctor's wife, she could not have brought herself to speak bluntly about rheumatism or renal colic) 'I've had quite a lot of little *distempers*. We each have our own ones, don't we? And as well, I've had a crisis in my male household staff. I'm no more of a martinet than the next woman, but I've just had to make an example and let the butler go. I do believe he was actually looking elsewhere for a more lucrative situation. But his departure very nearly precipitated the resignation *en masse* of the whole Cabinet! My maid was all set to leave too! We've had *titanic* struggles. However, I stood alone on the burning deck and, believe you me, it has taught me a thing or two which I shan't forget in a hurry! I'm sorry to go on like this about *below-stairs business*, but you know how provoking it is to be obliged to undertake a thoroughgoing recasting of one's dramatis personae. So, are we not to see that delightful daughter of yours? – No, the delightful daughter is dining at a friend's house tonight,' Mme Swann said; then she added as she turned towards me, 'I understand she has written asking you to come and see her tomorrow.' Then 'And how are your babies?' she asked of Mme Cottard. I breathed deeply. Mme Swann's words, proving that I could see Gilberte whenever I felt like it, were exactly the soothing balm I had hoped to receive from her, and which made it necessary for me to keep on visiting her at that time. 'Well no, actually,' I said. 'I'm going to write her a note this evening. In any case, Gilberte and I can't see each other any more.' I said this in a tone that suggested an air of mystery in our estrangement; and this in turn fostered in me an illusory feeling of love, which was further abetted by the affectionate manner in which Gilberte and I went on referring to each other. 'You know she's very fond of you, Mme Swann said. Are you sure tomorrow's not possible?' A sudden surge of joy went through me and I thought: 'Well, why not? I mean it's her *mother* who's asking me!' But my dejection returned at once. I was afraid Gilberte might deduce from my presence that my recent indifference towards her had been only for show, and I decided that the separation should continue. During this exchange, Mme Bontemps was lamenting the fact that she was afflicted by the wives of so many politicians, for she professed to think that everybody was insufferably absurd, and that her husband's job made life very difficult for her. 'So you don't actually *mind* being exposed to fifty doctors' wives one after the other?' she said to Mme Cottard, who was full of good-will towards all and respect for the notion of duty. 'Well, I must say that is *heroic* of you! Of course, at the Ministry, as you can appreciate, one does have certain duties. But you know, after a time, mixing with all those wives of *civil servants*, I can't help it, I feel like sticking out my tongue at them! My niece Albertine is just the same! You've no idea how cheeky she is! Just last week the wife of the Under-Secretary of State at the Treasury was at my at-home and she was saying how useless she was at anything to do with cooking. Well, my niece gave her the sweetest smile and said, "But surely, Madame, with a father who was a scullery-boy, you if anyone should know all about it." – Now, isn't that a *lovely* story? Mme Swann exclaimed. I just love that story! But surely, Mme Cottard, on your husband's consulting days you should make sure of having a little den of your own, with your flowers and your books and all the things you like.' 'Ho, ho! Albertine doesn't mince words, I can tell you! Straight out! Just like that! And not a word to me beforehand! She's as fly as a bunch of monkeys. You're lucky, you know how to restrain yourself. I do envy people who can hide their thoughts. – Yes, but I don't need to, you see, Mme Cottard replied in her mild way. I'm not hard to please. Unlike you, my position doesn't require it,' she added in the more emphatic voice which she used for stressing the clever little compliments she liked to slip into the conversation, the sprinkling of flattery which her husband admired so much and which contributed to the advancement of his career. 'And also I enjoy doing anything which may be of use to the Professor.

– No doubt. But I mean, everyone isn't capable of it, you know. You're probably not the highly strung type. As soon as I see that wife of the Minister for War contorting her face the way she does, I can't help imitating her. You've no idea what it's like to have a passionate nature like mine!

– Yes, you're right, Mme Cottard said. I've heard she's got a twitch. You see, Dr Cottard knows someone who moves in those exalted circles, and so when they meet they will talk …

– Or take the Head of Protocol at the Foreign Office – the man's a hunchback. Well, would you believe, he's only got to be in my house for five minutes and I can't keep my hands off his hump! My husband says I'll get him sacked one day. Well, what I say is, the Ministry be damned! Yes, the Ministry be damned! I really feel sometimes like having it printed on my letter-head. I'm sure you'll think me very shocking, because you're so well-meaning. But I must say I do enjoy getting a good *dig* at people from time to time! Life would be so dull otherwise.'

She went on talking about the Ministry as though it was Olympus. Changing the subject, Mme Swann said to Mme Cottard:

'Aren't you beautiful today! Is this one of Redfern's creations?

– No, no, as you know, I'm a disciple of Raudnitz. In any case, it's just something I've had remodelled.

– Well, I never! It's so smart!

– How much would you say it cost? … No, no, only three figures.

– Three! But that's *giving* it away! I was told the figure was three times as high.

– Well, that's how history's written, isn't it?'[62] said Mme Cottard. Then she drew Mme Swann's attention to a necklet which she was wearing, a present from Odette herself:

'Do you recognize this, Odette?'

A face might then appear round the edge of the door-curtain, its features set in a mime of polite and playful reluctance to interrupt: it was Swann: 'Odette, I've got the Prince d'Agrigente with me in my study and he wishes to know whether he may come and pay his respects. What am I to say? – Tell him I'll be delighted, of course!' Odette would say, full of gratification, and quite unperturbed by the prospect of being visited by such a fashionable gentleman, something she had always been accustomed to, even as a courtesan. Swann went off to deliver the message; and he would soon come back with the Prince, unless in the meantime Mme Verdurin had made her entry. On marrying Odette, Swann had asked her to resign from 'the little set'. For this he had many reasons; but even if he had had none, he would still have done so, by reason of a law of ingratitude which, quite without exception, demonstrates the improvidence of all go-betweens, or perhaps their disinterest. He had permitted Odette to exchange only two visits a year with Mme Verdurin, a number which seemed excessive to certain of the 'regulars' who were offended at the insult done to 'the Patronne', given that for so many years she had treated Odette and even Swann himself as her special favourites. Although the membership of the little clan included certain faithless souls who were capable of 'welshing' on certain evenings, so as to slip off and surreptitiously attend some function of Odette's, and who if they were found out gave as an excuse their eagerness to meet Bergotte (the Patronne's view being that he never went to the Swanns', and was devoid of talent anyway, despite which she made constant attempts to, as she liked to put it, 'bring him in'), it did also contain its extremists. They, in their disregard for the particular proprieties which can often dissuade others from whatever extreme course one may be urging upon them in one's desire to do a disservice to someone else, had pressed Mme Verdurin, but to no avail, to sever all contact with Odette, and thus deprive her of the pleasure of saying with a laugh: 'We don't see much of the Patronne now, you know, not since the Schism. While my husband was still a bachelor, of course, there was no difficulty. But for a married couple, it's not always easy … To be quite honest, M. Swann is not over-fond of old Mother Verdurin and he would not take kindly to my being among her boon companions. And I'm a very dutiful wife, you know.' Swann would accompany Odette to a soirée of Mme Verdurin's; but he made a point of not being at home for the latter's return visit. So it was that if Mme Verdurin was present in the drawing-room, the Prince d'Agrigente was sure to come in alone. He was also the only man whom Odette ever introduced to Mme Verdurin; for her idea was that if 'the Patronne' was surrounded by faces unfamiliar to her, and if she heard the names of no obscurities being uttered, she might believe these people were all aristocrats of note, an idea which worked so well that Mme Verdurin would sneer that evening to her husband, 'Charming people! She's got all the reactionary bigwigs!' As for Odette's illusion about Mme Verdurin, it was the opposite one. Not that the latter's salon at that time had even begun to aspire to the status which it will later be seen to have. Mme Verdurin had not even reached the stage of incubation, when one postpones one's most lavish galas lest one's few recently acquired celebrities should be swamped by the hoi polloi, and when one prefers to await the moment when the generative power of the ten good men and true whom one has managed to 'bring in' shall bring forth an hundredfold. As Odette's was soon to be, Mme Verdurin's aim was 'Society'; but the zones in which she launched her offensives were still so restricted, as well as being remote from those in which Odette might hope to emulate her and begin to make a name for herself, that Odette lived in a state of utter ignorance of the strategic plans drawn up by the Patronne. So when anyone spoke of Mme Verdurin as a snob, it was with the simplest sincerity that Odette would laugh and say, 'No, no, she's the exact opposite! I mean, she just hasn't got the basic requirement – she doesn't *know* anybody! And to be fair, you must admit that's how she likes to be. You see, what she really likes is those little Wednesday gatherings of hers, with those inoffensive people who drop in for a chat.' However, Odette did nurse a surreptitious envy of Mme Verdurin's mastery of those arts (though she rather prided herself too on having picked up the rudiments of them from such an Oracle) to which the Patronne attached so much importance, though all they ever do is refine the nicer quibbles of non-existence, give vacancy its shape, being in the strictest sense those Arts of Naught practised by hostesses: the ability to 'bring people together', to 'bring people out', to 'match guests with one another', to 'be present but invisible', to be 'a good go-between'.

The other ladies who visited Mme Swann were certainly impressed to see her drawing-room graced by a woman whom they generally pictured in her own salon, set within the perpetual frame of her *habitués*, her little group which seemed startlingly present, suggested, epitomized and condensed in the single person sitting in her armchair, the Patronne herself turned into someone else's guest, cosily wrapped in her great grebe-lined coat, as downy as the white fur rugs strewn in this salon, where Mme Verdurin was herself a salon. The shyest women, deciding it would now be discreet for them to withdraw, said to their hostess, with that plural which people use when trying to hint to an invalid's other visitors that it would be best not to tire her too much on her first day out of bed, 'We must be off now, Odette.' Mme Cottard was envied when the Patronne used her first name. 'Shall I whisk you away home, then?' Mme Verdurin said, irked by the thought that one of her regulars might be going to stay there rather than leave with her. 'Well, actually, this dear lady has very kindly offered to give me a lift,' Mme Cottard replied, loth to let it appear that she might give precedence to a more famous person over Mme Bontemps, whose offer of a lift in the carriage with its ministerial insignia she had already accepted.

'I must confess I am particularly grateful to dear friends who are kind enough to make room for me in their carriages. Having no Jehu myself, I must say it's too good an offer to decline. – Yes, of course, replied the Patronne, choosing her words with care, as she was slightly acquainted with Mme Bontemps and had just invited her to one of her Wednesdays. Especially since you're so far out of your way here at Madame de Crécy's – oh, goodness me, what have I said? I'll never get into the habit of saying "Madame Swann"!' Among those of Mme Verdurin's regulars who had little wit of their own, it was a standing joke to pretend that you could not get used to speaking of Odette as 'Madame Swann': 'I tell you, I got so accustomed to referring to Madame de Crécy that I nearly went and said it again by mistake!' Mme Verdurin, the only one not to nearly say it by mistake, said it on purpose. 'Odette, aren't you rather frightened by living in such a god-forsaken part of town? I'm sure if I lived hereabouts I'd quake in my shoes at having to come all this way after dark. And it's so damp! I shouldn't think it can be very good for your husband's eczema. You haven't got rats, I trust? – Heavens above! The very idea! – Well, that's all right at least. Only, someone said you did. I'm glad to hear it's not true, because I have an utter phobia of rats and I should never have set foot here again. So, good-bye, my dear sweet Odette. I do hope to see you soon. You know how pleased I am to see you. You're not very good at arranging chrysanthemums, are you?' she added on the way out, as Mme Swann was moving towards the door with her. 'These are Japanese flowers, you know. They should be arranged as the Japanese do them. – I don't agree with Madame Verdurin, although I must say her word is gospel for me. But really, Odette, no one has such beautiful chrysanthemums as you – or rather chrysanthema, as I believe we're supposed to say nowadays, said Mme Cottard after the door had closed on the Patronne. – Dear, sweet Madame Verdurin is not always very kind to other people's flowers, Mme Swann replied gently. – So, who's your flower-man?' asked Mme Cottard, cutting short such criticism of the Patronne.

'Is it Lemaître? I must admit there was a great big pink shrub outside Lemaître's the other day, and I threw economy to the winds!' Her sense of decency prevented her from going into the details of the price she had paid for the shrub; she said no more than that the Professor 'who was after all the soul of mildness' had nearly had a fit, and told her she spent money like water! 'No, actually, my only florist "by appointment" is Debac. – Yes, he's mine too,' said Mme Cottard. But I confess to having been occasionally unfaithful to him and frequenting Lachaume. – Ooh! Infidelities with Lachaume! I'll tell on you!' exclaimed Odette,

always trying to be the witty hostess who keeps the conversation going, which she felt she managed better at home than at the Verdurins'. 'Actually, Lachaume charges too much now. His prices are quite exorbitant.' Then, with a laugh, she added, 'His prices are quite indecent!'

Mme Bontemps, who had declared a hundred times that she had no desire to go to the Verdurins', was overjoyed to be invited and was wondering how she could make sure of attending as many of the Wednesdays as possible. She was unaware that Mme Verdurin's wish was that her guests should attend every single week. Also, she was one of those people whose company is not much sought after and who, having been invited to a 'run' of functions by the same hostess, instead of responding like those who know they will always be welcome, and who go to her house whenever they have the opportunity and the desire to go out, decide to abstain from the first and third occasions in the belief that they will be missed, but make a point of attending the second and the fourth; or else, having been assured that the third one will be a particularly brilliant soirée, they arrange their absences in a different sequence, and then apologize by saying 'what a pity they weren't free last time'. So Mme Bontemps calculated how many Wednesdays there were between now and Easter and how she could manage to get herself invited to an extra one without seeming too forward. She was relying on Mme Cottard to give her some hints about this during the drive home. 'Oh, Mme Bontemps!' exclaimed Mme Swann. 'I see you're getting to your feet! I'll have you know it's very naughty of you to be giving the signal for a general withdrawal. You've got to make amends, don't you know, for last Thursday when you didn't come. So, just sit down again for a minute. I mean, your'e not going to fit in another visit between now and dinner-time, are you? No? Are you quite sure?' she added, proffering a plate of cakes. 'Do have one of these little chaps. They may not look like very much, but if you just try one, you'll be very glad you did. – Mmm, they do look delicious, Mme Cottard said. One is never short of a bite to eat at your house, Odette. I don't need to ask where these came from. I know you have your standing order at Rebattet's. I must say I'm not as single-minded as you – for little cakes and all delicacies, I often order from Bourbonneux. But I admit they don't really know about ices. Whereas Rebattet's are artists when it comes to ice cream or mousses or sherbets. As my husband says, they're just the *ne plus ultra*. – Well, actually, these are home-made. Are you quite sure you won't? – No, really, said Mme Bontemps. I'll have no appetite left for dinner. But I will sit down for a moment. I do so enjoy conversing with a woman as intelligent as yourself. Odette, you may think I'm a great gossip, but I'd love to know what you think of that hat Mme Trombert was wearing. I know that large hats are very fashionable at the moment. But doesn't that one go a bit far? Although mind you, it's minute compared to the one she had on the other day when she came to me. – I'm not intelligent, Odette replied, thinking this a becoming thing to say. Really, I'm quite gullible. I'm just a woman who believes whatever she's told and who breaks her heart over a trifle.' She insinuated that, in the early days of marriage, she had suffered much from life with a man like Swann, who had a life of his own and was unfaithful to her. The Prince d' Agrigente, who had caught the words 'I'm not intelligent' and thought it behoved him to protest, was not quick-witted enough to interject. 'Oh, come now! exclaimed Mme Bontemps. Not intelligent? You? – My sentiments exactly! the Prince said, grateful for this assistance. I was just about to say "What's that I hear?" I must be hearing things. – No, no, I assure you, said Odette. At heart I'm really just a little middle-class housewife, easily shocked, full of prejudices, living in her small corner and very ignorant about everything.' Then, taking care to use the English word, she asked the Prince for news of the Baron de Charlus: 'What news of dear *baronet*? – Ignorant? You? exclaimed Mme Bontemps. Well, I never! If you're ignorant, what about the world of officialdom, what about all those ministers' wives who have nothing better to talk about than clothes! Let me tell you, Madame Swann, no more than a week ago I decided to try a mention of *Lohengrin* on the wife of the Minister of Education. Do you know what she said? '*Lohengrin*?' she said. 'Isn't that the new revue at the Folies-Bergère? I'm told it's hilarious.' Believe you me, when you hear that sort of thing, it makes your blood boil! I felt like slapping her face. I don't mind saying I've got a bit of a temper. Would you not agree, Monsieur? she added, turning towards me. Was I not right to feel like that? – Well, actually, said Mme Cottard, I do think one is quite within one's rights to answer back if one is bombarded with a question like that, point blank and without warning. I know what it feels like – it's exactly the sort of thing Mme Verdurin likes doing. – Oh, speaking of Mme Verdurin, Mme Bontemps said to her, do you know who she's likely to be having at her Wednesday this week? Oh dear, I've just remembered – M. Bontemps and I have been invited somewhere else this Wednesday! What would you say to dining with us the following Wednesday? You and I could then go on together to Mme Verdurin's. I'm rather apprehensive about turning up there all by myself. She's such a great personage, as you know, and for some reason I've always been intimidated by her. – I know why that is, said Mme Cottard. It's because of her imposing voice. I mean we can't expect everybody to have the mellifluous tones of our Mme Swann, can we? But you'll see, after the first moment spent sizing each other up, as the Patronne says, the ice will soon be broken. She's really a most welcoming person. But I can understand the feeling. It's never very nice to venture into new territory like that. – You could join us for dinner too, Mme Bontemps said to Mme Swann. Then after dinner all three of us could go and Verdurinate together, I mean Verdurinize. And if it turns out that the Patronne just glares at me and decides not to invite me again, the three of us can sit there and keep each other company. I'm sure that would be rather nice.' Then, casting some doubt on the veracity of this, Mme Bontemps asked: 'Who do you think she'll be having the following Wednesday? What will she have on the programme, do you think? She wouldn't have too many people there, would she? – Well, I for one shan't be going, said Odette. We'll just look in briefly at the last Wednesday of the run. If you don't mind waiting till then …' Mme Bontemps did not seem enraptured by this suggested adjournment.

Although the wittiness of any salon and its degree of fashionableness usually stand in inverse rather than direct relation to each other, it must be assumed, given that Swann thought Mme Bontemps was a pleasant person, that any acceptance of one's lowered status has its corollary in a relaxing of the standards one applies to the people whose company one is resigned to enjoy, whose wit one is prepared to find amusing. If that is so, then once the independence of individuals is threatened, their culture and even their language, like those of nations, must also stand in jeopardy. Beyond a certain age, one of the effects of this indulgence is to exacerbate our tendency to take pleasure in hearing praise of our own ways of thinking and preferences, which we see as an invitation to air them again; it is the age at which a great painter may find that the company of his creative peers begins to pall, when he prefers to mix with his pupils, whose only common point with him is their respect for the letter of his tenets, but who listen to him, who extol him; it is the age when, at a party, an outstanding man or woman, living only for some beloved, will be convinced, on hearing some possibly mediocre individual say something which, by suggesting a sympathetic understanding of the life devoted to amorous things, flatters their fond obsession, that they are listening to the only real mind among those present; it was the age at which Swann, in his capacity as husband of Odette, liked both to hear Mme Bontemps say how stupid it is to frequent only duchesses (from which he concluded she was a sensible woman, full of wit and without a touch of snobbery, the opposite of what he would have thought in earlier times at the Verdurins') and to share jokes with her which 'tickled her fancy', because, though she had never heard any of them, she always 'got' them, being eager to please and ever ready to enjoy a good laugh. 'So, Mme Swann said to Mme Cottard, you tell me the Doctor isn't a great flower-fancier like yourself? – Well, as you know, my husband is the soul of good sense – moderation in all things. Still, I must say, he does have one great passion. – And what's that, dear lady?' implored Mme Bontemps, her eyes gleaming with spite, glee and inquisitiveness. 'Reading, Mme Cottard replied in her artless way. – Oh well! That's a reassuring passion for a husband to have! Mme Bontemps exclaimed, stifling fiendish mirth. – Yes, just give him a good book! – Well, dear lady, there's nothing much to be alarmed about in that. – Oh, but there is! His eyesight! Which reminds me, Odette, I really must be off now. But I'll be back, knocking on your door, at the earliest opportunity. Speaking of eyesight, have you heard the house that Mme Verdurin has just bought is going to have the electric light in it? It wasn't my little private police who told me, you know. It was Mildé the electrician himself! I like quoting my sources, as you can see. And even the bedrooms will have electric lamps, with shades on, to soften the light. Very nice, very luxurious! We belong to a generation of ladies for whom everything must be up to the minute, the very latest thing. The sister-in-law of a friend of mine has actually got a telephone installed in her house! She can order something from a shopkeeper without stepping out of her own front door! I must admit I've been shamelessly currying favour, so that I'll be allowed to go and speak into the machine one day. The idea fascinates me – but only in someone else's house, not in my own. I don't think I'd like having a telephone about the house. Once the novelty of it wears off, it must be a definite nuisance. Now, Odette, I'm off! And you must also release Mme Bontemps, since she's looking after me. I really must go! You'll get me into hot water – Dr Cottard will be home before me!'

I had to go home too, though I had not savoured those promised winter pleasures that had seemed to lie concealed within the brilliant surface of the chrysanthemums. The pleasures had not materialized; yet Mme Swann seemed to be expecting nothing further. She let the servants carry away the tea things, as she might have announced, 'Time, please!' She even said to me, 'Really, must you go?' Then she added in English, 'Well, *good-bye*!' I sensed that, even if I were to stay on, I would never find those secret pleasures, and that it was not only my sorrow that had withheld them from me. Was it possible they did not lie somewhere along the well-frequented path of those hours which always lead so soon to going-home time, but by some side-path, branching off somewhere else unknown to me, which I should have taken? At least I had achieved the aim of my visit: Gilberte would know I had been to her house during her absence, where, as Mme Cottard kept saying, I had 'Straight off, from the word go, completely won over Mme Verdurin!', whom she had never seen 'go to so much trouble'. She had added, 'I expect it's a case of like attracting like.' Gilberte would be told I had spoken about her affectionately, as I could not help doing; and she would know I did not suffer from the inability to live without her which I felt was the source of her recent discontents with me. I had told Mme Swann I could no longer see Gilberte. I had made it sound as though my decision to sever contact with her was irrevocable. The letter I was going to send Gilberte would also be couched in those terms. But to keep my courage up, I told myself I would make the heroic but brief effort of staying away from her for only a few days longer: 'This will be the very last invitation of hers that I decline! I'll accept the next one!' So as to make my separation from her easier to achieve, I tried to see it as not being definitive. I sensed, however, that it was going to be.

That New Year's Day was especially painful. When one is unhappy, anything that serves as a reminder or an anniversary can cause this pain. If it is a reminder, say, of the death of a loved one, the grief comes from the sharpened contrast between present and past. In my position, however, it was aggravated by the unacknowledged hope that Gilberte might have been expecting me to make the first step towards a reconciliation, and that, now it was clear I had not made it, she might have decided to take the opportunity of the New Year, with its exchanges of greetings, to send me a note: 'Look, what's the matter? I'm madly in love with you, I can't live without you, let's meet and sort it all out.' By the last days of December, it had come to seem likely that I would receive such a letter. Whether it was really likely or not, our desire for such a letter, our need for it, is enough to make us believe it will probably come. The soldier is convinced that an indefinitely extendable period must elapse before he will be killed, the thief before he will be arrested, all of us before we must die. This is the amulet which protects individuals, and sometimes nations, not from danger, but from the fear of danger, or rather from belief in danger, which can lead to the braving of real dangers by those who are not brave. Such unfounded confidence sustains the lover who looks forward to a reconciliation or a letter. For me to stop expecting one from Gilberte, I would have had to stop wishing for it. Despite knowing one is an object of indifference to a woman one still loves, one fills her mind with imaginary thoughts (though they may amount only to indifference) and an urge to express them, one sees oneself as the focus of her complicated emotional life, albeit possibly only as a source of dislike, but by the same token as an object of her permanent attention. For me to have an inkling of what was in Gilberte's real mind on that New Year's Day, I would have had to be able to feel in advance what I would feel on some future New Year's Day, by which time I would have ignored entirely any notice or lack of notice Gilberte might take of me, any affection or lack of it that she might feel for me, just as I would have become incapable of having the slightest urge to seek solutions to such problems, for they would have long since ceased to be mine. When we are in love, our love is too vast to be wholly contained within ourselves; it radiates outwards, reaches the resistant surface of the loved one, which reflects it back to its starting-point; and this return of our own tenderness is what we see as the other's feelings, working their new, enhanced charm on us, because we do not recognize them as having originated in ourselves. New Year's Day chimed its hours one after the other without Gilberte's letter being delivered. By the 3rd of January, then the 4th, having just received some well-wishers' cards and letters which had been posted late, or held up in the great rush of New Year mail, I had not given up my hope, although it had begun to fade. On the following days I was often in tears. This meant, of course, that I had held on to the hope of having a New Year letter from Gilberte because, in giving her up, I had not been as sincere as I had thought. That hope having now died, before I had been able to fortify myself with a replacement, I was as distressed as an invalid who has finished his phial of morphine without having another one available. But it may also have meant – the two explanations need not rule each other out; and a single feeling may be made of opposites – that my hope of at last receiving a letter had brought the image of Gilberte closer, recreating in me the feelings which I had once had from looking forward to being with her, from the sight of her and her ways with me. The immediate possibility of being reconciled with her had abolished in me the thing of which we never realize the full enormity: resignation. Neurotics never believe people who assure them that, if they just stay in bed, read no letters and open no newspapers, they will gradually calm down. They foresee that such a regimen can only worsen the state of their nerves. Those in love see renunciation in the same light: they imagine it while living in a state which is its opposite; and never having so much as begun to try it, they cannot believe in its power of healing.

My heart palpitations had become so violent that I was ordered to reduce my consumption of caffeine. This having put a stop to them, I began to wonder whether the caffeine might not be partly responsible for the anguish I had felt when I more or less chose to fall out with Gilberte, and which I had attributed, each time it recurred, to the grief of separation from her, or the likelihood of being with her only when she was still in the same bad mood. But if this medication was really the source of a suffering that had then been misinterpreted by my imagination (which would not be unheard-of, as the most acute emotional pain suffered by a lover often comes from his sheer physical habituation to the woman he loves), then its action was like that of the love-potion which, long after Tristan and Yseult have drunk it, continues to bind them. For the physical improvement brought about almost at once by the reduction in caffeine did not inhibit the evolution of the sorrow which the toxic dose had possibly created, or which it had at least contrived to make more acute.

Then, about the middle of January, once my frustrated hopes for a New Year letter had faded, and the extra pain caused by their unfulfilment had settled too, I was assailed once more by the sorrow which had beset me before the holiday period. The cruellest thing in it was still that it was my own handiwork: that actively and consciously, patiently and ruthlessly, I had brought it upon myself. The only thing I cared for, my relationship with Gilberte, was the very thing I was trying to sabotage, through my prolonging of our separation, through my gradual fostering not of her indifference towards me, but – which would come to the same thing in the end – of mine towards her. My unremitting effort was directed to bringing about the slow, agonizing suicide of the self which loved Gilberte; and this I did with a clear awareness both of my actions in the present and of the consequences of them for the future: I could tell not only that within a certain time I would have stopped loving her, but that she herself would be unhappy about this, that her attempts to see me then would be as pointless as any she might make today, not because I would love her, as now, too much, but because without a doubt I would be in love with some other woman, and all my hours would be spent in the desire for her, in the expectation of a moment with her, and not even a second would I dare subtract from them to spend with a girl I no longer cared for. In this present moment, when Gilberte was already lost to me (since I was determined not to see her again, unless she made an unambiguous request for us to clarify our relationship, accompanied by a full declaration of her love for me, both of which I knew were impossible) and when I loved her more than ever (I knew she meant more to me now than she had the previous year, when I could spend as many afternoons with her as I wished, when I believed nothing could come between us), I detested the thought that one day I might have these same feelings for someone else, as this deprived me not only of Gilberte, but also of my love and my pain, the very love and pain through which, as I wept, I tried to grasp the real Gilberte, though I was obliged to admit they did not belong to her in particular, but would sooner or later devolve to some other woman. For we are always (or so I thought then) detached from the other person: while we love, we are aware that our love does not bear her name, that we may feel it again in the future – or might even have felt it in the past – for someone other than her; and at times when we are not in love, it is precisely because our feelings are unaffected by it that we find it easy to be philosophical towards the contradictoriness of love, that we can speak such untroubled words about it, because we have no consciousness of it at that moment, knowledge in this being intermittent and not outliving the effective presence of the emotion. There would of course have been time to warn Gilberte that the future in which I would no longer love her, a future my pain could foresee, but which my imagination could not distinguish in detail, was bound to take shape piece by piece, that its arrival was, if not imminent, at least inexorable, unless she came to my assistance and nipped my coming indifference in the bud. How often I came close to writing to her or going to say to her: 'I warn you, my

mind is made up! This is my very last offer! I'm seeing you for the last time! Soon I'll have stopped loving you!' But what good would it have done? What right had I to reproach her for treating me with the same indifference which, without thinking it blameworthy, I showed for everything except her? The last time! The words appalled me, because I loved her. But they would have made no more impression on her than the sort of letter a friend who is going abroad sends us to suggest a meeting, and which we ignore, as we ignore, say, the importunities of a woman who loves us, because we are looking forward to some enjoyment or other. The time we have to spend each day is elastic: it is stretched by the passions we feel; it is shrunk by those we inspire; and all of it is filled by habit.

Even if I had spoken to Gilberte, she would not have heard me. We always fancy, when we speak, that it is our ears and our minds which listen. If any words of mine had reached Gilberte, they would have been distorted, as though by passing through the mobile curtain of a waterfall, and would have been unintelligible to her, full of ludicrous sounds and devoid of meaning. Whatever truth one puts into words does not make its way unaided; it is not endowed with irresistible self-evidence. In order for a truth of the same order to take form within them, a certain time must elapse. When it has elapsed, the proponent of a political idea who, in the teeth of all counter-arguments and proofs, once said the proponent of the opposite idea was a blackguard, comes at length to share the abhorrent belief, which has been abandoned in the meantime by the man who once wasted his breath on spreading it. The masterpiece which, to the ears of the admirers who read it aloud, sounded pregnant with the proofs of inherent excellence, while to those of listeners it was inept or nondescript, comes eventually to be pronounced a masterpiece indeed by the latter, but too late for its creator to know of it. So it is with the barriers of love, which the efforts, however despairing, of the one who is excluded by them can do nothing to force; then a day comes when, as a result of quite extraneous influences at work inside the feelings of the once unloving woman, and though he no longer cares about them, the barriers give way suddenly, but to no purpose. So even if I had gone to warn Gilberte about my future indifference to her, if I had told her how she might obviate it, she would just have deduced from this that my love for her, my need for her, were even greater than she had thought; and she would have been more irked than ever by the sight of me. It is a fact, too, that it was this love for her which, because of the sequence of discordant states of mind it created in me, helped me to foresee better than she how it would end. Nevertheless, I might still have sent or spoken such a warning to her after enough time had passed, which, though it would of course have meant she was by then not quite as necessary to me, would also have enabled me to demonstrate to her how unnecessary she was. But then unfortunately some well-meaning or ill-intentioned people would speak to her about me in ways which could only give her the impression that I had asked them to do so. Whenever I heard that Dr Cottard, my own mother, even M. de Norpois, had with a few ill-advised words undone the sacrifice which I had so laboriously achieved, spoiling the whole effect of my silence towards Gilberte, by making it appear as though I had decided to end it, I was faced with a double difficulty. For one thing, my painful and profitable self-denial, which these meddlers had, unknown to me, just interrupted, and thus nullified, would have to be seen now as counting only from the day when they had spoken to her. What was worse was that I myself would have taken less pleasure in seeing her again, since she would have believed, not that I was living in a state of dignified resignation, but that I was intriguing behind her back to bring about a meeting which she had declined. I cursed the idle talk of people who for no particular reason, not even trying to hurt or please, often just for the sake of something to say, or because we have actually indulged in similar idle talk with them, turn out to be as indiscreet as we were, and harm us with a word out of place. However, in the sorry work done to cause the downfall of our love, the contribution of these people is not nearly as important as that of two others, who are in the habit of spoiling it at the very moment when its course promised to run smooth, one of them by being too kind, the other too unkind. Even so, we do not resent this pair as we do the meddling Cottards, as the second of them is the person we love and the first is ourself.

In fact, since Mme Swann, almost every time I went to visit her, would invite me to come to tea with her and her daughter, and told me to send my reply direct to Gilberte, I often had occasion to write to her, sending her notes that I filled not with words which might have won her over, but with words chosen for the sole purpose of letting my sorrow flow free and sweet. Regret, like desire, seeks satisfaction and not self-analysis: in the beginning of love, our time is spent not in finding out what love is made of, but in trying to make sure we can see each other tomorrow; and at the end of love, you do not try to ascertain the nature of your sorrow, but only to voice it in what you hope is its tenderest form to her who is the cause of it. You say things you feel the need to say and which she will not understand; you talk only for your own benefit. So I wrote to Gilberte: *I used to believe it couldn't be possible. But I can see now, alas, it's not that difficult* … Though I added: *I expect I'll never see you again*, I was still careful not to adopt a distant tone, which might have made her suspect it was feigned; and as I wrote these words, I was in tears, because I felt they expressed, not what I would have liked to believe, but what was in fact going to happen. I knew that when her next invitation came, I would once again be brave enough not to give in, and that each successive invitation declined would bring me gradually to a time when, having gone without seeing her for so long, I would have no further wish to see her at all. So with tears, courage and consolation, I sacrificed the happiness of being with her to the possibility of one day seeming lovable in her eyes, though knowing it would be a day when the prospect of seeming lovable in her eyes would leave me cold. Even the albeit highly unlikely hypothesis that at this very instant she still loved me, as she had claimed during my last visit to her, that what I saw as the annoyance of having to be with someone whose company is irksome was really only an expression of touchy possessiveness, an affectation of indifference no more genuine in her than mine was in me, served only to make my determination less cruel. And I felt as though, at a time several years hence, when we had completely forgotten one another, when I could look back on this letter I was writing and tell her there had been not one word of sincerity in it, she would say, 'What? You mean you *did* love me? Oh, if you only knew how I had been looking forward to getting that letter! How I longed for us to meet! How I cried when I read it!' As I sat writing to her, having just come home from visiting her mother, the thought that I was possibly there and then in the act of consummating that very misunderstanding, the sadness of it all, the joy of believing Gilberte loved me, made me go on with my letter.

My thoughts, as I left Mme Swann's at the end of her tea-time, were all for what I was going to say in my letter to her daughter; but Mme Cottard's thoughts were full of something very different. As she carried out her little 'tour of inspection', she had made a point of congratulating Mme Swann on any new piece of furniture or any recent 'acquisition' she had noticed in the drawing-room. Among them she might also have noticed a meagre remnant of the things Odette had once surrounded herself with in the rue La Pérouse house, especially the animals in precious stones and metals, her fetishes.

However, to Mme Swann, the word 'sham', picked up from a friend whom she admired, had opened new horizons by its applicability to things which, years ago, she had called 'chic'; and one after the other, most of those things had followed into oblivion the gold-painted garden-trellis against which her chrysanthemums had stood, many a bonbonnière from Giroux's and the note-paper embossed with a coronet (to say nothing of the *louis* coins in golden cardboard adorning her mantelpieces, which a man of taste had once hinted, long before she met Swann, that she might dispense with). As well, in the artistic disarray, the Bohemian jumble, of her rooms, with their walls still painted dark, making them as different as possible from the white drawing-rooms which she was to have a little later, the Far East was giving ground under the increasing onslaughts of the eighteenth century; and the cushions which Mme Swann plumped up and heaped behind me to make me (as she said in English) '*comfortable*', were decorated now with Louis XV posies, rather than Chinese dragons. In the room where one usually came upon her, of which she liked to say, 'Yes, I'm quite fond of it, I'm in here a lot. I couldn't live among unfriendly things, you see, ugly-pretentious sort of things. This is where I work' (though she never specified what it was she was working at, a picture, a book perhaps, those being the days when the idea of writing was occurring to the kind of women who like to have something to do, rather than sit idly about), she sat amid Dresden china, of which she would speak with an English accent, and which she liked so much that she was for ever saying, about anything that took her eye, 'Isn't it pretty? It's just like Dresden flowers!'; and as she feared for these pieces even more than she had once feared for her Chinese grotesques and vases, any clumsy servant who alarmed her by handling them the wrong way would be roundly abused in terms which Swann, the mildest and most urbane of masters, would hear but not be shocked by. Affection is undiminished by the clear sight of certain defects; it is what makes them appear charming. Nowadays, to receive guests, Odette less frequently wore a Japanese kimono, preferring the pale foamy silks of her Watteau tea-gowns, floating in them, seeming to caress their flowery froth against her breasts, basking, frolicking, and with such an air of health and well-being, of refreshment of the skin and deep breathing, that they looked as though their function was not just the decorative one of being a setting for her, but as necessary a one as her daily 'tub' or her 'constitutional', satisfying both the demands of her looks and the finer

requirements of the healthful life. She was in the habit of maintaining that she would go without bread sooner than be deprived of art and cleanliness, and that she would have been more upset by the burning of the *Mona Lisa* than by the annihilation of 'swarms' of people of her acquaintance. These conceptions appeared paradoxical to her lady-friends, giving her among them the renown of a high-minded woman, and brought the Belgian ambassador to visit her once a week; and in the little world which revolved about her Sun, everybody would have been astounded to learn that elsewhere, at the Verdurins' for example, she was seen as stupid. It was this spirit of spontaneous repartee in Mme Swann that made her prefer men's company to women's. And when she had something to say against certain women, it was always the former courtesan who drew attention to defects which might tell against them with men, thick wrists and ankles, a stale complexion, bad spelling, hairy legs, a dreadful smell, false eyebrows. She could, however, be kinder in speaking of any woman who had been friendly or indulgent towards her, especially if it was someone who had known happier days. Odette would be shrewd in defence of the woman: 'Oh, they say awful things about her. But she's really a nice person, I can assure you'

It was not only the interior decoration of Odette's drawing-room that Mme Cottard and all who had known Mme de Crécy would have had difficulty in recognizing if they had not seen her for a long time, it was Odette herself. She seemed to have grown so many years younger! This was in part no doubt because she had filled out, enjoyed better health, looked calmer, cooler, more relaxed; and in part because the new sleeker hair-styles gave more room to her face, which was enlivened by a little pink powder and in which the former flagrancy of her eyes and profile seemed to have been toned down. But another reason for this change was that Odette had now reached the middle years of life, where she found in herself, or invented for herself, a personal style of face, full of a fixed character, a recognized pattern of beauty; and on her formerly undesigned features (which for so many years had been left to the random whims of the responsive flesh, briefly ageing by years at the slightest indisposition, managing somehow to collaborate with her moods and daily demeanours in the composition of her variable face, unfocussed, unshaped and charming) she now wore this immutable model of eternal youth.

In Swann's own bedroom, instead of the grand photographs taken nowadays of his wife, in which, however unalike her different hats and dresses were, the same enigmatically imperious expression identified her triumphant figure and features, he kept a modest little old daguerreotype dating from the days before this unvarying model of Odette's, in which she seemed devoid of her new youth and beauty, as yet undiscovered by her. In this no doubt he clung, or had reverted, to a different conception of her, doting for ever on the Botticellian graces of a slender young woman with pensive eyes and a forlorn look, caught in a posture between stride and stillness. The fact was he could still see her as a Botticelli. Odette herself, who always tried to conceal things she did not like about her own person, or at least to compensate for them, rather than bring them out, things which a painter might have seen as her 'type', but which as a woman she saw as defects, had no time for Botticelli. Swann owned a wonderful Oriental stole, in blue and pink, which he had bought because it was exactly the one worn by the Virgin in the *Magnificat.* Mme Swann would not wear it. Once only, she relented and let him give her an outfit based on la Primavera's garlands of daisies, bellworts, cornflowers and forget-me-nots. In the evenings, Swann would sometimes murmur to me to look at her pensive hands as she gave to them unawares the graceful, rather agitated movement of the Virgin dipping her quill in the angel's inkwell, before writing in the holy book where the word *Magnificat* is already inscribed. Then he would add, 'Be sure not to mention it to her! One word – and she'd make sure it wouldn't happen again!'

Except at such yielding moments of unselfconscious languor, when Swann could hope to catch a glimpse of Botticelli's melancholy attitudes, Odette's body was now blocked out as a single profile, a unitary shape which took its outline from the woman within and ignored the former fashions with their fussy broken lines, the artificiality of their protrusions and indentations, their jutting angles and criss-crossings, their composite effect of disparate complexity, but which could also, if that anatomy within erred and made unwanted departures from the ideal design, correct these mistakes of nature with a firm stroke, redrawing whole sections of the contour so as to make good any deficiencies, whether of flesh or cloth. All the padding, the appalling 'dress-improvers' and bustles, had gone; as had the long vest bodices which for so many years, overlapping the skirt and rigid with whalebone, had added a false abdomen to Odette and made her look like a creature of separate parts unlinked by any individuality. The vertical fringes of jet and the stiff curves of the ruches had been replaced by the suppleness of a body which, having freed itself like an independent and organized life-form from the long opacity and chrysaloid chaos of the outworn modes, now rippled silk as a mermaid ripples water and gave a human look to the gloss of percaline. Mme Swann had managed to retain a vestige of some of these modes, amid the others which had replaced them. Some evenings, when I was unable to work, and when I was quite sure that Gilberte had gone to the theatre with a party of friends, I would call unannounced at her parents' house, where I was often greeted by Mme Swann in one of her handsome house-dresses, the skirt of which, in one of those magnificent dark shades, a deep red or orange, which seemed to have a special meaning because they were no longer fashionable, showed through a broad diagonal panel of black lace reminiscent of an outmoded flounce. Before Gilberte and I had fallen out, on one of those wintry spring days when Mme Swann had taken me to the Zoo in the Bois de Boulogne, the indented edging of her blouse, under the jacket which she would unbutton a little as the walk warmed her up, had looked just like the absent lapel of the vest bodices she had once worn and which she always preferred with such a slight zigzag edge; and she had been wearing a necklet (in a tartan pattern which she had never abandoned, though she had by now so toned down its colours, the red having shaded into pink and the blue into lilac, that it could almost have been taken for one of those dove-coloured taffetas which had just come in) knotted in a bow under the chin in a way that, because one could not see how it was fastened, instantly reminded one of those hats with long bands tied round the throat which nobody now wore. Before very long, young men, trying to define her ways of dressing, would be saying to each other, 'Mme Swann is a real period-piece, you know!' In her ways of dressing, as in a fine written style which embraces different forms of expression and is enriched by a concealed tradition, these semi-reminiscences of bodices and bows, an occasional instantly repressed hint of the 'monkey-jacket', and even a faint whisper of an allusion to long 'follow-me-lads' hat-ribbons, filled the actual forms of what she did wear with a constant unformed suggestion of older ones, which no real seamstress or milliner could have contrived, but which hung about her all the time, surrounding her with something noble – possibly because the very uselessness of these trappings made them appear designed for a more than utilitarian purpose, perhaps because of the remnant they preserved of former times, or even because of a kind of individuality in dress, peculiar to herself, which gave to what she wore, however dissimilar her ensembles, a sort of family resemblance. One could sense that, for her, dressing was not just a matter of comfort or adornment of the body: whatever she wore encompassed her like the delicate and etherealized epitome of a civilization.

Though Gilberte usually held her tea-parties on her mother's at-home days, she sometimes went out instead; and when that happened I could go to one of Mme Swann's 'afternoon jamborees'. I would find her wearing a magnificent dress, sometimes of taffeta, sometimes of faille, or else of velvet, crêpe de Chine, satin or silk, not a loose garment like the house-dresses she usually wore at home, but with something of the walking-dress in it, which somehow gave to her afternoon idleness indoors a quality of readiness and activity. The dashing simplicity of their cut suited her figure and her movements, which seemed to colour her sleeves variously each day: on blue velvet days, the material was full of sudden decisiveness, which became simple good nature when it was the turn of white taffeta; and, so as to become visible, a sort of supreme and distinguished reserve in her way of holding out her arm had taken on the glowing smile of self-sacrifice that shines in black crêpe de Chine. But at the same time, her complicated 'accessories', which had no visible purpose or practical usefulness, added something to these brilliant dresses, something disinterested, thoughtful and secret, that matched the melancholy still to be seen round her eyes and in the delicate joints of her hands. Under the dangle of sapphire-studded lucky charms, enamelled four-leafed clovers, silver medals, gold medallions, turquoise amulets, fine ruby chains, chestnutsized topazes, there would be a coloured pattern patched on to the dress itself, a borrowed panel enjoying a new lease of life, a row of little satin buttons which could neither button anything nor ever be unbuttoned, a length of matching braid trying to please with the unobtrusive aptness of a subtle reminder; and all of them, like the jewels, seemed to be there – for otherwise they had no conceivable function – to hint at a purpose, to be a token of tenderness, to keep a secret, exercise a superstition, commemorate a cure, a vow, a lover or a philippine. Sometimes a hint of a Plantagenet slash in the blue velvet of a bodice, or a slight bulge in a black satin dress, either high on the sleeve suggesting the 1830s and their leg-of-mutton, or under the skirt suggesting Louis XV hoop-petticoats, would almost make it look as though she was in fancy dress; and by slipping this sort of barely recognizable allusion to the past into the life of the present, they added to

the person of Mme Swann the charm of certain historical or fictional heroines. If I said this to her, she replied, 'Unlike some of my friends, I do not play golf. Unlike me, they have an excuse for being swaddled in sweaters.'

Amid the jostle of people in her drawing-room, as she came back in from seeing someone out or handed round a plate of cakes, Mme Swann would take me aside for a moment: 'Gilberte has most particularly urged me to invite you to lunch the day after tomorrow. I didn't know whether I would see you or not, so I was going to drop you a note about it if you didn't come today.' I persisted in my resistance to Gilberte's invitations. This resistance was now costing me less and less: however much one may savour one's poison, when one has been forcibly deprived of it for any length of time, one is bound to be struck by how restful it can be to do without it, by the absence of excitements and sorrows. We may be not entirely sincere in hoping never again to see the woman we love; but the same may well be true when we say we do hope to see her again. Of course, any absence from her can only be bearable if we mean it to be brief, if we keep thinking of being together again with her one day; but against that, we are aware of how much less disturbing these daily dreams of prompt but ever deferred reunion are than a real encounter with her would be, with its likely resurgence of jealousy; and so the knowledge that one *is* going to see her again could cause a recurrence of upsetting emotions. And what we keep postponing now day after day is no longer an end to the unbearable anguish of separation, but the dreaded renewal of futile feelings. How preferable the malleable memory of her seems: instead of the real meeting with her, in your solitude you can dramatize a dream in which the girl who is not in love with you assures you that she is! This memory, which can become as sweet as possible, by being gradually flavoured with what you most desire, is far better than the future encounter with a person whose words will be put into her mouth not by you, but by her foreseeable indifference and even her unforeseeable animosity. To be no longer in love is to know that forgetting – or even a fading memory – causes much less pain than the unhappiness of loving. What I preferred, without admitting it to myself, was the reposeful promise of that foreshadowed forgetting.

There is another reason why the pains of this treatment by isolation and emotional withdrawal may be gradually lessened, which is that, as a preliminary to curing us of the obsessive preoccupation of our love, it weakens the force of it. My own love was still strong enough for me to want Gilberte to look at me again with the eyes of admiration. So with every day that passed, it seemed to me that my prestige, because of my self-imposed separation from her, must be slowly growing in her eyes; and that each of these days of calm sadness when I saw nothing of her, in their gradual accumulation, with neither interruption nor expected expiry-time (unless some ill-advised person interfered with my arrangements), was a day gained, and not lost, to my love. A day pointlessly gained, perhaps, as I might soon be pronounced cured. Resignation, which is one of the modes of habit, favours the indefinite growth of some of our resources. By now, the puny forces which, on the evening of my first breach with Gilberte, were all I had at my command to help me bear my heartbreak, had been raised to an incalculable power. However, the tendency of all existing things to go on existing is sometimes interrupted by sudden impulses, which we obey without great qualms at breaking our own rule, since we know, from all those days and months when we have already managed to abstain, for how many more of them we would be able to make our abstention last. It is often when the purse in which we have been putting by our savings is nearly full that we suddenly decide to spend them all; it is when we have become used to a course of treatment, rather than when it has had its full effect, that we abandon it. One day, as Mme Swann spoke the usual words about how pleased Gilberte would be to see me, setting within my reach the happiness I had deprived myself of for so long, all at once I was overwhelmed by the knowledge that it was still possible to have it. I could hardly wait for the next day – I had just decided to surprise Gilberte by turning up at her house the following afternoon, before dinner-time.

What helped me to bear the thought of waiting for a whole day was a plan I had. Now that the entire thing was forgotten and we were coming back together, it was inconceivable to me that I could go to her in any capacity other than as a lover. Not a day must pass without her being sent the loveliest flowers I could find! If her mother should happen to rule against daily deliveries of flowers (not that she was entitled to severity in such things), I could think of more valuable but less frequent presents to send. My pocket-money from my parents did not allow me to buy expensive things. But I remembered a large vase in old Chinese porcelain that Aunt Léonie had left to me. My mother was for ever predicting the day when Françoise would come and report, 'It's gone and got broke!' and it would be irreparable. In that case, was it not wiser to sell it, so as to lavish every pleasure on Gilberte? I thought it might fetch 1,000 francs. One good thing about getting rid of it was that it afforded me the opportunity to get to know it: as it was being wrapped up, I noticed how habit had prevented me from ever seeing it. I took it with me on my way out and told the coachman to drive to the Swanns' via the Champs-Élysées: on a nearby corner, I knew there was a large shop dealing in Oriental articles owned by a friend of my father's. To my amazement, he offered me on the spot not 1,000 francs but 10,000! I handled the banknotes with delight: a year's worth of daily roses and lilacs for Gilberte! From the shop, the coach set off again for the Swanns'; and as they lived not far from the Bois de Boulogne, instead of taking the usual route, the coachman naturally headed up the avenue des Champs-Élysées itself. We had passed the corner of the rue de Berri and were very close to the Swanns' when I thought I saw Gilberte with a young man in the twilight: they were going in the opposite direction to myself, away from her house; she was walking slowly, but with a purposeful step, and talking to this young man, whose face I could not make out. I sat up, intending to tell the driver to stop; but then I hesitated. The pair were already at quite a distance, their two faint close silhouettes fading slowly into the gathering Elysian gloom. Soon we drew up outside Gilberte's house. 'Oh dear! Mme Swann said. She *will* be sorry! I can't imagine why she's not here. She came home from a class complaining of being too hot and said she felt like taking a little walk in the open air with one of her girl-friends. – I think I may have just glimpsed her along the avenue des Champs-Élysées. – Oh, no, I shouldn't think so. But whatever you do, don't mention it to her father. He doesn't like her to be out and about at this hour of the day.' She added in English '*Good evening!*' and I left. I told the cabman to go back the way we had come; but there was no sign of the pair. Where had they been? What manner of things had they been saying to each other in the gloaming, walking together in that intimate way?

I went home in despair, clutching my windfall of 10,000 francs, which was to have enabled me to give Gilberte so many little pleasures, and realizing that I was now determined never to see her again. The visit to the shop with the Chinese vase had gladdened me with the prospect that, now and for ever, my sweetheart's sole feelings for me would be happiness and gratitude. Yet if I had not made that detour to the shop, if the coach had not driven up the avenue des Champs-Élysées, I would never have seen Gilberte with the young man. For the stem of a single event may bear counter-balancing branches, the unhappiness it brings cancelling the happiness it caused. What had happened to me was the opposite of what is more usual: one yearns for a fulfilment which remains unattainable because one lacks the wherewithal required for it. As La Bruyère says, 'It is sad is to be a lover without wealth.'[63] One's only resource is the relentless endeavour of stifling one's yearning. The wherewithal was not what I lacked; but at the very moment when it materialized, an adventitious if not logical consequence of its acquisition had deprived me of the expected joy. It would appear that this is the fate of all our joys. They do of course tend to last longer than the single evening on which we have acquired what makes them possible. More usually, our fever of expectation lasts longer. Even so, happiness can never happen. Once the external circumstances are overcome, if they can be, nature then transforms the struggle into an internal one, by bringing about a gradual change in our heart, so that the gratification it desires is different from the one it is about to receive. And if the change in circumstance has come about so quickly that our heart has not had time to change with it, nature, nothing daunted, taking its own time, sets about defeating us in a way which, though more devious, is no less effective. Fulfilment is snatched from our grasp at the last moment; or rather it is fulfilment itself which nature the malicious trickster uses to destroy happiness. Having failed with everything belonging to the world of fact and external life, nature creates its ultimate impediment to happiness by making it a psychological impossibility. The phenomenon of happiness does not come to pass; or else it leads to utter bitterness.

I locked away my 10,000 francs. They were of no use to me now; and they were to end up being spent even more quickly than if I had sent flowers to Gilberte every day, since as twilight came each evening I was so unhappy that, rather than stay at home, I went to lie weeping in the arms of other women whom I did not love. As for trying to please Gilberte with presents, I had lost all desire to do so. To step inside her house now would have been to face the certainty of suffering. Just to see her – a thing that had seemed so exhilarating the previous evening – would have been of little help to me: every moment when I could not be with her would have revived my anxiety. This explains why every new pain that a woman inflicts on us (which she often does without meaning to) increases not only her

power over us, but also the demands we make on her. By every use of her power to hurt, the woman constricts us more and more, shackling us with stronger chains; but she also shows us the weakness of those which once seemed strong enough to bind her and thus to enable us to feel untroubled by her. Only the day before, had I not wanted to avoid upsetting Gilberte, I would have settled for infrequent meetings with her; but now these could no longer have satisfied me, and my conditions would have been very different. For in love, unlike war, the more one is defeated, the more one imposes harsh conditions; and one constantly tries to make them harsher, if one is actually in a position to impose any, that is. With Gilberte, I was not in this position. So to begin with, I preferred not to go back to her mother's house. I also went on telling myself that Gilberte did not love me, that I had known this for ages, that I could see her whenever I liked and that, if I preferred not to see her, I would eventually forget her. But these thoughts, like a medication which has no effect on certain disorders, were quite ineffectual against what came intermittently to my mind: those two close silhouettes of Gilberte and that young man, stepping slowly along the avenue des Champs-Élysées. This was a new pain, but one which would eventually fade and disappear in its turn; it was an image which one day would come back to my mind with all its noxious power neutralized, like those deadly poisons which can be handled without danger, or the small piece of dynamite one can use to light a cigarette without fear of being blown up. For the time being, though, there was another force in me, fighting for all it was worth against the pernicious impulse which kept showing me, without the slightest alteration, Gilberte walking through the twilight: working against memory, trying to withstand its repeated onslaughts, there was the quiet and helpful endeavour of imagination. The force of memory went on showing the pair walking down the avenue des Champs-Élysées, along with other irksome images from the past, such as Gilberte shrugging her shoulders when her mother asked her to stay in with me. But the second force, sketching freely on the canvas of my hopes, improvised a future which was much more lovingly detailed than the meagre glimpses afforded by such a paltry past. To think that, against a single moment of the sullen Gilberte, I had a wealth of other moments, all devoted to her attempts to bring about our reconciliation – or even our engagement! This force, though directed towards the future by my imagination, did of course draw its sustenance from the past; and as my unhappiness at Gilberte's surly shrug of the shoulders gradually faded, so would my memory of her charm and the yearning for her that came with it. However, at the present moment, that death of the past was still remote. I still loved Gilberte, though I believed I hated her. Whenever somebody complimented me on the neatness of my hair, whenever anyone said I was looking well, I wished she could be there to hear it. Throughout that whole period, I was irritated by receiving so many invitations; and I turned them all down. On one occasion there was a great row at home, because I declined to accompany my father to an official function, at which M. and Mme Bontemps were to be present with their niece Albertine, who was then little more than a child. The different periods of our life overlap. Because you are now in love with someone who will one day mean nothing to you, you refuse out of hand to meet someone who means nothing to you now, but whom you will one day come to love, someone whom you might have loved sooner if you had agreed to an earlier meeting, who might have curtailed your present sufferings (before replacing them, of course, with others). My own sufferings were changing. I was surprised to notice certain feelings in myself, one day a particular emotion, the following day some quite different one, generally inspired by some hope or fear focussed on Gilberte. The Gilberte of my private imaginings, I mean. But I ought to have borne in mind that the other Gilberte, the real one, was perhaps utterly different from this private one, that she probably lived in ignorance of all the regrets I invented for her to feel, and thought not only much less about me than I about her, but much less than I pretended she thought about me in my moments of private communion with the fictitious Gilberte, when I longed to know her real intentions towards me and pictured her as spending her days doting on me.

During these periods when sorrow, though already beginning to wane, still persists, there is a difference between the mode of sorrow caused by the obsessive thought of the loved one and the sorrow brought back to mind by certain memories: a nasty thing said, a verb once used in a letter. Let it be said here (all the diverse modes of sorrow will be described in connection with a later love-affair) that the first of these modes is not nearly as cruel as the second. This is because our impression of the woman, living for ever within us, is enhanced by the halo which our adoration constantly creates for her, and is tinged, if not by the glad promises of recurrent hope, at least by the peace of mind of lasting sadness. (It is noteworthy too that our image of a person who causes us pain takes up little space among the complications which exacerbate a heartbreak, which make it persist and prevent us from getting over it, just as in certain illnesses the cause is out of all proportion to the ensuing fever and the length of time required for a cure.) Though our image of the whole person we love is lit by the glow of a generally optimistic mind, this is not the case with the individual memory of the hurtful words spoken on a particular occasion or the unfriendly letter (I only ever had one like that from Gilberte): it feels as though these fragments, however minute they are, contain the whole person, amplified to a power well in excess of what she has in the usual imagined glimpses we have of her, entire though she is in them. Unlike the loved image of her, we have never gazed at the terrible letter with the untroubled eyes of melancholy and regret; the moment we spent reading it, devouring it, was fraught with the awful anguish of unexpected catastrophe. The difference in the making of these sorts of sorrows is that they come from the outside world and take the shortest and most painful route to the heart. The image of the woman we love, though we think it has a pristine authenticity, has actually been often made and remade by us. And the memory that wounds is not contemporaneous with the restored image; it dates from a very different time; it is one of the few witnesses to a monstrous past. Since this past goes on existing, though not inside us, where we have seen fit to replace it by a wondrous golden age, a paradise where we are to be reunited and reconciled, such memories and such letters are a reminder of reality; their sudden stab ought to make us realize how far we have strayed from that reality, and how foolish are the hopes with which we sustain our daily expectation. Not that this reality has to remain the same, although that can happen too. There have been many women in our lives with whom we have long since lost touch, and who have understandably matched our unpurposed silence by a similar lack of interest in ourselves. However, not being in love with them, we have never counted the years spent without them; and in our reasoning on the efficacy of separation, we disregard this counter-example, which should invalidate it, as those who believe in the possibility of foretelling the future overlook all the cases in which what they foresaw did not eventuate.

Even so, separation can be effective: the heart which at present ignores us may be visited by the wish to see us again, or by an expectation of pleasure in our company. It just takes time. And the demands we make on time are as inordinate as the requirements of a heart if it is to change. In the first place, time is the very thing we wish not to grant; for our pain is acute and we are in haste to have it cease. As well, in the time that it takes for the other's heart to change, our own heart will be changing too; and when the fulfilment desired comes within our reach, we will desire it no longer. Actually, the very notion that it *will* come within reach, that there is no fulfilment which will be for ever denied us, as long as it has ceased to be a fulfilment we desire, is one which, though true, is only partly true. By the time it comes to us, we have become indifferent to it. And our very indifference has made us less critical of it, which enables us to believe in retrospect that it would have delighted us at a time when, in fact, it might well have seemed grossly deficient. One's standards are not high, and one is no great judge, in things one does not care about. The friendliness of a person whom we no longer care for, though it may seem too much to our indifference, might have been deemed too little by our love. The affectionate words, the suggestion of a meeting, make us think of the joy they might have led to, but not of all the other joys by which we would have wanted them to be immediately followed, and which that very eagerness of ours might well have prevented from ever coming to pass. So it is not certain that the happiness which comes too late, at a time when one can no longer enjoy it, when one is no longer in love, is exactly the same happiness for which we once pined in vain. There is only one person – our former self – who could decide the issue; and that self is no longer with us. No doubt, too, if the former self did come back, identical or not as it might be, that would be enough for the happiness in question to vanish.

The belated coming true of these dreams, at a time when I would have ceased to long for it, was still in the future; and because I went on inventing, as in the days when I hardly knew Gilberte, words for her to say to me, letters in which she begged for forgiveness, confessed to never having loved another, asked me to marry her, this sequence of sweet and constantly regenerated images came to occupy more space in my mind than the glimpse of her with the young man, which weakened for lack of nourishment. I might well have gone back to Mme Swann's, had it not been for a dream I had, in which a friend of mine, quite unknown to me in the waking world, behaved towards me with the most villainous duplicity, while believing I was the treacherous one. This caused me such pain that I woke with a start; and as my pain did not abate, I thought again of the dream, in an attempt to identify the friend who had visited my sleeping mind and whose name, a

Spanish one, was now fading away. As both Joseph and the Pharaoh, I set about interpreting the dream.[64] I knew that in many dreams one must disregard the appearance of people, who may be disguised or may have exchanged faces with one another, like those mutilated saints on the fronts of cathedrals which have been repaired by ignorant archaeologists in a jumble of mismatched heads and bodies, attributes and names. Those we give to characters in our dreams can be misleading. The one we love can be recognized only by the quality of the pain we feel. It was this that identified for me the person who as I slept had turned into a young man, and whose recent treachery still ached within me – Gilberte. I remembered then that, on the last occasion when we had been together, the day when her mother had forbidden her to go a dancing-lesson, she had burst out with a strange laugh and refused, either sincerely or in pretence, to believe that my intentions towards her were quite proper. By association, this memory brought to mind another: long before that day, Swann himself had been the one to doubt my sincerity, to suspect that I was not a suitable friend for his daughter. I had written him my futile letter, which Gilberte had brought back and given to me with that same baffling laughter. She had not given it back immediately, of course; and I could remember the whole scene behind the clump of laurels. Unhappiness is a great promoter of morality. Gilberte's present unpleasantness towards me now seemed a punishment meted out by life because of my behaviour that day. Because one can avoid dangers, by watching out while crossing the street, one has the impression that one can also avoid punishment. But punishments can come from within; and the unexpected danger may arise in that way, too, from the heart. The words she had spoken, 'If you like, we can wrestle a bit more,' now horrified me. I imagined her behaving like that with the young man I had seen with her in the avenue des Champs-Élysées, at home perhaps, up in the linen-room. So, just as, some time ago, I had been ill-advised enough to believe I had come to a state of tranquil, stable happiness, I had been rash enough, now that I had accepted that happiness was not for me, to believe I had achieved at least a haven of lasting calm. The fact is that, as long as our heart harbours the dear image of another person, it is not only our happiness which runs the constant risk of sudden destruction; for even when happiness has gone and pain has come, even when we have contrived to lull our pain, the state of calm we reach is no less illusory and precarious than happiness once was. My own state of calm did eventually come back, as whatever enters our minds in the guise of a dream, affecting our desires and our inner being, sooner or later fades away like all other things, grief being no more capable than anything else of aspiring to permanence. Besides, those who suffer the torments of love are, as is said of people suffering from certain diseases, their own doctors. As the only consolation they can find must come from the person responsible for their pain, and as the giving of that pain is an attribute of that person, the remedy they eventually find for it lies within it. One day, their pain reveals their remedy – as they mull it over, the pain shows them a new aspect of the person whom they miss so terribly: sometimes she is so hateful that they lose all desire to see her again, and any pleasure they might take in her company demands that they first wound her in their turn; sometimes she is so loving that they turn this lovingness into an objective quality of the loved one, and see in it a reason to hope. In my own case, although this new phase of my suffering did gradually come to an end, I was left with a much diminished desire to go back to see Mme Swann. In the hearts of those whose love is unrequited, the state of expectation in which they spend their days – even though it may be an unrecognized expectation – turns very gradually into a second phase which, though it seems identical with the first, is in fact its exact opposite. That first phase was the consequence, the reflection of the hurtful incidents which caused the initial sorrow. Our expectation of what might happen next is mixed with apprehension, especially since, if we hear nothing more from the beloved, we are full of the urge to do something, but are unsure of the likely outcomes of any step we might take, including the possibility that the one we do take may well rule out any further one. But soon, without our realizing it, our continuing expectation is determined, as we have seen, not by our memory of the past we have just been through, but by the imaginary future we look forward to. By then, our expectation is almost pleasant. After all, if the first phase has lasted for some time, we have already become used to living with an eye to tomorrow. The pain we felt during our final encounters with her still lives in us, albeit subdued. We are reluctant to have it revive, especially since we cannot see what further demands we could possibly make. To possess a little more of her would only increase our need for the part of her that we do not possess; and in any case, within that part, since our needs arise out of our satisfactions, something of her would still lie for ever beyond our grasp.

When this reason was later reinforced by another one, I completely gave up my visits to Mme Swann's. This belated reason was not that I had already forgotten Gilberte: it was that I hoped in that way to forget her sooner. Of course, since the end of my acute unhappiness, my residual sorrow had once again drawn from my visits to Mme Swann the sedative and the diversion which I had found so comforting at an earlier stage. But the reason why the sedative was effective was also the reason why the diversion was a drawback: that the memory of Gilberte was inseparable from such visits. The diversion could have been beneficial only if it could have pitted thoughts, interests or passions unrelated to Gilberte against a feeling which was no longer reinforced by her presence. Such states of mind, from which the loved one is entirely absent, serve to take up a space which, though minimal to begin with, leaves a little less room in the heart for the love which once occupied it entirely. They must be fostered, they must be fortified, in time with the waning of the emotion which is no more than a memory, so that the new elements provided to the mind can encroach on a larger and larger area of the self and finally take it over completely. I realized it was the only way to kill a feeling of love; and I was young enough and brave enough to undertake to do this, to inflict this wound on myself, the cruellest of all wounds, since it comes from one's knowledge that, however long it may take, one is bound to succeed. When I wrote to Gilberte now, the reason I alleged for my reluctance to see her was some mysterious misunderstanding, utterly untrue of course, which had come between us, and on which I had at first been hoping she would invite me to explain myself. But in fact no clarification, even in the most trivial relationships, is ever required by any correspondent who knows that a designedly obscure, untrue or incriminating statement is included in a letter for the express purpose of provoking a protest, and who is satisfied to see in it a proof that he (or she) not only enjoys a commanding position and retains the initiative, but will continue to do so. In love relationships this is even more true, for love has so much eloquence, and indifference so little curiosity. As Gilberte had never expressed a doubt on this supposed misunderstanding, or tried to find out what it was, it had become a reality for me, and I alluded to it in each letter. There is, in such readiness to misinterpret, in the pretence of standoffishness, a dire charm which leads you further and further on. Having so often used the phrase 'since we fell out', so as to make Gilberte reply 'But we haven't, let's talk about it,' I had managed to persuade myself that we had. By so often writing statements like 'Life may have parted us, but it can never alter the feeling we shared,' in the hope of being told, 'Nothing has parted us, our feeling is as strong as ever,' I had become used to the idea that life *had* parted us, that our erstwhile feeling would live in our memories, as certain neurotics start by simulating an illness and end by really being ill. Whenever I had occasion to write to Gilberte now, I made a point of mentioning life's imagined parting of us. And this role of life having been tacitly accepted by the fact that Gilberte never referred to it in her replies, it would go on parting us. But then, eschewing mere reticence, she overtly adopted my point of view; and thenceforward, as a visiting Head of State will incorporate into his speech of reply to an official welcome some of the words used by his host, each time I wrote, 'Life may have come between us, but the memory of our time together will live on,' she took to saying, 'Life may have come between us, but it can never make us forget the dear days we shared' (why 'life' should be said to have come between us or to have changed anything, we would have been hard put to say). By now my pain had much abated. But then one day when I was telling her in a letter that I had just heard of the death of our old barley-sugar woman from the Champs-Élysées, as I wrote these words, 'I'm sure you must have been sad to hear of it; it certainly brought back many memories to me,' I collapsed in helpless tears, as I realized that, though I had gone on hoping against hope that our love was still a living emotion, or at least one which could revive, I was now speaking of it in the past, as though it too had died and was all but forgotten. How affectionate this correspondence was, between friends trying not to meet! Her letters were fully as considerate as any I wrote to people who meant nothing to me; and I was greatly comforted to receive from her the very same tokens of apparent affection which I sent to them.

Gradually, the more often I declined her suggestion that we meet, the less pain it caused me. As she became slowly less dear to me, my hurtful and incessantly recurring memories of her lost the power to prevent the thought of a visit to Florence or Venice from giving me pleasure. At such moments, I regretted the fact that I had turned down the diplomatic career and tied myself to a life without travel, so as not to absent myself from a girl whom I would not now be seeing again, whom I had already more or less forgotten. We design our life for the sake of an individual who, by the time we are able to welcome her into it, has turned into a total stranger, and never comes to share that life with us; and so we live on imprisoned in an arrangement made for someone else. Though my parents judged

Venice to be too distant and fever-ridden for me, at least it was easy and untiring to go for a time to Balbec. But that would have entailed leaving Paris and giving up my visits, infrequent though they were, to Mme Swann's, where I could hear her speak about her daughter, and where I was even beginning to discover other pleasures, which had nothing to do with Gilberte.

As spring advanced, as the Ice Saints[65] and Easter-time with its squalls of hail brought back the cold, Mme Swann was convinced that the house was freezing, and I often had occasion to see my hostess wearing furs: her shivery hands and shoulders disappeared under the dazzling white of a great flat muff and tippet, both of ermine, which she had been wearing outside and which looked like winter's last and most persistent patches of snow, unthawed by the warmth of her fireside or the change of season. The composite truth of those icy but already flowering weeks was brought into that drawing-room, which I was soon to cease visiting, by whiteness of a more affecting sort, such as the snowballs of the Guelder roses, each of their tall stems, as bare as the Pre-Raphaelites' linear flora, topped by its single clustered globe, as white as a herald angel and surrounded by the scent of lemon. For Odette, as befitted the lady of Tansonville, knew that even the iciest April is never without its flowers, and that winter, springtime and summer are not as hermetically partitioned from one another as may be supposed by the man-about-town who, until the first warm weather arrives, cannot imagine the world containing anything other than bare housefronts dripping rain. No doubt Mme Swann did not rely solely on what her gardener regularly sent up from Combray, and she did not decline to palliate, with the assistance of her 'florist by appointment', the insufficiencies of her artificial springtime by drawing on the resources afforded by Mediterranean precocity. Not that this mattered to me. Apart from the snows of Mme Swann's muff, all that was required to set me yearning for the countryside was that the snowballs of the Guelder roses (which may have had no other purpose than to join with my hostess's furniture and her own outfit in making the 'Symphony in White major' that Bergotte liked to talk of) should remind me that the Good Friday Spell[66] represents a natural miracle, which we could witness every year, had we but the good sense to do so, and that these white flowers, along with the heady acid perfume of blooms of other species, the names of which were unknown to me, but which had often made me pause on my walks about Combray, should give to Mme Swann's drawing-room an air that was as virginal, as candid, as blossomy without leaves, as thick with genuine smells, as the steep little path leading up to Tansonville.

But even the memory of the little path was almost too much. The danger of it was that it might keep alive in me the remaining vestige of my love for Gilberte. So, despite the fact that my visits to Mme Swann now caused me no grief at all, I made them even more infrequent, trying to see her as little as possible. I did allow myself, since I persisted in not leaving Paris, to walk with her a few times. Fine warm weather had at last arrived. Knowing that Mme Swann went out each day before lunch and took a short walk in the avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, not far from the Arc de Triomphe, quite close to the spot which was known in those days, in honour of the citizenry who went there to see all the rich people they had heard of, as the 'Hard-up Club', I had asked my parents' permission to go out for a walk late on Sunday mornings (not being free on weekdays at that time) and not to come back to lunch till a quarter-past one, which was much later than their own lunch-time. During that month of May, I did not miss a single Sunday, Gilberte having gone off to spend some time in the country with friends. I would arrive at the Arc de Triomphe about midday and stand at the end of the avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne, from where I could watch the corner of the side-street from which Mme Swann would emerge, coming from her house, which was only a few steps away. It was the hour at which many of those who had been out for a walk were going home to lunch; of the few remaining, most belonged to fashionable society. Then it was, stepping on to the fine gravel of the avenue, that Mme Swann would make her entrance, as late, languid and luxuriant as the most beautiful flower that never opens until noon, in outfits which gave her a bloom of radiance, and which, though they were always different, I remember as mainly mauve. The bright moment of her flowering was complete when, on an elongated stretch of stem, she unfurled the silky vexillum of a broad sunshade blending with the full-blown shimmer of her frock. She was accompanied by a whole retinue: Swann was there, as were four or five other club-men who had either dropped in to see her that morning or whom she had just encountered. And as the blacks and greys of this disciplined formation executed their almost mechanical movements, lending an inert frame to Odette, they made the woman, the only one with any intensity in her gaze, appear to be staring past them all, looking straight ahead as though leaning out of a window, and made her stand out, fragile and fearless, in the nudity of her gentle colours, as though she was a creature of a different species or of some mysterious descent, with a suggestion of something warlike about her, all of which enabled her single person to counter-balance her numerous escort. Beaming with smiles, contented with the lovely day and the sunshine, which was not yet too warm, with all the poise and confidence of a creator who beholds every thing that he has made and sees it is very good, and knowing (though vulgar passers-by might not appreciate this) that her outfit was more elegant than anyone else's, she wore it for herself but also for her friends, naturally, without show but also without complete indifference, not objecting if the light bows on her bodice and skirt drifted slightly in front of her, like pets whose presence she was aware of but whose caprices she indulged, leaving them to their own devices as long as they stayed close to her; and as though her purple parasol, often furled when she first emerged into the avenue, was a posy of Parma violets, it too at times received from her happy eyes a glance which, though directed not at her friends but at an inanimate object, brimmed with so much gentle good-will that it still seemed to be a smile. A margin of elegance, which Mme Swann's choice of outfit made all her own, was accepted as her essential and exclusive prerogative by the gentlemen whom she addressed most familiarly; and in this they deferred to her with the air of ignorant outsiders who do not mind recognizing themselves as such, conceding the aptness of her authority, as they might with an invalid on the matter of the special care he must take, or with a mother on how best to bring up her children. It was not just this suite of retainers, surrounding her and seeming not to notice passers-by, that suggested Mme Swann's indoor life: by reason of the lateness of her advent in the avenue, she brought to mind the house in which she had spent long morning hours, where she would soon have to return for lunch; the proximity of it was in the calm and leisured simplicity of her manner, as though she was strolling down her own garden path; the cool subdued light of its interior seemed to hang about her as she passed. But this vision of her only gave me a heightened sense of the fresh air and the warmth of the day, especially since (in my conviction that, in accordance with her pious expertise in the rites and liturgy of such things, Mme Swann's ways of dressing were linked to the season and the time of day by a bond that was necessary and unique) the flowers on her soft straw hat and the little bows on her frock seemed a more natural product of May than any flowers cultivated in beds or growing wild in the woods; and to witness the thrilling onset of the new season, I needed to lift my eyes no higher than Mme Swann's sunshade, opened now and stretched above me like a nearer, more temperate sky, full of its constantly changing blue. Though subordinate to none, these rites were honour-bound, as was consequently Mme Swann herself, to defer to the morning, the springtime and the sunshine, none of which I ever thought seemed flattered enough that such an elegant woman should make a point of respecting them, of choosing for their pleasure a frock in a brighter or lighter material, its lower neckline and looser sleeves suggesting the moist warmth of the throat and the wrists, that she should treat them as a great lady treats the common people whose invitation to visit them in the country she has cheerfully condescended to accept, and for whose special occasion, though they are nobodies, she makes a point of giving her dress a bucolic touch. As soon as she appeared, I made my bow to Mme Swann; she paused with me and gave me her smiling English '*Good morning!*' As we strolled, I realized that it was for her own sake that she observed these standards in dress, as though they were the tenets of a superior form of worship, which she merely served as a high priestess; for if she felt too warm, if she unbuttoned or even took off and asked me to carry the jacket that she had originally meant to keep buttoned, I discovered in the blouse she wore under it a host of details of handiwork which might well never have been noticed, after the manner of those orchestral parts which the composer has worked with exquisite care, although no ears among the audience will ever hear them; or else in the sleeves folded over my arm I picked out and studied, for the pleasure of looking at them or for the pleasure of being pleasant, this or that tiny detail, a strip of cloth of a delightful shade, or a mauve satinet normally unseen by any eye, but just as delicately finished as any of the outer parts of the garment, like the fine Gothic stonework hidden eighty feet up a cathedral, on the inner face of a balustrade, just as perfectly executed as the low-relief statues in the main doorway, but which no one had ever set eyes on until an artist on a chance visit to the city asked to be allowed to climb up there, walk about at sky-level and survey a whole townscape from between the twin steeples.

For those who were ignorant of Mme Swann's practice of taking a 'constitutional', the impression she gave of walking along the avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne as though it was a pathway in her back garden was enhanced by the fact that she was on foot, that no carriage followed her, despite the fact that by the month of

May she could usually be seen sitting behind the neatest pair of high-steppers in Paris, attended by grooms in the smartest livery, as relaxed and serene as a goddess, basking in the clement open air of a vast Cee-springed victoria. By walking, especially with her leisurely warm-weather gait, Mme Swann appeared to have acted on a whim, to be committing a graceful little breach of protocol, like a queen at a gala performance who, without telling anyone, and, as her household looks on in slightly shocked wonderment, none of them daring to protest, leaves the Royal box during an interval, so as to spend a few moments mingling with ordinary members of the audience. Watching Mme Swann as she walked, people sensed between her and themselves the barriers of a certain form of wealth, which always seem to the crowd to be the most impassable barriers of all. But the Faubourg Saint-Germain has its barriers too, albeit less striking to the eye and the imagination of members of the 'Hard-up Club'. When the latter see a great lady who is unaffected in manner, whom, because she has never lost the common touch, they can almost take for someone as lowly as themselves, they will never have the feeling of inequality, one might say the feeling of their own unworthiness, that they have when faced with the likes of Mme Swann. Unlike them, a woman of her sort is no doubt unimpressed by the sumptuous world in which she moves; she ignores it, for the very reason that she has become accustomed to it; that is, she has come to see it as all the more natural and necessary to herself, she has come to judge other people according to their greater or lesser familiarity with these standards of luxury; and so, the grand manner (which she enjoys showing off and recognizes in others) being entirely material, flagrantly noticeable, long to acquire and hardly replaceable by anything, when such a woman deems a passer-by to be someone of no consequence, it is in the same way as he has seen her to be someone of the greatest consequence – without hesitation, at first sight and once for all. It may be that this particular class of women no longer exists, or at least not with the same character and the same charm. It was a social class which at that time included women like Lady Israels, who was on terms with women of the aristocracy, and Mme Swann, who was one day to be on terms with them, a class that was intermediate, lower than the Faubourg Saint-Germain, since they courted it, but higher than others who were not part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; and it was peculiar in that, though existing apart from the society of the rich, it was of course a moneyed class, but one in which money had become tractable and had taken to responding to artistic ideas and purposes – it was malleable money, poetically refined money, money with a smile. In any case, the women who belonged to it then would have by now lost the quality which was their greatest claim to ascendancy: having aged, almost all of them have lost their beauty. For the stately, smiling, gentle Mme Swann who sauntered along the avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne was not only in the prime of her noble wealth, she was also at the glorious height of her own mellow and still delectable summertime, from which, like Hypatia, she could watch the turning of worlds beneath her measured tread.[67] Young men, seeing her pass, glanced anxiously at her, unsure whether their tenuous acquaintance with her (and apprehensive, too, about whether Swann, whom they had hardly met on more than a single occasion, would recognize them) could justify their daring to greet her. When they plucked up the resolve to do so, they were full of trepidation, in case such a foolhardy and provocative act of sacrilege, slighting the inviolable supremacy of a caste, might set off a catastrophe or bring down upon their heads the thunderbolt of divine retribution. All it did set off, however, in a sort of clockwork reaction, was the gesticulation of many little characters, who suddenly started to bow – Odette's courtiers, following the example of Swann, who, with the gracious smile once learned in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but without the indifference which would once have accompanied it, was raising his topper lined with green leather. As though he had been infected by the prejudices of Odette, his former indifference had become both the annoyance of having to acknowledge somebody so badly dressed and the satisfaction of having a wife who knew so many people, mixed feelings which he expressed to the retinue of their fashionable friends: 'Another one! I must say I do wonder where Odette *gets* these people! – So it's really all over between you? Mme Swann said to me, having nodded at the alarmed passer-by, who was now out of sight but whose heart was still palpitating. You're never going to come and see Gilberte again? I'm certainly glad you've made an exception for *me* and that I'm not to be completely jilted. I do like it when you come. But I also liked your influence on my daughter. I'm sure she's sorry about it all too. Still, I'm not going to bully you – you might decide you'd had enough of me too! – Odette, there's Sagan[68] saying good morning to you,' Swann murmured. And there was the Prince, like a knight in an old painting, or as though taking part in a grandiose finale on a theatre stage or in a circus ring, making his horse wheel round and greeting Odette with a grand dramatic gesture which was almost allegorical in its evocation of politeness and chivalry, of the nobleman's homage to Woman, even though she was embodied in a woman whom his mother or sister would never stoop to frequent. From all sides now, through the liquid transparency and glossy luminosity of the shadow cast on her by the sunshade, Mme Swann was being recognized and greeted by the last of the late riders, who looked as though filmed at a canter against the white midday shimmer of the avenue, members of fashionable clubs, whose names – Antoine de Castellane, Adalbert de Montmorency[69] and many more – famous to the public mind, were to Mme Swann the familiar names of her friends. So it is that, the average life-expectancy, the relative longevity, of memories being much greater for those which commemorate poetic sensation than for those left by the pains of love, the heartbreak I suffered at that time because of Gilberte has faded for ever, and has been outlived by the pleasure I derive, whenever I want to read off from a sundial of remembrance the minutes between a quarter-past twelve and one o'clock on a fine day in May, from a glimpse of myself chatting with Mme Swann, sharing her sunshade as though standing with her in the pale glow of an arbour of wisteria.

PART II: *Place-names: the Place*

By the time my grandmother and I left for Balbec, two years later, I had reached a state of almost complete indifference towards Gilberte. At times, as when I was under the spell of a new face, or if the companion with whom I imagined discovering the great Gothic cathedrals, the palaces and gardens of Italy was some other girl, I would reflect sadly that the love one feels, insofar as it is love for a particular person, may not be a very real thing, since although an association of pleasant or painful fancies may fix it for a time on a woman, and even convince us that she was its necessary cause, the fact is that if we consciously or unconsciously outgrow those associations, our love, as though it was a spontaneous growth, a thing of our own making, revives and offers itself to another woman. However, when I set off for Balbec, and during the first part of my stay there, my indifference was still only intermittent. Often (life being so unchronological, so anachronistic in its disordering of our days) I found myself living not on days immediately following the day or two before, but in the much earlier time when I had been in love with Gilberte. Suddenly it was as painful to be living apart from her as it would have been in that earlier time. The self of mine that had once loved her, though now almost entirely supplanted in me by another self, would revisit me; and when it did, it was brought back much more often by some trifling thing than by something important. For instance (if I may step forward for a moment to the actual visit to Normandy) one day in Balbec I was to overhear a stranger mention, as I walked past him on the esplanade, 'The family of the chief under-secretary at the Postmaster General's.' At the time, given that I had no idea then of the influence which that family would have on my life, this mention should have passed me idly by. But it gave me a sharp stab of pain, the pain felt by a self which had long since mostly ceased to exist but which could still mourn the absence of Gilberte. For a conversation about the family of the 'chief under-secretary at the Postmaster General's', which Gilberte and her father had once had in my presence, had gone completely from my mind. Memories of love are, in fact, no exception to the general laws of remembering, which are themselves subject to the more general laws of habit. Habit weakens all things; but the things which are best at reminding us of a person are those which, because they were insignificant, we have forgotten and which have therefore lost none of their power. Which is why the greater part of our memory exists outside us, in a dampish breeze, in the musty air of a bedroom or the smell of autumn's first fires, things through which we can retrieve any part of us that the reasoning mind, having no use for it, disdained, the last vestige of the past, the best of it, the part which, after all our tears seem to have dried, can make us weep again. Outside us? Inside us, more like, but stored away from our mind's eye, in that abeyance of memory which may last for ever. It is only because we have forgotten that we can now and then return to the person we once were, envisage things as that person did, be hurt again, because we are not ourselves any more, but someone else who once loved something that we no longer care about. The broad daylight of habitual memory gradually fades our images of the past, wears them away until nothing is left of them and the past becomes irrecoverable. Or rather, it would be irrecoverable, were it not that a few words (such as 'chief under-secretary at the Postmaster General's') had been carefully put away and forgotten, much as a copy of a book is deposited in the Bibliothèque nationale against the day when it may become unobtainable.

However, this recurrence of pain and the renewal of my love for Gilberte did not last longer than they would have in a dream of her, for the very reason that my life at Balbec was free of the habits which in usual circumstances would have helped it to prevail. Such effects of Habit may seem contradictory; but the laws which govern it are many and varied. In Paris, it was because of Habit that I had become more and more indifferent to Gilberte. The change in my habits, that is the momentary suspension of Habit, put its finishing touch to that process when I set off for Balbec. Habit may weaken all things, but it also stabilizes them; it brings about a dislocation, but then makes it last indefinitely. For years past, I had been roughly modelling my state of mind each day on my state of mind of the day before. At Balbec, breakfast in bed – a different bed, a different breakfast – was to be incapable of nourishing the ideas on which my love for Gilberte had fed in Paris. There are instances, albeit infrequent, in which, the passing days having been immobilized by a sedentary way of life, the best way to gain time is to change place. My journey to Balbec was like the first outing of a convalescent who has not noticed until that moment that he is completely cured.

Nowadays people would likely make the journey to Balbec by motor-car, in the belief that it would be pleasanter. As we shall see, it would certainly be a truer way to travel, in a sense, given that one's relationship to the various changes in the surface of the earth would be closer, more immediate. But the specific pleasure of travelling is not that it enables one to stop when tired or to stay somewhere along the way; it is that it can make the difference between departure and arrival not as unnoticeable as possible, but as profound as possible; it is that one can experience that difference in its entirety, as intact as it was in our mind when imagination transported us immediately from where we were living to where we yearned to be, in a leap which seemed miraculous less because it made us cover such a distance than because it linked two distinct personalities of place, taking us from one name to another name, a leap which is epitomized (more acutely than by a run in a motor-car, which allows you to get out where you like and thereby all but abolishes arrival) by that mysterious performance which used to be enacted in those special places, railway-stations, which, though they are almost separate from the city, contain the essence of its individuality, as they bear its name on a signboard.

But then in all sorts of ways, our age is plagued by the notion that objects should be shown only with things which accompany them in reality, thus depriving them of the essential, that act of mind which isolated them from reality in the first place. So a painting is 'featured' amid furniture, knick-knacks or hangings from the same period, the sort of insipid interior decoration which yesterday's ignoramus among hostesses, who now spends her idle hours in the archives and the libraries, is today adept at composing, and among which the masterpiece that we glance at as we dine does not give us the intensity of pleasure we more rightly expect from it in an art gallery, where the bareness of walls unadorned by any distracting detail symbolizes much more aptly the inner spaces into which the artist withdrew to create it.

Sad to say, those wonderful places, railway-stations, our starting-point for a distant destination, are also tragic places, for though they are the setting for the miracle which will turn a land hitherto non-existent except in the mind into one we are going to live in, for that very reason, as soon as we venture outside the waiting-room, we must abandon all hope of returning to the familiar bedroom which we left only a moment before. We have to give up all prospect of sleeping at home tonight, as soon as we have decided to venture into the reeking cavern which is the necessary anteroom to mystery, one of those huge glass-roofed machine-shops, such as the Gare Saint-Lazare, which was where I had to seek out the train for Balbec and which, above the great chasm slitting the city, had spread out one of those vast bleak skies, dense with portents of pent-up tragedy, resembling certain skies of Mantegna's and Veronese's, fraught with their quasi-Parisian modernity, an apt backdrop to the most awesome or hideous of acts, such as the Crucifixion or a departure by train.

As long as I had been content to lie in my snug bed in Paris and see Balbec's Persian church buffeted by blizzard and storm, my body had raised no objection to this journey. Objections only began once my body realized it was to be included and that on the evening of our arrival I would be shown to 'my' room, which would be completely unfamiliar to it. Its disagreement with this was especially acute since I had learned only on the eve of our departure that my mother was not to accompany us; my father, who was unable to get away from the Ministry until the date set for his visit to Spain with M. de Norpois, had decided to rent a house at Saint-Cloud on the outskirts of Paris. Not that to be able to gaze upon Balbec seemed less desirable because it could only be enjoyed at the cost of pain to myself. On the contrary, it was this pain which seemed to embody and guarantee the reality of the impression which I sought; and that impression could never have been replaced by some other supposedly equivalent sight, such as a 'fine view' which I might have been able to go and see without its preventing me from

going home at bed-time. Not for the first time I sensed that those who know love and those who enjoy life are not the same people. I was sure my desire to go to Balbec was as strong as my doctor's when he said, on the very morning of our departure, surprised as he was by my unhappy expression, 'Believe you me, if I could just take a single week off, to enjoy the sea-air, you wouldn't have to ask me twice! Just think: there'll be the races and the regattas – it will be lovely!' Long before going to see La Berma, however, I had learned that whatever I longed for would be mine only at the end of a painful pursuit; and that this supreme goal could be achieved only on condition that I sacrifice to it the pleasure I had hoped to find in it.

My grandmother, of course, saw our impending departure in a rather different light. She was still as convinced as she had ever been that any present given to me should have an artistic element to it; and so she had at one point decided, so as to give me a sort of old 'print' representing our journey, that we should retrace, partly by train, partly by carriage, the route taken by Mme de Sévigné in 1689 when she had gone from Paris to 'L'Orient', as she called it, via Chaulnes and 'the Pont-Audemer'.[1] My grandmother had eventually had to abandon this plan, faced with my father's refusal to countenance such an itinerary – he foresaw that her idea of a tour designed for intellectual benefit would turn into a series of missed trains, lost luggage, sore throats and disregard of doctor's orders. However, she took heart from the thought that at least when we were due to go down to the beach, we would never run the risk of being prevented from doing this by the arrival of what her dear Mme de Sévigné calls 'a carriage-load of plaguy visitors', given that we would know no one in Balbec, Legrandin having offered us no letter of introduction to his sister. (His remissness in this regard was not seen in the same light by my great-aunts Céline and Victoire:[2] they, having long been in the habit of referring to this sister, whom they had known, before her marriage, as 'Renée de Cambremer', who had given them the sort of presents which may figure in bedrooms or reminiscences but which now denote no more than a former closeness, felt it incumbent upon themselves, when visiting old Mme Legrandin, never to name the daughter and even to congratulate each other later with statements such as, 'I never so much as mentioned you-know-who' and 'I think we can say the point was taken', in the belief that they were thereby avenging this snub to our family.)

So our departure from Paris was to be quite simple, by that 1.22 train on which, perusing the railway time-tables, drawing from it each time the excitement and almost the blissful illusion of setting off, I had doted so often that I fancied I had already taken it. As our imagination, in fixing the definitive features of a future happiness, is more influenced by the unchangingness of our desire for that fulfilment than by any accuracy in the information which we may have about it, I was sure I had a close acquaintance with this one; and I had no doubt I would feel a special pleasure in our compartment as the warmth of the day began to wane, that as we drew into this or that station I would recognize a particular feature; for this train, having always given me glimpses of the same towns, which I saw tinged by the light of the afternoon hours through which it runs, seemed different from all other trains; and, as we often do with somebody we have never seen but whose friendship we like to fancy we already enjoy, I had come to picture it as a fair artistic wayfarer, to whom I had even given a particular and constant expression, who let me accompany him on his journey and whom, having bade him farewell outside the cathedral of Saint-Lô, I would then watch as he disappeared towards the setting sun.

As my grandmother could not resign herself to 'just' going to Balbec, she had decided to spend a day along the way visiting a friend; but I was to travel on alone that same evening, so as 'not to be a nuisance' and so as to be able to make a visit the following day to the Balbec church, which we had recently learned was some distance away from Balbec-Plage,[3] a fact which might make it difficult for me to go and see it once my course of sea-bathing had begun. It was perhaps less painful for me to know the grand object of my journey was now to precede the unhappy first night to be spent in the strange room which I was going to have to accept as my new home. But first it had been necessary to leave the old one. My mother had arranged to move into the house at Saint-Cloud that very day; and she had made, or had pretended to make, all necessary preparations that would enable her to go straight there after seeing us off at the Gare Saint-Lazare, without having to go back to our own house, in case I should take it into my head to go home with her, rather than set off for Balbec. She had even decided, alleging that there was too much to do in too short a time at the newly rented house, but really so as to spare me the sorrow of a last-minute leave-taking, not to stay with us until the departure of the train, that moment when the coming separation, which has lain concealed and possibly not inevitable among the preliminary bustle and haste, suddenly becomes unbearable and looms before us, impossible to elude now, concentrated into a stark and flagrant instant of impotent awareness.

I was beginning to realize for the first time that it was possible for my mother to live without me, to live for reasons unrelated to me, to lead a life of her own. She was going to live for herself, with my father, who she may have thought deserved a simpler and more enjoyable life than my ill-health and nervous disposition allowed him. This separation from her saddened me even more, as I told myself that she very likely saw it as a welcome pause in the succession of disappointments I had brought upon her, which she had never spoken of but which must have made her see the prospect of spending the holidays with me as irksome; very likely she even saw it as a first experimental step towards the future life to which she would have to resign herself, as she and my father advanced in years, in which I would see less of her, in which – and this I had never glimpsed in my worst nightmares – she would become something of a stranger to me, a lady to be seen going home alone to a house where I did not live and where she would ask the concierge whether there was not a letter from me.

I was barely able to speak to the porter who offered to carry my suitcase. My mother tried to comfort me in ways which seemed appropriate to her. Instead of pretending not to see how unhappy I was, which she knew was pointless, she bantered:

'Dear me, whatever would the church of Balbec say if it knew we were getting ready to come and see it with such a long face? Can this be the delighted traveller that Mr Ruskin writes about? Anyway, I'll know whether you've managed to keep a stiff upper lip. Even though I'll be miles and miles away, I'll still be with my little chap – and he'll have a letter from his loving Mama tomorrow.

– My dear, said my grandmother, I can see you'll be just like Mme de Sévigné, following our every movement on the map!'

My mother then tried to distract me by asking what I was going to order for dinner, admiring Françoise, complimenting her on her hat and coat, which she had not recognized as ones which, when new and worn by my great-aunt, had once filled her with dismay, the hat because it had a huge bird perched on top of it and the coat because it was overloaded with jet and ghastly designs. But my great-aunt having cast off the coat, Françoise had had it turned and its inside now showed as a fine cloth in a handsome self-colour. The bird had long since been broken and thrown out. And, just as it is sometimes strange to notice refinements which the most deliberate artist might have to strive for, in a popular song or in a single white or yellow rose blooming at exactly the right spot on a peasant's house, so with her sound and simple taste Françoise had placed on the hat, which was now a pleasure to behold, the velvet bow and the cluster of ribbon that would have delighted one in a portrait by Chardin or Whistler.

Or to go further back in time, the nobility often given to the face of our old servant by modesty and honesty had spread to the clothes which, like the retiring person she was, a woman quite devoid of base instincts but 'knowing her place', she had chosen for this journey, so as to be worthy of being seen with us while not appearing to be attracting attention to herself; and Françoise, in the faded cerise material of her overcoat and the uniform pile of her fur collar, called to mind one of those depictions of Anne of Brittany painted by an old master in a book of hours,[4] in which everything is so aptly matched, the feeling of the whole so evenly shared among all the parts, that the rich quaintness of the costume expresses the same pious solemnity as the eyes, the lips and the hands.

To speak of thought in connection with Françoise would have been inappropriate. She knew nothing, in the most complete meaning of 'knowing nothing', which is understanding nothing, except those rare truths to which the heart has direct access. The vast world of ideas had no existence for her. But to see the clear look from her eyes, the fine lines of her nose and lips, all those indications so often lacking from the faces of cultured people, in whom they would have denoted the supreme distinction or high-minded disinterest of a superlative soul, was to be touched as though by the intelligent and kind eyes of a dog, though one well knows all human conceptions are foreign to it; and one might wonder whether among our humbler brethren, the peasants, there might not be individuals who are as it were the outstanding men and women of the simple-minded world, or rather who, though condemned by an unjust fate to dwell for ever in the outer darkness of the simple-minded, though more naturally and more essentially related to higher natures than most educated people, resemble the dispersed members of the

holy family, lost and mindless, close relations of the finest minds, yet who have never grown up, who, as one can see in the unmistakable light shining from their eyes on to nothing, would have required only one thing to be talented, and that single thing was knowledge.

My mother, seeing that I was on the verge of tears, said, 'Regulus was accustomed, at moments of great consequence …[5] And it's not very nice for his dear Mama either. We'd better take a leaf out of your grandma's book and quote from Mme de Sévigné: "I'll have to draw on all the courage which you lack." '[6] Then, knowing that affection for others can divert one from grief for self, she tried to amuse me by saying that she thought her trip out to Saint-Cloud would be enjoyable, that she was very pleased with the hansom she had booked, that the driver was polite and his cab comfortable. Nodding with apparent acquiescence and satisfaction, I did my best to smile at these details. But all they did was help me to imagine more graphically Mama's departure; and I stared at her, sick at heart, as though she was already separated from me, in her round straw hat, bought for the stay in the country, and the light frock, put on because of the long trip by cab on such a hot day, which changed her into someone else, made her belong already to the Villa de Montretout, where I would never see her.

To avoid the fits of breathlessness that the journey might bring on, the doctor had suggested that just before the train left I should drink a little too much beer or brandy, so as to be in the state he called 'euphoria', in which the nervous system is briefly less susceptible. I was still not sure whether I was going to comply; but I did want my grandmother to admit that, should I decide to do so, it would be in accordance with both authority and good sense. So when I mentioned it, I made it sound as though my only hesitation concerned the place where this alcohol would be drunk, the station buffet or the dining-carriage. But my grandmother's face showed an expression of such disapproval, as though she was dismissing the idea out of hand, that I instantly resolved to have a drink, an act which had become necessary to demonstrate my freedom, since the merest hinting at it had been met with protest, and exclaimed, 'What? You know how unwell I am! You know what the doctor's orders are! And yet you're trying to put me off!'

Once I had explained how unwell I felt, my grandmother said, 'Well, go on then, quickly! Go and get a beer or a liqueur, if it's supposed to be good for you,' with an expression of such sorrowing kindness that I fell into her arms and kissed her again and again. The only reason why I then drank too much in the bar on the train was that I felt I might have a very severe attack, which would be even more upsetting for her. When I got back into our compartment at the first stop, I told her how happy I was to be going to Balbec, that I was sure everything would come out right in the end, that I would pretty soon get used to living apart from my mother, that this was a pretty nice train, that the barman and the other railway people were such good chaps that I would not mind travelling this way often so as to be able to enjoy their company again. All this good news did not appear to give my grandmother the same joy as it gave me. Not looking at me, she said, 'I think it might be a good idea for you to have a little nap,' then sat looking out of the window. Though we had lowered the curtain, it did not make an exact fit with the whole of the window-frame; and so, as a slant of sunshine slid over the polished oak of the door and the cloth of the seat (like a much more evocative advertisement for a life amid nature than those the Company had affixed to the walls of the compartment, too high up for me to read the names of the landscapes they showed), it brought in the same warm soothing glow which drowsed outside among the quiet clearings.

Now and then, when my grandmother thought my eyes were closed, I could see her glance towards me, through her veil with its thick spots, then look away, before glancing at me again in the same way, like someone attempting to practise a slight movement despite the pain it causes.

I spoke to her; but she did not appear to enjoy this. To me, however, there was a pleasure in the sound of my voice, as there was in the imperceptible internal motions made by my body. So I tried to draw them out, letting each inflection of my voice dwell at length on each word, enjoying my eyes' way of resting on whatever it was they were looking at and gazing at it for longer than usual. 'Look, I do think you should have a little rest,' my grandmother said. 'If you can't sleep, at least read a book or something.' She handed me a volume of Mme de Sévigné's letters, which I opened; and then she settled down to her own book, the *Mémoires* of Mme de Beausergent.[7] These two ladies were her favourite writers; and a volume of each of them would invariably accompany her whenever she travelled. I sat facing the blue blind drawn down on the window, holding the volume of Mme de Sévigné but not looking at it, as I was full of reluctance to move my head at such a moment and full of a vivid pleasure at remaining in any position my body happened to have adopted. To sit gazing at the blue holland seemed to me a wonderful experience; and if anyone had tried to divert my attention from it, I would not have bothered answering. In the colour of the cloth, it was not so much its beauty as the sheer intensity of its blueness which seemed to outshine all other colours which had ever met my eye between my birth and the moment when my drink had begun to have its effect, leaving them as drab and dull as they would have been for someone, once blind from birth, who remembers the darkness in which his days were spent before the operation which at last enabled him late in life to see colour. An old ticket-collector came along to check our tickets. I was fascinated by the silvery sheen of the metal buttons on his tunic. I was about to ask him to take a seat beside us. But he went on to the next carriage, leaving me full of a yearning wonder about the life of the railwaymen who, by spending their whole time on trains, must have daily opportunities to see the old ticket-collector. The pleasure I felt in gazing at the blue blind and in being aware that my mouth was hanging open began to lessen. I felt more mobile and made a couple of movements; I leafed through the book which my grandmother had passed me and was able to attend to a page or two here and there. As I read, I could feel my admiration for Mme de Sévigné grow.

It is easy to be misled by purely formal features of Mme de Sévigné's style, which, though only the mark of her period or of life in its *salons*, are taken to be the real Sévigné voice by some who write things like 'I await these news, my good woman,' or 'The said Count seemed to me to have much wit,' or 'Hay-making is quite the jolliest thing to do.' Even Mme de Simiane fancies she takes after her grandmother.[8] When she writes: 'Monsieur, I shall have you to know that M. de la Boulie excels in health and that he is quite ready to hear tell of his own decease,' or 'Oh, my dear Marquis, your letter affords such pleasure! One can not desist from answering it!' or 'It appears to me, Monsieur, that you owe me a reply and that I owe you some bergamot-peel snuff-boxes. Here are eight of them; there will be more; never has there been such a crop! It is evidently for your pleasure,' or when she writes in similar tone her letter about being bled, or the one about the lemons, she clearly believes these are Mme de Sévigné-like letters. But my grandmother, having come to Mme de Sévigné from the inside, as it were, through her love for her own family and her love of nature, had taught me to see the true beauty of her manner, which lies in very different things. This was soon to be brought home to me even more, as Mme de Sévigné is a great artist of the same family as a painter I was to meet at Balbec, Elstir, who was to have a profound influence on my way of seeing things. I realized at Balbec that her way of depicting things is the same as his, that is, she presents them in the order in which we perceive them, instead of explaining them by their causes. But even on that first afternoon, in the train, rereading her letter about the moonlight – 'I could not resist the temptation, so I put on all my cloaks and coifs, which were unnecessary, and went out to the mall where the air was as fine as that in my bedroom, and where I came upon figments and fantasms, *black and white monks, several grey and white nuns, raiment tossed hither and thither, men buried upright against trees*, etc.' –, I was delighted by what I would have called not much later the Dostoevsky side (for does she not sketch background as he does character?) of the *Letters* of Mme de Sévigné.[9]

That evening, having seen my grandmother to her friend's house, where I stopped for a few hours, I once more took the train, alone this time, but at least not looking forward to an unpleasant night. For I was not going to have to spend it imprisoned in a bedroom in which I would be kept awake by the sleeping of all things round about; I was surrounded by the reposeful activity of all the train's various movements, which kept me company, engaged me in a dialogue if I could not manage to sleep, soothed me with their noises which, as I used to do with the church-bells of Combray, I linked together sometimes in one particular rhythm, sometimes in another (fancying first that I could hear four equal semiquavers, then a single semiquaver banging violently against a crochet); and these noises neutralized the centrifugal force of my insomnia by pitting against it counter-pressures which kept me in a state of equilibrium, and on which my motionless and soon unconscious form felt itself supported with the same impression of release and relief as I would have drawn from sleep entrusted to the wild and wakeful forces of living nature, if I could have briefly turned into a fish asleep in the ocean swell, steered by the unknowing tides, or an eagle hanging on the wings of a high wind.

Sunrises are a feature of long train-journeys, like hard-boiled eggs, illustrated papers, packs of cards, rivers with boats straining forward but making no progress. As I sifted the thoughts which had been in my mind just a minute before, to see whether or not I had slept (my uncertainty about the matter already inclining me to the affirmative), I glimpsed in the window-pane, above a little black copse, serrated clouds of downy softness in a shade of immutable pink, dead and as seemingly indelible now as the pink inseparable from feathers in a wing or a pastel dyed by the fancy of the painter. But in this shade I sensed neither inertia nor fancy, but necessity and life. Soon great reserves of light built up behind it. They brightened further, spreading a blush across the sky; and I stared at it through the glass, straining to see it better, as the colour of it seemed to be privy to the profoundest secrets of nature. Then the train turned away from it, the railway line having changed direction, the dawn scene framed in the window turned into a village by night, its roofs blue with moonlight, the wash-house smeared with the opal glow of darkness, under a sky still bristling with stars, and I was saddened by the loss of my strip of pink sky, when I caught sight of it again, now reddening, in the window on the other side, from which it disappeared at another bend in the line. And I dodged from one window to the other, trying to reassemble the offset intermittent fragments of my lovely, changeable red morning, so as to see it for once as a single lasting picture.

The landscape became hilly and steep, and the train came to a halt at a little station between two mountains. Through the gorge, beside the swift stream, all one could see was the house of a level-crossing-keeper up to its window-sills in the flowing water. If a person can be the epitome of a place, conveying the charm and tang of its special savour, then this was demonstrated, more so than by the peasant girl I had longed for in the days of my lonely rambles along the Méséglise way, through the Roussainville woods, by the tall girl whom I saw come out of the keeper's house and start walking towards the station, along a footpath lit by the slanting rays of the sunrise, carrying a crock of milk. In that valley, hidden from the rest of the world by the surrounding heights, the only times she ever saw people would be when a train made its brief halt there. She walked along beside the carriages, pouring out coffee with milk for a few of the passengers who were up and about. Glowing in the glory of the morning, her face was pinker than the sky. Looking at her, I was filled with that renewed longing for life which any fresh glimpse of beauty and happiness can bring. Forgetting that beauty and happiness are only ever incarnated in an individual person, we replace them in our minds by a conventional pattern, a sort of average of all the different faces we have ever admired, all the different pleasures we have ever enjoyed, and thus carry about with us abstract images which are lifeless and uninspiring because they lack the very quality which something new, something different from what is familiar, always possesses, and which is the quality inseparable from real beauty and happiness. So we make our pessimistic pronouncements on life, which we think are valid, in the belief that we have taken account of beauty and happiness, whereas we have actually omitted them from consideration, substituting for them synthetic compounds which contain nothing of them. Likewise, a well-read man, hearing of the latest 'great book', can give a jaded yawn, assuming the work to be a sort of composite derived from all the fine works he has ever read. But the fact is that a great book is not just the sum of existing masterpieces; it is particular and unforeseeable, being made out of something which, because it lies somewhere beyond that existing sum, cannot be deduced simply from acquaintance with it, however close. No sooner has the well-read man discovered the new work than he forgets his earlier indifference and takes an interest in the reality it sets before him. In the same way this lovely girl, utterly different from the patterns of beauty devised by my mind in isolation, gave me an instantaneous taste for a particular form of happiness (the only form in which we can have the taste of happiness) which I might experience if I came to live here and shared her life. Of course, for this too the momentary intermission of Habit was largely responsible. I invested the milk-maid with advantages which came from the fact that it was my entire self, ready to gorge on life's sweetest delights, that confronted her. We commonly live with a self reduced to its bare minimum; most of our faculties lie dormant, relying on habit; and habit knows how to manage without them. But, on that morning, their presence had once more become essential, so as to cope with travel, departure from life's daily round, a change of place, the unwonted time of day. My habit, which was sedentary and unused to morning hours, was found wanting; and all my faculties had come flooding back to stand in for it, outdoing themselves, vying with each other, rising to the same unusual occasion, the basest of them and the noblest, from mere breathing and appetite, even the circulation of the blood, to sensitivity and imagination. I could not say whether the wild beauty of that place increased the beauty of the girl and made me see her as superior to other women; but she certainly beautified all things round about. How delightful life would have been if only I could have spent it with her, hour after hour, walking beside her to the river, to her cow, then out to meet the trains, being in her company at all times, feeling that she knew me, having a place reserved for me in her thoughts! She would have initiated me to the charms of rural life and the pleasures of early rising. I beckoned to her to bring me the coffee and milk. I needed her to notice me. She did not notice me, so I hailed her. Her tall person was topped by a face with a complexion so golden pink that I seemed to be seeing her through the radiance of a stained-glass window. She turned and walked back towards me: I could not look away from her face, which, as it neared and grew larger, was like a sun that did not dazzle the stare, no matter how close it came, which you could look straight at as it deluged you with its blaze of glorious golds and reds. Her eye, which had a piercing gaze, met mine; but just then, as the guard and station-master were shutting the doors, the train started to move. In broad daylight now, I watched as she walked away from the station and along her footpath: I was travelling away from the dawn. Whether my excitement had been caused by the girl, or whether it had been the cause of much of the enjoyment afforded me by the nearness of her, she was so much a part of my feeling that my desire to see her again was above all the longing to retain something of that excitement, not to let it die, not to be severed for ever from the one who, though she was unaware of this, had been part of it. It was not just that this feeling was pleasant. It was especially because (as the tightening of a string or the more rapid vibration of a nerve produces a different note or colour) it gave a sharper tone to what I saw, gave me a part to act in an unknown and infinitely more interesting world; and for as long as the gathering speed of the train allowed me to see the beautiful milk-girl, she was like a part of some other life, separated from the one I knew by a narrow borderline, another life in which the feelings transmitted to me by things were not the usual ones, and the leaving of which felt like a sort of inner death. To have the comfort of feeling that I was at least not cast out of her life, I would have been glad to live near enough to the little railway-station to be able to come down every morning and have this country-girl pour out coffee and milk for me. But, sadly, she would be for ever absent from the life towards which I was now heading faster and faster, a prospect I could accept only by imagining a plan to take this same train on some other day, and thus be able to stop again at the same station, a scheme which had the added advantage of fuelling the mind's selfish, active, practical, mechanical, lazy and centrifugal predisposition to shirk the effort required to analyse in an abstract and disinterested way any pleasant impression which we have experienced. And, since we also want to dwell on such an impression, the mind prefers to imagine a future recurrence of it, to design clever circumstances that could bring it about, none of which teaches us anything about the essence of it; it just relieves us of the bother of trying to replicate it within ourselves and enables us to hope that the outside world will bring it back to us.

The principal church of certain towns, Vézelay or Chartres, Bourges or Beauvais, is sometimes called, for short, by the name of the town itself. This habit of synecdochism has the result, if it concerns towns where we have never been, of sculpting the broader meaning of the name, which, when we attempt to fit the image of the whole unknown town back into it, will shape it like a mould, stamping on it the same toolings, in the same style, and turning it into a sort of great cathedral. It was, however, on a sign in a railway-station, hanging above a refreshment stall, in white lettering against a blue background, that I was to read the name of Balbec, of almost Persian style. I strode out through the station and across the boulevard which led to it, where I asked for directions to the beach, so as to set eyes on this church by the sea. People stared at me as though not understanding what I meant: Balbec-le-Vieux, Balbec-en-Terre, where I had arrived, was neither a seaside resort nor a port. Had not fishermen brought back from the sea, or so said the legend, the miraculous Christ whose coming to that spot was depicted in a stained-glass window of the church standing only a few yards from where I was? Had not the stone for its nave and its steeples been hewn from wave-washed cliffs? But the breakers, which for those reasons I had imagined splashing their spray about that very window, were nearly fifteen miles away, at Balbec-Plage; and the steeple by the dome, which because I had read of it as a stark Norman cliff braving the worst of the sea-weather, with birds wheeling in the squalls, I had always seen as being soaked by the spindrift blown from the tumultuous deep, now stood in a town square at the junction of two tramlines, opposite a café with the word *Billiards* above it in gilt lettering, against a background of houses with no masts swaying above their roofs. The church impinged on my mind with the café, the passer-by whom I had asked for directions and the railway-station to which I would soon return; it was just a part of its surroundings, with an

accidental look to it, as though it was a detail of a late afternoon in which the dome against the sky had the mellow swell of a fruit ripening its golden melting pink in the same sunshine as touched the chimneys of the houses. But when I recognised the Apostles, whose statues I had seen as mouldings in the Trocadéro Museum and who now stood to the left and right of the Virgin, waiting by the deep recess of the porch as though to pay me homage, I tried to close my mind to everything but the eternal significance of the sculptures. Slightly stooping, with their kind faces, snub noses and mild expressions, they looked like choristers come to fill the fine day with a welcoming Hallelujah. Then one noticed that their expressions were as fixed as those of the dead, not changing unless one stepped over to see them from the other side. I stood there telling myself: 'This is it! This is the church at Balbec! This town square, which looks as though it's aware of its claim to fame, is the only place in the world which possesses the church of Balbec. Until now, all I've ever seen of it was just photos of the church and mouldings of the Apostles and the Virgin. But now, this is the church itself, the statue in person, the real things! And the real things are unique – this is much more!'

It was also much less, perhaps. Just as a young man, having sat an examination or fought a duel, sees the answers he gave to the questions, or the bullet he fired, as paltry achievements compared to the great potential of learning or courage which he would have liked to display, so my mind, which had rescued the Virgin of the porch from the reproductions I had seen, protecting her for ever from any vicissitudes which might jeopardize them, letting her stand unscathed amid their annihilation, ideal, full of her universal value, was now amazed to see that the statue it had so often sculpted was reduced to nothing but its own shape in stone, cheek by jowl with an election notice, no less reachable than it, no less touchable with the tip of my cane, rooted to the square, inseparable from the junction with the high street, incapable of hiding from any eyes looking out from the café or the horse-tram depot, her face sharing half of the rays of the setting sun – and soon, in a few hours, half of those of the street-lamp – with the local branch of the Savings Bank, and assailed, also like it, by the smells from the pastrycook's kitchens, subjected so utterly to the tyranny of the Particular that, if I had felt like writing my name on the stone, it would have been this fabled Virgin, she whom until then I had endowed with a general existence and an inaccessible beauty, the unique (which meant, alas, the only) Virgin of Balbec, who would have been unable to avoid showing to all admirers who came to gaze upon her the mark of my piece of chalk and the letters of my name scrawled on her body, which was stained with the same soot as the neighbouring houses, she whom, like the church itself, I now found transformed from the immortal work of art that I had longed to see into a little old woman in stone, whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count. Time was getting on; I had to make my way back to the station from where, having met my grandmother and Françoise, I was to travel on to Balbec-Plage. I kept remembering everything I had ever read about Balbec and the words Swann had spoken: 'It's a delight – every bit as fine as Siena.' Blaming my disappointment on mere contingencies, my unready mood, the fact that I was tired, my inability to look at things properly, I tried to draw consolation from the knowledge that, intact and unvisited, other towns awaited me else where, that I might soon be able to walk about Quimperlé, amid a shower of pearls and a cool murmuring of constant droplets, or step through the greenish pink glow surrounding Pont-Aven. But with Balbec it felt as though, by going there, I had broken open a name which should have been kept hermetically sealed, and into which, through the breach which I had been ill-advised enough to make, replacing all the images I had allowed to escape from it, a horse-tram, a café, people crossing the square, a branch of the Savings Bank, under the irresistible forces of external pressure and air suction, had rushed into the vacuum left in the syllables, which had now closed upon them, turning them into a frame for the porch of my Persian church, and would never again be rid of them.

I did meet my grandmother on the little local branch-line which was to take us to Balbec-Plage; but she was unaccompanied. Intending to have everything arranged in advance for our arrival, she had sent Françoise on ahead of us; but by giving her misleading instructions, she had managed to send her off on the wrong train; so Françoise, all unknowing, was now travelling at full speed towards Nantes and might even not wake up until her train reached Bordeaux. I had barely sat down in the compartment, which was lit by the fading glow of sunset and still warm from the heat of the day (the former of these enabling me to see clearly on my grandmother's face the saddening evidence of how much the latter had exhausted her), when she said, 'So? How was Balbec?', with a smile of such radiant expectation, full of the great pleasure I must have had, that I could not bear to blurt out my disappointment. Also, the closer we came to the place to which my body would have to become accustomed, the less I thought about the mental impression I had been looking forward to in visiting Balbec. Though we were still more than an hour away from the end of this journey, I was trying to imagine the manager of the hotel where we were to stay in Balbec, knowing that, for him, I was at that moment non-existent, and wishing that I could have entered the field of his awareness in the company of someone more impressive than my grandmother, who would no doubt ask him to give us a reduction. I could picture him already, very imprecise in his bodily appearance, but stiff with arrogance.

Every now and then, when our little train stopped at one or other of the halts on the Balbec line, I was struck by the strangeness of their names – Incarville, Marcouville, Doville, Pont-à-Couleuvre, Arambouville, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, Hermonville, Maineville; whereas, had I read them in a book, I would have been struck by their obvious points of similarity with the names of certain places in the neighbourhood of Combray. To the ear of a musician, two phrases which have several notes in common may appear quite dissimilar, if they are coloured by different harmonies or orchestrations. And in the dismal litany of these names, which were full of sand and salt and too much empty, breezy space, with the startling syllable *ville* shrilling about them like a seabird, there was nothing to call to mind names like Roussainville or Martinville which, because I had heard them said so often by my great-aunt, over the dinner-table or in the 'parlour', had taken on a subdued patina of charm, an essence perhaps compounded of the taste of jam, the aroma of the wood-fire, the smell of the paper in a book by Bergotte and the colour of the free-stone house opposite, and which to this day, when they drift up like gas-bubbles from the depths of memory, retain their full specific virtue, though they have to traverse one after the other the many different layers of other mediums before reaching the surface.

These little places, perched high on their dune above a distant sea or already settling down for the night in the lee of flagrantly green hills, which were as ungainly as a hotel-room sofa when one sees it for the first time, were composed of a few villas, a tennis court and sometimes a casino with its pennant flapping in the fretful, freshening, vacuous wind, and showed me now for the first time their habitual denizens, leading their outside lives – tennis players in white caps, a station-master living on the premises with his tamarisk and his roses, a lady in a boater calling her dawdling whippet, then walking back towards her holiday house where the lamp was already lit, her steps revealing the daily shape of a life which I would never come to know – all of which, with the uncanny familiarity and disdainful everydayness of these glimpses, wounded my stranger's eyes and my homesick heart. However, this was nothing to the pain I was to suffer once we had come to rest in the vestibule of the Grand-Hôtel at Balbec and were faced with its monumental staircase in imitation marble and its manager, a dumpy little person whose face and voice were covered in the scars left by the removal of many pimples and the addition of many accents betokening distant origins and a cosmopolitan upbringing, who was wearing tails like a fashionable gentleman, whose acute psychological glances at those who stepped off the 'omnibus' usually enabled him to take a duke for a skinflint and a hotel thief for a duke, and with whom my grandmother, oblivious to the animosity and disdain she must be fostering in the strangers among whom we were to live, set about a discussion of terms. The manager, no doubt forgetting that his own salary did not amount to 500 francs a month, had a withering scorn for anyone who thought 500 francs, or as he put it 'Twenty-five *louis*', was a substantial sum, and he looked down on them as a breed of untouchables whose place was not at the Grand-Hôtel. There were, of course, even at the Grand-Hôtel, guests who could enjoy living quite cheaply without forfeiting the good opinion of the manager, as long as he was sure their penny-pinching was motivated not by poverty but by miserliness. For miserliness, being a vice and therefore at home in any social class, is in no way incompatible with prestige. Class was the only thing the manager paid attention to, or rather he was impressed by anything which he believed showed high class, such as a man stepping into the vestibule without taking off his hat, or people who wore plus-fours with a waisted coat and extracted purple-and-gold-banded cigars from cases of crushed morocco (none of which signs, alas, could I display). He sprinkled his commercial patter with choice expressions, which he misused.

As I sat there on an ottoman and heard my grandmother, who was unperturbed by the fact that he listened to her with his hat on and whistled a little tune to himself, inquire of him in an artifical tone of voice, 'So what are your … charges? Goodness me, much too much for my slender means!', I tried to shrink as far as possible into myself, to flee on the wings of eternal verities, to leave nothing of myself, nothing live, on the surface of my body – desensitized like the body of an animal which by inhibition feigns death when wounded – so as not to suffer too much pain in a place where my total lack of habit was made all the more

agonizing by the sight of people who seemed to be in their element, an elegant lady for whom the manager showed his respect by freely fondling the little dog which followed her about, a young dandy who came strolling in wearing a hat with a feather and asking whether there was 'Any post?', people for whom climbing the imitation marble stairs meant they were almost home. At the same time, the baleful glare of Minos, Æacus and Rhadamanthus,[10] in which I steeped my naked soul as though in some dread unknown where it had lost all protection, was turned upon me by three unreceptive individuals dignified by the title 'Reception Service'; and a little further along, behind a glass partition, people sat in a reading-room to describe which, if I had borrowed colours from Dante, I would have had to use first those with which he depicts Paradise, then those with which he depicts Hell, as I imagined both the bliss of the chosen who had the right to sit in there quietly reading, and the torture my grandmother would visit upon me if, in her disregard for such emotions, she were to tell me to go in and join them.

My loneliness was further increased a moment later. I had told my grandmother I was not feeling very well and that I thought we might find ourselves obliged to go back to Paris; and without a word of protest she had said she was going out to buy a few things which would be of service to us whether we stayed in Balbec or went home (and which I later found out were all for me, Françoise having been in charge of the things I might have needed). During her absence, I also went out and, among hordes of people who made the streets feel as hot and stuffy as an overcrowded room, wandered up and down, past a barber's shop which was still open, near a tea-shop where customers were eating ices, round the statue of Duguay-Trouin.[11] The sight of this statue afforded me about as much enjoyment as it would to a patient coming on an illustration of it in a magazine lying in a surgeon's waiting-room. I was amazed that the world contained people sufficiently different from myself for the manager of the hotel to have urged such a stroll upon me as a form of amusement, for there to be some to whom such a torture-chamber of unfamiliar quarters could actually be an 'abode of delight', as the hotel styled itself in its leaflet, possibly with some degree of licence, although it was undeniably addressing a wide public whose views it shared. So, to attract such people to the Grand-Hôtel of Balbec, it expatiated not only on 'the exquisite cuisine' and 'the entrancing view from the gardens of the Casino' but on 'the great god Fashion, whose decrees no man of good breeding will care to flout, unless he does not mind being thought a Philistine'.

My need for my grandmother was sharpened by the fear of having been a great disappointment to her. She must be disheartened by the thought that, if I could not put up with this degree of fatigue, it was impossible ever to hope that any trip could be of benefit to me. I decided to go back and wait for her in the hotel. The manager himself came to push a button for me; and a personage hitherto unknown to me, called in a sort of English the 'lift' (who, like a photographer behind his window or an organist in his loft, dwelt at the very top of the hotel, where the lantern in a Norman church would be), began to descend towards me with the agility of a captive, hard-working household squirrel. Then, with me on board, he slid up his pillar again towards the dome of the commercial nave. At each floor, fanning out from both sides of a short communication stairway, gloomy galleries opened, a chambermaid lugged a bolster about. To her face, which was unclear in the inner dusk, I held the mask of my most passionate fancies; but I could read in the glance she gave me my own appalling nullity. During the endless climb, to allay the dreadful anguish which clutched at me from the silence we traversed, with the mystery of its unpoetic dimness relieved only by a vertical succession of panes casting a little light from the single W. C. on each storey, I spoke to the young organist, this functionary of my ascent and associate of my captivity, as he went on pushing and pulling the knobs and stops of his instrument. I apologized for taking up so much space and giving so much trouble; and I asked him whether I was not in his way as he exercised his art in which, to flatter the virtuoso, I showed more than mere curiosity, professing to have a passion for it. He did not answer, whether because of surprise at my statement, attentiveness to his work, a sense of protocol, hardness of hearing, respect for place, fear of danger, laziness of mind or the manager's instructions.

To give us an impression of the realness of people and things external to us, even if they are insignificant, there are few comparisons more instructive than the change their disposition towards ourselves undergoes between the time before we know them and the time after. I was the same person who had taken the late afternoon train on the little branch-line to Balbec; the self in me was the same. But now inside that self, occupying the space which at six in the evening had been fraught with my inability to picture the manager, the Grand-Hôtel and its employees, as well as with a vague uneasy expectation of the moment of arrival, there were the erstwhile pimples on the face of the cosmopolitan manager (who was actually a naturalized Monegasque of, as he put it, 'Rumanian originality', being given to sprinkling his speech with malapropisms which he thought very distinguished), the gesture he had made to summon the 'lift', not to mention the 'lift' himself, a whole frieze of puppetlike characters out of the opened Pandora's box of the Grand-Hôtel, undeniable, unremoveable and, like all things which have come to pass, sterilizing in their effect. But at least this change, which I had not brought about, proved that something external to myself had happened, however trite a thing it was in itself; and I was like a traveller who, having set out on his journey with the sun in front of him, realizes that hours must have passed because it is now behind him. Feeling exhausted and with a touch of fever, I would have been glad to go to bed; but all my bedtime things were missing. I would have liked at least to lie down for a moment on the bed: but that would have done me no good, since I would have been incapable of granting any rest to that bundle of sensations that the waking body, even the material body, is for each of us, and also because the unknown objects which surrounded it, by forcing it to keep its perceptions in a permanent state of defensive alertness, would have held my eyes and ears, all my senses, in a posture as cramped and uncomfortable, even if I had stretched out my legs, as the one Louis XI inflicted on Cardinal La Balue[12] by having him locked in a cage which made it impossible either to sit or stand. As our attentiveness furnishes a room, so habit unfurnishes it, making space in it for us. In that room of mine at Balbec, 'mine' in name only, there was no space for me: it was crammed with things which did not know me, which glared my distrust of them back at me, noting my existence only to the extent of letting me know they resented me for disturbing theirs. Without let-up, in some unfamiliar tongue, the clock, which at home I would never have heard for more than a few seconds a week, on surfacing from a long reverie, went on making comments about me, which must have sounded offensive to the tall violet curtains, for they stood there without a word in a listening posture, looking like the sort of people who will shrug their shoulders to show they are irked by the mere sight of someone. They gave to that bedroom with its high ceiling an almost historical air: it was the perfect sort of place for the Duc de Guise to have been assassinated in,[13] say, and for crocodiles of tourists to file through led by a guide from Cook's – but not for me to get some sleep. I was tormented by the presence of low glass-fronted bookcases which ran all round the walls, and especially by a tall cheval-glass which stood athwart a corner of the room and which I knew would have to be taken away if I was ever to enjoy any possibility of calm. Constantly glancing or staring upwards (activities which, in Paris, were as unhindered by the things in my room as by my eyes themselves, these things being nothing but accessories of my own organs, extensions of myself), I looked at the vast height of the ceiling in this belvedere stuck on the very top of the hotel, which my grandmother had selected for me; and in that part of me which is more private than those used for seeing and hearing, that part where one is aware of shades of smell, almost inside the self, an assault by vetiver threw me back on my deepest defences as I tried to repel it, in my tiredness, with a pointless, repeated and apprehensive sniffing. Deprived of my universe, evicted from my room, with my very tenancy of my body jeopardized by the enemies about me, infiltrated to the bone by fever, I was alone and wished I could die. It was then that my grandmother entered the room and, as my shrivelled heart expanded, broad vistas of hope opened to me.

She was in a tea-gown of cotton cambric which she always wore about the house if one of us was ill (because she felt more at home in it, or so she said, always alleging selfish motives for what she did), and which was her nun's habit, the handmaid's and night-nurse's tunic in which she would care for us and watch over us. But unlike the attentions of nuns, handmaids and night-nurses, the kindness they exercise, the excellence we admire in them and the gratitude we owe them, which have the effect of increasing both our impression of being a stranger to them and the feeling of aloneness which makes us keep to ourselves the unshared burden of our thoughts and our desire to live, I knew with my grandmother that, however overpowering any cause of my sorrow might be, its expression would be met by a sympathy that was even greater, that whatever was in me, my cares, my wishes, would rouse within my grandmother a desire, even stronger than my own, for the protection and betterment of my life; and my thoughts became hers without alteration, passing from my mind to hers without changing medium or person. So – like a man in front of a mirror wrong-handedly trying to do up his bow-tie, without realizing that the end he can see must cross to the other side, or a dog snapping at the flittering shadow of an insect – misled by the appearance of the body, as we are in this world where souls are not directly perceptible, I fell

into my grandmother's arms and pressed my lips to her face as though that were how to take refuge in the greatness of heart she offered to me. Whenever my mouth was on her cheeks or her forehead, I drew from them something so nourishing, so beneficent, that I had all the immobility, gravity and placid gluttony of an infant on the breast.

Nor could I ever tire of gazing at her large face, outlined like a beautiful cloud, calm and glowing, illuminated from within by its tenderness. Anything which partook, however faintly, however remotely, of her sensations, anything which could be said to be still a part of her being, was thereby so spiritualized and sanctified that, in smoothing under my hands her lovely hair which was hardly grey yet, my touch was as respectful, careful and gentle as though it were her goodness itself I was handling. She took such pleasure in any trouble that spared me trouble, such delight in a moment of rest and peace for my weary limbs, that when I tried to prevent her helping me untie my laces and get ready for bed, making as though to undress myself, her pleading glance halted my hands, which were already on my boots and the first buttons of my jacket.

'Please! Let me! she said. Your old grandma loves to do it. And you must be sure to knock on the wall if you need anything during the night. My bed's back to back with yours, you know, and it's just a partition. In a moment, once you've hopped into bed, you try knocking and we'll see how easy it is to communicate.'

So that evening I did give three knocks; and a week later, when I felt unwell for a few days, I did the same thing each morning, because she wanted me to have an early glass of milk. As soon as I thought I could hear she was awake, so as not to make her wait, to let her go back to sleep as soon as possible, I would try giving my three little knocks, gently and tentatively, but quite clearly, since, though I was reluctant to interrupt her sleep when it was possible I might have been mistaken and she was not awake, I would not have wanted her to lie there expecting a renewal of a summons which it was possible she might not have heard distinctly, but which I did not dare repeat. No sooner had I tapped on the wall than I heard her three answering knocks, quite different in their intonation from my own, full of a tone of serene control, repeated twice so that there should be no mistake, and clearly stating: 'Not to worry – I heard; and I'll be with you in a moment or two.' And sure enough, she soon appeared. I said I had been anxious in case she might not have heard me or in case she thought it was someone else knocking on a wall close by. She would say with a laugh:

'What! How could I mistake my dear little chap's knocking for someone else's? I'd know it a mile away. Do you really think there's anyone else in the whole world who's as silly and anxious and torn between the fear of waking me up and not being heard? Even a tiny little scratching on the wall would be enough for me to recognize a mouse like you, especially when you're such a dear and doleful little mouse. I was lying there listening to my mouse rummaging about in its nest, getting ready to knock, working up to it …'

When she parted the blinds, the sun would be already up, on the roofs of the protruding annexe of the hotel, like a slater on the early shift, working in silence so as not to wake the sleeping town, which in its inactivity makes him appear all the more nimble. She would tell me what time it was, what the weather would be like that day, that I need not get up and go to the window, that there was a drift of mist on the sea, whether the baker's was open yet, whose carriage it was that we could hear passing, commenting on the daily insignificant curtain-raiser, the banal *introit* that no one ever attends, a scrap of life shared only by us, to which I would smugly refer later in Françoise's presence or when talking with other people, informing them of the peasouper there had been at six a.m., showing off not because I had been gifted with special knowledge, but because I had been singled out for affectionate attention by this quiet and gentle morning moment, opening like a symphony with the rhythmic dialogue between my three knocks and the answering three, ardently desired and twice repeated, given back by the partition full of love and joy, its solid substance turned into happy harmonies and singing like an angels' chorus, filled by the whole soul of my grandmother and the promise of her coming, sounding its glad annunciation with the fidelity of music. But on the night of our arrival, after my grandmother had left my room, I started feeling miserable again, as I had in Paris when it was time to leave for the station. That trepidation which overwhelmed me at the prospect of sleeping in an unfamilar bedroom – which is felt by many – may be nothing more than the lowliest, most obscure, organic and all but unconscious mode of the supreme and desperate refusal, by those things which make up the best of our present life, to countenance even our theoretical acceptance of a possible future without them; a refusal which was the core of the horror I had so often felt at the thought that my parents would one day be dead, that the requirements of life might force me to live apart from Gilberte or just make me settle for good in a country where I would never see my friends again; a refusal which lurked beneath the difficulty I found in trying to think about my own death or even the kind of after-life promised by Bergotte in his books, in which there would be no place for my memories, my defects, my very character, all of which found unconscionable the idea of their own non-existence and hoped on my behalf that I was fated neither to unbeing nor to an everlasting life which would abolish them.

One day in Paris when I had been feeling particularly unwell, Swann had said, 'What you should do is be off to the South Seas, the islands … You'd very likely never come back.' I almost answered, 'But that would mean I'd never see your daughter again – I would live among things and people she would never have set eyes on!' But at the same moment, reason was murmuring: 'Well, what difference will that make, since I won't be upset about it? When M. Swann says I very likely won't ever come back, what he means is I won't *want* to come back, and if I don't want to come back, that will be because I'll be perfectly happy to stay there.' Reason was aware that habit (which was going to set about making me like these unknown quarters, change the position of the cheval-glass, tone down the curtains, silence the clock) also undertakes to endear to us people whom we disliked to begin with, alters the shape of their face, improves their tone of voice, makes hearts grow fonder. This liking for new places and people is of course worked into our forgetting of older ones; but reason suspected I could foresee without qualms a life without certain people, who would even fade for ever from my memory, and so the promise of forgetting which it held out, though intended as a consolation, was heart-breaking. Not that the heart does not also benefit, once such a divorce is consummated, from the analgesia of habit; but until that time comes, it goes on suffering without let-up. The fear of a future deprived of the faces and voices of those we love, those who today give us our dearest happiness, rather than diminishing, may in fact be made worse by the thought that the pain of that deprivation is to be compounded by something which at the moment seems even more unbearable: our no longer being affected by it as a pain, but being indifferent to it; for that would mean our actual self had changed, and not just that we had lost the delight in our parents' presence, the charm of a mistress, the warmth of a friend; it would mean that our affection for them had been so utterly obliterated from our heart, of which it is an integral part today, that we would be able to take pleasure in a life spent without them, horrible though that seems at present; it would amount to a death of our self, albeit followed by a resurrection, but a resurrection in the form of a different self, whose love will remain for ever beyond the reach of those parts of the former self which have gone down to death. It is those parts of us, even the most insubstantial and obscure of them, such as our attachment to the dimensions or the atmosphere of a particular room, which take fright, withhold consent and engage in rebellions which must be seen as a covert and partial yet tangible and true mode of resistance to death, that lengthy, desperate, daily resistance to the sporadic but non-stop dying which attends us throughout our lives, stripping off bits of us at every moment, which have no sooner mortified than new cells begin to grow. For a nervous disposition such as mine (that is, one in which the functioning of the intermediaries, the nerves, is impaired, so that they fail to stifle the voice of the lowliest elements of self doomed to decease, and their harrowing many-headed lament, in all its sorrow, rises unmuted to the wearied ears of consciousness) the anguish and alarm I felt when lying beneath a ceiling that was unknown and too high was nothing but the protest of my surviving attachment to a ceiling which was known and lower. No doubt that attachment would end and be replaced by another: first death, then a new life, would have done their dual work at the behest of Habit. But until that end, this attachment would suffer every evening; and on that first evening especially, in revolt at being confronted with a future which had already taken shape, in which there was no role for it, it tortured me with the din of its wailing every time my eyes, unable to look away from what affronted them, tried to reach that inaccessible ceiling.

But what delight there was the following morning! After a servant had come to waken me and bring hot water, and while I washed and vainly rummaged in my trunk for necessary things, pulling out a jumble of unnecessary ones, how exhilarating it was, amid pleasant prospects of breakfast and a walk, to see not only the window but all the glass doors of the bookcases, as though they were the portholes of a ship's cabin, filled by the open sea, which showed no dark designs towards

me (though half of its expanse was actually darkened by a shadow, marked off from the rest of it by a thin shifting frontier), and to gaze at the long rollers which came plunging in, one after the other, like divers from a board! Holding the stiff, starched towel inscribed with the name of the hotel, with which I was making unavailing efforts to dry myself, I kept going back to the window to look again at the huge, dazzling amphitheatre, mountainous with the snowy peaks of its breakers of emerald, here and there polished and translucent, which with placid violence let their beetling, lionlike crags and towering slopes topple into avalanches and collapse upon themselves under the faceless smile of the sun. Every morning from then on, that window was where I posted myself, as though leaning out at the door of an overnight coach to see whether a range of hills that one longs to reach has come closer or receded during the hours of darkness – for the hills of the sea, before they come dancing back towards us, can retreat so far that often it was only at a distance, beyond a great stretch of sandy plain, that I caught sight of their closest undulations, in a transparent, vaporous, bluish remoteness calling to mind those glaciers one sees in the backgrounds of paintings by Tuscan primitives. On other days, the waves would be very near; and the sunlight laughed on a green which was as soft as the green brought out in Alpine meadows (among mountains where the sun sprawls about like a reckless giant blithely tumbling downhill) not so much by the moistness of the ground as by the liquid mobility of the light. Moreover, in that breach that a beach and its waves make in the rest of the world, so as to let the light flood in, it is especially the light, according to the direction it shines from and the point of view it thereby gives to the eye, which makes for the placement and displacement of a seascape's hills and dales. Variations in lighting can alter the outlook of a place, can bring before us new goals and give us the desire to attain them, no less effectively than can the laborious making of a long journey. In the mornings, when the sunlight came from behind the hotel, baring the illuminated sands for me all the way to the sea's first foothills, it appeared to be showing me a concealed slope of them and to be urging me to undertake a varied though stationary tour, by way of the turning road of its rays, through the most impressive sites of the hours' changing landscape. On the very first morning, the sun kept smiling and pointing out to me the sea's distant blue summits, named on no map, until its sublime transit of the resounding chaos of their cliffs and avalanches brought it dazzled into my room, out of the wind, to lie about on the unmade bed and strew its wealth on the wet wash-stand, in my opened trunk, its very splendour and incongruous extravagance increasing the effect of untidiness. Unfortunately, my grandmother's opinion of the sea-breeze, an hour later, as we had lunch in the large dining-room – sprinkling from a lemon's leather gourd a few golden drops on a brace of sole, which soon left on our plates the plume of their skeletons, as fragile as a feather and as resonant as a zither – was that it was a shame not to feel its bracing effects, of which we were deprived by a screen which, transparent but closed, made the beach look like an exhibit behind plate-glass, exposing it completely to our view but separating us from it, while the sky seemed so much a part of the room that its blue appeared to be the colour of the panes and the white of the clouds looked like flaws in the glass. Fancying that Baudelaire's lines about 'lounging on the esplanade' or 'in the boudoir' applied to me, I was wondering whether his 'sunbeams gleaming on the sea' – unlike the evening sunbeam, simple and shallow, a tremulous golden shaft – might not be those I could see at that very moment burnishing the surface of the waves to topaz, fermenting it to a pale milky beer, frothing it like milk, while every now and then great blue shadows passed over parts of it, as though high above us a god was having fun moving a mirror about. Compared to the 'parlour' at Combray, looking out on the houses opposite, its aspect was not, alas, the only way in which this dining-room in Balbec differed, with its great bare emptiness filled to the brim by sunshine as green as water in a swimming-pool, and with the high tide and broad daylight only a few feet away, as though guarding the celestial city with their indestructible moving barrier of emerald and gold. In Combray, where we were known by everybody, I paid attention to no one. But on holiday at the seaside, one is surrounded by strangers. I was not yet old enough, and had remained too sensitive, to have given up the wish to please others and to possess them. I had none of the dignified indifference that a man of the world would have felt towards the people lunching in that dining-room or the young men and girls walking past on the esplanade: it was galling to think I could go on none of their outings – though less galling than if my grandmother, in her disdain for polite convention and her concern for my well-being, had humiliated me by asking them whether I might not join them! Whether they were wandering back to some holiday house unknown to me, strolling out to tennis carrying racquets, or riding past on horses whose hooves trampled my heart, I sat gazing at them with passionate curiosity, as they dawdled in that seaside dazzle which alters social dimensions, watching their every move through the transparency of the grand glassed-in bay that let in so much light. However, it also kept the breeze out; and that was a shortcoming in my grandmother's estimation, she finding it intolerable that I should lose the benefit of a single hour of fresh air. So she surreptitiously opened one of the windows, which had the effect of blowing away the menus, newspapers, veils and caps of the other people having lunch, while she herself, invigorated by the bracing breath from heaven, was as unruffled and full of smiles as Saint Blandine,[14] braving the abuse which increased my feelings of aloneness and dejection and united the other guests against us in contempt, outrage and dishevelment.

Some of these people (and this was a feature which, at the Balbec hotel, gave quite a marked regional character to the guests, those who frequent such grand establishments being usually unremarkable in their common wealth and cosmopolitanism) were eminent personalities in the principal *départements* of those parts, one of Caen's First Presidents, a *bâtonnier*[15] from Cherbourg, a notary of note in Le Mans, who at each holiday season, leaving the far-flung points where they spent their workaday lives as disbanded free spirits, or pawns on the chessboard of western France, foregathered in this hotel. They always reserved the same rooms; and with their wives, who had pretensions to aristocratic connection, they formed a small group which also included a celebrated lawyer and a famous doctor, both from Paris, who would say on the last day of the holiday:

'Ah yes, of course, we're not taking the same train, are we? How fortunate you are – home by lunch-time!

– What do you mean 'fortunate'? You're from the capital, Paris, the hub of the nation. Whereas our humble abode is a mere country town of a hundred thousand souls – I tell a lie: a hundred and two thousand at the last census! But what's that to you Parisians, with your two and a half millions, your asphalted pavements, your metropolitan glamour?'

This would be spoken with a peasant-like rolling of the *r* and without provincial rancour, for these were men of some consequence in their part of the country, men who could have gone up to Paris like many another – the First President from Caen had several times been offered a seat on the bench of the Cour de cassation[16] – but who had chosen to stay put, because of their fondness for their native town or a preference for obscurity or for basking in local glory, because they were reactionary or else enjoyed being on friendly terms with the owners of local châteaux. Not all of them went straight back to their county towns, either.

The fact was that – since the Bay of Balbec was a little universe all to itself set amid the wider one, a posy of seasons composed of different sorts of days and many months, this meant that not only on days when one could see Rivebelle clearly (a thunder-storm warning, the sun shining on houses over there while the sky darkened over Balbec), but also when the colder weather had come to Balbec, one was always sure of two or three months more of warm days on that distant shore – each year when rains and fogs promised the coming of autumn, those regulars at the Grand-Hôtel whose holidays started late or lasted a long time had their luggage hoisted on to a boat and sailed across to continue their summer at Rivebelle or Costedor. This little group at the Balbec hotel would look askance at any new-comers and, though seeming to take no interest in them, would interrogate their friend the head waiter about them. Aimé by name, this head waiter was there for the season every year and made sure they all had the tables they preferred. Each of their good ladies, knowing that Aimé's wife was expecting a baby, would work after meal-times at making baby-clothes, now and again glaring through their lorgnettes at my grandmother and myself because we liked to have hard-boiled eggs in our salad, a taste which was known to be 'common', quite unheard-of among the best families of Alençon. They and their husbands affected a posture of ironic disdain towards a Frenchman whom everyone called 'Your Majesty' and who had actually proclaimed himself king of the few savage tenants of a tiny islet in the South Seas. He was living at the hotel with his pretty mistress; and whenever she tripped out towards her bathing cabin, little boys would shout, 'Hurrah for the Queen!', she being in the habit of tossing handfuls of half-franc pieces in their direction. The *bâtonnier* from Cherbourg and the First President from Caen did their best to appear not to see her; and if anyone of their acquaintance looked at her, they felt duty-bound to point out that she was a mere mill-girl.

'What? I was told they use the royal bathing-machine at Ostend!

– Well, of course! Anyone can rent it for twenty francs, you know. You could have it if you felt like it. I have it on very good authority too that he tried to get an audience with the King, who let him know it was out of the question for a real king to have anything to do with the likes of him!

– Well, I never! The things you hear … The people one meets nowadays!'

No doubt all this was true; but it was also because they were miffed by the knowledge that, for much of the world, they themselves were mere provincials unacquainted with this open-handed royal couple, that the notable notary, the First President and the *bâtonnier* were so upset by witnessing what they called 'a circus' and voiced aloud their indignation, which was no secret to their friend the head waiter, who, though obliged to smile upon the more generous than genuine Royals, made a point, as he took their order, of addressing a distant but meaning wink at his regular customers. There may also have been something of the same chagrin at being mistakenly thought less 'smart' and being unable to explain that they were *more* 'smart', in the 'Pretty fellow!' with which they greeted the appearance of the young 'masher', the consumptive prodigal son of a great industrialist, who drank champagne every day with his lunch, wearing a new jacket with an orchid in its buttonhole, then took his impassive pallor and smile of indifference off to the baccarat tables at the Casino, where he squandered a fortune 'Which he can ill afford to lose, believe you me,' as the notary, with a knowing air, vouchsafed to the First President, whose wife had it 'on the *very* best authority' that this deplorably *fin-de-siècle* young man would be the death of his long-suffering parents.

The *bâtonnier* and his friends also lavished sarcasm on the person of an old lady, rich and titled, because she would never travel without her entire household. Whenever the notary's wife and the good lady of the First President saw her at meal-times in the dining-room, they would hold up their eye-glasses and give her a good, long, insolent stare, with such an air of punctilious distaste and misgiving that she might have been a dish of pompous name and dubious appearance which, after subjecting it to a rigorous inspection, one waves away with a distant gesture and a grimace of disgust.

Presumably all they wished to show was that, though there might be some things they lacked, such as certain of the old lady's prerogatives and the fact of being acquainted with her, this was not because they could not aspire to them, but because they would not. But they had eventually come to convince themselves of the truth of this; and all desire for or curiosity about modes of life unknown to oneself, all hope of ever striking up new friendships, had been negated in these women and supplanted by a feigned disdain, a simulacrum of enjoyment of life, with the untoward effect that they called their displeasure satisfaction and had to lie to themselves all the time, two things that made for their constant unhappiness. But then no doubt everyone in that hotel behaved in the same way, albeit in different forms, sacrificing if not to self-esteem at least to certain principles of breeding or habits of mind the disquieting delights of mixing with unknown company. I have no doubt the little world to which the old lady restricted herself was free of the virulent embitterments and warped mockeries poisoning the lives of the wives of the notary and the First President. But her world, though it was fragrant with a fine old-fashioned perfume, was no less factitious than theirs. And if she had tried to please, if she had set out to win the mysterious regard of new people, which would have required her to renew herself too, she would most likely have experienced a charm which is absent from the twin pleasures of mixing only with one's own sort and reminding oneself that, one's own sort being the best sort, one can treat the ignorant disdain of others with the contempt it deserves. But perhaps she had sensed that by arriving incognito at the Grand-Hôtel of Balbec, wearing her black woollen dress and her old-fashioned bonnet, she might startle a smile out of some roisterer recuperating in his rocking-chair ('Ye Gods! What a miserable old duck!') or more likely that some worthy with the open face and witty sparkle to the eye that she liked in a man, such as the First President's between his pepper-and-salt whiskers, would have instantly drawn the attention of the conjugal lorgnette's magnifying lens to the manifestation of this bizarre phenomenon; and so it may have been the old lady's unconscious apprehension of that moment of first encounter, which one knows is brief but dreads all the same, like the first time one dives into deep water, that made her send on a servant to inform the hotel of her character and her customs, then brusquely turn a deaf ear to the manager's speech of welcome, so as to head speedily, albeit more from shyness than pride, for her room, where curtains of her own instead of the hotel's hung at the windows and where, what with her private screens and family photographs, instead of adapting to the outside world, she could erect between it and herself a bulkhead of habit so deftly constructed that it was her own home with her inside it which had done the travelling and not her.

Then, having placed between herself and tradesmen not only the employees of the hotel but also her own servants, who took it upon themselves to deal with this new race of people and maintained the accustomed atmosphere about their mistress, having placed her prejudices between herself and the bathers, unperturbed at any offence she might give to people whom her friends would never have received, she continued to dwell in her own world, through exchanges of correspondence with these friends, through memory, through the private conviction she had of her own situation, of the quality of her own manners and the adequacy of her politeness. Every day, when she walked downstairs to take her carriage exercise, the footman who preceded her and the maidservant carrying her things who brought up the rear were like the guards who stand at the entrance of an embassy in the shade of the flag of the country it represents, and are the guarantors, in an alien land, of its privilege of extra-territoriality. On the day of our arrival, she did not leave her room until the middle of the afternoon; and we did not see her in the dining-room to which, in our capacity as new-comers, the manager himself condescended to conduct us, as a non-commissioned officer marches a pair of recruits to the quartermaster-sergeant's to have them kitted out. However, we did see, after a moment, a squireen with his daughter, M. and Mlle de Stermaria, of an obscure but very old Breton family, at whose table, in the belief that they would not be back till that evening, we had been put. The sole purpose of their stay in Balbec being to meet certain landed families they knew in that district, the time they spent in the dining-room of the hotel, what with the invitations they accepted and the return visits they received, was the shortest possible. Their arrogance protected them against any liking for their fellow-man, against the slightest interest in the strangers sitting all about them, amidst whom M. de Stermaria adopted the manner one has in the buffet-car of a train, grim, hurried, stand-offish, brusque, fastidious and spiteful, surrounded by other passengers whom one has never seen before, whom one will never see again and towards whom the only conceivable way of behaving is to make sure they keep away from one's cold chicken and stay out of one's chosen corner-seat. My grandmother and I had barely started lunch when we were asked to change tables, on the order of M. de Stermaria, who had just arrived and who, in a loud voice and without the slightest token of apology towards us, required the head waiter to be sure not to let any such contretemps happen again, as he did not like the idea of his table being taken by 'persons unknown to him'.

There were other people (a certain actress, really better known for her elegance, her wit and her collection of fine Dresden than for the few parts she had had at the Odéon; her lover, a very wealthy young man, for whose sake she had acquired her cultured tastes; and a pair of very visible aristocrats) whose preference for no company other than their own – they only ever travelled as a group, lunched while at Balbec very late, long after everyone else, then spent their days over cards in their private drawing-room – was motivated not by ill-will towards others but only by the requirements of the pleasure they took in a certain conversational bantering and in certain refined tastes in food and wines, which meant they could only enjoy things together, even meal-times, and would have found it unbearable to spend their time with other people uninitiated into their preferences. Even when sitting at a dinner-table or a gambling-table, each of them needed to be sure that, in their fellow-guest or partner at cards, there reposed in a suspended and latent form a certain shared knowledge enabling one to detect the fake furniture which in so many Parisian households passes for genuine Medieval or Renaissance and, in general, a common set of criteria for discriminating between the good and the bad. At such moments, the special element in which they wished to have their being could show only in an occasional witticism proffered amid the silence of the dinner-party or the game, or in a charming new dress which the young actress had put on specially for lunch-time, or because they were going to play poker. But this element, by enveloping them in habits which were second nature to them, was enough to keep at bay the mysteries of life about them. Throughout the long afternoons, the sea hung before their eyes like a mere canvas of a pleasing shade on the wall of a well-to-do bachelor's sitting-room; and it was only between hands that one of the players, for lack of anything better to do, would glance out at it for a glimpse of a fine day or a clue to what time it might be, then remind the others that it was just on tea-time. In the evenings, they never dined in the hotel, where the electric fountains gushed their light into the spacious dining-room, turning it into an immense and wonderful aquarium, while, invisible in the outer shadows beyond the glass wall, the working classes of Balbec, the

fishermen and even middle-class families pressed against the windows, in an attempt to see the luxurious life of these denizens, glowing amid the golden sway of the eddies, all of it as weird and fascinating for the poor as the existence of strange fish and molluscs (but whether the glass barrier will go on protecting for ever the feeding of the marvellous creatures, or whether the obscure onlookers gloating towards them from the outer dark will break into their aquarium and hook them for the pot, therein lies a great social question). In the meantime, perhaps among the nameless clusters in the night there may have been a writer, a fancier of human ichthyology who, at the spectacle of the closing jaws of old female monsters gulping down a bite of food, could enjoy classifying them by species, by innate characteristics, but also by the acquired characteristics which may mean that an old Serbian lady with a great ocean fish's mouth-parts eats her lettuce – because since childhood she has swum in the fresh waters of the Faubourg Saint-Germain – like a La Rochefoucauld.

At that hour, one could see the three men in dinner-suits waiting for the woman: she was late but, having rung the 'lift' from her floor, wearing a new dress almost every night, with a scarf or a stole dictated by a taste peculiar to her lover, she would soon step out of the lift as from a toybox. Then all four of them, who thought that the sprouting of this palatial international establishment at Balbec had fostered mere luxury rather than fine cuisine, clambered into a carriage and were driven off to dine a couple of miles away at a small but highly regarded restaurant, where they would have interminable consultations with the chef on the composition of the evening's menu and the preparation of the different dishes. And as they drove, the road from Balbec, lined by apple-trees, was mere mileage – not very different in the dark from the distance separating their houses in Paris from the Café Anglais or the Tour d'Argent – which they had to cover in order to reach the smart little restaurant, where they would sit among friends who envied the wealthy young man his possession of such a well-dressed mistress, and where her scarves drew a sort of sleek perfumed veil over the little group, while secluding it from the rest of the world.

Unfortunately for my peace of mind, I was quite unlike all these people: I was greatly concerned about many of them. I wished not to be so ignored by a man with a low forehead and a pair of shifty eyes flitting between the blinkers of his prejudices and breeding, who was the first gentleman of those parts, none other than Legrandin's brother-in-law, who occasionally came into Balbec, and whose wife's weekly garden-party deprived the hotel of a contingent of its inhabitants each Sunday, one or two of them because they were invited to these functions, and many others who, so as not to appear to have been excluded from them, chose that day to go on a lengthy outing. The first day he turned up at the hotel he had had a very poor reception, as the staff had only recently arrived from the Riviera and had no idea who he was. Not only was he not wearing white flannel but, unused to the ways of such grandiose establishments, he had removed his hat in his old-fashioned French manner as soon as he stepped into a vestibule with women in it, which was why the manager had not so much as tipped his to him as they spoke, in the belief that this must be someone of no social importance, what he called 'a man of no extraction'. The only person who had viewed him with some favour was the wife of the notable notary who, sensing in him the stilted vulgarity of the prim and proper, had declared, with all the infallible and authoritative insight of one whose acuity had been acquired through long contact with the very best circles of Le Mans society, that one could see at a glance that here was a man of great distinction and impeccable breeding, a man who was a cut above everybody else one might meet at Balbec (all of whom she deemed it impossible to be seen with, until she started to be seen with them). This favourable judgment of hers on the brother-in-law of Legrandin was perhaps inspired by the drab demeanour of a man who was anything but imposing, or perhaps by the fact that in this gentleman farmer with the look of a sexton her clericalism had read the secret signs that showed he was a kindred spirit.

Even though I soon learned that the young horsemen who rode past the hotel every day were the sons of a dishonest tradesman – he owned a drapery and fancy-goods business – whom my father would never have condescended to know, the fact of being 'on holiday at the seaside' made them equestrian statues of demi-gods in my eyes; and the best I could hope for was that they would never deign to notice my own paltry person, who had nothing to do other than exchange a seat in the hotel dining-room for a seat on the sands. I wanted to be liked, even by the adventurer who had been king of a desert island in the South Seas, even by the consumptive young 'masher', who I fancied was really hiding a diffident and loving nature behind a stand-offish appearance, and would have been capable of lavishing on me alone all the unspent treasures of his friendship. Moreover – and it is usually the opposite of this that one hears in accounts of holiday relationships – since being seen about with certain people, at a resort which one revisits from time to time, may give one a certain cachet which has no equivalent in real society, the social world of Paris, rather than discouraging relationships struck up at the seaside, in fact cultivates nothing more sedulously. I was anxious about the esteem in which I was held by all these personages of temporary or local importance; and after my habit of putting myself in others' shoes and viewing the world as they must view it, I saw them not as occupying their proper rank, the one they would have had in Paris, say, which would have been a very lowly one, but the one they must believe was theirs by rights, and which actually *was* theirs in Balbec, where the lack of a common yardstick endowed them with a mode of relative superiority and a pregnant interest. Sad to say, the contempt of none of these people wounded me so deeply as that of M. de Stermaria.

I had noticed his daughter as soon as she came in, the bluish pallor of her pretty face, her height and distinctive way of carrying herself, her gait, all of which brought accurately to mind her lineage and aristocratic upbringing, all the more acutely because I knew her name – like those evocative themes invented by gifted composers which, for any listeners who have already glanced at the score and set their imagination on the right track, bring vividly to the mind's eye the shimmer of a flame, the rippling murmur of a stream, the calm of the countryside. 'Breeding' enhanced the charms of Mlle de Stermaria, added to them the knowledge of their cause, made them more intelligible and more complete. It also made them more desirable, with its hint that they were possibly out of my reach, as a high price adds to the value of an object we find attractive. The hereditary strain imbued her complexion with choice savours, the tang of an exotic fruit, the bouquet of a fine vintage.

It was chance which afforded my grandmother and myself a way of endowing ourselves, in the eyes of all the hotel's inhabitants, with instantaneous prestige. On our very first day there, as the old lady came down from her apartments, radiating an influence, through the footman before her and the maidservant scurrying after with a forgotten book and blanket, which affected every mind, inspiring curiosity and respect in all, visibly more so in M. de Stermaria than in anyone else, the manager leaned towards my grandmother and in a kindly way, as one points out the Shah of Persia or Queen Ranavalo of Madagascar to some obscure by-stander, who cannot possibly have the slightest link with the potentate but may be intrigued to realize who it is passing by, murmured to her, 'The Marquise de Villeparisis', and at that very moment the old lady, catching sight of my grandmother, gave a start of joy and surprise.

The sudden appearance, in the guise of a little old lady, of the most influential of fairy godmothers could not have caused me greater pleasure, devoid as I was of any device to bring myself closer to Mlle de Stermaria in a place where I knew no one. No one, I mean, of any practical assistance. The aesthetic range available to the human countenance being so narrow, one frequently has the pleasure, wherever one may be, of meeting faces known to one, without needing to seek them out, as Swann did, in the paintings of old masters. So it was that, in the very first days of our stay at Balbec, I had happened upon first Legrandin, then Swann's concierge and finally Mme Swann herself, turned into a waiter in a café, a visiting foreigner whom I never set eyes on again and a bathing monitor. There is a sort of magnetism which brings together, and keeps together, certain features of physiognomy and mentality, so that when Nature fits such a person into a different body, it does so without much mutilation. Though transformed into a waiter, Legrandin had kept his stature, the line of his nose and a part of his chin; Mme Swann, though she had undergone a sex-change and was a bathing monitor, had retained her usual facial features and even something of her own ways of speaking. However, even with her red belt and waving her flag to warn swimmers out of the water at the slightest swell (bathing monitors being cautious creatures, so few of them being themselves swimmers), she was of no more help to me in the present circumstances than she would have been in the *Life of Moses* fresco, where Swann had once noticed her disguised as Jethro's daughter. Mme de Villeparisis, however, was there in person; not only had no spell stripped her of her power, but she could actually cast a spell on my power, greatly increasing it and enabling me in an instant, as though on the wings of some fabled bird, to sweep over the infinite social distance – infinite in Balbec at least – separating me from Mlle de Stermaria.

Unfortunately, it would have been impossible to find a person who lived more enclosed within her own little world than my grandmother. It was not that she would have despised me, she would not even have understood me, if she had realized that the good opinion of, and personal acquaintance with, people whose

very existence she had not even noticed, whose name she would never have found out by the time she left Balbec, were for me matters of consuming interest; I did not dare tell her that, if only these people could see her chatting with Mme de Villeparisis, I would be overcome with pleasure, because I sensed that being friends with the Marquise, who had such prestige within the hotel, would have greatly enhanced our own in the eyes of Mlle de Stermaria. Not that I thought of my grandmother's old friend as someone belonging to the aristocracy: I was too used to hearing her name spoken at home during my childhood, at a time long before I had given any conscious thought to it; and the title she bore was only an added strangeness, rather like that conferred by an unusual first name or one of those noble names given to Paris streets, like the rue Lord-Byron, the rue de Gramont or the rue Rochechouart, which has come down in the world, none of them any nobler than the names of ordinary streets, such as the rue Léonce-Reynaud or the rue Hippolyte-Lebas. The name of Mme de Villeparisis conjured up no special world for me, any more than did the name of her cousin Mac-Mahon, someone no different from M. Carnot, who like him had been a president of the Republic, or from Raspail, whose photograph Françoise had bought along with that of Pius IX. For my grandmother, however, it was a matter of principle that when you go on holiday, you sever relations with people; you do not go to the seaside to meet people, there is plenty of time for that in Paris; they just make you squander in trite civilities the invaluable time you should be spending exclusively in the open air, communing with the waves. So, finding it convenient to believe that her view on this was shared by everyone else, that it allowed old friends whose paths happened to cross in a hotel vestibule to maintain the polite fiction of a reciprocal incognito, when the manager murmured the name of Mme de Villeparisis, my grandmother saw fit to glance away and appear not to see her old friend, whereupon the latter, sensing that my grandmother was not in the mood for a reunion, also averted her eyes. As she walked away, I stood there as forlorn as a shipwrecked mariner who has watched the approach of a vessel, which then sails on its way without rescuing him.

Mme de Villeparisis also took her meals in the dining-room, but she sat right at the other end. She was unacquainted with anyone who was staying in the hotel or who occasionally visited it, even with M. de Cambremer: I noticed that he did not greet her, one day when he and his wife came to lunch at the invitation of the *bâtonnier* from Cherbourg, who, intoxicated by the heady honour of having this noble at his table with him, made sure to keep away from his everyday acquaintances, at whom he just winked from a distance, to mark the historic occasion, but discreetly enough for them not to take this as permission to come over.

'So we're hob-nobbing now, are we? the wife of the First President from Caen said to him that evening. Mixing with the upper crust, is that it?

– Upper crust? Why on earth? the *bâtonnier* asked, masking his delight with a show of astonishment. What – oh, you mean my guests? he added, unable to keep up the pretence: But what's 'hob-nobbing' in having some friends to lunch? They've got to have their lunch somewhere!

– Of course it's upper crust! They're the *de* Cambremers, aren't they?[17] I knew it was them. The wife's a marquise. In her own right. Not from the distaff side.

– She's a very unspoiled lady, you know, quite charming. A less stuck-up person would be hard to find. I thought you might come over. I tried to tip you the wink. I could have introduced you!' said the *bâtonnier*, moderating with a slight irony the enormity of the suggestion, like Asahuerus saying to Esther, 'So now must I give you the half of my Estate?'[18]

– No, no! We're shy retiring little violets!

– Well, take it from me, you should really have come over, said the *bâtonnier* from Cherbourg, full of boldness now that the danger was past. They wouldn't have eaten you. So, is it time for our little hand at bézique?

– But of course! We were reluctant to suggest it, now that you're rubbing shoulders with marquises!

– Oh, come now! I do assure you, there's nothing very special about them! Look, I'm supposed to go there to dinner tomorrow night. Would you like to go instead of me? I mean it sincerely, I really do! Honestly, I wouldn't at all mind just staying here.

– Out of the question! I'd be turned off the bench as a Reactionary! exclaimed the First President, guffawing at his own joke; then he added, to the notary, But of course, you're on visiting terms up at Féterne.

– Well, yes, I do go up there on Sundays. It's in one door and out the other, actually. But they don't come and have lunch with me, unlike our *bâtonnier* here.'

M. de Stermaria was away from Balbec that day, to the great chagrin of the *bâtonnier*. However, he had a quiet word with the head waiter:

'Aimé, would you mind dropping the hint to M. de Stermaria that he's not the only noble who has graced this dining-room? You saw that gentleman lunching with me this forenoon? Toothbrush moustache, military bearing? The Marquis de Cambremer no less!

– Is that so? Well, I'm not surprised!

– That would let him know he's not the only one with a title. Take that, eh? Do these nobilities good to be taken down a peg or two from time to time! Actually, Aimé, if you'd rather not say anything, then don't bother. I wasn't speaking my own views there, you understand. And anyway, he knows the man quite well.'

The following day, M. de Stermaria, who knew that the *bâtonnier* had on one occasion represented a friend of his in court, introduced himself.

'Our mutual friends the de Cambremers had been trying to bring us together, but it was never the right day for both of us, or something of that kind,' said the *bâtonnier*, who was like many another liar in imagining that no one will bother to check such an insignificant detail; yet if chance puts anyone in possession of the humble fact which contradicts the detail, it can be enough to damn a character and spoil trust for ever.

As usual, though more easily now that her father's conversation with the *bâtonnier* had left her to her own devices, I sat and watched Mlle de Stermaria. One was struck not only by the eye-catching singularity and beauty of her every posture, as when she set both elbows on the table, her raised glass poised above her forearms, but also by the curt glance from an eye that let itself be only briefly caught, by a voice in which one sensed an underlying inbred hardness, barely masked by her individual inflections, which had irked my grandmother, as though Mlle de Stermaria had inherited some sort of pre-set ancestral mechanism which, after any expression of a private view, in a look or an intonation, automatically brought her back to neutral; and the observer's mind was for ever drawn to the lineage which had handed down to her such a dearth of simple humanity, such deficiency in sensitivity, such meanness of spirit just below the surface. Yet, from certain soft gleams that flitted across her eye only to be quickly dulled, in which one could sense the almost humble docility that a penchant for the pleasures of the flesh gives to the haughtiest woman, who soon values only one thing in the world, and that thing is any man who affords her those pleasures, possibly just an actor or some paltry entertainer for whose sake one day she may even be prepared to leave her husband; and from a certain shade of sensual pink that bloomed on her pale cheeks, reminiscent of the blushes that glowed in the heart of the water-lilies on the Vivonne, I suspected she might not mind letting me be the one to taste on her person the poetic flavour of the life she led in Brittany, a life which, whether through a surfeit of habit, an innate distinction, or her displeasure at the poverty or avarice of her family, she seemed to find uninspiring, but which even so she contained within her body. From the meagre reserve of will-power which she had inherited, and which gave something craven to her expression, she might not have been able to summon up very vigorous resistance. The grey felt hat which she invariably wore at meal-times, with its pretentious and rather out-of-fashion plume, endeared her to me a little, not because it suited her complexion of pink and silver, but because, by letting me see her as impoverished, it brought her closer to my own level. It was just possible that, though constrained in the presence of her father to follow convention in the attitudes she adopted, but with principles different from his for the perceiving and classifying of other people, she saw in me not lowly rank but sex and youth. If only M. de Stermaria would go on an outing one day without her, and especially if Mme de Villeparisis had chosen that day to come and sit at our table and thus given Mlle de Stermaria an opinion of me which might make me bold enough to approach her, perhaps we might have been able to exchange a few words, arrange to meet, strike up an acquaintance. If her parents had left her to herself for a month in her romantic Breton château, we might have been able to wander alone in the gloaming, by the darkening waters, where the pinkish heather would have a softer glow under the

oaks lashed by the leaping waves. Together we could ramble about her island fastness, which was steeped in so much charm for me because it had bounded the banal days of Mlle de Stermaria, and because the memory of it would haunt her eyes for ever. It felt as though I could never properly possess her anywhere else, as though I would have to trespass on the places which surrounded her with so many memories, as though these memories were a veil that my desire for her would have to strip away, one of those which is drawn between a woman and certain men by Nature (with the same purpose which makes it interpose the act of reproduction between all its creatures and their keenest pleasure, setting between the insect and the nectar it desires the pollen it must carry away) so that, misled by the illusion of possessing her more completely in that way, they feel compelled first to take possession of the landscapes among which she lives and which, though much more fruitful for the imagination than the sensual pleasure, would not have sufficed without it to attract them.

I had to look away from Mlle de Stermaria, whose father, presumably believing that making a person's acquaintance was a peculiar, perfunctory act, accomplished in a single movement, lending itself to no development worthy of a man's interest, beyond a mere handshake and a sharp glance, neither requiring conversation on the spot nor leading to any later intercourse, had now taken his leave of the *bâtonnier* and was on his way back to sit opposite his daughter, rubbing his hands together like a man who has just had a windfall. As for the *bâtonnier*, once the initial excitement of the encounter had subsided, he was to be heard, as on other days, saying to the head waiter:

'I'm not a king, you know, Aimé – be off and serve the King! I say, Your Worship, just look at those little trout – why don't we ask Aimé for some of them! Aimé, I must say, those little fish of yours look very irresistible! Why don't you bring us some of them, Aimé? We'll help ourselves!'

He kept repeating the name Aimé; and whenever he had a guest to dinner, the latter would say, 'Well, I can see you're highly regarded hereabouts,' and would take to dropping the name of Aimé too, in accordance with that propensity certain people have, part shyness, part vulgarity, part foolishness, to believe it is smart and amusing to behave exactly like someone they happen to be with. The *bâtonnier*'s incessant repetitions of Aimé's name were always accompanied by a smile, as he was pleased to show not only that he was in the head waiter's good graces but also that the latter was beneath him. At every mention of his name, the head waiter also showed in a smile how touched and proud he was, how much he appreciated the honour and shared in the joke.

Daunting as meal-times always were for me in the Grand-Hôtel's immense dining-room, which was usually full, they turned into an even greater ordeal with the arrival for a stay of a few days of the owner (or possibly just a managing director elected by a body of shareholders) not just of this palace but also of seven or eight others established in widely separated parts of the country, who would turn up from time to time at one or other of them and spend a week there. Every evening, shortly after the beginning of dinner, through the entrance to the dining-room would come a small man with white hair and a red nose, strikingly proper and impersonal, known, it was said, from London to Monte Carlo as one of Europe's premier hotel-proprietors. On one occasion, having slipped out just as dinner was beginning, I found he was there when I came back in: he gave me a little bow, presumably to acknowledge that I was under his roof, but the stiffness of his manner made me wonder whether it expressed the reserve of the man who knows his own importance or the disdain deserved by the insignificant customer. With customers who were themselves people of importance, the managing director's bow was just as stiff, but much deeper, and he lowered his eyelids with an appearance of muted respect, as he might have done at a funeral service when condoling with the father of the deceased or contemplating Holy Communion. Apart from these cold and infrequent bows, he made no movement whatsoever, as though to show that his eyes, which were very bright and seemed to protrude, could be aware of all things, dominate all things and make sure that all things, from the tiniest finishing touch to the broad effect of the whole, combined to make a perfect 'Dinner at the Grand-Hôtel'. It was clear that he saw himself as no mere stage manager or orchestral conductor, but as a commander-in-chief. In the belief that he needed nothing but a gaze of the greatest intensity to know that everything was in order, that whoever might blunder, defeat could not ensue, and so as to shoulder every single one of his responsibilities, not only did he make no gestures, he even kept his eyes quite still, fixed in a stare of concentration, encompassing and directing the entire theatre of operations. I suspected that even the movements of my soup-spoon did not escape his notice; and even if he went away soon after the soup, the result of his tour of inspection was that he took away with him my appetite for the rest of dinner. His own appetite was excellent, as could be seen at lunch, when he sat in the dining-room at the same time as all the other guests, as though he was no one special. The table at which he sat was distinguished by a single peculiarity: as he ate, the other manager, the ordinary one, stood by his side making conversation. Being the managing director's subordinate, he sought to flatter him and went in great fear of him. My own fear of him was less acute at lunch-times, because when he sat like that among all his customers he had the discreet air of a general who happens to be sitting in a restaurant where some of his troops are eating, but pretends not to notice them. All the same, I breathed more freely when the commissionaire, surrounded by his pages and porters, announced: 'He's off again tomorrow morning. First to Dinard, then on to Biarritz and over to Cannes.'

My life in the hotel was now not only sad, because I knew so few people, but also inconvenient, because Françoise knew so many. Her contacts should perhaps have made many things easier for us. In fact, they did the opposite. Although members of the working classes had great difficulty in being treated as acquaintances by Françoise, and could manage to achieve this only at the cost of extreme politeness towards her, once they had been accepted by her, they became the only people to whom she accorded the slightest importance. Her time-honoured code held that she owed no deference to any of the friends of her employers and that, if she was pressed for time, she could refuse to bandy words with a lady inquiring about my grandmother. However, her ways of dealing with her own acquaintances, that is with the few lower-class persons who were the beneficiaries of her infrequent friendships, were governed by the most delicate and inflexible protocol. For example, having struck up relationships with the hotel's coffee waiter and with a young chambermaid who did some sewing for a Belgian lady, Françoise gave up her practice of going back upstairs to attend to my grandmother as soon as lunch was over, delaying her return by a full hour, because the coffee waiter wanted to make her a cup of coffee or *tisane* down in the buttery, or the chambermaid had suggested she come and watch her sew, and to decline such offers was out of the question, was quite simply not done. The young chambermaid was particularly deserving of this sort of propriety, as she was an orphan who had been brought up by people not of her family, and she occasionally went to spend some days with them. This circumstance brought out all of Françoise's pity and benevolent disdain. She, who had a family to belong to, a little farm-house handed down by her parents, where a brother of hers kept a few cows, could never have considered such a person, quite without roots, to be her equal. As the girl was looking forward to the mid-August holiday and the chance to go and stay with her foster family, Françoise could not contain herself: 'She makes me laugh, she does. "I'm off home" she says, "for the 15th of August" she says – *home*! And it's not even hers! It's just some folk that took her in and there she is, going on about "home" as if it was a real one! The poor girl! Fancy, being so badly off that you haven't even got a home to call your own!' But if Françoise's new friends had been only chambermaids in the employ of guests at the hotel, who ate with her in the guests' servants' quarters, and assumed from her lovely lace cap and her fine profile that she must be a real lady, possibly of noble birth but now living in reduced circumstances, or else choosing from affection to live as lady's companion to my grandmother; if Françoise had limited her acquaintance, that is, to people who did not belong to the hotel, the inconvenience would not have been very great, as she could not then have prevented them from being of service to us, for the simple reason that there were no conceivable circumstances in which, whether acquainted or unacquainted with her, they might have been of any service to us at all. However, she had also got to know one of the wine waiters, a kitchen-hand and a housekeeper from one of the floors. The result of this for our daily arrangements was that, whereas at the very beginning of her stay Françoise, knowing no one, had kept ringing for the most trivial of reasons, at times when my grandmother and I would never have dared to ring – and if we raised some mild objection to this, she replied, 'Well, we're paying them enough!' as though she herself was footing the bills – now that she was on friendly terms with one of the personalities from below stairs, a thing which had initially seemed to augur well for our comfort if either of us happened to have cold feet in bed, she would not countenance the idea of ringing, even at times which were in no way untoward; she said it would 'put them out', it would mean the furnaces would have to be relit or the servants' dinner-hour would be disturbed and they would not like that. She would enforce her pronouncements with a form of words which, despite her unsure way of delivering it, was abundantly clear in the way it put us in the

wrong: 'The fact is …' Whereupon, we would desist, so as not to make her come out with another one of far greater severity for us: 'It's the limit!' The long and the short of it was that we had to make do without proper hot water because Françoise was a friend of the man whose job it was to heat it.

We too, eventually, found a friend, despite and because of my grandmother. She and Mme de Villeparisis, finding themselves face to face one morning in a doorway, were at last obliged to exchange greetings, but only after exchanging gestures of surprise and hesitation, going through a pantomime of standing back and doubting, then at length coming together with glad cries and polite exclamations, like a pair of actors in a scene by Molière who have been standing apart from one another, each delivering a soliloquy and supposedly not seeing the other, though there is no more than a few feet between them, and who suddenly catch sight of each other, cannot believe their eyes, start speaking at the same time, interrupting each other, all this under the eyes of the chorus, before at last falling into each other's arms. After a moment's conversation, Mme de Villeparisis tried tactfully to pass on; but my grandmother suggested they sit together until lunch-time, with the aim of discovering how she managed to have her mail delivered earlier than we did and be treated to such excellent grills (as a connoisseur of fine cuisine, Mme de Villeparisis was unimpressed by the fare offered by the hotel, where we were served meals which my grandmother would describe, with one of her quotations from Mme de Sévigné, as 'so sumptuous that you starve').[19] Every day from then on, the Marquise took to spending a moment with us in the dining-room, sitting at our table until her own meal was served, insisting that we not stand at her approach, that we should not put ourselves out in any way on her account. Sometimes, after we had finished eating, we sat on with her, chatting, at the squalid moment when knives and crumpled napkins lie about on the tablecloth. I sat there trying to look far beyond this scene, casting my eyes seaward in an attempt to preserve my attachment to Balbec and the idea that I was now on the farthest extremity of the land, scanning the waves for Baudelaire's words and paying no attention to the table, unless it was one of those days when we were served a giant fish, a sea-monster which unlike the knives and forks came to us straight from the primitive ages when wildlife first began to teem in the Ocean, in the days of the Cimmerians,[20] where its body with its countless vertebrae, its pink and blue nerves, though put together by Nature, had been built to an architectural design, like a polychromatic cathedral of the deep.

Just as a barber, seeing that an officer to whose hair he gives especial attention has recognized another customer who has just come in and stands chatting with him, cannot help smiling as he goes to fetch the soap-bowl, because he is pleased to realize they belong to the same circles, and pleased too that his establishment is not a mere barber's shop but a place where the most down-to-earth needs are compatible with the most refined pleasures of sociability, so Aimé, seeing that Mme de Villeparisis was treating us like old friends, went to fetch our *rince-bouches* with the tactfully knowing smile, full of subdued pride, of the hostess who knows when her guests can do without her. His expression, happy and touched, was that of a father doting on the joy of a young couple whose futures have been plighted at his dinner-table. To bring this look of happiness to Aimé's face, one needed only to speak the name of a titled person; and in this he was the opposite of Françoise, in whose hearing one could not mention 'Count This' or 'Viscount That' without her expression turning dark and her voice sounding curt and sour, which actually meant she cherished the nobility not less than Aimé but more. Also, Françoise had the quality which, in other people, she always found so unforgivable: she was proud. She was not of Aimé's breed, amiable and full of good cheer. If you tell them about some intriguing circumstance which is new to them, which they have never read about in the newspaper, say, the pleasure they feel and show is wholehearted. But Françoise preferred never to appear surprised. If one said in her presence that the Archduke Rudolf,[21] of whom she had never even heard, was not really dead, as was universally assumed to be the case, but still alive, she would have replied, 'True,' as though she had known about it for ages. Moreover, if Françoise was able to resist an impulse to anger on hearing the name of a noble spoken even by us (whom she humbly called her 'masters', to whom she was, in most things, entirely subservient) it was very likely because the lineage from which she sprang had enjoyed a comfortable independent position in her village, rivalled for good esteem only by the sort of noble family in whose household the likes of Aimé would have been employed since childhood as a servant, or who might even have taken him in as an act of charity. So in the eyes of Françoise, Mme de Villeparisis might well have been expected to apologize for being of noble birth. However, at least in France, being forgiven their nobility is not only the talent of lords and ladies, it is their sole occupation. Françoise, after the manner of servants, who are constantly accumulating fragmentary observations about the relations between their masters and other people, from which they draw sometimes faulty deductions – as humans do on the lives of animals –, was for ever jumping to the conclusion that we had been 'slighted', a notion inspired as much by her exaggerated love for us as by her delight in being unpleasant to us. But once she had unmistakably registered Mme de Villeparisis's countless little acts of considerateness towards us, and even towards herself, Françoise forgave her for being a marquise; and since she had never ceased being grateful to her for being one, of all the people we knew, Mme de Villeparisis was her favourite. The fact was that, of all these people, none took such constant trouble to be pleasant. If my grandmother merely remarked on a book that Mme de Villeparisis was reading, or exclaimed at a gift of fine fruit sent to her by a friend, an hour later a footman came upstairs with the book or the fruit. Then, the next time we saw her, she would receive our thanks as though trying to excuse her kind gift on the grounds of some special usefulness it might have, saying only, 'It's no masterpiece, but with the newspapers arriving here so late, one must have something to read,' or 'At the seaside it's always best to have fruit one can be sure of.'

'You know, I have the impression that you never eat oysters, Mme de Villeparisis said to us one day, increasing the distaste I felt at that time, as I was more disgusted by the thought of the living flesh of oysters than I was by the sticky remains of jellyfish littering the beach at Balbec. You really should – they're magnificent on this stretch of the coast! And I must tell my maid to fetch your letters when she goes down for mine. You mean to tell me your daughter writes to you *every* day! What on earth can you find to say to each other?' To this my grandmother said nothing, perhaps because she could not bring herself to speak of it to someone incapable of sympathizing with Mme de Sévigné, whose words she would quote to my mother: 'Each time I receive your letter, I wish straightway I could receive another one. They are the breath of life to me. Few people are worthy of understanding what I feel.'[22] I was afraid she might even apply to Mme de Villeparisis the conclusion: 'Of these happy few I seek the company, avoiding all others.' My grandmother chose instead to praise the fruit sent up to us by Mme de Villeparisis the day before. It was so good that even the manager, mastering the discomfiture afforded by our disdain of his fruit-dishes, had said to me, 'I'm just like you – I regale in fruit more than any other desert.' My grandmother told her friend that she had savoured it even more because of the generally inferior quality of the fruit served in the hotel: 'So I can't honestly say, like Mme de Sévigné, that if we were perverse enough to want bad fruit, we should have to send to Paris. – Yes, of course, you're reading Mme de Sévigné. I've seen you carrying her *Letters* about with you ever since you've been here (she was forgetting that she had never set eyes on my grandmother until their meeting in the doorway). So you don't think all that concern for the daughter is just a bit overdone? If you ask me, she talks about it too much for it to be quite sincere. There's a lack of naturalness in her.' My grandmother, feeling that it was futile to disagree, and so as not to have to speak of things she loved to someone whose mind was closed to them, concealed her copy of Mme de Beausergent's *Mémoires* by laying her handbag on top of the book.

If Mme de Villeparisis happened to meet Françoise when the latter was going down (at 'twelve o'clock time' in Françoise's parlance), wearing her neat cap and amid universal esteem, to lunch in the guests' servants' quarters, she would pause with her on the stairs and ask after us. When Françoise told us about it later, she would say, with an attempt to imitate Mme de Villeparisis's voice, 'And she said to me: "And be sure to not forget to tell them I was asking after them," she said.' Françoise was clearly convinced that she was faithfully reproducing the very words uttered by Mme de Villeparisis, though she distorted them no less than Plato distorted those of Socrates, or St John those of Christ. She was naturally very impressed by the interest which Mme de Villeparisis took in her. Not that she believed my grandmother, who she knew was lying out of class solidarity (these rich, always sticking together!), when she said Mme de Villeparisis had once been a great beauty. It was true there were very few vestiges left of this beauty; and to reconstruct from them the glory that was gone, Françoise would have had to be more of an artist than she was. To see how pretty an old woman once was, it is not enough just to look at each feature; they must be translated.

'I must remember to ask her one day whether I'm wrong in thinking she's got some family connection with the Guermantes,' my grandmother said, to my indignation. What possible common origin could there be in two names which had entered my experience in such dissimilar ways, one of them via the low, undignified door of the everyday, the other through the golden portals of the imagination?

For some days past, a tall and beautiful woman with red hair and a rather prominent nose had been seen about in a very grand carriage: the Princess of Luxembourg, who had come down from town to spend a few weeks in the vicinity. Her barouche had drawn up outside the hotel, a footman had come in to talk to the manager, had gone back to the carriage and had then carried in a magnificent basket of fruit which, like the Bay of Balbec itself, combined a range of seasons, as well as a card bearing the legend *The Princess of Luxembourg* and a few words added in pencil. Which princely traveller, living incognito in our hotel, was being sent such glaucous plums, their glowing roundness swelling to match the sea at that very moment, such translucent grapes hanging like a bright autumn day on their dried-up twig, pears of such celestial ultramarine? It was not possible that the person whom the Princess had been intending to visit was the old friend of my grandmother. And yet the following evening, Mme de Villeparisis sent us the bunch of cool golden grapes, with some plums and pears which we also recognized, although the plums, like the sea about dinner-time, had started to shade towards mauve, and the bluish surface of the pears now reflected patches of pink cloud. A few days later, we met Mme de Villeparisis at the end of the symphony concert given each morning down at the beach. I was convinced that the music I heard there (the prelude to *Lohengrin*, the overture to *Tannhaüser*, etc.) expressed the most exalted truths; and in my efforts to comprehend them I strove upwards, I yearned towards them, I drew the best out of my deepest self to offer up to them.

We were coming up from the concert and turning our steps towards the hotel, pausing for a moment on the esplanade with Mme de Villeparisis, who told us she had ordered 'rarebits' and creamed eggs for our lunch, when I caught sight of the Princess of Luxembourg, still quite a way off, but coming in our direction. As she walked, she was almost leaning on a sunshade, in a way that gave to her tall and wonderful body a slight inclination, a long undulation, so much a part of women who were beautiful during the Second Empire, and whose drooping shoulders and raised back, whose gaunt hips and slow, fluid stride swayed a silky ripple through their whole person, as though an invisible, inflexible rod slanted through their bodies and they were trying at each step to drape themselves about it. When she went out for her morning stroll along the esplanade, it was always about the time when everyone else who had been down for a swim was coming back up for lunch; and her own lunch-time being half-past one, she never got back to her villa until long after the bathers had abandoned the esplanade, which stretched empty before her in the full glare of the sun. Mme de Villeparisis introduced my grandmother to her; but when it was my turn to be introduced, unable to remember my surname, she had to ask me what it was. She may actually never have known, or if she had, she had forgotten years before the name of the man to whom my grandmother had married her daughter. On hearing it now, Mme de Villeparisis seemed much struck by it. The Princess of Luxembourg, having shaken hands, stood chatting with the Marquise, glancing tenderly now and then at my grandmother and me with an expression full of the incipient kiss that rises to lips which smile at a baby with his nanny. Despite her wish not to appear to dwell in spheres far above ours, she must have misjudged the distance between us; and her eyes, not properly adjusted, overflowed with such loving sweetness that I would not have been surprised if she had reached out a hand and patted us, as though we were a brace of docile animals poking our heads through the railings at the Zoo in the Bois de Boulogne. This idea of being animals in the Zoo was instantly underlined for me. It was the hour when hawkers of sweets, cakes and other delicacies haunt the esplanade, barking their wares in strident tones. At a loss to show her good-will towards us in a fitting manner, the Princess stopped the next one who came along. All he had left was a little loaf of rye-bread, the sort you feed to the ducks. The Princess took it, saying to me, 'This is for your grandmother.' But she then handed it to me, with a smile full of feeling: 'You be the one to give it to her,' meaning no doubt that my enjoyment would be greater if nobody came between me and the animals. Other hawkers having gathered round us, she filled my pockets with all sorts of things, little surprise packets tied with string, rolled wafers, babas, barley sugars: 'These are for you to eat. But you must let your grandmother have some too.' The hawkers were paid, at the Princess's behest, by the little black boy in a red satin suit who always walked behind her, to the amazement of the whole sea-front. Taking leave of Mme de Villeparisis, she proffered us a hand once again, trying to show that she treated her friends and the friends of her friends exactly alike, and that she had not lost the common touch. This time, however, her expression was aimed at not quite so lowly a level in the hierarchy of creatures; and the equality she shared with us was notified to my grandmother in the doting motherly smile with which one takes leave of a small boy when pretending he is a grown-up. My grandmother, by a vast stride of evolution, had stopped being a duck or an antelope and had turned into what Mme Swann would have termed, in her best English, a '*baby*'. Having taken her leave of us, the Princess of Luxembourg, with the slow undulations of her magnificent figure, took up again her interrupted stroll along the sun-drenched esplanade, her whole person winding itself round the rolled-up blue and white sunshade she held in her hand, as a snake coils about a wand. She was my very first Highness, not counting Princesse Mathilde, who in any case had nothing high and mighty about her. My second one, as will be seen, was to astonish me just as much by her graciousness. I was to become acquainted with one mode of the civility of the great the very next day, when Mme de Villeparisis gave us this report: 'She thought you were both just charming. She's a woman of great discernment, and her heart's in the right place. She's quite unlike your ordinary Highness or Royal – she's a woman of genuine qualities.' To which she added, with an expression of conviction, very pleased at being able to say so: 'I expect she would be delighted to meet you again.'

I was even more struck by something else Mme de Villeparisis said that very forenoon, shortly after the Princess of Luxembourg had left us, and which had nothing to do with civility.

'Aren't you the son of the department head at the Ministry? Well, I must say I hear your father is a charming man. And he's off on a nice trip at present.'

A few days before, a letter from my mother had told us that my father and his travelling companion M. de Norpois had lost all their luggage.

'It has turned up, or rather it was never lost in the first place. You'll never guess what happened,' Mme de Villeparisis said, seeming inexplicably better informed than either of us about the details of my father's journey. 'I think your father will return home early, next week, since he will probably decide not to go on to Algeciras. However, he does want to have one day longer in Toledo, being a great admirer of one of Titian's students – the name escapes me, but if you want to see his best things, you've got to go there.'

I was left wondering by what strange chance Mme de Villeparisis was able, given the dark and distant glass through which she looked at the rudimentary, insignificant and uncertain doings of the host of people known to her, to focus on my father through a tiny area of lens of such prodigious magnification that she could gaze in close-up and with so much detail at what was charming about him, the unforeseen circumstances obliging him to change his plans, his difficulties with the Spanish Customs, his liking for El Greco, and, with the scale of her vision thus increased, see a single man so huge among so many tiny ones, like Gustave Moreau's Jupiter painted with his superhuman stature because he is with a mere female mortal.[23]

My grandmother took leave of Mme de Villeparisis outside the hotel, so that we could enjoy a little more of the sea-air before lunch-time, of which we would be informed by beckonings through the glass screens. We heard a chorus of shouts: the young mistress of the King of the South Seas, having just been down for a bathe, was coming back up for lunch.

'Is that not an outrage!' exclaimed the *bâtonnier* from Cherbourg, who happened to be passing. 'It's enough to make a man want to shake the dust of France off his feet for good!'

The wife of the notary from Le Mans was gazing spellbound at the alleged queen.

'I wish I could tell you how it irritates me when Mme Blandais stares at those people like that, the *bâtonnier* said to the First President. I feel like giving her a good slap across the face. It's people like her that make people take an interest in riff-raff like that. And of course riff-raff love it when people take an interest in them. Tell her husband, would you, to tell her it's ridiculous. I for one will certainly not be going out with them again if they look as though they're fascinated by a couple in fancy dress!'

The advent of the Princess of Luxembourg, on the day when her barouche had stood outside the hotel while the fruit was being delivered, had not been overlooked by the wives of the notary, the *bâtonnier* and the First President, who for some time had been much exercised on the question of whether that old Mme de Villeparisis, whom everyone treated with such consideration, was a genuine marquise, rather than just an adventuress quite undeserving, as the ladies would have loved to learn, of all the bowing and scraping. Each time Mme de Villeparisis walked through the vestibule, the wife of the First President, always on the look-out for loose women, set aside her embroidery and inspected her in a way that moved her two friends to irresistible laughter.

'I make no apology, she said with pride, for believing the worst of people! I'm never convinced anyone's an honest woman until I've set eyes on their birth certificate and their marriage lines. So I've got a few little inquiries to make – you mark my words.'

Every day, the ladies gathered in their mirthful group.

'What have you learned?'

On the evening of the Princess of Luxembourg's arrival, the wife of the First President put a finger to her lips.

'I've got something for you.

– Isn't our Mme Poncin wonderful! I've never seen anyone as – What have you got?

– What have I got? Just a female with dyed hair, if you don't mind, made-up to the eyeballs, and with a carriage that smacked of 'immoral earnings' a mile away, the kind that sort of woman always has, and who turned up a while ago asking to see our alleged marquise!

– Goodness me! Oh dear, oh dear! Would you believe it! It must be that woman we saw, *bâtonnier*, don't you remember? We certainly thought she looked pretty fishy, but we didn't know she was looking for the Marquise. A woman with a Negro, wasn't it?

– Precisely.

– Well, is that so? And do you happen to know her name?

– Oh, yes. I picked up her card, pretending to think it was someone else's. She purports to be called the 'Princess of Luxembourg'! Didn't I tell you I could smell a rat? Isn't it charming to have to rub shoulders with the likes of the Baronne d'Ange!'[24] The *bâtonnier* quoted Mathurin Régnier and *Macette*[25] in the ear of the First President.

It should not be thought that this was a misunderstanding of short duration, like those which arise in the second act of a musical comedy and are resolved in the final scene. Whenever the Princess of Luxembourg, who was a niece of the King of England and the Emperor of Austria, came to fetch Mme de Villeparisis so that they could take carriage-exercise together, they could not help looking like a pair of retired demi-reps, of the sort whom it is difficult to avoid in fashionable resorts. Three-quarters of the gentlemen who belong to the Faubourg Saint-Germain are looked down on by many middle-class people as impecunious debauchees and wastrels (which of course some of them may well be) whom no honest man could mix with. In this, the middle class is too moral, as the defects of these gentlemen would never prevent them from being welcomed with open arms in places where it will never be. The gentlemen in turn are so convinced that the middle class is aware of this that they affect a straightforward attitude towards their own doings, even going so far as to disapprove of those of their associates who are most hard-up; and this only reinforces the misunderstanding. If by some chance a gentleman from the Faubourg, whose great wealth happens to qualify him to be a director of the leading banking houses, has to mix with members of the lower middle classes, the latter, seeing for once a noble they think worthy of being one of themselves, are convinced that he would have nothing to do with a gambling bankrupt of a marquis, who they think, especially because he is such a likeable man, must be quite out of favour with his class. They are taken aback when the duke who is the managing director of the enormous enterprise marries his son to the daughter of the gambling marquis, who happens to bear a name which is that of the oldest family in France, just as a sovereign will prefer to be father-in-law to the daughter of an erstwhile king rather than to the daughter of a present president of the Republic. This means that the view which the two worlds have of each other is as imaginary as the view which one seaside town has of another when they stand at opposite ends of the Bay of Balbec: from Rivebelle, it is just possible to see a little of Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse; but that misleads Rivebelle into thinking its delights are visible from Marcouville, when they are more or less invisible.

The Balbec doctor, summoned to my bedside because of a bout of fever, having ruled that, while the very hot weather lasted, I ought not to sit about on the shore in the sun, wrote out some prescriptions, which my grandmother received from his hand with an appearance of respect in which I recognized at once her firm resolve to have none of them made up for me. She did, however, heed his advice about leading a healthier life and accepted Mme de Villeparisis's offer to take us out and about in her carriage. Before lunch-time, I kept toing and froing between my room and my grandmother's. Unlike mine, hers did not directly overlook the sea, although it had three different aspects: on a short stretch of the esplanade, a courtyard and the countryside. Its furnishings were also very different, including armchairs embroidered in filigree and embossed with pink flowers, which seemed to be the source of the fresh and pleasant smell one encountered on entering. At that late morning moment, when rays of sunlight came in from more than one aspect and seemingly from other times of day, breaking the angles of the walls, setting side by side on the chest of drawers a reflection from the beach and a wayside altar of colours as variegated as flowers along a lane, alighting brightly on the wainscot with the warm tremble of folded wings ready to fly away, warming like bath-water a country mat by the little courtyard window, which the sunshine festooned like a vine, adding to the charm and the decorative complexity of the furnishings by seeming to peel away the flowered silk of the armchairs and unpick their braidings, that room where I loitered for a moment before dressing for our outing was a prism in which the colours of the light from outside were dispersed, a hive in which all the heady nectars of the day awaiting me were still separate and ungathered but already visible, a garden of hopes shimmering with shafts of silver and rose petals. My very first act had been to open my curtains, in my impatience to see which sea was playing by the shore each morning like a Nereid. Whichever one it was, it was never there for more than a day. The following day, it would be replaced by another one, which at times resembled it; but I never saw the same one twice.

Some of them were full of such rare beauty that my delight in seeing them was increased by surprise. When I opened my window, why did my marvelling eyes have the mysterious privilege, on one morning rather than on another, of seeing the nymph Glauconome,[26] whose lazy, soft-breathing loveliness had all the glow of a cloudy emerald, through which I could see the swell of the elements which gave her body and colour? She flirted with the sunshine, her melting smile veiled by an invisible mist which was only a vacant space about her translucent surface, making it more succinct and striking, like the goddess shaped by a sculptor on a block, the rest of which he leaves rough-hewn. With her unique colour, she whetted the appetite for an outing; and all day long, as we rode in Mme de Villeparisis's carriage along rough, land-bound roads, we would look at the cool, smooth-swelling, unattainable sea.

Mme de Villeparisis had her horses harnessed at an early hour, so that we could have time to go as far as Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, the rocks at Quetteholme or some other destination, which at a pace as sedate as ours lay rather far away and would require the whole day to go there and back. Looking forward to the lengthy excursion, I walked up and down, humming a tune recently heard as I waited for Mme de Villeparisis to come down. If it was a Sunday morning, there would be other carriages besides hers standing outside the hotel: several hired cabs would have come for the people who had been invited by Mme de Cambremer to her château at Féterne, and also for those who, rather than sit about moping like children deprived of a treat, announced that a Sunday in Balbec was unbearable, then set off as soon as breakfast was over to take refuge in a nearby resort or visit one of the local beauty spots. If anyone asked Mme Blandais whether she had been to the Cambremers', she would bark, 'Of course not! We went to the waterfalls at Le Bec,' as though that was the sole reason why she had not spent the day at Féterne. The *bâtonnier* would say in a sympathetic voice:

'I must say I do envy you. I wish we could have changed places. They're so much more interesting.'

Like a rare species of shrub in a tub, near the carriages, in front of the porch where I was waiting, stood a young page who amazed the eye as much by the remarkable harmonies of his coloured hair as by his plant-like skin. Inside the hotel, in the vestibule, which could be entered by people not staying at the hotel, and which corresponded to the narthex or church of the catechumens in Romanesque church buildings, the outside page's fellows, though just as inactive as he was, were at least in motion. Very likely they helped with the cleaning in the mornings. But in the afternoons, they stood about like members of the chorus who, even when serving no musical purpose, remain on stage to fill out crowd scenes. The managing director, he whom I found so awesome, was considering increasing their numbers the following summer, for he was a 'man of vision'. This was a decision which upset the manager of the hotel, who was convinced that all these lads were just 'obstruberant', by which he meant they got in everybody's way and served no useful purpose. However, they did at least fill up that slack time, punctuated only by the comings and goings of guests, between lunch and dinner, as Mme de Maintenon's charges used to walk on, in the guise of young Israelites, at each exit of Esther or Joad.[27] But the outside page with his remarkable hues and his tall willowy figure, near whom I stood waiting for the Marquise to appear, was a model of immobility, with something weepy in his posture as well, as his brothers had left this hotel behind them on their rise to higher destinies, and he felt lonely planted in this foreign field. Mme de Villeparisis came down eventually. To busy himself about her carriage, to hand her into it might have seemed to be part of the outside page's duties. But he was well aware that those who travel accompanied by servants not only expect them to serve but also hand out few tips to employees of hotels; and that the nobles of the erstwhile Faubourg Saint-Germain behave in the same way. Mme de Villeparisis belonged to both of these groups. The arborescent page, deciding that he could expect nothing from the Marquise, and leaving it to the head waiter and her own maid-servant to settle her in with all her things, went on sadly envying his roaming brothers' freer fates and maintaining his vegetable stillness.

We would set off. Some time after having driven past the railway-station, we would come to a rural road which was soon to become as familiar to me as any in Combray, from the sharp turn off the main road, between pleasant little orchards, as far as the bend where we branched off, with ploughed fields on either side. Dotted here and there in the fields could be seen single apple trees, minus their blossom, of course, and showing only bunches of pistils; but this was enough to delight me, as I recognized the broad spread of those inimitable leaves which, like a carpet in church once a wedding ceremony is over, had been visited not long since by a white satin train of blushing blossom.

Back in Paris, in the May of the following year, how often I was to buy a sprig of apple from a flower-shop, then spend the night hours in the presence of its blossom, which was steeped in the same creamy essence as the frothy dust on the unopened leaf-buds, and which looked as though the florist himself, as a special favour to me, in a moment of creativity and with an ingenious matching touch, had set off the white of the full-blown corollas by flanking each of them with extra little buds of pink. I would sit and gaze at them, posing them under my lamp, spending so long with them that I was often still there when dawn tinged them with the same red with which it must have been tingeing Balbec, striving to see them with the eyes of imagination as they might have been along that road, multiplying them, setting them within the prepared frame and on the waiting canvas of those little orchards and fields, which were familiar to me as a mere drawing, but which I longed to see again, which one day I was actually to see again, when springtime, with the rapture of genius, had coloured in this bare sketch.

Before getting into the carriage, I had composed the seascape which I was looking forward to seeing, full of Baudelaire's 'sunbeams gleaming on the sea' which, down in Balbec itself, I only ever saw in patches among a vulgar clutter of bathers, their bathing-machines and yachts, from which my fancy averted its disgruntled eye. Each time Mme de Villeparisis's carriage came to the brow of a hill, I caught sight of the sea through the branches of trees; and the distance separating me from it cancelled out the contemporary features which had as it were removed it from the world of nature and history, so that as I gazed down on the waves I could try to tell myself they were the ones which Leconte de Lisle had described in his version of the *Oresteia*, when he shows the shaggy warriors of heroic Hellas coming down 'like a flight of raptors in the dawn' and 'flailing the sounding flood with their hundred thousand oars'.[28] But now I was too far away from it; it no longer seemed to be a living thing, but more like a still life; and I could sense no power behind its spread of colours, which looked painted between the leaves and as insubstantial as the sky, differing from it only in that it was a deeper blue.

Mme de Villeparisis, who had noted my liking for churches, told me we would go one day to see this one, another day to see that one, and stressed especially the church at Carqueville. Saying it was 'cosily clad in its old ivy', she gestured in a way which seemed to enfold the absent façade in a delicate drapery of invisible foliage. This little descriptive hand movement would often accompany some striking thing she said, as she defined the charm and character of a building; and though she always eschewed technical terms, she could not conceal the fact that she was an expert on the things she spoke of. It was as though she felt she must apologize for this expertise, putting it down to the fact that one of the châteaux belonging to her father, where she had spent her childhood, stood in a part of the country where there were churches of the same style as those in the vicinity of Balbec, and that it would thus have been inexcusable for her not to have taken an interest in architecture, if only because the château itself was the finest example of the architecture of the Renaissance. But since it was also a veritable museum, where Chopin and Liszt had played, and Lamartine had recited poetry, where every celebrated artist for a century had left a thought, a tune or a sketch in the visitors' book, Mme de Villeparisis preferred, whether because of good breeding, graciousness, genuine modesty or even an unphilosophical cast of mind, to explain her familiarity with all the arts by that purely material circumstance, managing to let it appear that she looked on painting, music, literature and philosophy as merely the unavoidable accomplishments of any young girl given an aristocratic upbringing and happening to live in a building famous enough to figure on the list of national monuments. She gave the impression of believing that the only paintings worth anything are the ones you inherit. It was a pleasure to her one day when my grandmother admired a necklace she was wearing, which showed above the neckline of her dress. It was to be seen in a portrait of one of her forebears, by Titian, which had been in the family ever since. This was how the painting was known to be genuine. She had no interest in hearing about pictures bought up by some immensely wealthy man, being quite convinced they would be forgeries and that it would not be worth the trouble to look at them. We were aware that she did water-colours of flowers; and my grandmother, who had heard praise of them, mentioned them to her. Mme de Villeparisis's modesty made her change the subject, but with no greater show of surprise, or even of pleasure, than if she had been an established artist whose head is not to be turned by compliments. All she said was that it was a pleasant hobby, since, though painted flowers might not be as good as the real thing, at least one had to live in the company of natural blooms in order to paint them; and when one was obliged to examine them closely for the purpose of imitation, there was an inexhaustible delight in their beauty. However, in Balbec, Mme de Villeparisis intended to do none of this, as she needed to rest her eyes.

My grandmother and I were astonished to discover how left-of-centre her views were, much more so than those of most middle-class people. She in her turn was astonished that anyone could be shocked by the expulsions of the Jesuits, saying that there was nothing new in it, that it had been done in the time of the monarchy, and even in Spain. She was in favour of the Republic; and her only objection against its anti-clericalism she expressed as follows: 'I should be as much against being prevented from going to Mass if I wanted to go as I should be against being made to go to Mass if I *didn't* want to go!' She even said things like, 'The nobility nowadays, I ask you, what are they worth?' and 'If you ask me, a man who doesn't work is beyond the pale!' Of course, her reason for speaking like this may only have been that she sensed how strikingly paradoxical and provocative it would sound, coming from her.

The overt and frequent advocacy of such advanced opinions – they fell short of socialism, however, which was Mme de Villeparisis's pet aversion – by the very sort of person whose fine mind one esteems to the point of being reluctant, in one's sedulously diffident impartiality, to condemn the ideas of conservatives, brought my grandmother and myself close to believing that in our pleasant companion were to be found the measure and model of truth in all things. When she was pronouncing upon her Titians, the colonnade at her château or Louis-Philippe's calibre as a conversationalist, we took her word for it. But – like those scholars who can astound listeners when they hold forth on Egyptian painting or Etruscan inscriptions, while having nothing but shallow platitudes to deliver on literary works from nearer our own time, making us wonder whether we have not been mistaken in thinking their academic speciality interesting, since we have noticed in it none of the mediocrity of mind which they must have brought to it, just as they brought it to their vapid studies of Baudelaire – Mme de Villeparisis,

when I asked her about Chateaubriand, Balzac or Victor Hugo, all of whom had been guests in her parents' house and whom she herself had even glimpsed, found my admiration of them laughable, told me anecdotes about them which were just as mordant as any she had recounted about great nobles or statesmen, and frowned on them as writers, because they had been immoderate, full of themselves, deficient in that sobriety of manner which achieves its art in a single true stroke, without ever overdoing anything, which shuns especially the tomfooleries of grandiloquence, because they had lacked the deftness of touch and certain qualities of measured judgment and simplicity in which she had been taught to see the mark of genuine worth; and it was clear she had no hesitation in seeing them as inferior to men who, by virtue of those very qualities, might well have outshone the Balzacs, Hugos and Vignys, in a salon, an Academy or a cabinet, men like Molé, Fontanes, Vitrolles, Bersot, Pasquier, Lebrun, Salvandy, Daru.[29]

'I mean, take the novels of Stendhal, whom you seem to think so highly of. He would have been excessively surprised to be told of any such thing. My father, who used to see him at the house of M. Mérimée – now, *there* was a man of talent, I can assure you! – my father often told me that Beyle (his real name) was a man of the most frightful vulgarity. But he *was* a witty fellow to have at a dinner, and he never went in for bragging about his books. You've presumably read for yourself the piece with which he shrugged off the inordinate praise heaped on him by M. de Balzac. So at least in that respect he knew how to behave.' She possessed pieces in the handwriting of every one of these great men; and she appeared to believe, on the strength of the personal acquaintance her family had enjoyed with them, that her judgment of their value was more accurate than that of people who, like myself, were too young to have known them.

'You can take it from me. Because the fact is they were in and out of my father's house. As M. Sainte-Beuve used to say, and he was a fine judge of wit, one should take the word of people who knew them at first hand and could size them up properly.'[30]

At times, as we climbed a rise with ploughed land on either side, hesitant cornflowers, reminiscent of those in Combray, came straggling after the carriage, making the fields more real, adding a touch of genuineness, like the precious little flower used by certain old masters as a signature on their canvases. The horses soon outdistanced them; but a few paces further on, there would be another one waiting for us, twinkling its blue star in the grass. Some even dared to stand right beside the roadway; and these tame flowers clustered together with my remote memories into a nebula.

As we drove down the other side of the rise, we would come upon some other lovely creature who was walking up the hill, climbing it on her bicycle, sitting on a cart or in a carriage, one of those flowers of the bright and beautiful day, but unlike the wild flowers sprinkled about the fields in that each of them showed some feature which none of the others had, and which would create a desire for her that it would be for ever impossible to satisfy with any of them except herself, whether she was a farm-girl leading a cow or sprawled on a waggon, a shop-girl out for a walk, or some smart young lady perched opposite her parents in their barouche. Bloch had, of course, opened a whole new era for me and had given a new point to life by informing me that the solitary dreams I had once dramatized during my walks along the Méséglise way, starring a peasant girl who would fall into my arms, were not just idle fancies unrelated to the world outside me, but that every single one of these girls, from the village girl to the smart young lady, was ready and willing to oblige me. Though I was now in ill-health and did not go out alone, and though I might never aspire to making love with them, it still gladdened me to know this, as though I was a child who, having been born in prison or hospital, and having come to believe that the human organism can digest nothing but dry bread and medicines, suddenly learns that peaches, apricots and grapes are not just pretty things that grow in the countryside, but mouthwatering delicacies on which one may feed. Even though the gaoler or the nurse may prevent him from picking such fine fruit, the world seems a better place, and life itself more worth living. Any desire we may feel seems to us a finer thing, and we have an impression of it as a more reliable thing, when we know that external reality is in conformity with it, even if its fulfilment remains out of our personal reach. So, on condition that we avert our mind's eye for a moment from the small accidental impediment standing between such a desire and ourselves, the thought of living gives us greater joy now that we can imagine the enjoyment of it. As soon as I knew that each beautiful girl I happened to see would welcome my kiss on her cheek, I became curious about her soul; and the whole universe had begun to seem more interesting.

Mme de Villeparisis's carriage went too quickly for me to do more than glimpse the girl coming up towards us; and yet, since beauty in a human being is different from the beauty of a thing, since we feel it belongs to a unique person with an awareness of the world and a will, no sooner had the girl's individuality, a vague hint of soul, a will unknown to me, taken shape in a microscopic image, minute but complete, caught from her passing glance, than I could feel quickening within myself, like a mysterious replica of pollens ready for the pistils, the equally vague and minute embryo of the desire not to let this girl go on her way without her consciousness registering my presence, without my intervening between her and her desire for somebody else, without my being able to intrude upon her idle mood and take possession of her heart. The carriage passed the beautiful girl, leaving her behind us; and since her eyes, which had barely glimpsed me, had gathered nothing of the person in me, she had forgotten me already. Had I thought her so lovely only because I had caught a mere glimpse of her? Perhaps. For one thing, the impossibility of stopping and accosting a woman, the likelihood of not being able to find her again some other day, gives her the same sudden charm as is acquired by a place when illness or poverty prevents one from visiting it, or by the succession of drab days of one's unlived future when it is forfeit to death in battle. Were it not for habit, life should seem delightful to beings constantly under threat of dying, in other words to all humankind. And for another thing, though the imagination is easily teased by the desire for something we cannot possess, its wings are never clipped as they would be by a closer glimpse of reality, in these encounters where the charm of the passing beauty is generally in direct relation to their brevity. Nightfall and a coach travelling fast, in the country or in town, are all that any female torso requires, mutilated like an ancient marble by our speeding departure and the concealing dusk, standing at a road-junction and in every lighted shop, shooting the arrows of Beauty at our heart, and making us wonder at times whether Beauty in this world is ever anything other than the makeweight which our imagination, overwrought by regret, adds to a fragmentary and fleeting passer-by.

If I had been able to get out and speak to one of these girls we passed, I might well have been disillusioned by some flaw in her complexion which I had been unaware of from the carriage. (In that case, it would suddenly have felt impossible for me to make any effort to become part of her life. For beauty is a succession of hypotheses, and ugliness restricts these by blocking the way which seemed to be already leading us into the heart of the unknown.) A single word from her, a smile, might have given me an unsuspected key or clue, enabling me to read the expression on her face or the way she walked, and I might then have recognized these as nondescript. That would have been possible, for I have never met in real life any girls as desirable as the ones I saw when in the company of some important personage who baffled all my ingenious attempts to get rid of him. One evening in Paris, some years after this first visit to Balbec, I was on an errand with a friend of my father's, when from the carriage I caught sight of a woman walking away into the dark: the thought struck me that it was absurd to forfeit, for a reason of mere propriety, a share of happiness in this life, it being no doubt the only one we are to have, and so I jumped out without so much as a by-your-leave, ran after the intriguing creature, lost her at a crossing of two streets, saw her again in another street and eventually ran her to ground under a lamp-post, where I found I was out of breath and face to face with the ageing Mme Verdurin, whom I usually avoided like the plague and who now cried in delight and surprise, 'Oh, how nice of you to chase after me just to say good evening!'

That year in Balbec, when we passed these girls on the road, I told my grandmother and Mme de Villeparisis that I had a bad headache, but that I would feel much better if I could get out of the carriage and walk home unaccompanied. They never agreed to my suggestion. So the lovely girl, like a famous building (though much more difficult to see again than any building, being nameless and of no fixed location), was added to the collection of all those I had been promising myself to have a closer look at. There was one, however, whom I did catch sight of a second time, in circumstances which made me think it might be possible to get to know her properly. She was a milk-maid; and she came down one day from her farm to deliver an extra supply of cream to the hotel. The way she looked at me made me think she had recognized me too, though her interest may only have been caused by her surprise at the way I was looking at her. The following day, when Françoise came to open my bedroom curtains about midday, I having spent the whole morning resting, she brought me a letter which had been left for me by hand. Knowing no one in Balbec, I was sure it must be from the milk-maid! But, sad to say, it was only from Bergotte: he had been passing through and had

called at the hotel to see me; but when they told him I was still asleep, he had left a charming note, which the 'lift' had slipped into an envelope and addressed in a hand which I had taken for the milk-maid's. I was dreadfully disappointed; and the idea that it was much more difficult, as well as more flattering, to have a letter from Bergotte than from a milk-maid was no consolation. And I was to see no more of the girl than of the others only glimpsed from Mme de Villeparisis's carriage. These glimpses, and the loss of every girl glimpsed, aggravated the state of agitation in which I spent my days; and I wished for the wisdom of the philosophers who counsel the curbing of desires (assuming they mean one's desire for another person, as that is the only mode of desire which can lead to anxiety, focussing as it does on a world beyond our ken but within our awareness – to assume they mean desire for wealth would be too absurd). At the same time I was inclined to find something lacking in this wisdom, sensing well enough that these glimpsed encounters made for greater beauty in a world which sows such flowers, rare though common, along every country roadside, a new spice being added to life by the untried treasures of each day, by every outing with its unkept promises, my enjoyment of which had hitherto been prevented only by contingent circumstances which might not always be present.

Of course, it may be that, in looking forward to a freer day when I might meet similar girls along different roads, I had already begun to adulterate the exclusive desire to share one's life with an individual woman whom one has seen as pretty; and the mere act of entertaining the possibility of artificially fostering it was an implicit acknowledgement that it was an illusion.

On the day Mme de Villeparisis took us to Carqueville, to see the church she had described as 'clad in old ivy', which stands on a knoll above the village with its river still running under the little bridge from the Middle Ages, my grandmother, so that I could enjoy the pleasure of going on alone to view the building, suggested to her friend that they stay in the village square, which stood out clearly under an old-gold patina making it look like just one part among others of a single object of great antiquity, to sample the pastry-cook's tea and cakes. We agreed that I would come back down to meet them. To make out the shape of a church in the lump of greenery in front of which I stood required an effort that made me re-examine the very notion of a church: as can happen to a schoolboy who, by being made to translate a sentence into another language, divests it of shapes with which he is familiar and comes to grasp its meaning more clearly, the concept of a church, which I hardly ever needed when faced with most of the steeples I looked at, was now indispensable to me; and so as not to overlook the fact that an arch shaped from growing ivy was actually the top of an ogival stained-glass window, and that a projection of leaves was really the contour of a cornice, I had to keep it constantly in mind. When a breeze sprang up, it sent a thrill through the movable porch, eddying and rippling all over it like light, turning it into a tremulous cascade of leaves; and as the façade of vegetation swayed and shivered under the caress, it warped its shimmering pillars.

As I left the church, I noticed a few village girls in their garish Sunday finery, standing about down by the old bridge and bantering with the local lads. One of the taller of the girls, less showily dressed than the others, but apparently superior to them in some way (she paid little attention to what they said to her), with a more solemn and bolder look to her, was half-sitting on the parapet of the bridge, dangling her legs, beside a little jar full of fish which she had presumably just caught. Her face was tanned; her eyes, though gentle, were full of disdain for her surroundings; and the line of her neat little nose was delicate and charming. My eyes rested on her skin and my lips could almost believe they had done likewise. It was not only her body I was after, it was the person living inside it, with whom there can only be one mode of touching, which is to attract her attention, and one mode of penetration, which is to put an idea into her mind.

But the inner self of the beautiful fishergirl seemed to remain closed against me; and I doubted that I had managed to gain entry to her, even after I had seen my own image furtively reflected by the mirror of a look she gave me, which was affected by a refractive index as unfamiliar to me as though I stood within the field of vision of a deer. But just as it would not have been enough for me, in kissing her, to take pleasure from her lips without giving her any in return, so I wished that the idea of me, in entering her, in becoming part of her, might attract not only her attention, but her admiration, her desire, and might force it to keep a memory of me against the day when I might be able to benefit from it. Not far away I could see the little square where I was supposed to rejoin Mme de Villeparisis's carriage. There was not a moment to waste; I could already sense that these girls were on the point of starting to giggle at seeing me stand there. I had a five-franc piece in my pocket, which I took out; and before explaining to the lovely girl what it was I wanted her to do, I held up the coin so that she could see it and in the hope that it would make her listen to me:

'You appear to belong here, I said. Would you please do me a small favour? There's a carriage waiting for me somewhere about here – I'm not quite sure where, actually, outside some cake-shop in a square, I believe – and if you could just find it for me … Now, before you go, just to be sure it's the right one, do make sure you inquire whether it's the carriage of the Marquise de Villeparisis. But you can't really mistake it – it's got two horses.'

That was what I wanted her to know about me, so that she could be impressed. No sooner had I spoken the words 'Marquise' and 'two horses' than I felt a sudden great calm spread through me: knowing that the fishergirl would remember me, I was simultaneously aware that I had lost not only my anxiety at perhaps not being able to see her again, but with it part of my desire to do so. It felt as though I had touched her person with invisible lips and that she had liked it. As happens with physical possession, this forcible insertion of myself into her mind, this disembodied possession of her, had taken away some of her mystery.

We drove down towards Hudimesnil, and suddenly I was filled with a feeling of profound bliss, which I associated with Combray but had seldom felt since those days, rather like the feeling I had once had from things such as the steeples of Martinville. This time, however, nothing came of it. It was just three trees which I had noticed, set back a little from the steeply cambered road we were on, looking as though they stood at the entrance to a covered drive, and making a pattern which I knew I had seen somewhere before. I could not manage to recognize the place they had, as it were, been separated from; but I sensed that it must have been somewhere familiar to me, long ago; and as my mind stumbled about between a former year and the present moment, the countryside round Balbec shifted and faltered, and I had to ask myself whether this whole outing was not just some figment, Balbec merely a place where I might once have been in my imagination, Mme de Villeparisis someone out of a novel, and the three old trees nothing but the solid reality that meets the eye of a reader who glances up from a book, his mind still held by the spell of a fictional setting.

I gazed at the three trees, which I could see quite clearly; but my mind suspected they hid something on which it could have no purchase, as our fingertips at the full stretch of our arm may from time to time barely touch but not quite grasp objects which lie just out of reach. So one rests for a moment before trying harder, with the arm outstretched, in the hope of catching hold at last. However, for my mind to be able to pause and summon up the effort required, I would have had to be unaccompanied. How I wished I could leave the others behind, as I used to along the Guermantes Way, wandering away from my parents! I even had the feeling that I *ought* to do so now. I could sense in this moment the presence of one of those pleasures which, though they require the mind to work upon itself, reduce to insipidity the sweets of the mental idleness which makes one prefer to abandon the effort. It was a pleasure which came to me seldom, and its object always lay beyond my mental scope, requiring me to create it myself; but on each occasion when it did come, I would have the feeling that all the things which had happened to me since the last time were more or less devoid of significance, and that, for my real life to begin at last, I must now attend to nothing but this unique reality. I put my hand briefly over my eyes, so as to be able to close them without Mme de Villeparisis noticing. I sat there for a moment thinking of nothing; then, with the fresher impetus of pent-up consciousness, I managed to leap further in the direction of the trees, or rather towards the inner part of me where I could see them. Once again I could detect, just behind them, the same familiar but imprecise object, which I could not quite take hold of. Meanwhile, as the carriage rolled on, I could see them coming nearer. Where had I set eyes on them before? In the countryside near Combray, there was no such place with an opening to a drive. Nor did the place they reminded me of fit anywhere into the countryside round a German spa where I had gone one year with my grandmother. Did this mean they belonged to years of my past life which were so distant that the landscape surrounding them had been utterly wiped out, and that, like those passages one recognizes with sudden excitement in a text one fancied one had never read, they were the only scrap left from the forgotten story-book of my early childhood? Or did they belong to one of those places one glimpses in dreams, always the same places, or so they were in my dreams, where their strange aspect was only sleep's translation of the efforts I kept making while awake, either to see through the appearance of a place to a mystery which I

sensed lay beyond it (which had so often happened along the Guermantes Way), or to restore mystery to a place which I had longed to see and which, once I had been there, had turned into something quite superficial, as Balbec had? Were they perhaps a very recent image, a small fragment from a dream of only the night before, but already so faded that it seemed to derive from much longer ago? Or perhaps I had never seen them anywhere; and though I thought they were a memory to be recalled, were they in fact only an invitation to comprehend an idea, concealing behind themselves, like certain trees or clumps of grass glimpsed along the Guermantes Way, a meaning which was every bit as obscure and ungraspable as a distant past? Or else, might it actually be that they concealed no idea at all, and that it was only an impairment of my eyesight, making me see double in time as one can see double in space? I could not tell. Still coming towards me, they might have been some mythological apparition, a coven of witches, a group of Norns propounding oracles. But I saw them as ghosts from my past, beloved companions from childhood, sometime friends reminding me of shared moments. Like risen shades, they seemed to be asking me to take them with me, to bring them back to the realm of the living. In their naïve and passionate gesticulations, I read the impotent regret of a loved one who, having lost the power of speech, knows that he will never be able to let us know what he wants, and that we can never deduce his meaning. Soon, at a crossroads, the carriage left them behind. Like my life itself, it was carrying me away from what seemed the only truth, from what would have made me truly happy.

I watched the trees as they disappeared, waving at me in despair and seeming to say, 'Whatever you fail to learn from us today you will never learn. If you let us fall by this wayside where we stood striving to reach you, a whole part of your self which we brought for you will return for ever to nothing.' And it is true that, though the same mode of pleasure and disquiet which I had just experienced once more was to come back to me in later years, though I did attend to it at last one evening – too late, but for ever – I never did find out what it was these particular trees had attempted to convey to me, or where it was that I had once seen them. When the carriage went round a corner, I lost sight of them somewhere behind me; and when Mme de Villeparisis asked me why I looked so forlorn, I was as sad as though I had just lost a friend or felt something die in myself, as though I had broken a promise to a dead man or failed to recognize a god.

It was time to think of turning for home. Mme de Villeparisis, who had a certain feeling for nature, albeit one which was less warm than my grandmother's, and whose capacity for the appreciation of simple grandiose beauty in certain ancient things was not limited to the contents of museums and the houses of the aristocracy, told the coachman to return to Balbec by the back road, which was lined with old elm trees that we thought very fine, and where one rarely saw anyone.

For the sake of variety, once we had become used to this old back road, we would make a point of driving home by another route (unless we had taken it on our way out) which took us through the woods of Chantereine and Canteloup. The invisibility of the countless birds very close at hand calling to each other among the trees gave the same restful impression as one can have by closing one's eyes. Bound to my little folding-seat, like Prometheus to his rock, I listened to my Oceanides. And if I chanced to see one of these birds, slipping from one leaf to the shelter of another, there was so little apparent link between it and the songs that I could barely believe they were produced by that restless little body, full of surprise and lack of expression.

This road was similar to many another French road of the same kind, first a steep climb, then a long gentle downward slope. At the time, it did not impress me as having any great charm; I was just glad to be on the way home. But in later years, it did come to be a source of other joys, by staying in my memory as a starting-point giving immediate access to all similar roads which I would travel in the future, on a short outing or a longer journey, and which because of it were able to take a short-cut to my heart. For as soon as the later carriage or motor turned into one of those roads which resembled a stretch of the one I had driven along in Mme de Villeparisis's carriage, what adjoined my then consciousness, as contiguously as though it was my most recent past, abolishing all the intervening years, was the impressions in my mind on those late afternoons, after the horses' heads had been set towards Balbec, when we drove through the lovely smell of leaves into the rising mists and could see the sunset, beyond the next village, through the trees, looking just like one of the next wooded localities along that road, but rather too distant for us to reach it before nightfall. These impressions, mingling with the ones I would be experiencing in that other place, on that similar road, and surrounded by all the accessory feelings which were common to both states, and only by them – the sensation of breathing freely, curiosity, the enjoyment of being lazy, a good appetite, cheerfulness – would grow in volume, take on the consistency of a particular type of pleasure, almost of a way of existence, one which I seldom had occasion to revisit but within which reawakened memories blended a physically perceived reality with enough remembered, fancied, ungraspable reality for these places I was passing through to give me, not just an aesthetic experience, but a heady desire, however fleeting, to live there for ever. How often the mere breath of trees in full leaf has made me see the act of sitting on a bracket-seat opposite Mme de Villeparisis, as she acknowledges the greeting of the Princess of Luxembourg passing by in her carriage, then driving home to dinner at the Grand-Hôtel, as among those inexpressible joys of life which neither the present nor the future can ever bring back, which can be tasted once and once only!

Daylight had often completely faded by the time we reached Balbec. I would venture to quote to Mme de Villeparisis, indicating the risen moon, a fine line from Chateaubriand, Vigny or Victor Hugo: 'The moon revealing her old secret of melancholy' or 'Weeping like Diana by her fountains' or 'The shades were nuptial, august and solemn'.[31]

'You like that, do you? she would say. You think it's "brilliant", as you say. Let me tell you, I am for ever being surprised to see that people nowadays treat very seriously things which the friends of these writing gentlemen, whose merits they were well aware of, took plenty of pleasure in bantering them for. Words like "brilliant" and "genius" were not bandied about then as they are these days – credit a writer with mere "talent" and he thinks you're insulting him! I can assure you I have good reason to resist the blandishments of your M. de Chateaubriand – and his moonshine. He was a gentleman who was often in my father's house. Very pleasant to be with when there was no other company, quite unaffected, an amusing man. But no sooner would other guests come on the scene than he started his ridiculous posturing and showing off – he actually stated that he had tossed his resignation in the King's face and directed the whole Conclave of Cardinals, forgetting that in fact he had got my father to beg the King to take him back, and that my father had overheard him make the most wildly inaccurate forecasts about the election of the Pope! No, the man to hear on the subject of that Conclave was M. de Blacas, who was more than a cut above your M. de Chateaubriand. And as for his fine phrases on the moonlight, they were one of our family jokes. Why, on nights when there was a full moon, we would take the newest guest aside and suggest he take a turn in the park after dinner with M. de Chateaubriand. Then when they came back in, my father would make a point of murmuring to the new chap, "And was M. de Chateaubriand in fine voice tonight? – Ah, yes! – And did he allude to the moonlight? – Indeed he did, but how did you know? – And did he not say the moon was revealing her old secret of melancholy? – Yes he did! But how on earth –? – And did he not also refer to the moonlight in the Roman countryside? – You've got second sight!" Now, of course, my father did not have any such thing, but M. de Chateaubriand was always happy to trot out the same well-rehearsed speech.'

At the mention of Vigny, she burst out laughing.

'He was the chap that used to say, "I am the Comte Alfred de Vigny." There are plenty of people who are counts, and plenty who aren't – as if it mattered, for goodness sake!'

However, she may have thought it did matter a little, for she added:

'For one thing, I'm not sure he *was* a count. And even if he was, he was of pretty low extraction. Just think – mentioning his "escutcheons of a noble" in his poetry! How tasteful! How intriguing for the reader! Musset was another one: a mere Parisian, if you please, yet he went on about "The golden hawk I bear upon my helmet" – no genuine noble would ever say any such thing. Mind you, at least Musset had some talent as a poet. But anything by your M. de Vigny, apart from *Cinq-Mars*, bores me to death – the man's unreadable. M. Molé, who had so much of the wit and tact that M. de Vigny had so little of, gave him what he deserved, in his speech of welcome at the Académie française. D'you mean you haven't *read* it? It is a masterpiece of mischievous impertinence!'

In her astonishment at seeing Balzac revered by her nephews and nieces, Mme de Villeparisis complained that he had professed to describe a stratum of society about which, 'since it was not open to him', he had written a tissue of implausibilities. As for Victor Hugo, she said that her father, M. de Bouillon, had friends among the young Romantics, who had managed to get him into the opening night of *Hernani*,[32] but that he could not bear to stay till the end of the play, with its ridiculous lines turned out by a writer who was gifted but given to bombast, and who only came to be deemed a great poet as the result of a deal, as a reward for the sedulous self-interest with which he promoted the dangerous haverings of the socialists.

The hotel was now within sight, its lights, which had been so unfriendly on the evening of our arrival, now glowing with the gentle reassurance and promise of a homecoming. As our carriage neared the door, the doorman, the pageboys and the 'lift', standing in a body on the front steps, looking out for us, eager and ingenuous, slightly worried by our lateness, now that they too had become familiar to us, were examples of those in whom, though they change so often during our lifetime, as we ourselves change, we are soothed to see, for as long as they serve as our temporary mirrors, the faithful and friendly reflection of our habits. We prefer them to friends whom we have not set eyes on for ages, for they contain more of what we are at the moment. So as to be spared the rigours of the evening air, the outside page, having been exposed to the sunlight all day long, had been taken inside and wrapped in woollens, which among all the glass of the

vestibule, along with the forlorn orangey foliage of his hair and the peculiar rose-pink of his cheeks, made one think of a hothouse plant being protected from the cold. We would get out of the carriage, assisted by many more retainers than necessary; but they had sensed the significance of the scene, and felt it incumbent upon them to play a part in it. As I was usually famished, rather than postpone the start of dinner, I chose not to go up to my room (which had so genuinely become mine that to stand among its long violet curtains and low book-cases was to be alone with that self which saw its own image in furnishings, as in people); and so all three of us stayed in the vestibule, waiting for the head waiter to come and tell us that dinner was served. This gave us another opportunity to attend to Mme de Villeparisis.

'We're imposing on you, my grandmother said.

– Not at all, I'm delighted. I find it quite charming,' her old friend replied, with a winning smile, and descanting on a mellifluous note which contrasted with her customary plainness of speech.

The fact was that, at such moments, her manner was not natural; it was her unforgotten upbringing which spoke, with its aristocratic ways, which a great lady must display so as to impress upon commoners that she is happy to be among them, that she does not look down on them. The only deficiency in Mme de Villeparisis's politeness was the excess of it, for it could be seen as the professional mannerism of a lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain who, accustomed as she is to seeing in certain middle-class people the malcontents whom she is bound to make of them sooner or later, takes full advantage while she can of any opportunities to have the account-ledger of her friendly relations with them record in advance a credit balance, so that when she is debited with not inviting them to her next dinner party or reception, it shall be without qualm. So, with a keen and irresistible earnestness, and as though there were little time left for her to show how considerate she was, the spirit of the caste to which Mme de Villeparisis belonged, having long since indelibly affected her, and in its ignorance of the fact that the circumstances were now different, the people not the same and that, once back in Paris, she would be glad of our frequent presence in her house, kept prompting her into lavishing upon us, for as long as our stay in Balbec lasted, bouquets of roses, melons, loans of books, outings in her carriage and many honeyed words. In this way, not only the dazzling beauty of the beach, the bedrooms with their many-hued radiance and suboceanic glints, and the riding lessons which turned the sons of shopkeepers into godlike Alexanders of Macedonia, but also each day's friendly overtures from Mme de Villeparisis, and even the brief, summery ease with which my grandmother accepted them, all these survive in my memory as the typical redolences of a holiday by the sea.

'Hand over your coats, so that they can be taken up for you.'

My grandmother handed them to the manager; and because he was in the habit of being pleasant to me, I was dismayed by this inconsiderateness, which seemed to be hurtful to him.

'I do believe that gentleman is put out, Mme de Villeparisis said. He probably thinks he's too grand to be laden with people's things. I remember the Duc de Nemours,[33] when I was just a slip of a girl, coming to see my father – he lived on the top floor of the Hôtel Bouillon – with a big bundle of newspapers and letters under his arm. I can see the Prince as though it was yesterday, in his blue tail-coat, standing under the lintel of our front door, which had such pretty workings in the wood – by Bagard,[34] I think – you know those delicate beadings, so soft that the woodworker could shape them into little bows and flowers, like ribbons tied round a posy. "Here you are, Cyrus," he said, "here's what your concierge gave me to bring up to you. 'If you're going up,' he said, 'there's no point in me climbing the stairs too – but mind you don't spoil my string.' " Well, now that you've got rid of your things, do sit down – look, have this one,' she said, taking my grandmother by the hand, to usher her towards an armchair.

– Oh, really, if you don't mind, not that one! It's rather small for two people, but far too big for me. It would make me feel uneasy.

– That reminds me of an armchair, exactly like this one, which I had for a long time, but which I eventually had to be rid of, because it had been given to my mother by the ill-fated Duchesse de Praslin.[35] You see, my mother, though she was quite the most unpretending person imaginable, had rather retained certain ways of seeing things which belonged to another period, and which even then I was beginning to find rather difficult to understand, and to begin with she had declined to be presented to Mme de Praslin, who was only Mlle Sebastiani-that-was, whereas Mme de Praslin, who *was* a duchess, took the view that it was not for *her* to be presented. And of course,' added Mme de Villeparisis, forgetting that she found such social niceties rather difficult to understand, 'had she been Mme de Choiseul proper, rather than just Mme de Choiseul-Praslin, her view might well have been able to prevail, since than the Choiseuls there are none greater – being descended from a sister of King Louis the Large, they were once true sovereigns in their ancient fiefdom of Bassigny. I must confess that we Bouillons take precedence, through our marriages and illustrious achievements, but in point of ancientness there is little difference in rank. So, that matter of protocol had given rise to certain comical incidents, such as a luncheon which was an hour late in starting, because one of these two ladies required to be persuaded that she should agree to be the one presented to the other. Despite all that, they had become firm friends, and she gave my mother an armchair of this very sort, in which, just like you, everyone was reluctant to sit. One day my mother heard a carriage arriving in the courtyard and asked of a servant lad who it was. "It's Her Ladyship the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, Your Ladyship. – Fine, show her in." A quarter of an hour later, there was still no sign of her. "So where's Her Ladyship the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld? – She's comin' upstairs, Your Ladyship. Stopped for a breather, see," replied the servant lad, who had only recently come up from the country, it being my mother's sound practice to acquire them there. Many a time she had known them from birth. That's how one gets good people. And good people are the first luxury in life. So, there was the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld painfully ascending, she being gigantic, so gigantic indeed that when she came in, my mother had a moment's bother, as she wondered where she might seat her. That was when the armchair from Mme de Praslin caught her eye; so she moved it forward and said, "Do be so kind as to take a seat." The Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld filled it to overflowing. Despite being, shall I say, so imposing, she was still a perfectly agreeable person. One of our family friends used to say of her, "She still makes quite an effect when she arrives," to which my mother would reply, "She makes an even greater one when she leaves." My mother was freer in speech than would be thought proper nowadays. But even at her own house, no one felt inhibited about chaffing Mme de La Rochefoucauld on her inordinate proportions, and she laughed as readily as anyone. Once, when my mother went to visit her, having been welcomed at the door by the husband, she said to him, not having seen the Duchesse, who was sitting in an alcove, towards the back of the room, "Oh, are you all alone? Isn't Mme de La Rochefoucauld at home? I don't see her. – How kind you are!" the Duc replied, he being the man with the faultiest judgment I have ever known, but one who could rise to wit on occasion.'

After dinner, when my grandmother and I had gone upstairs, I said that the qualities in Mme de Villeparisis which we found charming – tactfulness, delicacy and discretion, unselfishness – were perhaps not worth all that much, since the people who were best known for embodying them were relatively uneminent men, like Molé or Loménie, and that, though the absence of such qualities may make for some unpleasantness in everyday relations, the lack of them had been no drawback for the Chateaubriands, the Balzacs, the Vignys and Hugos of the world, men full of vanity and lacking in judgment, men whom the likes of Bloch could scoff at … My grandmother protested at the mention of Bloch, preferring to sing the praises of Mme de Villeparisis. Just as it is supposed to be a concern for the species that influences choices in love, steering fat men towards thin women and thin men towards fat women, so that the make-up of the future child may be as well balanced as possible, so it was my grandmother's inkling of the requirements of my happiness, under constant threat from my inclination to nerves and my unwholesome tendency towards melancholy and aloneness, which made her stress qualities such as steadiness and judgment, peculiar not only to Mme de Villeparisis but to a social milieu which might afford me distraction and solace, a milieu reminiscent of those which, in earlier days, fostered the flowering of a spirit shared by people like Doudan or M. de Rémusat, to say nothing of a Mme de Beausergent, a Joubert[36] or a Mme de Sévigné, a spirit bringing more happiness and dignity to life than were ever afforded by cultivation of the opposite tastes, which led the Baudelaires, the Edgar Allen Poes, the Verlaines and Rimbauds into sufferings and low esteem, the like of which my grandmother wished to spare me. I interrupted her with a kiss and asked whether she had noticed something said by Mme de Villeparisis which was the mark of the woman who set more store by birth than she liked to admit. In these evening conversations, I

compared impressions with my grandmother, never knowing how much I should admire any person until she pronounced. I submitted to her the sketches I had done during the day of all these other people who, because they were not her, were non-existent for me. On one of these occasions I said, 'I couldn't live without you. – That's not the way to be, you know, she said in an unsteady voice. We've got to toughen up a bit. I mean, what would you do if I went away on a journey? I would hope you'd be a good boy and have a happy time. – Well, I might be if you went away for a few days. But I'd be counting the hours till you came back. – But what if I was away for months … (the thought of it chilled my heart) for years perhaps … or even …'

A silence lengthened between us; we dared not catch each other's eye. I was affected more by her distress than by my own. I stepped over to the window and, looking away from her, said quite clearly:

'You know I'm a creature of habit. When I'm away from the people I'm fond of, I'm unhappy for the first few days. But then, though I still go on being fond of them, I get used to it, life goes on, undisturbed, and I could put up with being parted from them for months, or years, or …'

I had to stop talking and gaze right out of the window. My grandmother left the room for a moment. Then the following evening I launched into philosophy, speaking in a detached voice but making sure that she was paying attention to my words: it was remarkable, I said, that the latest advances in science seemed to have made materialism untenable, and that the most likely outcome was still the eternal life of the soul and reunion beyond the grave.

Mme de Villeparisis informed us that she would soon not be able to see so much of us: a young nephew of hers who was preparing for entry to the cavalry school at Saumur, and who was garrisoned nearby at Doncières,[37] was coming to spend a few weeks' holiday with her, and she would have to devote much of her time to him. On some of our drives together, she had spoken very warmly of his high intelligence and especially his kind heart, and I had been imagining how he would take a liking to me, how I would become his favourite friend; then, when his aunt hinted to my grandmother, before his arrival, that he had had the misfortune to fall madly in love with some impossible woman who now had him in her clutches and would not let him go, as I was convinced that love affairs of that sort could only lead to mental derangement, crime and suicide, the thought of how little time was left for our friendship, which was already so strong in my heart although I had not set eyes on him, moved me to tears for the misfortunes which must attend it, as though it was some beloved companion who one learns is seriously ill and not expected to live long.

One very hot afternoon, from inside the dining-room, which was in half-darkness, sheltering from the sun behind drawn curtains, which were a yellow glow edged by the blue dazzle of the sea, I saw, traversing the hotel's central bay, which extended from the beach to the road, a tall, slim, young man with piercing eyes, a proud head held high on a fine uncovered neck, and with hair so golden and skin so fair that they seemed to have soaked up the bright sunshine of the day. In a loose off-white garment, the like of which I would never have believed a man would dare to wear, and which in its lightness was as suggestive of the heat and brilliance of outdoors as was the cool dimness of the dining-room, he was advancing at a quick march. His eyes, from which a monocle kept dropping, were the colour of the sea. We all sat there, intrigued, watching him as he passed, knowing that we beheld the young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, famous in the fashionable world. The newspapers had recently been full of descriptions of the suit he had worn when attending at a duel, as a second for the young Duc d'Uzès. It seemed as though the very special quality of his hair and eyes, his skin and bearing, which would have distinguished him in a crowd, as a pale precious vein of luminous opal stands out among crude earth, must be the mark of a life quite unlike those lived by ordinary men. In the days before the beginning of the liaison lamented by Mme de Villeparisis, when the prettiest women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain had vied for his attentions, his presence at a seaside resort, for example, with whichever celebrated beauty he was courting at the time, not only thrust the lady into the limelight, but also turned all heads towards him. Because of his general 'stylishness' as a young 'lion', his cavalier manner and above all his own remarkable beauty, some thought there was something effeminate about him, though no one ever said such a thing against him, as his virility and passionate liking for women were well known. This was the nephew of whom Mme de Villeparisis had spoken. I was warmed by the thought that, for these few weeks, I would have the opportunity of knowing him, and by the certainty that he would give me his affection. He strode right through the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which fluttered in front of him like a butterfly. He had come up from the beach; and the sea, which filled the lower half of the plate-glass in the vestibule, was a background against which his whole figure stood out, as in those portraits in which the painter, without departing from the strictest observation of present-day life, chooses to put his model in an apt setting – a polo ground, a golf-course, a race-track, the deck of a yacht – making a modern equivalent of the old masters' canvasses in which a human figure stands in the foreground of a landscape. A carriage and pair awaited him at the door; and with his monocle now flitting about against the background of the sunny roadway, the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis, with all the grace and command that a virtuoso pianist is somehow able to show even in the simplest passage, where it would have seemed barely possible for him to display any superiority over a lesser performer, climbed up beside his coachman, accepted the reins from the latter and, opening the while an envelope that the manager of the hotel handed to him, set the horses off.

What a disappointment it was for me, on each of the days following, whenever our paths crossed outside or inside the hotel, he with his high collar, and keeping his limbs in perpetual equilibrium about the dancing flight of his monocle, which seemed to be their centre of gravity, to realize that it was not his intention to make our acquaintance, that he never once greeted us, although he could not be unaware we were friends with his aunt! When I remembered how polite Mme de Villeparisis, and before her M. de Norpois, had been towards me, I wondered whether they might not be mere mock nobility, whether there might not be some secret provision in the code of laws governing the aristocracy which perhaps, for some reason unknown to me, permitted women or the odd diplomat who might have dealings with commoners not to treat them with the sweeping disdain which a merciless young marquis must show. Reason could have contradicted this. But the salient feature of the absurd age I was at – an age which, for all its alleged awkwardness, is prodigiously rich – is that reason is not its guide, and the most insignificant attributes of other people always appear to be consubstantial with their personality. One lives among monsters and gods, a stranger to peace of mind. There is scarcely a single one of our acts from that time which we would not prefer to abolish later on. But all we should lament is the loss of the spontaneity which urged them upon us. In later life, we see things with a more practical eye, one we share with the rest of society; but adolescence was the only time when we ever learned anything.

The insolence I sensed in M. de Saint-Loup, and the ingrained callousness to be inferred from it, was to be confirmed by his demeanour each time he passed through our vicinity, lean and straight as a ramrod, his head always held high, his eye quite blank, or rather quite implacable, devoid even of that hint of latent considerateness towards other persons (even though they may not know your aunt) which meant that my own attitude, for instance, towards an old lady was not the same as it was towards a lamp-post. The distance between his stand-offish ways and the fulsome letters into which, only the other day, I had imagined him pouring his liking for me, was as great as the gulf between the obscurity of the day-dreamer and the orator he fancies himself to be, swaying his fellow citizens with an unforgettable speech, filling his solitude with the sound of his own voice, carried away by the 'hear-hears' of the House and the acclaim of the country, but then, once the fictitious hubbub has died down, finding he is still the same mute inglorious nobody as before. When Mme de Villeparisis, no doubt hoping to correct the bad impression left on us by such appearances, with their suggestion of a haughty and bilious nature, rehearsed the inexhaustible goodness of her grand-nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces and not much older than I was), I marvelled at the ways of the fashionable, whose total disregard for truth enables them to praise the kind hearts of people whose hearts are hard, however cordial they may be with the brilliant members of their own set. Mme de Villeparisis, albeit indirectly, soon afforded me a confirmation of what I now knew were the essential features of her grand-nephew's nature, when I encountered them one day in a lane which was so narrow as to leave her no choice but to introduce me to him. He gave no sign that someone's name had just been uttered in his presence; not a muscle moved in his face; and had it not been for the fact that his eyes, in which there glowed not the slightest spark of humane feeling, showed a mere exaggeration of their insensitivity and emptiness of all expression, nothing would have distinguished them from lifeless mirrors. Then, staring at me with his hard eyes, as though he wished to be informed about me before acknowledging my greeting, suddenly set in motion as though by a muscular reflex

rather than by an act of will, and putting between himself and me the greatest distance possible, he thrust out his arm as far as it would go and, from a great distance, gave me his hand. When he sent up his card the following day, I thought it must be at least a challenge to a duel. But his talk was of literature; and after a long conversation with me, he announced that he was very much looking forward to spending several hours in my company every day. Throughout that first visit of his, not only did he show a keen preference for intellectual things, but he showed a liking for me that was quite out of keeping with the handshake of the previous day. It was not until I had seen him repeat it with several other people that I realized it was nothing more than a habit, part of the manners common to some of his family, passed down to him by his mother, who had trained his body to show the excellence of his breeding; and he always shook hands like that, giving it no more thought than he gave to his fine clothes or his handsome hair; it was something which had none of the inner meaning which I had seen in it, something which he had merely acquired, just as he had come to have another habit, that of making sure of being introduced immediately to the relatives of his friends, which had become so irresistible to him that, when he saw me with my grandmother on the day after our first meeting, he walked straight up to me and, without even saying 'Good morning', asked me to introduce him to her, with such feverish haste that his request might have been prompted by some impulse of self-defence, such as ducking to avoid a punch or closing the eyes against a spray of boiling water, as though he were faced by a danger demanding immediate evasive action.

These first rites of exorcism having been enacted, as a malevolent fairy divests itself of its first appearance and takes on the most captivating grace and beauty, I saw the man of disdain turn into the most likeable and considerate fellow I had ever met. 'Well, I thought, I've already misread the man once, I've been fooled by a mirage; but now that I've seen through it, here I am being taken in by another one, because he's clearly just one of the high and mighty, full of his own nobility, while pretending he's not.' In fact, before very long, all the charming manners and agreeableness of Saint-Loup were indeed to reveal another person in him, but a very different one from the person I now suspected him of being.

The only things valued by this young man, who looked like an aristocrat and a supercilious sportsman, the only things which aroused his interest, were intellectual things, and especially those most modernistic examples of literature and art which his aunt thought so ludicrous. In addition, he was imbued with what she called the 'haverings of the socialists', spoke of his own class with heartfelt contempt and spent hours deep in Nietzsche and Proudhon.[38] He was one of those 'intellectuals'[39] whose ready admiration keeps them immersed in books, satisfying a hunger for ideas. Actually, the manifestation of this very abstract tendency in Saint-Loup, which was at such a remove from my own usual mental activity, though it struck me as touching, also annoyed me somewhat. For instance, after I realized who his father was, if I happened to have been reading somebody's memoirs full of anecdotes figuring the doings of the famous Comte de Marsantes, whom I saw as the epitome of the special elegance of a period already long past, in the mood of vague yearning aroused in me by the book I found it galling that my appetite for information on the life that M. de Marsantes had led must remain unsatisfied, because Robert de Saint-Loup, rather than being content to be a chip off the old block, rather than being able to lead me through the chapters of the outmoded romance of his father's life, had aspired to familiarity with Nietzsche and Proudhon. Not that his father would have shared my regret. For he too had been an intelligent man, whose embrace of the world reached well beyond the fashionable Faubourg. He had had little time in which to become acquainted with his son, but had hoped he would turn out a better man than he was himself. I suspect that, unlike the rest of the family, he would have admired this son, would have rejoiced to see his own trivial pastimes exchanged for serious pursuits, and that, without a word to anyone, like the witty but modest nobleman he was, he would have dipped privately into his son's favourite authors, so as to ascertain by how far Robert had outdistanced him.

It was of course rather sad that, whereas the Comte de Marsantes was open-minded enough to appreciate a son so different from himself, Robert de Saint-Loup had kept a memory of his father which, though affectionate, was rather scornful, because he was one of those for whom merit is inseparable from certain forms of art and ways of life, and all he could remember was a man who had devoted his whole life to hunting and racing, who had yawned through Wagner and delighted in Offenbach. Saint-Loup was not intelligent enough to realize that intellectual worth is unrelated to belief in any particular aesthetic doctrine; and the disdain in which he held the intellectual life of M. de Marsantes was akin to what one might have expected in a son of Boieldieu or Labiche,[40] if either of them had had a son who was a lover of the most advanced symbolist writing or the most abstruse music. 'I hardly knew my father, Robert said. By all accounts, he was a delightful man. His trouble was just the awful period in which he lived. I mean, being born into the Faubourg Saint-Germain and being alive in the period of *La Belle-Hélène*[41] is enough to ruin anyone's existence. If he had been, say, a petty bourgeois with a passion for Wagner's *Ring*, it's conceivable that he might just have made some sort of a mark. They actually say he had a liking for literature, but it's not really possible to say, because what he thought was literature was made up of works that are all dead and forgotten.' Though I thought Saint-Loup was rather serious, he found it strange that I was not serious enough. Judging all things by their intellectual content, and being unaware of the delights that my imagination took in what he dismissed as frivolous, he was amazed that I, whom he thought of as far superior to himself, could take any interest in such things.

From the very first days of our acquaintance, Saint-Loup completely won over my grandmother, partly by the unfailing kindness with which he contrived to treat us, partly by the naturalness of the way he went about it, which was his way of going about everything. Naturalness, no doubt because it gives a glimpse, through human artistry, into nature itself, was the one quality which my grandmother preferred to all others, whether in gardens, which she disliked if, like the garden at Combray, their plots and flowerbeds were too regular, in cookery, in which she abhorred fancy contraptions like wedding-cakes, with their barely recognizable ingredients, or in piano playing, which displeased her if it was too polished, too immaculate, a style to which she even preferred Rubinstein's slight mistakes of fingering or wrong notes. She also found naturalness to enjoy in Saint-Loup's clothes, which showed a soft elegance, as far from the 'flashy' as from the 'prim and proper', without stiffness or starch. Even more to her taste were the casual, easy ways of this rich young man, who managed to live among luxury without 'smacking of money', without giving himself airs; and the charm of his naturalness she saw too in something that Saint-Loup had never outgrown, though it generally disappears with the loss of childhood, along with some of childhood's physiological characteristics: his inability to master his face, which revealed his every emotion. Taken by surprise, for example, by something he had wished for but not expected to receive, even just a compliment, he would be overcome by such a sudden gust of pleasure, so burning, so volatile, so expansive, that it was impossible for him to contain and conceal it; his features would set in an irresistible grimace of gratification; through the skin of his cheeks, of excessive fineness, there glowed a bright flush, and his eyes reflected embarrassment and joy; and my grandmother was greatly touched by this gracious show of candour and guilelessness, in which, at least in the days when I first came to know Saint-Loup, there was nothing misleading. I must say, though, that I have known another person, indeed there are many, in whom the physiological sincerity of the passing blush was entirely compatible with moral duplicity; in many such people, all it proves is that, for those who are capable of the direst treachery, there can be an intensity of enjoyment so disarming as to require immediate disclosure. But in nothing was the naturalness of Saint-Loup so endearing to my grandmother as in the open way he expressed his liking for me, in words which she herself, as she said, could never have bettered for their aptness and true devotion, words worthy of Mmes de Sévigné and de Beausergent; he made no bones about bantering me for my defects – the perspicacity with which he had surmised them had delighted her – but he did it in a way which was her own, with affection, and with a compensatory admiration for my qualities which was full of the warm spontaneity that eschews reserve and avoids disdain, the ways in which the self-importance of young men of his age usually likes to express itself. In anticipating my slightest indisposition, tucking my blankets round my legs at moments when I had not noticed the weather was turning cool, secretly arranging things so as to be able to stay late with me on evenings when he thought I was feeling doleful or not quite well, the care he took of my health, which might have required sterner measures, seemed all but excessive to my grandmother, though she was very touched by it as a token of his attachment to me.

It was very soon agreed between us that we had become firm friends for ever, and each time he said 'our friendship' it was as though he spoke of some important and delightful entity existing outside ourselves – before long he even came to say that, apart from his love for his mistress, it was the greatest joy in his

life. Such talk saddened me in a way, and I never knew how to respond to it: for in spending my time chatting with him, I felt none of the happiness I was capable of deriving from being without company; and in this, I suspect it would have been the same for me with any other person. It was only when I was alone that I would be swept on occasion by one of those impressions which brought with them such deeply satisfying feelings. But I only had to be in the presence of someone else, talking with a friend for instance, for my mind to face the wrong way, occupying itself with thoughts directed towards the other person rather than towards myself; and thoughts going in that other direction never afforded me any enjoyment. No sooner had I left the company of Saint-Loup than I sought words with which to tidy up the disordered minutes I had just spent with him: I assured myself that I had a close friend and that a close friend is a rarity; yet in knowing I was the recipient of things difficult to come by, what I felt was the exact opposite of the mode of enjoyment natural to me, the opposite of the pleasure that could come from finding something lying deep within myself, from bringing it out of its inner darkness and into the light of day. Whenever I spent two or three hours talking with Robert de Saint-Loup, and if he was impressed by what I had been saying, I was overcome by something like remorse, regret or weariness, vexed at not having spent the time alone, at not having got down once and for all to the work that awaited me. Then I would assure myself that there is no law against others' appreciation of one's cleverest ideas, that even the greatest minds may be excused for being admired, that it was not right to see a waste of time in hours which had led my friend to form a high opinion of me; I had no difficulty in convincing myself that I should really be happy about all this, and my hope that such happiness would never leave me was as strong as my knowledge that I had never in fact felt it. The joys we most dread losing are those which have remained outside us, beyond the reach of our heart. Although I felt I was better able than most to practise the virtues of friendship (in that I would always see the interests of my friends as counting for more than the sort of selfish advantage that motivates others, but which I ignored), I was aware of my own inability to find joy in a feeling which, rather than enhancing the differences between my mind and the minds of others – differences which exist among all minds – would abolish them. However, there were also moments when my mind could detect in Saint-Loup a creature of wider generality than himself, the 'nobleman', a being which, like some inner daemon, moved his limbs, directed his gestures and his actions; and at such times, though sitting beside him, I was as alone as I would have been gazing at a landscape and appreciating its harmonies. He had become an object for my thoughts to toy with in an idle moment. To glimpse through him the earlier, immemorial, aristocratic self that Robert sought to avoid being was to experience a keen joy, but it was a joy generated by the mind, not by friendship. In the moral and physical agility which gave him such grace in friendliness, in his easy manner as he offered my grandmother a lift in his carriage and handed her in, then in the nimble way he jumped down from the box when he feared I might be feeling the cold, so as to drape his own overcoat about my shoulders, I sensed not only the hereditary deftness of generations of great hunters, the ancestors of this young man who prized nothing so much as things of the mind, not only their disdain for wealth, which, though he also enjoyed being wealthy for the sole reason that he could afford to make much of his friends, had come down to him in a casual habit of lavishing luxury on them, but also especially the knowledge (or possibly the illusion) these grand personages had entertained of being 'above other people', which had prevented them from handing on to Saint-Loup any wish to show he was 'no better than other people', any reluctance to appear overfriendly, of which he was genuinely devoid but which can spoil even the sincerest likings of the less-than-noble with much stiff and awkward posturing. Occasionally I would feel a little guilty at delighting in this view of my friend as a work of art, at seeing the smooth interplay of his component parts as being regulated by a general idea which underlay their structure and function, but which, because he was unaware of it, added nothing to his inherent qualities as an individual, or to those personal values of mind and morality which he saw as paramount.

Yet that same general idea was, in some measure, the condition of the existence of such qualities and values. It was because he was a noble that his passion for ideas and his attraction to socialism, which made him seek the company of young, pretentious and badly dressed students, attested to something genuinely pure and disinterested in him, though the same could not be said about them. In his belief that he was the heir to an ignorant and selfish class, he endeavoured in all earnestness to have them forgive his aristocratic origins; yet it was these very origins which fascinated them and made them seek him out, though they made a show of coolness and even insolence towards him. So he would find himself making overtures to people the likes of whom my astounded family, imbued as they were with the sociology of Combray, would have expected him to shun. One day as I sat with him on the sands, we overheard a voice from a nearby tent bemoaning the dense infestations of Jews that one had to put up with in Balbec: 'You can't walk ten yards without stepping on one! Not that I'm a dyed-in-the-wool enemy of the chosen people, but hereabouts there's a glut of them. One's surrounded by people saying, "I say, Apraham, I've chust seen Chacob." One might as well be in the rue d'Aboukir.'[42] Eventually, the man who found Jews so distasteful stepped out of the tent and we glanced up to look at the anti-Semite: it was my old school-friend Bloch. Saint-Loup immediately asked me to remind Bloch that they had met before: once when they both sat for the *Concours général*,[43] at which Bloch had won the top prize, and on a later occasion, in one of the *universités populaires*.

I sometimes permitted myself a smile when I noticed in Robert the lessons once taught to him by the Jesuits, evident in the embarrassment which overcame him each time he risked hurting someone's feelings, as when one of his intellectual friends committed a social solecism or did something outlandish, the sort of thing which Saint-Loup saw as quite insignificant but which, if it had come to the attention of others, he sensed the person in question would have blushed for. So it was always Robert who blushed, as though he was the culprit, for instance on the day when Bloch said he would call at the hotel to see him, then added:

'Since the idea of kicking my heels among all the bogus gimcrackery of these palatial caravanserais is intolerable to me, and since gipsy orchestras make me feel ill, just tell the "lyfte" to make them be quiet and inform you without further ado of my presence.'[44]

I was none too pleased at the thought that Bloch might turn up at the hotel. The trouble was that he was not alone: he had come to Balbec with his sisters, who had many relatives and friends there. This Jewish colony was more picturesque than pleasant. Balbec, in this respect, was rather like certain countries, Russia or Rumania, for example, where, as geography classes inform us, the Jewish population does not enjoy the same favour, and has not attained the same degree of assimilation, as in Paris, say. Eternally together, quite without admixture of any extraneous element, whenever Bloch's uncles or female cousins, or any of their co-religionists of either sex, went to the Casino, some of them heading for the 'ball', others turning towards the baccarat rooms, they formed a homogeneous procession, quite distinct from the people who watched them pass and who recognized them from previous years without ever exchanging a greeting with them, whether it was the Cambremers' set, the little clan of the First President from Caen, people of exalted social position or of the mere middle classes, even simple corn chandlers down from Paris, none of whose daughters, beautiful, proud and scornful, as French as the statues of Rheims cathedral, would have dreamed of mixing with a rabble of ill-bred hussies who thought 'seaside' modishness so important that they always looked as though they had just been shrimping or were dancing the tango. As for the men, despite their glossy dinner-jackets and patent-leather shoes, they were so unmistakable in their physical characteristics that they brought to mind those allegedly 'clever' likenesses contrived by painters who, in illustrating the Gospels or the *Arabian Nights*, remember the country where the story unfolds and give to St Peter or Ali Baba the features of the most self-important 'punter' in Balbec. Bloch introduced his sisters to me, girls at whom he would suddenly snap to make them shut up, but who hailed with gales of mirth the slightest joke of this brother of theirs, their admiration and their idol. It is quite likely that this Jewish community, like any other, perhaps more than any other, could boast of many charms, qualities and virtues. The enjoyment of these, however, was restricted to its members. The fact was they were disliked; and this, once they became aware of it, became a proof in their eyes of anti-Semitism, against which they ranged themselves in a dense phalanx, closing ranks in the face of a world which was, in any case, in no mind to join their group.

The reference to the 'lyfte' had come as no surprise to me: a few days earlier, Bloch having asked me what I was doing in Balbec (he seemed to take it for granted that his own presence there was self-explanatory) and whether I was hoping to 'pick up a few useful connections', and as I had replied that my visit there was the fulfilment of one of my oldest dreams, not quite as strong, however, as my longing to see Venice, he said, 'Ah, yes, sitting about with the lovely ladies, sipping sherbet, pretending to read *The Stones of Venyce* of Lord John Ruskin – a moping monomaniac, by the way, and one of the crashingest bores ever invented.' Bloch clearly thought that in England not only all individuals of the masculine gender were Lords, but that the letter *i* was always pronounced like a *y*.

My new friend Saint-Loup looked on this mispronunciation as nugatory, tending to see it as indicating the mere absence of certain attributes of an elegant class, attributes which he dismissed with a scorn that was as profound as was his own mastery of them. However, his apprehension that one day Bloch would learn not only the proper pronunciation of 'Venice' but that Ruskin was no Lord, and that with hindsight he might suspect Robert of having thought him ridiculous, made Robert feel as guilty as though he had shown a lack of the considerateness which he actually had in abundance; and so, with foresight and his capacity for seeing himself as others might, he felt his own face colour with the blush which would darken Bloch's face on the day when he discovered his mistake. He was pretty sure, of course, that Bloch would see it as much more important than he did. Bloch himself proved this some time later, when he overheard me speak of the 'lift' and interrupted me with, 'I see – so it's "lift".' To which, in a sharp and supercilious tone, he added, 'Anyway – doesn't matter.' One may hear this statement, which is analogous to a reflex, spoken by all who have a touch of self-esteem, in circumstances which can vary from the trivial to the tragic, and which reveals, as it did on the present occasion, how much the thing which is said not to matter does matter to the speaker; and in the tragic vein, the first thing to come to the lips of any man who takes a certain pride in himself, if his last hope has just been dashed by someone's refusal to help him out, may well be the brave, forlorn words: 'Oh well, it doesn't matter, not to worry – I'll think of something else,' the something else which is the alternative to what 'does not matter' being sometimes the last resort of suicide.

Bloch's next words to me were very kind. There can be no doubt that he was trying to be as pleasant as possible. But then he asked, 'Tell me, are you hob-nobbing with de Saint-Loup-en-Bray because you fancy rising to the level of the nobility? Of course, his branch of the nobility is small beer – but you always *were* naïve. You must be going through a fine fit of snobbery, eh? *Are* you a snob, do you think? You are, aren't you?' It was not that he had suddenly taken leave of his intention to be pleasant. But his defect being what is known as 'bad manners', it was the one defect he never noticed in himself, the one he thought nobody could be offended by. Taking humankind as a whole, the incidence of the virtues shared by all is no more remarkable than the multiplicity of the defects peculiar to each. It is probably true to say that it is not 'common sense which is the commonest thing in the world',[45] but common kindness. In the remotest regions, one can be amazed by seeing it suddenly and unexpectedly flower, as one can come upon a single poppy standing all by itself in a little valley, identical with every other poppy in the world, though it has never seen any of them, and has never known anything other than the wind which from time to time ruffles the silk of its lonely scarlet standard. Even if this kindness is so paralysed by self-interest as to be in abeyance, it still exists; and whenever its functioning is not thwarted by some selfish urge, for example during the reading of a novel or a newspaper, it opens like a spreading bloom and, even in the heart of someone who, though a murderer in real life, is still easily moved by tribulations in fiction, becomes the wish to succour the weak, the just and the persecuted. But that variety in faults is no less striking than the similarity in virtues. The most perfect of persons has a particular fault, which gives rise to rage or shock. A man may have an admirable mind, may see all things with the loftiest disinterest and never speak ill of a soul, but he forgets he still has in his pocket the urgent letter which he himself offered to post for you, thus making you miss an appointment of the utmost importance; yet instead of apologizing, he will smile, because he takes pride in never letting his own life be ruled by the clock. Another one is so considerate, so thoughtful, so mild-mannered, that in conversing with you he only ever speaks of you in ways calculated to cheer you; but you have reason to suspect there are other reflections which he never voices, quite different things about you which he keeps to himself, things which fester in the heart; yet the pleasure he takes in being with you is so great that he will wear you out with kindness rather than leave you alone. Or there is the one whose sincerity is greater, but who takes it so far as to inform you, after you have pleaded ill-health as a reason for not visiting him, that you were seen going to the theatre, in what appeared to be a state of rude health, or that, since the good turn which you tried to do him was only partially successful, and since in any case three other people have already offered to do it, he now feels little sense of obligation towards you. In both of these circumstances, the second friend would have feigned ignorance of your outing to the theatre and of the fact that the same good turn could have been done for him by several others. The third friend, having also felt the need to repeat or divulge to someone else something you have said, but which can only embarrass you, basks in his own frankness and boasts, 'That's how I am!' And of course there are those who irritate you by their inquisitiveness, or even by their lack of curiosity, which can be so great that, even though you tell them of the most amazing events, they have not the slightest notion of what you are talking about; and there are others who will put off answering your letter for months, as long as it deals with something of concern to you but not to them; or who will let you know they are coming to see you about some matter, which makes you stay at home so as not to miss them, and then they do not come, so for weeks you hear nothing more from them because, not having received from you an answer which their letter did not seem to require, they assumed they had offended you in some way. There are people who, heeding their own wishes rather than yours, keep talking without letting you get a word in, if it happens they are in good spirits and are pleased to see you; but the same people, if they or the weather are out of sorts, will be struck dumb, meeting your best efforts with languid inertia, no more eager to utter so much as a monosyllable in reply than if they had not heard you speak. Each of our friends is so inseparable from his faults that, if we are to go on liking him, we must leaven them with reminders of his talent, his kind heart, his affectionate ways, or rather we must try, by exercising all our good will, to overlook them. Unfortunately, this stubborn willingness on our part to overlook the fault in our friend is outweighed by his own dogged persistence in it, he being either blind to himself or convinced that others are blind to him. Either he does not see it or he believes we do not. As the danger of giving offence lies mainly in the difficulty of gauging what will and what will not pass unnoticed, one should make a rule of never speaking of oneself, given that it is a subject on which we may be sure our own view and that of others will never coincide. On seeing into the real life of another person, learning the truth of an existence which is overlaid by an appearance of truth, we can expect as many surprises as though we were exploring a house of ordinary demeanour which turns out to be full of ill-gotten gains, cat-burglar's jemmies and corpses; and the opposite surprise can result if, instead of the image of ourselves which we have formed from the things others say of us to our face, we discover from what they say in our absence the utterly dissimilar image they have of us and our life. Each time we have spoken of ourselves, we may be sure that our harmless, cautious words, received with ostensible politeness and a pretence of approval, have later inspired a diatribe of unfavourable judgment on us, full of exasperation or hilarity at our expense. If nothing else, we run the risk of being thought irritating, because of the disparity between our idea of ourselves and our words, which is what usually makes the things people say about themselves as laughable as the approximate hummings of would-be music-lovers who, when they feel the need to tra-la-la their favourite piece, have to make up for the meagreness of their inarticulate rendition of it by an energetic pantomime and an air of admiration which is quite out of keeping with the impression they make on their listeners. The bad habit of speaking of oneself and one's faults should not go without mention of its corollary, the habit of criticizing in others faults which are closely analogous to our own. These are always the ones we choose to speak of, as though this was an unobtrusive way of speaking of ourselves, one which adds to the pleasure of self-forgiveness the pleasure of confession. It seems too that our attention, constantly attracted to whatever distinguishes us, notices this in others more than anything else. 'He can hardly see his hand in front of his face,' says one short-sighted person of another; a consumptive will voice a misgiving about the state of the healthiest man's lungs; someone who never washes keeps talking about the baths that others never take; the man who stinks says people stink; the deceived husband sees cuckoldry everywhere; the flighty woman speaks of flighty women; the snob's talk is of snobs. And of course each vice, like each of the professions, requires and acquires a special knowledge which we are not displeased at being able to display. It takes a homosexual to detect a homosexual; a dressmaker at a fashionable party has not so much as chatted with you, yet he already appreciates the fabric of the clothes you are wearing, and his fingertips itch with the desire to feel it; and if after several moments' conversation with an odontologist you were to ask him for his true opinion of yourself, he would tell you the number of your bad teeth. To him, there is nothing more important; to you, who have noticed his own bad teeth, there is nothing more ridiculous. It is not only when we speak of ourselves that we think others are blind: we act as though they were. Each of us is watched over by a special god, who hides our fault, or promises us it shall be invisible, just as he masks the eyes and blocks the nostrils of those who never wash, persuading them that they can blithely ignore the tide-mark near their ears and the smell of sweat hanging about their armpits, as these will remain imperceptible to the world in which they move. Those who wear or give fake pearls as presents always assume that others will think they are genuine. Bloch was a bad-mannered neurotic snob; and since he belonged to a family of no note, he suffered as though at the

bottom of the ocean from the incalculable pressures bearing upon him from not just the Gentiles on the surface, but the superimposed layers of Jewish society, all more estimable than the one he belonged to, and each of them pouring scorn on the one immediately below itself. To rise to the fresh air, through each level of Jewish families, would have taken Bloch several thousand years. A much better solution was to find a way out in some other direction.

When Bloch spoke of the fit of snobbery I must be having and invited me to own up to being a snob, I could have answered: 'If I was a snob, I wouldn't be mixing with you.' But all I said was that it was not a very nice thing to say. He made an attempt at an apology; but it was of the sort often favoured by the ill-mannered man, who is glad to revisit words of his which have given offence, as it gives him the chance to compound the latter. 'Do forgive me, he would say thereafter. I was a brute, I was horrible to you, I revelled in being nasty to you. And yet, mankind in general and your good friend in particular being such a singular animal, you have no idea of the depth of affection for you harboured in this heart of mine. Though I tease you unmercifully, it has been known to move me to tears.' These words he accompanied with a little sob.

There was a thing about Bloch that surprised me more than his tactlessness, and that was how uneven his conversation was. This fellow, who could dismiss the most up-to-the-minute writer with, 'The chap's a dismal imbecile, an out-and-out idiot!' was capable of revelling in unfunny anecdotes and judging a complete mediocrity to be 'somebody really interesting'. This dual standard of judgment, applied to the mind, the merit and the interestingness of people, was something of a mystery to me until the day I met M. Bloch senior.

I had assumed we might never have the privilege of being introduced to him, Bloch the younger having spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup and of Saint-Loup to me. In particular, he had told Saint-Loup that I was (still) a dreadful snob. 'Yes he is, he is, I tell you! He's beside himself at being acquainted with M. LLLLegrandin.' This habit of Bloch's, of stressing a certain word, was a marker of both irony and literature. Saint-Loup, who had never heard of Legrandin, said in surprise, 'Really? Who's he? – Oh, he's really someone!' said Bloch with a laugh, slipping his hands as though for warmth into his jacket pockets and convinced that what he was witnessing was the quainter side of a petty provincial gentleman more preposterous than any in the pages of Barbey d'Aurevilly.[46] In his inability to describe M. Legrandin, he contented himself with multiplying his initial consonant and savouring the flavour of the name, like a connoisseur with a mouthful of a fine old vintage. This, however, was a private pleasure, to which others had no access. Having spoken ill of me to Saint-Loup, Bloch then did the same about Saint-Loup to me. It was no later than the following day that each of us learned all about what had been said – not that either of us had repeated Bloch's statements to the other (that would have seemed too reprehensible to both of us), but Bloch himself thought it would be only natural and inevitable for us to do that; so, in his uneasiness, and in the conviction that he was telling us something we were bound to find out anyway, he chose to take the initiative. Taking Saint-Loup aside, he told him he had spoken ill of him on purpose, but only so that it would get back to him; and he swore 'by the Kroniôn Zeus, keeper of oaths',[47] that he was much attached to him, that he would willingly die for him, then wiped away a little tear. That same day, he made a point of seeing me alone, owned up to what he had said about me, insisting that he had acted only for my benefit, because he was firmly of the belief that, for me, there were certain social relations from which nothing good could ever come, and that I 'deserved better'. He took my hand, as maudlin as a drunkard, though his intoxication was purely nervous: 'Do believe me! May the black Ker carry me off this instant and bear me beyond the gates of Hades, detestable to men, if I did not spend last night weeping for you, in memory of Combray, my inexhaustible affection for you, and certain afternoons at school which *you* won't even remember. Yes, there I was, crying all night long! I swear it – but alas, I speak as one who knows what men are like, and I know you won't believe me.' I did not believe him, of course; and no great weight was added to words which I knew had been invented on the spot by his invocation of 'the black Ker', as Bloch's Hellenic cult was a purely literary thing. Besides, every time he felt a touch of maudlin coming over him and wanted you to share a moment's bogus emotion, he always said, 'I swear it!' not so much with the aim of having you believe he was telling the truth, but rather for the hysterical delight he took in telling a lie. So I did not believe him; but I bore him no ill-will, as my mother and grandmother had handed down to me not only their inability to bear a grudge, even against those who deserved it more than he did, but their reluctance to condemn anybody.

Not that Bloch was irredeemably flawed; he was in fact capable of acts of great kindness. Now that the Combray breed, the strain from which there once sprang people of utter integrity like my grandmother and mother, seems all but extinct, and if one's choice among men is more or less reduced, on the one hand, to uncomplicated troglodytes, unfeeling, straightforward creatures the mere sound of whose voice tells you they have not the slightest interest in any of your concerns, and on the other, a race of men who, while they are in your company, can sympathize with you, cherish you, be moved to tears by you, and then a few hours later will contradict all this by making a cruel joke about you, but who can go on being charming towards you, full of understanding, still on the same footing of momentary closeness, then I am inclined to think that, of the two, I prefer men of the latter breed, if not for their human value, at least for their company.

'You've no idea, Bloch would say, how sad it makes me to think of you. There really is a Jewish streak in me somewhere,' he added with an ironic narrowing of the eyes, as though trying to measure by microscope a minute drop of 'Jewish blood', as might be said (but most certainly never would be) by a great French aristocrat whose exclusively Christian ancestors might just have included a Samuel Bernard,[48] or even more remotely the Virgin Mary herself, from whom all people called Lévy descend, it is said. 'Yes, just my Jewish streak coming out. Among my various emotions, I do quite like to be aware of the feeble few which may just derive from my Jewish origins.' He made this statement because it seemed to him both witty and bold to speak the truth about his racial origins, while making sure to mitigate them somewhat, like a miser who, having decided to pay his accumulated debts, can pluck up the courage to settle only half of them. The type of fraudulence which consists of being bold enough to utter a difficult truth, while diluting it with enough untruths to falsify it, is more widespread than one might think; and even those who do not make a habit of this may now and then have recourse to it, if some critical episode of life, in particular one involving a love affair, gives them the opportunity.

The outcome of all these confidential diatribes of Bloch's to Saint-Loup against me, and to me against Saint-Loup, was an invitation to dinner. I think he may even have made a preliminary attempt to invite only Saint-Loup. Everything I know about him makes for the plausibility of this hypothesis; but it was unsuccessful, and it was in the presence of both Saint-Loup and myself that Bloch said one day, 'Good my lord, and you, knight favoured of Ares, de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, subduer of steeds, since I have met you on this surf-resounding strand of Amphitrite, close by the tents of Menier of the swift ships,[49] would you both please come to dinner one evening during the week, at the table of my illustrious father of irreproachable heart?' Bloch issued this invitation because of his desire for closer relations with Saint-Loup, who he hoped would give him access to aristocratic circles. If I had been the one to have such a desire, with such an intent, Bloch would have seen it as a mark of the most detestable snobbery, in keeping with the view he had formed of an aspect of my character (an aspect which, at least for the moment, he did not consider to be my most important feature); but the same desire on his part struck him as proof of his own mind's commendable curiosity about social explorations of a kind which might afford him some literary material. When he informed his father that he was bringing a friend of his to dinner, a friend whose name and title he announced in a tone charged with sarcastic satisfaction: 'The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray', M. Bloch senior had been seized by a fit of vehement emotion. 'The Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray!' he gasped. 'Egad!' This was the exclamation which, for him, best expressed deference towards one's social superiors. The gaze he turned upon this son of his, who was capable of having such friends, was full of admiration and clearly meant: 'What an amazing boy! Can such a prodigy really be a son of mine?' The younger Bloch basked in this glory, and looked as though his monthly allowance had just been increased by fifty francs. Within the family, he lived usually in a state of some unease, feeling that his father believed he had gone to the dogs, with his admiration of poets like Leconte de Lisle, Heredia[50] and other such 'Bohemians'. But to be friendly with Saint-Loup-en-Bray, whose father had been the president of the Suez Canal Company (Egad!), was an 'incontrovertible' advantage. What a pity that the stereoscope, which might have suffered some damage in transit, had been left in Paris! M. Bloch senior was the only one with the skill, or rather the right, to make use of the stereoscope. This he did only on rare, judiciously selected

occasions, on special gala evenings when they had taken on extra menservants. These stereoscope sessions conferred upon those who attended them a sort of distinction, a feeling of being singled out and privileged, and there devolved upon the host who was responsible for them a form of prestige akin to that accorded to talent, and which could not have been greater if the images projected had been taken by M. Bloch himself, or if the instrument had been of his own invention. 'You didn't have an invitation to Salomon's yesterday? one member of the family would ask another. – No, I wasn't one of the chosen few – what was on? – Oh, a great bean-feast, with the stereoscope and everything! – Well, if it was a stereoscope occasion, then I'm sorry to have missed it. I'm told Salomon is just brilliant with it.' 'But, look here, M. Bloch senior said to his son, it will be better not to lay on everything for him all at once. Then he'll still have something to look forward to.' M. Bloch, like a good father who wishes to do right by his son, had certainly considered sending for the apparatus. However, time was 'of the essence', or rather so they thought; but then the dinner had to be postponed, as Saint-Loup could not get away, one of his uncles being expected in Balbec to spend forty-eight hours with Mme de Villeparisis. This uncle was very fond of physical exercise, especially in the form of long walks; and so, as he was coming on foot from the château where he was at present a guest, sleeping overnight at farmhouses along the way, the timing of his arrival at Balbec was rather uncertain. Saint-Loup, who did not wish to risk missing him, even asked me to go to Incarville where there was a telegraph office and send the dispatch which he was in the habit of cabling every day to his mistress. The expected uncle was called Palaméde, a name handed down from the princes of Sicily, his ancestors. In later life, whenever I read historical texts which contained this name, a fine medallion of the Renaissance – some said a genuine antique – a name borne by some *podestà* or prince of the Church, and which had always remained in the family, being handed on from descendant to descendant, from the chancellery of the Vatican right down to my friend's uncle, I would experience the special pleasure savoured by those who, in their inability to afford a collection of medals or to constitute a private gallery of art-works, cultivate instead a passion for old names (place-names, as documentary and picturesque as an out-of-date map or isometric projection, a tradesman's sign or a customary; and baptismal names, with their fine French final syllables, in which one still hears the ring of the long-standing mutilations which our ancestors, by speech defects, the intonation of some ethnic vulgarity or mispronunciation, inflicted on Latin and Saxon words, in a way which later elevated them into the grammarians' noble statutes), repertoires of antique sonorities which enable them to enjoy private concerts, like those people who acquire a *viola da gamba* or *viola d'amore* so as to play ancient music on period instruments. Saint-Loup told me that, even within the most exclusive aristocratic circles, his uncle Palamède was distinguished by being even more exclusive, peculiarly difficult to get to know, disdainful, infatuated with his own nobility, and at the centre of a group which included his brother's wife and a few other hand-picked associates, known as the circle of the Phoenixes. Even within that inner circle, he was so dreaded for his insolent words that in the past, when fashionable people seeking an introduction had on occasion approached his brother, the latter had been known to refuse out of hand. 'No, please don't ask me for an introduction to Palamède. Even if my wife were to try on your behalf, even if any or all of us were to try, it would be pointless. Or else there would be the danger of his being less than friendly, and I should prefer to avoid that.' At the Jockey Club, with a few friends, the uncle had drawn up a list of two hundred members whom he would never permit to be introduced to him. In the household of the Comte de Paris, he was dubbed 'the Prince', in virtue of his elegance and his haughtiness.

Saint-Loup told me something of his uncle's younger days, long past. He had shared a flat with two friends who were as handsome as he was, which was why they were known as 'the Three Graces'; and every day he would bring women to it.

'One day, a fellow who has nowadays become what Balzac would have called "one of the most prominent members of the Faubourg Saint-Germain", but who in those early days went through an unfortunate period when he showed rather untoward tendencies, made an appointment with my uncle at the flat. When he got there, the chap made his intentions quite clear – but towards my uncle Palamède, not towards the women! My uncle pretended not to understand, then on some pretext or other sent for his two friends. They turned up, took the miscreant, stripped the clothes off him, beat him till the blood ran red, then kicked him out – it was ten below zero, and when he was found he was lucky to be alive. The police started an investigation, and the fellow had great difficulty in getting them to drop it. These days, my uncle would never have anything to do with such a cruel punishment – despite his unapproachability with people of his own station, you've no idea of the number of working-class men whom he takes a liking to, whom he takes under his wing, though he may well get no thanks for it in the end. A footman who attends him in a hotel somewhere and whom he'll set up in Paris; a peasant lad whom he gets apprenticed to a trade, that sort of thing. It's just this rather nice side of his nature, as opposed to his society side.' Saint-Loup was one of those young men of fashion who live at an altitude where certain expressions can take root and grow, for instance, 'The rather nice side of his nature' or 'There's rather a nice thing about him', rather precious blooms, which soon turn into a way of seeing things that reduces oneself to nothing, while exalting 'the proletariat'; quite the opposite, in fact, of the plebeian's pride in his origins. 'It seems we have no idea of the way he used to set the trends as a young man, the standards he set for the whole of society. At all times, he only ever did what was convenient, what struck him as enjoyable, but whatever it was, it was instantly imitated by all the snobs. If he felt thirsty at the theatre, say, and sent out for a drink to be brought to him in his box, the following week all the little sitting-rooms behind the boxes were full of refreshments. Or one rather wet summer, when he'd had a touch of rheumatism, he wanted a vicuna overcoat – it's a cloth which is soft but warm, normally used only for travelling-rugs – and the one he got still had the blue and orange stripes on it. All the best tailors were immediately inundated with orders for shaggy blue overcoats with a fringe. On another occasion, if he was spending a day or two at a château, he might turn up without his tails, because for some reason he felt like dining without any great ceremony; and so he would go in to dinner wearing his town clothes, and in country houses it became the fashion not to change for dinner. If he took to eating his cake not with a spoon, but with a fork or some other instrument of his own design specially made for him by a goldsmith, or even with his fingers, then it was soon inconceivable not to do likewise. Once when he wanted to be reminded of some of the quartets of Beethoven (despite his preposterous ideas, he's no fool, he's a gifted man) he just got a group of musicians to come to his house each week, and they played them for him and a few of his friends.[51] So the really elegant thing that year was to hold very select little gatherings, with chamber music. I'm pretty sure he's had a fair amount of pleasure in life. A man as handsome as he was – think of the number of women he must have had! I've no idea who they were, as he's a very discreet man. But I do know he was very unfaithful to my late aunt. Mind you, he was also very attentive and charming towards her, and she adored him, and after her death he was inconsolable for a long time. Even now, when he's in Paris, he still visits the cemetery nearly every day.'

On the morning following the day when Robert told me these things about this expected uncle, who had eventually failed to materialize, I was walking back to the hotel when, right in front of the Casino, I had a sudden feeling of being looked at by someone at quite close quarters. I glanced round and saw a very tall, rather stout man of about forty, with a jet black moustache, who stood there nervously flicking a cane against the leg of his trousers and staring at me with eyes dilated by the strain of attention. At times, they seemed shot through with intense darting glances of a sort which, when directed towards a total stranger, can only ever be seen from a man whose mind is visited by thoughts that would never occur to anyone else, a madman, say, or a spy. He flashed a final look at me, like the parting shot from one who turns to run, daring, cautious, swift and searching; then, having gazed all about, with a sudden air of idle haughtiness, his whole body made a quick side-turn and he began a close study of a poster, humming the while and rearranging the moss rose in his buttonhole. From his pocket he produced a little note-book, and appeared to write down the title of the performance advertised; he looked a couple of times at his fob-watch; he pulled his black straw hat lower on his brow and held his hand to the rim of it like a visor, as though looking out for someone he was expecting; he made the gesture of irritation meant to suggest one has had enough of waiting about, but which one never makes when one has really been waiting; then, pushing back his hat to reveal close-cropped hair with rather long, waved side-wings, he breathed out noisily as people do, not when they are too hot, but when they wish it to be thought they are too hot. It crossed my mind that he might be a hotel-thief who, having perhaps noticed me and my grandmother over the last few days, and having some dishonest intent, had just realized I had noticed him while he was watching my movements; and, so as to put me off the scent, he may only have been trying to express absent-mindedness and nonchalance, but he did it with such marked exaggeration that his purpose appeared to be not just to disarm suspicion, but also to avenge some humiliation which I had inflicted upon him unawares, to make me think not so much that he had not seen me, but that I was so insignificant an object that he

could not be bothered to pay the slightest attention to me. He had drawn himself up with a challenging air, setting his lips in a sneer, twirling his moustache and charging his eye with something hard and indifferent, something close to insulting. It was the strangeness of his expression which made me think he must be a thief, if not a madman. Yet his way of dressing, which was the acme of good taste, was both much more serious and much more simple than that of any of the bathers I saw at Balbec, as well as being something of a comfort to me in my suit, which had so often been humiliated by the bright and banal whiteness of their beach outfits. My grandmother now appeared and we went for a little walk. An hour later, she having gone back in for a moment, I was waiting for her outside the hotel when I saw Mme de Villeparisis come out in the company of Robert de Saint-Loup and the stranger who had stared at me near the Casino. His glance flashed rapidly through me just as before; then, as though he had not seen me, it lowered, seemed to settle somewhere outside his eyes, dull and neutral, like a look which feigns to see nothing outside itself, and is incapable of seeing anything inside, the look expressing nothing but the satisfaction of knowing it is edged by eyelashes, among which it merely sits, roundly pleased with its own crass candour, the smug and sanctimonious look of certain hypocrites, the conceited look of certain fools. I saw that he had changed his clothes: the suit he now wore was even darker than the other one – no doubt true elegance is closer to simplicity than is false elegance; but there was something else about him: at close range, one sensed that the almost complete absence of colour from his clothes came not from any indifference to colour, but because, for some reason, he deprived himself of it. The sobriety apparent in his clothing gave the impression of deriving from a self-imposed diet, rather than from any lack of appetite. In the fabric of his trousers, a fine stripe of dark green harmonized with a line visible in his socks, the refinement of this touch revealing the intensity of a preference which, though suppressed everywhere else, had been tolerated in that one form as a special concession, whereas a red design in the cravat remained as imperceptible as a liberty not quite taken, a temptation not quite succumbed to.

'How are you? Allow me to introduce my nephew, the Baron de Guermantes,' said Mme de Villeparisis. The gentleman so named, without looking at me, mumbled a vague 'How d'you do?' which he followed with 'Hmmm, hmmm,' as though to mark the fact that this politeness had been rather forced upon him; then, withholding his thumb, his little finger and his index finger, he proffered the other two, neither of which bore a ring, and which I shook through his suede glove. Then, still without having given me a glance, he turned his eyes to Mme de Villeparisis.

'Good heavens! she exclaimed. What am I saying? Baron de Guermantes indeed! Allow me to introduce my nephew, the Baron de Charlus! Not that it's a very heinous error – you are, after all, a Guermantes.'

My grandmother appeared and we all walked along the road together. Saint-Loup's uncle neither spoke a single word to me nor gave me so much as a glance. Though he glared at strangers (two or three times during our brief stroll, he flashed his awesome and searching eye deep into the heart of nondescript passers-by of the most humble extraction), he was in the habit, if his attitude towards me was any guide to his behaviour, of avoiding at all moments the eye of people he knew, like a police officer on a secret mission who excludes his friends from the scope of his professional observations. I fell back a little with Saint-Loup, letting the uncle walk on with my grandmother and Mme de Villeparisis:

'Tell me – did I hear right? Madame de Villeparisis said to your uncle that he was a Guermantes.

– But of course – he's Palamède de Guermantes.

– Do you mean the same Guermantes family who have a château near Combray and who claim descent from Geneviève de Brabant?

– Absolutely. My uncle, who's terribly heraldic, would soon let you know that our 'cry', our war-cry, which later became *Passavant*, was originally *Combraysis*,[52] Saint-Loup said with a laugh, which was meant to forestall any suspicion that he might take pride in sharing in the prerogative of the 'cry', enjoyed only by houses of nearly royal status, by the greatest war-lords. He is the brother of the present owner of the château.'

Mme de Villeparisis was therefore related, and that very closely, to the Guermantes, though she had for such a long time been only the lady who, when I was little, had given me a duck holding a box of chocolate, more remote in those days from the Guermantes Way than if she had been enclosed in the Méséglise Way, less splendid, less highly valued by me than the optician of Combray, but who now suddenly experienced one of those fantastic elevations, the corollary of equally unexpected devaluations of other objects in our possession, which, whether rising or falling, fill our adolescence and the parts of our lives in which a little of our adolescence lives on with metamorphoses as numerous as those Ovid speaks of.

'And doesn't the château contain busts of all the former lords of Guermantes?

– Yes, it's a grand spectacle!' Saint-Loup said ironically. Between ourselves, I think all that sort of thing is just a little quaint. But one thing there is at Guermantes that's really interesting is a very touching portrait of my aunt by Carrière.[53] It's every bit as good as anything by Whistler or Velazquez,' he added, the tyro's enthusiasm getting the better, as it sometimes did, of his sense of proportion. 'And there are other canvasses, very stirring ones, by Gustave Moreau.[54] My aunt is the niece of your friend, Mme de Villeparisis, who brought her up, and she then married her cousin, the present Duc de Guermantes, who is also a nephew of my aunt de Villeparisis.

– So what's your uncle?

– He bears the title of Baron de Charlus. Strictly speaking, at the death of my great-uncle, my uncle Palamède should have taken the title of Prince des Laumes, which was his brother's before he in his turn became the Duc de Guermantes – the people in my family change their titles the way other people change their shirt. However, my uncle has his own way of thinking on such things: he takes the view that there are rather too many Italian duchies and Spanish grandees and the like, and so, though he could have chosen any one of four or five titles which would have made him Prince of This or That, he remained plain Baron de Charlus, as a sort of protest, but with a lot of pride concealed under the apparent simplicity of it. "Nowadays," he says, "when every Tom, Dick or Harry is a prince, one requires something else with which to differentiate onself. I'll keep my 'Prince' for when I'm travelling incognito." According to him, there's no title as ancient as Baron de Charlus: if he undertakes to prove to you that it's older than the titles of the Montmorency family, who falsely claim to be the first Barons of France, when all they were was Barons of Île-de-France,[55] because that's where their feudal lands were, he'll take a delight in inundating you, submerging you with facts and figures about it. It must be said that, although he's very clever, very gifted, he thinks that's a brilliant topic of conversation, Saint-Loup said with a smile. But I'm not like him and you're not going to get me to talk for hours about genealogies – life is too short to spend it prattling about boring out-of-date nonsense like that.'

I now realized that the fierce stare which had attracted my attention earlier that afternoon outside the Casino was the one I had seen at Tansonville, when Mme Swann had called out the name of Gilberte.

'Did Mme Swann ever happen to be one of the many mistresses you say your uncle, M. de Charlus, used to have?

– Oh, no, absolutely not! He's a great friend of Swann's, that is, and has always stood by him, but no one has ever suggested he might have been the wife's lover. You would create consternation in the ranks of society if it was thought you believed that.'

I did not dare reply that I would have created greater consternation in Combray if it was thought I did not believe it.

My grandmother was delighted with M. de Charlus. There was no doubt that he did attach extreme importance to all matters of birth and social status; but her awareness of this was uncoloured by any of the severe disapproval which is the mark of a secret envy and the vexation of seeing someone else enjoying advantages which one would like to have, but which are out of reach. My grandmother, quite content with her lot in life, untroubled by any wish to live in grander society, exercised on M. de Charlus only her mind, which enabled her to observe his foibles and to speak of this uncle of Saint-Loup with the benevolent, smiling detachment that is close to liking, and is our way of rewarding the object of our disinterested observation for the pleasures we find in it, in this case especially

because this object was a personage full of pretensions which, though possibly misplaced, she found at least picturesque, and which sharply differentiated him from all the other people with whom she usually had occasion to mix. But there were things in M. de Charlus, such as intelligence and sensibility, which one sensed were of acute potency, marking him off from the many society people whom Saint-Loup found painfully amusing; and it was especially these things which made my grandmother so indulgent towards his aristocratic bias. Unlike the nephew, the uncle had not sacrificed this preference to values seen as higher: he had reconciled it with them. In his capacity as descendant of the Ducs de Nemours and the Princes de Lamballe, he owned archives, furniture, tapestries, portraits painted for his ancestors by Raphael, Velázquez or Boucher, and could quite properly have said, when merely glancing over a few family souvenirs, that he was visiting a museum or some grand library; and it was this rich heritage of the aristocracy which he valued so highly and his nephew so little. In addition, there being less of the ideologue in him than in Saint-Loup, less readiness to take fine words at face value, more realism in his judgment of men, he may have been loth to neglect something which they see as essential to prestige, something which, as well as affording its disinterested delights to his imagination, could also be powerfully effective as an aid to his practical purposes. There is no common ground between men of his sort and those who aspire to an inner ideal which urges them to divest themselves of such advantages and to devote themselves solely to it, who thereby show a similarity with painters or writers who renounce their virtuosity, artistic peoples who embrace modernization, warlike peoples who opt for total disarmament, dictatorial governments which turn democratic and repeal harsh laws, though often the world will not reward them for this noble effort: some lose their talent, some their hereditary predominance; pacifism can lead to war and indulgence can foster crime. However noble and sincere the impulse of Saint-Loup towards emancipation, when one saw the result, one was convinced that it was just as well it was not shared by M. de Charlus, who had had most of the admirable wood panelling transferred from the Guermantes' family *hôtel* to his own house, rather than replace it, as his nephew had done, by an *art nouveau* décor and paintings by Lebourg and Guillaumin.[56] Even so, M. de Charlus's ideal was factitious in the extreme, and – if one may say such a thing of an ideal – it was one which aspired towards the fashionable world as much as to the world of art. In certain women who were exceptionally beautiful and extraordinarily cultivated, whose great-great-grandmothers, two centuries before, had been part of the full glory and elegance of the *ancien régime*, he perceived a form of distinction which made them the only women whose company he found at all pleasant; and though no doubt this admiration was sincere, it was coloured by the reminders of history and art which rang for him in their names, just as reminders of Antiquity may explain the pleasure a cultured man enjoys in an ode of Horace, though it may be inferior to poems of our own day which leave him indifferent. In the view of M. de Charlus, a pretty woman of the middle classes, in relation to any of these women, was like a contemporary painting of a road or a wedding-party in relation to an old master, the history of which we know, from the pope or the king who commissioned it to the various personages in whose company it has lived, as a result of donation, purchase, legacy or looting, and because of which it can recall an event or at least a union of two houses, some historical interest, some element of learning, all of which adds to it an extra dimension of usefulness, and increases our appreciation of the richness of what we can possess through memory or erudition. M. de Charlus drew comfort too from the fact that a similar bias to his own prevented these few great ladies from frequenting other women of lesser breeding, thus enabling him to worship them in their unimpaired nobility, as intact as an eighteenth-century façade still supported by its shallow columns of pink marble, unchanged in any particular by modern times.

In celebrating the true *nobility* of mind and heart of these women, M. de Charlus was playing on a double meaning of the word which deceived him, and in which there lay not only the falseness of such a misbegotten notion, this medley of aristocracy, magnanimity and art, but also its dangerous attractiveness for people such as my grandmother, in whose eyes the flagrant but harmless prejudice of the noble who attends to the number of quarterings in another man's escutcheon, and for whom nothing else counts, would have seemed too ridiculous; but she was susceptible to something masquerading as a spiritual superiority, which was why she thought princes were the most blessed of men, in that they could have as their tutor a La Bruyère or a Fénelon.[57]

The three Guermantes took their leave of us in front of the Grand-Hôtel; they were going to lunch with the Princess of Luxembourg. While my grandmother, Saint-Loup and Mme de Villeparisis were saying their farewells, M. de Charlus, who had still not spoken a syllable to me, dropped back a few steps and said, 'This evening, after dinner, in the rooms of my aunt de Villeparisis, I shall take tea. I hope you will do me the pleasure of attending, in the company of your grandmother.' He then rejoined the Marquise.

Though it was a Sunday, there were no more cabs in front of the hotel than at the beginning of the season. The wife of the notary from Le Mans, in particular, was of the opinion that it was rather expensive to hire a carriage once a week so as not to go to the Cambremers', and she preferred to stay in her room all day instead.

'Is Mme Blandais not well, then? people asked the notary. We haven't seen her all day.

– She has a slight headache … the heat, you know, this stormy weather. The slightest thing … But I expect you'll see her tonight. I've suggested she should come down. I'm sure it would do her good.'

I imagined that M. de Charlus, by inviting us to the suite of his aunt, whom he had no doubt consulted on the matter, intended to make amends for his discourtesy towards me during our walk that morning. Yet, when I arrived in Mme de Villeparisis's sitting-room and attempted to greet her nephew, however hard I tried to catch his eye, I found it impossible: he just went on recounting in a shrill voice a rather disobliging story about one of his relatives. I decided to bid him good evening in a loud voice, so that he could be aware of my presence, but I soon saw that he had noticed me: just as I was about to bow, and before a word had passed my lips, I saw his two fingers extended for me to grasp, although he had not even glanced towards me or stopped talking. He had obviously seen me, but had given no hint of it, which was what made me realize that his eyes, which never met those of the person with whom he was speaking, were in constant motion in all directions, like the eyes of some animals when frightened, or those of pedlars who, while they recite their patter and display their illicit wares, manage to study all the points of the compass without so much as looking round, in case the police are about. I was also rather surprised to see that Mme de Villeparisis, though pleased to see us come in, had seemed not to have been expecting us; and then I was even more surprised to hear M. de Charlus say to my grandmother, 'Well, how nice of you to think of dropping in like this! Isn't it charming of them, Aunt?' He must have noticed Mme de Villeparisis's expression of surprise at our arrival and thought, as a man accustomed to setting the tone, that to turn her surprise into pleasure all he had to do was make it plain that he himself took pleasure in the present circumstance, and that pleasure was an appropriate response. In this, he was a good judge, for Mme de Villeparisis, who greatly esteemed her nephew and knew how hard to please he was, instantly appeared to discover new qualities in my grandmother and welcomed her with open arms. It was difficult to accept that in the few hours which had passed since the morning, M. de Charlus could have forgotten an invitation which, though curtly delivered, had had all the appearances of being intentional and premeditated, and that he should now say my grandmother was just 'dropping in', when it was he who had asked us to come! With a respect for the facts, which I retained until the day when I realized that the truth about a man's motive is not to be got from him by direct questioning, and that the damage likely to be done by a misunderstanding which could pass unnoticed may well be less than that done by naïve persistence, I said to him, 'Surely you must remember, sir, that it was you who asked us to come this evening?' He gave no hint, either by word or movement, of having heard me. So I repeated my question, like a diplomat or a youngster who, after a falling-out, tries and tries again, with indefatigable but futile good-will, to reason with someone who is determined not to be reasoned with. M. de Charlus persisted in not replying. I thought I could see a smile flicker about his lips: the smile of the man who looks down from a great height on the characters and manners of lesser men.

In the face of M. de Charlus's refusal to explain himself, I was reduced to conjecture, though I knew that none of the possible explanations which came to mind might be the right one. Perhaps he did not remember; perhaps I had misheard what he had said that morning … It appeared more likely that it was his pride making him wish to avoid appearing to seek out people whom he despised, and that he therefore shrugged off on to them the idea that they should come to visit. But if he despised us, why had he wanted us to come, or rather, since he addressed not a syllable to me all evening and spoke only to my grandmother, why had

he wanted her to come? Sitting almost behind her and Mme de Villeparisis, and all but hidden by them, as though in a theatre-box, he contented himself from time to time with glancing away from them and letting his penetrating eye rest on my face, which it investigated with an air of gravity and preoccupation, as though I was a manuscript full of indecipherable things.

If it had not been for his eyes, M. de Charlus's face would have been similar to those of many handsome men. When at a later date Saint-Loup said, of other men of the Guermantes family, 'I tell you, there's not one of them who has my uncle Palamède's air of breeding, that look of being every inch a peer,' confirming for me that there was nothing mysterious or new in a thoroughbred air and aristocratic bearing, that these consisted of elements which I had already recognized without difficulty, without experiencing any special emotion, I was to sense the fading of one of my illusions. However, although M. de Charlus was careful to keep a hermetic seal on the expression of his face, to which a faint dusting of powder gave something theatrical, his eyes were like a crack in a wall, or a loophole in a fortification, which he had been unable to close up, and through which, depending on one's position with regard to him, one felt oneself to be suddenly in the line of fire of some inner device that seemed potentially perilous, even for the person who, without having it completely under his control, carried it about with him in a state of permanent instability and readiness to explode; and the expression in his eyes, circumspect and incessantly uneasy, left on his face, whatever its fineness of design and construction, deep marks of fatigue, including dark circles hanging low under them, and made one think of an incognito, a disguise adopted by a powerful man threatened by some danger, or at times just of an individual who was dangerous, but tragic. I wished I could guess what this secret was that other men did not have to bear, which had made such an enigma of the very first look he had shot at me near the Casino. Now that I knew something of his family history, I could no longer entertain the notion that it was the glance of a thief; and having listened to his conversation, I was sure he was no madman. That he should be so cold to me, while being so amiable with my grandmother, might have nothing to do with any personal antipathy, for generally speaking he was as well disposed towards women (whose faults he could speak of without in any way departing from his habitual indulgence in their favour) as he was disgusted by men, and especially young men, his violent criticisms of whom were of the sort that some misogynists reserve for the opposite sex. When Saint-Loup happened to mention the names of two or three gigolos, who were relations or friends of his, M. de Charlus said, with an expression close to ferocity, which was markedly different from his customary lack of warmth, 'They are nasty little beasts!' I gathered that the thing he disliked most about young men of today was their effeminacy. 'They are just women,' he said scornfully. But the life led by any man would have seemed effeminate, compared to the kind of life he would have preferred to see men lead, ever more energetic and virile. (During the long walks which he enjoyed, after hiking for hours, his body burning, he would throw himself into icy streams.) He even disliked it if a man wore a ring on his finger. Not that this bias in favour of virility prevented him from having some of the finest qualities of sensibility. Mme de Villeparisis asked him to describe for my grandmother a château where Mme de Sévigné had stayed, adding that she detected a fair amount of writer's posturing in the despair the letter-writer expresses at being separated from that tedious Mme de Grignan:[58]

'There I must disagree, M. de Charlus said. It seems to me to be completely genuine. Also, it was a time when such sentiments were better appreciated. You might well think, my dear aunt, that in La Fontaine, the inhabitant of Monomotapa hurrying to see his friend, because of a dream in which he had seemed a little sad, or the pigeon who thinks the greatest of misfortunes is the absence of the other pigeon,[59] are as exaggerated as Mme de Sévigné in her impatience for the moment when she can be alone with her daughter. Think of what she says on leaving her: "This separation pains me to the soul, and I feel it like an ache in the body. In absence, we make free with the hours: we live already in the time we long for."[60] Is it not beautiful?' My grandmother was delighted to hear Mme de Sévigné's *Letters* spoken of exactly as she would have spoken of them herself. She was amazed that a man could appreciate them so well; and she detected in M. de Charlus feminine sensitivity and intuitions. Later, when she and I were alone together, we agreed that he must have been profoundly influenced by a wife, his mother or perhaps a daughter, if he had had any. 'A mistress,' was what I thought, remembering the influence I believed Saint-Loup's mistress must have had on him, which enabled me to have an idea of what power for the refinement of men is given to the women they live with.

'Oh, once she was back together with her daughter, said Mme de Villeparisis, she probably had nothing to say to her.

– Nothing of the kind, said M. de Charlus. She would have said the sort of things which she says are "so slight that none, save you and I, ever notices them".[61] And in any case, she was *with* her, which as La Bruyère says is the most essential thing in life: "To be with those one loves is enough: to talk with them or not to talk with them is all the same."[62] He's right – it is the only happiness, he added in a melancholy tone. Life is, alas, so badly arranged that we rarely enjoy that happiness. Mme de Sévigné was actually better off than most: she spent much of her life with a loved one.

– You're forgetting that it wasn't love, though – it was just her daughter.

– But the important thing in life is not *whom* one loves,' he exclaimed, in a voice that was authoritative, peremptory, almost cutting. 'The important thing is to love. The feelings of Mme de Sévigné for her daughter can more properly deserve the name of the passion depicted by Racine in *Andromaque* or *Phèdre* than the paltry goings-on between the young Sévigné and his mistresses. The same goes for the love of a mystic for his God. The limits we set to love are too restrictive and derive solely from our great ignorance of life.

– Do you really like *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, then? Saint-Loup asked his uncle in a tone of slight disdain.

– There is more truth in a single tragedy by Racine than in all the melodramas of M. Victor Hugo put together, M. de Charlus replied.

– Aren't fashionable people the limit? Saint-Loup murmured to me. Preferring Racine to Victor! I ask you!' He was sincerely dejected by what his uncle had said, but the pleasure of saying 'the limit' and especially 'I ask you' was of some consolation to him.

In expressing these views on the sadness of the life lived without the loved one (views which led my grandmother to say to me later that the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis was in some ways a better judge of books than his aunt, and in particular that there was something in him that made him far superior to the majority of club-men), M. de Charlus not only showed a delicacy of sentiment which is indeed rarely to be found in a man; but his very voice, like certain contralto voices in which the middle register has been insufficiently trained and which, in song, sounds rather like an antiphonal duet between a young man and a woman, rose as he expressed these subtle insights to higher notes, took on an unexpected gentleness and seemed to echo choirs of brides and loving sisters. This bevy of girls which M. de Charlus, with his horror of effeminacy, would have been dismayed to know took over his voice, played a part not only in his interpretation and modulation of the passages full of sentiment. While he spoke, one could often hear their light laughter, the giggling of coquettes or schoolgirls full of pranks, mischief and teasing talk.

He spoke of an estate which had once belonged to his family, with a house in which Marie-Antoinette had slept and a park designed by Le Nôtre,[63] now in the possession of the Israels, the wealthy financiers who had bought it. 'Israel, at least that's the name borne by the persons in question, although it does seem to me to be not a proper name, but a generic or ethnic term. Who knows, it may be that such people do not have names. Perhaps they are identified only in so far as they belong to a particular grouping? However! he shrieked. Just think – to have been the dwelling of the Guermantes and to be owned by the *Israels*! It puts one in mind of the room in the château at Blois where the guide showing you round says, "And now this 'ere is where your Mary Queen of Scots used to say her prayers and now it's where I keeps me brooms". Naturally, I now have not the slightest wish to have any knowledge of that house which has disgraced itself, just as I have no desire for contact with my cousin Clara de Chimay, who has left her husband.[64] However, I do keep a photograph of the house as it was when unsullied, just as I have one of the Princesse de Chimay taken at a time when her great eyes were full of no one but my cousin. Photography acquires a certain dignity, which it does not normally have, when it is not just a reproduction of reality, but can show us things which no longer exist. I could give you a copy,' he added to my grandmother, 'since you have an interest in that manner of architecture.' At that moment, noticing that his embroidered handkerchief was revealing part of its coloured edging, he thrust it back into his pocket with a startled glance, like a prudish but not innocent woman concealing bodily charms which in her excessive

modesty she sees as wanton. 'Can you credit, he said, that the first thing those Israel persons did was lay waste Le Nôtre's park? Why, it's like defacing a canvas by Poussin! The place for such people is behind bars. Although, of course, he added with a smile after a moment of silence, there are probably plenty of other reasons why they should be behind bars! However! I leave to your imagination the effect produced by an English-style garden in front of the architecture of such a house!

– Well, actually, said Mme de Villeparisis, the architecture of the house is the same as that of the Petit Trianon at Versailles. That didn't stop Marie-Antoinette having her English garden in front of it.[65]

– Yes, said M. de Charlus. And it completely spoils the façade, which is by Gabriel. Obviously it would be an act of barbarism if anyone were nowadays to raze Marie-Antoinette's English cottages. But whichever fad each day may bring, I do find it difficult to believe that a passing fancy of a Mme Israel could have the same value as a memento of the Queen.'

My grandmother had signalled to me that it was time for bed, despite the protests of Saint-Loup, who, to my great shame, had been referring in his uncle's hearing to the feelings of evening sorrow which often afflicted me round about bed-time; and I was sure that M. de Charlus would think this was very unmanly of me. I delayed for a few minutes, then went off to bed. Not long afterwards, having heard a knock at my bedroom door and having asked who was there, I was surprised to hear the voice of M. de Charlus say in a sharp tone:

'Charlus here. May I come in, Monsieur? Then, having stepped in and closed the door, he said in the same tone, Monsieur, my nephew said you might be rather unsettled before getting to sleep. He also tells me you are a great admirer of the books of Bergotte, and since I happened to have in my trunk a Bergotte which is very likely unfamiliar to you, I have brought it for you, in the hope that it may help you feel better at a time which you find distressful.'

I thanked M. de Charlus with all the effusion at my command and told him that my fear had been that Saint-Loup's words about my disquiet at nightfall might have made him think me more of a fool than I was.

'Not at all, he replied in a gentler voice. You may well be devoid of personal worth, but in that case you're like nearly everyone else! However, at least for a time you have youth, and youth is always irresistible. Moreover, young man, it is the height of stupidity to think there is something ridiculous or reprehensible in feelings one does not share. I love the night and you say you dread it. I love the scent of roses, yet I have a friend in whom it sets off a fever. Do you suppose that, for me, that makes him a lesser man than I am? I strive to understand everything and do not allow myself to condemn anything. However! Do not feel too sorry for yourself. Not that I would ever maintain that such dejection as yours is not hard to bear – I know how much one can suffer for things which others could never understand. But at least you have your grandmother to whom to entrust your affection. You can see her all the time. And it is a permissible mode of affection, I mean a requited love. There are so many other modes of affection of which one cannot say the same!'

He was striding about the room, lifting or staring at an object here or there. I felt he had something he wanted to say to me but that he could not find the right words.

'I have another volume of Bergotte with me,' he said as he rang the bell. 'I'll just get it for you.' A page appeared, to whom M. de Charlus said haughtily, 'Fetch me the butler, boy. He's the only one round here who's clever enough to run an errand. – Do you mean M. Aimé, Monsieur? asked the page. – I do not know the fellow's name! But now you mention it, yes, I seem to remember he's called Aimé. Look sharp – it's urgent! – He'll be here straight away, Monsieur. I saw him downstairs just now,' said the page, wishing to appear efficient. After a moment, he came back: 'M. Aimé is in bed, Monsieur. But I could do the errand instead. – No, you must get him out of bed. – Monsieur, I can't. He doesn't sleep at the hotel. – In that case, leave us. – Monsieur, I said when the page had left, you are too kind – a single volume of Bergotte will suffice. – Yes, I agree, actually.' M. de Charlus was still striding up and down. Several minutes went by; then, after hesitating for a few moments and making as though to leave several times, he swung round and made his exit, calling out in his former scathing voice, 'I bid you good evening, Monsieur!' After all the elevated sentiments I had heard him express that evening, he amazed me on the beach the following morning: just before he was to leave Balbec, and as I was about to go in for a bathe, he came down to tell me my grandmother would like to see me as soon as I came out of the water, and, as he spoke, he pinched me on the neck, with a most vulgar laugh and air of familiarity:

'Who's the naughty little rascal, then, who couldn't care less about what his old granny wants?

– I adore her, Monsieur!

– Monsieur, he said icily, stepping back, you are young! But you should take advantage of your youth to learn two things: the first is that you should abstain from expressing sentiments which are too natural not to be taken for granted. And the second is that it is a mistake to get on one's high horse and take offence at things said to one before one has properly understood their meaning. Had you taken that precaution just now, you might have contrived not to appear to be giving voice at random, speaking without rhyme or reason, and thereby compounding the ludicrousness of wearing that bathing- costume with anchors embroidered upon it! I lent you a volume of Bergotte which I need to have back. Send it to me within the hour by the butler of the hilarious and undeserved Christian name[66] who, one assumes, is not in bed at this time of day. You have made me aware that, in speaking as I did last evening of the irresistibleness of youth, I spoke too soon – I should have done you a greater service had I pointed out youth's foolishness, its inconsistencies and its wrong-headedness! I trust, Monsieur, that this little dressing-down will prove as beneficial to you as your dip in the sea. However! You must not stand about like that – you might catch cold. I bid you good day, sir!'

M. de Charlus must have regretted his words, for some time later I received another copy – morocco-bound and with a panel of incised leather on its front cover showing a sprig of forget-me-not in half-relief – of the book which he had lent me and which, it being Aimé's day off, I had asked the 'lift' to take back to him.

M. de Charlus having departed, Robert and I were at last able to go to dinner at Bloch's. I realized that evening that the anecdotes at which Bloch was inclined to laugh too heartily were stories he had heard from M. Bloch senior, and that the 'somebody really interesting' who figured in them was always one of the latter's friends whom he described in those words. We can all recall certain people we admired as children, a father who was wittier than the rest of the family, a teacher whose mind we saw as better than it was because he revealed philosophy to us, a fellow-pupil more advanced than ourselves (as Bloch had been in relation to me), who despises the Musset of 'L'Espoir en Dieu' at a time when we still admire him, but who, by the time we have moved on to old Leconte de Lisle or Claudel, will still be full of enthusiasm for the Musset of:

> À Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca,
> Vous étiez, vous étiez bien aise …

without forgetting:

> Padoue est un fort bel endroit
> Où de très grands docteurs en droit …
> Mais j'aime mieux la polenta …
> … Passe dans son domino noir
> La Toppatelle

and who rejects all of the 'Nuits' except:

Au Havre, devant l'Atlantique,
À Venise, à l'affreux Lido,
Où vient sur l' herbe d'un tombeau
Mourir la pâle Adriatique.[67]

When we are impressed by someone, we remember and quote with admiration things which are markedly inferior to other things which we would not even consider saying, if left to the resources of our own invention, just as in a novel a writer will include real characters and their sayings because they are true, notwithstanding the fact that they represent a mediocre element, a dead weight in the living whole. The portraits of Saint-Simon are admirable, though presumably he did not admire himself as he wrote them; and the words he quotes as charming, spoken by wits of the time, have remained mediocre or become incomprehensible. He would have scorned to invent what he quotes as so acute or so vivid from Mme Cornuel[68] or Louis XIV, a feature which can be remarked in many others and which lends itself to various interpretations, the only one of which is relevant here is the following: that in the state of mind in which one 'observes', one is well below the level at which one creates.

So, set within my old school-friend Bloch was Bloch senior, forty years behind the times of his son, who recounted stupid stories and laughed at them in the son's voice, as much as the real Bloch senior laughed at them in his own voice, since whenever he bayed with laughter and repeated the funny part several times so that his audience would properly savour the point of each anecdote, the gales of the son's faithful guffaws would never fail to celebrate in unison with the father the latter's table-talk. The younger Bloch was capable of saying things that were strikingly clever, which he would follow immediately by showing what he owed to his family, telling for the thirtieth time some jokes of his father's which the latter trotted out, along with his frock-coat, only on those ceremonial occasions when Bloch the younger brought home somebody whom it was worth going to some trouble to impress: one of his former teachers, a 'chum' who was a great prize-winner or, as on this occasion, Saint-Loup and myself. So we were treated to this: 'A military commentator of genius, who had proved without the shadow of a doubt why, in the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese would be beaten and the Russians could not fail to win …'; and then to this: 'He's an eminent man who's seen as a great financier in political circles and a great politician in financial circles.' These statements were interchangeable with others concerning the Baron de Rothschild and Sir Rufus Israel, two characters who were introduced ambiguously, in a way which could make a listener infer that M. Bloch senior had known them personally.

I was caught out by this habit of M. Bloch's: his way of referring to Bergotte gave me to understand that he too was one of his old friends. But the fact was that the only famous people whom M. Bloch knew were those he knew *of*, people whom, 'without being acquainted with them', he had seen in the distance at the theatre or about town. He was pretty sure his own person, his name, his identity as a personality were not unknown to these people, who, when they caught sight of him, probably had to resist a frequent furtive urge to greet him. Though people in high society may well be acquainted at first hand with people of talent, may have them to dinner, this does not mean they understand them any better. But when one has a certain familiarity with society, the vacuity of those who compose it makes one over-willing to frequent obscure people, who know the famous 'without being acquainted with them', and over-ready to expect them to be intelligent. I was to discover this when speaking of Bergotte. M. Bloch senior was not the only one to be a success in his own house: my old school-friend was even more celebrated among his sisters, at whom he kept grumbling, with his face almost in his plate. At this, they laughed till they cried. They had also adopted their brother's lingo: they spoke it fluently, as though it was compulsory, as though it was the only language that intelligent people could use. On our arrival, the eldest daughter said to one of the younger ones, 'Go and tell our wise father and our venerable mother. – Minxes and hussies, said Bloch, I bring you my lord Saint-Loup of the swift javelins, who is come for some days from Doncières of the smooth-stoned dwellings, Doncières the dam of horses.' Bloch being as vulgar as he was cultured, his speech usually ended with a less Homeric pleasantry: 'Look here, close up your peplos of the beautiful clasps a bit! What sort of goings-on are these? I mean, he's not my father,[69] is he?' Whereupon Mesdemoiselles Bloch collapsed in a maelstrom of merriment. I told their brother how much pleasure he had given me by recommending me to read Bergotte, whose books I loved.

M. Bloch senior, who had no acquaintance with Bergotte, but had heard something of his life by lending an ear to gossip in theatres, had an equally indirect way of being familiar with his books, relying on judgments of apparent literary relevance. His world was that of approximations, where greetings are half-exchanged, where half-truths usurp the place of judgment. Inaccuracies and incompetence in no way reduce self-assurance. The opposite is more usual: self-esteem works its beneficent miracle and, since few of us can enjoy intimacy with the great or a familiarity with higher learning, those who are excluded from these can still see their own position as the most enviable; the point of view we have from the social tier we occupy makes each of us believe it is the best, for we can see not only many who are worse off than ourselves and to be pitied, but also the great, whom we can name and condemn without knowing them, misjudge and disdain without understanding them. Those who believe they deserve a share of happiness greater than that accorded to others, who find deficient the degree of it afforded them even by self-esteem's magnification of their meagre personal advantages, can call upon envy to make up the deficit. Envy may well express itself, of course, in the accents of disdain; and 'I have no wish to know him' must be translated as 'I have no possibility of knowing him'. The latter is the literal translation; but the passionate meaning remains: 'I have no wish to know him.' We know it is untrue; yet it is not simple dishonesty that makes us say it: we say it because that is how we feel, and that is enough to abolish the difference between truth and untruth, enough for our happiness.

Self-centredness thus making each man a king, enabling him to see the ordered ranks of the universe beneath him, M. Bloch enjoyed the luxury of absolute monarchy every morning as he leafed through the paper, over his bowl of chocolate, whenever he caught sight of the name of Bergotte at the foot of an article: he granted him a haughty and cursory audience, handed down his judgment and, between sips at his scalding beverage, savoured the joy of sneering: 'Really, that Bergotte chap has become unreadable. What an old bore! Makes you feel like stopping your subscription. What a piece of convoluted nonsense! What a rigmarole!' And he helped himself to some more bread and butter.

M. Bloch senior's illusion of importance reached a little beyond the confines of his own range of vision. For one thing, his children saw him as an outstanding man. All children tend either to underrate or to overrate their parents; but a good son always sees his father as the best of all possible fathers, without reference to any objective grounds for admiration. Such grounds, in the case of M. Bloch senior, were not completely absent: he was educated, percipient, affectionate towards his relations. Those relations who were closest to him were particularly attached to him, especially since in middle-class life, with its multiplicity of smaller worlds (unlike in 'society', where people are judged by a single standard which is fixed, however absurd and false it may be, and which is, for purposes of comparison, an aggregate derived from the sum total of all elegant people), there will always be supper parties and family celebrations which have as their life and soul somebody who is deemed to be amusing and agreeable, yet who in society proper would be given short shrift. Also, in those smaller worlds, where the aristocracy's factitious scale of grandeurs does not exist, it is replaced by distinctions which are even sillier. So it was that, within the family, even well beyond the closest circles, because of a supposed likeness in the cut of his moustache and the bridge of the nose, M. Bloch was known as 'the Duc d'Aumale's double'.[70] (Among club-men who hunt and shoot, the one who wears his cap at a jaunty angle and buttons his tunic very tight, so as to give himself what he thinks is the look of an officer from a foreign army, will always be seen as something of a character by the others.)

This resemblance was remote; yet it seemed to be viewed as a sort of title. People said, 'Which Bloch do you mean – the Duc d'Aumale?' as they might say, 'Which Princesse Murat do you mean – the Queen of Naples?' One or two other minute features were enough to make all the kith and kin exclaim at how distinguished he looked. Though his style of life did not run to a carriage, on certain days M. Bloch would hire an open victoria and pair, and have himself driven through the Bois de Boulogne, nonchalantly sprawling, with two fingers at his temple and two under his chin; and though passers-by who did not know him may have thought he was 'just a joker', the whole family knew that, when it came to 'the high life', Uncle Salomon could show a thing or two to Gramont-Caderousse[71]

himself. He was one of those men who, when they die, are described in the social column of *Le Radical*, because they used to eat in a restaurant on the boulevards at the same table as the editor of that little newspaper, as 'a personality well known to Parisians'. M. Bloch said to Saint-Loup and me that Bergotte was well aware why he, M. Bloch, never greeted him, that Bergotte averted his eyes as soon as he caught sight of him at the theatre or at the club. Saint-Loup started to blush, at the thought that such a club could not possibly be the Jockey Club, of which his father had been the chairman. Yet it had to be quite an exclusive one, as M. Bloch had just said that, nowadays, Bergotte would not be elected to it. So, with some apprehension, in case he was 'underestimating the opponent', Saint-Loup asked whether the club in question was not the Cercle de la rue Royale, which was a club deemed to be 'beyond the pale' by his family, to which he knew certain Jews had been elected. 'No, replied M. Bloch with an air of negligence, pride and shame, it's a small club, but much more enjoyable than that one: the Old Duffers' Club. We're very select, you know. – Isn't Sir Rufus Israel the Chairman?' the younger Bloch asked, to give his father the opportunity to tell a lie which would put him in a good light, and quite without realizing that the financier's name did not have the same prestige for Saint-Loup as it had for him. In point of fact, the Old Duffers' Club counted among its members, not Sir Rufus Israel, but one of his employees. This man, being on good terms with his employer, carried about a supply of cards bearing the financier's name, one of which he would give to M. Bloch whenever the latter was about to travel with a railway company of which Sir Rufus was a director. M. Bloch would say, 'I must look in at the club and get a recommendation from Sir Rufus.' Once on the train, the card enabled him to impress the guard. Mesdemoiselles Bloch being more interested in Bergotte than in pursuing the subject of the Old Duffers, the youngest of them asked her brother in a voice that was completely serious (for she was under the impression that the only way to speak of talented men was to use her brother's repertoire of expressions), 'Is this Bergotte customer really an outstanding sort of a cove? I mean, is he one of your Villiers or your Catulles,[72] really big customers like that? – I've met him at a few first nights, said M. Nissim Bernard. He's awkward, a sort of Peter Schlemihl.'[73] M. Bloch had nothing against this reference to the Count von Chamisso; but the mention of a word like 'Schlemihl', though it belonged to the sort of semi-German, semi-Jewish dialect which delighted him within the family circle, he thought was vulgar and out of keeping when spoken in front of strangers. He shot a dark look at his uncle. 'He does have some talent, Bloch said. – Oh, I see, the sister replied, in a very sober voice, as though meaning that in that case I was to be excused. – All writers have some talent, M. Bloch senior said scornfully. – It's even being said,' said the son, brandishing his fork and screwing his eyes into a diabolically ironic expression, 'that he's going to present himself for election to the Académie française! – Oh, for goodness sake! The man's a light-weight!' replied M. Bloch senior, who seemed not to hold the Académie in such low esteem as his son and daughters. 'He doesn't have the necessary calibre. – In any case, the Académie is a *salon* and Bergotte enjoys too little credit,' pronounced Mme Bloch's uncle, a harmless and gentle individual with money to leave, whose surname, Bernard, might have been enough to stimulate my grandfather's diagnostic gift, though it might also have seemed insufficiently in harmony with a face which could have been brought back from the palace of Darius and recomposed by Mme Dieulafoy,[74] had it not been preceded by the name of Nissim, chosen by some expert wishing to crown this visage from Susa in an aptly Oriental way, by spreading above it the wingspan of some androcephalous bull from Khorsabad. M. Bloch senior would often insult this uncle, either because he was stimulated to pick on him by the man's simple but vulnerable good nature, or because, the villa being rented in the name of M. Nissim Bernard, he wanted to show that, though his beneficiary, he was not beholden to him in any way, and especially that he was not trying to ingratiate himself with the aim of inheriting all that money when the time came. M. Nissim Bernard was upset mainly at being treated rudely in the presence of the butler. He murmured something unintelligible, in which all one could make out was, 'When the Meschores are here.' In the Bible, 'Meschores' means the 'servant of God'. Among themselves, the Blochs used the word with the meaning of 'the servants' and they had great fun in using it: their belief that neither Gentiles nor indeed their servants understood the allusion quickened for both M. Nissim Bernard and M. Bloch senior the gratification they derived from their double status of 'masters' and 'Jews'. However, the latter satisfaction turned into dissatisfaction when guests were present. When M. Bloch heard his uncle say 'Meschores', he felt he was drawing too much attention to his Easternness, as a courtesan entertaining some of her likes along with more respectable people will be annoyed if the loose women raise the subject of their profession or use objectionable language. So, rather than mollifying M. Bloch, his uncle's murmur of complaint irritated him beyond measure; and he lost no opportunity of berating the poor man. 'Naturally, when there's some pompous stupidity to utter, one may be sure you will do it. You would be the first to lick Bergotte's boots if he was here!' M. Bloch exclaimed, while M. Nissim Bernard lowered the dense locks of the beard of King Sargon towards his plate. Young Bloch too now wore a beard, which was also frizzed and blue-black, bringing out in him a close resemblance to his great-uncle. 'What, do you mean you are the son of the Marquis de Marsantes?' M. Nissim Bernard said to Saint-Loup. 'I knew him well.' I thought he must mean 'knew' in the way M. Bloch senior said he 'knew' Bergotte, by sight. But M. Nissim Bernard then added, 'Your father was a good friend of mine.' Young Bloch had turned extremely red, his father looked profoundly upset, Mesdemoiselles Bloch were stifling laughter. In M. Nissim Bernard, the art of showing off, which was curbed in M. Bloch senior and his offspring, had led to a habit of perpetual mendacity. If staying at a hotel when travelling, M. Nissim Bernard, as M. Bloch senior might have done, always had his manservant bring all the newspapers to him in the dining-room, in the middle of lunch, so that the other guests could see he was a man who travelled with a manservant. But if he struck up an acquaintance with any of these guests, M. Nissim Bernard would be sure to say he was a Senator, which his nephew would never have done. Although he knew perfectly well that it would come out one day that he had no right to this title, at the moment of speaking of it, he could not resist the temptation to acquire it. These lies told by his uncle, and the difficulties they could create, were a trial to M. Bloch. 'Pay no attention,' he murmured to Saint-Loup. 'It's just his way of making a little joke.' Saint-Loup, who had a strong interest in the psychology of liars, was very interested in all of this. 'A bigger liar than Odysseus of Ithaca,' said Bloch, 'despite the fact that Athene said of the latter that he was the greatest liar among men. – Well, I must say, exclaimed M. Nissim Bernard, I did not expect to find myself dining with the son of my friend! I have in Paris a photograph of your father and any number of letters from him. He always called me "Uncle", for some reason. A charming man, of sparkling wit. I remember a dinner I once gave in Nice, for Sardou, Labiche, Augier …[75] – Molière, Racine, Corneille, M. Bloch senior continued ironically, his list being completed by his son: Plautus, Menander, Kalidasa.'[76] M. Nissim Bernard, with hurt feelings, abandoned his story, ascetically forgoing a great pleasure, and said not another word throughout the rest of dinner.

'O bronze-helmeted Saint-Loup, said Bloch, do have some more of this duck with thighs thick with fat, whereon the illustrious sacrificer of poultry has poured copious libations of the red wine.'

Usually, once M. Bloch senior, so as to impress one of his son's important friends, had brought out his choicest stories about Sir Rufus Israel, he would withdraw, feeling that he had already touched a chord of deepest gratitude in his son, and not wanting to 'go too far' in front of 'the lad'. But if there was some quite exceptional reason, such as the time when 'the lad' passed the *agrégation*,[77] then M. Bloch would augment the normal series of anecdotes by bringing out an ironic remark which he generally preferred to keep for his select group of friends, and which, now that it was offered to friends of the younger Bloch, filled the latter with an excess of pride: 'The government's behaviour is an outrage! They have not sought the view of M. Coquelin! M. Coquelin has let it be known he is extremely upset.' (M. Bloch took pride in being reactionary and scornful towards theatre people.)

Mesdemoiselles Bloch and their brother blushed to the roots of their hair, a sign of how impressed they were, when their parent, to show that he knew how to behave like a king when occasion demanded it, gave the order to serve champagne, then let drop the news that, as a 'treat' for his son's 'faithful friends', he had booked three seats for the performance to be given at the Casino that very night by a touring comic-opera company. He was sorry he could not get a box, but they were all taken: however, he had often tried every one of them, and you were far better off in the front stalls. Whereas the son's failing, that is, a way of behaving he thought was invisible to others, was bad manners, the father's fault was avarice. So he had the 'champagne', really a mediocre sparkling wine, poured from a carafe, and he treated us to 'front stalls' which turned out to be seats in the back stalls, half the price of the others, under the miraculous persuasion of his failing that no one would notice the difference, whether at dinner or in the theatre (where all the boxes were in fact unoccupied). M. Bloch having let us wet our lips in shallow champagne glasses, which his son described as 'craters with deep-swept flanks', he invited us to admire a painting which he liked so much that it had accompanied him to Balbec. It was a Rubens, he told us. Saint-Loup was naïve enough to ask whether it was signed. M. Bloch replied with a blush that he had

had the signature cut off because of the frame, but this was of no importance as he had no intention of selling it. Then he bundled us out, so as to catch up on his reading of the *Journal officiel*,[78] piles of which were to be seen about the house, and which he said he could not avoid reading, because of his 'parliamentary situation', on which he did not enlighten us further. 'I'll just get a scarf, said Bloch, as Zephyrus and Boreas are abroad on the fish-teeming seas, and if we delay even a little after the performance, our homecoming will be lit by the first glimmerings of rosy-fingered Eos. By the way,' he said to Saint-Loup, once we had left the house (and I had my heart in my mouth, having immediately realized that Bloch's irony was now being exercised at the expense of M. de Charlus), 'who's the priceless clown in the dark suit that you were parading about the beach the other day? – That was my uncle, Saint-Loup answered curtly. Such a blunder was not the sort of thing to give Bloch pause. He spluttered with laughter: 'Congratulations! I ought to have realized – he's very neatly turned out, and he's got a physog that stamps him as a codger of the first water. – You are utterly and completely mistaken, Saint-Loup snapped. He is a man of high intelligence. – Well, that's a pity, Bloch said, because it makes him less than perfect. I wouldn't mind getting to know him, though, as I'm sure I could write something pretty good on customers like him. When you see him walk past, it's just huge! Mind you, I would have to underplay the face with its burlesque aspect, caricature being beneath any artist who's really interested in the plastic beauty of his sentences – though mind you it did give me a good laugh! – and I'd bring out your uncle's aristocratic side, which really makes a splendiferous effect, and once you get over the first fit of the giggles it really does strike you with its grand manner. Tell me, Bloch said to me, just to change the subject for a moment, there's one thing I keep meaning to ask you, then every time we meet, some divinity, some blessed denizen of Olympus, makes me completely forget to find out from you something which could come in handy some day – which might *already* have come in handy! Who is that beautiful creature I saw you with once at the Zoo? She was with a gent that I know by sight and a damsel with long hair.' I had of course noticed at the time that the name of Bloch was unfamiliar to Mme Swann, who had called him by some other name and said he was attached to a ministry, a statement which I had never thought to ask him to verify. I could not understand how Bloch, who, according to what she had said, had sought an introduction to her, could remain in ignorance of her name. This so surprised me that I was speechless for a moment. 'Well, anyway, he said, you deserve to be congratulated – she must have given you a nice time. I had just met her a few days before, you see, riding on the suburban line. She had no objection to yours truly, and so a nice ride was had by one and all, and we were just on the point of arranging to do it again on a future occasion when someone she knew had the bad form to get on, just one stop before the terminus.' I said nothing, which did not appear much to his liking. 'So, he said, I was rather hoping you could let me have her address, and then I could pop round there a few times a week and share with her the joys of Eros, favourite of the gods. But look, if you're reluctant to let *me* into the secrets of a professional who, between central Paris and the Point-du-Jour, had no reluctance to letting me into *her*, three times in a row and with refinements, then so be it, I won't insist. I'm bound to come across her again, one of these evenings.'

I went to see Bloch shortly after this dinner, and when he came to the hotel to return my visit, I was out. As he was asking for me, he was noticed by Françoise, who as it happened, though he had once come to Combray, had never set eyes on him before. All she knew was that 'one of my gents' had called to see me, but she 'didn't know for why'; all she could say was that it was a man dressed in no particular style and who had made no great impression on her. Though I knew that some of Françoise's notions about social things would remain for ever impenetrable to me, that they derived from misheard words, names once mistaken and never thereafter put right, and though I had long since taken the view that any investigation into this was pointless, I could not help wondering, to no avail, of course, what there could possibly be in the name 'Bloch' which she found so stupendous. For I had no sooner told her that the young man she had seen was M. Bloch, than she stepped back, dumbfounded and disappointed. 'What! You mean *that's* M. Bloch?' she gasped, quite staggered, as though such a prestigious personage should have had an appearance which would make manifest to all and sundry that they were in the presence of a prodigy of nature; and like someone finding out that a historical figure does not live up to his reputation, she repeated in an awe-struck voice which suggested that in future she would be a sadder but wiser, if more sceptical, woman, 'So, *that* was M. Bloch! Well, all I can say is, you wouldn't think so to see him!' She seemed to bear me a grudge, as though I had misled her about him, or exaggerated his importance. She did, however, have the considerateness to add, 'Well, if that's your M. Bloch, sir, then all I can say is you're every bit as good as he is!'

Françoise soon had to endure, with regard to Saint-Loup, whom she adored, a disillusionment of a different order, but more short-lived: she learned that he was a Republican. Despite the fact that, when she spoke, say, of the Queen of Portugal, she could say, with that homely disrespect which is the expression of supreme respect among the lower classes, 'Amélie, that sister of Philippe's', Françoise was a royalist. But that someone who was not only a marquis, but a marquis who had dazzled her, could be a supporter of the Republic, seemed beyond the bounds of the possible. She was as peeved towards me as though I had given her a box which she had believed to be of solid gold, for which she had thanked me from the bottom of her heart, only to be told by a jeweller that it was just gold-plated. She instantly lost her admiration for Saint-Loup, which she soon gave back to him, however, it having occurred to her that, since he was the Marquis de Saint-Loup, he could not possibly be a Republican and was therefore only pretending, out of self-interest, since with 'a government like that, he stood to make a bit out of it'. From then on, her coolness towards him and her spite towards me disappeared; and when she spoke of Saint-Loup, she would say, 'He's just a hypocrite,' her broad, kindly smile showing that she thought as well of him as before and that she had forgiven him.

Saint-Loup's sincerity and disinterest were, *pace* Françoise, absolute. In fact, it was this complete integrity of his which, in its inability to find entire fulfilment in a self-regarding emotion such as love, and being, unlike myself, free of the impossibility of finding spiritual sustenance anywhere but within the self, made him as capable as I was incapable of friendship.

Françoise was equally mistaken when she said of Saint-Loup that he 'just *looked* as though he didn't look down on people beneath him', but that this was really untrue: you only had to see the way he got angry with his coachman. Robert, it was true, had more than once had occasion to speak rather severely to the man; but that, rather than a proof of any consciousness of class-distinction, was a proof of his belief in equality between the classes. 'But look here,' he said, when I reproached him for having treated his coachman harshly, 'why should I affect to speak politely to the fellow? Are we not equals? Is he not as close to me as my uncles and my cousins? You seem to suggest that I should handle him with care, like an inferior!' And he added disdainfully, 'You're speaking like an aristocrat.'

If anything, Saint-Loup's class-consciousness, expressed as a bias or a prejudice, went against the aristocracy, to the extent that he was as ready to disbelieve in the moral superiority of a man of fashion as he was ready to believe in that of a man of the people. When I mentioned the Princess of Luxembourg and her encounter with me and my grandmother, he said:

'She's just a silly old bore, like all her kind. A sort of cousin of mine, actually.'

Robert rarely went into society, with his prejudice against the people who made it up; and when he did, the attitude of disgust and coldness which he took with him increased all his close relatives' distress about his liaison with a woman 'of the theatre', which they believed was doing him great harm, in particular because it had fostered his tendency towards wilful and systematic disparagement, because it had 'led him astray' and 'addled his mind', and could be expected to lead him to complete abandonment of his social position. This explained why many of the most frivolous men of the Faubourg Saint-Germain said the most cutting things about Robert's mistress: 'Harlots have their job to do, they're a necessary evil, but she is quite unforgivable! She has done too much harm to someone we are very fond of.' Not that Robert was the first man ever to fall victim to a loose woman; but the others saw their women as a mere pastime for men of the world, and went on thinking as men of the world in all things, politics included. Robert's family thought he was 'embittered'. They did not understand that for many young men in fashionable society, who might otherwise never acquire a certain cultivation of mind or a measure of mildness in friendship, who might never be exposed to good taste or gentler ways of doing things, it is often in a mistress that they find their best teacher and in relationships with such women that they make their only acquaintance with morality, serve an apprenticeship in higher culture and learn to see the value of knowledge for its own sake. Even among the lowest classes, who can often vie in uncouthness with the highest, it is the woman, with her greater sensitivity and delicacy, and her idle mind, who inquires further into certain

refinements, aspires to modes of beauty or art which, even though she may not fully grasp them, she still sees as more important than the things, like money or position, which to the eyes of the man would have seemed more desirable. The lover, whether a young club-man like Saint-Loup or a young working-man (nowadays electricians, for example, have a rightful place in the ranks of the true nobility), has so much admiration and respect for his mistress that he will naturally extend these sentiments to what she respects and admires, and this leads to a complete reversal of his scale of values. By virtue of her sex, she is weak and prone to inexplicable nervous troubles which, if he encountered them in a man, or in some other woman, an aunt or a cousin of his for instance, the sturdy youngster would dismiss with a smile. But the woman he loves he cannot bear to see in pain. When a young aristocrat like Saint-Loup takes his mistress to dinner at an exclusive little restaurant, he soon acquires habits, such as making sure he has in his pocket the valerianate which she may need during the evening, or telling the waiter, forcefully and without irony, not to let the doors bang, and not to include damp moss among the table decoration, so as to prevent her from feeling ill, a reaction he himself has never had to it, but which is part of an occult world which she has taught him to see as real, which despite his lack of personal experience now arouses his sympathy and will continue to arouse it in the future at the sight of somebody else suffering in the same way. Because she was fond of animals (her dog, her canaries and her parrots went everywhere with her), Saint-Loup's mistress had taught him – as the earliest monks in the Middle Ages had taught Christendom – not to inflict suffering on dumb creatures; and he now took great care of all her pets and spoke of people who were cruel to animals as brutes. In addition, an actress, whether real or, like the one who lived with Saint-Loup, so-called, whether she was intelligent or unintelligent (and her intelligence was something I knew nothing about), by making him see the company of fashionable ladies as insipid and the requirement to attend their functions as intolerable, had saved him from snobbery and cured him of frivolity. Although his mistress had helped reduce the importance of society and its relations in his life, she had had the converse effect of making him invest with real nobility and refinement his relations with friends, which, if he had been merely a frequenter of fashionable salons, would have been governed by vanity or self-interest and dominated by grossness. With her woman's instinct, better able to appreciate in men certain qualities of sensitivity which her lover might otherwise have overlooked or mocked, she had the gift of immediately identifying among his friends the ones whose affection for him was genuine, and also the habit of preferring them to the others. She knew how to make him feel real gratitude to these friends, to make him show it, and pay attention to the things they enjoyed and the things they disliked. Before long, he came to have no need of her reminders and attended to all this himself; and so in her absence, at Balbec, though she had never set eyes on me, though he had perhaps never even mentioned me in the letters he wrote to her, he took care to close the windows of carriages for me, took away flowers which might make me have an attack and, when he was taking his leave of several people at once, made sure to say his farewells in such an order as to be able to have a few final minutes alone with me, marking a difference between them and me, treating me in a way which contrasted with the way he treated other people. The mistress had opened his mind to things invisible; she had brought serious considerations into his life; she had changed his heart for the better. But none of this was apparent to the family, who went on lamenting, 'That whore will be the death of him! She has already led him into a life of dishonour!' By this time, to be sure, Robert had derived from her all the benefit she had to give; and now she could do nothing but hurt him, as her feelings for him had turned to disgust and she tortured him. It had started one day when she had thought for the first time that he was stupid and ridiculous, some friends of hers, writers and actors, having assured her this was the case; and she had taken to repeating what they had said of him, with all the passion and absence of moderation that one puts into the expression of opinions and the display of attitudes of which one has just discovered the existence. She maintained, like her theatrical friends, that there was now an unbridgeable gulf between her and Saint-Loup, because their worlds were too dissimilar, she being an intellectual and he, whatever he might say, being a born enemy of the intellectual life. This way of seeing herself and Saint-Loup struck her as acute, and she enjoyed looking for proof of it in his most insignificant statements and his slightest actions. Then, once these same friends had convinced her that she was squandering on someone unworthy of her the great promise she had already shown, that her lover was bound to have a bad effect on her, that by living with him she was throwing away her chance to become a great actress, the scorn she had for him was combined with a hatred which could not have been more virulent if he had been trying to infect her with a fatal disease. She saw him as infrequently as possible, while still putting off the moment of a definitive break with him, an eventuality which seemed remote to me. The sacrifices Saint-Loup made for her were so great that, unless she was strikingly lovely (he had always declined to show me a photograph of her, saying, 'For one thing, she's no great beauty; and for another, she doesn't photograph well. They're just snaps I took myself with my Kodak and they'd give you a misleading impression of her'), I thought she would have trouble finding another man who would be prepared to do so much for her. It did not occur to me that, even for an obscure little tart, the passing fancy of being famous, though one may have no talent to speak of, or just the good opinion of a few people who matter to her, may be (though, of course, that might not be the case for Saint-Loup's mistress) much more powerful motives than the satisfaction of making money. Although Saint-Loup, without clearly understanding what was in her mind, did not believe she was entirely sincere, either in her unfair criticisms of him or in her promises of undying love, he did now and then suspect she would break with him when it suited her; and so, no doubt acting on his love's instinct for self-preservation, which may have been more perceptive than he was, and exercising a practical side of his nature which could function in tandem with the most passionate and spontaneous urgings of his heart, he had refused to advance her any sizable capital, while borrowing a huge sum so that she should lack for nothing, but making sure it was paid to her in the form of a daily allowance. If she really did intend to leave him, no doubt she would wait quietly until she had 'made her pile', which, in view of the sums doled out by Saint-Loup, looked as though it might take a very short time, although any time, however short, would afford my new friend a little extra happiness – or unhappiness.

This dramatic period of their liaison (now reaching not only its climax but its cruellest phase for Saint-Loup, since in her exasperation with him she had forbidden him to remain in Paris and had obliged him to spend his leave at Balbec, not far from where he was garrisoned) had begun one evening at the house of one of his aunts, Saint-Loup having prevailed upon this lady to put on a performance by his mistress, in which she recited, before the aunt's many guests, excerpts from a symbolist play in which she had once acted on an avant-garde stage, and which she admired so much that she had communicated her liking for it to him.

However, when she made her entrance in front of the gathering of club-men and duchesses, with a tall lily in her hand and wearing a costume copied from the *Ancilla Domini*,[79] which she had assured Robert was a true 'vision of art', her appearance had been greeted by smiles, which the sing-song monotony of her delivery, the outlandishness of certain words and the frequent repetitions of them had changed into tittering, quickly stifled at first, but then becoming so irrepressible that the poor artiste had had to abandon the performance. The following day, Saint-Loup's aunt had been unanimously condemned for having presented such a bizarre performer. A prominent duke made no secret of the fact that, if people were criticizing her, she only had herself to blame: 'Well, for goodness' sake, what do you expect, if you will expose people to that sort of nonsense? If the woman actually had a bit of talent – but she hasn't, nor will she ever! And, heavens above, Paris isn't as stupid as it's said to be. Society isn't entirely composed of idiots. It's obvious that your little lady thought she could show Paris a thing or two. But it takes a bit more than that to show Paris anything, and there are some things which just won't wash!'

The artiste herself said to Saint-Loup as she was leaving, 'God, what a gang! Brainless hussies, ill-mannered bitches and rotten pigs, the lot of them! I don't mind telling you that those dirty old men spent the evening making eyes at me, every single one of them, and trying to play footy-footy with me, and it was because I refused to have anything to do with them that they decided to get their own back!'

These words had changed Robert's antipathy towards society into a much deeper and more painful abhorrence, which he felt especially in the presence of some towards whom it was least justified, those devoted relatives who, at the family's behest, had attempted to persuade his mistress to give him up, and who she told Robert were motivated solely by their own desire for her. Though he had immediately broken off all contact with these men, Robert sometimes thought, especially when he was away from her, as he was at Balbec, that they or others would take advantage of his absence to make further advances to her, and that she had perhaps given in to them. When he spoke of the sort of rake who could deceive a friend, attempt to seduce women, lure them into bawdy houses, his face contorted with pain and hatred.

'I could kill them with less compunction than if they were dogs – a dog is at least a loving, loyal and faithful animal. People like that deserve the guillotine, more so than the poor devil who has been pushed into crime by poverty and the ruthlessness of the rich.'

At Balbec, he spent most of his time writing letters to his mistress and sending off telegrams to her. Every time she managed not only to prevent him from returning to Paris, but to provoke a squabble with him, even at such a distance, I only had to glance at his wretched expression to know what had happened. She would never say outright what her grievance against him was; and Robert, with the idea that her silence on this matter meant she had no particular grievance but just a general feeling of having had enough of him, kept asking by letter for the frank discussion he would have preferred: 'Please tell me what I have done wrong. I'm quite willing to admit I've behaved badly.' His sorrow had the effect of convincing him that he was the one at fault.

She always kept him waiting for her answers, which, when they came at last, made no sense. I usually saw him coming back empty-handed and with furrowed brow from the post-office, the only person in the hotel, apart from Françoise, who fetched and carried his own letters, he being impelled to do this by lover's haste, she by servant's distrust. (To send his telegrams he was obliged to go much further afield.)

A few days after the dinner-party at the Blochs', my grandmother told me, with an overjoyed air, that Saint-Loup had just asked her whether she would not like him to take a photograph of her before he left Balbec; and when I saw that, in view of this, she had put on her best clothes and was trying to decide which hat to wear, I felt a touch of irritation that she should make such a fuss over something so trivial, which struck me as surprising in her. I even wondered whether I was not mistaken in my estimate of my grandmother, whether I had not put her on too high a pedestal, whether concern for self was as genuinely foreign to her as I had always thought, whether she did not have some slight measure of what I believed her completely free of: affectation.

I was ill-advised enough, in Françoise's presence, to show something of my disgruntlement at the intended photography session, and at the gratification that my grandmother seemed to derive from it; and Françoise, having noticed this, unintentionally aggravated my mood by making a sentimental and lachrymose remark, which I greeted with an expression calculated to dissociate myself from it.

'Oh, master, your dear grandmother will love having her photo took – and she's even going to wear the hat that her dear old Françoise has done up for her. We mustn't stand in her way, sir.'

I told myself it was not unkind to scorn Françoise's mode of sensibility, with the reminder that my mother and grandmother, my models in all things, often did so. But my grandmother, noticing that I looked put out, said that, if the taking of the photograph was bothersome to me, she would not go ahead with it. I did not want her to abandon the idea, told her I had no objection and let her titivate herself. But I thought it was pretty clever and superior of me to say a few hurtful and sarcastic words to her, so as to neutralize the pleasure she seemed to look forward to from being photographed; and, though I was obliged to see her magnificent hat, at least I managed to banish from her face the signs of a joy which I ought to have been happy to share with her, but which, as so often happens while those whom we love best are still alive, can strike us as a mere irritant, a mark of something silly and small-minded, rather than the precious revelation of the happiness we long to give to them. My bad mood was mainly the result of the fact that, throughout that week, my grandmother had appeared to be avoiding me and that I had been unable to have a moment with her, either during the day or in the evenings. When I went back to the hotel in the afternoons, so as to have a little time with her, I was told she was not in; or else she was closeted with Françoise, having long confabulations which I was supposed not to interrupt. Or if I had been out all evening with Saint-Loup, and came back to the hotel enjoying the prospect of being with her again and giving her a kiss, I would wait in vain for her little knocks on the wall, which were her invitation to me to go in and kiss her goodnight; I would get into bed, a little resentful at this unfamiliar indifference in her, at her way of depriving me of a pleasure which I had been much looking forward to; and with my heart throbbing as much as it had ever done when I was a child, I would lie there listening to the silence of the wall, until sleep came to dry my tears.

That day, as on the preceding days, Saint-Loup had had to go to Doncières, where his presence was required until late each afternoon and where he would soon have to return full-time. I missed him in Balbec. I could see young women alighting from carriages, some of them going into the ballroom at the Casino, some into the ice-cream parlour, and from a distance they seemed lovely. I was at one of those times of youth when the idle heart, unoccupied by love for a particular person, lies in wait for Beauty, seeking it everywhere, as the man in love sees and desires in all things the woman he cherishes. We need only to see in passing a single real feature of a woman, a glimpse of her at a distance or from behind, which can be enough for us to project Beauty on to her, and we imagine we have found it at last: the heart beats faster, we lengthen our stride and, on condition that she disappears, we may be left with the certainty of having set eyes upon it – it is only if we succeed in catching up with her that we discover our mistake.

Also, my health was going from bad to worse, and I was inclined to magnify the simplest of pleasures because of the obstacles that lay between me and the possibility of enjoying them. Beautifully dressed women seemed to be everywhere, because I was unable to approach them, either being too weary if I saw them on the beach, or too diffident if I saw them in the Casino or in a cake-shop. If I was fated to die young, I wished I could first find out for myself what real life had to offer in the persons of the prettiest girls, even if someone other than me, or possibly no one, was ultimately to enjoy them (I did not recognize that, underlying my curiosity about them, there was a desire for possession). I would have been brave enough to walk into the ballroom, if only Saint-Loup had been with me. By myself, I was standing about outside the Grand-Hôtel, waiting for the moment when I would go in to sit with my grandmother; and there, still far away along the esplanade, where they made a strange mass of moving colours, I saw five or six young girls, as different in their appearance and ways from all the other people one was used to seeing in Balbec as the odd gaggle of seagulls which turns up out of the blue to strut along the beach, the stragglers flapping their wings to catch up with the leaders, in a procession which seems as obscure in its purpose to the bathers, whom they seem not to see, as it is clear to their bird-minds.

One of these girls was walking along pushing her bicycle; two others carried golf-clubs; and their accoutrements made a flagrant contrast with the appearance of other young girls in Balbec, for even those who practised certain sports did not walk about dressed in a particular way.

It was the hour for ladies and gentlemen to take their daily walk along the esplanade, directly into the merciless line of fire of the lorgnette held by the wife of the First President from Caen, who scrutinized each and every one of them as though they might be tainted with some blemish which she felt bound to inspect in its minutest details, as she sat in her proud posture in front of the bandstand, midway along the redoubtable row of chairs in which the subjects of her scrutiny would themselves soon come to sit, actors turned critics, and set themselves to the task of examining all the other people strolling past. All these esplanade walkers were pitching about as though stepping along the deck of a ship (for they could not take a stride without also swinging an arm, shifting their glance, setting their shoulders straight, counter-balancing on one side of their body the movement they had just made on the other, and becoming flushed about the face), and though they pretended not to see the other strollers walking beside them or coming in the other direction, so as to let it be thought they had no interest in them, while actually glancing at them surreptitiously so as to avoid colliding with them, they collided with them nonetheless, or jostled them, because all of them had been furtively looking at each other, their attention concealed behind the same apparent disdain for everyone else; for love, hence fear, of the crowd is one of the most powerful motives in all individuals, whether they wish to please others, astonish them or show that they despise them. In a recluse, the most irrevocable, lifelong rejection of the world often has as its basis an uncontrolled passion for the crowd, of such force that, finding when he does go out that he cannot win the admiration of a concierge, passers-by or even the coachman halted at the corner, he prefers to spend his life out of their sight, and gives up all activities which would make it necessary for him to leave the house.

Amid all these people, some of whom were following a train of thought, but who revealed its mobility through restless gesturing or wandering looks, all of which made them look just as uncoordinated as the others with their circumspect lurchings, the girls I had seen, with the confidence of gesture which comes from the perfect mastery of a supple body and sincere contempt for the rest of humanity, strode straight on, without hesitation or stiffness, making exactly the

movements they wished to make, each of their limbs in complete independence from all the others, while most of their body retained the poise which is so remarkable in good waltzers. They were now not far from me. Though each of them was of a type quite different from the others, all of them were beautiful; but I had been looking at them for so few moments, and was so far from daring to stare at them, that I had not yet been able to individualize any of them. With the exception of one, whose straight nose and darker complexion marked her out among the rest, as a king of Arabian looks may stand out in a Renaissance painting of the Magi, they were knowable only as a pair of hard, stubborn, laughing eyes in one of the faces; as two cheeks of that pink touched by coppery tones suggesting geraniums in another; and none of even these features had I yet inseparably attached to any particular girl rather than to some other; and when (given the order in which I saw their complex whole unfold before me, wonderful because the most dissimilar aspects were mixed into it and all shades of colour were juxtaposed, but also as confused as a piece of music in which one cannot isolate and identify the phrases as they form, which once heard are as soon forgotten) I noticed the emergence of a pale oval, of two green eyes, or black ones, I had no idea whether they were those whose charm had struck me a moment before, in my inability to single out and recognize one or other of these girls and allot them to her. The fact that my view of them was devoid of demarcations, which I was soon to draw among them, sent a ripple of harmonious imprecision through their group, the uninterrupted flow of a shared, unstable and elusive beauty.

It may not have been mere fortuitousness which, in bringing all these girls together, had managed to choose only beautiful ones; the girls themselves (whose attitudes sufficed to show their tough, daring and frivolous nature), by their excessive sensitivity to anything ridiculous or ugly, their inability to feel an attraction of an intellectual or moral sort, may have naturally coincided in feeling repelled by any of their coevals whose pensive or sensitive dispositions were revealed by shyness, embarrassment or awkwardness, by girls whom they probably saw as 'horrid' and whom they had ruled out as possible friends; and they may have taken up with others to whom they felt drawn by a blend of gracefulness, ease and bodily elegance, the only appearance through which they could conceive of candour and attractiveness in a character, offering a promise of good times together. It may have been too that the social class to which they belonged, and which I could not define with any degree of precision, had reached a stage in its evolution where – by reason of growing prosperity and leisure, or because of the new interest in sports, spreading now even among the working classes, and in physical training without any concomitant training of the mind – a social environment similar to that of certain schools of sculpture, in which harmony of line and prolific creativity aspire as yet to no over-elaboration or distortions, produces naturally an abundance of beautiful bodies with lovely limbs and handsome hips, with lusty, unperturbed faces and an air of sprightly cunning. For surely these were noble and tranquil models of human beauty that met my eye, against the sea, like statues in the sun along a shore in Greece.

As though with a single mind, this gang of girls, making its way along the esplanade like a shining comet, seemed to think the crowd of people all about them was composed of beings of another species which, even if it was capable of suffering, could not move them to sympathy, as they advanced seemingly oblivious to it, forcing everyone who stood in their way to move aside, to give way as though to a locomotive bearing down upon them without the slightest likelihood that it would avoid pedestrians; and their only reaction, if some fearful or furious old gentleman, of manifestly negligible existence, whom they swept aside as they passed, hobbled urgently or ludicrously out of their path, was to exchange a look amongst themselves and burst out laughing. For anyone or anything outside their group they affected no scorn; their sincere scorn was enough. They could not see an obstacle without taking pleasure in jumping over it, either by running at it or from the standing position, because they were full to overflowing with the youthfulness which must expend itself, which even when one is sad or unwell makes one obey the needs of age rather than the mood of the day, so that one can never come upon the possibility of leaping or sliding without making a point of leaping or sliding, and deliberately punctuating one's slow progress, as Chopin does with even the most melancholy of his phrases, with serial detours full of grace, impulsiveness and virtuosity. The wife of an old banker, after having indecisively tried several different places for her husband to sit, had eventually settled him in his deck-chair facing the esplanade, where he was sheltered from the wind and the sun by the band-stand. Once he was comfortable, she went off to buy a newspaper, so as to read to him and keep him amused, never being away for more than five minutes at a time, while he sat by himself during her brief absences, which he found long but which she repeated, in the hope that her aged husband, the beneficiary of her close but unobtrusive care, could have the feeling that he was still capable of living a normal life and did not require help and support from anybody. The floor of the band-stand jutted out above the old man's head, forming a natural springboard so tempting that the eldest of the little gang[80] of girls, without the slightest hesitation, dashed across and jumped off the edge, sailing right over him: he was terrified by a pair of nimble feet grazing his nautical cap, to the great amusement of the other girls, and especially of a pair of green eyes in a chubby face full of admiration, merriment and possibly also some slight shyness, or rather a sort of bare-faced bashfulness, which was not apparent in the others' expressions. 'Oh, wot a poor old bloke! He'd break your heart, so he would – he's got one foot in the grave!' said one of them in a broad, husky accent that was half-ironic. They all walked on a few paces, before halting for a moment right in the middle of the promenade, unconcerned about holding up the procession of strollers, forming a dense, shapeless, untoward mass, loud with squawking, like a prattle of birds that gather just before flying off; and then they took up again their own slow stroll along the esplanade, above the sea.

By now, their charm was not blended into undifferentiated features. I could separate these from one another and apportion them to individual girls (in lieu of their names, which I had no knowledge of), such as the tall one who had jumped over the old banker; the small one who set off her plump pink cheeks and her green eyes against the horizon of the sea; the one whose darker colouring and straight nose made her look so different from the others; another one with a face as white as an egg, on which a little nose, like a chick's beak, drew an arc of a circle, a face reminiscent of some very young men's; the other one who was tall and wearing a hooded cape, which made her look so poor, and was in such contrast with the rest of her elegant outfit that my idea of her was that she must have parents whose brilliance and pride-in-self, drawn from things well above the heads of Balbec and its bathers, things utterly divorced from considerations of the elegance or otherwise or their own offspring, enabled them to be totally indifferent to the fact that this daughter of theirs went walking along the esplanade wearing something that people of the lower classes would have deemed too unprepossessing; a girl with shining, laughing eyes and full, matt-complexioned cheeks, a little black toque pulled right down, who was pushing a bicycle along and swinging her hips so freely, while using slang words which were so strong, and which she shouted out so loud as I passed close by (among which I distinctly heard the unladylike expression 'She's no better than she should be'), that I had to replace the hypothesis I had built on the hood and cape of her friend by another more plausible one: every one of these girls belonged to the crowds who frequent velodromes, and must be the extremely youthful girl-friends of racing cyclists. Certainly, in none of my conjectures did I entertain the possibility that they might be chaste. I had known as much at a glance: I saw it in the way they kept exchanging looks and laughs, and in the insistent stare of the one with the cheeks and the matt complexion. Moreover, my grandmother's concern for me had always been so over-scrupulous that I had come to believe that the things one must not do are a single indivisible set, and that young girls who are prepared to be rude to old age might well have few qualms about infringing other prohibitions, in which the pleasures to be enjoyed are more tempting than just jumping over an octogenarian.

Though the girls were now individualized, the connivance in the glowing glances they kept exchanging, bright with conceit and their joy in being the little clique they were, flashing with self-interest or insolent indifference, depending on whether they were looking at each other or at people passing, as well as their sense of knowing one another closely enough to be always out together, to be 'as thick as thieves', linked their separate and independent bodies into an invisible harmony, as though they shared the same warm shade, walked within a separate atmosphere, which made of them an entity as alike in its parts as it was unlike the throng through which their closed little company wended its slow way.

For an instant, as I passed close to the brunette with the full cheeks and the bicycle, I glimpsed her oblique, laughing glance, looking out from the inhumane world which circumscribed the life of their little tribe, an inaccessible *terra incognita*, obviously incapable of harbouring or offering a home to any notion of who or what I was. With her toque pulled down low on her brow, entirely engrossed in what her companions were saying, did she see me, at the moment when the black ray from her eyes encountered me? If so, what must I have seemed like to her? What sort of world was the one from which she was looking at me? I could

not tell, any more than one can tell from the few details which a telescope enables us to descry on a neighbouring planet whether it is inhabited by human beings, whether or not they can see us, or whether their view of us has inspired any reflections in them.

If we believed that the eyes of such a girl were nothing but shiny little discs of mica, we would not be eager to enter her life and link it to our own. But we are well aware that whatever it is that shines in those reflective discs is not reducible to their material composition; that flitting about behind them are the black incognizable shadows of the ideas she forms about the people and places she knows – the paddocks at race-courses, the sandy paths along which she might have pedalled, drawing me after her, over hill and meadow, like a little Peri[81] more seductive than the sprite from the Persian paradise – the dimness of the house into which she will disappear, her own impenetrable projects and the designs of others upon her; and what we are most aware of is that she herself lies behind them, with her desires, her likes and dislikes, the power of her inscrutable and inexhaustible will. I knew I could never possess the young cyclist, unless I could also possess what lay behind her eyes. My desire for her was desire for her whole life: a desire that was full of pain, because I sensed it was unattainable, but also full of heady excitement, because what had been my life up to that moment had suddenly ceased to be all of life, had turned into a small corner of a great space opening up for me, which I longed to explore and which was composed of the lives led by these young girls, because what was laid out now before my eyes was that extension and potential multiplication of self which we know as happiness. The fact that they and I shared nothing, no habit, no idea, was surely bound to make it more difficult for me to make their acquaintance and meet with their approval. But perhaps it was my very awareness of these differences between us, my knowledge that, in the nature of the girls as in their every action, there was not one iota of an element that was known to me or that I could have access to, which had replaced my satiety of life by a thirst, akin to that of a drought-stricken land, for a life which my soul, having gone for ever without a single drop of it, would now absorb in great greedy draughts, letting it soak me to the roots.

I had been staring so much at the bright-eyed cyclist that she seemed to notice it: she said something to the tallest girl, which I did not catch but which made her laugh. This bicycling brunette was not in fact the one I liked best, for the very reason that she was a brunette: for me, the unattainable ideal, ever since the day I had caught sight of Gilberte from the steep little lane by Tansonville, had been a golden-skinned girl with fairish ginger hair. But then, had I not also fallen in love with Gilberte because she had appeared to me surrounded by the halo of glory conferred upon her by being the friend of Bergotte, by going with him to look at cathedrals? In the same way, was it not promising that I had seen the brunette look at me (which made me hope it might prove easier to get to know her first), since she would be able to introduce me to the others, to the ruthless one who had jumped over the old man's head, to the heartless one who had said, 'Oh, wot a poor old bloke!' and then all of them one after the other, in her capacity, and her prestige, as their inseparable companion? And yet in the assumption that I might one day be a friend of one or other of those girls, that the eyes which passed their unknown glances over me, as unaware of me as a touch of sun on a wall, might ever undergo the miraculous alchemy which would enable a notion of my existence, or friendship for my person, to merge with the inexpressible minutiae of their minds, that I myself might one day be a member of their bevy as it roamed along the sea-front, there was a contradiction as insoluble as though I had thought it possible not just to stand and admire the parading figures in an ancient frieze or fresco, but to be admired in return and step up to join in their divine progress.

Was the happiness of knowing these young girls really unattainable? It would certainly not have been the first happiness of that sort which I had abandoned all hope of ever enjoying. I needed only to think of all the unknown girls, even on the roads round Balbec, whom I had had to give up as the speeding carriage parted me from them for ever. Even the joy I derived from this little group, as noble as though composed of Hellenic virgins, had something in it akin to the feeling I got from those fleeting passers-by on the road. The transience of brief strangers who enter our life and force us out of the normality in which all the women we are used to will eventually reveal their blemishes, puts us into a state of readiness to pursue them, in which nothing inhibits the imagination. For a pleasure divested of imagination is a pleasure reduced to itself, to nothing. If they had been offered to me by a madam – in the sort of house which, as has been seen, I did not disdain – divorced from the element which lent them so many colours and such attractive imprecision, they would have been less enchanting. The imagination, aroused by the possibility that it will not achieve its aim, is obliged to mask it with another, and by replacing sensual pleasure with the idea of penetrating someone's life, makes sure we neither recognize that pleasure, experience its true flavour nor restrict it to its dimension of mere pleasure. If we were to set eyes on a fish for the first time as it might be served on a dinner table, it would hardly appear to be worth the countless ruses and devious tricks required to land it, unless between us and it there were afternoons spent fishing, eddies through which glimpses barely caught of fleshy gleams and an imprecise shape ruffle the surface of our indecision about what to do with them, in the blue fluidity of a transparent and mobile medium.

The girls benefited also from the alteration in social proportions which is characteristic of holiday life at the seaside. All the ways in which our usual environment confers advantages on us, extending and inflating our importance, become invisible there, indeed are abolished, while other people in whom we imagine such advantages, which may be non-existent, move in a world enriched for us by this same fictitious density. It was this which made it easy for unknown women, as on that day this group of girls, to assume enormous significance in my eyes, while making it impossible for me to give them any indication of my own significance.

Though this little sauntering gang of girls was an example of the countless occasions when young passers-by had escaped my grasp, a failure which had always irked me, this time the escapers had slowed their pace almost to the point of immobility. That faces, instead of dashing past, should make a slow enough disappearance for their features to be set and distinct, yet still appear beautiful, prevented me from believing, as I had so often believed when Mme de Villeparisis's carriage was whisking me further and further away from a young woman, that at close range, if I had been able to pause for a moment, certain details of her face or body – a pock-marked complexion, an imperfection in the nostrils, a dull look, a crude smile, a graceless waist – would have supplanted those which my imagination had seen in her; for often I had needed no more than a pretty contour of a body, a glimpse of a cool complexion, to create in all good faith a lovely shoulder to go with it, or a look from delightful eyes, memories or preconceptions which I carried about with me at all times; and such cursory decipherings of a creature seen in a fleeting glimpse expose us to the same misconceptions as hasty readings of a text, whereby, on the faith of a single syllable, and without pausing to identify the others, we replace the word printed by another quite different word proffered by memory. But this occasion had to be different: I had been able to have a close look at each of their faces; and though I had been unable to see any of them from both sides, and few of them in full face, I had still managed to sketch two or three aspects of them which were sufficiently different from one another for me to be able to make either the necessary adjustments to their different hypothetical contours and colours, as jotted down by my first glance, or the verification and proof of them, and to see through their few overlaid expressions to something which was immutably material. So I knew I could say with certainty that, whether in Paris or in Balbec, assuming the most favourable possible outcomes with any of the young women who had ever caught my eye in passing, if I had been able to pause for a while and chat, there had never been any whose appearance, then disappearance without anything coming of it, would have left me with such regrets as would these ones, or who could make me believe there would be such excitement in being their friend. No actress, no peasant girl, no boarder at a convent school had ever been so beautiful to me, so fascinating in a suggestion of the unknown, so invaluably precious, so probably unattainable. The exemplar these girls offered of life's potential for bringing unsuspected happiness was so full of charm, in a state of such perfection, that it was almost for intellectual reasons that I despaired of ever being able to experience, in unique conditions which would allow no room for possible error, the profound mystery to be found in the beauty one has longed for, the beauty one replaces, because one knows it is for ever beyond one's reach, by seeking mere pleasure from women one has not desired – which Swann had always refused to do, before meeting Odette – with the result that one dies without ever having enjoyed that other form of fulfilment. It was of course possible that there would have been no revelation in such a fulfilment, that the mystery would have been nothing but a projection or mirage of desire, to be dispelled by proximity. If so, I would have to blame an inescapable law of nature (which, if it was applicable to these girls, would be applicable to all girls), and not any defectiveness in the present object. For this present object was the one I would have preferred above all, as I knew perfectly well, having botanized so much among such young blossoms, that it would be impossible to come upon a bouquet of rarer varieties than these buds, which, as I looked at them now, decorated the line of the water with their gentle stems, like a gardenful of Carolina roses edging a cliff-top, where a whole stretch of ocean can fit between adjacent flowers, and a steamer is so slow to cover the flat blue line separating two stalks that an idling butterfly can loiter on a bloom which the ship's hull has long since passed, and is so sure of being first to reach the next flower that it can delay its departure until the moment when, between the vessel's bow and the nearest petal of the one towards which it is sailing, nothing remains but a tiny glowing gap of blue.

I had to go back to the hotel, as Robert and I were going out to dinner at Rivebelle and my grandmother insisted that, on such occasions, I take an hour's rest on my bed, a siesta which the Balbec doctor soon ordered me to extend to all other evenings as well.

To go back into the hotel, there was now no need to leave the esplanade, walk round the back and enter by the main vestibule: by a change of time-table analogous to Combray's Saturday, when lunch was one hour early, the midsummer days had become so long that, when the tables were being laid for dinner at the Grand-Hôtel of Balbec, the sun was still high in the sky, making it feel like afternoon tea-time. And, as the tall sliding glass-doors, which opened right on to the esplanade, stayed wide open, all I had to do was step over a low wooden frame, straight into the dining-room, then walk directly to the lift.

As I passed the office, I gave the manager a smile and received one in return, signalled by his face, which, since the beginning of our stay at Balbec, my studious attentiveness had been injecting and gradually transforming as though it was a specimen in natural history. The features of his face had become nondescript, expressive of a meaning which, though mediocre, was as intelligible as handwriting one can read; they no longer resembled the outlandish and unbearable characters printed on this face as I had seen it on our first day, when I had been confronted by a personage now forgotten – or at least, if I ever contrived to remember him, now unrecognizable – and difficult to identify in this polite and insignificant person, of whom the other had been only a caricature, hideous and summary. Freed of the shyness and distress of the evening of my arrival, I rang for the 'lift', who did not now observe unbroken silence as we

ascended together, as though inside a mobile rib-cage gliding upwards along the vertical column, but kept saying, 'Not as many people about now as a month ago. Days getting shorter. They'll all start leaving soon.' He said this not because it was true, but because he had another job waiting for him on a warmer stretch of the coast and wished we would all go away as soon as possible, so that the hotel would close and he might have a few days to himself before 'recommencing' his 'new situation'. 'Recommencing' and 'new' were in no way contradictions for him, 'to recommence' being for him the normal form of the verb 'to start'. The only thing that surprised me in what he said was the word 'situation', for he belonged to the working classes of modern times, who try to remove from their speech all reminder of the system of domestic service to which they belong. He also told me that in this 'situation' where he was about to 'recommence', he would have a handsomer 'tunic' and higher 'remunerations', the words 'uniform' and 'wages' seeming antiquated and unseemly to him. Vocabulary having, by an absurd contradiction, outlived the idea of inequality in the minds of the 'bosses', I always had trouble in understanding what the 'lift' said. For instance, if what I really wanted to know was whether my grandmother was in or out, the 'lift' would anticipate my questions and say, 'The lady has just left your rooms.' This caught me out every time without fail: I always thought he meant my grandmother. 'No, I mean that lady that's an employee of yours, I think.' A cook, at least in middle-class terminology of former times, soon no doubt to be abolished, never having been 'an employee', I would think for a moment: 'He's mistaken: we're not factory-owners – we don't have employees.' Then I remembered that the word 'employee' is as essential to the self-esteem of servants as wearing a moustache is to waiters in cafés, and realized that the 'lady' who had just left our rooms was Françoise (probably off to visit the buttery or to watch the young chambermaid sewing for the Belgian lady); though even this degree of self-esteem was insufficient for the 'lift', who, as he bemoaned the lot of his own class, also liked to say not 'workers' but 'the worker', not 'commoners' but 'the commoner', using the sort of singular with which Racine, meaning 'poor men', refers to 'the poor man'. Usually, however, since I had lost all my early eagerness and timidity, I no longer spoke to the 'lift'. He was the one who spoke without receiving an answer as he put his little craft to full speed ahead and, with his hand on the tiller, piloted us up through the hotel, which was like a hollow toy, and which, as storey replaced storey, deployed all about us its branching corridors, where distant light faded away into soft shadows, thinning down communicating doors and the faint steps of stairways, converting them into that golden amber, as insubstantial and mysterious as twilight, from which Rembrandt models a window-ledge or the handle of a well. And at each of these storeys, a golden glow on the carpet showed it was now sunset beyond the lavatory windows.

I wondered whether the girls I had seen lived in Balbec and who they might be. When the focus of our desire singles out a tiny human tribe, whatever may bear upon them in any way sets off an emotion in us, which then becomes a wondering day-dream. On the esplanade I had overheard a lady say, 'Yes, she's one of the friends of the Simonet girl,' with the smug, superior knowledge of the person in the know who says, 'Yes, he's very thick with the young Duc de La Rochefoucauld.' I was instantly aware of a look of curiosity on the face of the person being told this, a quickened interest in somebody who was so favoured as to be 'one of the friends of the Simonet girl'. It was clear this was a privilege not open to all and sundry. Aristocracy is relative: there are all sorts of inexpensive little resorts where the son of a furniture salesman may be the arbiter of all things elegant, holding court like a young Prince of Wales. Since that moment when I first heard the name 'Simonet', I have often tried over the years to remember how it must have sounded there on the esplanade, in my uncertainty about its shape, which I had not quite noticed, about its meaning and the identity of this or that person to whom it might belong: full of the imprecision and foreignness which we later find so moving, when our unremitting attention to this name, with its letters more deeply imprinted in us with each passing second, has turned it (as the name of 'the Simonet girl' was to be turned for me, but not until several years later) into the first word to come to consciousness, whether on waking each morning or after fainting, even before any inkling of the time of day, or where we are, almost before the word 'I' itself, as though the one it names were more us than we are ourselves, as though the first respite always to end after a few moments' oblivion were the respite of not thinking of it. Why I decided, there and then, that the name 'Simonet' must belong to one of the gang of girls I have no idea: how to get to know the Simonet family became my constant preoccupation, and especially how to be introduced to them by people they would see as above themselves – which should not prove difficult, if the girls were just vacuous and immoral specimens from the working classes – so that they could not look down on me: perfect knowledge of those who disdain you, like complete absorption of any such person, is impossible unless one has overcome that disdain. Every time we are assailed by images of women very different from ourself, unless these images are eliminated by being forgotten or overlaid by others, we can have no peace of mind until we have converted these strangers into something more like us, the self in that respect being similar in its action and reactions to the physical organism, which is incapable of accepting a foreign body within itself, without immediately setting to work to digest and assimilate the intruder. The Simonet girl must be the prettiest of them, and also, it seemed to me, the one who might be able to become my mistress, since she was the only one who, by turning slightly away two or three times, had appeared aware of my staring eyes. So I asked the 'lift' whether he knew of anyone in Balbec called Simonet. Being reluctant to admit to ignorance of anything, he replied that he thought he had 'heard tell of some such a name'. When we reached the top floor, I asked him to have them send up the latest list of new-comers.

On leaving the lift, instead of going directly to my room, I walked further along the corridor, as at that time of day the duty-servant, despite his aversion to draughts, had opened the window at the far end of it, and this window, though it overlooked the hillside and the valley, instead of the sea, never let one see them, since its panes were of opaque glass and it was usually kept shut. I stood for a moment in front of it, long enough to make my devotions to the view which it had for once disclosed: this went beyond the hill against which the hotel backed, and contained a single house, set some distance away, but with its bulk preserved by the perspective and the evening light, which had worked delicately on it, embossing it and setting it within a velvet-lined casket, as though it were an example of miniaturized architecture, a tiny temple or chapel worked in gold and enamel, used as a reliquary and exposed only on rare occasions to the veneration of the faithful. But my moment of worship had gone on too long, and the duty-servant, holding a bunch of keys in one hand and touching the other to his sexton's cap, rather than exposing himself to the cool evening air by raising it to me, came along to close the windows, like the little double doors of a monstrance, thus putting an end to my adoration of the golden relic of the miniature church. I went to my room: the painting on show in the window-frame kept changing as the season advanced. At the beginning of my stay, it was broad daylight, its tones sometimes dulled by bad weather: the sea, through the glaucous glass bulging with its round waves, held between the iron uprights of the frame as though set in the lead of a latticed window, teased out along the deep, rocky fringe of the bay triangles plumed with spray which hung motionless, touched in with the delicacy of down or a feather pencilled by Pisanello, and fixed by the creamy white never-fading enamel used for a fall of snow in glass-works by Gallé.[82]

Then the days grew shorter; and when I went to my room, the violet sky, which seemed to have been branded by the rigid, geometrical, fleeting, flashing iron of the sun (as though in representation of some miraculous sign or mystical apparition), hung down over the sea at the juncture of the horizon like a religious canvas above a high altar, while the different parts of the sunset, exhibited in the glass-doors of the low mahogany book-cases running round the walls, and which I mentally compared to the marvellous painting from which they had been detached, were like the different scenes with which an old master once decorated a shrine for a religious house, now divided into separate panels, for display in a museum, where only the imagination of a visitor to the exhibition can reassemble them on the predellas of the altar-piece. Some weeks later, when I went up, the sun would have already set. Lying above the sea, there would be a band of red, as dense and fine-edged as a slab of aspic, similar to the red striping the sky at Combray, above the wayside cross, on evenings when I was nearing home after a walk and intended to go down to the kitchen before dinner; and before long, right on top of the water, which had the coldness and the colour of the fish known as grey mullet, there would be another sky, of the same pink as one of the salmon we would soon order at Rivebelle; and these shades whetted my expectation of the pleasure of changing into evening clothes to go out to dine. Very close to the shore, trying to rise over the sea, in storeys which spread ever wider, its layers superimposed upon one another, there was a haze as black as soot, but also with the smooth sheen and consistency of agate, its highest parts, visibly top-heavy, beginning to tilt above their deformed support, leaning away from the centre of gravity of those which had underpinned them hitherto, and seeming about to crumble and collapse into the sea, dragging down with them from half-way up the sky the whole precarious edifice. The sight of a ship leaving, like a night traveller, gave me the impression I had once had in the train, of being freed of the restrictions of sleeping and staying closed up in a room. Not that I felt hemmed

in by this room, since within the hour I was going to walk out of it and go off in a carriage. I lay down on the bed; and, as though I were on a bunk, aboard one of the boats which I could see not far away, and which after nightfall people might be surprised to see moving slowly through the darkness, like dim, silent swans that never sleep, I was surrounded on all sides by images of the sea.

However, quite often they were nothing but images: I would forget that, beneath the colour of them, there was the forlorn, empty shoreline, with the uneasy evening wind which had so upset me on my arrival in Balbec. Also, even in my room, my thoughts were full of the girls I had seen walking along the esplanade, and my state of mind was neither calm enough nor disinterested enough for me to be able to attend properly to vivid impressions of beauty. Because I was looking forward to the dinner at Rivebelle, my state of expectancy made me feel even more frivolous; and my mind, occupying at such moments the surface of my body, which I was about to clothe in such a way as to appear as attractive as possible to the eyes of women staring at me under the bright lights of the restaurant, was unable to see through the colours of things to anything deeper. Had it not been for the tireless and restful aerobatics of the swifts and swallows outside my window, their sudden vertical spurts like water-jets, fireworks of vitality, filling the intervals between their vertiginous rocket-like ascents with the straight white wake of a long unwavering glide, making a delightful miracle of a natural and local phenomenon, linking the landscapes before my eyes to reality, I could have seen these landscapes as a mere selection of paintings, changed every day, arbitrarily exhibited at the spot where I happened to be, but having no necessary relation to it. One evening it would be an exhibition of Japanese prints: beside the flimsy cut-out of the sun, red and as round as the moon, a yellow cloud was a lake against which black blades, and the trees on its bank, were silhouetted; a bar of soft pink, in a shade which I had not set eyes on since my very first paint-box, swelled like a river, with boats seemingly beached on both sides of it, looking as though waiting there to be refloated. With the bored, disdainful superficiality of the sated expert, or the elegant lady glancing in at an exhibition during her crowded day of visits to fashionable friends, I dismissed it with the thought: 'Quite an interesting sunset, rather different, but I've seen plenty of others that are just as delicately done and every bit as striking.' On other evenings, there was greater enjoyment to be had: from a ship which had been absorbed and liquefied by the horizon, and which had such an appearance of being of the same colour as it, as though in an Impressionist painting, that it also seemed to be made of the same material, as though once the hull and rigging had been cut out of it, it had faded away into the hazy blue of the sky. Or it was the sea itself which took up almost the whole height of the window, having been extended upwards by a broad band of sky topped by a strip of the same blue as the sea, and which I thought was the sea, the difference in shade being due to an effect of the light. Or else the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest being filled by clouds in horizontal stripes piled on top of one another, so numerous that it looked as though the artist might have intended the panes to contain one of his specialities, a 'Study in Clouds', while the different glass-fronted doors of the book-cases, showing clouds which were similar, but reflected from other points of the horizon, and variously coloured by the light, seemed to be, as one sees in the works of certain contemporary masters, endless repetitions of a single effect, none of them noted at the same time of day, but all of them, through the immobility of art, now available to be viewed together in one room, executed in pastel and displayed under glass. Sometimes, with exquisite delicacy, a touch of pink was added to the uniform grey of sea and sky; and at the very bottom of this *Harmony in Grey and Pink* after Whistler,[83] a tiny moth asleep on the window-pane seemed to lend its wings to the favourite signature of the master from Chelsea. Then even the pink disappeared and there was nothing else to look at. I got up to close the tall curtains, then lay down again. From my bed, I could see the fading line of daylight that lingered above the curtains, growing dimmer and fainter; but I had no qualms or regrets about letting the last daylight hour die behind the curtains at a time when I was usually in the dining-room, for I knew this day was of a different kind from the rest, lasting longer, like those polar days which turn into a night of a few minutes' duration; I knew that a brilliant metamorphosis was at work within the chrysalis of this twilight, and that from it there would soon emerge the dazzling illuminations of the restaurant at Rivebelle. I thought, 'It's time'; I stretched, still lying on the bed, then got up and finished making ready to go; and I found a great charm in these slack moments unburdened by any material concern, which everyone else spent sitting downstairs at the dinner-table, as I used the energy stored during the inactive evening, drying my body, putting on a dinner-jacket, tying my bow-tie, going through all these motions which were already informed by the expected pleasure of being once again in the presence of a particular woman whom I had noticed the last time we had gone to Rivebelle, who had appeared to look at me, who had even left the room for a moment, conceivably for the sole purpose of giving me the chance to follow her out; it was a joy to put on this finery, so as to be ready to devote myself wholly to my new life of freedom and lack of care, when my hesitations could rest on Saint-Loup's untroubled certainties, and I could choose, from all the species of natural history and products from all countries, those which would challenge my appetite or my imagination, to make the most unusual dishes, which my friend would order for me forthwith.

Then, right at the end, there came days when it was no longer possible to step straight from the esplanade into the dining-room, because it was already dark outside and the glass-doors were not open, and the swarms of the poor and the curious, chilled to the marrow by the north wind, drawn towards the blazing, unreachable illuminations, were clinging in thick black clusters to the glowing sliding panels of our hive of glass.

There was a knock at the door: it was Aimé, making a point of being the one to bring me the latest list of new-comers.

Before he left the room, Aimé felt the need to inform me that there could be no doubt that Dreyfus was guilty, totally and utterly.[84] 'The whole truth, he said, will come out, not this year, but next. It was this gent that's very in the know with the General Staff that told me.' I asked him whether it would not be decided to divulge everything all at once, before the end of the year. 'Look, he put down his cigarette,' Aimé said, acting the scene for me, shaking his head and his forefinger at me, as the hotel-guest had done, meaning: Don't be so demanding. ' "Not this year, Aimé," he says, giving me a tap on the shoulder. "Out of the question. But just you wait and see what Easter brings!" ' Aimé gave me a tap on the shoulder, then said, 'There, that's exactly what he did,' either because he was flattered at having been treated so familiarly by a great man, or so that I could better appreciate the force of the argument and the validity of the reasons why we must live in hope.

It was not without a little palpitation that I read, on the first page of the list of new-comers: *The Simonet family*. There was in me a residue of old dreams of love, dating since my childhood, full of all the tenderness my heart was capable of, all the love it had ever felt and which was now indistinguishable from it, which could be suddenly brought back to me by someone as different as possible from me. This someone I now once more invented, this time using the name 'Simonet' and the memory of the harmony shared by the group of young bodies I had seen making their way along the sea-front in an athletic procession worthy of ancient Greece or Giotto. I had no idea which of these girls – or indeed whether any of them – might be Mlle Simonet; but I knew that Mlle Simonet loved me and that, because of Saint-Loup's presence, I was going to try to make her acquaintance. Unfortunately, he was obliged to return to Doncières every day, that being the condition on which he had managed to have an extension of his leave approved. Despite this, in the hope of having him disregard his orders, I had thought I might be able to play, if not on his friendship for me, at least on the same sort of naturalist's curiosity about human beings which in my own case (on hearing a mere mention of a pretty till-girl working in a fruiterer's shop, and without even having set eyes on the person spoken of) had so often led me to an observation of a new variety of feminine beauty. However, I had been mistaken in thinking that, by telling Saint-Loup about my gang of girls, I might stimulate this curiosity in him. It had been paralysed by his liaison with the actress whose lover he was. And even if he had been tempted to feel it, he would have repressed it, under the influence of a sort of superstitious belief: that the fidelity of his mistress to him might depend on his to her. So he gave me no promise to further my cause with the girls, and we set off to dine at Rivebelle.

The first few times we went there, the sun had just set when we arrived, but there was still light: in the garden of the restaurant, they had not yet lit the lamps, and the heat of the day was dropping, subsiding, as though into a vase, lining the inner surface of it with the dim, crystalline transparency of the air, which seemed so firm that a tall rose-bush, veining with pink the darkened wall against which it stood, resembled the arborization to be seen inside an onyx. Before long, it was dark by the time we stepped out of the carriage, or even by the time we left Balbec, if the weather was bad and we had delayed the moment of

harnessing up, in the hope of an improvement. Even on those days, I was not upset by the bluster of the wind; I knew it would not frustrate plans for the evening or result in my having to stay indoors; I knew that, as we walked into the large dining-room of the restaurant, to the music of the gipsy band, the countless lamps would easily cure the dark and the cold, by applying to them their broad golden cauteries; and I happily took my place alongside Saint-Loup in the brougham which stood waiting in the rain. For some time, the conviction expressed by Bergotte that, despite what I said, I was made for the pleasures of the intellectual life, had made me think again about what I might do with my life, reviving hopes which were, however, doomed to frustration every time I sat down to a desk to sketch the draft of a critical study or a novel. 'Well, I thought, it may be that the pleasure to be taken in writing it is not an infallible criterion of the value of a fine page. Perhaps it's only an accessory state, often present, but not necessarily invalidating the writing by its absence. Perhaps it's possible to yawn all the way through the composition of a masterpiece.' My self-doubt was assuaged by my grandmother, who assured me that, if I were in good health, I would work well and with enjoyment. Our doctor having thought it wiser to add the view that my state of health could expose me to serious risks, setting forth all the precautions I must take so as to avoid having an attack, I now subordinated all pleasures to the aim, which seemed infinitely more important than they were, of becoming well enough to accomplish the work which I might have it in me to produce; and since coming to Balbec I had been paying constant and close attention to my health. No one could have made me drink a cup of coffee, and jeopardize thereby the night's sleep which I needed if I were not to suffer from fatigue the following day. But as soon as we arrived at Rivebelle – because of the excitement generated in me by a new pleasure, and having crossed the line which anything exceptional makes us cross after it has severed the thread, patiently woven over so many days, which was leading us towards a more sensible way of living – as though no tomorrow would ever come, as though the worthier achievements were of no importance, the whole careful arrangement of wiser precautions, the whole point of which was to make those achievements possible, would disappear. While a servant helped to relieve me of my overcoat, Saint-Loup would say:

'Won't you feel the cold? It might be better to keep it on, it's not very warm here.'

To which I replied, 'No matter.' Perhaps I did not even feel the cold, but certainly I had lost all fear of being ill; and the need to protect myself against the possibility of dying, like the importance of getting down to work, had likewise vanished from my mind. I handed over the coat, we stepped into the dining-room, to the strains of a swashbuckling march played by the gipsies, and walked between the rows of laid tables as though we were conquering heroes; and, though we could feel in our bodies the thrill of exuberance communicated by the rhythms of the band, as it accorded us these military honours and an undeserved triumph, we hid it behind an appearance of glacial gravity and a world-weary gait, avoiding any suggestion of the type of swaggering songstress who performs in cabarets, strutting on to her little stage with the martial air of a victorious general, and launching into a bawdy adaptation of a marching-song.

From that moment on, I was a different person, no longer the grandson of my grandmother, to whom I would not give another thought until after having left the restaurant, but briefly the brother of the waiters who were about to serve us.

An amount of beer, let alone of champagne, which I would not have wanted to drink in a week at Balbec, even though my mind, when unclouded and sober, was capable of having a clear appreciation of the taste of these drinks as a pleasure, albeit one which could be easily forgone, now passed my lips in the space of an hour, interspersed with a little port, which I was too preoccupied even to taste; and to the violinist, who had just played for us, I gave the two golden *louis*, saved over the previous month so as to enable me to buy something which had now completely gone from my head. Some of the waiters rushed along the aisles between the rows of tables, one outstretched hand bearing a dish which it was the seeming purpose of this type of race not to drop. Sure enough, the chocolate soufflés reached their destination without spilling, the potatoes *à l'anglaise*, despite the canter and the apparent shaking about, always arrived as they had set out, neatly ranged about the Pauillac lamb.[85] I noticed one of these servers, very tall, with a superb plume of black hair and wearing make-up of a colour more suggestive of certain species of rare birds than of a human face, who ran to and fro, without let-up and, it seemed, without purpose, from one end of the room to the other, and brought to mind the macaws which fill the large aviaries in zoos with their gorgeous colouring and incomprehensible agitation. Soon the spectacle became more ordered, at least to my eyes, turning into something nobler and calmer. All the giddy activity slowed down and settled into a soothing harmony. I could see the round tables, a countless constellation of them filling the restaurant like so many planets, as depicted in allegorical paintings from earlier times. These different heavenly bodies also exercised irresistible attractions on one another, and at every table the diners kept looking at the other tables, except for a rich man entertaining guests, including a famous writer whom he had managed to attract, whom he was now plying with questions, in the hope that the virtues of the turning table would induce him to utter inanities, which the ladies would marvel at. The harmony of these astral tables did not impede the incessant revolutions of the innumerable servers who, being on foot, unlike the seated diners, moved in a higher realm. Of course, one or other of them dashed in with the hors-d'œuvre, changed the wine, brought extra glasses. But despite these particular reasons, their perpetual hurrying about among the round tables eventually clarified the law of its own restlessness, dizzying but regulated. Like a pair of witches, sitting behind a great floral decoration, two ghastly cashiers, endlessly busy with their arithmetic, seemed engaged in astrological calculations of the upheavals which might on occasion disrupt life in this planetary system, designed in accordance with the science of the Middle Ages.

I felt rather sorry for the diners, because I sensed that for them the round tables were not planets, and that they were unpractised in the art of cross-sectioning things so as to rid them of their customary appearance and enable us to see analogies. Their heads were full of the knowledge that they were dining with such and such a person, that the meal would cost this or that much, that they would probably eat another dinner the following day. They seemed absolutely impervious to the appearance of a procession of young waiters' assistants who, probably having no urgent business to attend to, were processionally bringing in bread in baskets. Some of them, too young, and victimized by the senior waiters, who cuffed them about the head in passing, had their hangdog eyes on a distant day-dream, and cheered up only if a guest staying at the Balbec hotel, where they had been formerly employed, recognized them, spoke to them and asked them in person to take away the champagne, which was undrinkable, and this filled them with pride.

I could hear the muffled protests of my nerves, in which there was actually a feeling of well-being, unconnected with the external objects which can supply it, but which the slightest movement I made with my body or my mind sufficed to give to me, as a gentle pressure on a closed eye can create an impression of colour. I had already drunk a great deal of port; and when I asked for more, it was less because I was hoping the next glasses would give a feeling of well-being than because the previous ones had already given it. I let the music conduct my pleasure to each note, and it rested on them docilely. While the restaurant at Rivebelle, like those chemical industries which produce great quantities of substances which, in nature, occur only by chance and are very rare, brought together more women and their prospects of happiness for me than a year of chance encounters during journeys or outings in the country could have brought me, the music we could hear (arrangements of waltzes, German operettas and cabaret songs, all of it new to me) was itself like an airy place of pleasure, superimposed on the real one and more exciting than it: each musical phrase, though as individual as a particular woman, did not limit to a single privileged person, as she would have done, the secret of its sensual thrills – it offered them to me, it ogled me, it accosted me, it toyed with me in seductively whimsical or vulgar ways, it caressed me, as though I had suddenly become more attractive, more powerful or wealthy; and in the tunes I detected something cruel: the fact that the slightest disinterested sense of beauty or vestige of intelligence was foreign to them – for them, there is nothing beyond physical pleasure. They are the most merciless form of hell, the hell with no way out, for any poor victim of jealousy who hears that pleasure in them – the pleasure which the woman he loves enjoys with someone else – and who hears it as the only thing desired in the whole world by the woman who is the whole world to him. To me, as I hummed over the tune and returned its kiss, the special sensual pleasure which it gave enchanted me so much that I would have left my parents, to follow the echoes of the phrase through the singular world which it created in its invisible element, its outlines at times languishing, at times sprightly. At such moments, despite the fact that this secret joy is not of a sort which increases the attractiveness of the person who has acquired it, since no one else can perceive it, and though any failure to impress a woman who may have dismissed us at a single glance cannot possibly be imputed to our having or not having this inner and subjective bliss, since in her unawareness of its presence or absence in us, her view of us is bound to be unaffected by it, I felt endowed with a power which seemed to make me almost irresistible. It felt as though my love

was no longer something irksome, something to be dismissed with a smile, but that it had exactly the touching beauty, the wistful charm of this music, which itself now gave the impression of being a favourable place and time which had brought me and the woman I loved together, to meet and become close.

Women of easy virtue were not the only people to frequent this restaurant; there were also people from the most fashionable society, who would go to it for afternoon tea or else held lavish dinner-parties there. Afternoon tea was served in a long, narrow gallery, like a corridor walled with glass, leading from the entrance-hall to the dining-room and forming one side of the garden, from which it was separated only by its few pillars of stone and the large windows, many of which were often open. The result of this arrangement was not only that it was very draughty, but that one was exposed to sudden and intermittent sunlight, a dazzling and unreliable form of illumination which made it all but impossible to make out the women taking tea; and when they sat there, crammed at pairs of tables along both sides of the narrow passageway, shimmering at every movement they made as they sipped their tea or greeted each other, the place looked like a tank or a creel which a fisherman has filled with his shiny catch, some of the fish being half out of the water, their sheen glinting and changing under glossy lights.

Some hours later, during dinner, which was served of course in the dining-room, the lamps would be lit though it was still daylight outside, and in the garden one could see, alongside outlying pavilions still lit by the dusk, and looking like pallid evening ghosts of themselves, arbours of green gloom shot through by the last rays of sunlight, and resembling, out there beyond the glass of the lamplit room where we sat dining – and unlike the late-afternoon ladies at tea, enmeshed in the sparkling moisture of their bluish-gold passage – plants in a giant aquarium bathed in a faint, supernaturally green light. As dinner finished and the room began to empty, the diners who, though they had spent their time during the meal looking at, recognizing, or asking to be informed of the names of other diners near by, held together in complete cohesion round their own table, now began to be freed of the gravitational force which had kept them close about their host of the evening, which lost its power over them at the moment when they drifted out to take coffee in the corridor where afternoon tea had been served; and a dinner-party on the move would often shed one or more of its corpuscles, which had been too strongly affected by the attractive power of a competing dinner-party, and was briefly replaced by a lady or gentleman who stepped across to greet a friend, before going back to their own group, saying, 'Must go – I'm with Monsieur X's party tonight.' One had a momentary impression of two separate bouquets exchanging a few of their flowers. Then even the corridor was deserted. Some nights this long corridor was left unlit, as there was still a little daylight even after dinner, and with the trees hanging down close by, just outside the glass, it had the look of a path through a shadowy, overgrown garden. On occasion a lady, detached from a dinner-party, lingered in the half-dark. One evening, as I crossed the corridor on my way out, I noticed, sitting among a group of people unknown to me, the beautiful Princess of Luxembourg. I raised my hat to her but did not stop. She recognized me and inclined her head, smiling: from far above this movement of her head, and emitted by it, a few melodious words for me rose into the air, probably an elongated good evening intended not to delay me, but just to round off the nod of the head, to make it a spoken nod. Her words were so indistinct to me, and the sound of them, which was all I heard, lasted so long and was so musical, that it was as though a nightingale among the close, leafy twilight had burst into song. If, as sometimes happened, Saint-Loup decided to finish the night with a group of his friends whom we had met, and with whom he went on to the Casino of one of the neighbouring seaside towns, he would put me into a carriage by myself: I told the cabman to set the horse at a gallop, so as to abridge as much as possible the interval during which I could rely on no one but myself to provide my sensitivity – by engaging its reverse gear, and switching off the mechanism of passivity in which I had been held – with the stimuli which, ever since arriving at Rivebelle, I had been receiving from other people. Nothing, not even the possibility of colliding with a carriage coming in the other direction, along these paths which were pitch-dark and wide enough for only a single vehicle at a time, the uneven ground which was often littered with earth-falls from the cliff above, or the nearby precipice on the other side dropping straight to the sea, could bring me to make the small effort required for the idea of danger, and the fear of it, to rise to my reasoning mind. Just as it is not the wish to be famous, but a habit of hard work, which may make a creative artist of us, so it is not the joy we take in the present, but sober reflection on the past, which may enable us to safeguard the future. In my own case, not only had I begun the evening at Rivebelle by throwing away my crutches of rationality and self-discipline, which help us in our infirmity to walk a straight path, and had been afflicted thereby by a sort of moral ataxia, but then the alcohol, with its heightened effect on the nerves, had filled the present minutes with a quality and a charm, the effect of which had not been to make me more able, or even more willing, to defend myself against them: my state of light-headedness segregated them from the rest of my life and made me see them as vastly preferable to it; I was trapped in the present, as heroes are, or drunkards; in brief eclipse, my past had ceased to project in front of me that shadow of itself which we call our future; seeing the purpose of my life not in any past dreams coming true but in the simple bliss of the passing moment, I could see no further than that moment. So, by the working of a contradiction which was one only in appearance, it was at the very moment when I experienced an exceptional pleasure, when I sensed that my life could be one of fulfilment, and should therefore have seen it as having increased in value, that I felt liberated from the anxieties it had hitherto inspired in me, and was prepared to commit it without hesitation to the unsure hands of chance. In fact, what I was doing was condensing into one evening the unconcern which others dilute in their whole existence: every day they take the needless risk of a sea-voyage, a ride in an aeroplane, a drive in a motor-car, when the person who would be stricken by grief if they were to die sits waiting for them at home, when the book, as yet unrevealed to the world, in which they see the point of their whole life, still lives only within their fragile brain. So it was that, if somebody had turned up at the Rivebelle restaurant with the intention of killing me on one of the evenings when we stayed on there, when my grandmother, my life to come and my unwritten books had all shrunk to a remote unreality, when I had no mind to give to anything but the fragrance of the woman at the next table, the courtesies of the head waiter, the outlines of the waltz-tune being played, when I was glutted with the present sensation and had no existence beyond it, no wish except to be never separated from it, I would have died in its embrace, I would have let myself be torn limb from limb, without raising a hand to defend myself, like a bee so bemused by tobacco-smoke as to have lost its intent to garner away the supplies its efforts have gathered, and all hope of ever reaching the hive.

It must be added that the insignificance which came over all serious things in the face of my intense exhilaration eventually affected even Mlle Simonet and her friends. The enterprise of getting to know them now seemed easy, but a matter of indifference, since nothing but my present sensation, because of the extraordinary power of it, the euphoria afforded by its slightest variations and even by the mere continuity of it, had any importance; everything else, my parents, my work, my pleasures, my gang of girls at Balbec, was reduced to the insubstantiality of a fleck of spray in the high wind which prevents it from coming to earth, and had no existence except in so far as it related to my sensation of power: drunkenness brings about, for the space of a few hours, subjective idealism, pure phenomenalism; all things become mere appearances, and exist only as a function of our sublime selves. This does not mean that genuine love, if we happen to have such a feeling, cannot survive in these conditions. But we are well aware, as though we had moved into a new element, that unknown pressures have altered the dimensions of our feeling, and we can no longer consider it as we did before. We know it is still there somewhere, but it has shifted, it no longer weighs on us, it is satisfied with the sensation afforded it by the present, a sensation which satisfies us too, for we have no interest in anything that is not the present. Unfortunately, the coefficient which alters values in this way works only during the hour of drunkenness. Tomorrow the individuals who had become insignificant, whom we blew away like soap-bubbles, will again take on their full density; and the work left undone, but which had lost all meaning, will have to be faced once more. Even more seriously, these morning-after mathematics, which are no different from day-before mathematics, are not only the making of the unavoidable problems which we must still contend with, they are also the mathematics which, unknown to ourselves, have in fact been governing our life during the drunken hours. If at those moments we are with a woman whose virtue or unfriendliness made her inaccessible, what was implausible the day before (that she should be attracted to us) now seems a million times easier, although it has not become any easier in fact, it being only in our eyes, our inner view of ourself, that we have changed. At the moment when we take a little liberty with her, she is as displeased as we will be the morning after, when we remember having tipped the porter 100 francs, and for the same reason, which for us has simply been delayed: the fact of not being drunk.

I knew none of the women who were at Rivebelle and who, because they were part of my drunkenness, as reflections are part of a mirror, seemed infinitely more desirable than the more and more non-existent Mlle Simonet. A young blonde with a forlorn air, sitting alone, wearing her straw-hat with wild flowers about

its brim, gave me a brief wistful glance and seemed attractive to me. I noticed another one, then a third; she was replaced by a brunette with a magnificent complexion. Almost all of them were known, if not to me, to Saint-Loup.

Before meeting his present mistress, he had in fact been so familiar with the small world of debauchery that, of all the women who dined on those evenings at Rivebelle, many of whom were there quite by chance, some having come to the coast at the behest of their present lover, others in the hope of finding a new lover, there were very few whom he did not know, either he or one or other of his friends having spent at least a night with most of them. If they were in the company of a man, he did not greet them; and though the women glanced at him more than at other men, since the indifference they knew he felt towards any woman who was not his actress gave him a strange prestige in the eyes of the others, they too gave the appearance of not knowing him. One of them would murmur, 'There's young Saint-Loup. It seems he still loves his little trollop. It's the great love of his life! What a handsome chap, though! I think he's just lovely. And what style! Some women have *all* the luck. He's a good sort in all other ways, too. I knew him well when I was with d'Orléans – they were inseparable. Mind you, he burned the candle at both ends in those days! He's stopped all that now, though: he's only got eyes for her. I wonder if she knows how lucky she is. And I wonder what he sees in her. He must be a bit of a fool, though: she's got feet like barges and a walrus moustache – and her undies are just filthy! Even a factory-girl wouldn't have drawers like hers! Take a look at those eyes – a girl could really go for a man like him. Not a word, now, he's recognized me, he's laughing – he knew a thing or two about me! Just ask him about me!' I caught knowing glances passing between him and them. I wished he would introduce me to these women, so that I could ask them for an appointment and they agree to one, even though I might not be able to keep it. For otherwise, in my memory, a particular part would be for ever missing from the face of each of them – as though she was wearing a veil – a part which varies from woman to woman, which we cannot imagine on an individual face when we have never seen it there, as it appears only in eyes looking at ours, accepting our desire and promising that it will be satisfied. However, even in this unfinished form, the faces of these women meant much more to me than those of women I suspected of being virtuous, having none of the flatness and emptiness of theirs, which were made out of a single piece and without depth. For me, of course, these faces were not what they must have been for Saint-Loup: in his memory, through the transparent indifference of impassive features which feigned not to know him, under the ordinariness of a greeting which could have been exchanged with anyone else, he could see the tumbled hair, the gasping mouth, the half-closed eyes, all the detail of a silent scene which a painter, wishing not to offend visitors to his studio, conceals behind a more seemly canvas. For me, aware as I was that nothing of my life had penetrated these women's, and that, whichever roads they might take in the future, nothing of me would go with them, their faces remained closed. But the simple knowledge that they could open was enough to make me see them as prizes worth winning, which they would not have seemed if they had been mere medals, however fine, rather than lockets with mementoes of love hidden inside. As for Robert, who became restless as soon as he had to sit for a while, concealing behind the smile of the courtier the warrior's zest for action, I only had to look at him closely to realize how similar the emphatic bone-structure of his triangular face must be to that of his ancestors, more that of the ardent archer than of the sensitive bookman. Through the fine skin, the strong shapes of feudal architecture were visible. His head reminded one of an ancient castle keep, with its unmanned battlements still preserved, but its interior transformed into a library.

All the way back to Balbec, if it happened that Robert had introduced me to one or other of these unfamiliar women, I kept repeating to myself, as though singing over a remembered refrain, without a second's pause, but almost without noticing what I was doing, 'What a delightful woman!' The words, rather than expressing a lasting judgment, were prompted by a state of nervous excitement. Nevertheless, if I had had 1,000 francs on me, and if any jewellers had been open at that hour, I would have bought a ring for her. When the compartments in which we live parts of our lives are too different from one another, we can expend ourselves on a person who, by the following day, may come to seem uninteresting. But we feel responsible for what we may have said the night before, and wish to honour it.

As I was back late to the hotel on those nights, it was a pleasure to walk into the bedroom, which had stopped being hostile, and find the bed, in which I had been sure on first arriving that I could never go to sleep, and which was now a comfort to my weary limbs; and one after the other, my thighs, my hips, my shoulders tried to imprint their every feature in the sheets enveloping the mattress, as though my tiredness were a sculptor moulding a cast of the whole human body. However, sleep evaded me: I was aware of the imminence of the morning; peace of mind and well-being of body were no longer in me. In my distress, I felt I had lost them for ever. To enjoy them again, I would have needed to sleep for a long time. But even if I had fallen asleep, I would still have been wakened a couple of hours later by the symphony concert. Then suddenly I was unconscious, submerged in the dense sleep which reveals to us mysteries such as youth regained, the rediscovery of years past and emotions once felt, disincarnation, the transmigration of souls, the summoning-up of the dead, the illusions of the mad, travel in time back to the most primitive stages of nature (for it is said we often see animals in our dreams, forgetting that, almost always when we dream, we ourselves are animals deprived of the clarity of certainty shed on all things by our faculty of reason; instead of it, all we can turn on the spectacle of life is an infirm gaze which is abolished by oblivion at every successive moment, each reality no sooner glimpsed than vanishing in the face of the next one, as the slides projected by a magic lantern succeed one another), mysteries which we think are closed to us, yet which we are admitted to almost every night, just as we are to the other great mystery of annihilation and resurrection. The difficulty of digesting the Rivebelle dinner meant that it was in a more fitful light that I visited in incoherent succession the darkened zones of my past life, and that I became a creature for whom supreme happiness would have been to meet Legrandin, with whom I had just had a dream conversation.

In addition, even my own daily life would be completely hidden from me by new scenery, like the décor set out near the edge of the stage, in front of which, while the scene-shifting is going on behind it, actors present a divertissement. The one in which I was cast to play a part was after the manner of Oriental tales: I had no knowledge of my past life or of myself, because of the extreme nearness of the intervening scenery; I was just a character getting a good flogging, being punished in various ways for an unexplained misdemeanour, which was that I had drunk too much port. Suddenly awake, I would realize that a long sleep had prevented me from hearing the symphony concert. It was already the afternoon, as I would see from my watch, after attempts to sit up, unsuccessful at first and interrupted by collapses on to the pillow, brief collapses of the sort which follow sleep, the drunkenness caused by wine, or that other intoxication one experiences in convalescence; but in any case, before I had looked at the time, I knew for certain that it was after midday. The night before, I had been a creature without substance, weightless and unable to stop moving or talking (as in order to sit up, it is necessary to have been lying down, and in order to stop talking, it is necessary to have been asleep); I had had neither consistency nor centre of gravity, I was unstoppable, I felt my monotonous trajectory could have taken me as far as the moon. But in sleeping, though my eyes had been incapable of telling the time, my body had known how to, measuring it not according to the surface markings of a clockface, but by its continuous hefting of all my refreshed energies which, cog by cog, like the mechanism of a powerful timepiece, it had gradually lowered, moving them from my brain down into the rest of my body, where they were now stocked, the unused abundance of their supply reaching already above my knees. If it is true that the sea was once our life-giving environment, in which we must reimmerse our blood so as to restore our strength, the same can be said of forgetting, of mental oblivion: for some hours, we seem to live outside time; but the energy accumulated unspent during that period measures it by itself, as accurately as the weights of a clock or the trickling little sand-hill in an hour-glass. Such a sleep is no easier to leave than a period of prolonged wakefulness, all things tending to endure; and if it is true that some narcotics make one sleep, sleep itself, if long, is a more powerful narcotic, from which we have great difficulty in waking. Like a sailor who can see the pier where he must moor, but whose boat is still rocked by the waves, I had a clear impression of looking at the time and getting up; but my body was tossed back again and again into sleep; my landing was a difficult one, and before I could stand up and reach for my watch, so as to compare its time with the time indicated by the wealth of materials stored in my once-weary legs, I fell back two or three more times on the pillow.

Able at last to make out the time – 'Two o'clock in the afternoon!' – I rang; but then I immediately fell into another sleep which, to judge by the feeling I had on waking from it, of being fully rested, and the vision I had of having slept through an immense length of night, must have been infinitely longer than the

previous one. But since what woke me was Françoise coming in, in answer to my ring, this sleep which had seemed so much longer than the earlier one, and had afforded me such a depth of beneficent relief from consciousness, had lasted no more than half a minute.

My grandmother was opening my bedroom door: I asked her some questions about the Legrandins.

I had done more than just return to mental repose and well-being: between them and me, the night before, there had been more than a slight distance, and I had had to struggle all night long against a torrent of foreignness; yet now here they were, not only back within my reach, but inside me. My ideas had taken up their former places in precise and as yet rather painful corners of my empty head, which would one day be split open, scattering them to the winds and ending an existence which they had so far put, alas, to little profit.

Once more I had escaped the impossibility of sleeping, and the ravages and the havoc of nervous disorder which it brought. Everything which had been a menace to me the night before, when I was without rest, was now incapable of alarming me. A new life stretched before me: without making a single movement, since I still felt crippled though already alert, I revelled in my exhaustion; it had dismembered me and broken the bones in my arms and legs, which I could feel lying there close by, ready to be reassembled, and which I was going to bring together again, with a mere song, like the builder in the fable.[86]

I suddenly remembered the young blonde with the wistful look who had glanced at me at Rivebelle. During the evening at the restaurant, many other women had seemed just as nice, yet she was the one who now stood alone in my memory. I had the feeling that she must have noticed me: one of the waiters from Rivebelle might even now be bringing me a note from her! She was not known to Saint-Loup, who had thought she was respectable. It would be difficult to see her, and to go on seeing her. But I was prepared to do anything that would make it possible; I could think of nothing but her. Philosophy talks of free acts and necessary acts. Perhaps none is so completely inescapable as the one which, on the release of a hitherto compressed elevating force, brings up to the surface of the idling mind a memory which was weighted down at the same level as others by the ballast of activity and preoccupation, and makes it spring to the mind's eye because, unknown to us, it contains a charm which the others lack, and which we notice only twenty-four hours later. But perhaps none is so completely free either, since such an act is still unaffected by habit, that type of mental obsessiveness which, under the aggravation of love, becomes the exclusive rehearsal of the memory of a certain person.

It was the day after I had seen my group of girls profiled in beautiful procession against the sea. I asked several of the hotel-guests about them, people who often spent their summers at Balbec, but they could tell me nothing. Some time later, a photograph was to explain why: in the group as it was now, in these girls who had barely, but definitively, left behind the age at which we change for ever, could anyone have recognized the delightful, amorphous mass of little girls, still children, who only a few years before were to be seen sitting in a circle on the sand, by a tent, a white blur of a constellation, in which a pair of eyes finer than any other pair, a mischievous face, a head of fair hair, once noticed, would soon have gone unnoticed, blended back into the milky, indistinct nebula?

No doubt, at that time, so few years before, it was not the vision of the group which lacked clarity, as it had been the day before when they first appeared to me, but the group itself. In those days, the girls were too young to have gone beyond the elementary degree of formation of self, when personality has not yet stamped its seal on each face. Like primitive organisms in which the individual hardly exists, or rather in which it is constituted more by the polypary than by each of its component polyps, they lived in a close conglomerate, huddled together. One of them would suddenly push another one over, and a fit of the giggles, which seemed to be the only manifestation in them of personal life, convulsed them all at once, masking and unifying the undefined, grimacing faces in the sparkle and translucency of a single, quivering cluster. In an old photograph which they subsequently gave me, and which I have kept, their pack of children numbers no fewer of them than were to figure later in their feminine company; it suggests that even then the blur of colour they made on the beach was remarkable enough to make eyes turn towards them, but in order to recognize any of them individually, one must resort to deduction, try to imagine the whole range of their possible transformations during later childhood, up to the point at which their remodelled forms started to coincide with another individual set of features, which one must attempt to identify also in the beautiful face (now accompanied by full height and hair that is waved) that might once have belonged to the photo's wizened and grimacing gnome; and the distance covered in so short a time by the physical characteristics of each of the girls was such an unreliable criterion – in addition to which, their collectiveness, so to speak, and the things they had in common, were already so marked – that even their best friends could look at that photograph and mistake them for one another; with the result that the uncertainty could be dispelled only by the presence of some article of clothing which one of them knew without a doubt that she, and not one of the others, had worn. Different though those earlier days were from the day when I had seen them on the esplanade – different, yet so close to it – the girls still enjoyed laughing with gusto, as I had noticed the day before; but this laughter was not the intermittent and almost automatic sort indulged in by children, the spasmodic release which had once made the whole group of heads duck down as one, as a block of minnows in the Vivonne used to dive and disintegrate, before reforming a moment later; their individual faces had now become capable of self-mastery, their eyes remaining fixed throughout on the aim they pursued; and the day before, it had been only my indecision and the vacillation of my initial perception which, like their former hilarity and the old photo, had fused into an indistinct whole the now individualized and separated sister stars of the pale madrepore.

Of course, when I saw pretty girls pass by, I often promised myself I would make a point of seeing them again. Usually, such girls make no reappearance in one's life; and memory, quickly mislaying their existence, would be hard put to remember their features; perhaps our eyes would not even recognize them again, and before long we see others passing by, whom we shall not see again either. However, on other occasions – and this was what was to happen with this little gang of impudent girls – further chance encounters bring them back into our field of vision. In such chance there is seeming beauty, for we see in it an incipient intent or effort to organize our life, to give it shape; and it is this same chance which can make it easy for us, inevitable and sometimes even cruel – after intermissions which may have made us hope for a cessation of such memories – for us to acquire a sort of fidelity to mental images which we may come to believe we were predestined to acquire, yet which, had it not been for that chance, we could have forgotten at the very beginning, like so many others, so easily.

Saint-Loup's stay at Balbec was soon to come to an end. I had not seen any of the girls on the beach again. He could spend too few afternoons at Balbec to be able to busy himself with getting to know them on my behalf. In the evenings, he had more time and often took me out to Rivebelle. In those sorts of restaurants, as in public parks and trains, one comes across people enclosed in an ordinary appearance, and whose name astonishes us if, having asked by chance what they are called, we discover them to be, not the nondescript nobody we had supposed, but none other than the minister or the duke whom we have so often heard of. In the Rivebelle restaurant, Saint-Loup and I had several times noticed a tall man, very well-built, with regular features and a beard turning grey, who, having arrived when most other diners were leaving, would sit at a table resolutely staring at nothing with pensive, unfocussed eyes. When we asked the owner one night who this unknown, solitary, belated diner was, he replied, 'What? Don't you know the famous painter Elstir?' Swann had once spoken the name of Elstir in my presence, though I had completely forgotten in what connection; but the loss of a memory, like the omission of a phrase during reading, rather than making for uncertainty, can lead to a premature certainty. 'He's a friend of Swann's, a very well-known artist, among the best,' I said to Saint-Loup. The immediate thought that thrilled through the mind of each of us was that Elstir was a great artist, a famous man; and the next was that he must look on us as he looked on the other diners, and be quite unaware of the excitement that filled us at the knowledge of his brilliance. Had we not been at the seaside, we would not have been irked to realize he knew nothing of our admiration for him or our acquaintance with Swann. But we were still at an age when enthusiasm cries out to be known of; and with a sudden conviction that our incognito was intolerable, we wrote a letter, which we both signed, telling Elstir that the two diners sitting not far away were ardent admirers of his ability and friends of his great friend Swann, and asking his permission to present our compliments. We got a waiter to take our message to the famous man.

To tell the truth, Elstir may not have been quite as famous at that time as the owner of the restaurant claimed, or as he became not many years later. He had been one of the first to live in the restaurant, at a time when it was still little more than a farm-house, to which he had brought a colony of artists (all of whom had

later migrated elsewhere, once the farm-house, where they had eaten out of doors under a simple canopy, had become a fashionable rendezvous; the only reason Elstir himself had come back to eat at that time at Rivebelle was that his wife, with whom he lived not far from there, was briefly away from home). But a great talent, even when it goes largely unrecognized, is bound to give rise to certain manifestations of admiration, such as those the owner of the farm-house had seen in the questions of more than one visiting Englishwoman, eager for information on the life led by Elstir, and in the number of letters the artist received from abroad. The owner had also noticed that Elstir disliked being interrupted while he was working, that when the moonlight was good, he got up in the middle of the night, so as to take a young model down to pose in the nude by the sea; and on recognizing in one of Elstir's paintings a wooden cross which stood just outside Rivebelle, he had decided that such self-imposed discipline was not wasted, and the admiration of the tourists not unjustified. 'It's the very same cross, I tell you!' he would say in amazement. 'You can see the four bits of it! Mind you, he really goes at it.'

And he wondered whether a little *Sunrise on the Sea*, given to him by Elstir, might not be worth a fortune.

We saw Elstir read our letter, slip it into his pocket, go on with his dinner, then ask for his things and leave the table. By now we were so sure that by writing to him we had given offence that we would have preferred (as much as before we would have been reluctant) to leave the restaurant without being noticed by him. We gave not the slightest thought to a thing which should have seemed the most important of all: that our enthusiasm for Elstir, the sincerity of which we would not have allowed anyone to doubt (and in its support we could, of course, have alleged our bated breath and our wish to do anything for the great man, as long as it was difficult or heroic), was not, as we believed it was, admiration, since we had never seen any of his canvases; it was possible for such a feeling to be inspired by the empty idea of 'a great artist', but not by work which was completely unknown to us. At best, it was theoretical admiration, the nervous framework and emotional skeleton of an admiration without object, that is to say, something as inseparably linked to childhood as certain organs which no longer exist in the body of a grown man: we were still boys. Elstir had almost reached the door, when he turned and came towards us. I felt myself flooded with a feeling of delicious terror, the like of which I would have been incapable of experiencing a few years later, for not only does age diminish the ability, but habituation to society takes away all impulse, to bring about such strange occasions and the sort of feelings that accompany them.

Elstir sat with us at our table and spoke a few words; but he did not pursue any of the allusions I made during the conversation to Swann. I could easily have believed he did not know him. He did, however, invite me to go and see him at his studio in Balbec, an invitation which did not include Saint-Loup, and which I owed to the fact that I had said a few things which made him think I had an interest in the arts (an invitation, be it said, which might never have been issued in response to a recommendation from Swann, if Elstir had been a close friend of his, as the influence of disinterest on the feelings of men is greater than is commonly believed). He treated me in a markedly friendly manner, which outdid Saint-Loup's as much as Saint-Loup's outdid the affability of a person from the lower middle classes. However charming the kindness of a lord may be, compared to the kindness of a great artist, it always suggests play-acting, pretence. Saint-Loup's aim was to please; Elstir's was to give, and to give himself: he would have gladly given whatever he possessed, ideas, works and all the rest that he valued much less highly, to anyone who understood him. But he found something lacking in the company of most people, and lived in a state of isolation and unsociability which fashionable people saw as ill-mannered and affected, the powers-that-be as wrong-headed, his neighbours as mad, and his family as arrogant and inconsiderate.

To begin with, even in his solitude, he must have taken pleasure in the thought that, through his works, he was addressing, albeit at a remove, those who had misunderstood or offended him, and giving them a better opinion of himself. Perhaps his choice of the solitary life was motivated not by indifference towards others, but by love for them; and, much as I had given up Gilberte in the hope of being able to appear to her in the future in a more lovable guise, perhaps he painted with certain people in mind, in a sort of gesture of reconciliation towards them, so that, without ever meeting again, they would love him, admire him, speak about him; renunciation is not always total from the very first moment – the self which commits us to it is a former self, one which has not yet been acted upon by the fact of renunciation itself, whether it be the renunciation of the invalid, the monk, the artist or the hero. However, even if Elstir's intention had been to work with a view to impressing certain people, in working he had lived only for himself, turning his back on the society to which he had become indifferent: the practice of solitude had given him a love for it, which is what happens with any important thing that we have ever begun by fearing, because we knew it was incompatible with pettier things to which we were attached, and from which it must sever us for ever, rather than just distract us from them. Before we have committed ourselves to it, our whole concern is to know how we may be able to reconcile it with certain pleasures, which will cease being pleasures as soon as we have experience of it.

Elstir did not sit talking with us for very long. I told myself I would go to his studio at some time over the next two or three days; but then, the very next afternoon, my grandmother and I having been for a walk to the cliffs of Canapville, right at the far end of the esplanade, we were on our way back when we passed a young girl, at the corner of one of the side-streets which run perpendicular to the beach: hanging her head, like an animal being forced back to the stable, and carrying golf-clubs, she was walking in front of an authoritative-looking personage, presumably her English governess, or the English governess of one of her friends, who looked like John Jeffreys in the portrait by Hogarth, with a complexion so red as to make one think she drank gin rather than tea, and a black trace of tobacco adding its curl to a grey moustache which was quite pronounced. The girl walking in front of her bore some resemblance to the one in the group whose chubby, motionless face, with its laughing eyes, had been topped by a black toque: this girl also wore a black toque, but she seemed much prettier than the other one, the line of her nose being straighter and the wings of her nostrils wider and more fleshy. The first one had looked like a pale and proud young lady; this one was more like a pink-faced child, grudgingly submissive. However, as she was pushing a similar bicycle along, and wearing the same reindeer-skin gloves, I deduced that the differences might have to do with my angle of vision and the circumstances, since it was unlikely there would be a second young girl in Balbec whose face looked so much like hers, and with so many other similarities in articles of dress and equipment. She sidled a quick glance towards me; and over the following days, each time I caught sight of the little gang of girls on the beach, and even later, after I had come to know all of them, I could never be absolutely sure whether any of them, including the first one with the bicycle, who looked more like her than any of the others, was in fact this one I had seen that evening, at the far end of the beach, by the street-corner, this one who was hardly any different, but who was actually a little bit different, from the one I had noticed in their procession.

From that moment on, although until then I had been thinking mostly about the tall one, it was once more the girl with the golf-clubs, whom I assumed to be Mlle Simonet, who preoccupied me. Walking along with the others, she would often stop, making her friends, who seemed to respect her greatly, also come to a standstill. That is how I see her to this day: standing there, her eyes shining under her toque, silhouetted against the backdrop of the sea, and separated from me by the transparent sky-blue stretch of time elapsed since that moment, the first glimpse of her in my memory, a very slight image of a face first desired and pursued, then forgotten, then found again, a face which since then I have often projected into the past, so as to say to myself, of a girl with me in my bedroom, 'That was her!'

But I was not really sure whether the girl I would have preferred to know was not perhaps the one with the green eyes and the cheeks suggesting geraniums. And whichever one of them I chose to look out for on different days, the presence of the others, even without her, was enough to fill me with excitement: even if my desire bore on one of them some of the time and on another at other times, it went on seeing them all, as on the first day of my indistinct vision of them, as one, as a little world apart, living a single life, which was probably how they liked to see themselves; and if I could have become friends with only one of them, I would have gained access – like a refined pagan, or a Christian full of scruples, fallen among barbarians – to a whole society with powers of rejuvenation, a society based on rude health, recklessness, bodily pleasure, cruelty, non-intellectuality and joy.

My grandmother, whom I had told of my encounter with Elstir, and who was pleased to think of all the intellectual advantage there could be for me in the friendship of such a man, thought I was absurd and impolite not to have gone and visited him before this. But I could think of nothing other than the little band of girls; and unsure as I was of when they might appear, I did not dare to leave the esplanade. My grandmother was also surprised at how elegantly I dressed, as I had suddenly remembered suits which till then had remained in my trunk. Now I wore a different one every day and had even written to Paris to ask for new hats and ties to be sent down.

The life we lead in a seaside resort such as Balbec can acquire much charm if the sight of a pretty face, a seller of sea-shells, a florist, a girl in a cake-shop, painted in its vivid colours in our morning memory, becomes the aim of each of the sunlit days we idle away on the sands. It is this aim which makes them, though holidays, as busy as working-days, marked by directions and destinations, tending always towards the coming moment, when in buying our ammonites, our shortbread or our roses, we can delight in the colours of a feminine face, as pure and clear as those of a flower. But with shop-girls, at least one can chat, which avoids the necessity of filling in by imagination all the aspects of them not directly perceptible to the eye, of inventing a life for them and exaggerating the charm of it, as though extrapolating from a mere portrait; and for another thing, for the very reason that they can be chatted with, one can learn where and when to meet them. This, of course, was nothing like the position I was in with the girls of the little gang. On days when I did not see them, as their habits were unknown to me, I was in total ignorance of the possible cause of their non-appearance: did they only come every second day, or in certain weather, or were there days when they were never to be seen? I imagined being their future friend and being able to say, 'But you didn't come on such-and-such a day? – True, because it was a Saturday, and we never come on Saturdays because …' Not that it was as simple as just knowing that on sad Saturdays it was futile to hope against hope, that I could walk up and down the beach, sit in the window-seat of the cake-shop, pretend to eat an eclair, wander into the curiosity shop, moon about waiting for it to be time to go for a bathe, listen to the concert, watch the fishing-boats come in, see the sunset, then nightfall, and still not have seen the little group I longed for. For it was possible the dreaded day did not come round once a week. Nor might it be a Saturday. Certain atmospheric conditions might have an influence on it – or conversely, might have nothing at all to do with it. How many patient, but not dispassionate, observations must be recorded about the apparently erratic movements of these unknown worlds, before one can be sure of having ruled out misleading coincidences, of having confirmed one's predictions, and being able to draw up the infallible laws, arrived at through cruel experience, of this passionate astronomy! I would remember that I had not seen them on this day last week, and concluded that they would not appear, that it was pointless to stay down on the beach. And then I would see them! But then, on another day which, in so far as I could detect the functioning of laws in the recurrences of their constellation, I had calculated must be an auspicious one, they did not appear. Then my initial uncertainty about whether I would see them or not on a particular day was aggravated by another, much more serious one, whether I would see them ever again – for all I knew, they might be leaving for America or returning to Paris. This was enough to make me begin to fall in love with them. Having a liking for someone is one thing; but to be afflicted with the sadness, the feeling of something irreparable having happened, the anguish which all accompany the onset of love, what is necessary is the risk – which may even be the object to which passion in its fretfulness tries to cling, rather than to a person – of an impossibility. These forces were already working within me, and they revive each time one falls in love (they can in fact attach themselves, though usually this only happens in town life, to working-class girls, if one is unaware of their day off and fails to see them leaving the factory at the end of the day's work), or at least that is what happened with my successive love affairs. Perhaps such forces are inseparable from all love: it may be that whatever particularities were present in our first experience of it become incorporated into the following ones, by the workings of memory, suggestion or habit, and that, throughout the consecutive periods of our existence, they give a common character to its different phases.

On all possible pretexts, I went down to the beach at any hour when I hoped they might be expected. Having seen them once while we were having lunch, I became very unpunctual at that meal-time, waiting about on the esplanade in case they came along; for the short time I sat in the dining-room, my stare questioned the blue of the glass doors; I went without dessert, so as not to miss them if they had been out for their walk at some different hour; and I was annoyed at my grandmother's unintentional unkindness, when she made me sit there with her after the time which I thought the most propitious. I tried to lengthen the horizon by setting my chair at an angle to the table; and if by some chance I caught sight of any one of the girls, it suddenly felt, since all of them had a share in the same special essence, as though a fickle and diabolical hallucination had projected before my eyes a scene from the latent dream, baleful yet ardently desired, which a moment before had existed only in my mind, where it always lay in readiness.

Loving them all, I was in love with none of them; and yet the possibility of meeting them was the only element of delight in my days, the only source of those hopes which make one feel capable of overcoming all obstacles, and which for me, if I did not see them, were often dashed and turned to rage. The girls eclipsed my grandmother: I would gladly have left for a long journey, if it had promised to lead me to where they were. They were what was always hovering agreeably in my thoughts, whenever I thought I was thinking of something else, or of nothing. And even when I was unaware of thinking about them, at a deeper level of unconsciousness they were the towering blue waves or the shapes of a parade passing in front of the sea. If I went to another town where I might meet them, it was the sea I looked forward to seeing. The most exclusive love for any person is always love for something else.

My grandmother, because I had now developed an acute interest in golf and tennis, which was preventing me from seizing the opportunity of going to watch an artist at work – an artist she knew to be among the greatest – and listen to his talk, now treated me with scorn, which seemed to me very narrow-minded of her. At the Champs-Élysées I had had an inkling, which since those days had become clearer to me, that when we are in love with a woman, all we are doing is projecting on to her a state of our own self; that consequently what is important is not the merit of the woman, but the intensity of that state; and that the emotions which a mediocre young girl can give us may enable us to bring up to consciousness elements of ourself which are more private and personal, more remote and essential than anything which we may acquire from the conversation of an extraordinary man, or even the admiration with which we gaze at his works.

I eventually had to comply with my grandmother's urgings, though I did so with a bad grace, which was aggravated by the fact that Elstir lived nowhere near the esplanade, but in one of the newest avenues of Balbec. The heat of the day made me take the tram along the rue de la Plage; and I sat there trying to imagine that I was in the ancient realm of the Cimmerians, in the land of King Mark or perhaps on the very spot where the Forest of Broceliande had been,[87] so as to avoid looking at the sham luxury of the buildings all about me, among which Elstir's villa was perhaps the most sumptuous in its ugliness, despite which he had rented it because it was the only one of all Balbec's villas which afforded him the use of a spacious studio.

As I walked through the garden, I kept my eyes averted also from the lawn – smaller than, but reminiscent of, that of any middle-class philistine in the suburbs of Paris – the statuette of a lovelorn gardener, glass balls for looking at one's reflection, borders of begonias and a little arbour with rocking-chairs set out round a metal table. After all these approaches full of citified ugliness, once in the studio itself, I paid no attention to the chocolate-coloured mouldings on its skirting-boards: I was perfectly happy among all the studies ranged about, for I glimpsed in them the possibility that I might rise to a poetic awareness, rich in fulfilling insights for me, of many forms which I had hitherto never distinguished in reality's composite spectacle. Elstir's studio seemed like the laboratory out of which would come a kind of new creation of the world: from the chaos made of all things we see, he had abstracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas now standing about on all sides, glimpses of things, like a wave in the sea crashing its angry lilac-shaded foam down on the sand, or a young man in white twill leaning on a ship's rail. The young man's jacket and the splash of the wave had taken on a new dignity, in virtue of the fact that they continued to exist, though now deprived of what they were believed to consist in, the wave being now unable to wet anyone, and the jacket unable to be worn.

As I came in, the creator, paintbrush in hand, was just putting the last touch to the shape of the sun as it set.

The blinds being down on most sides, the studio was rather cool; and, except for one part where daylight's fleeting decoration dazzled the wall, it was dim; the only window open was a small rectangle framed in honeysuckle, looking out on a strip of garden, then a road; so most of the studio was in half-darkness, transparent and compact in its mass, but moist and glistening at the angles where the light edged it, like a block of rock crystal with one of its sides already cut and polished in patches, so that it shines like a mirror and gives off an iridescent glow. While Elstir, at my request, went on with his painting, I wandered through this chiaroscuro, stopping here and there in front of a picture.

Most of those in the studio were not what I would have preferred to see: the paintings from his first and second periods, so called by an English art magazine which I had found lying on the table in the salon at the Grand-Hôtel, that is, his mythological manner and the paintings in which a Japanese influence had become evident, both of which were admirably represented, the article said, in the collection of Mme de Guermantes. Almost all of the works I could see about me in the studio were, of course, sea-scapes done recently here in Balbec. But I could see that their charm lay in a kind of metamorphosis of the things depicted, analogous to the poetical device known as metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, Elstir recreated them by removing their names, or by giving them another name. The names of things always express a view of the mind, which is foreign to our genuine impressions of them, and which forces us to eliminate from them whatever does not correspond to that view.

At the hotel in Balbec, there had been mornings when Françoise unpinned the blankets keeping out the light, or evenings when I was waiting for it to be time to go out with Saint-Loup, when an effect of sunlight at my bedroom window had made me see a darker area of the sea as a distant coastline, or filled me with joy at the sight of a zone of liquid blue which it was impossible to say was either sea or sky. The mind quickly redistributed the elements into the categories which the impression had abolished. Similarly, in my room in Paris, I had heard sounds of squabbling, almost rioting in the streets, until I had linked them to their cause, for instance the rumbling approach of a dray, the sound of which, once identified, made me eliminate from it the high-pitched discordant shouting which my ear had really heard, but which my mind knew is not made by wheels. Those infrequent moments when we perceive nature as it is, poetically, were what Elstir's work was made of. One of the metaphors which recurred most often in the sea-pictures which surrounded him then was one which compares the land to the sea, blurring all distinction between them. And it was this comparison, tacitly, tirelessly repeated in a single canvas, imbuing it with its powerful and multifarious unity, which was the source of the enthusiasm felt, though sometimes they were not quite aware of this, by many lovers of Elstir's painting.

It was to a metaphor of this sort – in a painting showing the harbour of Carquethuit, which he had finished only a few days before, and which I looked at for a long time – that Elstir had alerted the mind of the spectator, by using marine terminology to show the little town, and urban terms for the sea. Whether because the houses hid part of the harbour and the caulking basin, say, or perhaps because inlets of sea indented the land, as is very frequent in the country round Balbec, beyond the extreme promontory on which the town stood, masts rose above roofs, like chimneys or steeples, as though making citified things of the ships to which they belonged, things built on land, an illusion enhanced by other boats lying alongside the pier, in ranks so serried that men conversed from one deck to the other without there being any visible separation between them, any interstice of water, giving the impression that the fishing-fleet was more out of place on the sea than, for instance, the churches of Criquebec, which seemed to be standing in the water, surrounded by it on all sides, so distant as to be seen without their town, amid a sparkling haze of sunlight and spindrift, blown out of alabaster or foam and making, when bounded by the versicoloured sash of a rainbow, an unreal and mystic picture. On the beach in the foreground, the painter had accustomed the eye to distinguish no clear frontier, no line of demarcation, between the land and the ocean. Men pushing boats out moved in the tide as on the sand, which being wet reflected the hulls as though it was water. The sea did not invade evenly, but followed the irregularities of the shoreline, which the perspective made more jagged, and a ship out to sea, half-hidden by the outworks of the arsenal, seemed to be sailing in the thick of the buildings; women shrimping among rocks looked, because they were surrounded by water and because, beyond the circular barrier of rocks, the beach dipped down to the level of the sea at the two points closest to the land, as though they were in an under-sea grotto, with waves and boats above, open yet miraculously protected from the inrush of waters. Though the whole painting gave the impression of seaports where the waves advance into the land, where the land almost belongs to the sea and the population is amphibious, the power of the marine element was everywhere manifest; and out by the rocks or at the end of the pier, where the sea was rough, the efforts of the sailors, and the slanting of the boats, lying at an acute angle near the upright stability of the wharf, the church and the houses of the town, with some people coming in and others setting out to fish, made one sense the urgency in their step as they scurried over the heaving water, as though it were a swift and spirited animal which, had it not been for their nimbleness, might throw them to the ground.

A group of holiday-makers were setting out gaily in a yawl, which was shaken about like a farm-cart; a sailor, cheerful but also careful, controlled it as though with reins, driving the spirited sail, everyone sitting in their proper place so as not to overload the equipage at one side and capsize it, and she cantered across sunlit fields and through shaded places, prancing down the slopes. The morning was radiant, despite a recent thunder-storm. One could even sense the powerful activity that the motionless boats had had to contend with, as they lazed now in their fine equilibrium in the sun and the cool, on parts of the sea which were so calm that the reflections were almost more solid and real than the hulls, which were turned to vapour by an effect of the light and run into one another by the perspective. Or rather, they did not look like other parts of the sea: there was as great a difference between these areas of sea as between any one of them and the church rising out of the waters, or the ships behind the town. It was the mind which, on second thoughts, came to see as one and the same element what was stormy black at one point, at another indistinguishable from the sky in colour and sheen, and elsewhere so blanched by sunlight, mist and spray, so compact, so landlike, so hedged about by houses, that one was reminded of a causeway of stone or a snowfield, on which it was alarming to see a ship steeply climbing the dry slope, like a carriage shaking water as it rattles up from a river-ford, but which one realized before long, as one saw other ships lurching about on the high, uneven expanse of its solid plateau, was identical in all its differences, and nothing other than the single sea.

Although it is said, and rightly so, that it is only in the sciences, and not in art, that there can be progress or discovery, and that no artist who launches into his own endeavour can ever be helped or hindered by the endeavours of any others, it must be recognized that, in so far as art establishes certain laws, and once an industry has vulgarized them, the art of earlier times loses in retrospect something of its originality. Since the earliest period of Elstir, we have seen supposedly 'admirable' photographs of landscapes and cities. If one tries to define what it is that art lovers mean by that adjective, it can generally be seen to apply to some unfamiliar image of a familiar thing, an image that is different from the ones we are in the habit of noticing, unusual yet true, and which for that reason seems doubly striking, since it surprises us and shakes us out of our habits, while at the same time it turns us in on ourselves by recalling an impression. For instance, one of these 'magnificent' photographs will illustrate a law of perspective by showing a cathedral which we are accustomed to seeing in the centre of the city, but taken from a point of view chosen so as to make it appear thirty times higher than the houses and jutting out beside the river, whereas it is nowhere near it. The fact was that Elstir's intent, not to show things as he knew them to be, but in accordance with the optical illusions that our first sight of things is made of, had led him to isolate some of these laws of perspective, which were more striking in his day, art having been first to uncover them. A bend in the course of a river, or the apparent contiguity of the cliffs bounding a bay, seemed to make a lake, completely enclosed, in the middle of the plain or the mountains. In a painting done at Balbec on a stifling hot summer's day, a recess of the coastline, held between walls of pink granite, appeared not to be the sea, which could be seen further off: the unbrokenness of the ocean was suggested only by seagulls wheeling above what looked like solid stone, but which for them was wind and wave. The same canvas defined other laws, such as the Lilliputian grace of white sails at the foot of the immense cliffs, set on the blue mirror like sleeping butterflies, and certain contrasts between the depth of the shadows and the pallor of the light. This play of shadows, which photography has also spread far and wide, had fascinated Elstir so much that at one point he had enjoyed painting veritable mirages, in which a château topped by a tower looked like a completely circular château with a tower growing out of the roof and another one, inverted, beneath it, either because the extraordinary purity of a fine day gave the shadow reflected in the water the hardness and glitter of stone, or because morning mists made the stone as insubstantial as shadow. Similarly, beyond the sea, behind a stretch of woodland,

the sea began again, turned pink by the setting sun, but it was the sky. The sunlight, as though inventing new solids, struck the hull of a boat and pushed it back beyond another one lying in the shade; it laid the steps of a crystal staircase across the surface of the morning sea, which, though in fact smooth, was broken by the angle of illumination. A river flowing under the bridges of a city was shown from a point of view that split it, spread it into a lake, narrowed it to a trickle, or blocked it by planting a hill in it, covered with woods, where the city-dwellers like to go for a breath of evening air; and the rhythm of the disrupted city was marked only by the inflexible verticality of the steeples, which did not climb skywards, but seemed rather, like gravity's plumb-line marking the beat in a triumphal march, to have the whole vague mass of houses hanging beneath them, ranged in misty tiers along the crushed and dismembered river. Even that semi-human part of nature, a footpath along a cliff-top or on a mountain-side (Elstir's earliest works dating from the period when landscapes had to feature the presence of a character), was affected, like rivers or the ocean, by the eclipses of perspective. And whether a mountain ridge, a haze of spume rising from a waterfall, or the sea prevented one from seeing the road in its entirety, visible to the character but not to us, the little human figure in outdated clothes, lost among this wilderness, often seemed to have stopped in front of an abyss, the route he was following having come to an end; and then, three hundred yards higher up, among the pine-woods, we would be touched and reassured to see the reappearance of the thin white line of sandy path, friendly to the wanderer's tread, the intervening turns and twists of which, disappearing round the gulf or the waterfall, had been hidden from us by a mountainside.

The effort made by Elstir, when seeing reality, to rid himself of all the ideas the mind contains, to make himself ignorant so as to paint, to forget everything for the sake of his own integrity (since the things one knows are not one's own), was especially admirable in a man whose own mind was exceptionally cultivated. When I told him of my disappointment on seeing the church of Balbec, he said, 'What's that? Disappointed by that porch! Why, it's the finest collection of Bible stories that the faithful could ever have had. That Virgin, and all those low-reliefs telling her life-story, make up the most tender and inspired expression of the long poem of adoration and praise which the Middle Ages dedicated to the glory of the Madonna. If you only realized, not just the closeness and fidelity to the sacred text, but the old sculptor's touches of genius, the profundity of some of his ideas, the delicacy and poetry of the thing! The idea of the great veil in which the Angels bear away the body of the Virgin, which is too holy for them to dare to touch it (I told him the same subject was to be seen in the church at Saint-André-des-Champs: he said he had seen photographs of the porch, but observed that the scurrying of all those little peasants round about the Virgin was not quite the same thing as the gravity of Balbec's two great angels, almost Italian in their tall, gentle slenderness); the angel taking away the soul of the Virgin to reunite it with her body; then in the meeting between the Virgin and Elizabeth, the gesture of the latter when she touches the breast of Mary and expresses her surprise at finding it already swollen; or the bandaged arm of the midwife who had been reluctant to believe, without touching for herself, in the Immaculate Conception; or the sash that the Virgin tosses to St Thomas to prove her resurrection; and the veil that the Virgin tears from her own breast so as to cover the nakedness of her son, from whose pierced side the Church gathers His blood, the liquor of the Eucharist, while on His other side the Synagogue, its reign over, blindfolded, and holding a half-broken sceptre, drops its crown and the tablets of the old Law; and what about the husband, at the hour of the Last Judgment, helping his young wife to step out of the tomb and holding her hand against his heart to reassure her and prove to her that it's really beating – isn't that a neat little touch? Then there's the angel taking away the sun and the moon, because they're useless now, since it's written that the Light of the Cross will be seven times brighter than that of the heavenly bodies; or the one dipping his hand in Jesus's bathwater to make sure it's warm enough; or the other one coming down from the clouds to set his crown on the brow of the Virgin; and all the rest of them looking down from on high, peeping through the banisters of the heavenly Jerusalem, throwing up their hands in horror and joy at the sight of the evil ones in torment and the bliss of the chosen! It's all the circles of heaven you've got there, you see, a huge theological and symbolic poem. It's crazy, it's divine, it's far superior to anything you'll ever see in Italy – and the Italians, by the way, literally copied the tympanum of Balbec, but they were sculptors with much less genius. For, you see, it all comes down to genius. There's never been a period when everyone was a genius – that's just nonsense, as much of a joke as the golden age. The chap that did that porch at Balbec, you can be sure, was every bit as good, with ideas every bit as sharp, as the people nowadays that you admire the most. If we go there one day, I can show you all that. There's a phrase from the liturgy for the Assumption which is illustrated with a subtlety that your Redon[88] can't match.'

Though Elstir spoke of a grand vision of heaven and gave me an idea of a gigantic theological poem written on the face of the church, the eyes full of desires with which I had looked at it had seen nothing of them. I mentioned the large statues of saints on their stilts, forming a sort of avenue.

'It's an avenue which begins at the dawn of time, Elstir said, and leads to Jesus Christ. On one side, you've got His spiritual ancestors, and on the other, the Kings of Judah, His ancestors in the flesh. All the centuries are there. And if you had taken a closer look at what you call "stilts", you'd have been able to put names to the ones standing up high – under the feet of Moses, there's the Golden Calf; under the feet of Abraham, the ram; and under the feet of Joseph, the devil advising Potiphar's wife.'

I told him the church I had been looking forward to seeing was almost Persian in character, and that this was no doubt one of the reasons why I had felt so disappointed. 'Well, he said, there's a lot of truth in that Persian idea. Some parts of it *are* completely Eastern. And on one of the columns, there's a capital which reproduces so accurately a Persian subject that it can't be explained just by the survival of Eastern traditions. The sculptor must have copied a casket brought back by navigators.' In this connection, he was later to show me a photograph of a capital with very Chinese-looking dragons devouring each other, a little detail of sculpture which, as I stood before the church, I had failed to notice in the overall effect of a building which had not corresponded to the image created in my mind by the words 'almost Persian'.

The intellectual pleasures I enjoyed by being in the studio did not prevent me from taking pleasure in other things, though they surrounded us in an incidental way: the room, with the tepid scumbles of its walls, its glowing penumbra; and beyond the little window set among honeysuckle, along the rural-looking road, the rough, desiccated surface of the sunburnt earth, which distance and the shadows of trees did no more than hazily veil. Perhaps the unconscious well-being drawn from the summer's day helped to swell, like a tributary, the joy I had taken in seeing *Harbour at Carquethuit*.

I had assumed that Elstir was modest; but I realized I was mistaken in this when in thanking him I spoke the word 'fame', then saw a faint sadness in his expression. Those who think their works will last, and he did, come to see them as belonging to a time when they themselves will have become mere dust. By making them think of their own annihilation, any idea of fame saddens them, because it is inseparable from the idea of death. To disperse the cloud of arrogant melancholy which I had unwittingly brought to his features, I changed the subject. 'I was once told,' I said, recalling the conversation with Legrandin at Combray, and thinking it would be interesting to know Elstir's view, 'to stay away from Brittany. It was supposed to be bad for someone rather inclined to wistfulness. – Not at all, he replied. When the soul of a man inclines to the wistful, he mustn't be kept away from it, he mustn't have it rationed. If you keep your mind off it, your mind will never know what's in it. And you'll be the plaything of all sorts of appearances, because you'll never have managed to understand the nature of them. If a little wistfulness is a dangerous thing, what cures a man of it is not less of it, it's *more* of it, it's all of it! Whatever dreams one may have, it is important to have a thorough acquaintance with them, so as to have done with suffering from them. A certain divorce between dreaming and daily life is so often useful to us that I wonder whether one should not take the precaution of practising it preventively, so to speak, in the way some surgeons recommend appendectomy for all children, so as to avoid the possibility of future appendicitis.'

Elstir and I were now right at the far end of his studio, by the window which looked out on the garden and a narrow side-street beyond it, little more than a country lane. The late afternoon air was cooling and we were standing by the window to enjoy it. I felt I was far from my gang of girls; and the hope of seeing them I had for once, if belatedly, sacrificed to my grandmother's wish that I should be here with Elstir. We do not know where to find what we seek; and often we avoid for a long time the very place to which others, for other reasons, invite us, not knowing that it is the very spot where we could meet the one who is in our thoughts. I stood there, vaguely seeing the country lane which skirted the property where Elstir had his studio, but did not belong to it. Suddenly the young cyclist

from the little group of girls came tripping along the lane, with her black hair, and her toque pulled down, her plump cheeks and her cheerful, rather insistent eyes; and in that blessed place, pregnant with the miracle of sweet promises, under the trees, I saw her give Elstir a smile and greet him like a friend, making a rainbow for me between our terraqueous world and spheres which until then I had believed to be inaccessible. She even came over to shake hands with the painter, without stopping, and I could see she had a small beauty-spot on her chin. 'Do you know that young lady?' I asked him, realizing that he could introduce me to her, invite her to the house. The tranquil studio, with its rustic outlook, was now filled with a delicious awareness of something more to come, like a house in which a child is enjoying himself, when he learns that, in addition to his present pleasures, in accordance with the generous propensity of beautiful things and nice people to go on being beautiful and nice, he is to be treated to a magnificent feast. Elstir told me her name – Albertine Simonet – and the names of her friends, whom I was able to describe accurately enough for him to have little hesitation in identifying them. It turned out that I had been mistaken about their social status, but in a way which was unlike my usual mistakes in Balbec, where I was in the habit of assuming that the merest son of a shopkeeper riding a horse must be a prince. My mistake this time had been to see the daughters of extremely wealthy lower-middle-class families, from the world of industry and business, as belonging to some unsavoury milieu. Their world was one which, prima facie, had least interest for me, as it was devoid of the sense of mystery I perceived both among the working classes and the society frequented by the Guermantes. If the shallow and flashy nature of seaside life had not made me see them through the prestige of a preconception, giving them a dazzle and charm they would never lose in my eyes, I daresay I might not have been able to overcome the knowledge that they were the daughters of big wholesalers. I could only stand amazed at the range of different sculptures produced, as in a wonderful workshop, by the French middle classes – so many unexpected patterns, so much inventiveness in the characters of faces, such decisive lines, such freshness and simplicity in the features! The miserly old burghers who had engendered such Dianas and nymphs I now saw as masters in statuary. Before I had time to notice the social metamorphosis of the girls – this type of discovery of a mistake, or a readjustment of one's idea of a certain person, happens with the instantaneousness of a chemical reaction – behind these faces, young female ruffians as they had appeared to me, the girl-friends of racing cyclists and champion pugilists, there had already appeared the idea that they could very well be related to the family of a notary known to my own parents. As for Albertine Simonet, I had more no idea about what she might represent than she had about the importance she would one day come to have for me. Even the name of Simonet, which I had already heard down on the esplanade, was unfamiliar to me: I would have spelled it, if asked to, *Simonnet*, in my ignorance of the importance that her family attached to having only one *n*. The lower the level that people occupy in the social scale, the more snobbery they attach to insignificant things, which may be no more vacuous than the things valued by the aristocracy, but which, by being more obscure, more peculiar to individuals, are always more surprising. Perhaps at one time there had been Simonnets who had failed in business, or worse. Whatever the case, the Simonets had always been affronted, it seems, as though they had been defamed, whenever anyone doubled their *n*. The pride they took in being the only single-*n* Simonets was possibly comparable to that of the Montmorency family in being the first Barons of France. I asked Elstir whether the girls lived in Balbec: the answer was that some of them did. The villa of one of them happened to be situated right at the far end of the sea-front, near the cliffs of Canapville. I saw the fact that this particular girl was a great friend of Albertine Simonet as a further reason to believe it was the latter I had seen on the day when I was out walking with my grandmother. Not that I could have clearly identified at which corner of which side-street I had seen her, there being many of them running perpendicular to the beach and making a similar angle with it. We would like our memories to be clear; but at the time, our vision is unclear. It was almost certain that Albertine and the girl going to her friend's house were one and the same. And yet, although the innumerable images that the dark-haired golfing-girl showed me at later times, however dissimilar they are, can be superimposed on one another, because I know she was the model of them all, and though, if I wind in the clew of my memories of her, I can follow the same identity from one to the other, find my way through the labyrinth and come back always to the same person, on the other hand if I try to find my way back to the girl I passed when I was with my grandmother, I lose my way. I am sure it must be Albertine, the same girl who used to come to a standstill among her friends, as they walked, profiled against the horizon of sea. But all the other images remain separate from this one, because I cannot give it in retrospect an identity it did not have for me at the moment when it impinged on my sight. In the strictest sense of the verb 'to see again', whatever the theory of probabilities has to say on the matter, that particular girl with full cheeks, who looked at me so boldly at the junction of the side-street with the sea-front, and who I think could have fallen in love with me, I was never to see again.

Was it my initial hesitancy, my inability to choose among the different girls of the little gang, in each of whom was preserved something of the collective attractiveness that had first excited me, which added to the other causes and, at the time of my greater love for Albertine, my later, second love for her, gave me, albeit intermittently and very briefly, the freedom to not love her? Because it had wandered about among all her friends, before opting definitively for her, my love kept some 'slack' between it and the image of Albertine, enabling it, like a badly adjusted beam of light, to settle briefly on others before returning to focus on her; the relation between the pain in my heart and the memory of Albertine did not seem a necessary one; I could perhaps have made it match the image of another person. And that enabled me, for a split second, to make reality vanish, not just external reality, as in my love for Gilberte (which I had recognized as an inner state, in which I was the source of the particular quality, the special character of the girl I loved, and of everything which made her indispensable to my happiness), but also the inner, purely subjective reality.

'There's hardly a day, Elstir said, when one or other of them doesn't come down that lane and drop in to pay me a little visit,' a statement that reduced me to despair – if I had gone to see him as soon as my grandmother had suggested it, I might well have made the acquaintance of Albertine long since!

She had walked on and was now out of sight from the studio. I guessed she had gone down to the esplanade to meet her friends. If I could be down there with Elstir, I might make their acquaintance. I tried to think of pretexts to have him come for a walk with me. The peace of mind I had enjoyed before the appearance of the girl had gone, and the frame of the little window, which had been so charming draped in its honeysuckle, was now very empty. Elstir filled me with joy and torture by saying he would be glad to take a stroll with me, but that he must first finish the piece he had been working on. It was a group of flowers, but not any of those – hawthorns, white and pink, cornflowers, apple blossom – whose portrait I would have liked to commission from him, in preference to that of any person, in the hope of having his genius reveal what it was in them I had so often sought in vain as I stood before them. As he worked, he spoke of botany, but I barely listened: to me, he was no longer sufficient in himself, being only the necessary intermediary between the girls and myself; and the only value of the prestige which his talent had lent him, only a few moments before, in my eyes, was that, when he introduced me to the little gang, it might lend some of itself to me, in their eyes.

I walked up and down, impatient for him to finish; of the many studies stacked against one another, face to the wall, I took up some and looked at them. So it was that I came upon a water-colour which must have dated from a much earlier time in the life of Elstir, and which made me feel that particular enchantment one gets from works which are not only painted to perfection, but the subject of which is so singular and delightful that we see it as accounting for much of the charm of the thing, as though the painter only had to notice this charm, study it as it stood before him fully present in the material reality of the natural world, then reproduce it. That such objects can exist, beautiful in themselves and without any painter's interpretation of them, is something which satisfies an innate materialism in us, though resisted by reason, and serves as a counter-balance to the abstractions of aesthetics. The water-colour was the portrait of a young woman who, though not pretty, was of a curious type: she was wearing a close-fitting headdress, something like a bowler-hat edged with a ribbon of cerise silk; in one of her hands, which wore lace mittens, there was a lighted cigarette; and the other held at knee-height a sort of large garden hat, a mere screen of straw against the sunlight. On a table beside her, a little vase full of roses. Often, and it was the case here, the singularity of such works lies in the fact that they were executed in particular circumstances, which we do not clearly appreciate at first, for instance whether the odd get-up of a female model is in fact fancy dress worn for a ball, or whether the red robe worn by an old man, who looks as though he has just put it on at the passing whim of the painter, might not be his professor's gown or his cardinal's cape. The ambiguous character of the person whose portrait I was looking at came from the fact, which I did not understand, that it was a

young actress of an earlier period, partly cross-dressed. However, her bowler, set on hair that was puffed out but cut short, and her velvet jacket, without lapels and open on a white dickey, made me hesitate about the date of the fashion and the sex of the model, so that I could not tell what I was looking at, except that it was a brilliant piece of painting. My pleasure in it was mitigated only by the fear that Elstir might delay so long as to make me miss the gang of girls, for the sun was now angling very low through the little window. The water-colour contained nothing that served merely as a factitious accessory to the scene depicted (the costume, for instance, for no better reason than that the woman had to be wearing something, or the flower-holder, because there were flowers): the glass of the receptacle, lovingly seen in its own right, seemed to surround the water in which the stems of the carnations stood with a substance which was no less limpid and almost as liquid; the garments worn by the woman enclosed her in a material which had its own charm, independent, fraternal and, if man-made things can equal the charm of nature's wonders, as delicate, as satisfyingly smooth to the eye's touch and as neatly painted as the fur of a cat, the petals of a carnation or the feathers of a dove. The shirt-front, its white as fine as hail and its frivolous pleating smocked with little bells like lily-of-the-valley, shone with bright reflections from the room, themselves sharply seen and as delicately shaded as though there were flower motifs brocaded on the linen. The velvet of the jacket, which had a pearly lustre in its pile, was roughened in places, frayed and shaggy in a way which was like the ruffled carnations in their vase. One's main impression was that Elstir, not only unconcerned about what might appear immoral in this young actress dressed like a man, who was herself less interested in how well she would play her part in the performance than in the fascination and stimulation she was bound to offer to the sensuality, surfeited or depraved, of certain spectators, had actually focussed on these points of ambiguity as an aesthetic element in his picture, which he had worked hard to bring out. In the lines of the face, the sex of the person seemed at times on the point of owning up to being that of a rather boyish girl, faded at others into the impression of an effeminate young man, perverted and pensive, then changed again, always elusive. In the look of the eyes, there was something wistful or forlorn which, in the contrast it made with the accessories from the worlds of the theatre and debauchery, gave a strange thrill. But one also felt that this look was affected, and that the young person in the provocative costume, seemingly asking to be fondled, must have thought there would be something even more intriguing in an expression suggestive of romantic or secret feelings, a hint of unspoken heartbreak. At the bottom of the picture were the words *Miss Sacripant*,[89] *October 1872*. I could not contain my admiration. 'Oh, that's nothing – just a thing done by a young man. A costume from a pantomime at the Théâtre des Variétés. It's all a very long time ago. – And what became of the model?' At my question, his face showed surprise, which he replaced a moment later by a look of inattentive indifference. 'Quick, let me have that canvas, he said. I can hear Mme Elstir coming. And though I can assure you the young creature in the bowler hat had no part to play in my life, it would be pointless to let my wife see this water-colour. I only kept it as an entertaining memento of the theatre of that period.' Before hiding the work behind him, Elstir, who had perhaps not seen it for a long time, stared at it and murmured, 'The head's the only thing worth keeping. Those lower bits are dreadful. The hands are by a beginner.' I was quite put out by the arrival of Mme Elstir, which was likely to make us delay even longer. The window-ledge soon turned pink. It would be futile to go out now: there was no longer the slightest chance of seeing the girls, and so it did not really matter whether Mme Elstir went away or stayed. In fact, she left again after only a short time. I thought her a bore: at twenty, leading a bullock in the Roman countryside, she would have been beautiful; but her black hair was turning white; and she was common but not simple in her manner, since she believed that a certain dignity of bearing and majesty of attitude were required by her mode of statuesque beauty, which had lost, in ageing, all its attractiveness. Her dress was striking in its utter simplicity. And it was touching and surprising to hear Elstir say, with great frequency and in a tone of caressing respect, as though by just speaking the words he was moved to tenderness and veneration, 'My beautiful Gabrielle!' At a later time, when I had become acquainted with his mythological paintings, I too came to see beauty in Mme Elstir; and I realized that, in a certain ideal pattern, the few outlines and arabesques of which could be seen to recur in his work over and over again, in a certain model of beauty, he had once seen something almost divine, since all of his time, the whole intellectual effort of which he was capable, in short the whole of his life, was devoted to the task of seeing those outlines more clearly and reproducing them more accurately. This ideal had become a form of worship, of such solemnity, and so demanding, that he could never be content; it was the innermost part of his self, and so he had never been able either to view it with detachment or to transform it into feelings, until the day when he came upon it externally manifested, in the body of a woman, who later became Mme Elstir, in whom he had at last been able – as we only ever are able, with that which is not part of ourselves – to see it as meritorious, moving and divine. What peace there was in placing his lips on Beauty, when until then he had had to drag it out of himself, create it in pain, but which now in a mysterious incarnation offered itself for a sequence of efficacious sacraments! By that time, Elstir had outgrown youth's first confidence in the unaided power of thought to achieve the ideal. He was reaching the age at which one looks to the body and its fulfilments to stimulate the energy of the mind, when we are inclined by its weariness to materialism, by the lessening of its activity to the possibility of passively receiving influences, when we begin to accept that there may be certain bodies, certain professions, certain privileged rhythms which achieve our ideal very naturally, that even without genius, one can produce a masterpiece merely by copying the movement of a shoulder or the taut lines of a neck; it is the age at which we enjoy letting the caress of our eye rest on Beauty outside ourselves, close to us, on a tapestry, on a beautiful sketch by Titian discovered in an antique shop, or on a mistress every bit as beautiful as the sketch by Titian. Once I had come to understand this, I could never see Mme Elstir without pleasure; and her body lost all its ungainliness, for I filled it with an idea: that she was a creature of immateriality, a portrait by Elstir. And for Elstir too, that is what she was. The bare materials of life do not count for the artist; they merely offer him the opportunity to show his genius. Set side by side ten portraits of different people, all by Elstir, and their most flagrant feature is that they are Elstirs. But then, after the high tide of genius which once swamped the whole of life, once the brain has started to tire, gradually the equilibrium is lost, and like the flow of a great river beginning to prevail against the counter-flow of an exceptional tide, life reasserts itself. During his first period, the artist has managed to define the law, the formula, of his unconscious gift. He knows the situations, if he is a novelist, and the landscapes, if he is a painter, that can best provide him with the material which, though inessential in itself, is as indispensable to his research as a laboratory or a workshop. He knows he has made his masterpieces out of effects of attenuated light, remorse that changes the view of a wrong once done, women posed under trees or half-immersed in water like statues. A day will come when, with the onset of mental fatigue, he will face the materials which once served his genius, without finding in himself the intellectual vigour required for the creation of a work, yet will continue to seek them out and to enjoy their presence, because of the spiritual pleasure which, as the sometime spur of work, they still afford; and viewing them with a sort of superstition, as though they were superior to everything else, or as though they already contained a good part of the work of art, latent and ready-made, he will do no more than frequent and adore his subjects. He will continue to seek out rehabilitated criminals, whose remorse and repentance used to be the subjects of his novels; he will buy a country house in a region where the light is attenuated by mists; he will spend hours watching women bathing; he will become a collector of fine fabrics. So it was that, even for Elstir, a day would eventually come when he regressed to the attitude to beauty (which I had seen in Swann and beyond which he had never gone) implicit in the expression 'the beauty of life', a phrase almost devoid of meaning, suggesting beauty that never rises to art, a day when his creative genius would begin to dissipate, gradually giving way to idolatry, mere worship of the forms which had once nourished it and to the beguiling temptations of inertia.

He had just put a final dab of paint on his flowers and I wasted another moment in looking at them. This wasting of a moment did not redound at all to my credit, as I knew that by now the girls would have left the beach; but even if I had known for sure that they were still there and that this waste of minutes would make me miss them, I would still have looked at the painting, as I would have told myself that Elstir's flowers were more important to him than my meeting the girls. Though my grandmother's nature was the exact opposite of my complete egoism, it could be reflected in mine. In a situation where someone who inspired indifference in me, but for whom I had always feigned affection or respect, might be caused some bother and I might be exposed to a danger, I would have been incapable of not sympathizing with him and treating his nuisance as something important, and the threat to me as unimportant, because that would be how I would imagine our respective positions seeming to him. To be precise, it was more than that: not just ignoring the danger I was in, but wilfully exposing myself to it, while trying to make sure, even if this increased my own chances of being harmed, that the other person would be able to avoid being put out. This can be explained by several reasons, none of which say much in my favour. One of them is that, though I have managed to reason myself, in theory, into the belief that I

am attached to my own life, there have been times when, beset by emotional problems, or mere nervous anxieties, some of them so childish that I would not dare speak of them here, an unforeseen circumstance has arisen, bringing with it a risk of death for me, and this new consideration has actually appeared of such slight consequence to me, compared to the others, that I have welcomed it with a feeling of relief approaching exhilaration. Though I am the least intrepid man in the world, I have in this way experienced something which I had contrived to convince myself was so foreign to my nature as to be inconceivable: the intoxication of danger. But in the face of danger, mortal danger, even if I am going through a period of total calm and happiness, I would find it impossible not to shield someone else from it by putting myself in the dangerous position. Having learned from a significant number of experiences that I always acted in that way, and with pleasure, I discovered to my shame that, contrary to what I had always believed and affirmed, I was very sensitive to the opinions of others. Such unconfessed self-importance has no connection, however, with conceit or pride: the satisfactions afforded by either of these sentiments could never tempt me, and I have always abstained from them. But though I have always been able to conceal from certain people those petty advantages of my own which might have made them see me as slightly less paltry, I have never been able to resist the pleasure of letting them see that I am more concerned to avert death for them than for myself. My motive being self-esteem and not virtue, I see it as quite natural that their own behaviour in every situation should be quite different. I do not in the slightest blame them for this, as I might do if I had been motivated by a conception of duty, which would then appear to me to be as binding on them as on myself. On the contrary, I think it is entirely sensible of them to look out for themselves, though I cannot help subordinating my own interest to theirs, and though I must say this does appear singularly absurd and blameworthy, when I consider that the lives of many of those whose bodies I shield with mine when a bomb drops are even less valuable than my own. Anyway, at the time of my visit to Elstir, the day of my discovery of that difference in value was still far in the future; and there was no danger, but only the importance I saw (a forewarning of the pernicious self-esteem) in not appearing to think the pleasure I was longing for was more important than his task of finishing his water-colour. He finished it at last. As soon as we went outside, I noticed it was not as late as I had thought, the days being long at that time of year; and we walked down to the esplanade. I racked my brains to think of ways of keeping him near the place where I thought there was still a chance that the girls might appear. I pointed to the cliffs near by and kept asking him questions about them, in the hope of making him forget the time and keeping him there. I suspected we might have a better chance of catching up with the little gang if we went towards the far end of the beach. 'Perhaps we could look at those cliffs from a little closer,' I said, knowing that one of the girls often walked off in that direction. 'And as we walk, perhaps you could tell me about Carquethuit? How I would love to go to Carquethuit!' I added, without thinking that what was so novel and powerful in *Harbour at Carquethuit* probably came from the vision of the painter rather than from some special quality in the place itself. 'Since seeing your painting, that's the place I would really like to see – as well as the Pointe du Raz, of course, but that would be quite a journey from here. – In any case, Elstir said, even if it wasn't nearer to Balbec, I'd still be inclined to recommend Carquethuit. The Pointe du Raz *is* magnificent, but it's really just your typical tall cliffs on the coast of Normandy or Brittany, which you're quite familiar with. But Carquethuit is completely different, with its rocks and its low sandy beach. I've never seen anywhere else like it in France – it looks more like somewhere in Florida. A most curious place, and very wild country too. In between Clitourps and Nehomme – you know what a wilderness all that part is, with the lovely line of the beaches. Hereabouts the line of the beaches is nondescript. But in those parts, it's full of grace, very sweet.'

Daylight was fading; it was time to go. I was walking back towards the villa with Elstir when, with the suddenness of Mephistopheles materializing before Faust, there appeared at the far end of the avenue – seemingly the simple objectification, unreal and diabolical, of the temperament opposite to my own, of the almost barbaric and cruel vitality which, in my feebleness, my excess of painful sensitivity and intellectuality, I lacked – a few spots of the essence which it was impossible to mistake for any other, a few of the stars from the zoophytic cluster of young girls, who, although they looked as though they had not seen me, were without a doubt at that very moment making sarcastic remarks about me. Seeing that a meeting between them and us was inevitable, and knowing that Elstir would call me over, I turned my back, like a bather as a large wave comes in: I stopped, letting my illustrious companion walk on without me, and stood outside the antique shop which we happened to be passing, stooping towards its window as though fascinated by something. I was not sorry to be able to appear to have something other than the girls to think about, and I could vaguely foresee already that, when Elstir called me over to introduce me, I would put on the interrogative look which reveals not so much surprise as the desire to appear surprised – each of us being as bad at acting as our witness is good at reading faces – that I would even go so far as to point at my own chest as though asking, 'Who? Me?' and then walk quickly over to them, my head bent in docile obedience, and my expression a cold mask hiding annoyance at being dragged away from my study of old china, merely to be introduced to people whom I had no desire to know. I went on gazing into the shop-window, waiting for the moment when Elstir would shoot my name at me, like a harmless, expected bullet. The certainty of being introduced to the girls had made me not only feign indifference towards them, but feel it. The pleasure of their acquaintance, having become inevitable, was compressed and reduced; it now seemed a smaller thing than the pleasures of chatting with Saint-Loup, having dinner with my grandmother, going on outings in the surrounding country which, because of this imminent connection with people who very likely had little interest in historical architecture, I would feel reluctantly obliged to forgo. Also, the joy awaiting me was diminished not only by the imminence, but by the incongruity, of its coming to pass. The order of the images which we form in our minds, one above the other, is maintained by the functioning of laws as precise as those of hydrostatics, but the proximity of an event can disturb it. Elstir was about to call my name – but this was nothing like the scene in which, down on the beach, up in my bedroom, I had so often pictured my first encounter with the little gang of girls! What was about to happen was a different event, one for which I was unprepared: in it, I could recognize neither my desire nor its object; I was almost sorry to have gone out for a walk with Elstir. But the main reason for the shrinking of the pleasure to which I had been so looking forward was the knowledge that nothing could now prevent me from enjoying it. It only went back to its previous dimensions, as though by the working of an elastic force, when that knowledge ceased to constrain it; and that occurred at the moment when, happening to glance round, I saw Elstir just a few feet away, taking his leave of the group of girls. Something in the face of the one standing closest to him, plump and illuminated by the bright look in her eyes, made me think of a cake with a bit of sky in it: her eyes, even when motionless, gave an impression of mobility, as happens on blowy days when the air, though invisible, shows the rate at which it is skimming over the sky-blue surface. For an instant her eyes passed across mine, like those flowing skies on stormy days when clouds moving at different speeds come close, touch, then part: they do not meet or ever become one. In a momentary intersection of eyes we stood there, each in ignorance of the promises or threats for the future that the other silent passing continent might contain. Only at the instant when her glance lowered, without slowing in its movement, did it fade slightly, as on a clear windy night, the moon is swept behind a cloud, veiling its brightness, then immediately reappears. Elstir parted from the girls without calling me over. They turned up a side-street and he came towards me. It was a fiasco.

I have said that, on that day, Albertine did not appear to be the same as on previous occasions, and that each time I saw her she was to seem different. But at that particular moment, I sensed also that certain changes in the appearance, the importance or the size of a person can be explained by the variability of the factors which may interpose between us and the other. One of the most potent in that regard is a belief in our mind: on that evening, within a matter of seconds, my belief that I was going to meet Albertine, then the annihilation of that belief, had made her almost insignificant to me, then infinitely precious; and some years later, the belief that she was faithful to me, followed by disbelief, would have analogous results.

At Combray, depending on the time of day, and on whether I was entering one or other of the two dominant modes of my sensitivity, I had already experienced the decrease or increase of my sorrow at being parted from my mother, which all afternoon could be as imperceptible as moonlight while the sun shines, but after nightfall, banishing recent memory, would cast its unhappy pallor into my sickly soul. But on that day, seeing Elstir bidding goodbye to the girls without calling me over, I realized that the variable measure we apply to joys and sadness may be affected not only by such fluctuation between two states of mind, but also by a transformation in invisible beliefs, which may, for instance, make death seem insignificant, because they shed a light of unreality on it, enabling us to see our attendance at a musical evening as imperative, though it would lose its charm for us if the belief colouring that evening with inevitability were suddenly to dissolve because we learned we were just about to be guillotined; it is true that something in me, the will, knew this about the importance of

belief; but what is known to the will remains inefficacious if it is unknown to the mind and the sensitivity: they can believe in good faith that we wish to leave a woman, when only the will is privy to our attachment to her. They are fooled by the belief that we will see her again in a moment. But let that belief vanish, in the realization that she has just gone and will never come back, and the mind and sensitivity, having lost their bearings, are afflicted with a fit of madness, and the paltry pleasure of being with her expands to fill everything in life.

A variation in belief can also cause the death of love. Love, mobile and pre-existing, focusses on the image of a certain woman simply because she will be almost certainly unattainable. From then on, one thinks not so much about her, it being difficult to imagine her anyway, as about possible ways of getting to know her. A whole process of anxieties comes into play, which is enough to fixate our love on her, though she is the barely known object of it. Love having become immense, we never reflect on how small a part the woman herself plays in it. And if, as had happened to me when I saw Elstir stop beside the girls, we have sudden cause to lose our feeling of anxiety or uneasiness, since our love amounts to nothing more than that, our love too seems to have vanished at the very moment when we come into possession of a prize the value of which we have never really thought about. What did I know of Albertine? One or two profiles of her against the sea, definitely less lovely than those of women by Veronese, women whom, if my feelings were motivated by aesthetic considerations, I ought to have preferred to her. Could they be motivated by other considerations, since, once the anxiety abated, I was left possessing nothing but these mute profiles? Every day since I had first seen Albertine, I had entertained thousands of thoughts about her, I had carried on, with what I called 'her', an extended interior conversation, in which I had questions put to her and had her answer them, think and act; and in the endless series of imagined Albertines who occupied my head one after the other, for hours on end, the real Albertine, the one glimpsed down at the esplanade, was merely the forerunner, like an actress, the star who, having created a part, hands it over after the very first performances to others. This real Albertine was little more than an outline: everything else that had been added to her was of my own making, for our own contribution to our love – even if judged solely from the point of view of quantity – is greater than that of the person we love. This is true of love even in its most effective forms. Often very little suffices not only for love to form, but to subsist, even after it has attained its fulfilment through the flesh. A former drawing-teacher of my grandmother's had had a daughter with an obscure mistress. The latter died soon after the birth of the child; and this was such a heartbreak to the drawing-teacher that he did not long survive her. During the final months of his life, my grandmother and some ladies from Combray, who had never so much as wished to refer in his presence to the woman, with whom he had never officially lived and who had occupied little space in his life, decided to contribute to a fund that would give the little girl a life annuity. It was my grandmother's proposal; but some ladies proved reluctant: Was the child really worth it? Was she actually the daughter of the man who believed he was her father? One can never be sure, with women like her mother … However, it was decided; and the child came to thank them: she was ugly and bore a marked resemblance to the old drawing-teacher, thus dispelling all doubts. Her hair being her best feature, one of the ladies said to the father, who had brought the child, 'What lovely hair!' My grandmother added, thinking that, the fallen woman being now dead and the drawing-teacher almost dead, there could be no harm in alluding to past events of which everyone had feigned ignorance at the time, 'It must run in the family. Did her mother have such lovely hair?' To which the father gave the guileless reply: 'I don't know – I only ever saw her wearing a hat.'

I had to rejoin Elstir. A mirror showed me my reflection: in addition to the disaster of not having been introduced, I noticed that my tie was crooked and that my hair, which was too long, was sticking out from under my hat. Still, it was a good thing that they had at least seen me with Elstir, even in such a state, and would not be able to forget me; and it was lucky that I had heeded my grandmother's suggestion that I put on my handsome waistcoat, when I had all but decided to wear an awful one instead, and that I carry my best cane: no event which we look forward to ever turns out quite as we wish it to, but in the absence of the advantages we had hoped to be able to count on, others arise unexpectedly, and there are compensations; we so dreaded the worst that we are ultimately inclined, taking one thing with another, to think that chance was, on balance, on our side. 'I would have been so happy to meet them,' I said to Elstir as I came up with him. 'Well, in that case what did you stand miles away for?' Those were the words he spoke, not because they expressed his own mind, since if he had intended to grant my unspoken wish, it would have been easy for him to call me over; but possibly because they were one of those phrases he had heard, used by vulgar people who think they are in the wrong, and because even great men are like vulgar people in some things, taking their everyday excuses from the same repertoire, as they buy their daily bread from the same baker; or possibly because such words, which must in a sense be read back to front, since the letter of them means the opposite of their truth, are the necessary effect, the negative graph, as it were, of a reflex. 'Anyway, they were in a hurry.' I was sure they must have prevented him from introducing someone they saw as dislikable: otherwise he would have been bound to call me over, after all the questions I had asked about them, and the interest he could see I took in them. 'I was talking to you about Carquethuit, he said, before I left him at his front door. I once did a little sketch which catches much better the neat loop of the shore-line. The painting's not bad, but it's not the same thing. If you like, I could give you the sketch, as a memento of our friendship,' he added, for the people who decline to give you the things you desire give you other things.

'I would very much have liked to have a photo of your little portrait of Miss Sacripant,[90] if you have such a thing. Where does the name come from? – It was the name of a character acted by the model in a stupid little operetta. – But you're aware that I've no idea who she is – though you seem to believe the opposite.' Elstir said nothing. 'You're not going to tell me it's Mme Swann before her marriage?' I said, leaping in a sudden fluke to the truth, one of those fortuitous discoveries which are really quite rare occurrences, but of which there are enough to give a sort of basis to the theory of presentiments – after the event, that is, and on condition that one also discounts all the errors which invalidate it. Elstir still said nothing. It was in fact a portrait of Odette de Crécy, which she had not wished to keep, for many reasons, some of which are perfectly obvious. There were others. The painting dated from before the time when Odette, taking to designing her own appearance, had made of her face and figure the creation from which, over the years, in its broad lines, for her dressmakers, her hairdressers and for Odette herself, in her ways of standing, speaking, smiling, holding her hands, casting her glances, or even of thinking, there could now be no departure. It required the degeneration of taste in the sated lover for Swann to reject the numerous photographs of his beautiful wife in her *ne varietur* mode, in favour of the little photo of her which he kept in his bedroom, showing a thinnish young woman wearing a straw-hat adorned with pansies, rather plain, with puffed-out hair and drawn features.

But even if the portrait had belonged, not to a time (like Swann's favourite photograph) before the definitive redesign of Odette's features into their new pattern, full of majesty and charm, but to a later period, Elstir's vision would have sufficed to disorganize that pattern too. An artist's genius functions like the extremely high temperatures which can dissociate combinations of atoms and reshape them into a totally opposite order, one which corresponds to a different pattern. The whole factitious harmony which a woman imposes on her features, checking the continuity of it in her mirror each day before she goes out, making sure that it inheres in the angle of the hat, the smoothness of the hair, the vivacity of her expression, can be dismantled in a second by the eye of a great painter, who puts in its stead a rearrangement of her features more in accordance with a certain feminine and pictorial ideal of his own. Similarly, it often happens that after a certain age, the eye of the great researcher, wherever it looks, notices elements essential to the establishing of the only relationships which interest him. Such men, like versatile workers or card-players who do not mind turning their hand to any job or game, could say of any material: This will do. In this connection, a cousin of the Princess of Luxembourg, a woman of great beauty and arrogance, having taken a fancy to a form of art which was new at the time, commissioned a portrait of herself from the most prominent of the painters of the Naturalist school. The artist's eye had instantly detected what it sought everywhere: on the completed canvas, instead of the grand lady, there was a dressmaker's errand-girl, against a broad inclined background of violet which called to mind the place Pigalle. But even without going to those lengths, not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not try to satisfy any of its subject's requirements – such as those which make a woman who is beginning to age want to be photographed wearing things more suited to young girls, which flatter her with a youthful figure and make her look like the sister, or even the daughter, of her daughter, whom she may even have stand beside her in a suitably dowdy dress for the occasion – but it will underscore unfavourable features of her which she tries to conceal (such as a feverish, vaguely greenish flush to the face) and which the artist will find interesting because they have 'character', but which will eventually disgust the vulgar viewer, as they reduce to nothing the feminine ideal of

which her person was once the impressive embodiment and which had seemed to place her, in her unique, irreducible form, beyond and far above the rest of humanity. Deposed, expelled from her own pattern, over which she had once reigned supreme, she has become a mere woman like any other, a sometime paragon in whom all faith has been lost. In our minds, the pattern constituted by an Odette de Crécy used to consist not just in her beauty, but also in her personality, her identity, so much so that, faced with the portrait which strips her of that pattern, we are tempted to exclaim not only, 'How ugly he's made her!' but, 'He can't even paint a likeness!' We have difficulty in believing it is the same woman; we cannot recognize her. Despite which, we sense perfectly well the presence of someone we have already seen, but it is someone who is not Odette. Yet the face, the body, the appearance are very familiar to us. They remind us, not of this woman, who has never stood like that, whose habitual posture never traces such a strange and provocative outline, but of other women, all those whom Elstir has painted and whom, however different they may be from one another, he has always liked to pose in full face like that, one arched foot showing under the skirt, the large round hat hanging from one hand, a symmetrical reminder, at the level of the knee which it conceals, of the other full round disk of the face. A brilliant portrait not only disassembles the pattern of the woman, as her pride in her appearance and her self-centred conception of beauty had defined it, but if it is an old portrait it also ages the original in the same way as photographs do, by showing her in her old-fashioned finery. In a portrait, however, it is not just a woman's style of dress that dates, it is also the painter's style of painting. And Elstir's earliest style, from his first period, gave Odette her most merciless birth certificate, not just because, like photographs of her from that time, it made her a junior among well-known courtesans, but because it showed that the painting dated from the period of the many portraits by Manet or Whistler of sitters long vanished, consigned to history, gone to oblivion.

These thoughts, which I ruminated silently as we walked back towards the villa, were inspired by the discovery I had just made about the identity of Elstir's model for 'Miss Sacripant'; and they were to lead me to a second discovery, even more thought-provoking for me, about the identity of Elstir himself. He had painted a portrait of Odette de Crécy – could such a brilliant man, a solitary, a philosopher, who had accumulated wisdom, who stood above all things, whose conversation was so enthralling, possibly be the painter, vacuous and devious, adopted long ago by the Verdurins? I asked him if he had known them, and whether they had not nicknamed him 'Monsieur Biche'. He answered, in a very simple manner, that this was indeed the case, as though speaking of a part of his life which was rather remote, as though not realizing that his answer caused me an acute disappointment. Then, glancing at my expression, he did realize it; and this brought an expression of displeasure to his own face. A lesser man, a man less proficient in things of the mind and heart, now that we were nearing the house, might have just taken his leave of me without ceremony, and avoided me thereafter. However, this was not Elstir's way: like the true master he was (and to be a master, at least in this sense of the word, may have been, from the point of view of pure creativeness, his sole defect, since an artist, if he is to live in tune with the truth of the spirit, must shun company, even that of disciples, and so avoid frittering himself away in such things), he endeavoured to draw from every circumstance, whether relative to himself or to others, and for the benefit of those younger than himself, whatever element of truth it might contain. So, instead of venting hurt pride, he preferred to speak in a way that would be of some profit for me. 'There is no such thing, he said, as a man, however clever he may be, who has never at some time in his youth uttered words, or even led a life, that he would not prefer to see expunged from memory. He should not find this absolutely a matter for regret, as he cannot be sure he would ever have become as wise as he is, if indeed getting wisdom is a possibility for any of us, had he not traversed all the silly or detestable incarnations that are bound to precede that final one. I know there are young men, sons and grandsons of distinguished men, whose tutors, since their earliest high-school years, have taught them every nobility of soul and excellent precept of morality. The lives of such men may contain nothing they would wish to abolish; they may be happy to endorse every word they have ever uttered. But they are the poor in spirit, the effete descendants of doctrinarians, whose only wisdoms are negative and sterile. Wisdom cannot be inherited – one must discover it for oneself, but only after following a course which no one can follow in your stead; no one can spare you that experience, for wisdom is only a point of view on things. The lives of men you admire, attitudes you think are noble, haven't been laid down by their fathers or their tutors – they were preceded by very different beginnings, and were influenced by whatever surrounded them, whether it was good, bad or indifferent. Each of them is the outcome of a struggle, each of them is a victory. I can understand that the image of what we were in an earlier time might be unrecognizable and always irksome to behold. It should not be rejected for all that, as it is testimony to the fact that we have lived, that in accordance with the laws of life and the spirit, we have managed to derive, from the common constituents of life, from the life of the studio and artists' cliques, if we're talking of painters, something which surpasses them.'[91] We had reached his door. I was disappointed not to have met the girls. But at least there was now a possible opening into their lives; the days when they did nothing but pass across a horizon, when I could believe they might never appear on it again, were over. They were no longer surrounded by the great turbid swirl which kept us apart, which was nothing but the translation of the desire – perpetually ablaze, mobile, urgent, constantly fuelled by worry – ignited in me by their inaccessibility, their possible disappearance from my life for ever. This desire for them could now be turned down, kept in reserve, alongside so many others the fulfilment of which, once I knew this was a possibility, I postponed. I left Elstir and was alone. Despite my disappointment, I could see in my mind all the unforeseeable improbability of what had taken place: that he in particular should turn out to be known to the girls; that they who had been, only that morning, figures in a picture against a background of the sea, had now set eyes on me; that they had seen me in the company of a great painter; that he now knew of my wish to know them, and would help to bring this about. All of this had given me pleasure, but it was a pleasure which had remained hidden from me: it was one of those visitors who do not approach us till all the others have gone, and we can be alone together; that is when we notice them, when we can say, 'I'm all yours' and give them our full attention. Sometimes, between the moment when such pleasures have entered our mind and the moment when we too can withdraw into it, so many hours have elapsed, and we have seen so many people in the meantime, that we fear they may not have waited. But they are patient, they do not weary, and when the last visitor has gone, there they are looking at us. And sometimes it is we who are so tired out that we feel we cannot find the strength in our weary mind to entertain these memories, these impressions for which our feeble self is the only habitable place, the sole medium of their realization. But this we would regret, for almost the only interest in existence lies in those days when a pinch of magic sand is mixed with the dust of reality, when a trite incident can become the spur of romance. An entire promontory of the inaccessible world takes sudden shape, lit by a dream, and becomes part of our life, that life in which, like a sleeper awakened, we can see the people of whom we had dreamed with such longing that we had become convinced that it was only ever in dreams that we would see them.

The relief brought by the likelihood that I could come to know the girls whenever I wanted to was precious to me, especially because I would have been unable to stay on the look-out for them over the next few days, which were taken up with the preparations for Saint-Loup's departure. My grandmother wished to show my friend how much she had appreciated his many kindnesses towards us. I told her he was a great admirer of Proudhon, and gave her the idea to send for a number of letters written by the thinker, which she had bought. When they arrived, the day before his departure, Saint-Loup came to the hotel to see them. He read them eagerly, handling each page with respect and trying to memorize phrases from them. When he stood up to go, excusing himself for having stayed so long, he heard my grandmother say:

'You must take them with you. They're for you – I sent for them so that you could have them.'

Saint-Loup, overjoyed, was no more able to control his reaction than if it had been a bodily state produced without the intervention of the will: he turned scarlet, like a child who has been punished; and my grandmother was much more touched by the sight of all the efforts he made, unsuccessful as they were, to contain the joy that surged through him than by all the thanks he could have expressed. The following day, doubting whether he had shown enough gratitude, he was still asking me to excuse him as he leaned out of the window of the little local train which was to take him back to his garrison, which was not far away. He had originally thought he might drive over, as he often did when he had to return there in the evening, when he was to be away from Balbec for only a short time. But he had so much luggage this time that it would have had to go by train; so he had thought it more convenient to take the train himself, a view confirmed by the manager of the hotel, who, when asked about the respective merits of carriage or train, replied that either of these modes of travel would be 'more or less equitable to the other'. By which he meant 'equivalent', roughly what Françoise would have expressed as 'it's all the same as one or the other'. 'Right, Saint-Loup

had said, I'll take the little Slowcoach.' I would have taken it too and accompanied my friend to Doncières, if I had not been tired out; but during the time the little train spent in the station at Balbec – that is, the time the driver spent waiting for friends who were late and without whom he did want to start, and having a drink – I promised Saint-Loup I would visit him several times a week. Bloch had also come to see him off, to Saint-Loup's great displeasure; and having noticed that Bloch had overheard him urging me to come to Doncières for lunch or dinner, or even to stay, he eventually said to him, in a tone of great coldness, intended to counter the forced politeness of the invitation, and to prevent Bloch from thinking he meant it: 'If you should ever happen to be passing through Doncières some afternoon when I'm off duty, you could ask for me at the barracks, but I'm hardly ever off duty.' Robert may also have feared that if left to myself I might not come; and in the belief that I was closer to Bloch than I had given him to understand, he may have thought the latter could be relied upon to make me bestir myself, to serve as a travelling companion.

I was afraid this tone, this way of inviting someone while implying that he should not come, would offend Bloch; and I thought Saint-Loup would have been better to say nothing. In this I was mistaken, for after the train had left, and as Bloch and I were walking together as far as the crossroads where our paths diverged, one of them leading towards the hotel, the other towards his villa, he kept asking which day we would go to Doncières, since in view of 'all the overtures of Saint-Loup towards him' it would be 'too ill-mannered of him' not to accept the invitation. I was glad that he had either not noticed, or was unoffended enough to wish to appear not to have noticed, the less than eager tone, almost impolite, in which the invitation had been delivered. However, for his sake, I would have preferred him to avoid the ridicule of going over to Doncières straight away. I did not dare advise him on this, though, as I could only have done so in a way which would displease him, by revealing that Saint-Loup's eagerness to invite had been much less than his own to accept. He was in fact over-eager; and though all his faults in that line were compensated by remarkable qualities, which someone less forward would not have had, he was so tactless that it was a constant annoyance. According to him, we must not let the week pass without visiting Doncières (he said 'we' because, I think, he was half-counting on my presence to excuse his). All the way along the road, in front of the gymnasium among its trees, by the tennis court, in front of the town hall, in front of the sea-shell vendor's, he kept making me stop, begging me to settle on a day; and as I declined, he walked off in a huff, saying, 'As it please Your Lordship, then. But I at least am obliged to go, since he did invite me.'

Saint-Loup was so uneasy at the thought of not having properly thanked my grandmother that he asked me again to be sure to pass on his gratitude to her, in a letter that I received two days later. It was from the town where he was garrisoned, the name of which postmarked on the envelope seemed to be bringing it to me, telling me that inside its walls, in the Louis XVI cavalry barracks, he was thinking of me. The notepaper bore the arms of Marsantes, in which I could make out a lion on a crown closed by the cap of a peer of France.

'After a successful journey, his letter said, during which I read a book bought in the station, by Arvède Barine[92] (a Russian writer, I believe; it struck me as remarkably well written for a foreigner, but do give me your view, you who must know, as you've read everything and are a mine of knowledge), here I am once more back in this coarse life where I feel like an exile, where I have nothing of what I left in Balbec, a life without reminders of affection, devoid of the charm of intellectual things, a life lived in an atmosphere which you would no doubt despise, yet which is not without its own charm. Everything seems to have changed since I left, for in the meantime something has marked an era in my life: the beginning of our friendship. I hope it will never end. I have spoken of it, and of you, to a single person, my darling mistress, who gave me a pleasant surprise by coming down here to spend a moment with me. She would like to meet you; and I'm sure you would get on together, as she too is extremely literary. On the other hand, the better to remember the talks we had together, you and I, to recall times I'll never forget, I have also been keeping away from my fellow officers, who, though capital chaps, would be incapable of appreciating such things. For this first day, I could almost have preferred to keep the memory of our times together to myself, rather than write about it. But I was afraid that you, with your subtle mind and your ultra-sensitive heart, might begin to worry if you received no letter – assuming, that is, that you have deigned to lower your thoughts to the rough trooper whom you will be hard put to refine, to make a little more subtle and worthy of you.'

This letter, by its affectionateness, was really very reminiscent of those which, at a time when I did not know Saint-Loup, I had imagined him writing to me, in the day-dreams eventually cancelled by the icy reality of his initial greeting, which had proved not to be his definitive manner. After that first letter, each time the post was brought in, at lunch-time, I recognized instantly any letter from him, as they all showed the second face which every person has, the one seen in his or her absence, and in the features of which (the letters of the script) there is no reason not to believe we can see the individual spirit so clearly perceptible in the line of their nose or the tones of their voice.

At the end of lunch, I was inclined now to sit on as the tables were being cleared; and if it was not a moment at which the little gang of girls could be expected to pass, my eyes looked on things other than the sea. Since seeing such things in the water-colours of Elstir, I enjoyed noticing them in reality, glimpses of poetry as they seemed: knives lying askew in halted gestures; the bell-tent of a used napkin, within which the sun has secreted its yellow velvet; the half-emptied glass showing better the noble widening of its lines, the undrunk wine darkening it, but glinting with lights, inside the translucent glaze seemingly made from condensed daylight; volumes displaced, and liquids transmuted, by angles of illumination; the deterioration of the plums, green to blue, blue to gold, in the fruit dish already half plundered; the wandering of the old-fashioned chairs, which twice a day take their places again about the cloth draping the table as though it is an altar for the celebration of the sanctity of appetite, with a few drops of lustral water left in oyster-shells like little stone fonts; I tried to find beauty where I had never thought it might be found, in the most ordinary things, in the profound life of 'still life'.

Some days after the departure of Saint-Loup, when I had managed to prompt Elstir to hold a little reception at which I would be able to meet Albertine, I was rather sorry that the charm and elegance, albeit momentary, on which I was complimented as I stepped out of the Grand-Hôtel, which were the result of a long rest and extra expenditure on appearance, could not be reserved, along with the prestige of Elstir, for my conquest of some other more interesting person, rather than being lavished on Albertine and the pleasure of making her acquaintance. My mind saw this pleasure, now that it was assured, as being worth not very much. But the will in me did not share that illusion for an instant, being the persevering and unwavering servant of our successive personalities, hidden in the shadows, disdained, forever faithful, working unceasingly, and without heeding the variability of our self, making sure it shall never lack what it needs. When a journey we have longed to make begins to become a reality, and the mind and sensibility are starting to wonder whether it is really worth the effort, the will, which well knows that, if it turned out the journey could not be made, these feckless masters would immediately long for it to become possible again, lets them loiter in front of the station, having their say, hesitating until the last minute, while it makes sure of buying the tickets and getting us into the train before departure time. It is as invariable as the mind and sensibility are changeable; but because it is silent and never gives its reasons, it seems almost non-existent; all the other parts of our self march to its tune unawares, though they can always see clearly their own uncertainties. So my mind and sensibility set up a debate on how much pleasure there might be in making the acquaintance of Albertine, while in front of the mirror I considered the vain and fragile charms which they would have preferred to preserve unused for some better occasion. But my will did not lose sight of the time at which I had to leave; and it was Elstir's address which it gave to the coachman. My mind and sensibility, now that the die was cast, indulged in the luxury of thinking it was a pity. If my will had given a different address, they would have been in a state of panic.

On arriving at Elstir's a little later, I thought at first that Mlle Simonet was not in the studio. There was only a young lady, sitting down, wearing a silk dress, bare-headed, but whose magnificent hair was unknown to me, as were her nose and complexion, in none of which could I recognize the being I had constructed out of a young girl walking along the esplanade, pushing a bicycle and wearing a toque. Albertine it was, however. Yet, even after realizing this, I paid no attention to her. On going into a fashionable gathering as a young man, one takes leave of the person one was, one becomes a different man, each new salon being a new universe, in which, subject to the law of a new moral perspective, we focus acute attention on individuals, dances, games of cards, as though they were

destined to be part of our life for ever, and which we will have forgotten by the following morning. Being obliged, in order to come eventually to a chat with Mlle Simonet, to follow a route which was not of my own design, which reached a first destination in front of Elstir, before leading me on to other groups of guests, to whom I was introduced, then along the buffet where I was handed, and where I ate, strawberry tarts, while pausing to listen to music which had just begun to be played, I found myself giving to these various episodes the same importance as to my introduction to Mlle Simonet, which was only one among their sequence, and which I had by now completely forgotten had been, a few minutes before, the sole object of my presence there. Does not the same happen, in busy everyday life, to our truest joys and greatest sorrows? We stand among other people, and the woman we adore gives us the answer, favourable or fatal, which we have been awaiting for a year: we must go on chatting; ideas lead to other ideas, making a surface beneath which, rising only from time to time, barely perceptible, lies the knowledge, very deep but acute, that calamity has struck. Or if it is happiness rather than calamity, we may not remember until years later that the most momentous event of our emotional life happened in a way which gives us no time to pay close attention to it, or even to be aware of it almost, during a fashionable reception, say, despite the fact that it was in expectation of some such event that we had gone to it.

At the moment when Elstir suggested I go with him and be introduced to Albertine, who was sitting a little way away, I finished a coffee eclair and inquired with interest of an old gentleman, whom I had just met and to whom I saw fit to offer the rose he had admired in my button-hole, about certain agricultural shows in Normandy. This is not to say that the introduction which followed gave me no pleasure, or that it did not have a character of some gravity in my eyes. The pleasure, of course, I did not experience till a little later, back at the hotel when, having been alone for a while, I was myself again. Pleasures are like photographs: in the presence of the person we love, we take only negatives, which we develop later, at home, when we have at our disposal once more our inner dark-room, the door of which it is strictly forbidden to open while others are present.

Unlike the awareness of my pleasure, delayed for some hours, the gravity of the introduction was perceptible to me at the time. At a moment of introduction, though we feel an immediate gratification, though we know we are now in possession of a voucher valid for future pleasures of the sort we have been seeking for weeks past, we also sense that its possession puts an end, not only to our wearisome searching, a reason for unmitigated joy, but also to the existence of a particular person, the figment created in our imagination and magnified by the fretful fear that we might never come to be acquainted with that person. At the moment when our name sounds in the voice of our introducer, and especially if the latter accompanies it, as Elstir did, with words of praise (a moment as sacramental as the one in pantomimes when the genie commands a person to turn all of a sudden into someone else), the girl we have been longing to approach vanishes – for one thing, how could she go on being the same, since, by the very attention she is obliged to give to our name and display to our person, the conscious gaze and unknowable mind which we had been vainly seeking in her eyes, which were infinitely distant from us yesterday, and which we thought our own eyes, wandering, unfocussed, desperate, divergent, would never manage to meet, have just been miraculously and simply replaced by our own image, pictured as by a smiling mirror? If our own reincarnation as something which formerly seemed as distant as possible from ourselves is what most transforms the unknown girl to whom we have just been introduced, her own form is still rather vague; and we may wonder whether she will turn into a goddess, a table or a bowl.[93] With the agility of a wax-modeller who, as we watch, can make a bust in five minutes, the few words she is about to speak will rough out her form and give it something definitive, eliminating every single hypothesis which our desire and imagination had elaborated. Before she attended Elstir's little party, Albertine was no doubt not quite the mere phantom that a passer-by becomes, whom we have barely glimpsed, of whom we know nothing and who may haunt our life thereafter. Her being related to Mme Bontemps had already restricted these marvellous hypotheses, by blocking off one of the channels via which they might have proliferated. As I came closer to the girl and gradually knew her better, my acquaintance with her proceeded by subtraction, as each part of her made out of imagination and desire was replaced by a perception worth much less, although to each of these perceptions was added a sort of equivalent in human relations of that 'continuing dividend' which finance companies go on paying after the redeeming of the original share. Her name and her family connections had fixed a first limit to my suppositions. Another was set by the pleasantness of her manner as I stood beside her, noticing again the beauty spot on her cheek, just under the eye; and I was astonished to hear her use the adverb 'perfectly' instead of 'completely' when talking of two people, one of whom she said was 'perfectly mad, but really quite nice' and the other 'perfectly common person, and perfectly boring'. Inelegant as it was, this usage of 'perfectly' suggested a level of cultivation far above what I would have imagined to be that of the bacchante with the bicycle, the orgiastic muse of the golf-course. And after that initial metamorphosis, Albertine was of course to go through many other changes in my eyes. The qualities and faults of any person, as they appear in the foreground of the face, will be arranged in a different order if we come upon them from another angle, as the landmarks of a city, seen lying along a straight line in a random order, are shuffled into different dimensions of depth, and exchange among themselves their relative sizes, when glimpsed from another point of view. At the beginning, I thought Albertine looked somewhat intimidated, rather than ruthless; she seemed proper, and not ill-mannered, judging by statements she made about every one of the girls I mentioned to her, such as 'She's very "fast" ' or 'She's perfectly unladylike'; and the focal point of her face was one of her temples, flushed and unpleasing to look at, instead of the singular expression in her eyes, which until then had been the thing about her which had always been in my thoughts. But this was only my second sight of her, and there would undoubtedly be a sequence of other points of view from which I would have to see her. To achieve accurate knowledge of others, if such a thing were possible, we could only ever arrive at it through the slow and unsure recognition of our own initial optical inaccuracies. However, such knowledge is not possible: for, while our vision of others is being adjusted, they, who are not made of mere brute matter, are also changing; we think we have managed to see them more clearly, but they shift; and when we believe we have them fully in focus, it is merely our older images of them which we have clarified, but which are themselves already out of date.

Yet, whatever disappointments it is bound to bring, that way of approaching what one has glimpsed, what one has had the leisure to imagine, is the only wholesome one for the senses, the only one which keeps them in appetite. What monotony and boredom colour the lives of those who, from laziness or timidity, drive directly to the houses of friends whom they have come to know, without first having imagined them, without ever daring to dally along the way with what they desire!

On my way home from Elstir's little reception, I thought about it, remembering the coffee eclair which I had finished before letting him take me to meet Albertine, the rose I had given to the old gentleman, all these details selected without our knowledge by the circumstances and which, in their special haphazard arrangement, constitute our picture of a first meeting. It was this same picture that, some months later, I had the impression of seeing from another point of view, one very remote from my own, and of realizing that it had not existed only for me: one day, as I spoke to Albertine about our first meeting, to my amazement she reminded me of the eclair, the flower I had given away, everything which I believed, not to be of importance only to myself, but to have been noticed only by me, and yet here they were, transcribed in a version which I had not suspected existed, in the mind of Albertine. Back at the hotel on that first day, when I could focus on the memory I had taken away with me, I saw the conjuring-trick which had been done, and how I had spent some time chatting to a person who, by the magician's sleight of hand, had been substituted for the girl I had watched so often along the esplanade, and who had nothing in common with her. This I could have suspected in advance, as the young girl on the esplanade had been my own creation. Even so, since I had identified her with Albertine in my conversations with Elstir, I now felt a moral obligation towards the real Albertine to keep the promises of love made to the imaginary one. Betrothed by proxy, we feel constrained to marry the intermediary. Besides, though my life was now at least temporarily free of an anguish any recurrence of which could have been quickly cancelled by the memory of her properness, the expression 'perfectly common' and the flushed temple, this memory now roused in me a different sort of desire, which, though sweet and quite painless, rather like a brotherly feeling, was capable of becoming in time just as dangerous, by giving me a constant need to kiss this new person, whose good manners, shyness and unexpected availability curbed the futile surges of my imagination, but gave rise to a touching gratitude. Also, since memory immediately begins to take snap-shots which are quite independent of one another, abolishing all links and sequence among the scenes they show, in the collection of them which it displays, the latest does not necessarily obliterate the earlier ones. Beside the unremarkable and touching Albertine with whom I

had chatted, I could see the mysterious Albertine against the backdrop of the sea. Both were now memories, pictures, that is, neither of which seemed truer than the other. The final image of my introduction to her that afternoon was that when I tried to remember the little beauty spot on her cheek, just below the eye, I realized that, after my first sight of her, when she had greeted Elstir in passing, I had seen it on her chin. Each time I saw Albertine, I noticed she had a beauty spot, and my misguided memory moved it about her face, sometimes putting it in one place, at other times in another.

Disappointed as I was with Mlle Simonet, a young girl not very different from others I knew, I consoled myself with the thought (just as my disappointment with the church of Balbec had not affected my desire to go to Quimperlé, Pont-Aven and Venice) that, even though she had not lived up to my expectations, at least through her I would be able to meet her friends in the little gang.

I thought at first that I was going to fail in this aim. As she was going to be staying in Balbec for quite a while, as I was myself, I had decided that it would be better not to seek her out too directly, but wait for an opportunity when circumstances would bring us together. However, if that were to happen every day, it was very likely that she would do no more than greet me without stopping, and by the end of the season I would be no further forward.

Not many days later, one morning when it had rained and it was almost cold, I was accosted on the esplanade by a young girl with a little flat hat and a muff, so different from the person I had seen at Elstir's reception that it appeared to be a feat beyond the power of the human mind to recognize her. My mind, however, managed it, but only after a second's surprise, which I think did not escape Albertine's notice. Also, remembering the good manners which had so struck me, I was now surprised by their opposite, her coarse tone and her 'little gang' manners. And then her temple was no longer the reassuring optical centre of her face, either because I was now on her other side, or because her hat concealed it, or because its flush was not constant. 'What weather! she said. Balbec's endless summer is just a great joke, of course. Don't you do anything here? You're never to be seen at the golf-course or the dances in the Casino, and you're never out riding a horse either. You must find it all a great bore. You don't think that people who just stay on the beach are a bit silly? Oh, I see, you like just lazing about. Well, you've got plenty of time. I can see you're not like me – I love all sports! You weren't at the races at La Sogne? We went by the tram and I can understand that you wouldn't want to set foot in a rattletrap like that. It took two hours! I could've gone there and back three times on my bike!' I had admired Saint-Loup for referring quite naturally to the little local train as the 'Slowcoach' because of all the twists and turns of the line, but her fluency with words like 'tram' and 'rattletrap' disconcerted me: I sensed in it a mastery of forms of speech in which I was afraid she must recognize my inferiority, and for which she would despise me. At that time, the wealth of synonyms current among the little gang for that little train had not yet been revealed to me. When she spoke, Albertine held her head still, keeping her nostrils tight and barely moving her lips. This gave her a nasal drawl, perhaps partly composed of the accents of provincial forebears, a youthful affectation of imperturbable Britishness, the coaching of a foreign governess and a blocked nose. This pronunciation, which, once she got to know people better, disappeared and was replaced by a more naturally girlish manner, could have sounded quite unpleasant. But I found the peculiarity of it enchanting. When I had not seen her for a few days, I could excite myself by repeating, 'You're never to be seen at the golf-course,' with the nasal twang she had used, speaking straight at me, without moving her head. And I thought there could be no one more desirable in the whole world.

That morning, we were one of the couples who here and there punctuate the esplanade with their momentary meetings, pausing long enough to exchange a few words before separating to take up again their two diverging trajectories. I took advantage of this brief immobility to make a thorough check of the place where the beauty spot was to be found. Just as a phrase of Vinteuil which had delighted me in the sonata, and which my memory kept moving from the *andante* to the finale, until the day when, with the score in hand, I was able to find it and localize it where it belonged, in the *scherzo*, so the beauty spot, which I had remembered on her cheek, then on her chin, came to rest for ever on her upper lip, just under her nose. In the same way, we are astonished to come upon a stanza we know by heart, but in a poem which we did not realize contained it.

At that moment, as though for the purpose of displaying, in the full variety of its forms, against the back-drop of the sea, all the fluent freedom of the rich decorative ensemble made by the procession of the virgins, both golden and pink, coloured by the sun and the wind, the group of Albertine's friends, with their lovely legs and their lithe waists, but all different from one another, came towards us, nearer to the sea than we were, stretched out in a long line. I asked her if I might walk with her for a moment. Unfortunately, she did no more than wave to them. 'But won't your friends feel you've abandoned them?' I asked, in the hope that we might all go for a walk together. A young man with regular features and tennis racquets approached us. It was the baccarat-player, whose follies so scandalized the wife of the First President. With a manner which was cold and expressionless, and which he clearly believed was one of supreme distinction, he said good morning to Albertine. 'Have you been golfing, Octave? she asked. Did you have a good game? Were you in good form? – Oh, I'm disgusted with myself. I'm just an also-ran. – And was Andrée there? – Yes, she had a round of seventy-seven. – Goodness me! That's a record! – I went round in eighty-two yesterday.' He was the son of a very wealthy industrialist who was to play a rather important part in the organizing of the next International Exhibition. I was struck by how knowledgeable this young man and the other few male friends of the girls were in things like clothes, ways of wearing them, cigars, English drinks, horses – a form of erudition which in him was highly developed, which he wore with a proud infallibility, reminiscent of the scholar's modest reticence – an expertise which was quite self-sufficient, without the slightest need for any accompanying intellectual cultivation. He could not be faulted on the appropriate occasions for wearing dinner-jacket or pyjama-suit, but he had no idea of the way to use certain words, or even of the most elementary rules of good grammar. That disparity between two cultures must have been shared by his father, who, in his capacity as president of the Association of Property-owners of Balbec, had written an open letter to his constituents, now to be seen as a placard on all the walls, in which he said, 'I was desirous of talking to the Mayor about this matter, however, he was of a mind to not hear me out on my just demands.' At the Casino, Octave won prizes in all the dancing competitions – the Boston dip, the tango and so on – a qualification, if he should ever need one, for a good marriage among seaside society, a milieu in which young girls quite literally end up married to their 'partner'. He lit a cigar and said to Albertine, 'If you don't mind,' as one excuses oneself for going on with an urgent piece of work in the presence of someone. For he always 'had to be doing something', despite the fact that he never did anything. Just as a total lack of activity can eventually have the same effects as over-work, whether in the emotional domain or in the domain of the body and its muscles, the constant intellectual vacuum which resided behind the pensive forehead of Octave had had the result, despite his undisturbed air, of giving him ineffectual urges to think, which kept him awake at night, as though he were a metaphysician with too much on his mind.

Thinking that, if I knew their friends, I might have more opportunities of seeing the girls, I had been about to ask Albertine to introduce me to him. As soon as he had walked away, repeating, 'I'm just an also-ran,' I said so to her, with the idea that this might inspire her to introduce us on the next occasion. 'Oh, goodness! she said. I couldn't introduce you to a lounge lizard! The place is crawling with them! But they'd be incapable of conversing with you. He's good at golf and that's all he's good at. Believe me, he wouldn't be your type at all. – Your friends will feel neglected if you stay away from them like this, I said, hoping she would suggest we go and meet them together. – Not at all, they don't need me.' We soon came upon Bloch: he gave me a shrewd and meaning smile; then, in some perplexity towards Albertine, whom he did not know, or rather whom he did know but 'without being acquainted with her', with a stiff, uncouth movement, he gave a nod. 'Who's that savage? she asked. I can't think why he's nodding at me – he doesn't know me. I'll ignore him.' I had no time to reply, as Bloch came straight over and said to me, 'Excuse me for interrupting, but I just wanted to let you know I'm going over to Doncières tomorrow. It would be impolite of me to leave it any longer and I don't know what Saint-Loup-en-Bray must think of me. So I'm letting you know that I'll be taking the two o'clock. It's up to you.' However, I had no thoughts for anything but Albertine and the need to meet her girl-friends. Hence, a visit to Doncières, where they never went, which would get me back to Balbec long after their time for appearing on the beach, seemed like a trip to the end of the earth. So I told Bloch I could not go. 'In that case, I'll go by myself. And to charm Saint-Loup-en-Bray's clericalism, I shall speak to him of you with the ridiculous couplet of Master Arouet:

> Apprends que mon devoir ne dépend point du sien;
> Qu'il y manque, s'il veut; je dois faire le mien.[94]

– I can see he's really quite handsome, Albertine said. But I must say I don't like him at all!'

It had never occurred to me that Bloch might be 'quite handsome'. But he was: with his slightly protruding forehead, his pronounced Roman nose, his look of being extremely astute (and of believing he was extremely astute), he had a very pleasant face. Even so, he was not to Albertine's liking. This may have been explainable by the dislikable sides of her own character, the toughness of the little gang, its insensitivity, its rudeness towards all things outside itself. Later, when I had introduced them, her dislike did not lessen. Bloch belonged to a world which, what with its sneer at good society and yet the tolerance of good manners which a man must retain if he is not to be seen as untouchable, has reached a sort of special compromise by the use of manners which, though not quite those of fashionable society, manage to achieve a peculiar kind of detestable fashionableness. When you introduced him to someone, he would bow with a sceptical smile and an exaggerated show of respect, and, if it were a man whose hand he was shaking, he would say, 'Charmed to meet you, sir,' in a voice which mocked the words it spoke, but which knew it did not belong to a boor. Having occupied that second in simultaneously observing and scoffing at a custom (just as he would say, on New Year's Day, 'I wish you a Happy New One'), he would then affect an acute and wily expression, and 'let fall pearls of wisdom', which I often found full of good sense but which Albertine 'could not abide'. On that first day, when I told her his name was Bloch, she exclaimed, 'I wouldn't have minded betting he was a Jew-boy! They always know how to get your back up!' At a later stage too, Bloch was to irritate Albertine in another way. Like many intellectuals, he could not say simple things simply. He would describe them with precious epithets, then generalize. Albertine, who disliked it when people paid attention to what she was doing, was annoyed that, when she had sprained her ankle and was resting, Bloch said, 'She's lying on her chaise longue. But being gifted with ubiquity, she continues simultaneously to haunt ghostly golf-courses and the tritest of tennis lawns.' It was merely his 'stylish' banter; but to Albertine, who felt it might create difficulties for her with people who had invited her out, and whom she had told she was incapable of moving, it was enough to make her loathe the sight and the sound of the person who said such things. Having agreed to go out together soon, she and I parted. While talking to her, I had been as unaware of my words and where they went as though I had been throwing pebbles into a bottomless well. That in general the people to whom we speak draw from within themselves the meaning they give to our words, and that this meaning is very different from the one we put into them, is a truth constantly revealed to us by everyday life. But if in addition the person to whom we are speaking is, as Albertine was for me, someone whose upbringing is inconceivable, whose inclinations and principles, even the books she reads, are a mystery to us, then we cannot tell whether our words have any more semblance of meaning for her than they would have if we tried to explain ourselves to an animal. Trying to strike up a relationship with Albertine felt like relating to the unknown, or even the impossible, an exercise as difficult as training a horse, as restful[95] as keeping bees or growing roses.

Some hours before, I had believed Albertine would give me only a distant nod. Now we had just agreed to an outing together. I resolved that, the next time I met her, I would be more forward; and I drew up a detailed scheme for what to say to her and even, since I had a strong impression that she was not overburdened by virtue, for all the pleasures she would lend herself to at my suggestion. But the mind is as susceptible to influence as any plant, any cell, any chemical elements; and the milieu which modifies it is the circumstances by which it is surrounded, a new setting. The presence of Albertine was enough to make me different; and when I was next with her the things I said were also completely different from what I had planned. Then, remembering her flushed temple, I wondered whether she might not be more appreciative of a kindness on my part which she would know was not self-interested. I was also perplexed by some looks she gave me, a way she had of smiling. They might be taken to mean easy virtue; but they might also mean the guileless if silly gaiety of a girl who, though vivacious, is fundamentally virtuous. There being more than one connotation for a single expression, whether on her face or in her speech, I was as hesitant as a pupil faced with the difficulties of a Greek unseen.

On this occasion, almost without delay we met the tall girl, Andrée, the one who had jumped over the First President;[96] and Albertine had to introduce me. Her friend's face was lighted by eyes that were extraordinarily limpid, as a dimly lit flat is brightened through an open bedroom door by the sunshine and greenish glow reflected up from the sea.

Five gentlemen walked past; since the beginning of my stay at Balbec, I had come to know all of them well by sight, and had often wondered who they might be. 'They're not very posh people, Albertine said, with a snigger of contempt. Take a look at that little old bloke with the dyed hair and the yellow gloves! Isn't he the limit? Well, he's the local dentist, not a bad old bloke, actually. The fat one's the Mayor. I don't mean the *little* fat one – you must have seen *him*, he's the dancing-master; he's a bit of a brute too: he can't *stand* us because we make too much noise at the Casino, we demolish his chairs, we want to dance with the carpet rolled up, so he's never given us the prize, though we're the only ones that can dance! The dentist's quite a nice bloke, and I wouldn't have minded saying hello to him just to annoy the dancing-master, but I couldn't because that's M. de Sainte-Croix with them, the member of the *Conseil général*,[97] a gentleman of very good family but who's gone over to the Republicans now, for money – all proper people ignore him totally. He knows my uncle, because of the government, but the rest of my family cut him dead. The thin one in the raincoat is the conductor of the orchestra. What? You don't know him? His playing's divine! You didn't go and hear *Cavalleria Rusticana*?[98] Oh, I think it's just lovely! He's giving a concert this evening but we can't go because it's in the Town Hall – the Casino's all right, but the Town Hall's out of bounds: they've gone and taken down the crucifix[99] and Andrée's mother would throw forty fits if we went! I know my aunt's husband's in the government, but I can't help that – my aunt may be my aunt, but that doesn't make me like her, you know! She has only ever wanted one thing – to get rid of me. The only person who was ever anything like a mother to me – and who really deserves double credit for it, as she's not even family – is a friend that I actually love like a mother. I'll show you a photo of her.' We were briefly joined by the golf champion and baccarat player, Octave. I thought I might have discovered a link between us, on learning from the conversation that he had some slight family relationship with the Verdurins, who were also rather fond of him. However, he disparaged the celebrated Wednesdays, and added that M. Verdurin was ignorant of the proper wearing of the dinner-jacket, which made it pretty embarrassing to encounter him in certain music-halls, where one would rather not be accosted by a gentleman wearing an ordinary suit and a black tie, looking like a village notary up in town and calling out, 'Good evening, whipper-snapper!' Octave walked on; and soon afterwards Andrée also left us, as we had reached her chalet. She went in, having said not a single word to me throughout the whole walk. I was sorry to see her disappear, especially because, while I was remarking to Albertine how unfriendly her friend had been, and mentally comparing the difficulty Albertine appeared to have in letting me make the acquaintance of her girl-friends with the reluctance Elstir had also seemed to encounter on the very first day in trying to effect the same thing, two young girls passed, the d'Ambresac sisters, whom I greeted and to whom Albertine also said good morning.

This made me think that my situation with Albertine might improve. The mother of these two girls was a relative of Mme de Villeparisis's, and she also knew the Princess of Luxembourg. M. and Mme d'Ambresac, who owned a small villa at Balbec, though exceedingly rich, lived very simply, the husband always wearing the same jacket, the wife always a dark dress. They always made a great show of bowing to my grandmother, but went no further. The daughters, both very pretty, were more elegant dressers, but it was Paris elegance, not seaside elegance. In their long dresses, under their expansive hats, they seemed to be a very different breed from Albertine. She was quite aware of who they were. 'Oh, so you know the d'Ambresac girls, do you? In that case, you know some pretty posh people. Actually, they're very simple people, she added, as though there was some contradiction in this. They're very nice but so well bred that they're not allowed to go to the Casino, especially because of us, because we're so unladylike. Do you like them? Well, they're not everyone's cup of tea. Little innocents, the pair of them. The sort of thing some people might find quite to their taste. If you fancy little innocents, there you are, plenty to choose from. And it seems there *are* people who like that sort of thing: one of them's already betrothed to the Marquis de Saint-Loup. And the younger one, who was in love with the gentleman herself, is breaking her heart. I must say I can't stand the way they speak, as though butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. And they wear such ludicrous things – imagine, playing golf in a silk frock! At their age, their get-up is more pretentious than older women who have a sense of dress. I mean, Mme Elstir for instance, there's a woman who dresses well.' I said Mme Elstir's way of dressing had struck me as very simple. Albertine burst out laughing: 'Of course she's simple in her way of dressing! But her way is so delightfully right! And to get the effect that you see as simplicity, she spends a fortune.' To someone whose taste in things of dress was poor or deficient, there was nothing remarkable in Mme Elstir's dresses. Taste in these things, which I lacked, Elstir had in abundance, or so Albertine said. I had had no idea of this; nor had I noticed that the objects ranged about his studio were wonders of elegance, but also of simplicity, things he had yearned to possess for a long time, which he had kept an eye on at every auction, things whose whole history he knew, until the day came when he had made enough money to acquire them. Albertine, who was as ignorant as I was on this aspect of Elstir, could tell me nothing about it. However, on women's dress, with her instinctive delight in attractive clothes, and perhaps also with something of the longing of the girl who, though poor, is disinterested and modest enough to enjoy the spectacle of rich people wearing what she will never be able to afford, she could tell me things about Elstir's standards of taste, so refined and exacting that in his view all women were badly dressed, and that, with his concern for every proportion and slightest nuance, he would spend huge sums having his wife's sunshades, hats and cloaks made, explaining to Albertine the while the charm of such things, to which a person devoid of taste would have been as oblivious as I had been. Albertine had also dabbled in painting, though she had, as she said herself, no 'bent' for it, and greatly admired Elstir; and, from what he had told her and shown her, she had acquired an appreciation of good painting which was in marked contrast with her liking for *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The fact was, invisible as this was to me at the time, she was highly intelligent; and though there was stupidity in things she said, it was not her own, but that of her peers. Elstir had influenced her for the better, but only partially. Not all modes of cultivation and sensibility were equally developed in her. Her appreciation of painting now almost equalled her liking for clothes and for all things fashionable, but it was unaccompanied by an appreciation of good music.

Despite her awareness of the significance of the d'Ambresac family, despite my having greeted their daughters, since ability in greater things may accompany inability in lesser, I did not find Albertine any more prepared to introduce me to her group of girl-friends. 'It's very sweet of you to bother about them. But they're nobody, just pay no attention to them. I mean, a chap as clever as you should have nothing to do with a group of silly girls like that. Actually, Andrée's very clever, and she's a very nice girl, although perfectly skittish. But honestly, the others are just silly.' As soon as Albertine had gone, I felt very sad to realize that Saint-Loup had concealed his engagement from me and that he should be contemplating such an immoral thing as to marry without first giving up his mistress. A few days later, I was introduced to Andrée, and she having chatted with me for quite a while, I took the opportunity to say that I would like to meet her the following day; but she replied that it would not be possible, as she thought her mother was unwell and did not wish to leave her alone. Two days later I went to see Elstir, who told me how much Andrée had liked me; to which I replied, 'Well, I liked her a lot too, from the very first! I asked her to meet me the next day, but she couldn't manage it. – Yes, I know, Elstir said. She told me about it. She was rather sorry, but she had agreed to go on a picnic, an outing by break to a place more than twenty miles away, and she couldn't get out of it.' Even though the lie Andrée had told was negligible, she being such a new acquaintance, I ought not to have gone on seeing someone who was capable of it: what people have done once, they will go on doing for ever. If we make a point of paying an annual visit to a friend, who has broken several such engagements before, who has caught a cold, we shall find him with his cold on later occasions; he will fail to keep the other appointments – and the reason will be the same each time, although he will believe he has given a range of different reasons, each of them conditional on differing circumstances.

One morning, not long after the day when Andrée had told me she had to stay with her mother, I was walking along beside Albertine, whom I had chanced to meet, and who was holding up a strange device on a string which made her look rather like Giotto's *Infidelitas*: it was actually called a 'diabolo', and it is now so out of date that, faced with a picture of a girl holding it, scholars may discourse in the future, as they do now on certain allegorical figures in the Arena chapel, about what it is she is holding in her hand. After a moment, one of the group of girls, the one who looked rather poor and tough, who on the day when I first saw them had sneered in such a broad, unpleasant way about the old gentleman whose head had been endangered by Andrée's flying feet, 'He'd break yer heart, that

poor old bloke!' came over and said to Albertine, 'Morning! Not in the way, I hope!' Her hat had been a bother to her, so she had taken it off, and her hair, like some unfamiliar and beautiful botanical variety, lay on her forehead in all the delicate and minutely detailed luxuriance of its foliation. Albertine, who may have been annoyed with her for being bare-headed, gave no reply to her greeting and walked on, icily silent; despite which, the other girl did not move away, although Albertine kept her at a distance from me, at times moving closer to her than to me, at other times walking by my side and leaving the girl behind. In order to be introduced, I had to ask Albertine directly, in the other girl's hearing. As Albertine spoke my name, I saw a smile, open and affectionate and full of blue eyes, flash across the face of the girl who had seemed so cruel when she said 'Wot a poor old bloke – he'd break yer heart!' and who now stood there holding out her hand to me. Her hair was golden, as was everything else about her: for though she had pink cheeks and eyes of blue, they too looked like the colours of the morning sky when everything is touched and tinted by the gold of summer sunlight.

She went straight to my head: I told myself she was just a shy girl in love, that she had stayed with us, despite being snubbed by Albertine, for my sake, for the love of me, and that she must have been happy to be able to tell me at last, with this soft-hearted smile, that she would be as tender towards me as she was cruel towards others. She must have noticed me down on the beach, at a time when I had no knowledge of her, and must have been thinking about me ever since – perhaps her reason for laughing at the old gentleman had been so that I should admire her, perhaps her reason for going about, the following days, with such an unhappy look, was her displeasure at not being able to get to know me! Sitting in the hotel, I had often noticed her taking an evening stroll down by the beach. She must have been hoping to meet me! And now, as embarrassed by the presence of Albertine as she would have been by the whole gang of her girl-friends, it was clear that her only reason for dogging our footsteps, in the face of her friend's increasing hostility towards her, was the hope of outstaying Albertine, of arranging a meeting with me for a moment when she would be able to slip away without the knowledge of her family or friends, and come to me at some secluded spot, before Mass or after her game of golf. It would be very difficult to see her, especially as she was on bad terms with Andrée, who hated her. 'I've put up with her awful dishonesty for ages, Andrée told me, her nastiness, all the dirty tricks she's played on me! I've put up with it all for the sake of the others. But the latest bad turn she's done me is really the last straw.' She told me something the girl had said against her, which could indeed have had serious consequences for Andrée.

The words which Gisèle's eyes promised would be spoken to me as soon as Albertine left us alone together were not to be uttered, as Albertine went on obstinately keeping us apart, giving shorter and shorter answers to the girl, and eventually ignoring her altogether, so that she at length gave up and walked away. I reproached Albertine for having been so unpleasant. 'Well, that'll learn her! I mean, why does she have to be so pushy? She's not a bad sort, but she's a pain in the neck. There's no need for her to come and stick her nose in everywhere. Why does she have to come and play gooseberry when she's not wanted? I'd a good mind to tell her to buzz off. Anyway, I can't stand it when she shows her hair like that, it's very unladylike.' While Albertine was speaking, I watched her cheeks and wondered what flavour they might have, what fragrance: that day, she did not look cool, but all smooth and with a uniformly purplish pink blush, creamy, like certain roses with a waxy sheen. I had a passion for her cheeks, as one can have for a variety of flower. 'I didn't notice, I said. – Well, you took a good look at her,' she said, unmollified by the fact that she was the one I was now taking a good look at. 'You looked as if you wanted to paint her portrait. Anyway, I don't think you'd like her: she's definitely not a flirt, and I suppose you probably prefer girls that are flirts. In any case, her time for being a little pest to be got rid of is nearly up, because she's going back to Paris this afternoon. – And are your other friends going back too? – No, just her, her and her English governess, because she's got exams to re-sit – she's going to have to do some swotting, poor kid. And that's no joke, I can tell you. Still, you can always have the luck to get an easy paper – anything's possible. One of us got "Describe an accident you have seen" – just a gift! But I know a girl that got "Who would you prefer to have as a friend: Alceste or Philinte?"[100] – and in the written paper too! I wouldn't have had a clue! I mean, for one thing, it's not a question for girls! Girls are friends with other girls, and they're not supposed to *have* gentlemen friends. (In this sentence I heard an intimation that I had little chance of being accepted by the little gang, which struck fear into my heart.) But even if boys were asked a question like that, what sort of an answer could they possibly write? Several families have written to the editor of *Le Gaulois*[101] to complain of the difficulty of that sort of question. And the worst of it is that in a collection of the best essays by prize-winning pupils, that subject has been treated twice, but in completely opposite ways! So it all depends on which examiner you get. One of them wanted them to say Philinte is a scheming flatterer, and the other one wanted them to say you can't help admiring Alceste, but that he's too peevish, and so for a friend you have to prefer Philinte. How are poor girl-pupils supposed to make sense of things if teachers can't agree among themselves? And in any case they're making it harder every year. Gisèle's only chance of passing is if she can get a string pulled for her.'

When I got back to the hotel, my grandmother was not there; having waited a long time for her to come back, I begged her to let me go off on an excursion, unexpected but not to be missed, which might last for up to forty-eight hours. I lunched with her, ordered a carriage and was driven to the railway-station. Gisèle would not be surprised to see me; and once we had changed trains at Doncières, we would have a corridor-train to Paris: while the English governess dozed, I would have Gisèle all to myself, slipping off with her to dark corners and arranging times and places so that we could meet after my own return to Paris, which I would try to bring about as soon as possible. Depending on her attitude to me, I would travel with her as far as Caen or Évreux, then double back to Balbec by the next train. But whatever would she have thought, if she had known how long I had hesitated in my choice between her and her friends, and that I had been prepared to fall in love with Albertine, or the girl with the limpid eyes, or with Rosemonde, rather than with her! This thought filled me with remorse, now that Gisèle and I were to be joined together in a requited love. In any case, I could have assured her with total veracity that I was no longer attracted to Albertine. That morning, as she walked over to speak to Gisèle, I had caught a glimpse of her from behind: her head was bowed, a posture that made her look moody, and the hair at the back was different, even blacker than it was at the front, and shining as though she had just come out of the water. It had put me in mind of a wet hen and made me see her as embodying a soul very unlike the one which filled the mauve of her complexion and the mystery in her eyes. For a moment, she had been reduced to the sheen of this hair on the back of her head; and it was still the only thing I could see in my mind's eye. Our memory is like one of those shop-windows where different photographs of a certain person are displayed on different days. Sometimes it is the most recent one which stays on show for a time, in isolation. While the coachman urged on his horse, I could hear Gisèle assuring me of her gratitude and tenderness, in words which were a direct translation of her lovely smile and ready handshake: for, at those moments in my life when I was not in love but wished I was, the ideal of physical beauty which I carried about with me – and which, as has been seen, I could recognize in a distant glimpse of any passing stranger who was far enough away for the imprecision of her features not to impede that recognition – was partnered by the emotional shadow, ever ready to be brought to real life, of the woman who was going to fall in love with me and step straight into the part already written for her in the comedy of fondness and passion which had been awaiting her since my childhood, and for which every young girl I met, as long as she had a pleasant disposition and some of the physical characteristics required by the role, appeared eager to be auditioned. In this play, whoever it was I cast as the new star or her under-study for this part of leading-lady, the outline of the plot, the main scenes and even the words to be spoken had long since taken the form of a definitive edition.

A few days later, despite Albertine's reluctance to bring us together, I had made the acquaintance of the whole group of girls I had seen on the first day, all of them having stayed on in Balbec (with the exception of Gisèle, whom I had been prevented from meeting at the station by a long delay at the barrier, whose train in any case had left five minutes early because the timetable had been changed, and who now could not have been further from my thoughts), plus two or three of their other friends whom I had asked to be introduced to. The hope of pleasure to be enjoyed with a new girl having been transmitted to her by the other girl who had introduced us, each of them came to seem like one of those new roses which can be developed from a rose of a different variety. Then, going back along my chain of flowers, from corolla to corolla, the joy of discovering each different specimen made me revert to the one who had led me to her, with as much desire in my gratitude to her as there was in my hope for the new one. Before long, I spent every day with the girls.

In the freshest bud, alas, one may read the all but imperceptible signs which tell the practised eye what the future, through the desiccation or fecundation of the flesh in full blossom today, holds for the seed, immutably predestined in form and outcome. We delight in the line of a young nose, as beautiful as a delicate ripple ruffling the surface of the morning sea, seemingly motionless and sketchable, the water being so calm that the rise of the tide is invisible. When we look at faces, they do not appear to be changing, the revolution they are undergoing being so long drawn out as to escape our notice. But to see one of these young girls standing beside her mother or her aunt was to glimpse the remoter reaches of ugliness to which, in response to an inner attraction, the features of most of them would have come less than thirty years later, the time of waning glances, the time when such a face receives no more light and slips for ever below the horizon. I knew that, under the present rosy blossoming of Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée, unknown to them, biding its time, as deep-rooted and inescapable as Jewish clannishness or Christian atavism in people who believe they have risen above their race, there lurked an outsize nose, a graceless mouth, a propensity to overweight which would surprise people, but which had been standing by, awaiting only the favour of circumstance, as unforeseen, as fated as others' Dreyfusism, clericalism, national and feudal heroisms, which the fullness of time suddenly summons from a nature predating the individual himself, through which he thinks, lives and evolves, from which he draws his sustenance and in which he dies, without ever being able to distinguish it from the particular motives he mistakes for it. Even mentally, we depend much more than we believe on natural laws; and our mind, like the humblest plant, the merest grass, contains particularities which we think we have chosen. All we can grasp, though, is the secondary ideas, while the first cause (Jewishness, French family, etc.), which gives rise to them, and which we respond to at a time of its choosing, remains beyond our ken. Though we think our thoughts are ours by choice, and our ills a mere consequence of our own recklessly unhealthy life, it may well be that, just as papilionaceous plants produce a seed of a certain shape, our family hands down to us the ideas which keep us alive, as well as the illness which will cause our death.

As though on a seedling whose blossoms ripen at different times, I had seen in old ladies, on that beach at Balbec, the dried-up seeds and sagging tubers that my girl-friends would become. But, now that it was the time for buds to blossom, what did that matter? If Mme de Villeparisis invited me out for a carriage-ride, I made up an excuse for not going. The only times I went to visit Elstir were when my new friends went with me. I could not even find a spare afternoon to keep my promise to go and see Saint-Loup in Doncières. If my outings with the girls had been replaced by gatherings of the fashionable, earnest conversations, or even just a chat with a friend, it would have felt like a lunch-time at which, instead of being fed, I had been expected to take an interest in somebody's picture-book. The men and youths, the old or middle-aged women, in whose company we think we take pleasure, we conceive of as shallow beings, existing on a flat and insubstantial surface, because our only awareness of them is that of unaided visual perception; but when our eye ventures in the direction of a young girl, it is as though it acts on behalf of all our other senses: they seek out her various properties, the smell of her, the feel of her, the taste of her, which they enjoy without the collaboration of the hands or the lips; and because of desire's artful abilities in transposition, and its excellent spirit of synthesis, these senses can draw from the colour of cheeks or breasts the sensations of touching, of savouring, of forbidden contact, and can rifle girls' sweet succulence, as they do in a rose-garden when plundering the fragrances of the flowers, or in a vineyard when gloating with greedy eyes upon the grapes.

If it was raining – not that wet weather daunted Albertine, who could be seen in her waterproof dashing along on her bicycle, through the pelting rain – we would spend the day in the Casino. On such days it would have been inconceivable to me not to go there. I scorned the d'Ambresac girls, who had never set foot in it; and I was glad to be a party to the tricks played on the dancing-master. We usually brought down on our heads the wrath of the proprietor or of any of his employees who saw themselves as acting in his stead, since my girl-friends (even Andrée, who on the very first day had made me think she was such a Dionysiac creature, yet who was actually not at all robust, but intellectual and, that year, quite unwell; despite which, unconcerned for the good of her health, she acted in conformity with the spirit of her time of life, an age which carries all before it, infecting with its gaiety not just the hale and the hearty but the lame and the halt as well) were incapable of walking from the entrance-hall to the reception-room without breaking into a run, hurdling the chairs, sliding back across the floor towards the others, keeping their balance with gracefully outstretched arms, singing, mingling all the arts, youth's first blush manifesting itself in them as it did in those poets of antiquity for whom the different genres had not yet diverged, and who would adorn an epic poem with agricultural advice and theological instruction.

The Andrée who had struck me to begin with as being the most unfriendly of them all was in fact much more sensitive, affectionate and astute than Albertine, to whom she was all sweetness, as gentle and caressing as though she was her elder sister. At the Casino, she would come and sit by my side and, unlike Albertine, could even decline an invitation to waltz; or if I was tired, she would come to see me at the hotel rather than go to the Casino. The words in which she expressed her liking for me, and for Albertine, were exquisitely well chosen, showing the subtlest insight into things of the heart, which may have come in part from her acquaintance with ill-health. She always gave a bright smile, by way of excuse for the childish and vehement directness of Albertine's ways of expressing her irresistible fascination with outings and parties, which she could not bring herself to forgo, as Andrée did, so as to stay and chat with me. If we were all together when the hour set for a tea-party at the golf-club was approaching, Albertine would get ready to go, then say to Andréee, 'So what are you waiting for? You know we're to take tea at the golf-club. – No, I'm going to stay here with him, Andrée replied, with a nod in my direction. – But as you know, Mme Durieux invited you,' Albertine exclaimed, as though the real reason for Andrée's intention to stay with me must be that she did not know she had been invited. 'Oh, look, do stop being silly,' Andrée replied. And Albertine let the matter drop, in case she should be requested to stay with me too. She shook her head and, as though dealing with an invalid who takes a reckless delight in committing very slow suicide, said, 'Well, on your own head be it. I'm off, though, because I think my watch is a bit slow.' She dashed away. 'She's just lovely, but quite preposterous,' Andrée said, with an indulgent but critical smile for her friend. In this liking of Albertine's for amusement there was something of the Gilberte I had known in the earliest days, the explanation of which is that there is a degree of resemblance between the women we love at different times; and this resemblance, though it evolves, derives from the unchanging nature of our own temperament, which is what selects them, by ruling out all those who are not likely to be both opposite and complementary to us, who cannot be relied on, that is, to gratify our sensuality and wound our heart. Such women are a product of our temperament, an inverted image or projection, a negative, of our sensitivity. A novelist could shape the whole life of his hero by depicting his consecutive loves in more or less the same terms, giving thereby the impression, not of being self-repetitive, but of being creative, there being less power in an artificial innovation than in a reiteration designed to convey a hitherto unrevealed truth. However, the novelist should take care to note in the character of the lover a factor of variability, which becomes more marked as the lover moves into new regions and explores some of life's other latitudes. He might even speak a further truth if, in his apportionment of character to the other members of his cast, he made a point of giving none to the woman his hero loves. We are thoroughly acquainted with the characters of people who mean nothing to us; but how could we possibly grasp anything of a person who is intricately involved in our life, who soon becomes inseparable from our very self, whose motives are the subject of our anguished, incessant and constantly revised hypotheses? Our curiosity about the woman we love, the roots of which lie far beyond our reasoning mind, reaches far beyond her character. Even if we were capable of pausing and focussing on it, we would probably not wish to. The object of our anxious investigations is her essence, not to be confused with peculiarities of character more akin to the minute diamond-shapes on the surface of the skin, which in their varieties of combinations give rise to the rosy individuality of the person in the flesh. Our intuitive radiation sees through them, and the images it gives are not those of any particular face, but rather the lineaments of a skeleton, in all its dismal and dismaying universality.

Andrée, who was extremely wealthy, showed great generosity in sharing her luxury with Albertine, who was poor and an orphan. Towards Gisèle, however, Andrée's feelings were not quite those I had thought. News of the departed student soon came; and when Albertine showed the letter in which Gisèle, for the benefit of the whole group, recounted her journey and return to Paris, apologizing for being too lazy as yet to write to the others, I was surprised to hear Andrée, who I thought was at daggers drawn with her, saying, 'I'll write to her tomorrow. If I wait till she writes to me, I might wait for ever. She's so haphazard.' She

added, to me, 'I expect you wouldn't think there was anything very outstanding about her. But she's such a nice girl, and I'm really very fond of her.' I decided that when Andrée was on bad terms with someone, it never lasted long.

Except on these rainy days, we usually went cycling along the cliffs or into the countryside behind Balbec; and an hour before it was time to go I would be fully occupied in titivating myself and nagging at Françoise if she had not laid out my things properly.

Even in Paris, at the slightest hint of a criticism, Françoise, who was so humble, capable of such charming modesty when her self-esteem was soothed by praise, would stiffen with offended pride, straightening her back, which was beginning to stoop with age. And as the pride she took in her work was what gave purpose to her whole life, her satisfaction and good humour were in direct proportion to the difficulty of the duties she was required to perform. At Balbec, her only tasks were so easy that she went about them with an air of discontent, which could be instantly intensified and aggravated into a grimace of ironic pride if I should complain, when I was about to set off to meet my girl-friends, that my hat was unbrushed or my ties in disarray. She did not mind putting herself to any amount of trouble; but if one so much as remarked that a jacket was not in the right place, not only did she take pleasure and pique in pointing out the care with which she had 'put it by, so as to not have the dust gather', but she would treat you to a diatribe on the subject of her tasks, the sad fact that this whole long time in Balbec was no holiday for her, and that you could never find another body to put up with it! 'I can't understand how a body can be expected to just drop everything, and you mark my words, nobody else would be able to! A mess like this – it's more than flesh and bone should have to cope with!' Or else she would look regal, wither me with a glare and say nothing, until, that is, she had left the room, closed the door and was walking along the corridor, which then echoed with words which I could surmise were insulting, but which were as indistinct as those uttered by characters coming on stage and already speaking as they emerge from the wings. Moreover, at these times when I was getting ready to go for an outing with the girls, even if everything was in order and Françoise was in a good mood, she could still show herself at her insufferable worst: she trotted out jokes which, in my need to speak of the girls, I had retailed to her, and seemed to think she was informing me of things which, if they had been true, I would have known more about than she did, but which were not true, because she had misunderstood something I had told her. Like everyone, Françoise had her own character: no one we know ever resembles a straight path; and we will always be astonished by every person's twists and turns, idiosyncratic, unavoidable and irksome as they may be, which others may not even be aware of, but which we have to put up with. Whenever my speech with Françoise reached the 'Hat not in the right place' stage or 'Mention of the name of Andrée or Albertine', she obliged me to follow her ludicrous rigmaroles along the highways and byways of her thought processes, all of which greatly delayed my preparations. The same happened when I asked her to make up sandwiches of Cheshire cheese and lettuce, or to buy some tarts, which I intended for a picnic later that afternoon, up on the cliffs, 'with those girls who (said Françoise) could surely have been expected to buy their own once in a while, if they weren't just out after what they could get', all her atavistic avarice and provincial vulgarity coming out in such statements, which could have made one think the soul of Eulalie, dead, departed and divided, had been reincarnated, more gracefully than in St Éloi, in the delightful persons of my little gang of girl-friends. I weathered these aspersions, galled to know that here I had reached one of the points where the familiar and rambling country lane of Françoise's character had just become impassable (though, fortunately, not for long). Then, the jacket having turned up, the sandwiches having been made, I would sally forth to meet Albertine, Andrée and Rosemonde, and at times others of the group, and together, on foot or on bicycles, we would set off.

There was a time when I would have preferred such outings to take place in dreadful weather, when I looked forward to Balbec as 'the land of the Cimmerians', a place where there could be no such thing as a sunny day, that anomalous intrusion of vulgar sea-bathers and their summer into my ancient land wreathed in its mists. Now, however, everything I had disdained, everything my eyes had shunned, not just the sparkle of the sunlight, but even the regattas and the horse-racing, I would have passionately participated in, and that for the same reason which once made me yearn only for raging seas, which was that all of these things, then as now, were linked to an aesthetic idea: the girls and I had been together to Elstir's, and on those days what the artist had shown us in particular was sketches he had pencilled of pretty yachtswomen, or a drawing done at a race-course not far from Balbec. With some diffidence, I had told Elstir of my reluctance to go to the events which took place there. 'That's not the view to take, he said. They're very pretty and full of interest. Take that particular figure, the jockey, the centre of attraction: down in the paddock there he looks so dull, so featureless in his glowing colours, at one with the horse, reining it in as it wheels about – yet wouldn't it be interesting to grasp the technical movements he makes, to show the bright blob he makes, along with the glossy coats of the horses, out on the turf! Look at how all things are transformed in that vast and luminous space of the race-course, full of so many surprising effects of light and shade which you can see nowhere else! Look at how pretty the women can be! The first race-meeting I went to was especially magnificent, with women of exceptional elegance, amid a wash of moist light, a Dutch light, and you could sense the penetrating chill from the water reaching up into the sunlight. I'd never seen women arriving in carriages, and looking through their binoculars, bathed in that sort of light, which must be saturated by the air off the sea. How I wished I could capture it! I went home from that race-meeting with my head reeling, bursting with the urge to paint!' Elstir spoke even more lyrically about yachting events than about horse-racing, which made me realize that for a modern artist regattas and gatherings of sportsmen, where women are suffused by the glaucous glow of a seaside race-course, could be a study fully as captivating as the ceremonial celebrations which Veronese and Carpaccio so liked to depict. 'Your comparison is especially apt, Elstir said, given that in the city where they painted, those celebrations were partly nautical. Except that the beauty of the vessels of that period lay often in their cumbersomeness and intricacy. As is also done here at Balbec, they held jousting on the water, usually in honour of a visiting embassy, like the one Carpaccio shows in *The Legend of St Ursula*. The ships were massive, built like cathedrals, and they looked almost amphibious, like smaller Venices within the real one, when they were moored to landing stages, draped with crimson satins and carpeted by Persian rugs, and carrying women in cherry-coloured brocades or green damask, close to balconies inlaid with multicoloured marble, where other women would lean out to get a good view, in gowns with black sleeves with white slashes in them thick with pearls or adorned with point lace. It was unclear where the land finished and the water began, what was still palace or possibly ship, a caravel, a galleas, the Bucentaur.' With passionate concentration, Albertine listened to these details of dress and adornment, and gloated upon Elstir's images of luxury: 'Oh, I'd love to see point lace like that! Venice lace is so pretty! I'd really love to go to Venice. – Well, said Elstir, before long you may be able to gaze on the wonderful fabrics they used to wear in Venice. It has been impossible to see them except in the canvases of Venetian masters, or sometimes among the relics and ornaments of a church, though now and again a garment would come up for auction. But I'm told that a Venetian artist, Fortuny[102] by name, has rediscovered the secret of their manufacture and that within a few years women will be able to walk out, or sit at home more likely, wearing brocades as magnificent as any which Venice, to grace its great ladies, ever adorned with designs from the Orient. To tell you the truth, I' m not sure I would fancy that, or whether it might not be rather too much your "period costume" for women of today, even when they're on display at a regatta, because after all, to revert to our modern pleasure craft, they're quite different from those of the time when Venice was "Queen of the Adriatic". The most charming thing about a yacht, about its fittings and the things people wear for yachting, is that they're so simple, it's their seafaring simplicity – and I do so love the sea! I don't mind saying I prefer today's styles to those of the time of Veronese and even Carpaccio. If there's one really pretty thing about yachts, medium-sized yachts, I mean, not your great enormous ones which are more like ships – as with hats, there is a limit – then it's the plain and simple, the pale and the grey, which on hazy blue days takes on a creamy, blurred quality. The cabin where you sit should feel like a little café. And it's the same with women's clothes on board a yacht: the really graceful ones wear things that are light and white and plain, linen, lawn, duck, twill, which when you see them in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea are as white as the white of a sail. Actually, very few women dress well, although there are some who are quite exquisite: Mlle Léa at the races, for instance, with a little white hat and a little white sunshade – just delightful, I tell you. I would give a lot to have that little sunshade.' I would have given a lot to understand what it was that made this little sunshade different from other sunshades; and for different reasons, related to feminine pleasure in appearance, Albertine would have given even more. But as Françoise used to say of her soufflés, 'There's a knack to it,' and the difference lay in the lines of the thing: 'It was just small and round, like a Chinese parasol,' Elstir said. I mentioned the sunshades of particular women, but no, it was nothing like them. Elstir thought all these other sunshades were dreadful. He was a man of exact and exacting

tastes, for whom a mere nothing, which was really everything, made the difference between what was worn by three-quarters of the women in the world, which he detested, and a single pretty thing which he thought charming, and which, unlike me (for I found luxury to have a numbing effect on the mind), filled him with the desire to paint and 'try to make something as nice as that'. 'You see that girl there – she's someone who knows all about how that hat and sunshade looked,' Elstir said, with a nod towards Albertine, who was gazing at him with a greedy gleam in her eye. – Oh, I'd love to be rich and have a yacht! she said to the painter. I'd ask your advice about fitting it out. Think of the lovely trips I could have in it! Wouldn't it be lovely to sail across to Cowes for the regatta! What about a car, too? Do you think women's fashions for motoring are nice? – No, I don't, Elstir said. But that will come. There are so few dress-designers, you see, only one or two: Callot, for instance, though they go in rather too much for lacy things, Doucet, Cheruit and from time to time Paquin.[103] But all the others are just rubbish. – So, is there such a huge difference between an outfit by Callot, say, and an average dressmaker? I asked Albertine. – Huge is the right word, young fellow! she replied. Oh, sorry! The only problem is, alas, that they charge you 2,000 francs for what you can get for 300 somewhere else! But of course, it never looks the same – except to people who've got no idea, that is. – Precisely, Elstir said. Though I wouldn't want to say the difference is as far-reaching as between a statue on the cathedral at Rheims and a statue in Saint-Augustin.[104] Speaking of cathedrals,' he said to me, alluding to a conversation which the girls had taken no part in, and which would have been of no interest to them, 'remember what I was saying the other day about the church of Balbec looking like a great cliff, a great outcrop of the stone of these parts. Well, have a look now at the opposite, he said, showing me a water-colour. Look at those cliffs – it's a sketch done not far from here, at Les Creuniers[105] – see the power and delicacy in the way these rocks have been chiselled. Aren't they reminiscent of a cathedral?' They did resemble vast pink vaulted arches; but, having been painted on a very hot day, they appeared to have been turned to dust, pulverized by the heat which, across the full breadth of the canvas, had also reduced the sea by half, diluting it to a haze. Illuminated in that way, reality had been almost destroyed by the light, but had been concentrated in dark, transparent creatures which by contrast gave a more vivid and faithful impression of being alive: the shadows. Gasping for coolness, most of them had abandoned the blaze of the open sea to cower under rocks, out of the sun's reach; others swam slowly on the surface like dolphins sidling along by moving boats, their sleek blue bodies broadening the hulls on the top of the pale water. It may have been their suggestion of a longing for coolness which gave the greatest impression of the heat of such a day, and made me exclaim with regret at not being familiar with Les Creuniers. Albertine and Andrée assured me that I must have been there dozens of times. In which case, it must have been without my knowledge, without my so much as suspecting that a day might come when the sight of them would give me such a yearning for beauty, not exactly the natural beauty I had hitherto sought in the cliffs about Balbec, but rather an architectural beauty. I could never have thought – having come there to set eyes on the realm of gales and tempests, having been on outings with Mme de Villeparisis, when the ocean could only ever be seen in the distance, painted in the spaces between the trees, having never thought it real enough, liquid enough, alive enough, or giving a sufficient impression of the high seas tossing vast amounts of water about, having never wished to see it lie motionless except under a sheet of winter mist – that a day would come when the sea I would long for a glimpse of would be an expanse of whitish vapour, blanched of all consistency and colour. It was the enchantment of this sea that Elstir, like the people who dozed in those boats held comatose by the heat, had experienced so profoundly that he had been able to capture and set down on his canvas the imperceptible ebbing of the tide, the throb and thrill of a minute of happiness; and to see it in this magic picture was to fall suddenly in love with it, to be filled with the resolve to seek out that vanished day, somewhere in the world, and savour it in all the dormant immediacy of its charm.

Whereas before my visits to Elstir's studio (before I had seen in one of his seascapes a young woman wearing a dress of barège or lawn, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, who imprinted the spiritual replica of a dress of white lawn and a flag in my imagination, giving it an instantaneous and insatiable desire to set eyes on dresses of white lawn and flags by the sea, as though I had never seen such a sight before) I had always striven, when looking at the sea, to exclude from my field of vision not only the bathers in the foreground but the yachts with their sails as excessively white as beach-clothes, indeed anything which prevented me from having the feeling that I was gazing upon the timeless deep, whose mysterious existence had been rolling on unchanged since long before the first appearance of mankind, even the glorious weather which seemed to veil that foggy gale-lashed coastline behind summer's trite and changeless aspect, filling it with an empty pause, the equivalent of what is called in music a rest, now, however, it was bad weather which seemed to have become the unfortunate accident and to have no place in the world of beauty; and so, burning with the desire to go and seek out from reality what had so stirred me, I hoped the day would be fine enough for me to see from the cliff-top the same blue shadows as I had admired in Elstir's picture.

Nor could I continue, as we walked along, to blinker myself with my hands as I had done in the days when I conceived of nature as being animated by a life of its own, dating from before the time of human beings and out of keeping with all these futile refinements of industry which made me yawn with boredom at universal exhibitions or in dressmakers' displays, so as to see only the stretch of sea with no steamer on it, so as to go on imagining it as immemorial and still belonging, if not to that earliest era when it had been divided from the dry land, at least to the first centuries of ancient Greece, which enabled me to go on reciting to myself in all good faith the lines of 'old Leconte' that Bloch was so fond of:

> Ils sont partis, les rois des nefs éperonnées,
> Emmenant sur la mer tempétueuse, hélas!
> Les hommes chevelus de l'héroïque Hellas.[106]

To despise dressmakers was no longer possible, since Elstir had said that the deft and gentle gesture with which they give a final ruffle, a last caress, to the bows and feathers of a just-completed hat was as much a challenge to his artistry as any movement by a jockey, a statement which had delighted Albertine. However, I could not hope to see a dressmaker till my return to Paris, or a horse-race or a regatta till my return to Balbec, where no more were to be held until the following year. There was even a dearth of yachts with women on board wearing white lawn.

We would often encounter Bloch's sisters; and, since I had dined at their father's table, I was obliged to greet them. My new friends did not know them. 'I'm not allowed to be friends with children of Israel,' Albertine said. Her way of pronouncing 'Issrael' rather than 'Izrael' would have been enough to let you know, even if you had not heard the beginning of her sentence, that the chosen people did not inspire warm feelings in the bosoms of these daughters of the middle class who, with their good Catholic upbringing, probably believed that Jews fed on the flesh of infant Christians. 'And anyway, there's something quite unseemly about your girl-friends,' said Andrée, with a smile which meant she knew perfectly well they were not my friends. 'As there is about the whole tribe,' added Albertine, in the worldly-wise tone of the woman of experience. The fact was that Bloch's sisters, over-dressed but half-naked, managing to look both languid and brazen, resplendent and sluttish, did not create the best of impressions. And one of their cousins, a girl of no more than fifteen, shocked everyone at the Casino by her flagrant admiration for Mlle Léa, who, as an actress, was much to the taste of M. Bloch the elder, although her own tastes were reputed not to extend to gentlemen.

On some days, we would take tea in one of the neighbourhood farmhouse-inns. These are the farms known as Les Écorres, the Marie-Thérèse, the Croix-d'Heuland, the Bagatelle, the Californie and the Marie-Antoinette. It was the last of these that the little gang of girls had adopted.

Sometimes, though, instead of stopping at one of the farmhouses, we climbed to the top of the cliff; and having reached our destination, we would sit on the grass and unwrap our sandwiches and cakes. The girls all preferred sandwiches and exclaimed at seeing me eat only a chocolate cake, with its Gothic architecture of icing, or an apricot tart. But sandwiches of Cheshire cheese and lettuce, untried and unknowing fare, had nothing to say for themselves. Whereas cakes were privy to much, and tarts were talkative. In cakes, there was a cloying creaminess, and in tarts, a refreshing fruitiness, which were aware of many things about Combray and about Gilberte, and not just the Gilberte of Combray days, but the Gilberte of Paris too, for I had renewed my acquaintance with them at her afternoon teas. They brought back the illustrated *Arabian Nights* side-plates which had once afforded such a variety of entertainment to my Aunt Léonie,

depending on whether Françoise brought her one day *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp* or on another day *Ali Baba* or *The Sleeper Awakes* or *Sinbad the Sailor Taking Ship at Basra with All his Riches*. I wished I could see them again, but my grandmother did not know what had become of them; and in any case she believed they were just vulgar old plates, which had been bought locally. Even so, their multicoloured vignettes glowed among the greyness of Combray-in-Champagne,[107] like the shimmer of the jewelled windows in the dark of its church, the illuminations from the magic lantern in the twilight of my bedroom, the buttercups from the Indies and the lilacs from Persia in the foreground of the view of the railway-station and the little local line, or the collection of old Chinese porcelain at my great-aunt's, an old lady's gloomy house in a country town.

Lying there on the cliff-top, I could see nothing but meadows; and above them stretched not the seven superimposed heavens of Christian physics, but only two, one of which was darker – the sea – and the other, on top of it, lighter. We would enjoy our picnic; and then, if I had brought with me a trinket of some sort which I thought one or other of the girls might like to have, their translucent faces would instantly turn red with such a vehement surge of joy that their mouths could not contain it, and they would burst into laughter. They were grouped about me; and between their faces, which were close together, the airy spaces were like azure paths, such as a gardener might make so as to move about in his garden of roses.

Once we had eaten, we would play at games which would hitherto have seemed boring to me, some of them real children's games, such as 'The King of the Barbarees' or 'Who's Going to Laugh First?', but which now I would not have missed for anything; the dawn-flush of youth which still glowed in the faces of the girls, which had already faded from mine, shone on everything about them and, like the fluid painting of certain primitives, brought out against a background of gold the most insignificant details of their lives. The faces of most of them were indistinctly suffused by their daybreak's indiscriminate bloom, concealing the real features which would one day show through. All that was visible was an enchantment of colouring, behind which the profile of years to come was not yet distinguishable. The present profile was quite undefinitive; it might have been nothing more than a transient likeness to some long-dead relative, to whom nature accorded this commemorative acknowledgement. The moment comes so soon when there is nothing left to hope for, when the body is static, held in a state of immobility which promises no further surprises, when disappointment sets in at the sight of faces which, though still youthful, are framed by hair already thinning or fading, like leaves hanging dead on midsummer's trees, when the brevity of their radiant early morning makes one able to love only very young girls, in whom the unleavened flesh, like a precious dough, has not yet risen. They are malleable, a soft flow of substance kneaded by every passing impression that possesses them. Each of them looks like a brief succession of little statuettes, representing gaiety, childish solemnity, fond coquettishness, amazement, every one of them modelled by an expression which is full and frank, but fleeting. This plasticity lends much variety and great charm to a girl who is trying her best to be nice to us. These qualities are of course indispensable in the grown woman too; and in our eyes, any woman who does not like us, or does not show that she likes us, takes on a depressing uniformity of manner. But after a certain age, even such graces are reflected only faintly in a face which the struggles of life have hardened into an immutable mask of righteousness or ecstasy. One face, through the relentless workings of the obedience which subjects helpmeet to husband, resembles a soldier's rather than a wife's; another, sculpted by the sacrifices which a mother makes day in, day out, for the sake of her children, is an apostle's. A third, after years of hopes blighted and storms weathered, is the face of an old sea-dog, in a woman whose clothes alone reveal her sex. Of course, the loving attentions of a woman we love can still enchant the hours we spend with her. But she is not a series of different women to us. Her gaiety remains external to her unchanging face. Adolescence, however, comes before complete stabilization, and what is so refreshing in the presence of young girls is this spectacle of ceaselessly changing forms, reminiscent in its restless contrasts of that perpetual recreation of nature's primordial elements which we witness by the sea.

Fashionable gatherings and Mme de Villeparisis's invitations to carriage-outings were not the only pastimes I was willing to sacrifice to my games of ring-on-a-string and riddles with the girls. Robert de Saint-Loup had several times sent me word that, since I never went to visit him at Doncières, he had requested twenty-four hours leave, so as to come to Balbec. On each of these occasions I wrote to put him off, inventing the excuse of a family visit which I said I was obliged to make that very day with my grandmother. He must have thought badly of me when he learned from his aunt the nature of this family visit and the identity of the people who were my grandmother for the occasion. Yet in sacrificing not just the joys of foregathering with the fashionable, but the joys of friendship too, to the pleasure of dallying the whole day in this lovely garden, perhaps I was not ill advised. Those who have the opportunity of living for themselves – they are artists, of course, and I was long since convinced that I would never be one – also have the duty to do so; and for them, friendship is a dereliction of that duty, a form of self-abdication. Even conversation, which is friendship's mode of expression, is a superficial digression, through which we can make no acquisition. We may converse our whole life away, without speaking anything other than the interminable repetitions that fill the vacant minute; but the steps of thought which we take during the lonely work of artistic creation all lead us downwards, deeper into ourselves, the only direction which is not closed to us, the only direction in which we can advance, albeit with much greater travail, towards an outcome of truth. Moreover, friendship is not just devoid of virtue, as conversation is, it is actively pernicious. Those of us whose law of growth is one of purely internal growth, and who cannot escape the impression of boredom inseparable from the presence of a friend, an impression which comes from having to stay at the surface of self, instead of sounding our depths for the discoveries which await us, can only be tempted by friendship, once we are alone, to disbelieve this impression, to let ourselves be retrospectively moved by the words spoken by our friend, to see them as the sharing of something valuable; whereas we are not like a building to which a brick or a stone can be added on the outside, but rather like a tree which distils from its own sap each new knot in its trunk and the next layer of its foliage. I lied to myself, I stunted my growth in the very direction which could lead me to genuine progress and happiness, each time I took pride in being liked and admired by a person as kind, as intelligent, as sought after as Saint-Loup, by adapting my mind not to my own confused impressions, which it should have been my duty to decipher, but to the words spoken by my friend, in which, as I repeated them to myself – or rather, as I listened to them being repeated by that person other than ourself who lives in us, and by whom we are always glad to be freed from the onus of thinking – I sought to find a mode of beauty, which was a far cry from the beauty I sought in the silence of my real solitude, but which I hoped might add merit to Robert, and to myself, while making my life more worthwhile. In the life which his friendship made for me, I could see myself as cosily protected from solitude, and full of a noble aspiration to self-sacrifice for his benefit, in a word, deprived of the power of self-realization. When I was with the girls, however, though the pleasure I took in being there was selfish, at least it was not founded on a lie: the lie which tries to have us believe we are not inescapably alone in the world, and which, when we converse with someone, prevents us from admitting that it is not we who are speaking, that at such times we try to take on the semblance of other people, rather than be the self which differs from them. When we spoke, which was not often, the things said by me and the girls of the little gang were without interest; and on my part, they were interrupted by long silences. This did not prevent me from listening to what the girls said with as much pleasure as when just looking at them, discovering through the voice of each of them the vividly coloured picture of her. It was a delight to listen to their piping chorus. Loving sharpens discernment and our power to make distinctions. In a wood, a birdwatcher's ear will instantly pick out the chirps and warbles peculiar to different species which the uninstructed cannot tell apart. The fancier of young girls knows that human voices are even more varied. Each of them has a wider range of notes than the most versatile instrument; and the combinations it can make of them are as inexhaustible as the infinite variety of personalities. When I chatted with one of the girls, I noticed that the outline of her individuality, original and unique, was ingeniously drawn and ruthlessly imposed upon me as much by the modulations of her voice as by the shifting expressions of her face, and that I was confronted by two performances, each of which rendered in its own mode the same singular reality. The lines of the voice, like those of the face, were not yet fixed once for all: the former would deepen, the latter would develop. As infants possess a gland whose secretions help them digest milk, and which grown-ups no longer have, the lilt of the girls' light voices struck notes which women's never reach. On their more adaptable instrument they played with their lips, with all Bellini's musical cherubs' [108] diligence and ardour, which also belong exclusively to youth. Later they would lose their accents of eager earnestness, which gave a charm to whatever they said, however simple it was, whether it was the authoritative voice used by Albertine for making puns, which the younger ones listened to admiringly until, with the irresistible violence of a sneeze, they suddenly burst into giggles, or the essentially childish solemnity with which Andrée spoke of their school-work, which was even more child's play than their play;

and their words struck strangely different notes, like those strophes from ancient times in which poetry, still seen as not far removed from music, was chanted on a range of tones. In each of the voices there somehow managed to sound the viewpoint on life already adopted by these green girls, a bias with such an individuality to it that to define them by common terms such as 'She takes everything with a laugh,' or 'She always lays down the law,' or 'She's forever in a state of cautious expectation,' would be to use a statement far too broad in its application. The features of our face are little more than expressions ingrained by habit. Nature, like the catastrophe at Pompeii or the metamorphosis of a nymph, freezes us into an accustomed cast of countenance. In the same way, the intonations of our voice express our philosophy of life, what one says to oneself at each moment about things. The facial features of these girls did not, of course, belong just to them: they belonged to their parents. As individuals, each of us lives immersed in something more general than ourselves. Parents, for that matter, do not hand on only the habitual act of a facial and vocal feature, but also turns of phrase, certain special sayings, which are almost as deeply rooted and unconscious as an inflection, and imply as much as it does a point of view on life. It is true that there are some of these set phrases which parents cannot hand on to young girls until they are of less tender years, usually after they have married. Such expressions are held in reserve. If, for example, the talk turned to the paintings of a certain friend of Elstir's, Andrée, with her girlish waist-length hair, was not at liberty to say of him what her mother and married sister might have said: 'I'm told that, *as a man*, he is quite a charmer.' But one day, like the permission to walk in the gardens of the Palais-Royal, that would come. Certainly Albertine had been saying since the time of her first communion, copying one of her aunt's lady-friends, 'Well, I think that would be pretty terrific.' Another present she had received was her way of having you repeat things you had just said, so as to appear interested in the subject and give herself the air of wishing to form a personal view on it. If someone said the work of this or that painter was good, or that he had a nice house, she would say, 'So his work's good, is it?' or 'Is that so, a nice house?' Also, more general features than these family heirlooms were the body and redolence given to their whole speech by the far-flung regions of France from which their voices came, and which flavoured their intonations. Whenever Andrée gave a sharp twang to a deep note, she could not prevent the Périgourdine string in her vocal instrument from singing its little provincial song, in harmony with the south-western purity of her profile; and Rosemonde's perpetual pranking and skittishness were a perfect match for her regional accent, which could not help shaping the northern substance of which her face and her voice were made. My ear enjoyed the bright dialogue between the province of origin and the temperament producing each girl's inflections, a dialogue which never turned to discord. Nothing can come between a girl and the part of the country from which she hails: she is it. Such reaction of local materials on the genius of the one who exploits them, and whom it invigorates, does not make the outcome less individual; and whether the work produced is that of an architect, a cabinet-maker or a composer, its minutely detailed reflection of the most distinctive touches of the artist's personality is no less faithful because he had to work in the coarse burr-stone of Senlis or red sandstone from Strasbourg, because he put to good use the knots peculiar to ash, because his writing took account of possibilities and limitations in the sound-range offered by the flute or the viola.

I was aware of all this, and yet we hardly ever had a conversation! With Mme de Villeparisis or Saint-Loup, my words would have made a show of much more enjoyment than I really felt, concealing the fact that they always wore me out; whereas when I lay among those girls, the full cup of my joy, unaffected by the insignificance and sparseness of what we said, brimming in motionless silence, overflowed and let the murmuring wavelets of my happiness lap and ripple among these young roses.

No convalescent who rests all day long in a flower-garden or an orchard is more aware of the scents of flowers and fruit, colouring the countless minutiae which sweeten his idle well-being, than I was of the tones and aromas that the presence of the girls fed to my feasting eyes, gradually permeating me with their deliciousness. Thus grapes mellow in the sunshine. The leisurely repetitiousness of the simple games we played had brought out in me, as in someone who just lies on a beach, relishing the salty air and the sun on the skin, a revelment in relaxation, a blissfully indulgent smile, an unfocussed daze of the delighted eyes.

Now and then one or other of the girls would favour me in a way which sent a shock-wave of pleasure through me and weakened my desire for any of the others. One day Albertine said, 'Who's got a pencil, then?' Andrée supplied it, Rosemonde proffered some paper and Albertine said, 'All right, ladies, I forbid you to read what I'm writing.' She took much trouble over shaping each letter, resting the paper on her knees; then she handed it to me, saying, 'Make sure no one can read this.' I unfolded it and read the words she had written: *I like you*.

'Look here!' she shouted to Andrée and Rosemonde, turning suddenly impetuous and serious, 'instead of sitting about writing silly things, why don't I show you this letter I got from Gisèle this morning. How stupid of me! It's been sitting in my pocket all this time, and it could be so useful to us!' Gisèle had had the idea of enclosing the composition she had written for her fourth-form examination, so that Albertine could show it to the others. The forebodings Albertine had expressed about the difficulty of the essays had been more than borne out by the two topics of which Gisèle had had to choose one: 'Writing to Racine from the Underworld, Sophocles commiserates with him over the failure of *Athalie*'; and 'Imagine that Mme de Sévigné, having seen the first performance of Racine's *Esther*, writes a letter to Mme de Lafayette to say how much she wishes the latter could have been there too' Gisèle, whose willingness to please must have touched the examiners, had chosen the first and more difficult of the two subjects, in which she had acquitted herself so well that her essay had been marked at fourteen out of twenty; and she had even been specially commended by the examiners. Altogether, they would have awarded her a pass with distinction, had she not 'come a cropper' in her Spanish exam. Albertine now read aloud to us the copy of the essay which Gisèle had sent: she was soon to sit the same examination herself and felt much in need of some advice from Andrée, who, being by far the cleverest of them all, might be able to give her some good tips. 'She's as lucky as anything! Albertine said. She got to choose one of the subjects her French teacher made her mug up when she was here!' Sophocles' letter to Racine, as drafted by Gisèle, began like this: 'Dear Racine, Do forgive me for presuming to write like this without having the honour of being personally acquainted with you, but your new tragedy *Athalie* suggests that you yourself have a close acquaintance with my own modest productions. You have put verse not only into the mouths of the protagonists (the leading characters of the piece) but have also composed other lines – full of charm, if I may say so without incurring a suspicion of toadying – to be spoken by the chorus, which some have said was quite a good thing in Greek tragedy, but is a real novelty in France. Furthermore, your talent, which is such a graceful one, so delicate, so charming, so fine, so painstaking, has displayed itself so consummately as to deserve my congratulation. In Athalie and Joad, you have brought off a pair of characters whom your rival Corneille could not have developed better. You present personalities who are forceful, and a plot which is simple and solid. Here is a tragedy without love as its mainspring, on which I compliment you most sincerely. The most famous precepts are not always the truest ones. Let me quote as an example what Boileau says about love:

> De cette passion la sensible peinture
> Est pour aller au cœur la route la plus sûre.[109]

You show that religious feeling, as chanted by your chorus, is no less capable of touching the heart. The vulgar may be disaffected, but true connoisseurs salute you. Please accept the warmest admiration of one who begs to remain, my dear Racine, your most humble and obedient servant, etc.'

As Albertine read, her eyes had been sparkling; and as soon as she had finished, she burst out: 'I bet you she copied it! I wouldn't think Gisèle could write a thing like this all by herself. I mean, look at the poetry she quotes – where do you think she pinched it?' Her admiration, now shifting its focus to Andrée, continued to make her eyes 'start out of her head', as did the close attention she paid to Andrée's words, when the latter, in her capacity as the most senior and the best at French, commented on Gisèle's essay with a touch of irony at first, then redrafted the letter in her own way, with an air of light-heartedness which barely concealed true earnestness. 'It's not bad, she said to Albertine. But if I were you, having to write on that subject – and that's perfectly possible, you know, because it's one they set quite a lot – I wouldn't do it like that. Here's what I'd do: for one thing, if I'd been Gisèle, I wouldn't have plunged in straight away. I'd have started by writing out my plan on a separate page: on the first line, the statement of the question and the setting out of the subject. Next, the broad ideas to be brought into the discussion. And then at the end, the appreciation, the style and the conclusion. If you follow an outline like that, you always know where you're

going. You see, Titine, right from the setting out of the subject, or if you like, since it's a letter, right from the opening salutation, Gisèle went and muffed it. I mean, if he's writing to a man in the seventeenth century, Sophocles shouldn't say "Dear Racine". – I know! Albertine interjected, full of passion. She should've made him say "My dear Monsieur Racine". That'd be much better. – Not at all, Andrée replied in a slightly supercilious voice. She should have put just "Sir". And at the end she should have put something like "While assuring you of the high esteem in which I hold you, I remain, Sir (or at the most Dear Sir), yours etc." Also, Gisèle says the chorus is a novelty in *Athalie*, but she's forgetting *Esther*, as well as two other little-known tragedies that the examiner himself has just written an analysis of this year! So he's got a real bee in his bonnet about them and all anyone has to do to pass is mention them: they're called *Les juives* by Robert Gamier and *Aman* by Antoine de Montchrestien.'[110] As she spoke these names and titles, Andrée was unable to conceal a little smirk of indulgent self-satisfaction, which was not without charm. Albertine burst out: 'Andrée, you're a wonder! Write down those two titles for me. Just think – if I got that subject, even just in the oral exam, I could quote them straight away and really take his breath away!' (After that, every time Albertine asked Andrée to say the names and titles again, so that she could make a note of them, her well-read friend said she had forgotten them; and she never in fact repeated them.) 'The next thing,' Andrée said, in a tone of faint disdain for these more childish friends, though glad of their admiration, and investing more self-esteem than she meant to show in this matter of how she would have dealt with the essay, 'is that Sophocles in the Underworld is bound to be well informed – he must know that *Athalie* wasn't performed for the vulgar, but for the Sun King himself and a few privileged courtiers. Mind you, what Gisèle says about true connoisseurs is really quite good, but it doesn't go far enough. I mean, Sophocles is now immortal, so it would be quite all right for him to have the gift of second sight, and be able to predict that Voltaire will come along and say *Athalie* is "not just the masterpiece of Racine, but of the whole human spirit".'[111] Albertine, her eyes glowing with concentration, was not missing a single word of what Andrée was saying: she declined indignantly Rosemonde's suggestion that they should start a game. 'And then,' Andrée said, in the same detached, casual voice, with a tone of slight mockery and rather heart-felt conviction, 'if Gisèle had bothered to note down the broad ideas she was going to include in her discussion, she might have thought of doing what I would have done: show the difference in religious inspiration between Sophocles' chorus and Racine's. I'd have made Sophocles point out that though Racine's chorus is as full of religious feeling as the choruses in Greek tragedy, it's not for the same gods. The God of Joad has got nothing to do with the god of Sophocles. And that would lead naturally into the concluding question, after the end of the development, "What does it matter that the beliefs are not the same?" Sophocles would make a point of insisting on this, not wishing to hurt Racine's feelings, and would then slip in a few words about the latter's masters at Port-Royal, by way of congratulating his rival on his high-minded poetic spirit.'

Albertine, warmed by her efforts of admiration and attention, had broken out in a sweat; whereas Andrée had the cool, self-possessed smile of a female dandy. 'It would be a good idea too to quote the views of a few famous critics,' she said, just before we started another game. 'So I've been told, Albertine said. The best opinions to use are usually Sainte-Beuve's and Merlet's, aren't they?' – You're not completely mistaken, said Andrée, still refusing to write down the other two names, despite Albertine's pleas. Sainte-Beuve and Merlet are quite good. But the ones you've *got* to quote are Deltour and Gasc-Desfossés.'[112]

I had been thinking about Albertine's little slip of paper torn from the note-pad: *I like you*; and an hour later, climbing down the paths back to Balbec, a little too steep for my liking, I was thinking she was the one who would be the great love of my life.

No doubt my state of mind, marked by the presence of symptoms which we usually interpret as meaning we are in love – such as the orders I gave at the hotel that I was not to be disturbed for any visitor, unless it was one or other of the girls; the palpitations with which I waited for whichever of them I was expecting to come; and my rage on those days if I had been unable to find a barber to shave me and was obliged to appear unkempt to the eyes of Albertine, Rosemonde or Andrée – and which shifted at will from one of them to the other, was as different from what we call love as human life differs from the life of zoophytes, in which existence or individuality, so to speak, is divided among different organisms. Yet natural history teaches that such an animal, thus organized, can be observed; and the life of any of us who have lived a little is no less instructive about the reality of states of mind of which we once lived in total ignorance, to which we are bound to come, though very likely also bound to grow out of at a later stage; and for me that was the loving state, simultaneously divided among several young girls, in which I lived. Divided, or rather undivided, for more often than not what I found delightful and different from everything else in the world, what had begun to endear itself to me so intensely that the sweetest joy in life was the hope of being with them again the next day, was really the whole group of girls, taken together, inseparable from those breezy afternoon hours up on the cliffs, on that stretch of grass where their faces lay, full of excitement for my imagination, Albertine, Rosemonde, Andrée making it impossible for me to know which of them made this place so precious, which of them I most longed to love. At the very beginning of love, as at its end, we are not exclusively attached to a single beloved: it is the yearning to love, of which that person will be the loved outcome, and later the echo left in the memory, which wanders voluptuously in a place full of charms – sometimes deriving only from contingencies of nature, bodily pleasures or habitation – interchangeable and interrelated enough for it to feel in harmony with any of them. Also, since my perceptions of the girls were at that time unsated by habit, whenever I was with them I was still able to see them, that is to be profoundly surprised by setting eyes on them. This feeling of surprise can be explained in part no doubt by the fact that it is a new side that the person shows us each time; but there is such multiplicity in each woman, such richness in the lines of her face and body, so little of which is preserved during her absence by our high-handed and simple-minded memory, it having opted to single out one particular feature of her which has struck us, to isolate and exaggerate it, turning a woman who appeared to be tall into a study in elongated disproportion, or one who seemed pink and blonde into a pure *Harmony in pink and gold*, that when we are once again in her presence we are beset by the complex confusion of all her other forgotten features, which balanced the one we have retained, and now reduce her height, dilute her pink, replacing the exclusive object of our anticipation with other particulars, which we now recall having noticed the last time and find it incomprehensible that we should not have looked forward to seeing again. Our recollection, our expectation was of a peacock; the reality is a bullfinch. Nor is this inevitable surprise the only one that awaits us: there is another sort that comes not from the disparate stylizations of the remembered and the real, but from the difference between the person we saw on the previous occasion and the one we have before us today, seen from a new point of view and now showing a hitherto undisclosed aspect. The human face is truly like that of a god in some Oriental theogony, a whole cluster of faces side by side, but on different planes and never all visible at once.

But then again, much of our surprise comes also from the very fact that the person does show the same aspect. It would take such a huge effort to recreate whatever we have derived from outside ourselves, even just the taste of a certain fruit, say, that as soon as we receive the slightest impression, we slide gradually down memory's gentle slope; and before long, without realizing it, we have gone a long way from what we really felt. Each new encounter is a readjustment, bringing us back to what we in fact saw. Faithful recollection of it was already lost, for what is called remembering somebody is actually a process of forgetting. For as long as we are still capable of seeing, however, no sooner does the forgotten feature impinge on our sight than we recognize it, and are obliged to straighten the line which had deviated; and so the rich and ever-ready surprise which made my daily encounters with these lovely young girls by the sea so beneficial and refreshing was a thing not only of discovery but of retrieval. Add to that the commotion inspired in me by what they meant to me (for that was never quite what I thought it would be; and what I looked forward to each time was not what I had looked forward to the time before, that having been supplanted by the thrill of the memory of our last meeting) and it will be clear that each of our outings suddenly turned my thoughts in a wholly unexpected direction; and this direction was never the one which, in the seclusion of my room at the hotel, I had foreseen and calmly reconnoitred. It was now forgotten, abolished, each time I came back to my room, my head buzzing like a hive with words which had stirred me and which went on reverberating for a long time in my mind. A person lost sight of is a person destroyed; a person who reappears is a new creation, different from the one before and possibly from all previous incarnations. The minimum of variety that can exist in such creations is two. When what stays in our mind is the vivid flash of a bold glance, inevitably what will take us by surprise in our next glimpse, almost solely strike us, that is, will be a look close to languid, a gentle and pensive expression, overlooked in the former memory. It is this which, in our comparison of memory with the new reality, will colour our disappointment or our surprise; and by its notifying us that our memory had been defective, it will seem to be reality itself which was in need of refocussing. Then the aspect of the face that was recently overlooked, having now become for that reason the most

unforgettable, the most real, the most accurately corrective, will itself become an object for us to dream about and recall. What we long for now is a soft, languorous look, an expression full of gentle pensiveness. Then the same thing will happen the next time: it will be the strange determination in the piercing eyes, the pointed nose and the tense lips which will cancel the disparity between our desire and the object it thought it had in mind. Of course, this fidelity to first impressions, the purely physical ones, which I re-encountered each time I saw the girls, was an effect not just of their facial features, since as has been seen I was also responsive to their voices (more responsive perhaps, for the voice not only offers the same singular and sensual surfaces as the facial features, it belongs to those unplumbable depths tempting us to the vertiginous peril of impossible kisses), in each of which sounded the unique note of a little instrument utterly expressive of its owner and playable by no one but her. A dark line in any of their voices, drawn by one of their intonations, surprised me each time I recognized it again, after having forgotten it. And the corrections I had to make, on each new occasion, so as to retrieve perfect accuracy, were as much those required of a tuner or a singing-master as of a draughtsman.

The various waves of feeling sent through me by the different girls, neutralized for a time by the resistance which each of them set against the expansion of the others, were held in a harmony of cohesion which was to be disturbed in Albertine's favour one afternoon during a game of ring-on-a-string. We were playing in a little wood on the cliff-top. My place was between two girls who did not belong to the little gang, who had been brought along just to make up the numbers needed for the game, and I kept gazing with envy at the person sitting beside Albertine, a young fellow, thinking that, if only I had been her neighbour during these minutes which might not come back, I could have known the fortuitous thrill of touching her hands, which might have led to all sorts of consequences. Even without such possibilities, the mere touch of her hands would have been a delight to me. Not that I had never seen hands more lovely than hers: without going beyond the little group itself, Andrée's hands were finer by far, slender and delicate, with a life all of their own, entirely docile and obedient, yet independent, often to be seen lying by her, like noble greyhounds, stretching lazily, idling in a dream or suddenly flexing a knuckle, postures in which Elstir had made several studies of them. In one of these studies, in which Andrée could be seen warming them by the hearth, they glowed in the firelight with the golden transparency of two autumn leaves. Albertine's hands, however, which were fleshier, briefly gave, then tensed, under the pressure of any hand that held them, responding with an unmistakable sensation. A squeeze from the hand of Albertine had a sensual softness which seemed at one with the slightly mauve pink of her skin: it made you feel as though you were penetrating her, entering the privacy of her senses, an impression one had too from her resounding laugh, which was as suggestive of indecency as any throaty murmur of invitation, or as certain cries. She was one of those women whose hand it is such a pleasure to take and hold that one is grateful to civilized convention for having made the handshake a licit act between young men and girls when they meet. If the arbitrary habits of politeness had replaced shaking hands by some other mode of contact, my days would have been spent in gazing at the untouchable hands of Albertine, pining for the feeling of them as acutely as I now yearned to be familiar with the taste of her cheeks. If I had been beside her in the game of ring-on-a-string, the joy of holding her hands between mine for a long time would not have been the only fulfilment I could foresee: what confessions, what declarations, unspoken by my shyness till now, I could put into this or that way of pressing her hand! How easy it would have been for her too, to hint in reply by other gentle pressings that she welcomed them! What complicity! What first steps towards sensuous delight! My love could make more progress in those few minutes sitting beside her than in all the time since I had known her. I could not bear it, just sitting there, knowing the brief time was running out, because this little game would very likely not last much longer, and once it was over it would be too late. So I made sure of getting caught holding the ring and had to take my place in the middle: then, while pretending not to see the ring passing from hand to hand, I kept an eye on it, waiting for it to reach the hands of the chap beside Albertine. She was laughing for all she was worth, pink and glowing with the joy and animation of the game. Andrée, with a nod towards the trees around us and an allusion to the words of the song, said, 'We're *in* the pretty greenwood,' and sent me a special smiling glance, as it were over the heads of the other players, as though she and I were the only ones clever enough to step outside ourselves for a moment and make a poetical reflection on the game we were playing. Though her voice sounded reluctant, her fine wit made her sing, 'The ring in the wood, my ladies, the ring in the pretty greenwood, as though she was one of those people who cannot go to Trianon[113] without organizing a party in Louis XVI costumes, or who think it is jolly to hear a song sung in the setting for which it was written. I too would have been pleased to see the charm of this arrangement, had I had the mental leisure to think of it. But my mind was on other things. All the players, boys and girls alike, were beginning to exclaim in surprise at my stupidity in not snatching the ring. I was engrossed in watching Albertine, sitting there in all her beauty, her gaiety and her indifference to me, unaware that she would soon have me beside her, as soon as I could catch the ring in the right hands, having first made sure that she could not suspect me of having done it by design, for this ploy, I knew, would only annoy her. Some of her long tresses having come undone in the heat of the game, clusters of curls hung about her cheeks, the crisp dark brown setting off the perfect pink of her complexion. Getting closer to her, I murmured in her ear, 'Your hair's like Laura Dianti's and Eleanor of Aquitaine's, or her descendant who was Chateaubriand's sweetheart.[114] I wish you would always let your hair hang a little loose like that.' The ring was suddenly in the hands of the person beside her: I grabbed at them, forced them open and snatched it; he was the one who had to take my place in the middle, and I sat myself down beside Albertine. Only a few minutes before, I had been envying this fellow who, each time I saw him slide his hands to and fro along the string, could touch hers. Now that I had the chance to do the same, I was too shy to seek her touch and too excited to enjoy it, conscious of nothing but the accelerated and painful thudding of my own heart. At one point, Albertine leaned towards me, a conspiratorial look on her plump pink face, pretending to have the ring, so as to trick the one in the middle into looking away from where it really was. I was perfectly aware that this feint was the purpose of her suggestive glances; yet there was a thrill in this glimpse into a secret shared between us, even one that was mere make-believe for the duration of a game, which, though non-existent, instantly seemed a possibility, a delicious consummation to be wished for. In that moment of intoxication, I sensed a tiny squeeze of Albertine's hand on mine, a faint caress of her finger between my own, and I caught a wink from her that she meant to be barely perceptible. All at once a host of hopes, which had been invisible to me, took firm shape, and my joy sang within me: 'She's taking advantage of the game to let me know how much she likes me!' My song was cut off by a furious stage-whisper from Albertine: 'Take the thing, would you! I've been trying to pass it to you for about half an hour!' Abashed and deflated, I lost my grip on the string; the chap in the middle saw the ring and dived on it; and I had to go back into the middle, where, as the shuffling hands did their frantic shuttle round me, I stood desperate and despised, the butt of all the girls' scorn, trying to laugh it off when I felt like crying, while Albertine kept saying, 'People that don't want to play properly or just try to spoil it for the others shouldn't play. Next time we want to play this, Andrée, we'll just make sure he doesn't come. Or if he does come, then I shan't.' Andrée, who found the game too easy and who was still singing her little 'Greenwood' song, which Rosemonde had taken up too, in half-hearted imitation, said to me, trying to make up for Albertine's complaints, 'You know Les Creuniers that you said you wanted to see – they're not far from here, along a lovely little lane. If you like, I'll take you there, and these sillies can stay here and go on behaving like eight-year olds.' Andrée was always very nice to me, so as we walked I told her everything about Albertine that might endear me to the latter and make her love me. Andrée said she was also very fond of Albertine and thought she was a dear; but the complimentary things I said about her friend did not seem much to her liking. Then, half-way down the little lane, I stood still, as the soft flutter of a childhood memory brushed my heart: I had just recognized, from the indentations of the shiny leaves which overhung the threshold, a hawthorn bush, which since the end of spring, alas, had been bare of all blossom. A fragrance of forgotten months of Mary and long-lost Sunday afternoons, beliefs and fallacies surrounded me. I wished I could grasp it as it passed. Andrée, seeing me pause, showed her charming gift of insight by letting me commune for a moment with the leaves of the little tree: I asked after its blossom, those hawthorn flowers which are like blithe young girls, a little silly, flirtatious and faithful. 'Those young ladies left long ago,' said the leaves, possibly reflecting that, for someone who professed to be such a close friend, I was very uninformed about their habits. I *was* a close friend, though one who, despite his promises, had lost touch with them for many years. Yet, just as Gilberte had been my first sweetheart among the girls, they had been my first among the flowers. 'Yes, I know, I replied, they go away about the middle of June. But it's a pleasure to see the spot here where they lived. My mother brought them up to see me in my bedroom at Combray, when I was ill. And we used to meet in church on Saturday evenings during the month of Mary. Are they allowed to go here too? – Of course! My young ladies are actually much in demand at the nearest

parish church, Saint-Denis-du-Désert. – One can see them now, you mean? – No, no, not till the month of May next year. – And can I be sure they'll be there? – Every year, without fail. – I'm just not sure I can find my way back to this exact spot … – Of course you will! My young ladies are so gay, they never stop laughing, except to sing hymns – you can't mistake them, you'll recognize their perfume from the end of the lane.'

I walked back towards Andrée and went on singing Albertine's praises. I spoke so emphatically that I had no doubt she was bound to repeat my words to Albertine. Despite which, I was never to learn that Albertine heard a word of what I said about her. And yet Andrée was vastly more perceptive in things of the heart, more gifted with considerateness: to be nice to others with a carefully chosen word or a thoughtful glance, to keep to herself a remark which might hurt somebody's feelings, to sacrifice (while making it appear that it was no sacrifice) an hour of possible play-time, even an outing to a matinée or a garden-party, for a friend who was feeling sad, so as to show him or her that she preferred such simple moments to indulging in frivolous pastimes, these were everyday acts of kindness for Andrée. Then, when you came to know her a little better, she put you in mind of those people whose poltroonery, through their reluctance to be afraid, can rise to heroism of a particularly meritorious kind: it seemed as though in her heart of hearts there was no trace of the constant kindness which, out of moral nobility, responsiveness to others and a magnanimous desire to appear the devoted friend, so marked her conduct. From the charming things she said about the possibility of Albertine and me loving one another, one might have thought she would do everything conceivable to bring it about. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, despite all the tiny things which it was within her power to do to bring us together, she never once did any of them; and though my own efforts to be loved by Albertine may not have made her friend resort to guile, with the aim of thwarting my desire, I wish I could swear they did not cause her anger; though if they did, she hid it well, and her own sense of decency may have made her resist it. Andrée's behaviour showed many touches of kindness that Albertine would have been incapable of; yet I had no conviction of Andrée's genuine goodness of heart, such as I later came to have of Albertine's. Andrée's soft-hearted indulgence of Albertine's exuberant frivolity expressed itself in words and smiles full of friendliness; and her actions too were those of a friend. I was to see her, day after day, trying to promote the happiness of this friend who was poorer than she was, by letting her share a little in the luxury she could afford; and without the slightest self-interest, she put herself to more trouble than a courtier seeking to ingratiate himself with a monarch. If anybody expressed sympathy with the plight of Albertine in her poverty, it was always Andrée, full of a plaintive gentleness, who found the words of sympathy and charm; and she put herself out for Albertine much more than she would ever have done for a friend who was rich. However, if anyone should hint that Albertine was perhaps not as poor as it might be thought, a faint cloud would veil Andrée's eyes and brow, and she seemed to be in a bad mood. If it was suggested that Albertine's marriage prospects might not be as bad as was supposed, Andrée scotched the notion and repeated in a furious tone, 'Of *course* the girl's unmarriageable! I don't need to be told – I think it's terrible!' As for myself, she was the only one of the whole group of girls who would never have repeated to me some hurtful thing that had been said about me; nor was this all – if I myself told her of some such thing, she would pretend to disbelieve it, or else she explained it away as meaning something quite innocuous. These qualities, taken together, are what is known as tact. It is to be found in the man who compliments you on having fought a duel, then adds that there was no need for you to take up the insult, thereby magnifying in your own eyes the courage you showed without being obliged to. Such a man is the opposite of those people who greet the same event with the words, 'What a bore it must have been to fight a duel! Although of course you couldn't let him get away with such an insult – you really had no choice.' However, there being pros and cons in all things, if the pleasure taken by friends in retailing to us something insulting said about us, or at least their indifference to its potential to hurt us, proves they are deficient in fellow-feeling, at least at the moment when they are speaking, sticking their pins into us, stabbing us with their knives as though we were some sort of stuffed dummy, then the contrary art of always hiding from us whatever nasty things they may have heard about our actions, or the private views they may have formed about these same actions, may prove that this other group of friends, the tactful ones, are experts in dissimulation. Not that there need be anything bad about that, if it means they are incapable of thinking evil, or if the evil spoken of us wounds them as they know it would wound us. This was the conclusion I came to about Andrée, though I could never be completely sure.

By now we were out of the little wood and into a network of rather deserted lanes, which Andrée followed without difficulty. 'Well, here we are! she said all at once. Here are Les Creuniers for you! And you're in luck – the weather today and the light are just as in Elstir's water-colour.' But the game of ring-on-a-string had knocked my high hopes from under me and I was too sad to take the pleasure I might otherwise have enjoyed in suddenly coming upon the sea-divinities whom Elstir had watched for and taken by surprise: there they were, directly beneath me, crouching among the rocks for protection against the rays of the sun, under the glow of a dark glaze as beautiful as any used by Leonardo, those wonderful furtively sheltering Shadows, nimble and soundless, ready at the slightest feint of light to slip under their stones or hide in a hole, and just as ready, once the threat from the rays had passed, to slip out again and lie awake beside the rocks or the seaweed, watching over them as they drowse drenched in the light of the cliff-corroding sun and the faded ocean, unmoving, insubstantial guardians, showing on the surface of the water the viscid shimmer of their bodies and the vigilant dark of their eyes.

It was time to go home, and we walked back towards the other girls. I knew now that I loved Albertine, but I was in no hurry, alas, to tell her: the fact was that, since the time when I had played at the Champs-Élysées, my notion of love had undergone a change, while those to whom my love was addressed, though they were consecutive, remained unchanged. For one thing, the confession of love, the declaration of my tenderness to her whom I loved, no longer seemed to be one of love's classic and indispensable scenes; and for another, love itself, instead of appearing to be a reality external to me, now seemed a subjective pleasure. I sensed that the less Albertine knew about this pleasure of mine, the more she would be likely to let me go on enjoying it.

All the way back to Balbec, the image of Albertine, flooded by the glow from the other girls, was not the only one I could see. But just as the moon, after spending the daylight hours in the guise of a white cloudlet, more shaped and stable than others, begins to come into its own as soon as daylight fades, so by the time I was back in the hotel, it was Albertine's image which rose to shine unrivalled above the horizon of my heart. My room suddenly seemed new to me. It had, of course, long since ceased to be the baleful bedroom it had been on my first night. We are tireless redesigners of the space we live in: gradually, as habit relieves us of the need to experience, we eliminate the pernicious elements of colour, dimension and smell which objectified our unease. By now, it was no longer even the room which retained power enough over my sensitivity, not to make me suffer, but to give me joy; it was not the reservoir of sunny days, like a swimming-bath half-way up the sides of which they dappled their azure, watery with light briefly blanked out by the fleeting reflection of a sail, as white and impalpable as a flash of heat; nor was it the purely aesthetic bedroom of the evening picture-displays; it was merely the room I had lived in for so many days that I had stopped seeing it. But now my eyes had just begun to open to it again, seeing it from the selfish viewpoint which is that of love. I fancied that, if Albertine should ever visit me here, the fine slanting cheval-glass and the handsome glass-fronted book-cases would give her a high opinion of me. Instead of being a mere place of transit, where I spent a moment or two before making my escape to the beach or over to Rivebelle, my room had once more become real and dear to me, had been renewed, because I could see and appreciate all its contents through the eyes of Albertine.

A few days after our game of ring-on-a-string, we had gone for such a long walk that, having reached Maineville, we counted ourselves fortunate to come upon a couple of little two-seater governess-carts, which would enable us to get back in time for dinner. The effect of my love for Albertine, which was already acute, was to make me suggest, not to her, but first to Rosemonde, then to Andrée, that either of them should ride with me; and then, despite having expressed this preference for Andrée or Rosemonde, I raised certain secondary considerations related to the time of night, the road to be taken and the coats being worn, thus convincing everybody that, though it was quite against my will, it would be preferable for Albertine to come with me; and I pretended to make the best of a bad job by having to accept her as my passenger. The trouble was, though, as love tends always towards complete assimilation of the loved one, and as no one is eatable through mere conversation, Albertine's being as pleasant as possible during our drive homewards was of no avail: after I had dropped her at her door, I was in a state of happiness, but also in a state of much greater hunger for her than before, and I saw the minutes we had just spent together as having no great importance in themselves, as being only a prelude to those which would follow. They did, however, have the charm there is in all beginnings, and which never comes back. So far I had made no demands on Albertine. Perhaps she imagined what I wanted of her; but, in her ignorance of what it really was, she could

suppose I had no particular end in view, other than some undefined relationship, in which she must savour that sweet, indeterminate sense, rich in expected surprises, which is romantic readiness.

Throughout the following week, I made little attempt to see Albertine. I pretended to prefer Andrée. With the beginning of love, one would like to go on being, in the eyes of the woman one loves, the lovable stranger; but we need her; and what we need of her, rather than the touch of her body, is to catch her attention, to impinge upon her heart. We sprinkle a little spite into a letter, to move her from indifference to a request for a favour; and the infallible logic of love, with its alternating arguments, locks us into its vicious circle, making it as impossible for us not to love as it is inevitable that we remain unloved. If the other girls went off to a matinée, I would spend the time with Andrée, knowing she gave up such things willingly, and would even have done so unwillingly, from a spirit of moral distinction, so as to avoid letting others, or even herself, suspect that she could see any point in participating in anything that smacked, however slightly, of society. In this way, I managed to monopolize her each evening, not with the aim of making Albertine jealous, but rather of rising in her estimation, or at least of not falling in it by letting her know it was herself I loved, and not Andrée. I said nothing of my love to Andrée either, in case she might repeat it to Albertine. When I spoke about her to Andrée, I feigned a cold demeanour, which may have fooled her less than her apparent credulity fooled me. She made a show of believing in my indifference towards Albertine; she made a show of wishing for the closest possible intimacy between Albertine and me. But it is much more likely that she doubted the indifference and had no desire for the intimacy. While I was assuring her of how little her friend meant to me, my mind was full of a single purpose: how to effect my introduction to Mme Bontemps, who had come to stay near Balbec for a few days, three of which Albertine was soon to spend with her. Naturally, I gave Andrée no hint of this purpose; and whenever I made a mention of Albertine's relations, my manner was very absent-minded. In the words that Andrée spoke in reply, there was no semblance of a doubt about my sincerity. But if that was really the case, why did she happen to say one day, 'I've actually just seen Albertine's aunt'? Now, she had not said, 'I know what you're up to: you keep talking in that off-hand way, but you're really thinking of getting in with Albertine's aunt.' Yet her use of the word 'actually' seemed to derive from some such idea, lurking in her mind, but suppressed by her as impolite. The word was of a piece with certain looks or gestures which, though they assume no logical or rational form designed to be communicable to the mind of the listener, contrive none the less to reach it with their true meaning, as human speech, having been converted into electricity by the telephone, turns back into speech for the purpose of being understood. From then on, so as to rid Andrée's mind of the idea that I was interested in Mme Bontemps, I made sure of speaking of the lady not just absent-mindedly, but spitefully: claiming to have met her once, I said she was crazy and that I hoped never to have to renew the experience. Whereas I was really doing whatever I could to meet Mme Bontemps.

I tried to persuade Elstir to recommend me and bring about a meeting with her (without letting anyone know that I had asked him to). He undertook to do this, though he expressed surprise that I should want him to, Mme Bontemps being, in his view, a scheming female beneath contempt, as uninteresting as she was self-interested. Realizing that, if I did meet Mme Bontemps, Andrée would hear of it sooner or later, I thought it prudent to tell her myself. 'The things you most want to escape are the ones you end up being unable to avoid, I said. I can't imagine anything more irksome than meeting Mme Bontemps, but I'm going to have to – Elstir has invited us to the same occasion. – I knew it all along!' Andrée exclaimed bitterly, gazing away at some invisible point, her eyes enlarged and flawed by displeasure. Her words did not add up to the most coherent expression of the meaning, which can be stated as follows: 'I am aware that you love Albertine and that you're moving heaven and earth to get in with her relatives.' But they were the shapeless fragments which could be reassembled into that meaning, which despite Andrée's best efforts I had provoked into explosion. Just like her use of 'actually', the level of meaning of these words was at one remove from them: they were of the kind which, though unrelated to a person's literal statements, may make us admire (or distrust) a person, or even bring about a falling-out between us.

Since Andrée had disbelieved me when I said Albertine's relations were a matter of indifference to me, it meant that she believed I was in love with Albertine, and very likely that this made her unhappy.

She was usually present when Albertine and I were together. But there were other times when I was due to see Albertine without her, each of which I looked forward to in a fever of expectation, then looked back on with the knowledge that it had brought about nothing of significance, that it had not been the great day I had hoped for, a hope I immediately transferred to the next one, which would not live up to it either; and so, one after the other, like waves, these pinnacles of promise rose, then broke, and were replaced by others.

About a month after the day when we played ring-on-a-string, I heard that Albertine was leaving the following morning, to go and spend two days at Mme Bontemps's, and that, because she was taking an early train, she would be spending the night at the Grand-Hôtel, so as to be able to take the bus to the station and catch the first train without disturbing the friends with whom she was staying. I spoke to Andrée about it. 'No, I don't think so, she said, looking discontented. Anyway, it would get you nowhere, because I'm pretty sure Albertine won't want to see you if she's spending the night alone at the hotel. It wouldn't be protocol.' (This was an expression Andrée had been using freely for some time, with the sense of 'It's not the done thing'.) 'I'm only telling you this because I know how Albertine's mind works. I mean, for all I care, you can see her as much as you like. It's all one to me.'

Octave the golfer soon came along and was glad to tell Andrée how many strokes he had gone round in the day before, then Albertine, who, as she walked, was as engrossed in playing with her diabolo as a nun might be in telling her beads. This game could keep her happily occupied for hours. No sooner had she joined us than the impertinent tip of her nose became apparent, having been omitted from my mental image of her over the previous few days; below the black hair, her forehead was vertical, as it had been more than once before, contradicting the indistinct shape of it left in my mind, while its whiteness was an eye-opener to me: Albertine, emerging from the dusty haze of memory, was once more taking shape. Golf encourages the development of solitary pleasures; and the pleasure of a diabolo is undoubtedly a solitary one. Yet, even though she was standing there chatting with us, Albertine went on playing with hers, after the manner of a lady who, despite the presence of visitors, does not lay aside her crochet-work. 'I'm told, she said to Octave, Mme de Villeparisis has complained to your father,' (and behind her way of saying 'I'm told' I could hear one of those tones which were peculiar to her: every time I noticed I had forgotten them, I simultaneously remembered having already glimpsed through them the set French face of Albertine. Even if I had been blind, they would have informed me, as accurately as did the tip of her nose, of some of her lively and slightly provincial qualities. In this, her nose and these tones were equal, interchangeable; and her voice was like the one which it is said will be part of the photo-telephone of the future: the sound of it gave a vivid picture of her). 'And she hasn't just written to your father, but to the Mayor of Balbec too, to get diabolos prohibited on the esplanade, because she got hit in the face by a ball.

– Yes, I heard about that complaint. It's ridiculous, when you think of how little there is here in the way of entertainment.'

Andrée took no part in this conversation, not being acquainted with Mme de Villeparisis, which was of course also the case with Albertine and Octave. However, she did say, 'I can't see why she had to make such a fuss. I mean, old Mme de Cambremer got hit by a ball too and *she* didn't complain. – I'll tell you the difference, Octave said in a serious tone, as he struck a match. If you ask me, Mme de Cambremer is a real lady and Mme de Villeparisis is just a vulgar upstart. You on for golf this afternoon, then?' And he went off, accompanied by Andrée, leaving me alone with Albertine. 'As you can see, she said, I'm doing my hair now the way you like it – look at this ringlet. Everybody makes fun of it and nobody knows who it is I'm doing it for. My aunt'll probably laugh at it too. And I won't tell her the reason either.' Her cheeks often looked pale; but seen from the side, as I could see them now, they were suffused and brightened by blood which gave them the glow of those brisk winter mornings when, out for a walk, we see stone touched and ruddied by the sun, looking like pink granite and filling us with joy. The joy that the sight of Albertine's cheeks gave me at that moment was just as keen, though the desire it induced was not for a walk, but for a kiss. I asked her whether what I had heard about her plans was true. 'Yes, she said, I'm to sleep tonight at your hotel – and actually I'll be going to bed before dinner, because I've got a bit of a cold. So you can come up and sit by my bedside while I'm having my dinner. Then we can play at something, whatever you like. I'd've liked you to come and see me off in the morning, too, but it might look a bit funny – not to Andrée, mind you, she's too sensible, but to the others who'll be at the

station. And if it got back to my aunt, there could be trouble. But at least we can have an evening together – and my aunt won't know a thing about *that*. I'm just off to say cheerio to Andrée. So I'll see you shortly. Come soon, so's we can have a nice long time all to ourselves,' she added with a smile. Her words carried me back further than the time when I had been in love with Gilberte, to the days when love had seemed to be a thing that was not only external to myself, but achievable. While the Gilberte I had known at the Champs-Élysées was a very different girl from the one I knew so well in the privacy of my solitary heart, here suddenly, the real Albertine, the one I saw every day, who I thought was hidebound in bourgeois prejudices and was so open with her aunt, had lent her form to the imaginary Albertine, the one who, at a time when I did not even know her, I had thought was taking furtive looks at me on the esplanade, the one who, when she saw me walking off, had seemed to be wending so reluctantly her own way home.

When I went in to dinner with my grandmother, I was full of the secret I carried within me and that she knew nothing about. Albertine too, the following morning, would be with her girl-friends, none of whom would know what was new between her and me; and when Mme Bontemps kissed her niece on the forehead, she would be unaware that I stood between them, that I was in that hair-style, the purpose of which, hidden to all eyes, was that I should be pleased, I who until then could only envy Mme Bontemps for being related to the same people as her niece, for having to wear mourning when she did and make the same round of family visits; yet here I was, meaning more now to Albertine than this same aunt. She would be with her aunt, but she would be thinking of me. As for what might take place between us later in the evening, I had no clear idea. But the Grand-Hôtel, and the evening before me, no longer seemed empty: they were the repository of my happiness. I rang the 'lift', to go up to the room Albertine had taken, which overlooked the valley. The slightest motions, the mere act of sitting down on the little seat inside the lift, were full of sweetness, because they were in direct touch with my heart; in the cables which hauled the lift upwards, and in the few stairs still to be climbed, I saw nothing but the workings of my joy and the steps towards it, materialized. In the corridor, I was only a few paces away from the bedroom inside which lay the precious substance of her pink body – the room which, however delightful the acts to take place in it, would go on being its unchanging self, would continue to seem, for the eyes of any unsuspecting passer-by, identical to all the other rooms, which is the way things have of becoming the stubbornly unconfessing witnesses, the conscientious confidants, the inviolable trustees of our pleasure. From the landing to Albertine's room it was a few steps, a few steps that no one could now prevent me from taking, and which, as though I was walking in a new element, as though what moved slowly aside to let me through was happiness itself, I took in a mood of utmost bliss and attentiveness, with an unfamiliar feeling of being all-powerful, of at last coming to claim an inheritance which had always been meant for me. Then it suddenly occurred to me that I was wrong to harbour any doubts: she had told me to come up after she had gone to bed. There could be no doubt! I could barely contain myself; I jostled past Françoise, who was in my way; I ran, with shining eyes, to the room where my sweetheart awaited me. I found Albertine in bed. Her white nightgown bared her throat and altered the proportions of her face, which seemed of a deeper pink, because of the warmth of the bed, or her cold, or her recent dinner; I thought of the colours which I had seen close at hand a few hours before on the esplanade, and which were now going to reveal their taste; her cheek was bisected from top to bottom by a lock of her long black wavy hair, which to please me she had completely undone. She smiled at me. Beside her, through the window, the valley was bright with moonlight. The sight of her naked throat and her excessively pink cheeks had so intoxicated me (that is, had so transferred reality from the world of nature into the deluge of my own sensations, which I could barely contain) as to have upset the balance between the tumultuous and indestructible immensity of the life surging through me and the paltry life of the universe. The sea, which through the window could be seen beside the valley, the swelling breasts of the closest of the Maineville cliffs, the sky where the moon had not yet reached the zenith, all of this seemed to lie as light as feathers between my eyelids, at rest upon eyeballs in which I felt the pupils had expanded and become strong enough, and ready, to hold much heavier burdens, all the mountains in the world, on their delicate surface. Even the whole sphere of the horizon did not suffice to fill their orbits. Any impingement of the natural world upon my consciousness, however mighty, would have seemed insubstantial to me; a gust of air off the sea would have seemed short-winded for the vast breaths filling my breast. I leaned over to kiss Albertine. Had death chosen that instant to strike me down, it would have been a matter of indifference to me, or rather it would have seemed impossible, for life did not reside somewhere outside me: all of life was contained within me. A pitying smile would have been my only response, had a philosopher put the view that, however remote it might be now, a day was bound to come when I would die, that the everlasting forces of nature would outlive me, those forces with their divine tread grinding me like a grain of dust, that after my own extinction there would continue to be swelling-breasted cliffs, a sea, a sky and moonlight! How could such a thing be possible? How could the world outlive me, given that I was not a mere speck lost in it – it was wholly contained within me, and it came nowhere near filling me, since, somewhere among so much unoccupied space, where other vast treasures could have been stored, I could casually toss the sky, the sea and the cliffs! 'If you don't stop that, I'll ring!' Albertine cried, realizing that I was attempting to kiss her. But I was convinced that any girl who entertains a young man in secret, after making sure that her aunt knows nothing of the assignation, must have an ulterior motive, and that in any case success lies in taking advantage of whatever opportunities are on offer; in my state of fevered excitement, Albertine's round face, glowing as though from an inner night-light, had acquired such relief that, in imitation of a rotating fiery sphere, it appeared to be turning like those figures by Michelangelo being carried away by a motionless, vertiginous whirlwind.[115] I was about to find out the scent and the flavour of this unknown pink fruit. I heard a sudden noise, jarring and long drawn out – Albertine was pulling the bell for all she was worth.

I had thought the love I felt for Albertine did not depend on any hope of physical intimacy. However, once that evening's experience appeared to have ruled out all possibility of possessing her, once I had exchanged my initial certainty, acquired on the very first day down by the beach, that she was unchaste, and my various later notions of her, for the definitive conclusion that she was thoroughly virtuous, and when she said to me coldly a week later, having come back from her aunt's, 'I forgive you and I'm sorry if I was nasty to you, but you mustn't ever do that again,' what followed was quite the opposite of what had happened when Bloch first informed me that women were there for the having: as though I had been in love not with a real girl, but only a wax doll, it turned out that my desire to enter her life, to go with her to see the places where she had spent her childhood, to be initiated by her into the sporting life, gradually detached itself from her; my intellectual curiosity about what she might think on this or that subject did not outlast my belief that I might be able to kiss her. My dreams forsook her as soon as they ceased to be swayed by the hope of possessing her, which I had believed did not affect them. They were then free to recruit one or other of Albertine's friends, if her charm impressed me on a particular day, and especially if I could see a possibility of being loved by her; and so I turned first towards Andrée. Yet, had Albertine not existed, I might not have taken the pleasure I took, more and more over the following days, in being the beneficiary of Andrée's attentions. Albertine had told no one of my fiasco in her bedroom. She was one of those sorts of pretty girls who, from earliest youth, because of their beauty, or more usually a charm of manner or appearance, which remains something of a mystery and may lie in a fund of vitality in which those who are less favoured by nature find something refreshing, have always been better liked – whether within the family, among their friends or in the wider world – than others who are more richly endowed with beauty or fortune; she was one of those of whom, before attaining the age of love and even more so after, much more is demanded than they demand of themselves, much more too than they have it in them to give. Ever since childhood, Albertine had been surrounded by four or five admirers, little girls of her own age, one of whom, far superior to her and aware of it, was Andrée – it may even be that this attractiveness of Albertine's, exercised by her quite unselfconsciously, had been one of the founding principles of the little gang. The influence of her attractiveness had been known to be felt far and wide, and even among people who were, relatively speaking, more exalted than her family: if, for instance, a pavane were to be danced, it was Albertine who was chosen rather than a girl of better family. A consequence of this was that, with no prospect of a dowry, and dependent as she was on M. Bontemps, who begrudged what she cost him, was said to be corrupt and would have been glad to have her off his hands, she was invited not only to dinner, but on week-end parties, by people who, though in Saint-Loup's eyes they might have been beyond the pale of fashion, represented unattainable heights for the mothers of Rosemonde or Andrée, women who, despite being very wealthy, could not aspire to the acquaintance of such people. So it was that, every year, Albertine would spend several weeks with the family of a man who was on the board of governors of the Bank of France, the managing director of one of the larger railway companies. This financier's wife was 'at home' to important people, yet had never mentioned her 'day' to Andrée's mother, who, though she thought this impolite of the lady, was still prodigiously

interested in everything that went on at her house. She too made a point of urging Andrée to invite Albertine down to their villa every year: it was, she said, a good deed, to enable a girl like that to enjoy a stay at the seaside, a girl who could never afford such a holiday and whose aunt neglected her. In this, Andrée's mother was probably not motivated by the hope that the governor of the Bank of France and his wife, on learning that Albertine had been singled out by her and her daughter, would look kindly on them; nor could she have hoped that Albertine, for all her kind heart and astuteness, would be able to get an invitation, if not for herself, then at least for Andrée, to one of the financier's garden-parties. However, each night at dinner, behind her pose of disdain and indifference, she was delighted to hear Albertine's tales of what had taken place at the château during her stay there, and of the people who had been invited, most of whom she knew either by sight or by repute. Even the thought that she knew these people only in that way, that is knew them not at all (what she called having known people 'for ever'), veiled Andrée's mother's mind with a faint melancholy, as she asked Albertine her stilted little questions about them in her haughty, off-handed way; and it might also have sown in her mind some faint doubt or a misgiving about the eminence of her own position in society, had she not reassured herself and returned to 'living in the real world' by saying to the butler, 'Tell chef his peas are too hard.' She went back then to being imperturbable. She was determined that Andrée should marry not just a man of excellent family (that went without saying), but one who was rich enough to allow her also to have a chef and two coachmen. This was a plain matter of fact, it was the simple truth of having a position. Yet the other fact, that Albertine had dined at the château of the governor of the Bank of France with Madame This or Madame That, and that one of these ladies had even invited the girl to be a house-guest the following winter, made Andrée's mother see her as deserving of a certain esteem, which went quite well with the pity, not to say the contempt, inspired by her unfavourable circumstances, the contempt being sharpened by the knowledge that M. Bontemps had turned his coat and become a supporter of the government – there was even a suggestion that he might have been slightly tainted by the Panama Affair.[116] Not that any of this prevented Andrée's mother, who was a lover of truth, from also turning the withering fire of her disdain on any who appeared to believe that Albertine was of lowly origin. 'Why, they're top-drawer! They're Simonets – with one *n*!' It was true that, given the social stratum in which all this took place, where money plays such an important part, where position in the world may consist with issuing an invitation, but not with a proposal of marriage, Albertine could not assume that a practical outcome of the esteem in which she was held by people of some distinction would ever be a fashionable marriage, since such people could never overlook her lack of means. Nevertheless, her successes, even devoid of any hope of a matrimonial consequence, still roused the envy and fury of the mothers of other marriageable girls, who were exercised by the thought of Albertine being treated 'like a daughter' by the wife of the governor of the Bank, and even by Andrée's mother, whom they hardly knew. So they took to telling mutual friends of theirs and these two ladies that the latter would be horrified if they but knew the truth: that they having been ill-advised enough to admit the girl to their family circle, she now regaled each of them with whatever she observed in the house of the other, retailing all sorts of tiny private matters which both of them would have been mightily distempered to have bruited abroad. In saying so, these envious ladies hoped it would eventually come to the ears of Albertine's two patronesses, and cause a falling-out. However, as is often the case, these attempts failed in their object: the malice behind them was too undisguised; and the only result was that the ladies who had devised them attracted more dislike to themselves. The attitude of Andrée's mother towards Albertine was too entrenched for her to change her view: though 'an unfortunate', the girl was gifted with great good-nature and took pains to be nice to people.

Albertine's general popularity, though it seemed unlikely to lead to any advantageous consequence, had ingrained in her the distinguishing characteristic of those who, by being always sought after, never need to make overtures (a trait which can be found, for similar reasons, in another remoter region of society, among the great ladies of the fashionable world), and who, rather than boasting of their successes, tend to conceal them. She would never have said of someone, 'He's dying to see me'; and she spoke of everybody with great good-will, giving the impression that she was the one seeking out others, trying to be liked by them. If one alluded to a young fellow who had just been cruelly berating her for not wishing to see him again, Albertine would sing his praises ('Such a *nice* chap!') instead of priding herself publicly on a conquest, or bearing him a grudge. In fact, she was put out by being so well liked, because it meant that she sometimes had to be unpleasant to people; whereas her natural inclination was to be pleasant. This inclination had even led her to adopt a form of lying, which is peculiar to people who like to be useful, or the type of man who has come up in the world. This mode of insincerity, which exists in embryo in a great many people, consists in the inability to be satisfied with the pleasure that can be given to a single person by a single act. If, for example, Albertine's aunt required her attendance at a boring reception, she did not think that in the gratification she afforded her aunt by going to it there was enough moral benefit to herself. So her response to the kindly welcome of their hosts was to assure them that, having been looking forward to meeting them for a long time, she had begged her aunt to let her come on this occasion. Even this struck her as insufficient; and if she came across one of her friends at the reception, someone who had reason to be heartbroken, Albertine would say, 'I didn't like to think of you being on your own, so I thought you might like me to keep you company. Perhaps you'd prefer us to leave and go somewhere else? I'll do whatever you like – I'd give anything for you not to be so sad' (which was, of course, quite true). However, there were times when the fictitious purpose destroyed the real purpose: on one occasion, she called on a particular lady, with the intention of asking her to do a favour for a friend; but at the sight of this warm-hearted lady, Albertine, responding all unawares to her own principle of the multifarious usefulness of the single act, thought it would be nicer if she could appear to have had no other reason for visiting the lady than the enjoyment she expected from her company. The lady was extremely touched to think that Albertine had come such a long way on an impulse of simple friendship. Albertine, seeing how affected the lady was, responded with an even stronger fondness for her. The trouble was, though, that she was herself so keenly affected by the friendliness which she had falsely said was her reason for being there that she was reluctant to ask the favour for the friend, in case the lady should doubt the sincerity of her feelings (which were in fact quite sincere). The lady might believe that the favour was Albertine's real reason for coming, which was true; but then she would assume that Albertine had no real pleasure in seeing her, which was untrue. The upshot was that Albertine would return home without having asked the favour, after the manner of those men who, having done a good turn to a woman in the hope of having their way with her, then keep their desire for her to themselves, so as to preserve a semblance of selflessness. On other occasions, it could not be said that the true purpose was sacrificed to the subsidiary one invented on the spur of the moment; but the real one was at such variance with the ostensible one that, had the person who was so touched by hearing the latter learned the former, all pleasure would instantly have been turned into a shock of mortification. Such contradictions will be clarified, eventually, by the rest of my story. They are, however, very prevalent, in even the most diverse circumstances of life, as can be shown by an example deriving from a very different order of experience. A married man brings his mistress down to live in the town where he is garrisoned. His wife, who is still in Paris, half-aware of how things stand, frets and broods, and pours her jealousy into letters to the husband. A moment comes when the mistress is obliged to go back to Paris for a day. Her lover finds her pleas that he should accompany her irresistible, and arranges to take twenty-four hours' leave. Then, because he is a good-hearted fellow and is sorry for the pain he causes his wife, he goes round to see her and says, with the help of a few sincere tears, that her letters have so disturbed him that he managed to get away, so as to bring her consolation and a kiss. He has thus contrived, with a single journey, to prove his love both to the mistress and to the wife. But if the wife should find out the real reason why he came back to Paris, her joy would no doubt turn to pain, unless of course the pleasure of being with the miscreant should outweigh the sorrow of knowing him for a liar. One of the men who seemed to me to be most diligent in applying this principle of the plurality of purposes was M. de Norpois. He had been known to step in and act as an intermediary between two friends who had fallen out; and for this he was seen as the most obliging of men. But he was not satisfied just to seem to be helping out the one who had come to ask his advice: when speaking to the other party, he would present his intervention, not as resulting from a request by the first friend, but as being in the interest of the second; and this he had little difficulty in doing, faced with a man whose mind was already prepared to believe he was dealing with 'the most helpful of men'. In this way, by hedging his bets, operating 'against' his client, as the parlance of the outside-brokers has it, he never jeopardized his influence; the services he rendered never had the effect of compromising his credit, but always of partly enriching it. Also, each of these services, seemingly doubly rendered, enhanced in that same measure his reputation as a dependable friend, and an effectively dependable friend at that, one whose aim is true, whose every stroke counts, as was attested by the gratitude of the two assisted parties. Such duplicity in obligingness (not unbelied at times, as in all human creatures) made up a

significant element of the character of M. de Norpois. At the Ministry, he often made use of my father, who was rather a guileless man, while letting him think he was being of use to him.

Being more popular than she would have liked, and having no need to trumpet her own triumphs, Albertine said nothing about our bedside scene, which a plainer girl might have wanted to share with the world. As for me, I could make no sense of the part she had played in it. My hypothesis about the thoroughness of her virtue (my initial explanation of the vehemence with which she refused to be kissed and possessed by me), though not indispensable to my conception of her fundamental goodness and integrity, had to be rethought and more than once reformulated. It was so diametrically opposite to the one I had formed on the day when I first set eyes on Albertine! Not only that, but the single act of brusque hostility, pulling the bell to thwart my designs, was set amid so many of her other acts, of a different sort, all of them well disposed towards me, whether affectionate or, as they sometimes were, anxious or alarmed, because of her jealousy at my liking for Andrée. So why had she invited me to spend the evening by her bedside? Why always speak the language of tenderness? What lies behind the desire to be with a friend, the fear that he might prefer one of your girl-friends, the intention to be nice to him, the romantic statement that none of the others will know he spent the evening with you, if you then refuse him such a straightforward pleasure, and if it is not in fact a pleasure for you? I could not accept that Albertine's virtue stretched quite that far; and I even began to wonder whether her violent reaction might not have been prompted by some other reason, such as squeamishness (if she had suddenly noticed a bad smell about her person, and thought it might offend me), or timidity (if she believed, in her ignorance of the realities of love-making, that my state of nervous debility might somehow be contagious, contractable from a kiss).

What was sure was that she was upset at not having been nice to me, and that she gave me a little golden pencil, acting on that virtuous perversity of people who are moved by the liking we inspire in them to do us a favour, not the one we would prefer, but some other: a critic, rather than writing a good review on a novelist, takes him out to dinner; a duchess, instead of including a social climber in her theatre party, lends him her box for an evening when she stays at home. Thus conscience, in those who do little and who could do nothing, makes them do something more. I told Albertine that I was very pleased by her gift of a pencil, but that I would have been better pleased if she had let me kiss her on the evening when she stayed at the hotel: 'It would have made me so happy! What difference could it have made to you? I'm surprised you didn't want to. – Well, *I'm* surprised you're surprised! she replied. What sort of girls must you be familiar with to be surprised at what I did? – I'm sorry if I upset you, but I can't say, even now, that I think what I did was wrong. If you ask me, it's the sort of thing which is utterly unimportant, and I can't see why a girl who could so easily be nice to someone won't do it. Mind you, I added, the memory of the girl who was friendly with the actress Léa, and the odium heaped on her by Albertine and her group of friends, making me concede a sort of semi-agreement with her ideas of morality, I don't mean girls can do just anything, or that there's no such thing as immorality. I mean, that Balbec girl you were all talking about the other day, who's supposed to be carrying on with that actress, well I think that's just disgusting – so disgusting, actually, that I can only assume it's not true, but was invented by the girl's enemies. It just strikes me as improbable, impossible in fact. But letting a chap that you like kiss you, and go even further, since you say you like me … – I do! But I've liked other chaps too. Believe you me, I've known other boys who were just as fond of me as you are. But there wasn't one of them who would've dared do any such thing! They knew perfectly well they'd have got a good slap in the face! Anyway, the thought never entered their heads – we just shook hands in the usual way, like ordinary good friends. No one would ever have thought of kissing, but that didn't stop us being close friends. Look, if you really want us to be friends, then you can count yourself lucky – I must be pretty fond of you to forgive you like this. In any case, I'm sure you're just having me on! Andrée's the one you really like – admit it! And I'm sure you're right – she's much nicer than me, and she's beautiful! Oh, you men!' That Albertine should speak so openly was balm to my recent hurt feelings; and this gave me a high opinion of her. The consolation I drew from her words may even have had, much later, far-reaching and grave consequences for me, because it contributed to the development of a sort of family feeling for her, a moral core which gathered in the centre of my love for her, and was to be for ever inseparable from it. Such a feeling can be the harbinger of acute suffering: for a woman to cause us great pain, there must have been a time when we trusted her implicitly. For the time being, this embryo of friendliness, of moral esteem, lay latent within me, a toothing stone for a future extension. Without that growth to come, if it had remained in the inert state in which it still was the following year, let alone during the last weeks of my first stay in Balbec, it would have been unavailing against my happiness. It lived in me like a quiescent parasite, which it would really be wiser to be rid of, but which one leaves to its own devices, undisturbed, harmless for the moment, weak and lost as it is in the further reaches of a foreign self.

My dreams were now free to recruit one or other of Albertine's friends, first and foremost Andrée, whose attentions to me might not have endeared her so much to me, had I not known that Albertine would be bound to be told of it. My feigned fondness for Andrée had already given me, in the form of our cosy chats and murmured confidences, a sort of outer semblance of love for her, which lacked only the sincerity of a feeling that my heart, in its new state of availability, could now have afforded. However, it was impossible for any love of mine for Andrée to be true: she was too intellectual, too highly strung, too prone to ailment, too much like myself. Though Albertine now seemed empty, Andrée was full of something with which I was over-familiar. At my first sight of her on the beach, I had supposed she was a racing cyclist's girlfriend, infatuated with the sporting life; yet Andrée now told me that, though she had taken an interest in sports, it was only on the advice of her doctor, who recommended it as a way of treating her neurasthenia and her eating difficulties, and that she was actually never happier than when translating into French a novel by George Eliot. This disappointment, the outcome of my own misconception about her, was actually of no consequence for me. But it was a misconception of the kind which, though they may foster the onset of love, and may not be recognized as misconceptions until love is beyond containment, can also foster sorrow. Such misconceptions (including some which differ from mine about Andrée, or which may even be the opposite of it) can be abetted by the fact – and this was exactly Andrée's case – that, in our desire to be seen as someone we are not, we take on enough of the appearance and the ways of that someone to create an illusion at first encounter. To that outward appearance, affectation, imitation and the desire to be admired, either by the righteous or the unrighteous, add the misleading effects of words and gesture. Many a figment of cynicism or cruelty does not stand the test of closer acquaintance, any more than some acts of apparent goodness or generosity. A man renowned as a champion of charity can turn out a self-conceited skinflint; by showing off as though shameless, a simple girl full of the primmest prejudices can seem a Messalina. I had taken Andrée for a healthy, uncouth creature, whereas she was only a person seeking health, like many people in whom she herself may have seen evidence of rude health, but who came no closer to it than an overweight arthritic with a red face and a white flannel blazer comes to being a Hercules. In certain circumstances, our happiness may be compromised by the discovery that someone in whom we loved an appearance of good health is really an invalid, in whom the good health is as second-hand, as borrowed, as the light shed on us from the planets, or the electricity that certain inert bodies can conduct.

However, Andrée, like Rosemonde and Gisèle, and even more than they, was a friend of Albertine's, sharing her life, and imitating her ways so much that, at my first sight of them, I had been unable to tell which of them was which. My bevy of girls, like long-stemmed roses, whose main charm was that they stood against the blue background of the sea, was as indivisible now as in the days when its members were strangers to me, when any one of them only had to appear, for me to be seized by the thrilling expectation that the whole group must soon come and join her. A moment with one of them could still give me a pleasure which was indefinably mingled with the joy of knowing that the others would be along soon; and, even if they did not turn up that same day, I had the joy of talking with her about them, and of being sure they would be told I had been down to the beach.

My feeling was no longer the simple attraction of the first days: it was an incipient tentative love for each or any of them, every single one of them being a natural substitute for any of the others. My greatest sorrow would not have been to be forsaken by the one I preferred: I would have instantly preferred the one who forsook me, since that would have focussed on her the whole indeterminate mist of sadness and romance through which I saw them all. In that eventuality, it was all the others, in whose eyes I would soon come to lose all prestige, whom I would have unconsciously missed through my yearning for the forsaker, my collective love for them being of the sort felt by a politician or an actor who, having once basked in the approval of electors and audiences, cannot bear to fall from their favour. The sweets I had not managed to taste in Albertine's arms I went on expecting to enjoy with one or other of her friends, each of whom could

suddenly attract my desire to herself, for a day at a time, merely by taking leave of me the evening before with a word or a glance into which I could read an ulterior meaning.

This desire of mine drifted from one to the other, delighting especially in its awareness of a relative firming of the features on each of their unfinished faces, far enough advanced for a malleable and uncertain likeness to be already discernible through the promise of further change. What made the differences between these faces was not a set of corresponding disparities in the length or breadth of their features, which, however dissimilar the girls appeared to be, it might actually have been possible to superimpose on one another. The fact is, though, that our perception of faces is not mathematical in its functioning. For one thing, it does not set about it by measuring components; it starts from an expression, or an impression of the whole. In Andrée's face, for instance, the elegance of her gentle eyes seemed to belong with the thin stroke of her nose, which was as fine as a mere curve drawn so as to bring together into a single line the considerate intent expressed higher up via the divided smile in her twinned pupils. Another line, just as fine, was drawn in her hair, with all the fluency and depth of the lines swept in sand by the wind. This one must have been hereditary, for her mother's hair, though already quite white, had a similar sweep, like the swelling and falling lines of snowdrifts which flow over the rises and dips of the underlying terrain. Rosemonde's nose, to be sure, compared to the delicate lineaments of Andrée's, seemed to offer broad surfaces, suggesting a tall tower set on a solid base. But though a mere expression can mislead us into seeing vast disparities between things separated by minute distinctions – and though a minute distinction can be enough to create an absolutely singular expression, an individuality – in the case of all the girls' faces, it was not just a minute peculiarity of line or originality of expression that made them appear irreducible to one another. It was their colouring which set them so far apart; and that, not so much because of the range of beauty in the various hues it gave them, which were so dissimilar that the pleasure I derived from the sight of Rosemonde, with her skin suffused in pinkish gold still tinged by the greenish glow from her eyes, and the pleasure of looking upon Andrée, whose white cheeks took such austere distinction from her black hair, were the diverse pleasures I enjoyed in gazing at a geranium by the sun-drenched sea or a camellia by night; but rather because the unforeseen element of colour, which acts not only as the dispenser of different shades, but also as a great creator, or at least alterer, of dimensions, had changed everything, hugely magnifying the tiny differences in line and redesigning the relations between surfaces. So it was that different lighting effects – the pink glow shed by a shock of russet hair, the flat pallor cast by a colourless light – could stretch and thicken faces of largely similar design, turning them into other things, like those accessories of the Russian ballet, which when seen in the simple light of day may consist of a mere circular cut-out of paper, but which the genius of Bakst, by flooding the stage-set with a wash of flesh pink or a blank lunar tone, transforms into a sharp-faceted, hard turquoise, set into the façade of a palace, or a soft, full-blown Bengal rose growing in a flower-garden. So our perception of faces does entail measuring; but our methods are those of painters, rather than of surveyors.

In such things, Albertine's face was no different from her girl-friends'. There were days when she was thin, with a dull complexion and a sullen look, with a dark violet zone, oblique and transparent, somewhere in her eyes, such as can be seen at times in the sea, and seemingly oppressed by all the sorrows of an outcast. On other days, her face was smoother and it beguiled my desires, keeping them engrossed in its glossy surface, and preventing them from going beyond it, unless a quick sidelong glimpse of her, with an inner pink glowing through her cheeks, which were as matt white as wax on the surface, made me long to kiss them and get at that inaccessible inner tint of her. Or else there were times when happiness rippled through her cheeks, so bright and mobile that their skin turned fluid and tenuous, as though traversed by underlying glances which gave it the appearance of being made from the same substance as her eyes, only of a different colour; and sometimes, when one caught sight, unthinkingly, of her face with its punctuation of little brownish blotches, and its pair of bluer ones among them, one had the brief impression of having glanced at a goldfinch's egg, or an opalescent agate which had been worked and polished at only two spots, where, amid all the dusky stone, like the translucent wings of an azure butterfly, one caught the glow of the eyes, in which flesh becomes mirror and gives us the illusion that through them, more than through any other part of the body, we come closest to the soul. Mostly, however, she had more colour, and was more animated; sometimes the single touch of pink, amid her whole white face, was the tip of her nose, as neat as the nose of a sly little kitten, made to be played with; sometimes the smoothness of her cheeks was so even that one's eye slid over their pink enamel as though it was the pink of a miniature, a semblance given more delicacy and intimacy by the black hair set above it like a locket lid half-lifted; on occasion the shade of her cheeks was as deep as the purplish pink of cyclamens; and there were moments too, if she was feverish or flushed with warmth, when the midnight shades of certain roses, whose red is so dark as to be almost black, gave her complexion an unhealthy appearance, debasing my desire for her to something more sensual, filling her eyes with a look that was more perverse and unwholesome; and each of these Albertines was unlike the others, as the colours, the shape, the character of a ballerina may be transmuted, each time she comes on, by the constantly changing effects from a spot-light. It may be because the personalities I perceived in her at that time were so various that I later took to turning into a different person, depending on which Albertine was in my mind: I became a jealous man, an indifferent man, a voluptuary, a melancholic, a madman, these characters coming over me not just in response to the random recurrence of memories, but also under the variable influence of some intervening belief which affected this or that memory by making me see it differently. There was, there is, no getting away from these beliefs: most of the time they fill our minds unawares; yet they are more important for our happiness than the very person standing there in front of us, given that it is through these ideas that we see such a person, that it is they which endow the person seen with whatever importance he or she may have. In the interests of accuracy, I should really give a separate name to each of the selves in me which was to harbour a future thought of Albertine; and it would be even more appropriate if I had a different name for each of the Albertines who appeared in her single guise, none of whom were identical to any of the others, as variable as the seas I saw before me, which I simplified to the same word 'sea', and which served as the back-cloth to my inconstant nymph. But above all (analogously to, but more usefully than, the story-teller's mention of what the weather was like on a certain day), I should give her invariable name to whichever belief about her, when I saw her on different days, prevailed in my mind, constituting its atmosphere, as the appearance of each person seen, like that of each day's new sea, is modified by those barely visible clouds which, by their density and changeableness, their distribution across the sky and their impermanence, can alter the colours of all things, like the cloud which Elstir had banished on the evening when he failed to introduce me to the group of girls with whom he had paused to talk, and whose figures, as they started to move away from me, had immediately begun to seem more beautiful – a cloud which had reformed a few days later, once I had met them, muting the glow of their loveliness, often passing between them and my eyes, which saw them now dimmed, as through a gentle haze, reminiscent of Virgil's Leucothea.[117]

The meaning to be read in their faces had of course changed, since their speech had revealed some of it; and the significance I saw in whatever they said was directly related to the fact that I could make them say it, in answer to my own questions, and that, like an experimental scientist who designs a control test to check an apparent finding, I could also make them say different things. One way of solving the problem of existence, after all, is to become so closely acquainted with things and individuals we once saw from further away as being full of beauty and mystery, that we realize they are devoid of both: therein lies one of the modes of mental hygiene available to us, which though it may not be the most recommendable, can certainly afford us a measure of equanimity for getting through life and – since it enables us to have no regrets, by assuring us we have had the best of things, and that the best of things was not up to much – in resigning us to death.

I had at last rooted out, from the minds of these girls, all aversion to chastity, any memory of their lives of casual fornications, and these I had replaced by staunch precepts which, though they might at times be severely tried, had managed to protect them against all misconduct and kept them in the paths of middle-class righteousness. However, when we have started out from a wrong assumption, even one affecting only minor things, when a faulty deduction or an unreliable memory, say, leads us away from the true originator of a piece of mischievous gossip, or the place where we have mislaid a possession, it is possible, once we have discovered our mistake, to replace it not with the truth, but with another mistake. In assessing the girls' modes of life, in deciding how to behave towards them, I had inferred all the implications of the word 'innocence', which I could now read, writ large on their faces, as I chatted with them. But my eye, baffled by its own haste, may have misread the word, and perhaps it was not to be seen there, any more than the name of Jules Ferry had figured on the programme of the

matinée at which I had had my first sight of La Berma – despite which, I had assured M. de Norpois that Jules Ferry,[118] without the slightest doubt, was a writer of curtain-raisers.

With any one member of my little gang of girls, was I not bound to recall only the most recently glimpsed of her possible faces, given that the mind eliminates from our memories of anyone whatever does not contribute in an immediately useful way to our daily dealings with them, even if– especially if! – these dealings are coloured by a tincture of love, which, by being perpetually unsatisfied, lives for ever in the coming moment? The chain of past days runs through the memory, which only holds fast to the nearest end of it, and the metal of which this end is forged is often very different from the metal of the earlier links, which have already slipped away into the dark; in our journey through life, the only country the mind sees as real is the one in which we live the present instant. My very first impressions, which were now at such a remove, could find no ally in my memory against their day-by-day deforming; throughout the long hours which I spent among the girls, chatting, going on picnics, playing, I never once remembered that they were the same ruthless, sensual virgins whom I had once seen, like figures in a fresco, filing past against the sea.

Geographers or archaeologists may well take us to Calypso's island or unearth the true palace of King Minos. Unfortunately, though, Calypso then turns into a mere woman; and Minos is no more than a king, shorn of divinity. Even the qualities and defects which history can show to have been those of these very real people are often extremely unlike the ones we used to imagine in the creatures of fable who once bore their names. So it was that all my charming oceanic mythology, lovingly composed by me during the very first days, had faded away to nothing. However, time spent in close familiarity with those we once thought inaccessible, those we have longed for, is not, at least on occasion, time spent to no purpose. Even amid the factitious enjoyments we may eventually find in our later dealings with people whom we at first found unlikeable, there always remains the sour after-taste of the failings they have contrived to conceal; whereas in relationships such as those I had with Albertine and her friends, the genuine delight in which they have originated always leaves a trace of the fragrance that no artifice can ever give to fruit that is forced, to grapes that have never ripened in the sunshine. The supernatural creatures they had briefly been for me could still, even without my knowing it, sprinkle a spice of wonder into the tritest things I did with them, or rather they for ever banished the trite from the vicinity of such things. My desire had yearned so helplessly after the meaning in those eyes which now knew me and smiled upon me, but which, at first sight, had met my own like light radiating from another universe, it had so broadly and so intricately distributed colours and scents on all the flesh-tinted surfaces of these girls who lay on the cliff-top, handed me a simple sandwich or played their guessing-games, that often, as I sprawled there of an afternoon, I was like a painter who seeks the grandeur of antiquity in modern life, giving a woman cutting her toe-nail the nobility of the *Spinario*,[119] or like Rubens, using women of his acquaintance to figure as goddesses in a scene from mythology: I gazed on the loveliness of their bodies, the fair and the dark, so varied in their styles, as they lay about me in the grass, and I neither ignored all the mediocre contents with which daily life had filled them, nor recalled expressly their celestial origin, as though, like Hercules or Telemachus, I was disporting myself among the nymphs.

Then the concerts came to an end, the weather turned bad and my girls left Balbec, not all at once, as the swallows leave, but within the same week. Albertine was the first to go, without warning, without any of the others being able to understand, either then or later, why she had suddenly gone back to Paris, where her presence was required neither for business nor for pleasure. 'Without even a with-your-leave or a by-your-leave,' grumbled Françoise, 'she just up and went.' Françoise would have preferred us to do likewise. Her view was that we were being inconsiderate towards the employees of the hotel, of whom there were in fact few remaining to serve the needs of the by now sparse population of residents, and towards the manager, who was 'wasting money like water'. It was a fact that for a long time the hotel, which was soon to close, had been bidding farewell to almost all those who had spent the summer there – never had it been so pleasant to live in! Not that the manager shared this view: one came upon him in corridors and in lounges which were now freezing cold and had no pages standing by their doors, as he strode past wearing a new frock-coat and so nattily barbered that his drab face seemed to be a blend made up of one part flesh and three parts cosmetics, for ever changing his tie (these attentions to self cost less than making sure the heating works and keeping on staff; like the man who, having decided he can no longer afford to donate 10,000 francs to a charity, finds it easy to appear generous by giving a princely five-franc piece to the telegram-boy who brings him a cable). He looked as though he was conducting an inspection-tour of nowhere, as though the purpose of his show of elegance was to give an air of temporariness to the dismal atmosphere of a hotel which had had a poor season; and he called to mind the ghost of a king haunting the ruins of what was once his palace. His displeasure was aggravated when a dearth of passengers made the local branch-line close down until the following spring. 'What's missing round here,' he said, 'is proper means of commotion.' Despite his current deficit, he already had grandiose plans for future seasons. Being actually quite capable of using fine words properly, especially when they were suited to the hotel business and had the effect of aggrandizing it, he would say, 'I was let down by my supporting troops, though I did have a fine squad in my dining-room. Mind you, the pages left a little to be desired – but you'll see, next year, I'll have a first-class phalanx of them!' Meanwhile, the suspension of services on the Balbec–Caen–Balbec line obliged him to send someone out to fetch the mail and even at times to have departing guests taken away by waggonette. I often asked the coachman to let me sit beside him and in this way I went out and about in all weathers, as I had done during the winter I once spent in Combray.

At times, however, the rain was too heavy and my grandmother and I had to stay indoors; the Casino having closed, we spent our days in sitting-rooms which were almost completely deserted, like a ship's passengers keeping below decks out of the wind, where every day, as happens on a voyage, one or other of the people among whom we had spent three months without having made their acquaintance, the First President from Rennes,[120] the *bâtonnier* from Caen, an American lady with her daughters, came to sit with us, struck up conversation, devised a way of making the hours seem less slow to pass, revealed a talent, taught us a game, invited us to tea, to make music with them, to foregather at a particular time of day, to collaborate with them in one of these diversions that have the happy knack of affording us true enjoyment, which consists not in being striven after, but in merely helping us to while away our boredom, and formed friendships with us right at the end of our stay which would be broken off the very next day by their successive departures. I even came to know the very wealthy young man, one of his two aristocratic friends and the actress (who had come back down to spend a few days in Balbec); but their little closed group now contained only the three of them, as their other friend had returned to Paris. They asked me to go and have dinner with them at their special restaurant. I think they were quite relieved that I declined the invitation. Still, it had been issued in the nicest possible manner: though the inviter was really the wealthy young man, the other two being just his guests, when the actress asked me whether I would go with them, she automatically phrased it so as to flatter me: 'Maurice would love you to come' – Maurice being the friend, the Marquis de Vaudémont, a man of exceptionally noble descent.

When I met all three of them in the vestibule, it was M. de Vaudémont who said, as the wealthy young man hung back:

'So we're not to have us the pleasure of your company at dinner?'

Altogether, I had derived little benefit from being in Balbec, for which reason I was all the more determined to come back one day. I felt I had spent too short a time there. My friends took a different view, and had been writing to ask whether I intended to settle there for good. In the knowledge that the place-name they had to write on their envelopes was that of Balbec, and since the view from my window was not of the countryside or a streetscape, but of the wide wilderness of the sea, since I could hear its restless echoes during the hours of darkness and entrusted my own rest to them each night as I fell asleep, as though venturing out in a boat, I harboured the illusion that this close relationship with the waves must imbue my mind unawares with the sense of their charm, as though it was one of those lessons you can learn in your sleep.

For next year, the manager promised me better rooms; but by now I was attached to mine: I could walk into it without noticing the slightest smell of vetiver; and my mind, which had once had such difficulty in occupying its upper reaches, had fitted itself so accurately into the room's dimensions that I had to train it to do the opposite, once I was back in Paris and getting ready for bed in my old room, which had a low ceiling.

For eventually we had been obliged to leave Balbec, where the cold and the damp had become too penetrating for us to stay on in a hotel without fireplaces or heating system. Our final weeks there I forgot almost immediately. When I thought of Balbec, what came to mind almost invariably was the morning moments, at the height of summer, when, because I was going out with Albertine and the other girls in the afternoons, my grandmother made sure I obeyed the doctor's instructions that I should stay in bed and lie there in complete darkness. The manager ordered that no noise must be made on my floor and personally ensured that these instructions were obeyed. Because the daylight was so bright, I kept the curtains closed as long as possible, those tall violet curtains which, on the first evening, had received me with such hostility. However, since Françoise never managed to close them completely and exclude every speck of light, despite the pins she stuck in them each evening, and which no one else could get out again, despite the blankets, the red cretonne table-cover, the odds and ends of cloth which she patched on, the darkness was in fact not complete, and they allowed a sprinkle of scarlet, as of a scatter of anemone petals, to dapple the carpet, in which I could not resist paddling for a moment with my bare feet. Opposite the window, on the wall which was partly illuminated, a golden cylinder stood upright, supported by thin air and slowly moving, like the pillar of fire which gave light to the Children of Israel as it led them through the way of the wilderness. Then I would go back to bed: obliged as I was to take all my pleasures simultaneously in imagination, without moving – playing, bathing, walking, whatever the morning sun advised – happiness made my heart beat louder, like a motor turning at full power, but motionless and out of gear, so that it can only discharge its power into the empty air as it idles at full speed.

I knew that my gang of girls were already out there on the esplanade, but I could not see them as they walked past the uneven ranges of the sea, beyond which, perched amid its bluish peaks like an Italian hilltop village, the little town of Rivebelle appeared in an occasional sunny glimpse, vivid and detailed. I could not see the girls: but as the shouts of the newspaper-boys – 'Those journalists,' as Françoise called them – floated up to my belvedere, along with the cries of bathers and children at their play, punctuating the quiet breaking of the waves along the shore like the calls of the sea-birds, I could imagine their presence and hear their laughter, lapping like the laughter of Nereids among the gentle hush of tide-swell that rose to my ears. 'We stopped to see whether you were going to come down, Albertine would say that evening, but your shutters were still closed, even after the concert started.' The concert always broke out at ten o'clock, under my windows. If the tide was in, one's ear caught the smooth legato of a wave sliding in among the instruments, blending the tones of the violin into its own ripples of crystal and splashing its foam all over the broken echoes of underwater melodies. My things had not been laid out, and the impossibility of getting up and dressing began to make me lose patience. Then the clock struck twelve and at last Françoise came up. For months on end, in Balbec, the place I had so yearned to visit because my imagination had lashed it with gales and shrouded it in fog, the summer weather had been so unvaryingly bright that whenever Françoise came in to open my window, my expectation, never wavering and never disappointed, had been to see the same expanse of sunlight folded into the angle of the outside wall, so unchanging in its colour as to be not so much a thrilling indicator of summer, but rather a drab enamel, inert and artificial. And as Françoise pulled her pins out of the transom and peeled off the extra layers of cloth, then drew back the curtains, the summer's day that she uncovered seemed as dead and immemorial as a mummy, magnificent and millennial, carefully divested by our old servant of all its wrappings and laid bare, embalmed in its vestments of gold.

BOOK III
The Guermantes Way
PART I

The early-morning twitter of the birds sounded tame to Françoise. Every word from the maids' quarters made her jump; their every footstep bothered her and she was constantly wondering what they were doing. All this was because we had moved house. It is true that the servants in our former home had made quite as much stir in their quarters on the top floor, but they were servants she knew and their comings and goings had become friendly presences to her. But now she even made silence the object of her painful scrutiny. And since the district to which we had moved appeared to be as quiet as the boulevard we had previously overlooked was noisy, the sound of a man singing in the street as he passed (as feeble perhaps as an orchestral motif yet quite clear even from a distance) brought tears to the eyes of the exiled Françoise. And if I had made fun of her when she had been distressed at leaving an apartment block where we had been 'so well thought of by everybody', weeping as she packed her trunks in accordance with the rituals of Combray and declaring that our former home was superior to any other imaginable, I, who found it as difficult to assimilate new surroundings as I found it easy to abandon old ones, none the less felt a close sympathy with our old servant when I realized that the move to a building where the concierge, who had not yet made our acquaintance, had not shown her the tokens of respect necessary to the nourishment of her good spirits, had driven her to a state close to total decline. She alone could understand my feelings; this was certainly not the case with her young footman; for him, a person as remote from the Combray world as it was possible to be, moving into a new district was like taking a holiday in which the novelty of the surroundings provided the same sense of relaxation as an actual journey; he felt he was in the country and a head cold gave him the delightful sensation, as if he had been a victim of a draught from the ill-fitting window of a railway carriage, of having seen something of the world; every time he sneezed, he rejoiced that he had found such a select position, having always wanted to work for people who travelled a great deal. And so it was not to him I went, but straight to Françoise; and because I had laughed at her tears over a departure that had not affected me in the least, she now showed a frosty indifference to my misery, because she shared it. The so-called sensitivity of neurotics develops along with their egotism; they cannot bear for other people to flaunt the sufferings with which they are increasingly preoccupied themselves. Françoise, who would not allow the least of her own troubles to pass unobserved, would turn her head away if I were suffering, so that I should not have the satisfaction of seeing my suffering pitied, let alone noticed. This is what happened when I tried to talk to her about our move. What is more, she was obliged, two days later, to return to our former home to collect some clothes that had been forgotten in the move, while I, as a result of the same move, was still running a temperature, and like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed an ox, was feeling painfully swollen by the sight of a long sideboard which my eyes needed to 'digest'; and Françoise, with a woman's inconstancy, returned home saying that she thought she was going to choke to death on our old boulevard, that she had gone 'all around the houses' to get there, that never had she seen such awkward stairs, that she would not go back there to live for all the world, not if you were to offer her a fortune – unlikely hypotheses – and that *everything* (meaning everything to do with the kitchen and the hallways) was far better appointed in our new home. And this new home, it is time to explain – and to add that we had moved into it because my grandmother was far from well (though we kept this reason from her) and needed cleaner air – was a flat that formed part of the Hôtel de Guermantes.

At an age when Names, offering us the image of the unknowable that we have invested in them and simultaneously designating a real place for us, force us accordingly to identify the one with the other to a point where we go off to a city to seek out a soul that it cannot contain but which we no longer have the power to expel from its name, it is not only to cities and ruins that they give an individuality, as do allegorical paintings, it is not only the physical world that they spangle with differences and people with marvels, it is the social world as well: so every historic house, every famous residence or palace, has its lady or its fairy, as forests have their spirits and rivers their deities. Sometimes, hidden deep in her name, the fairy is transformed by the needs of our imaginative activity through which she lives; this is how the atmosphere surrounding Madame de Guermantes, after existing for years in my mind only as the reflection of a magic-lantern slide and of a stained-glass window, began to lose its colours when quite different dreams impregnated it with the bubbling water of fast-flowing streams.

However, the fairy wastes away when we come into contact with the actual person to whom her name corresponds, for the name then begins to reflect that person who contains nothing of the fairy; the fairy can reappear if we absent ourselves from the person, but if we stay in the person's presence the fairy dies for ever and with her the name, as with the Lusignan family,[1] which was fated to become extinct on the day when the fairy Mélusine should die. So the Name, beneath the successive retouchings which might eventually lead us to discover the original handsome portrait of an unknown woman we have never met, becomes no more than the mere photograph on an identity card to which we refer when we need to decide whether we know, whether or not we should acknowledge a person we encounter. But should a sensation from the distant past – like those musical instruments that record and preserve the sound and style of the various artists who played them[2] – enable our memory to make us hear that name with the particular tone it then had for our ears, even if the name seems not to have changed, we can still feel the distance between the various dreams which its unchanging syllables evoked for us in turn. For a second, rehearing the warbling from some distant springtime, we can extract from it, as from the little tubes of colour used in painting, the precise tint – forgotten, mysterious and fresh – of the days we thought we remembered when, like bad painters, we were in fact spreading our whole past on a single canvas and painting it with the conventional monochrome of voluntary memory. Yet, on the contrary, each of the moments that composed it, in order to create something original, a unique blend, was using those colours from the past that now elude us, colours which, for instance, are still able to fill me with sudden delight, should the name Guermantes, assuming for a second after so many years the ring it had for me – so different from its present resonance – on the day of Mlle Percepied's marriage, chance to restore to me the mauve colour, so soft, too bright and new, which lent the smoothness of velvet to the billowing scarf of the young Duchesse, and to her eyes like inaccessible and ever-flowering periwinkles lit by the blue sun of her smile. And the name Guermantes belonging to that period of my life is also like one of those little balloons that has been filled with oxygen or some other gas: when I manage to puncture it and free what it contains, I can breathe the Combray air from that year, that day, mingled with the scent of hawthorns gusted from the corner of the square by the wind, announcing rain, and at times driving the sunlight away, at others letting it spread out on the red wool carpet of the sacristy and tingeing it brightly to an almost geranium pink with that 'Wagnerian' softness of brio which preserves the nobility of a festive occasion. Yet even apart from rare moments such as this one, when we can suddenly feel the original entity give a stir and resume its shape, chisel itself out of syllables that have become lifeless, if in the dizzy whirl of daily life where they serve merely the most practical purposes, names have lost all their colour, like a prismatic top that revolves too fast and seems only grey, when, on the other hand, we reflect upon the past in our day-dreams and seek to grasp it by slowing down and suspending the perpetual motion in which we are carried along, we can see the gradual reappearance, side by side but utterly distinct from one another, of the successive tints which a single name assumed for us in the course of our existence.

Of course, what shape this name Guermantes projected for me when my nurse – knowing no more, probably, than I today in whose honour it had been composed – rocked me to sleep with that old song, '*Gloire à la Marquise de Guermantes*', or when, several years later, the veteran Maréchal de Guermantes filled my nursery-maid with pride by stopping in the Champs-Élysées and exclaiming 'A fine child you have there!', giving me a chocolate drop from his pocket bonbonnière, I cannot now say. Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer with me; they are external to me; all I can know about them, as with what we can know about events that took place before we were born, comes from other people's accounts. But after these earliest years, I can find a succession of seven or eight different figures spanning the time this name inhabited me; the first ones were the finest: gradually my dream, forced by reality to abandon a position that was no longer tenable, took up its position afresh, a little further back, until it was obliged to retreat even further. And as Mme de Guermantes changed, so did

her dwelling-place, itself born from that name fertilized from year to year by hearing some word or other that modified my dreams of it; the dwelling-place itself mirrored them in its very masonry which had become as much a mirror as the surface of a cloud or of a lake. A two-dimensional castle keep which was really no more than a strip of orange light where the lord and his lady, high up, decided upon life or death for their vassals, had been replaced – right at the end of the 'Guermantes way' along which I used to follow the course of the Vivonne with my parents on all those sunny afternoons – by the land of bubbling streams where the Duchesse taught me to fish for trout and to recognize the names of the flowers whose purple and reddish clusters adorned the low walls of the neighbouring garden plots; then it had become the hereditary property, the poetic domain from which the proud race of the Guermantes, like a mellowing, crenellated tower spanning the ages, was rising already over France, at a time when the sky was still empty in those places where Notre-Dame de Paris and Notre-Dame de Chartres were later to rise; a time when on the summit of the hill in Laon the cathedral nave had not been placed there like the Ark of the Deluge on the summit of Mount Ararat,[3] full of Patriarchs and Judges anxiously leaning from its windows to see whether the wrath of God has been appeased, carrying with it the species of plants that will multiply on earth, brimming over with animals spilling out even from the towers where oxen, moving calmly around on the roofs, gaze down over the plains of Champagne; a time when the traveller who left Beauvais at close of day did not yet see, following him and turning with the bends in the road, the black branching wings of the cathedral spread out against the golden screen of sunset. It was, this 'Guermantes', like the setting of a novel, an imaginary landscape I could picture to myself only with difficulty and thereby longed all the more to discover, set amid real lands and roads which would suddenly become immersed in heraldic details, a few miles from a railway-station; I recalled the names of the places around it as if they had been situated at the foot of Parnassus or of Helicon, and they seemed precious to me as the physical conditions necessary – in topographical science – for the production of an inexplicable phenomenon. I remembered the coats of arms painted beneath the windows of the church in Combray, their quarters filled, century after century, with all the lordly domains which this illustrious house had appropriated by marriage or gain from all the corners of Germany, Italy and France: vast territories in the north, powerful cities in the south, assembled together to compose the name Guermantes and, losing their material form, to inscribe allegorically their sinople keep or castle triple-towered argent upon its azure field. I had heard of the famous Guermantes tapestries and could see them, medieval and blue, somewhat coarse, standing out like a cloud against the amaranth, legendary name beneath the ancient forest where Childebert[4] so often went hunting, and it seemed to me that, without making a journey to see them, I might just as easily penetrate the secrets of the mysterious corners of these lands, this remoteness of the centuries, simply by coming into contact for a moment, in Paris, with Mme de Guermantes, the suzerain of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face and her words must possess the local charm of forests and streams and the same age-old characteristics as those recorded in the book of ancient customs in her archives. But then I had met Saint-Loup; he had told me that the house had borne the name Guermantes only since the seventeenth century when his family had acquired it. They had lived, until then, in the neighbourhood and their title did not belong to the area. The village of Guermantes had taken its name from the château and had been built after it, and, so that the village should not destroy the view from it, building regulations that were still in force dictated the lines of its streets and set limits on the height of its houses. As for the tapestries, they were by Boucher,[5] acquired in the nineteenth century by a Guermantes with artistic tastes and hung, along with mediocre hunting-scenes which he had painted himself, in a particularly ugly drawing-room done out in adrinople and plush. By revealing these things to me, Saint-Loup had introduced into the château elements that were foreign to the name Guermantes, and they no longer made it possible for me to go on extracting from its syllables alone the style in which it was built. Then, the château reflected in its lake had disappeared from the depths of this name, and what had appeared to me around Mme de Guermantes as her dwelling had been her Paris house, the Hôtel de Guermantes, as limpid as its name, for no physical and opaque element intervened to disrupt and darken its transparency. Just as the word church signifies not merely the building but also the company of the faithful, the Hôtel de Guermantes included all those who shared in the life of the Duchesse, but these close friends I had never seen were for me merely famous and poetic names, and, knowing only persons who were themselves merely names as well, they only enlarged and protected the mystery surrounding the Duchesse by extending around her a vast halo, which at best grew dimmer as it increased in size.

In the parties she gave, since I could not imagine the guests as having bodies, moustaches, boots, as making any remark that was banal, or even original in a human and rational manner, this whirl of names, introducing less physical presence than a banquet of ghosts or a ball of spectres around the statuette in Dresden china known as Mme de Guermantes, maintained a show-case transparency around her glass mansion. Then, when Saint-Loup had told me various anecdotes about his cousin's chaplain and her gardeners, the Hôtel de Guermantes had become – as some Louvre might have become in the past – a kind of castle surrounded, in the very centre of Paris, by its lands, acquired by inheritance, by virtue of an ancient right that had oddly survived and over which she still enjoyed feudal privileges. But this last dwelling had itself faded away by the time we had come to live right next to Mme de Villeparisis in one of the apartments adjoining the one occupied by Mme de Guermantes in a wing of the Hôtel. It was one of those old houses, some of which may still exist, in which the main courtyard was often flanked – alluvial deposits washed up by the rising tide of democracy or the legacy of bygone days when the various trades were grouped around the seigneurial dwelling – by the backs of shops, premises like a bootmaker's or a tailor's, for instance (like those you see clustered around cathedrals when restorers have not had the aesthetic sense to remove them), together with a concierge who was also a cobbler, kept chickens and grew flowers – and, at the far end, in the main house, lived an aristocratic lady who, when she drove out in her old carriage and pair, her hat sporting a few nasturtiums which seemed to have escaped from the concierge's garden (with a footman at her coachman's side who got down to leave cards at every aristocratic mansion in the neighbourhood), dispensed smiles and little waves of the hand indiscriminately to the porter's children and to any middle-class tenants who happened to be passing and between whom her disdainful affability and her egalitarian hauteur could not distinguish.

In the house to which we had moved, the aristocratic lady at the end of the courtyard was a Duchesse, elegant and still young. Her name was Mme de Guermantes, and, thanks to Françoise, it was not long before I came to know something about her household. For the Guermantes (often referred to by Françoise as the people 'below' or 'downstairs') constantly occupied her thoughts from morning when, as she did Mama's hair, unable to resist casting a forbidden, furtive glance into the courtyard, would remark: 'Oh, there go two holy Sisters: they'll be for downstairs', or 'Oh! just look at those pheasants in the kitchen window. No need to ask where they've come from. The Duc will have been out hunting' – to evening when, handing me my night-clothes, she might chance to hear the sound of a piano or a snatch of song and would conclude: 'Gay goings-on below, they've got company'; and in the steady set of her face, beneath her now whitened hair, a smile from her younger days, lively and demure, would for a second set each one of her features in its place and match them together in a carefully ordered readiness, as if to dance a quadrille.

But the moment in the Guermantes' day that most aroused Françoise's curiosity, that gave her most satisfaction and also most annoyance, was the moment when the doors of the carriage entrance opened and the Duchesse stepped into her barouche. This usually happened shortly after our servants had finished celebrating the solemn Passover feast that none might disturb, otherwise known as their midday meal, during which they were so 'taboo' that not even my father would have dared to ring for them, in the full knowledge that not a single one of them would have stirred even if the bell had rung five times, and that he would have committed this breach of etiquette to no effect whatsoever, but not without detriment to himself. For Françoise (who, in her old age, lost no opportunity to assume 'a suitable expression') would not have failed to present him, for the rest of the day, with a face covered with little red cuneiform markings, which was her way, indecipherable though it was, of displaying to the outside world the long record of her grievances and the underlying causes of her displeasure. She would enlarge upon these by addressing herself to no one in particular, but not in a way that made what she said at all clear. And this is what she meant – in the belief that for us it was exasperating, 'mortifying', 'vexing' as she put it – when she talked about saying 'low mass' for us the whole blessed day.

The last rites completed, Françoise, who was at once, as in the early church, both celebrant and a member of the faithful, poured herself a final glass of wine, removed the napkin from her neck and, wiping the traces of red liquid and coffee from her lips, folded it up and slipped it into its ring; she directed a doleful look of thanks to 'her' young footman, who was ingratiating himself with her by a 'Come, Madame, a few more grapes, they're 'eavenly', then went straight to open the

window on the pretext that it was too hot 'in this wretched kitchen'. As she turned the window-knob and let in the air, she managed, at the same time, to steal a skilfully indifferent glance towards the back of the courtyard; from this she gained the stealthy assurance that the Duchesse was not yet ready to leave, and gazed longingly for a moment with scornful and impassioned eyes at the waiting carriage; once this second of attention had been paid to the things of this earth, she raised her eyes to heaven, whose purity she had already anticipated as she felt the mildness of the air and the warmth of the sun; at the corner of the roof, her gaze rested on the place where, each spring, there came to nest, immediately above my bedroom chimney, two pigeons like the ones that used to coo in her kitchen in Combray.

'Ah! Combray, Combray!' she would cry. (And the almost singing tone in which she declaimed this invocation, just as much as the Arlésienne purity of her features, could have made one suspect that Françoise was of southern origin and that the lost homeland she was bewailing was simply a land of adoption. But one might have been wrong here, for it seems that no province is without its 'south'; are there not any number of Bretons or Savoyards we come across whose speech has all the delightful transpositions of longs and shorts characteristic of the south?) 'Ah! Combray, when will I see you again, my poor old home? When will I be able to spend every blessed hour of the day among your hawthorns, under our poor old lilacs listening to the finches and the Vivonne murmuring away like someone whispering, instead of that wretched bell from the young master, who has me running up and down that dratted corridor every half-hour. And even then he thinks I don't come quick enough; but you'd need to hear the bell before he'd rung it, and if you're a minute late he "takes on" something dreadful. My poor old Combray! I dare say I'll be dead before I see you again, when they throw me like a stone into a hole in the ground. And I'll never smell your lovely white hawthorns again. It seems to me that what I'll be hearing in my final rest are those three rings of the bell which put a curse on me when I was still alive.'

But she was interrupted by the voice of the waistcoat-maker in the courtyard below, the one whom my grandmother had found so agreeable in the past, when she had gone to pay a call on Mme de Villeparisis, and who now ranked no less highly in the affections of Françoise. The sound of our window opening had made him look up and he had already spent some time trying to attract his neighbour's attention so that he could bid her good day. At this point, the flirtatiousness of the young girl Françoise had once been, softened, for M. Jupien's benefit, the grumpy face of our old cook, weighed down by age, bad temper and the heat of the stove, and it was with a charming blend of reserve, familiarity and demureness that she gracefully acknowledged the waistcoat-maker, but without a word to him; if she was infringing Mama's instructions by looking into the courtyard, she would not have dared to challenge them to the point of talking from the window, which would have entailed, as Françoise saw it, a 'whole lecture' on the subject from her mistress. She pointed out the waiting carriage to Jupien with a gesture that seemed to convey: 'A fine pair of horses there all right!' but what she actually muttered was: 'What an old crate!', and she did this mainly because she knew what his response was going to be: he would put his hand to his lips so that he would be audible without having to shout: '*You* could have one too if you wanted, more than just one perhaps, but you're not interested in that sort of thing.'

And Françoise, after a modest, furtive and delighted gesture that conveyed something like: 'Each to his own; but simplicity's the thing in this house', closed the window in case Mama should enter the room. The 'you' who might have owned more horses than the Guermantes meant us, but Jupien was right to use 'you' in this way because, apart from a few strictly personal indulgences (like pretending with an irritating giggle that she did not have a cold when she was coughing all the time and the whole household lived in fear of catching it), Françoise, like those plants that are completely attached to a particular animal and nourished by that animal with food it catches, eats and digests for them, offering it to them in its final and easily assimilable residue, lived with us symbiotically; we were the ones who, with our virtues, our wealth, our style of living, our position, had to take it upon ourselves to devise the little ways of humouring her which constituted – along with the recognized right freely to practise the ritual of the midday meal according to ancient custom, including a breath of air at the window afterwards, a certain amount of lingering when she went out to shop and a Sunday visit to her niece – the portion of contentment without which her life could not be lived. So one can understand why Françoise had pined away during the first days of our move, a prey to a sickness – in a house where my father's claims to distinction were not yet known – which she herself called 'ennui' in the strong sense in which the word is used by Corneille, or in the letters of soldiers who end up by committing suicide because they 'pine' too much for their fiancées or for their native villages. Françoise's ennui had been quickly remedied in fact by Jupien because his attitude procured her an immediate sense of pleasure, no less keenly felt and more refined than it would have been had we decided to keep a carriage. 'A good class of people, these Juliens' (Françoise was always ready to assimilate new names to the ones she already knew), 'decent souls; it's written all over their faces.' Indeed Jupien was able to understand the situation and to let it be known that if we had no carriage, it was because we had no wish for one. This friend of Françoise's had obtained a post in a government office and was seldom to be found at home. He had initially been a waistcoat-maker with the 'slip of a girl' my grandmother had assumed to be his daughter, but it was no longer worthwhile for him to go on doing the job after the girl, who could already repair a torn skirt with great skill when she was little more than a child (at the time my grandmother paid her call on Mme de Villeparisis), had turned to ladies' dressmaking and become a skirt-maker. After a period as apprentice seamstress with a dressmaker, employed to stitch, to sew up a flounce, to secure a button or a press stud and to fix a waistband with fasteners, she had quickly risen to become second then chief assistant, and after creating her own clientele of ladies from the best circles, she now worked at home (to wit in our courtyard), generally with one or two of her young friends from the dressmaker's workshop whom she engaged as apprentices. So Jupien's presence was not really needed there any more. No doubt the little girl, now a grown woman, was often required to make waistcoats. But with her friends to help her, she no longer needed anyone else. And so Jupien, her uncle, had looked for a job elsewhere. At first his work had allowed him to get home for midday, but he then permanently replaced the man whose assistant he had been and could not return home until the evening meal. Fortunately he was appointed to this 'tenured position' several weeks after we had moved in, so that his kind attention lasted sufficiently long for Françoise to get through the difficulties of these early days without undue discomfort. At the same time, without underrating Jupien's value as an 'interim palliative' for Françoise, I have to say that I did not initially take to him. From a few feet away, completely destroying the effect that his plump cheeks and florid complexion would have otherwise produced, his eyes, brimming with dreamy, woeful sympathy, created the impression that he was either very ill or had just suffered a major bereavement. Not only was this not the case, but as soon as he spoke – perfectly well in fact – he tended to be cold and mocking. The disparity between his gaze and his speech produced an uncomfortable sense of falsity and it seemed to embarrass him in the way that a guest wearing ordinary clothes at a party where everyone else is in evening dress is embarrassed, or likewise, someone who has to speak to a member of royalty without knowing exactly how and whose reaction to the dilemma is to use as few words as possible. There the comparison ends, because Jupien's way of speaking was, by contrast, charming. Indeed, in the same way that his face was inundated by his eyes (and this passed unnoticed once you knew him), I soon discovered that he was a man of rare intelligence, one of the most spontaneously literary men who has come my way, in the sense that, although he was probably uneducated, he possessed, or had acquired, with the sole help of a few hastily scanned books, the most ingenious turns of phrase. The most gifted people I had known had died very young. And I was convinced that Jupien's life would be a short one. He had kindness, sympathy and the most sensitive and generous feelings. His role in Françoise's life had soon ceased to be indispensable. She had learned the role for herself.

Even when a tradesman or a servant delivered a parcel to our door, while seeming to pay no attention to him and merely pointing him absently to a chair as she continued with her work, Françoise took such shrewd advantage of the few moments he spent in the kitchen awaiting Mama's instructions, that only rarely did he depart without the certain knowledge ineradicably engraved in his mind that 'if we did not have one, it was because we had no wish for it'. And if it was so important to her that other people should know we 'had money' (for she knew nothing about the use of what Saint-Loup called partitive articles and would say 'have money', 'fetch water'),[6] that we were rich, it was not because wealth alone, wealth without virtue, was the supreme good for Françoise, but virtue without wealth was not her ideal either. For her, wealth was like a necessary condition without which virtue would lack both merit and charm. She made so little distinction between the two that she came to see their qualities as interchangeable, expecting material comfort from virtue and moral edification from wealth.

Once she had closed the window, fairly quickly (otherwise, it seemed, Mama would have given her 'a real piece of her mind'), Françoise began with a sigh to clear the kitchen table.

'There are some Guermantes in the rue de la Chaise,' said our valet. 'I had a friend who worked there. He was their second coachman. And I know someone, not my pal but his brother-in-law, who did his time in the army with one of the Baron de Guermantes's grooms. "So how's your father?" ' added the valet, who had a habit of sprinkling his conversation with the latest witticisms, just as he liked to hum the latest popular tunes.

Françoise, with the weary look in her eyes of an ageing woman, and viewing the world entirely from Combray, in a distant blur, grasped not the witticism in these words but the fact that they must be witty, since they were unrelated to the rest of the valet's remarks and had been uttered with strong emphasis by someone she knew to be a joker. So she smiled with dazzled benevolence as if to say: 'He doesn't change, our Victor!' Besides she was pleased, because she knew that listening to wit of this kind was connected – remotely – to those reputable social pleasures for which, in all classes of society, people are eager to dress up and risk catching cold. In fact she regarded the valet as a good friend for her to have, since he was always angrily denouncing the dreadful measures the Republic was about to take against the clergy. Françoise had not yet grasped that our cruellest adversaries are not those who contradict and try to convince us, but those who exaggerate or invent things that are liable to distress us, taking care not to present them in any justifiable light, which would diminish our distress and perhaps lead us to entertain some slight respect for an attitude they are anxious to display to us, to complete our torment, as being both hideous and unassailable.

'The Duchesse must be connected to all that,' said Françoise, resuming the remarks made about the Guermantes in the rue de la Chaise, as one takes up a piece of music again at the andante. 'I can't remember who it was told me that one of them married a cousin of the Duc. But they all belong to the same "bracket". A great family, those Guermantes!' she added with respect, attributing the greatness of the family both to the number of its members and to the brilliance of its reputation, as Pascal attributes the truth of religion to reason and the authority of the Scriptures. With the single word 'great' as her only means of expressing both ideas, it seemed to her that these were one and the same, her vocabulary, like certain gem stones, thus presenting a flaw in places which projected darkness into the depths of her mind.

'I wonder if they're the ones with a château in Guermantes ten miles from Combray? If they are, they've got to be related to their cousin in Algiers, too.' My mother and I were kept wondering for a long time who this cousin in Algiers might be, but we finally realized that by 'Algiers' Françoise meant the city of Angers. The remote can be more familiar to us than the near. Françoise, who knew the name 'Algiers' from some very nasty dates we were customarily sent at New Year, had never heard of Angers. Her language, like the French language itself, particularly its toponomy, was strewn with errors. 'I meant to ask their butler about it… what is it they call him?' She broke off, as if she were consulting herself on a matter of protocol, then came out with the answer: 'Oh yes! they call him Antoine', as if 'Antoine' had been some sort of title. 'He's the one could tell me, but he's a proper toff that one, a great pedant, you'd think they'd cut off his tongue or that he'd forgotten to learn to speak. He makes no reply when you talk to him,' added Françoise, who used the expression 'make reply' like Mme de Sévigné.[7] 'But,' she went on, untruthfully, 'as long as I know what's cooking in my own pot I don't bother about what's in other people's. Anyway, it's not Catholic. And he's not a courageous man either.' (You would have thought from this estimation of the man that Françoise had revised her ideas about physical courage, which, when she was in Combray, she saw as reducing men to the level of wild beasts. But this was not the case. 'Courageous' simply meant 'hard-working'.) 'They say he's as thievish as a magpie as well, but you can't always believe what you hear. Their staff are always leaving because of the concierge. He's jealous and he sets the Duchesse against them. But that Antoine is a real idler, that's for sure, and his Antoinesse is no better,' continued Françoise, whose need to find a feminine form of the name 'Antoine' for the butler's wife was no doubt unconsciously motivated in this grammatical invention by the memory of the words 'chanoine' and 'chanoinesse'. She was not entirely wrong in this. There is still a street called rue Chanoinesse near Notre-Dame, a name given it (since it was only occupied by canons) by those Frenchmen in the past whose contemporary Françoise in fact was. She went on immediately to provide another example of this way of forming feminines, with the remark: 'It's got to be the Duchesse who owns the Guermantes château. And she's the one who's mayoress down there. That's quite something.'

– I should think it *is*,' said the footman with conviction, having failed to detect the irony.

'You think so, do you, my lad? For people like them, being mayor or mayoress is not worth tuppence. Now if I had the Guermantes château, you wouldn't see me setting foot in Paris. Why on earth do important folk, well-off people like Monsieur and Madame, get it into their heads to stay in this wretched city when they could be going off to Combray the minute they're free and there's no one to stop them? What's stopping them from retiring? They're not short of anything. Why wait till they're dead? All I'd need would be a bit of plain food and enough wood to keep me warm in winter and I'd have been off home to my brother's poor old place in Combray a long time ago. At least you feel alive there without all these houses around you. It's so quiet you can hear the frogs singing at night for miles around.

– That must be wonderful, Madame,' the young footman broke out enthusiastically, as if this last detail had been as much a part of Combray as gondolas are of Venice.

A more recent arrival in the household than the valet, he would talk with Françoise about things that might be of interest not so much to himself as to her. And Françoise, who grimaced with resentment when she was treated as the cook, was particularly well-disposed towards this footman (who referred to her as 'the housekeeper') in the same way that princes of the second rank are towards the well-meaning young men who treat them like royalty.

'At least you know what you're supposed to be doing there and what time of the year it is. Not like this place where seeing one measly buttercup at holy Easter is like looking for one at Christmas. I can't even hear the tiniest bit of an angelus ring when I shift my old bones out of bed in the morning. Down there you can hear every hour strike. It's a only a poor old bell but you think "my brother's on his way back from the fields now". You can see the daylight fading, they ring the bells to bless the fruits of the earth, there's time to turn round before you light the lamp. In this place it's day, then it's night, and off you go to bed with no more idea of what you've been doing than a dumb animal.

– I hear that Méséglise is really pretty too,' broke in the young footman, for whom the conversation was taking rather too abstract a turn, and who happened to remember hearing us talk at table about Méséglise.

'Oh! Méséglise,' said Françoise with the broad smile which always came to her lips whenever she heard the names Méséglise, Combray or Tansonville. They were so much part of her that whenever she encountered them outside herself, heard them in a conversation, she felt a similar sort of glee to that which a professor provokes among his students by alluding to some contemporary figure whose name they would never have expected to fall upon their ears from the rostrum. Her pleasure also arose from the feeling that these places meant something to her that they did not for other people, old friends with whom one has experienced much; and she smiled at them as if she found something witty about them, because they contained a great deal of herself.

'You're right, my lad, Méséglise *is* quite a pretty place,' she went on with gentle laugh, 'but how have *you* heard of Méséglise?

– How have I heard of Méséglise? But it's well-known. People have told me about it many a time,' he replied with that criminal inexactitude of the informant who, whenever we try to assess objectively the possible importance for someone else of a thing that matters to us, makes it impossible for us to do so.

'Ah! it's better down there under the cherry trees than it is in front of this stove, I can tell you.'

She even spoke to the servants of Eulalie as a good person. For since Eulalie's death, Françoise had completely forgotten that she had liked her as little when she was alive as she liked anyone who had nothing to eat in the house, who was 'starving to death' and who then, like a good-for-nothing and thanks to the bounty

of the rich, started to 'put on airs'. It no longer galled her that Eulalie had so skilfully managed, week after week, to ensure that she received her 'tip' from my aunt. As for the latter, Françoise never stopped singing her praises.

'So it was at Combray itself that you were then, with Madame's cousin? asked the young footman.

– That's right, with Mme Octave, a real saint, my dears, and a house where there was always more than enough, the very best – a good woman she was, I can tell you, she didn't begrudge the partridges or the pheasants, or anything; five or six people to dinner and plenty of meat to go round, best-quality meat too, white wine, red wine, the lot.' (Françoise used the verb 'begrudge' in the same way as La Bruyère.) [8] 'She always paid the damages, even if the family stayed for months, for donkey's years.' (There was nothing offensive intended towards us in this remark; Françoise belonged to an era when the word 'damages' was not restricted to legal use and simply meant 'expenses'.) 'People didn't go away with empty stomachs, I can tell you! Monsieur le Curé was always coming out with it: if there was ever a woman could count on going straight to our Good Lord, it was her. Poor Madame, I can hear that tiny voice of hers now: "Françoise, I eat nothing myself, as you know, but I want the food to be as nice for everyone else as if I did." The food wasn't for her, of course not. You should have seen her, she weighed no more than a bag of cherries; there wasn't much of her. She'd never listen to a thing I said, she'd never see the doctor. Ah! you didn't gobble down your food in that house. She wanted her servants to be fed properly. And look at us, we hardly had time for a bite to eat this morning. It's all one big rush in this place.'

What exasperated her most were the slices of toast my father was in the habit of eating. She was convinced that he ate them out of affectation and to keep her 'dancing attention'. 'I have to admit,' the young footman assured her, 'that I never saw the likes of it.' He said this as if he had seen everything there was to see and as if his range of experience included all countries and customs, among which the custom of taking toast was completely unknown. 'Yes, yes,' muttered the butler, 'but all that could come to an end, the workers are supposed to be going on strike in Canada, and the Minister told Monsieur the other night that he'd got two hundred thousand francs out of it.' There was no note of blame attached to the butler's remarks; not that he was not himself perfectly honest, but, because he thought that all politicians were dubious, the criminal misappropriation of public money seemed to him less serious than the pettiest case of larceny. It did not occur to him even that he might have misheard this historic remark, nor was he struck by the unlikelihood that the guilty party would have said it to my father without being asked to leave the house. But Combray philosophy did not allow Françoise to entertain the hope that strikes in Canada would have any effect on the consumption of toast. 'Ah, well, as long as the world is the way it is, there'll be masters to keep us on the trot, and servants to pander to their whims.' Notwithstanding this theory of perpetually trotting about, for the last quarter of an hour my mother, who probably did not have the same sense of time as Françoise in regard to the duration of the servants' midday meal, had been saying: 'What on earth can they be up to? They've been at table for more than two hours.' And she rang timidly three or four times. Françoise, her footman and the butler heard the bell ring, not as a summons and with no thought of answering it, but rather as the first sounds of instruments tuning up for the next part of a concert, when it is clear that there are only a few more minutes of the interval left to go. And so, when the bell rang again more insistently, our servants began to take notice, and, judging that there was not much time left before they took up their duties again, when the bell rang once again, even more loudly this time, they each heaved a sigh and went their separate ways: the footman going down to smoke a cigarette outside, Françoise, after various remarks about us such as 'They've really got the fidgets today', up to the top floor to tidy her room, and the butler, after supplying himself with notepaper from my bedroom, to deal hurriedly with his private correspondence.

Despite the apparent haughtiness of their butler, Françoise had been able, from very early on, to inform me that the Guermantes did not occupy their *hôtel* because of some immemorial right but were fairly recent tenants, and that the garden they overlooked on the side that was unknown to me was quite small and no different from all the other neighbouring gardens; so I discovered at last that it contained no feudal gallows or fortified mill, no fishpond or pillared dovecote, no communal bakehouse, tithe-barn or fortress, no fixed bridges or drawbridges, not even flying bridges or toll-bridges, no pointed towers, wall charters or commemorative mounds. But just as Elstir, when the bay at Balbec lost its mystery for me and became a nondescript part, interchangeable with any other, of the quantity of salt water spread over the globe, had suddenly restored it to something distinctive by revealing that it was the opal gulf Whistler[9] painted in his 'Harmonies in Blue and Silver', so the name Guermantes had seen the last of the dwellings it evoked destroyed by Françoise's blows, when one day an old friend of my father said to us, speaking of the Duchesse: 'She has the highest status in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Hers is the leading house in the Faubourg.' No doubt the leading house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain counted as next to nothing beside all the other dwellings dreamed up in turn by my imagination. Yet this one too – and it was to be the last – however humble it was, possessed something that exceeded its material substance, some hidden quality of its own.

And it became all the more vital for me to be able to seek out in Mme de Guermantes's salon, among her friends, the mystery of her name, since I did not discover it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage. It is true that she had once appeared to me, in the church at Combray, in a momentary flash of transfiguration, with cheeks that were irreducible to, impervious to, the colour of the name Guermantes and of afternoons on the banks of the Vivonne, dislocating my shattered dream, like a god or a nymph changed into a swan or a willow and henceforth subjected to natural laws, gliding over the water or shaken by the wind. Yet scarcely had I left her presence than these vanished glints had come together again like the pink and green reflections of sunset behind the oar that has disturbed them, and in the solitude of my thoughts the name had been quick to appropriate my memory of the face. But now I often saw her at her window, in the courtyard, in the street; and if I did not manage to match the name Guermantes with her person, to think of her as Mme de Guermantes, I could at least put the blame on the failure of my mind to carry out completely the act I demanded of it; but she too, our neighbour, seemed to be committing the same error, and committing it without a qualm, without any of my misgivings, without even suspecting that it was an error. Thus, in the way she dressed, Mme de Guermantes showed the same concern to follow fashion as if, in the belief that she had become a woman like any other, she had aspired to the sort of elegance in which ordinary women might equal or perhaps surpass her; I had seen her in the street look admiringly at a well-dressed actress; and in the morning, just as she was about to leave the house on foot, as if the opinion of people in the street, whose vulgarity she accentuated by parading her inaccessible life familiarly among them, might be there to pass judgment on her, I would see her in front of her mirror where, with a conviction devoid of all pretence and irony, with passion, with ill-humour, with conceit, like a queen accepting the part of a servant-girl in a comedy staged at court, she played out the role, so unworthy of her, of a fashionable woman; and in this mythological obliviousness of her native grandeur, she checked the position of her veil, smoothed her cuffs, arranged her cape, as the divine swan goes through all the movements of his animal species, keeps his painted eyes on either side of his beak without any sign of movement in them, and then darts suddenly after a button or an umbrella, behaving like a swan and forgetting that he is a god. But like a traveller who is disappointed by his first impression of a city and who tells himself that he might perhaps penetrate its charm by visiting its museums, getting to know its inhabitants and working in its libraries, I assured myself that, had I been a regular visitor to Mme de Guermantes's house, were I one of her circle, were I to enter into her life, I should then know what was really enclosed within the brilliant orange-coloured envelope of her name, know it objectively, through the eyes of others, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes were an exclusive set in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The life I supposed them to be living stemmed from a source so different from anything I knew and must, it seemed to me, be so special, that I could not have imagined the presence at the Duchesse's parties of the sort of people I had frequented so far, of people who really existed. For, incapable of suddenly changing their nature, they would have conducted conversations there in a way that was familiar to me; their partners would perhaps have stooped to answer them in the same human speech; and, in the course of an evening spent in the leading salon of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, there would have been moments identical with moments I had already experienced: but this was impossible. It is true that my mind was hampered by certain difficulties, and the presence of the body of Jesus Christ in the sacrament seemed to me no more obscure a mystery than this leading salon of the Faubourg Saint-Germain being situated on the right bank and the fact that, every morning, from my bedroom, I could hear its carpets being beaten. But the line of demarcation that separated me from the Faubourg Saint-Germain seemed to me all the more real because it was purely ideal; I had a strong sense of it already being the Faubourg when I saw, spread out on the other side

of this Equator, the Guermantes door-mat of which my mother had been bold enough to say, having like myself caught sight of it one day when their door was open, that it was in a dreadful state. Besides, how could their dining-room, their dim gallery with its red plush furniture, which I could sometimes see from our kitchen window, have failed to possess for me the mysterious spell of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to form an essential part of it, to be geographically located within it, when to be invited into that dining-room was to have gone into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to have breathed its air, since the people who sat down beside Mme de Guermantes on the leather sofa in the gallery before proceeding to table all belonged to the Faubourg Saint-Germain? No doubt, outside the Faubourg, at certain parties, majestically enthroned amid the vulgar herd of fashionable people, one might occasionally see one of those men who are no more than names and who, when one tries to picture them, assume in turn the aspect of a tournament or of a royal forest. But here, in the leading salon of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in the dim gallery, they were the only company. They were the columns, built with precious material, that upheld the temple. Even for intimate gatherings it was from among them alone that Mme de Guermantes could select her guests, and in the dinner-parties for twelve, assembled around the lavishly set table, they were like the golden statues of the apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolic and sanctifying pillars before the Lord's Table. As for the tiny patch of garden that lay behind high walls at the back of the house, where in summer Mme de Guermantes had liqueurs and orangeade served to her guests after dinner, how could I have failed to feel that to sit there between nine and eleven at night on its wrought-iron chairs – they had the same magic power as the leather sofa – and not to breath in the air peculiar to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was as impossible as to take a siesta in the oasis of Figuig and not to be in Africa? Only imagination and belief can differentiate certain objects and people from the rest, and create a particular atmosphere. Alas, those picturesque sites, those natural features, those local curiosities and works of art of the Faubourg Saint-Germain would doubtless remain forbidden territory to me. So I made do with a twitch of excitement as I sighted from the open sea (without the least hope of ever landing), like a prominent minaret, like the first palm tree, like the first signs of exotic industry and vegetation, the well-trodden door-mat of its shore.

But if for me the Hôtel de Guermantes began at the door to its entrance hall, its dependencies must have extended much further in the estimation of the Duc de Guermantes, who, regarding all the tenants as farmers, villeins, acquisitors of national assets, whose views were of no importance, stood shaving himself at his window in his nightshirt every morning, then came down into the courtyard, dressed, depending on the temperature, in his shirt-sleeves, in pyjamas, in a plaid jacket of unusual colours and a shaggy nap, in little light-coloured cardigans shorter than his jacket, and had one of his grooms lead past him at a trot some horse he had just purchased. On more than one occasion the horse damaged Jupien's shop-front, and Jupien, to the Duc's indignation, demanded compensation. 'If it were only out of respect for all the good work that Madame la Duchesse does here and in the parish,' said M. de Guermantes, 'it's outrageous that this fellow should claim anything at all from us.' But Jupien had held his ground and appeared to be completely unaware of what 'good' the Duchesse had ever done. And yet she did do good, but, since we cannot do good to everyone at once, the memory of the help heaped on one person becomes a reason for not helping another, whose discontent is then all the more aroused. From other points of view that had nothing to do with good works, the neighbourhood seemed to the Duc – and this over a considerable area – to be little more than an extension of his own courtyard, a longer track for his horses. After seeing how a newly purchased horse trotted on its own, he would have it harnessed and taken through all the streets in the area, the groom running alongside the carriage holding the reins, making it pass to and fro before the Duc, who stood there on the pavement, a giant, enormous in his light-coloured clothes, a cigar between his teeth, his head in the air, his monocle alert, until the moment came when he jumped up on to the box, tried out the horse for himself, then set off with his new equipage to meet up with his mistress in the Champs-Élysées. M. de Guermantes would bid good day in the courtyard to two couples who belonged more or less to his world: some cousins of his who, like working-class couples, were never at home to look after their children, since every morning the wife went off to study counterpoint and fugue at the Schola Cantorum, and the husband to carve wood and tool leather in his workshop; and then the Baron and the Baronne de Norpois, who were always dressed in black, she like a pew-attendant and he like an undertaker, and who appeared several times a day on their way to church. They were the nephew and niece of the former ambassador we knew and whom my father had in fact met at the foot of the staircase without realizing where he was coming from; for to my father's mind, such an important figure, who had consorted with the most eminent men in Europe and was probably quite indifferent to empty distinctions of social rank, was hardly likely to keep company with these obscure, clerical and narrow-minded nobles. They were newcomers to the place; Jupien, who had come out into the courtyard to say something to the husband, who was in the process of greeting M. de Guermantes, called him 'M. Norpois', uncertain of his real title.

'So it's Monsieur Norpois, is it? How very original! Just wait and see! this individual will be calling you Citizen Norpois next!' exclaimed M. de Guermantes, turning to the Baron. He had finally found the opportunity to give vent to his rancour against Jupien, who addressed him as 'Monsieur' and not as 'Monsieur le Duc'.

One day when M. de Guermantes needed some advice which my father was professionally qualified to give, he had introduced himself with great courtesy. After that, he had often some neighbourly service to ask of my father and, as soon as he saw him coming downstairs, his mind occupied by work and anxious to avoid meeting anyone, the Duc would leave his stable-lads and come up to him in the courtyard, straighten the collar of his greatcoat with the obliging attentiveness he had inherited from a line of royal valets, take his hand and hold it in his own, stroking it even, to prove to him, with the shamelessness of a courtesan, that he did not begrudge him the honour of contact with his noble flesh, and would then lead him off, extremely disgruntled and bent only on escape, to the carriage entrance and out into the street. He had run into us and greeted us effusively one day as he was setting out in the carriage with his wife; he must have told her my name, but what chance was there of her remembering either my name or my face? And besides, what a feeble recommendation to be pointed out merely as one of her tenants! It would have been more effective to meet the Duchesse at the house of Mme de Villeparisis, who had, as it happened, sent a message through my grandmother that I was to pay her a visit and, knowing that I had been intending to pursue a literary career, had added that I would meet various writers at her house. But my father felt that I was still rather young to go into society, and, since the state of my health was a continuing cause of concern to him, he was not keen to provide me with fresh opportunities for leaving the house when I did not have to.

Since one of Mme de Guermantes's footmen spent a lot of time gossiping with Françoise, I heard the names of several of the salons she frequented but was unable to picture any of them: once they were part of her life, the life I could see only through the screen of her name, were they not inconceivable?

'There's a big shadow-theatre party tonight at the Princess of Parma's,' said the footman, 'but we shan't be going because Madame is taking the five o'clock train to Chantilly and spending a couple of days with the Duc d' Aumale. But it's her maid and the valet are going with her. I'm to stay here. She won't be at all pleased, will the Princess of Parma, she's written to Madame la Duchesse four times or more.

– Then you're not off to the Guermantes château this year?

– It's the first time we're not going. Because of Monsieur le Duc's rheumatics; the doctor says he's not to go there again until they get a heating boiler installed, but we've been there every year so far, right through to January. If the boiler's not ready, Madame will probably go to Cannes for a few days to the Duchesse de Guise's, but that's still to be decided.

– And do you ever get to the theatre?

– We sometimes go to the Opéra. Sometimes when the Princess of Parma has her box. That's once a week. They do really good things there by all accounts, plays, operas, everything. Madame la Duchesse didn't want to take out a subscription herself, but that doesn't stop us going to the boxes of one or other of Madame's friends. It's often the Princesse de Guermantes, the wife of Monsieur le Duc's cousin. She's sister to the Duc de Bavière. – So you're off again upstairs, are you? said the footman. Although he was identified with the Guermantes, he regarded 'masters' in general in a political light that allowed him to treat Françoise with as much respect as if she too was in service with a duchess. I see you're in good health, Madame.

– Oh, if it weren't for these blasted legs of mine! I'm all right on the plain' ('on the plain' meant in the courtyard or in the street where Françoise was not averse to walking, in other words, on the flat) 'but it's these dratted stairs. Good-bye, Monsieur. Perhaps I'll see you again this evening.'

She was all the more eager to continue her conversations with the footman after he told her that the sons of dukes often bore a princely title which they retained until the fathers were dead. Clearly the cult of nobility, accommodatingly mingled with a certain spirit of revolt against it, and springing hereditarily from the soil of France, must be strongly ingrained in her people. For Françoise, to whom you might speak of Napoleon's genius or of wireless telegraphy without managing to attract her attention and without her pausing for a moment in her work as she cleared the grate or set the table, at the least hint of such details, like learning that the younger son of the Duc de Guermantes was generally called the Prince d' Oléron, would burst out with: 'Isn't that lovely!' and stand there in wonder, as though in front of a stained-glass window.

Françoise had also learned from the Prince d' Agrigente's valet, who had become friendly with her because he often called round to deliver letters to the Duchesse, that there had been a great deal of talk in society about the marriage of the Marquis de Saint-Loup to Mlle d' Ambresac, and that it was virtually settled.

The particular villa, the particular opera-box, into which Mme de Guermantes decanted her life, were places I saw as no less magical than her home. The names Guise, Parma, Guermantes-Bavière, differentiated from all others the holiday places to which the Duchesse went, the daily festivities that the track of her carriage wheels linked to her mansion. If they told me that the life of Mme de Guermantes consisted of a succession of such holidays and festivities, they enlightened me no further on the subject. Each name gave a different determination to the Duchesse's life, yet merely added a change of mystery without allowing any of its own mystery to escape, so that it simply moved about, protected by an impenetrable barrier, enclosed in a vase, amid the waves of other people's lives. The Duchesse could have lunch beside the Mediterranean at Carnival time, but in the villa of Mme de Guise, where the queen of Parisian society was no more, in her white piqué dress, and amid numerous princesses, than a guest like any other, yet on that account more moving still to me, more herself by being made new, like a prima ballerina who, in an elaborate dance figure, takes the place of each of her sister ballerinas in turn; she could look at shadow-theatre performances, but at a party given by the Princess of Parma; she could listen to tragedy or opera, but from the Princesse de Guermantes's box.

Since we localize in a person's body all the potentialities of that person's life, the memory of the people they know and have just left or are on their way to meet, if, after discovering through Françoise that Mme de Guermantes was going on foot to luncheon with the Princess of Parma, I saw her coming down around midday in her flesh-coloured satin dress above which her face was of the same shade, like a cloud at sunset, what I saw before me were all the pleasures of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, contained in that small volume, as though between the lustrous, pearl-pink valves of a shell.

My father had a friend at the Ministry, a certain A. J. Moreau, who, to distinguish himself from other people called Moreau, always took care to prefix his name with his two initials, and so became known as 'A. J.' for short. For some reason or other this A. J. found himself in possession of a stalls ticket for a gala night at the Opéra; he sent the ticket to my father, and since La Berma, whom I had not seen on stage since my first disappointing experience, was to appear in an act of *Phèdre*, my grandmother saw to it that my father gave the ticket to me.

To tell the truth, I set no great store by this opportunity of seeing La Berma perform, which, a few years earlier, had thrown me into such a state of over-excitement. And it was not without a feeling of melancholy that I registered my indifference to something I had previously put before my health and peace of mind. My need to be able to contemplate closely the precious particles of reality glimpsed by my imagination had not diminished, it was not that. But I no longer imagined them to be found in the diction of a great actress; since my visits to Elstir, it was to certain tapestries, to certain modern paintings that I had transferred the inner allegiance I had formerly given to the acting and the tragic art of La Berma; since my allegiance and my enthusiasm no longer came to pay incessant worship to the diction and the stage presence of La Berma, the 'double' I possessed of them in my heart had gradually shrivelled away like those other 'doubles' of the deceased in ancient Egypt which needed to be nourished continually in order to ensure the life of their souls. La Berma's art had become pathetically thin. It was no longer inhabited by a profundity of soul.

As I ascended the grand staircase of the Opéra, armed with the ticket my father had been given, I saw in front of me a man whom I took at first to be M. de Charlus, whose bearing he had; when he turned to ask something of an attendant I saw that I had been mistaken, but I had no hesitation in placing the stranger in the same social class, not only from the way in which he was dressed but also from his manner of speaking to the ticket attendant and to the usherettes who were keeping him waiting. For quite apart from individual characteristics, there was still at this time a very marked difference between a rich and dressy man from this section of the aristocracy and a rich and dressy man from the world of finance or high industry. Where one of the latter would have thought he was asserting his elegance by adopting a cutting and haughty tone in speaking to an inferior, the aristocrat, mild and affable, would convey the impression of respect, of practising an affectation of humility and patience, the pretence of being any ordinary member of the audience, as the prerogative of his good breeding. It is likely that, seeing him thus dissemble behind such a good-natured smile the uncrossable threshold of the exclusive little world he carried inside him, more than one wealthy banker's son, entering the theatre at that moment, would have taken this nobleman for a man of little importance, had he not been struck by the astonishing resemblance to a portrait that had recently appeared in the illustrated papers of a nephew of the Emperor of Austria, the Prince de Saxe, who happened to be in Paris at that moment. I knew him to be a great friend of the Guermantes. And as I reached the ticket attendant myself, I heard the Prince de Saxe (if this is who he really was) say with a smile: 'I don't know which number. My cousin told me I need only ask for her box.'

He may well have been the Prince de Saxe; perhaps it was the Duchesse de Guermantes (and if it was, I would be able see her living out one of the moments of her unimaginable life in her cousin's box) that he saw in his mind's eye when he used the words 'my cousin told me I need only ask for her box', and this feeling was so strong that his distinctive smiling gaze and the utter simplicity of his words caressed my heart (far more than any abstract reverie would have done) with the alternate intuitions of a possible happiness and a vague glamour. At least, by uttering these words to the ticket attendant, he opened up an ordinary evening in my everyday life to the possibility of entry into a new world: the corridor to which he was directed after he had mentioned the word 'box' and into which he now turned was damp and cracked and seemed to lead to marine grottoes, to the mythological realm of the water-nymphs. Ahead of me there was simply a gentleman in evening dress walking away from me; but around him, as if I were playing with a clumsy reflector which I was unable to focus accurately upon him, I projected the idea that he was the Prince de Saxe on his way to join the Duchesse de Guermantes. And although he was alone, this idea, external to him, impalpable, immense and as unsteady as a searchlight, seemed to go before him as a guide like the Deity who stands beside Greek warriors in battle, but is invisible to others.

I took my seat, trying to recall a line from *Phèdre* which I could not quite remember. There was not the right number of feet in the form in which I repeated it to myself, but I was not trying to count them, and it simply seemed to me that the imbalance of my line had nothing in common with a line of classical verse. It would not have surprised me to discover that I needed to subtract at least six syllables from my monstrous phrase to make it into an alexandrine. But it suddenly came back to me, and the insurmountable harshness of an inhuman world vanished as if by magic; the syllables of the line immediately matched the required length of an alexandrine and the excess moved off with the fluid ease of a bubble rising to break on the surface of the water. And as it happened, the monstrosity with which I had struggled turned out to be only a single foot.

A certain number of the front stalls on sale at the box office had been bought by those who wished, out of snobbishness or curiosity, to study the appearance of people whom they would have not otherwise been able to see at close quarters. And it was true that something of their actual society life, normally concealed, could be examined here in public; since the Princess of Parma had distributed her friends in the dress circle, in balcony and parterre boxes, the auditorium was like a drawing-room where everyone moved around and went to sit here or there, next to their friends.

I was sitting next to some vulgar people who did not know who the regular seat-holders were but were anxious to show that they were capable of identifying them and were naming them loudly. They went on to remark that these regulars behaved as if they were in their own drawing-rooms, which implied that they were paying no attention to what was being performed. In fact it was quite the opposite. The inspired student who has taken a stall in order to see La Berma thinks only of keeping his gloves clean, of not disturbing, of ingratiating himself with the neighbour whom chance has placed in the next seat, of pursuing with an intermittent smile the fleeting glance, or avoiding with apparent bad manners the intercepted glance, of someone he knows and has seen in the audience; after endless indecision, he decides to go and pay his respects just as the three knocks from the stage, sounding before he has had time to reach his acquaintance, force him to flee back to his seat, like the Hebrews in the Red Sea, through the heaving swell of men and women in the audience whom he has made to get up from their seats and whose dresses he tears and whose boots he crushes on the way. By contrast, it was because society people sat in their boxes (behind the tiered circle) as in so many little suspended drawing-rooms with the fourth wall removed, or little cafés where refreshment can be taken, unintimidated by the gilt-framed mirrors and the red plush seats of this Neapolitan establishment; it was because they rested an indifferent hand on the gilded shafts of the columns supporting this temple of lyric art and because they remained unmoved by the excessive honours which they seemed to receive from the two sculpted figures that held out palm and laurel branches towards each box, that they alone would have had the clarity of mind to attend to the play, if only they had had minds.

At first there were only vague shadows in which one suddenly encountered, like the gleam of an unseen jewel, the phosphorescence of a pair of famous eyes or, like a medallion of Henri IV against a dark background, the bent profile of the Duc d'Aumale, to whom an invisible lady was exclaiming: 'Your Highness must allow me to take his coat', and who responded with: 'Oh, come now, Madame d' Ambresac, there's really no need.' She went ahead, despite this vague demurral, and became the envy of all for being thus honoured.

But in almost all the other boxes, the white deities who inhabited these dark abodes had taken refuge against their shadowy walls and remained invisible. Yet as the performance proceeded, their vaguely human forms began to emerge in languid succession from the depths of the darkness they embroidered, and, rising towards the light, they allowed their half-naked bodies to emerge as far as the vertical surface of half-light where their gleaming faces appeared behind the gently playful foam of their fluttering feather fans, and beneath their purple, pearl-threaded coiffures which seemed to have been bent by the motion of incoming waves; beyond lay the front stalls, the abode of mortals forever separated from the sombre transparent realm to which the limpid and reflecting eyes of the water-goddesses, dotted about on the smooth liquid surface, served as a frontier. For the folding seats on the shore and the forms of the monsters in the stalls were figured in their eyes in simple accordance with the laws of optics and their angle of incidence, as is the case with those two elements of external reality to which, in the knowledge that they are without any soul, however rudimentary, analogous to our own, we would consider it insane to address a smile or a glance: namely, mineral substances and people to whom we have not been introduced. But within the limits of their domain, by contrast, these radiant daughters of the sea were constantly turning round to smile at the bearded tritons who hung from the anfractuous rocks of the ocean depths, or at some aquatic demi-god whose skull was a polished stone around which the tide had washed up a smooth deposit of seaweed and whose gaze was a disc of rock crystal. They leaned towards these creatures and offered them bonbons; occasionally the waters parted to reveal a new nereid who had just blossomed out of the shadowy depths, a late arrival who smiled apologetically; then, at the end of the act, with no further hope of hearing the melodious sounds of the earth that had drawn them to the surface, the divine sisters plunged back together and disappeared into darkness. But of all these retreats to whose thresholds their idle curiosity to behold the works of man brought the inquisitive goddesses who let no one approach them, the most celebrated was the block of semi-darkness known as the parterre box of the Princesse de Guermantes.

Like a great goddess who presides from afar over the sport of lesser deities, the Princesse had deliberately remained somewhat to the back of her box on a side-facing sofa, red as a coral rock, beside a wide vitreous reflection which was probably a mirror and which suggested a section, perpendicular, dark and liquid, cut by a ray of sunlight in the dazzled crystal of the sea. At once a feather and a corolla, like certain marine plants, a great white flower, as downy as a bird's wing, hung down from the Princesse's forehead along one of her cheeks, following its curve with flirtatious suppleness, lovingly attentive, as if half enclosing it like a pink egg in the down of a halcyon's nest. Over her hair, reaching down to her eyebrows and continuing lower down at her throat, hung a net made up of the little white shells that are fished from certain southern seas which were mingled with pearls, a marine mosaic barely emerging from the waves and every so often plunged back into darkness in which, even then, a human presence was revealed by the glittering motility of the Princesse's eyes. The beauty which set her far above the other mythical daughters of the semi-darkness was not altogether materially and inclusively inscribed in the nape of her neck, in her shoulders, in her arms or in her waist. But the exquisite, unfinished line of this last was the exact starting-point, the inevitable origin of invisible lines into which the eye could not help extending them, marvellous lines, engendered around the woman like the spectre of an ideal figure projected against the darkness.

'That's the Princesse de Guermantes,' said my neighbour to the gentleman who was with her, taking care to preface the word 'Princesse' with a whole string of *P*s to show that the title was ludicrous. 'She's not short of a pearl or two. I'm sure if I had as many as that I wouldn't be making such a show of them. It's rather common, to my way of thinking.'

And yet, as their eyes caught sight of the Princesse, all those who were looking round to see who was in the audience felt in their hearts that the rightful prize for beauty went to her. The truth was that, with the Duchesse de Luxembourg, with Mme de Morienval, Mme de Saint-Euverte and any number of others, the features that made their faces distinctive were a big red nose next to a hare-lip, or two wrinkled cheeks and a faint moustache. Such features cast their own spell well enough since, as a merely conventional form of handwriting, they enabled one to read a famous and impressive name; but ultimately they also gave rise to the notion that ugliness was somehow aristocratic, that it was a matter of indifference that the face of a grand lady should be beautiful, provided it was distinguished. But like certain painters who sign the bottom of their canvases not with the letters of their names, but with some figure that is beautiful in itself, a butterfly, a lizard, a flower, it was the figure of her exquisite body and face that the Princesse affixed to the corner of her box, thus proving that beauty can be the noblest of signatures; for the presence of the Princesse de Guermantes, who brought to the theatre only those who were permanent members of her intimate circle, was in the eyes of connoisseurs of the aristocracy the best possible guarantee of authenticity for the painting represented by her box, a sort of scene from the familiar round of her exclusive life in her palaces in Munich and in Paris.

The imagination being like a barrel-organ that does not work properly and always plays a different tune from the one it should, every time I had heard anyone mention the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, a recollection of certain sixteenth-century masterpieces began to sing in my head. I was forced to rid myself of the association now that I saw her there before me offering crystallized fruit to a stout gentleman in tails. In no way did this lead me to conclude that she and her guests were mere mortals like the rest of us. I was very conscious of the fact that what they were doing was only a game, and that as a prelude to the acts of their real life (the important part of which they presumably did not conduct here) it was appropriate, in accordance with rituals of which I knew nothing, that they should pretend to offer and decline bonbons, a gesture stripped of its normal significance and decided beforehand like the steps of a ballerina who alternately dances on points or circles around a scarf. For all I knew, perhaps as she offered him bonbons, the goddess was saying, with that irony in her voice (for I saw her smile): 'Will you have a bonbon?' What did it matter to me? I should have found a delicious refinement in the deliberate dryness, in the style of Mérimée[10] or Meilhac,[11] of these words addressed by a goddess to a demi-god who knew what sublime thoughts they both held in their minds, reserved no doubt for the moment when they would resume their real life, and who played along with the game by answering her with the same mysterious roguish connivance: 'Thank you. I should rather like a cherry bonbon.' And I would have listened to this exchange as eagerly as to a scene from *Le Mari de la débutante*, in which the absence of poetry and lofty thought, elements that Meilhac would have been perfectly capable of introducing, seemed to me in itself a refinement, conventional enough and therefore all the more mysterious and instructive.

‘The fat fellow over there is the Marquis de Garançay,’ said the man next to me in a knowing voice. He had not quite caught the name that had been whispered in the row behind.

The Marquis de Palancy, his head turned sideways on his craning neck, his great round eye glued to the glass of his monocle, moved slowly around in the transparent gloom and appeared no more to see the public in the stalls than a fish that drifts by, unaware of the crowd of curious visitors, behind the glass wall of an aquarium. Occasionally he paused, venerable, wheezy and moss-covered, and the onlooker could not have told whether he was unwell, asleep, swimming, spawning or simply taking breath. No one aroused my envy more, because of his apparent familiarity with this box and the indifference with which he allowed the Princesse to offer him her box of bonbons; as she did so, she threw him a glance from her lovely eyes, cut from a diamond that intelligence and friendliness seemed to turn liquid at such moments, whereas when they were still, reduced to their purely material beauty, to their merely mineral brilliance, if the least thing caused them to move, even slightly, they set the depths of the orchestra stalls ablaze with the horizontal splendour of their inhuman fire. But now, because the act from *Phèdre* to be given by La Berma was about to begin, the Princesse moved to the front of her box; and, as if she herself were a theatrical apparition, as she crossed through a different zone of light, I saw not only the colour but the material of her ornate costume change. There in the box, now drained dry, emergent and no longer part of the kingdom of the sea, the Princesse, ceasing to be a nereid, appeared turbaned in white and blue like some marvellous tragic actress dressed for the part of Zaire or possibly Orosmane,[12] then, when she had taken her seat in the front row, I saw that the downy halcyon’s nest which lovingly shielded the pearly pink of her cheeks was an immense bird of paradise, soft, glittering and velvety.

But my eyes were diverted from the Princesse de Guermantes’s box by a badly-dressed, ugly little woman, her eyes aflame with anger, accompanied by two young people, who came and sat a few seats away from me. Then the curtain rose. I could not help being saddened by the fact that there was now nothing left of my former frame of mind when, in order to miss nothing of the extraordinary phenomenon I would have gone to the ends of the earth to see, I used to keep my mind prepared like the sensitive plates astronomers take to Africa or the West Indies for the scrupulous observation of a comet or an eclipse; when I sat there in fear that a cloud (a bad mood on the performer’s part, an incident in the auditorium) might prevent the spectacle from taking place with maximum intensity; when I should not have believed I was seeing it in the best conditions unless I went to the very theatre that had been consecrated to her like an altar, where it still felt that an integral (though ancillary) part of her appearance from behind the little red curtain was played by the ticket attendants with their white carnations whom she had appointed, by the vaulted gallery over a pit crowded with badly-dressed people, by the women selling programmes with her photograph, by the chestnut trees in the square outside, by all these companions, these confidants of my impressions at that time and, to my mind, inseparable from them. *Phèdre*, the ‘declaration scene’, La Berma, had had for me then a sort of absolute existence. Placed at a remove from the world of daily experience, they existed in their own right, I had to move towards them, penetrate what I could of them, and even if I opened wide my eyes and my soul to them, I would still absorb very little. But how pleasant life seemed to me then: the insignificance of my daily life did not matter, no more than the time we spend dressing, getting ready to go out, since beyond it there existed, in absolute form, rewarding yet difficult to approach, impossible to possess in their entirety, the more substantial realities of *Phèdre* and the way La Berma spoke her lines. Steeped in these day-dreams of the perfection possible in dramatic art, from which a strong dose of drama could have been extracted had anyone chosen to analyse my mind at the time, at whatever hour of the day or even of the night, I was like a battery charging itself with electricity. And things had reached such a point that, ill as I was, even if I had thought I would die from it, I needed at all costs to go and hear La Berma. But now all this, like a hill which seems to be sky-blue when seen from a distance but from close to reverts to our commonplace vision of things, had left the world of the absolute and was no more than a thing like other things; I took notice of it because I was there; actors were no different in substance from the people I knew, trying to deliver as best they could these lines from *Phèdre* which themselves no longer formed some sublime and distinct essence, existing in isolation, but were lines that were more or less effective, ready to rejoin the vast corpus of French verse to which they belonged. This made me feel a sense of despondency all the more profound in that, if the object of my stubbornly persistent desire had ceased to exist, by contrast, the same tendency to get stuck in day-dreams, which varied from year to year but still led to sudden, heedless impulses, refused to go away. A day on which I left my sickbed to go and see one of Elstir’s paintings or a mediaeval tapestry in some country house was so like the day on which I ought to have left for Venice, or the day I went to see La Berma and the day I departed for Balbec, that I felt in advance that the immediate object of my sacrifice would leave me indifferent in no time at all, that I might therefore pass very close to the place without actually going to see the painting or the tapestries for which I was prepared at this time to face any number of sleepless nights and bouts of pain. The shifting nature of its object made me sense the vanity of my effort and at the same time its immensity, which I had not really acknowledged, like one of those neurasthenics whose exhaustion is doubled when it is pointed out to them that they are exhausted. In the meantime, my day-dreams lent glamour to anything that came their way. And even in my most carnal desires, oriented always in a particular direction, concentrated around a single dream, I could have recognized as their primary motive an idea, one for which I would have laid down my life, at the very heart of which lay, as in my day-dreams when I used to sit reading in the afternoon in the garden at Combray, the notion of perfection.

I no longer felt the same indulgence as before for the painstaking endeavours to convey feelings of love or anger which I had then observed in the delivery and gestures of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte. It was not that the actors – they were the same – did not still seek as intelligently as they had before to introduce a caressing inflexion or a calculated ambiguity into their voices, a tragic breadth or an appealing sense of supplication into their gestures. Their intonations commanded the voice: ‘Be gentle, sing like a nightingale, be soothing’ or, conversely: ‘Make yourself furious’ and then fell upon it in an attempt to carry it along with them in their frenzy. But their voices, rebellious and independent of their diction, refused to be anything but their natural voices with their material defects or charms, their everyday ordinariness or affectation, and so presented a set of acoustic and social phenomena which the emotive power of the lines they were delivering could do nothing to alter.

Similarly the actors’ gestures said to their arms, to their robes: ‘Be majestic.’ But their unsubmissive limbs allowed a biceps which knew nothing of the part they were playing to flaunt itself between shoulder and elbow; their bodies continued to express the triviality of everyday life and to emphasize not the subtlety of Racine but the related functions of their muscles; and the hanging robes that they held up fell back into a vertical drop in which the laws governing falling bodies were challenged solely by the tame movement of textiles. At this point the little woman sitting near me exclaimed: ‘Not a jot of applause! Just look at her get-up! She’s too old for it, she can’t do it any more. She really ought to give it up.’

Amid protests of ‘hush!’ from the people near them the two young people who were with her attempted to quieten her down and her fury became confined to her eyes alone. In any case such fury could have been relevant only to success and fame, and La Berma, who had earned so much money in the past, had nothing now but her debts. Since she was forever making business or social appointments she was unable to keep, she had messengers running all over the place with her apologies, hotel suites booked in advance which she would never use, oceans of perfume for her dogs, penalties to be paid for breaches of contract with all her managers. Failing any more serious expenses, and being less voluptuous than Cleopatra, she would have found the means to squander provinces and kingdoms on telegrams and hired carriages. But the little woman near me was an actress whose career had not been successful and who had vowed a deadly hatred towards La Berma. The latter had just come on to the stage. And then, miraculously, like the lessons which we have vainly spent an exhausting evening trying to learn and which we find we know by heart after a night’s sleep, and like the faces of dead friends which the intense efforts of our memory pursue without success and appear right there before our eyes, lifelike, when we are no longer thinking of them, the talent of La Berma which had escaped me when I had struggled hard to grasp its essence, now, after these years of oblivion, in this hour of indifference, imposed itself forcefully upon my admiration as something self-evident. Previously, in my attempts to distinguish this talent, I had somehow deducted the part of Phèdre itself from what I was hearing, a part which was the common property of all the actresses who played the role, and which I had studied in advance so that I could subtract it and, from what was left, glean the talent of Mme Berma in isolation. But this talent which I was trying to perceive outside the role was inseparable from it. The same is true of a great musician (it seems that this

was the case with Vinteuil when he played the piano): his playing is that of so great a pianist that you forget completely that the performer is a pianist; by avoiding the whole apparatus of strenuous muscularity, which achieves sporadically brilliant effects like the whole splatter of notes in which the undiscerning listener at least sees evidence of talent in its material, tangible form, his playing has become so transparent, so full of what he is interpreting, that he himself disappears and becomes simply a window opening on to a masterpiece. The reasons that dictated the diction and the gestures of Aricie, Ismène and Hippolyte and seemed to frame them like an imposing or an unobtrusive border, were obvious to me; but Phèdre had interiorized her own and my mind had not managed to wrest from her diction or her moods, to apprehend in the spare simplicity of their flawless surfaces, the strokes of inspiration, the effects which remained unobtrusive, so completely had they been absorbed. La Berma's voice, which retained no scrap of inert matter refractory to the mind, betrayed no sign of the excessive tears which, because they had been unable to soak into it, could be seen trickling down the marble of the voices of Aricie or Ismène; it had been rendered supple and sensitive down to its smallest cells, like the instrument of a great violinist in whom, when one says that he produces a beautiful sound, one means to praise not a physical property but a superiority of soul; and, as in classical landscape where in the place of a vanished nymph there is an inanimate spring, discernible and conscious intention had become a strangely limpid quality of tone, apt and cold. La Berma's arms, which the lines of verse themselves, with the same force that they used to project her voice from her lips, seemed to raise to her breast like branches displaced by rushing water; her stage presence, which she had gradually developed, which she was to modify still further, and which was based upon motivations that were anchored in something quite different from those that could be glimpsed in the gestures of her fellow-actors, but motivations that had lost their initial self-consciousness, melted into a kind of radiance and set throbbing around the character of Phèdre rich and complex elements which the fascinated spectator took not for accomplished acting but for real life; those white veils themselves, exhausted and faithful, which seemed to be made of a living substance and to have been spun by the half-pagan, half-Jansenist suffering around which they clung like a frail and shrinking cocoon; all these, voice, stage presence, gestures, veils, around that embodiment of an idea represented by a line of poetry (an embodiment which, unlike human bodies, does not stand in the way of the soul like an opaque obstacle that prevents us from seeing it, but is there like a purified, vitalized garment in which the soul is diffused and can be discovered), were merely additional coverings which, instead of concealing, revealed the greater splendour of the soul that had assimilated and spread itself through them, like lava-flows of different substances, turned translucent, superimposed upon each other only to refract the more richly the imprisoned, central ray of light that shines through them, and to render more far-reaching, more precious and more beautiful the flame-drenched matter in which it is sheathed. So La Berma's interpretation was, around Racine's work, a second work, it too enlivened by genius.

My impression, to tell the truth, though more agreeable than before, was not really different. Only, I no longer pitted it against a preconceived, abstract and false notion of dramatic genius, and I understood now that dramatic genius was precisely this. I had been thinking earlier that if I had not enjoyed my first experience of La Berma it was because, as with my earlier encounters with Gilberte in the Champs-Élysées, I had approached it with too strong a desire. Between these two disappointments there was perhaps not only this resemblance, but another, deeper one. The impression made upon us by a person or a work (or its interpretation) of strong character is intrinsic to them. We have brought along with us the ideas of 'beauty', 'breadth of style', 'pathos', which we might just possibly think we recognize in the banality of a passable talent or face, but our critical mind is confronted in fact with the nagging presence of a form for which it possesses no intellectual equivalent, the unknown part of which it needs to extricate. It hears a high-pitched sound, an oddly questioning intonation. It asks: 'Is that good? Is it admiration I am feeling? Is this what is meant by richness of colour, nobility, power?' And what answers back is a high-pitched voice, an oddly questioning tone, the despotic impression, wholly material, caused by a person we do not know, in which no scope is left for 'breadth of interpretation'. And for this reason, really fine works of art, if they are given genuine attention, are the ones that disappoint us most, because in the sum total of our ideas there is none that responds to an individual impression.

This was exactly what La Berma's acting made clear to me. This was indeed what was meant by nobility, by sensitivity of diction. Now I could appreciate the merits of a wide-ranging, poetic and powerful interpretation; or rather it was upon this that these words are conventionally conferred, but only in the way that we give the names Mars, Venus, Saturn to planets that have nothing mythological about them. Our feelings belong to one world, our ability to name things and our thoughts to another; we can establish a concordance between the two, but not bridge the gap. And it was something like this gap, this fault, that I had to cross when, the first time I went to see La Berma act, and after straining to catch her every word, I had found some difficulty in connecting my ideas of 'nobility of interpretation' and 'originality' and had broken into applause only after a moment's blankness and as if my applause did not spring from my actual impression but was somehow linked to my preconceived ideas and to the pleasure I felt in saying to myself: 'At last I am listening to La Berma.' And the difference that exists between a person or a work of art of strongly individual character and the idea of beauty exists just as much between what they make us feel and the idea of love or admiration. Listening to La Berma had given me no pleasure (any more than seeing Gilberte). I had said to myself: 'So I *don't* admire her.' Yet all the while I was thinking only about deepening my understanding of her acting, I was preoccupied with that alone, and I was trying to open my mind as wide as possible to grasp everything that was involved in her acting: I now understood that this was exactly what admiration was.

Was this genius, which La Berma's interpretation was there only to reveal, the genius of Racine alone?

This is what I thought at first. I was soon to think differently, once the act from *Phèdre* was over, and after the curtain-calls, during which my furious old neighbour, drawing her tiny body up to its full height, turning sideways in her seat, sat there poker-faced with her arms folded across her breast to show that she was not joining in the general applause and to draw attention to a protest which to her seemed sensational but which nobody noticed. The play that followed was one of those novelties which at one time I would have expected, since they were not famous, to be slight and restricted in scope, given that they had no existence outside their current performance. But I did not feel, as I did with a classic play, the disappointment of seeing the eternity of a masterpiece reduced to the dimensions of the footlights and to the duration of a performance that dealt with it just like some minor piece of theatre. Also, at each set speech which I sensed that the audience liked and would one day be famous, in the absence of any past fame that could be attributed to it, I added the fame it would enjoy in the future, through a mental effort which is the reverse of that which consists of imagining masterpieces on the day of their first frail appearance, when it seemed utterly unlikely that a title, which no one had ever heard before, would one day be placed beside those of the author's other works and bathed in the same light. And this role would one day figure in the list of her finest interpretations, next to that of Phèdre. Not that the role in itself was devoid of all literary merit; but La Berma played it as sublimely as she did Phèdre. I understood then that the work of the writer was for the actress no more than the raw material, of no particular distinction in itself, for the creation of her masterly interpretation, just as the great painter I had met in Balbec, Elstir, had found the inspiration for two equally good paintings in the drabness of a school building and in a cathedral which is itself a masterpiece. And in the same way that a painter dissolves houses, carts, people, in some broad effect of light which makes them homogeneous, La Berma spread great sheets of terror or tenderness over the words, which were equally blended, all smoothed down or heightened, and which a mediocre performer would have painstakingly detached from one another. Of course each word had its own inflection and La Berma's diction did not blur the distinction between each line of verse. Is it not already a first element of ordered complexity, of beauty, to hear a rhyme – that is to say something which is at once similar to and distinct from the preceding rhyme-word, something prompted by it, yet which introduces the variation of a new idea – and to have the sense of two systems superimposed, one intellectual, the other metrical? But La Berma also integrated the words, the lines and even whole speeches into ensembles that were even vaster than themselves, at the margins of which it was magical to see them obliged to stop, to break off; in the same way, a poet will delight in momentarily delaying at the rhyme-break the next word to come, and a composer in merging the various words of the libretto into a single rhythm which both runs counter to them and carries them along. Thus into the prose of the modern playwright as into the verse of Racine, La Berma had the ability to introduce those vast images of suffering, nobility and passion that were her personal masterpieces and which bore her hallmark in the same way as the portraits a painter has made of different sitters.

I would not have wanted, as I once did, to be able to retain a fixed image of the poses adopted by La Berma, or of the fine sense of colour she presented for a mere second in a lighting effect that immediately faded never to reappear, nor to have her repeat the same line over and over again. I realized that my former desire had been more exacting than the requirements of the poet, the actress and the great decorative artist who had staged the production, and that the magic surrounding a line as it was delivered, the shifting gestures perpetually transformed into others, the successive tableaux, were the fleeting result, the momentary objective, the mobile masterpiece which the art of the theatre meant itself to be and which the attentiveness of an over-captivated spectator would destroy by trying to hold it in a fixed image.. I was not even anxious to come back and hear La Berma again another day; I had been completely gratified; it was when I was too full of admiration not to be disappointed by the object of my admiration, whether it was Gilberte or La Berma, that I was already asking tomorrow's impression to provide me with the pleasure yesterday's had denied me. Without seeking to question more deeply the elation I had just felt and which I could have perhaps turned to more profitable use, I said to myself, as some of my school-friends used to say: 'La Berma tops them all for me', but with the confused feeling that La Berma's genius was not perhaps very accurately expressed by the way I was stating my preference and my award of 'top place', however much peace of mind this brought me.

Just as the second play began, I looked over to Mme de Guermantes's box. The Princesse, with a movement that generated an exquisite contour which my mind pursued into the void, had just turned her head towards the back of the box; her guests were standing and looking in the same direction, and between the double hedge they formed, with the self-assured grandeur of a goddess, but with an uncharacteristic mildness of manner that was due to her feigned and smiling embarrassment at arriving so late and forcing everyone to get up in the middle of the performance, the Duchesse de Guermantes entered the box, smothered in white chiffon. She went straight up to her cousin, made a deep curtsey to a young man with fair hair seated in the front row, and turning towards the idolized sea monsters floating in the depths of the cavern greeted these demi-gods of the Jockey Club – and at that moment I would have given anything to be one of them, particularly M. de Palancy – with the familiarity of an old friend, an allusion to her day-to-day relations with them over the last fifteen years. I could feel the mystery but could not decipher the secret of the smiling glance she addressed to her friends, of its azure brilliance as she gave her hand to them in turn, and had I been able to break down its prism and analyse its crystallizations, it might have revealed to me the essence of the unknown life inhabiting it at that moment. The Duc de Guermantes came in behind his wife, the flash of his monocle, the smiling gleam of his teeth, the whiteness of his carnation or of his pleated shirt-front casting their own light and relegating his eyebrows, lips and tail coat to the shadows; with a gesture of his outstretched hand, which he let fall on their shoulders, standing bolt upright with his head motionless, he commanded the inferior monsters who were making way for him to resume their seats, and made a deep bow to the fair-haired young man. It was as if the Duchesse had guessed that her cousin, of whom, rumour had it, she was prone to make fun for what she called her 'exaggerations' (a word which from her own point of view, so wittily French and restrained, lent itself readily to Germanic poetry and enthusiasm), would be dressed this evening in a manner that the Duchesse thought of as 'theatrical', and that she had decided to give her a lesson in good taste. Instead of the wonderful soft plumage which hung from the Princesse's head down to her neck, instead of the net of shells and pearls, the Duchesse wore only a simple aigrette in her hair, and because it surmounted her arched nose and prominent eyes, it looked like the crest of a bird. Her neck and shoulders emerged from a snowy drift of chiffon against which fluttered a fan of swan's feathers, but below this her gown, the bodice of which was adorned simply with innumerable sequins (either tiny metal sticks or beads, or brilliants), clung to her figure with a positively British precision. But however differently they were dressed, after the Princesse had given her cousin the seat which she had previously occupied, the two women could be seen turning to eye each other in mutual admiration.

Perhaps Mme de Guermantes would smile next day as she mentioned the Princesse's slightly over-elaborate coiffure but this would not prevent her from declaring that her cousin had looked none the less ravishing and wonderfully dressed; and the Princesse, for whose taste there was something a little cold, a little severe and 'tailored' in the way her cousin dressed, would discern an exquisite refinement in such strict sobriety. Furthermore, the harmony that existed between the two women, the universal and preordained gravitional force of their upbringing, neutralized the contrasts not only in their way of dressing but in their attitude. At the invisible magnetic boundary lines that the elegance of their manners drew between them, the expansiveness natural to the Princesse became more subdued, while the formal correctness of the Duchesse allowed itself to be drawn towards them, to become more flexible, to turn to sweetness and charm. As in the play that was now being performed, to understand how much personal poetry La Berma drew from it, one had only to transfer her role, the role she alone knew how to play, to any other actress, so the spectator who looked up towards the balcony would have seen, in two of the boxes there, how an 'arrangement' which was supposed to resemble that of the Princesse de Guermantes's box, merely made the Baronne de Morienval appear eccentric, pretentious and ill-bred, and how an attempt, both painstaking and costly, to imitate the dress and style of the Duchesse de Guermantes merely made Mme de Cambremer look like some provincial schoolgirl mounted on wires, rigid, desiccated and crabby, with a plume of feathers from some funeral procession stuck vertically in her hair. Perhaps the latter had no place in a theatre where only the most distinguished women of that season filled the boxes (even those on the highest tier which, seen from below, seemed like huge hampers dotted with human flowers, attached to the circle of the auditorium by the red cords of their plush-covered partitions) and presented an ephemeral panorama which deaths, scandals, illnesses, quarrels would soon alter, but which was for the moment held motionless by attentiveness, heat, dizziness, dust, elegance and boredom, in the sort of eternally tragic instant of unconscious expectancy and calm torpor which, in retrospect, seems to have preceded the explosion of a bomb or the first flames of a great fire.

The reason for Mme de Cambremer's presence was that the Princess of Parma, who, like most other aristocratic people, was utterly without snobbery and, by contrast, eaten up with a proud and passionate sense of charity as strong as her taste for what she believed to be the Arts, had ceded a few boxes here and there to women like Mme de Cambremer, who did not belong to the highest ranks of aristocratic society but whom she knew through her charity work. Mme de Cambremer never took her eyes off the Duchesse and the Princesse de Guermantes, which was easy enough for her to do because she was not really acquainted with either and so could not be suspected of fishing for some sign of recognition. To be received into the society of these two great ladies was none the less what she had been striving towards with untiring patience over the last ten years. She had calculated that it would possibly take her another five years. But since she had succumbed to an incurable disease the inexorable nature of which she thought she knew, for she was a woman who prided herself on her medical knowledge, she was afraid that she might not live to see her aim achieved. She was happy enough this evening with the thought that all these women she scarcely knew would be able to see a person from their own set seated beside her, the young Marquis de Beausergent, the brother of Mme d'Argencourt, who moved between both social worlds and whom the women of the second were delighted to parade before the eyes of those in the first. He was seated beside Mme de Cambremer on a chair placed at an angle so that he could inspect who was in the other boxes. He knew everyone in them, and to acknowledge his friends, with the exquisite elegance of his attractively arched figure, his delicate features and fair hair, with a smile in his blue eyes, he half raised his upright body in a gesture of nonchalant deference, thus cutting a precise image into the rectangle of the oblique plane in which he was placed, like one of those old prints depicting the proud bearing of a noble courtier. He often accepted Mme de Cambremer's invitations to the theatre; in the auditorium and the lobby as they were leaving, he stayed loyally at her side amid the press of more brilliant women friends around him, to whom he refrained from speaking, to avoid any embarrassment, as if he had been in doubtful company. If the Princesse de Guermantes happened to pass by on such an occasion, like some beautiful light-footed Diana, trailing her incomparable cloak, with everyone's head and eyes turning to follow her (Mme de Cambremer's in particular), M. de Beausergent would become engrossed in conversation with his companion and respond to the Princesse's dazzling smile only with constraint and with the well-bred reserve and well-intentioned aloofness of a person whose friendly attention might have caused a momentarily awkward situation.

Had Mme de Cambremer not already known that the box belonged to the Princesse, she could still have told that the Duchesse was a guest from the semblance of greater interest which the latter was devoting to the spectacle of stage and auditorium out of politeness towards her hostess. But concurrently with this centrifugal force, another opposite force, generated by the same desire to be agreeable, drew the Duchesse's attention back to her own dress, her aigrette, her

necklace, her bodice and to that of the Princesse herself, whose subject, whose slave her cousin seemed to proclaim herself to be, present with the sole purpose of seeing her, ready to follow her elsewhere had the titular holder of the box taken it into her head to leave, and regarding the rest of the audience merely as a collection of strangers who were interesting as curiosities, although she had any number of friends among them in whose boxes she was to be found on other occasions when she never failed to give them proof of the same loyalty, exclusive, relativistic and lasting exactly one week. Mme de Cambremer was surprised to see her there that evening. She knew that the Duchesse stayed on very late at Guermantes and had supposed that she was still there. But she had been told that sometimes, when there was some entertainment in Paris that caught her interest, Mme de Guermantes would order one of her carriages to be waiting for her as soon as she had taken tea with the hunt-party and, as the sun was going down, set off at full trot through the half-light of the forest, then along the road, to catch the train at Combray to be in Paris the same evening. 'Perhaps she has come from Guermantes specially to see La Berma,' thought Mme de Cambremer admiringly. And she remembered Swann saying, in the ambiguous jargon he shared with M. de Charlus: 'The Duchesse is one of the noblest creatures in Paris, the cream of the choicest, most refined society.' And I, who derived from the names Guermantes, Bavière and Condé my notions of the life and thoughts of the two cousins (something I could no longer do from their faces now that I had seen them), would rather have had their opinion of *Phèdre* than that of the greatest critic in the world. For in the critic's opinion I would have found merely intelligence, intelligence superior to my own, but of the same kind. But the opinion of the Duchesse and Princesse de Guermantes, which would have furnished me with invaluable facts about the nature of these two poetic creatures, was something I imagined through the power of their names and credited with an irrational charm, and, with the thirst and longing of a man in a fever, what I demanded that their opinion of *Phèdre* should restore to me was the charm of the summer afternoons I had spent on walks along the Guermantes way.

Mme de Cambremer was trying to distinguish how the two cousins were dressed. Personally, I had no doubt that their manner of dressing was peculiar to themselves, not merely in the sense that livery with red collar or blue lapels had once been peculiar to the houses of Guermantes and Condé, but rather as for a bird, where its plumage is not some added adornment of its beauty but an extension of its body. The way the two women dressed seemed to me like the snow-white or the many-coloured materialization of their inner worlds and, like the gestures I had seen the Princesse de Guermantes make and which, I assumed, corresponded to some hidden motivation, the feathers which hung down from her forehead and the dazzling, sequinned bodice of her cousin seemed to have a particular significance and to represent for each of the women an attribute which was hers alone, the meaning of which I should have liked to know; the bird of paradise seemed to be as inseparable from one of them as the peacock is from Juno; I did not believe that any other woman could usurp the sequinned bodice of the other any more than the fringed and shining shield of Minerva. And when I looked over towards their box, far more than on the ceiling of the theatre, which was painted with lifeless allegories, it was like seeing, thanks to some miraculous break in the customary clouds, the assembly of the Gods contemplating the spectacle of mortals, beneath a red canopy, in a clear patch of light, between two pillars of Heaven. My eyes studied this momentary apotheosis with a disquiet which was partly attenuated by the feeling that I was unknown to the Immortals; the Duchesse had certainly seen me once with her husband but could surely have retained no memory of that, and it did not disturb me that she should find herself so placed in her box that she could gaze down at the anonymous collection of madrepores in the stalls, for I was happy to be dissolved in their midst; and then, at the moment in which, by virtue of the laws of refraction, the blurred outline of the protozoon with no individual existence which I was must have been reflected in the impassive current of her two blue eyes, I saw them light up: the Duchesse, goddess turned woman, and for that moment a thousand times more beautiful, raised in my direction the white-gloved hand which had been resting on the edge of the box and waved it as a sign of friendship; my eyes were met by the spontaneous incandescence and the flashing eyes of the Princesse, who had unwittingly set them ablaze merely by the movement of looking to see whom her cousin had just greeted, and the latter, who had recognized me, showered upon me the sparkling and celestial rain of her smile.

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Now, every morning, well before the time she left the house, I made a long detour and went to post myself at the corner of the street she normally took, and when I thought she was about to appear, I would walk back along the street as if I were absorbed in my thoughts, looking in the opposite direction and then raising my eyes towards her the moment I drew level with her, as if she were the last person I expected to see. Indeed, for the first few mornings, to be sure of not missing her, I even waited in front of the house. And every time the carriage gate opened (to let out a succession of people who were not the one I was waiting for), its shuddering clatter would go on vibrating in my heart and take a long time to die down. For never did a devotee of a famous actress whom he does not know, hanging around at the stage-door, never did an angry or idolatrous crowd, gathered to insult or to carry in triumph through the streets the condemned man or the hero it believes to be about to emerge every time any sound is heard from inside the prison or the palace, never did either feel the emotion I felt as I awaited the departure of the aristocratic lady, who, in her ordinary dress, had the power, in the grace of her deportment (quite different from the manner she adopted when she entered a drawing-room or a theatre box), to transform her morning walk – and for me she was the only one in the world out walking – into a whole poem of elegance, into the most refined adornment, the rarest flower under the sun. But after three days of this, so that the concierge should not realize what I was up to, I went much further afield to some point along the route usually taken by the Duchesse. Before the evening at the theatre, I had often made similar outings before lunch when the weather was fine; if it had been raining, I would go down to take a short walk as soon as there was a bright spell, and suddenly, coming towards me on the still wet pavement that the sunshine had transformed into a surface of lacquered gold, in the apotheosis of a crossroads powdery with a mist tanned and bleached by the sun, I caught sight of a schoolgirl followed by her teacher or a dairy-maid with her white sleeves, and I would stand there motionless, my hand against my heart which was already leaping forward towards an unknown life; I would try and remember the name of the street, the time of day, the doorway into which the young girl (I sometimes followed her) had disappeared and not re-emerged. Fortunately the fleeting nature of these pet images, which I promised myself I would seek out again, meant that they did not remain very vividly in my memory. No matter, I felt less unhappy now about my poor health and the fact that I had never mustered enough conviction to begin work, to start writing a book; the world seemed a better place to live in, life more interesting to experience, now that I could see that the streets of Paris, like the roads in Balbec, blossomed with those unknown beauties I had so often tried to spirit up from the woods of Méséglise, each one of whom aroused a voluptuous desire that she alone seemed capable of satisfying.

After returning home from the Opéra, I had added for the following morning another image to the ones I had been hoping to encounter again for the last few days, the image of Mme de Guermantes, tall, with her fine, fair hair piled high, with the affection promised by the smile she had sent me from her cousin's box. I intended to follow the route that Françoise had told me the Duchesse took, and I would try at the same time to cross paths with the two girls I had seen two days earlier by not missing anyone emerging from a class or a catechism. But meanwhile, from time to time, the glittering smile of Mme de Guermantes and the feeling of warmth it had created, came back to me. And without knowing quite what I was doing, I tried to place these (in the way that a woman who has just been given a certain kind of jewelled buttons examines their effect against a dress) against the romantic notions I had long held and which had been set free by Albertine's coldness, Gisèle's premature departure, and before that, by my deliberate and overlong separation from Gilberte (the idea for instance of being loved by a woman, of having a life in common with her); then it was the image of one or other of the two girls seen in the street that I matched against these ideas, and immediately after came my memory of the Duchesse, which I tried to adapt to them. Compared with these romantic ideas of mine, the image of Mme de Guermantes at the Opéra was very insignificant, a tiny star beside the long tail of a blazing comet; moreover I had been very familiar with these ideas long before I knew Mme de Guermantes; by contrast, the memory of her was something I possessed imperfectly; it was during the hours when, instead of floating around in my mind like images of other pretty women, it gradually developed into a unique and definitive association – utterly distinct from every other feminine image – with the romantic ideas I had held for so long before it appeared, it was during those few hours when I remembered it best that I ought to have decided to discover exactly what it was; but at that point I was still unaware of the importance it was to assume for me; I cherished it simply as a first encounter with Mme de

Guermantes inside myself, the first, the only true sketch, the only one taken from life, the only one that was really Mme de Guermantes; yet during the few hours I was fortunate enough to be able to hold it there without conscious attention, this memory must have been really charming, since it was always to it, still freely then, unhurriedly and untiring, with no trace of compulsion or anxiety, that my ideas of love returned; then, as these ideas came to fix it more securely, it acquired greater strength from them but became less clear itself; soon I could no longer recapture it; and in my dreams I no doubt distorted it completely, because each time I saw Mme de Guermantes, I realized that there was a gap, always a different sort of gap, between what I had imagined and what I saw. It is true that every morning now, at the moment when Mme de Guermantes appeared at the top of the street, I went on seeing her tall figure, the face with its bright eyes beneath the fine hair, all the things for which I stood waiting; but by contrast, a few minutes later when I directed my gaze elsewhere so as to seem not to be expecting the encounter I had come to seek and raised my eyes to the Duchesse the moment we drew level in the street, what my eyes then encountered were red patches (it was not clear whether they were caused by the fresh air or by a blotchy complexion) on a sullen face which gave a distinctly curt nod, far removed from the friendly gesture of the *Phèdre* evening, in response to the greeting which I addressed to her daily with an air of surprise and which did not seem to please her. Yet, after a few days, during which the memory of the two girls fought against heavy odds with that of Mme de Guermantes for the mastery of my amorous feelings, it was generally the latter which in the end emerged unscathed, as if of its own accord, while its challengers withdrew; it was to it in the end, voluntarily still and as if from choice and with pleasure, that I had transferred all my thoughts of love. The girls from catechism class and a certain dairy-maid left my mind for ever; and yet I had given up hope of encountering in the street what I had come there to seek, the affection promised to me at the theatre in a smile, the figure of a woman and the bright face beneath her fair hair, which were only real when seen from a distance. Now I could not even have said what Mme de Guermantes was like, what I recognized her by, for every day, in the picture she presented as a whole, the face was as different as the dress and the hat.

Why was it, on any given day, as I saw coming towards me beneath a mauve hood a sweet, smooth face whose charms were symmetrically distributed around a pair of blue eyes and into which the curve of the nose seemed to be absorbed, that a delighted sense of shock informed me that I would not return home without having caught a glimpse of Mme de Guermantes? Why did I feel the same stir of emotion, affect the same indifference, look away with the same air of abstraction as the day before, when, in some side-street, I caught sight of the profile, beneath a navy-blue toque, of a beak-like nose against a red cheek, barred across by a piercing eye, like some Egyptian deity? On one occasion it was not merely a woman with a bird's beak that I saw, but almost the bird itself; Mme de Guermantes was dressed in fur to the tip of her toque, and since no other material was visible she seemed to be naturally furred, like certain vultures whose thick, soft, tawny plumage looks like the coat of an animal. Amid this natural plumage, her tiny head curved out its beak and the prominent eyes were piercing and blue.

On such and such a day, after pacing up and down the street for hours on end without catching sight of Mme de Guermantes, suddenly, inside a dairy shop hidden away between two town houses in this aristocratic and working-class district, the vague and unfamiliar face of a smartly dressed woman who was asking to see some *petits suisses* would emerge, and before I had time to see who it was, I would be struck, as by a flash of lightning reaching me sooner than the rest of the image, by the glance of the Duchesse; on another occasion, having failed to see her and hearing midday strike, I realized that it was pointless to wait any longer, and I was making my mournful way home; deep in my disappointment, staring blindly at a disappearing carriage, I suddenly realized that the nod a lady had given from the carriage window was intended for me and that the lady, whose features, relaxed and pale or conversely tense and vivid, beneath a round hat with a tall feather, constituted the face of a person I had assumed to be an unknown stranger, but was in fact Mme de Guermantes, whose greeting I had let pass without so much as an acknowledgement. And sometimes I encountered her as I entered the house, standing by the lodge where the detestable concierge, whose prying eyes I loathed, would be bowing and scraping to her and also no doubt supplying her with 'reports' of what went on. For the entire staff of the Guermantes household, hidden behind the window-nets, would tremble with fear as they spied upon this conversation they were unable to hear and which would surely result in the Duchesse depriving one or other of them of their days off after the concierge had sneaked on them. Because of this whole succession of different faces offered in turn by Mme de Guermantes, faces that occupied a relative and changing space, sometimes narrow, sometimes vast, in her style of dress as a whole, my love was not attached to any particular part of flesh and fabric, different with each day, and which she could modify or renew almost completely without affecting my state of agitation because beneath them, the new cape and the unfamiliar cheek, I felt that it was still Mme de Guermantes. What I loved was the invisible person who set all this in motion, the woman whose hostility caused me distress, whose approaching presence threw me into turmoil, whose life I should have liked to exclude from her friends and hold as my own. Whether she wore a blue feather or displayed an inflamed complexion, her actions would lose none of their importance for me.

I should not myself have felt that Mme de Guermantes was irritated at meeting me every single day had I not gathered it indirectly from the coldness, disapproval and pity which filled Françoise's face when she helped me to get ready for these morning excursions. The moment I asked for my things, I felt a contrary wind arise in her worn and shrunken features. I made no attempt to gain her confidence, knowing that I should not succeed. She had a knack, the nature of which has always been a mystery to me, of sensing immediately anything bad that might happen to my parents or myself. This was not a supernatural power perhaps, but could be explained by sources of information best known to herself; rather like the news that reaches certain primitive tribes several days before the post has brought it to the European colony, transmitted not by telepathy but from hill-top to hill-top by beacon fires. So, in the particular instance of my morning excursions, it was possible that Mme de Guermantes's servants had heard their mistress say how tired she was of inevitably running into me when she went out, and had repeated her remarks to Françoise. It is true that my parents could have placed someone other than Françoise at my service, but that would not have improved matters. Françoise was in a sense less of a servant than the others. Her way of feeling, of being kind and commiserative, harsh and disdainful, shrewd and narrow-minded, her white skin and red hands, made her very much the village girl whose parents 'went back a long way' but had now fallen on hard times and had been forced to put her into service. Her presence in our household was the country air and the social life of a farm of fifty years ago transported into our midst by a kind of inverse journey in which the holiday destination travels towards the traveller. Like the glass cases of a local museum with their exhibits of curious handiwork, still crafted or embroidered by peasant-women in certain parts of the country, our Paris flat was decorated with Françoise's words, inspired by a traditional local sentiment and governed by very ancient laws. And she knew how to trace her way back through them, as if with lengths of coloured thread, to the cherry trees and birds of her childhood, to the bed where her mother had died and which she could still see. But in spite of all this, once she had come to Paris and entered our service, she had adopted – as anyone else would have done in her place, and with better reason to do so – the ideas, the agreed codes of procedure used by the servants on the other floors, compensating for the respect she was obliged to show us by repeating the bad language the cook on the fourth floor had used to her mistress, and with a satisfaction so typical of a servant that, for the first time in our lives, feeling a sort of solidarity with the detestable tenant on the fourth floor, we told ourselves that perhaps we too were employers like any others. This change in Françoise's character was perhaps inevitable. Some ways of life are so abnormal that they are bound to produce their characteristic defects, like the life led by the King among his courtiers at Versailles, a life as strange as that of a Pharaoh or a Doge, and stranger still for his courtiers themselves. The life led by servants is perhaps even more strange and abnormal, and it is only familiarity that conceals the fact from us. But it was for even more peculiar matters of detail that I should have been compelled, even if I had dismissed Françoise, to stick to the same servant. For various others were to enter my service later; already possessing the defects common to all servants, they none the less underwent a rapid transformation with me. As the laws of attack govern those of riposte, to avoid being harmed by the asperities of my character, they all adopted in their own the same withdrawal tactics, and always at the same point; in compensation for this, they took advantage of the gaps in my defences to gain ground there. Of these gaps I knew nothing, any more than of the ground gained in the spaces they left, precisely because they were gaps. But my servants, as their faults became gradually more apparent, taught me of their existence. It was in the defects that they invariably acquired that I learned of my own natural, invariable defects, and their character presented me with a sort of negative proof of my own. In the past we used to laugh, my mother and I, at Mme Sazerat, for

referring to servants as ‘that race’, ‘that species’. But I have to admit that the reason why I had no grounds for wishing to replace Françoise by anyone else was that her replacement would have inevitably belonged just as much to the race of servants in general and to my own species of servant in particular.

To return to Françoise, I have never once experienced a humiliation without having seen beforehand on her face the signs of condolences held there in readiness; and when in my anger at the thought of being pitied by her I tried to pretend that I had in fact done something successful, my lies broke pointlessly against her respectful but quite obvious disbelief and her awareness of her own infallibility. For she knew the truth; she kept it back and confined herself merely to a slight movement of the lips, as if she still had her mouth full and was finishing some tasty morsel. She kept it back? at least this is what I believed for a long time, for in those days I supposed that it was through words that the truth was communicated to other people. Even the words that people addressed to me impressed their meaning so unalterably on my sensitive mind that I could not believe it possible that someone who said they loved me did not, any more than Françoise herself could have doubted when she read in the paper that a priest or some gentleman or other was able, on receipt of a stamped envelope, to send us free of charge an infallible remedy for every illness in the book or the means of hugely increasing our income. (By contrast, if our doctor prescribed for her the simplest ointment for a head cold, she, so hardy in the face of the harshest pain, would groan about what she had been made to sniff, insisting that it tickled her nose and that life had become a torture.) But Françoise was the first person to demonstrate to me by her example (which I was to understand only much later, when it was repeated more painfully, as the final volumes of this work will show, by a person who was much dearer to me) that the truth does not have to be spoken to be made apparent, and that it may perhaps be gathered with more certainty, without waiting for words and without even taking them into account, from countless external signs, even from certain unseen phenomena, analogous in the world of human character to atmospheric changes in the physical world. I might perhaps have suspected this, since it often occurred to me at that time to say things myself that contained no ounce of truth, while I made the real truth plain through all kinds of involuntary confidences expressed by my body and my actions (and these were all too easy for Françoise to interpret); I should have suspected as much, but to do so I would have had to be conscious of the fact that I was on occasion lying and deceitful. Now my lies and deceitfulness, like everyone else’s, arose in such an immediate and contingent fashion, in defence of a particular interest, that my mind, fixed on some high ideal, allowed my character to fulfil these pressing, paltry needs in the dark and did not bother to observe them. When, in the evening, Françoise was nice to me and asked if she could come and sit in my room, it seemed to me that her face became transparent and that I could see her kindness and honesty revealed. But Jupien, whose lapses into indiscretion were unfamiliar to me at the time, revealed afterwards that she had told him that I was not worth the price of the rope it would take to hang me, and that I had tried to do her all the harm I could. Jupien’s words immediately set before me, in unfamiliar colours, a print of my relations with Françoise so different from the one I often took pleasure in contemplating and in which, beyond any shadow of doubt, Françoise adored me and lost no opportunity of singing my praises, that I realized that it is not only the physical world that differs from the particular way we see it; that all reality is perhaps equally dissimilar from what we believe ourselves to be directly perceiving and which we compose with the help of ideas that do not reveal themselves but are functioning all the same, just as trees, the sun and the sky would not be the way we see them if they were perceived by creatures with eyes differently constituted from our own, or with organs other than eyes, which fulfilled the same purpose and conveyed equivalents of trees and sky and sun, but not visual ones. Whatever it was, this sudden glimpse of the real world that Jupien had opened up to me filled me with horror. Yet it concerned only Françoise, about whom I cared little. Was it the same with all social relations? And to what depths of despair would it lead me, if it were the same with love? That was the future’s secret. For the moment it only concerned Françoise. Did she genuinely believe what she had told Jupien? Had she said it simply to put Jupien on bad terms with me, so that there might be less risk of us appointing Jupien’s niece as her successor? At all events, I realized the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge of whether Françoise loved me or hated me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that people do not, as I had imagined, present themselves to us clearly and in fixity with their merits, their defects, their plans, their intentions in regard to ourselves (like a garden viewed through railings with all its flower-beds on display), but as a shadow we can never penetrate, of which there can be no direct knowledge, about which we form countless beliefs based upon words and even actions, neither of which give us more than insufficient and in fact contradictory information, a shadow which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, as masking the burning flame of hatred and of love.

I really was in love with Mme de Guermantes. The greatest boon I could have asked of God would have been that he should bring down upon her every possible calamity, and that ruined, discredited, stripped of all the privileges that separated me from her, with no home of her own or people who would consent to speak to her, she would come to me for asylum. In my imagination, I would picture her doing this. And even on those evenings when a change in the atmosphere or in my own state of health led to my awareness of some forgotten scroll on which impressions of earlier days were inscribed, instead of taking advantage of the forces of renewal they generated, instead of using them to unravel the thoughts which usually eluded me, instead of finally setting myself to work, I could find nothing better to do than to recite out loud and at length, following a bustling, external train of thought which added up to no more than a useless and florid exposition, a mere adventure novel, sterile and unreal, in which the Duchesse, fallen upon misfortune, came to beg help from me, who had become, by a converse set of circumstances, rich and powerful. And when I had spent hours in this way, imagining circumstances, uttering the words with which I would welcome the Duchesse beneath my roof, the situation remained unaltered; I had, alas, in the real world, chosen to love the very woman whose person possibly combined the greatest number of different advantages there are; in whose eyes therefore I could not hope to cut any sort of figure; for she was richer than the richest people outside the nobility; not to mention the personal charm which placed her in the eye of fashion and made her into a sort of queen among all others.

I felt that I displeased her by my deliberate encounters with her each morning; but even if I had had the will to forgo them for two or three days, Mme de Guermantes might not have noticed such an abstention, which would have represented a great sacrifice on my part, or might have put it down to some hitch beyond my control. As it happens, I could not have brought myself to stop dogging her except by making sure that it was impossible for me to do so, for the constantly recurring need to meet her, to be for a second the object of her attention, the person to whom her greeting was addressed, was a need far stronger than the pain of arousing her displeasure. I should have needed to go away for a period; I did not have the heart for it. I did think of it several times. I then told Françoise to pack for me, and immediately afterwards to unpack. And as the mania for imitation, for being seen to be keeping up with the times, alters the most natural and most reliable version of oneself, Françoise, borrowing the expression from her daughter’s vocabulary, remarked that I was ‘barmy’. She did not like my indecision and told me I was always ‘balancing’, for when she was not trying to rival the moderns, she used the language of Saint-Simon. It is true that she liked it even less when I spoke to her as her employer. She knew that this did not come naturally to me and did not suit me, something she expressed in the phrase ‘if there’s no will, there’s no way’. I would not have had the heart to leave Paris except to go somewhere that would bring me closer to Mme de Guermantes. This was not an impossibility. Would I not find myself nearer to her than I was every morning in the street, solitary, humiliated, with the feeling that not one of the thoughts I should like to convey would ever reach her, forever marking time on those walks which might continue indefinitely without me getting anywhere, if I were to go miles away from Mme de Guermantes, but to someone she knew, someone she knew to be particular in his choice of friends and who valued my acquaintance, who might speak to her about me, and if not obtain from her what I wanted, then at least make her aware of it, someone, at all events, in whose company, simply because we would discuss together whether it would be possible for him to convey this or that message to her, I would give a new form to my solitary and silent day-dreams, a spoken, active form, which would seem to me like a move forward, almost a realization? What she did during the mysterious life of the ‘Guermantes’ that she was, this was the constant object of my thoughts, and to be able to break into that life, even indirectly, as with a lever, by employing the services of someone who was not excluded from the Duchesse’s house, from her evening reception and from extended conversations with her, would that not be a more distant yet more effective contact than my contemplation of her every morning in the street?

The friendship and admiration that Saint-Loup had shown me seemed to me to be undeserved and had been a matter of indifference to me up to this point. Suddenly they seemed important to me; I should have liked him to disclose them to Mme de Guermantes; I was quite prepared even to ask him to do this. For

when we are in love, we long to divulge to the woman we love all the secret little privileges we enjoy, as bores and underprivileged people do as a matter of course. It causes us pain that she is unaware of them, and we try to console ourselves with the thought that precisely because they are never visible she has perhaps added to her present opinion of us this possibility of undisclosed advantages.

For a long time now Saint-Loup had been unable to come to Paris, either, as he put it, because of his military duties, or, as was more likely, because of the painful relationship he was having with his mistress, with whom he had twice now been on the point of breaking off. He had often told me how much pleasure it would give him if I came to see him in his garrison town the name of which, two days after his departure from Balbec, had caused me so much joy when I read it on the envelope of the first letter I had received from my friend. This town, not so far from Balbec as its wholly landlocked surroundings would have suggested, was one of those small fortified towns, aristocratic and military, set in a broad expanse of countryside over which, on fine days, there so often floats a sort of distant mist of intermittent sound, which – like the curving line of a screen of poplar trees indicating the course of an unseen river – reveals the movements of a regiment on manoeuvres, that the very atmosphere of its streets, avenues, and squares has ended up contracting a sort of perpetual vibrancy, musical and martial, and the most humdrum sound of a cart or tram is prolonged in vague trumpet-calls, indefinitely repeated, to the hallucinated ear, by the silence. It was not too far away from Paris for me to be able to step off the express, go back home to my mother and grandmother and sleep in my own bed. As soon as I realized this, troubled by a painful longing, I had too little will-power to decide not to return to Paris and to stay on in the town; but also too little to prevent a porter from carrying my case to a cab and to follow behind him without assuming the destitute soul of a traveller looking after his belongings with no grandmother in attendance, or not to get into the cab with the indifference of a person who, having ceased to think of what he wants, appears to know what he wants, and not to give the driver the address of the cavalry barracks. I thought that Saint-Loup might come and sleep that night at the hotel where I was staying so that I should find my first contact with this strange town less harrowing. One of the men on guard went to fetch him and I waited at the barracks gate, in front of that huge hulk, booming with the November wind, out of which, at every moment, for it was six in the evening, men emerged into the street in pairs, staggering unsteadily as if they were coming ashore in some exotic port where they were temporarily stationed.

Saint-Loup arrived, bustling about all over the place, his monocle flying in front of him: I had not given my name and I could not wait to enjoy his surprise and delight.

'Oh, what a bore!' he exclaimed, suddenly catching sight of me and blushing to the tips of his ears. 'I've just taken a week's leave, and I shan't be off duty for another week!'

And, preoccupied with the thought that I should have to spend this first night on my own, for he knew better than anyone my bedtime anxieties, which he had often noticed and soothed at Balbec, he broke off his complaint to turn and look at me, to give me little smiles, tender but lopsided glances, some of them coming directly from his eye and the rest through his monocle, but all of them indicative of the emotion he felt on seeing me again, and also indicative of that important matter which I still did not understand but which now vitally concerned me, our friendship.

'Dear me, and where are you going to sleep? I really don't recommend the hotel where we mess, it's next to the Exhibition ground and there's a show about to start there. Far too crowded for you. No, the Hôtel de Flandre would be better. It's a little eighteenth-century palace with old tapestries. "Old-historic-dwelling" sort of place.'

Saint-Loup was always using turns of phrase like the last, because the spoken language, like the written, feels the need for these alterations of usage, these refinements of expression. And just as journalists are often quite ignorant of the schools of literature from which they derive their 'fine turns of phrase', so Saint-Loup's vocabulary, even his diction, was formed in imitation of three different aesthetes, none of whom he knew, but whose modes of speech had been indirectly inculcated into him. 'Besides,' he concluded, 'the hotel I mean is more or less adapted to your over-sensitive ears. You won't have any neighbours. That's a slight enough advantage, I can see that, and with the possibility of another guest arriving tomorrow it would not be worth choosing that particular hotel on such precarious grounds. No, it's for its appearance that I'm recommending it. The rooms are rather attractive, all the furniture is old and comfortable. There's something reassuring about it.' But to me, less artistically inclined than Saint-Loup, the pleasure that an attractive dwelling might give was superficial, almost non-existent, and incapable of soothing my incipient anxiety, which was as painful as the anguish I used to feel at Combray in the past when my mother failed to come upstairs to say good night to me, or that which I experienced on the evening of my arrival at Balbec in the bedroom with the unnaturally high ceiling, which smelt of vetiver. Saint-Loup understood all this from my staring gaze.

'A lot you care, though, about this charming palace, my poor chap. You're quite pale. Here I go, great brute that I am, talking to you about tapestries which you won't even have the heart to look at. I know the room they'll give you. Personally, I find it most cheerful, but I can quite understand that for you with your sensitive nature it won't be the same. You mustn't think I don't understand. It's not the same for me, but I can see just how you feel.'

At this point, an officer who was putting a horse through its paces in the yard, intent on making it jump, disregarding the salutes of passing soldiers but hurling torrents of abuse at those who got in his way, turned with a smile to Saint-Loup and, seeing that he had a friend with him, saluted. But his horse suddenly reared up, frothing. Saint-Loup flung himself at its head, managed to calm it down and returned back to my side.

'Yes,' he continued, 'I assure you that I do understand what you go through, and I sympathize. I feel bad,' he added, laying his hand affectionately on my shoulder, 'when I think that if I could have stayed with you, we could have talked together into the small hours and I might have been able to make you feel a bit better. I could lend you some books, but you won't want to read them if you're feeling like you do. I haven't a chance of getting someone to stand in for me here; I've done it twice already when my girl came to see me.'

And he frowned with annoyance in his effort to decide, like a doctor, what remedy he could prescribe for me.

'Run along and light a fire in my quarters,' he called to a passing soldier. 'Hurry up, get a move on!'

Then, once more, he turned towards me, and both monocle and myopic gaze bore witness to our great friendship.

'I can't believe it! you, here in these barracks where I've so often thought of you. I can't believe my eyes, I feel I must be dreaming. But tell me, how's your health? Are you any better? You can tell me all about it later. We'll go up to my room. We mustn't stay out here too long, there's a devil of a wind. I don't feel it any more but you're not used to it. I don't want you to catch cold. What about your work? Have you settled down to it? No? You're an odd chap! If I had your gifts, I'm sure I should be writing all day long. It amuses you more to do nothing. What a pity it's the second-rate people like me who are always ready to work, and the ones who could don't want to! And I've not even asked you how your grandmother is. I'm never without the Proudhon[13] she gave me.'

An officer, tall, majestic and handsome, emerged from one of the staircases with slow and solemn steps. Saint-Loup saluted him and stilled the perpetual restlessness of his body long enough to hold his hand at the level of his cap. But he had made this gesture with such force, straightened himself up with so brusque a movement, and, once the salute had been made, brought his hand down with so abrupt a release, changing all the positions of his shoulders, leg and monocle, that this moment was less a moment of immobility than of vibrant tension in which the excessive movements he had just made and the ones he was about to make cancelled each other out. Meanwhile the officer, without approaching, calm, benevolent, dignified, imperial, in fact the direct opposite of Saint-Loup, also raised his hand, but unhurriedly, to his cap.

'I must just have a word with the captain,' whispered Saint-Loup. 'Would you mind awfully going to wait for me in my room? It's the second on the right, on the third floor. I'll be with you in a minute.'

And setting off at the double, preceded by his monocle flying all over the place, he went straight up to the dignified and unhurried captain whose horse was being brought round and who, before getting ready to mount, was giving orders with a studied nobility of gesture that belonged to some historical painting, and as though he were setting off to some battle of the First Empire, when in fact he was simply about to ride home to the house he had rented for the period of his service at Doncières, and which stood in a square that was named, as if in ironic anticipation of the presence of this child of Napoleon, Place de la République. I started to climb the staircase, just avoiding slipping on each of its nail-studded steps, catching glimpses of bare-walled barrack-rooms with their double rows of beds and kits. I was shown Saint-Loup's room. I stopped for a moment outside the closed door, for I could hear movement; something was being moved, something else was being dropped; I could feel that the room was not empty, that there was someone in it. But it was merely the recently lighted fire burning away. It could not keep quiet; it was shifting the logs about, and very clumsily. I went in. It sent one log rolling and set another smoking. And even when it was still, as common people do, it made constant noises, which, from the moment I saw the flames rising, revealed themselves as the noises that come from a fire, whereas if I had been on the other side of the wall I should have thought that they came from someone who was blowing his nose and walking about. I finally sat down. Liberty hangings and old eighteenth-century German fabrics preserved the room from the smell that exuded from the rest of the building, a coarse, sickly, corruptible smell like that of brown bread. It was here, in this charming room, that I could have dined and slept with calm and contentment. It was almost as if Saint-Loup was in the room because his text-books were there on the table beside his photographs, among which I was able to recognize my own and that of Mme de Guermantes now that there was light from the fire, which had finally settled itself in the grate and, like an animal crouched in ardent watchfulness, noiseless and faithful, merely let fall an occasional log which crumbled into sparks or licked the sides of the chimney with a tongue of flame. I could hear the tick of Saint-Loup's watch, which must have been somewhere near at hand. The tick changed place all the time, for I could not see the watch; it seemed to be coming from behind me, from in front, from my right, from my left, sometimes to die away as though it were coming from a long way off. Suddenly I caught sight of the watch on a table. So now I heard the tick in a fixed place from which it did not move again. Or I thought I did; in fact I did not hear it in this place, I saw it there, for sounds have no fixed point in space. At least we connect sounds with movements, and in that way they serve to alert us to those movements, appearing to make them necessary and natural. And indeed it does sometimes happen that a sick man whose ears have been plugged ceases to hear the noises of a fire like the one that was crackling away at that moment in Saint-Loup's fireplace, as it worked to produce embers and cinders which it then dropped into the grate, nor would he hear the passing tram-cars, whose music rose at regular intervals over the main square of Doncières. Then, if the sick man is reading, the pages will turn silently as if they were moved by the fingers of a god. The heavy rumble of a running bath becomes faint, light and remote, like a celestial babbling. The withdrawal of sound, its dilution, robs it of any aggressive power it may have over us; thrown into a panic a moment ago by the sound of hammer-blows that seemed to be making the ceiling shudder over our heads, we now find it possible to enjoy them, light, caressing, distant, like the rustle of leaves playing along the roadside with the passing breeze. We play games of patience with cards we cannot hear, so much so that we imagine we have not shuffled them, that they are moving of their own accord and, anticipating our desire to play with them, have begun to play with us. And in this connection we may wonder whether, in the case of Love (to which we may even add the love of life, the love of fame, since there are people, it appears, who are acquainted with these two), we should not behave like those who, when noise disturbs them, rather than praying for it to stop, block their ears against it; and, following their example, bring our attention, our defences, to bear upon ourselves, give them as an object to subdue not the external being whom we love, but our capacity to suffer on account of the loved one.

To return to the question of sound, we have merely to use thicker earplugs to close the aural passages and the girl who has been playing a boisterous tune overhead is reduced to pianissimo; and if we grease our cotton-wool plugs, then the whole household immediately obeys their despotism and their sway extends even beyond the house. Pianissimo is no longer enough; the earplug instantly shuts the keyboard and the music lesson comes to an abrupt end; the gentleman who was pacing the room above us stops at once; the movement of carriages and trams is interrupted as though a State procession were about to take place. And this attenuation of sounds can sometimes disturb our sleep instead of protecting it. Only yesterday the incessant sounds we heard, by continuously describing to us everything that was going on in the street and in the house, eventually managed to send us to sleep like a boring book; today, on the surface of silence spread over our sleep, a burst of sound louder than the rest manages to make itself heard, gentle as a sigh, unrelated to any other sound, mysterious; and the need for explanation it exhales is enough to wake us up. On the other hand, remove for a moment from the sick man the cotton-wool plugs placed in his ears and in an instant the light, the full sunlight of sound appears afresh, blindingly, and is born again in the universe; the host of exiled sounds comes rushing back; we witness, as if it were chanted by singing angels, the resurrection of the voice. The empty streets are filled for a moment with the rapid succession of whirring wings of the singing tram-cars. In the bedroom itself, the sick man has this moment created, not, like Prometheus, fire, but the sound of fire. And when we increase or reduce the thickness of cotton wool in our ears, it is like working alternately one or other of the two pedals we have added to the sonority of the external world.

Only there are some suppressions of sound that are not temporary. Someone who has become completely deaf cannot even heat a pan of milk at his bedside without having constantly to keep his eyes open for the hyperborean reflection, on the lifted lid, like that of a snowstorm, the premonitory sign it is wise to obey by stopping, as the Lord stilled the waves, the electric current; for already the unevenly rising egg of the boiling milk is peaking in a series of sidelong undulations, swelling and filling out a few drooping sails puckered by the cream, sending one of them billowing out gleaming into the tempest, until the cutting off of the current, if the electric storm is exorcized in time, will make them all swirl round on themselves and scatter, transformed into magnolia petals. Should the sick man not have been quick enough to take the necessary precautions, he will soon see his drowned books and watch barely emerging from the white sea left by this tidal wave of milk and be obliged to call for his old nurse, who, whether he be an eminent statesman or a famous writer, will tell him that he has no more sense than a five-year-old. At other times in the magic room, standing in front of the closed door, someone who was not there a moment ago has appeared, a visitor who has entered unheard and who merely gesticulates, like a character from one of those little puppet shows which are so restful for those who have developed a distaste for the spoken language. And for this stone-deaf man, since the loss of one of the senses brings as much beauty to the world as its acquisition did, to walk about on this earth is close to tasting the delights of an Eden in which sound has not yet been created. The highest waterfalls unfold their sheets of crystal for the eye alone, stiller than the still sea, pure as cascades in Paradise. Since sound was for him, before his deafness, the perceptible form which the cause of movement assumed, objects moved now without sound seem to be moved without cause; stripped of all qualities of sound, they display a spontaneous activity, they seem to be alive; they move, remain static, burst into flames of their own accord. Of their own accord they fly off into the air like the winged monsters of prehistory. In the solitary, neighbourless house of the deaf man, the servants' duties which were already being carried out with more discretion and in silence before the onset of total deafness, are now performed, almost surreptitiously, by mutes, as for a king in a fairy-tale. And as in the theatre, the building the deaf man sees from his window – a barracks, a church, a town hall – is merely part of stage set. If one day it should fall to the ground, it may send up a cloud of dust and leave rubble; but, with less substance even than a palace on stage, though not in fact as flimsy, it will fall to the ground in the magic universe without letting the crash of its heavy blocks of stone blemish the chastity of the silence with anything so vulgar as a noise.

The silence, altogether more relative, which dominated the little barrack-room where I had been waiting was suddenly broken. The door opened and Saint-Loup rushed in, dropping his monocle.

'Ah, Robert, how pleasant it is here,' I said. 'It would be so good to be allowed to dine and sleep here.'

And indeed, had it not been against the regulations, what untroubled sleep I could have enjoyed there, protected by that atmosphere of tranquillity, vigilance and gaiety which was maintained by a thousand ordered and unruffled wills, a thousand carefree minds, in that great community known as a barracks where, with time transformed into action, the gloomy bell that usually tolls the hours was replaced by the same joyous fanfare of the bugle-calls which constantly hovered as a

sonorous memory over the paved streets of the town like a scattered dust haze – a voice certain of being heard, and a harmonious one, since it represented the command not only of authority to obedience but of wisdom to happiness.

'So you'd rather stay with me and sleep here than go to the hotel by yourself, would you?' said Saint-Loup with a smile.

– Oh, Robert, it's cruel of you to be so ironic about it, I answered, when you know that it's out of the question, and you know how miserable I shall be over there.

– Well, you flatter me! he replied. Because it actually occurred to me that you'd prefer to stay here tonight, and that is precisely what I went to talk to the captain about.

– And he has given his permission? I cried.

– He hasn't the least objection.

– Oh! I adore him!

– No, that would be going too far. Look, let me just go and find my batman and tell him to see about our dinner,' he added, while I turned away to hide my tears.

At several points one or other of Saint-Loup's comrades came into the room. He drove them all out.

'Come on, clear off.'

I asked him to let them stay.

'No, it's not worth it, they would bore you silly. They're so uncouth. They can talk about nothing but racing and grooming horses. I don't really want them here anyway; they'd spoil these precious moments I've been looking forward to so much. Mind you, when I say these chaps are not very interesting, I don't mean that everything to do with the army is mindless. Far from it. We have a major here who's an admirable man. He's given a course in which military history is treated like a demonstration, a bit like an algebraic equation. Even from the aesthetic point of view there's a beauty about it, inductive and deductive in turn. It wouldn't leave you unmoved.

– Are we talking about the officer who's allowed me to stay here tonight?

– No, thank God! The man you "adore" for that tiny privilege is the biggest fool who's ever walked the earth. He's the perfect man for looking after messing and uniform inspection. He spends hours with the squadron sergeant-major and the master-tailor. That just about sums him up. Besides, like everyone here, he has nothing but contempt for the admirable major I'm talking about. They all avoid him because he's a freemason and doesn't go to confession. The Prince de Borodino would never have such a petit-bourgeois in his house. Which is a damn cheek when you think about it, coming from a man whose great-grandfather was a small farmer and who'd probably be one himself if the Napoleonic Wars hadn't happened. Not that he isn't just that little bit conscious of his own ambiguous position in society, neither fish nor flesh. He scarcely shows his face at the Jockey, this so-called Prince; it makes him feel so awkward,' added Robert, who, having been led through a similar spirit of imitation to adopt the social theories of his teachers and the worldly prejudices of his relatives, unwittingly combined a democratic love of humanity with a contempt for the nobility created by the Empire.

I studied the photograph of his aunt, and the thought that Saint-Loup, as the owner of this photograph, might perhaps give it to me, made me value him all the more dearly and long to do a thousand things for him, a small enough exchange for it, it seemed to me. For this photograph was like a further encounter with Mme de Guermantes, added to all the others I had already had; better still, it was a prolonged encounter, as if, through some sudden stride forward in our relations, she had stopped beside me, in a garden hat, and allowed me for the first time to gaze at leisure at the fullness of her cheek, the curve of her neck, the kink of her eyebrows (so far veiled from me by the rapidity of her passage, the dizzy nature of my impressions, the unreliability of memory); and to be able to study all these, as well as the throat and arms of a woman I had only ever seen in a high-necked dress, was to me a voluptuous discovery, a special favour. Those forms which I had thought of as an almost forbidden spectacle were now there for me to study as in a text-book of the only geometry that had any value for me. Later on, looking at Robert, I could see that he too was a little like a photograph of his aunt, through some mysterious process which I found almost as moving, since, if his face had not been directly produced by hers, the two none the less shared a common origin. Those features of the Duchesse de Guermantes which were pinned to the way I had seen her at Combray, the nose like a falcon's beak, the piercing eyes, seemed to have served for the cutting out – in another copy, analogous and slender, with too delicate a skin – of Robert's face, which could almost be superimposed on his aunt's. I looked longingly at the characteristic features he shared with the Guermantes, that race which retains its individuality in a world by which it is not submerged and in which it remains isolated in its divinely ornithological glory, for it seems to have sprung, in the age of mythology, from the union of a goddess and a bird.

Robert, unaware of what provoked it, was touched by my affectionate mood. This was increased by the sense of well-being induced in me by the heat of the fire and the champagne which simultaneously brought beads of sweat to my forehead and tears to my eyes; the wine accompanied some partridges; I ate them with the unexpected surprise of any uninitiated person, when he discovers in a way of life that was unfamiliar to him what he supposed it to exclude (the surprise, for instance, of the unbeliever who is given an exquisite dinner in a presbytery). And when I woke up the following morning, I went over to Saint-Loup's window, which was high enough to have a view over the whole countryside, curious to make the acquaintance of my new neighbour, the landscape which I had been unable to see the day before, arriving too late and at an hour when it was already asleep in the darkness. But however early it had awoken, when I opened the window, I could only see it, as I might have done from the window of a country house beside a lake, muffled still in its soft white morning robe of mist which prevented me from seeing scarcely anything distinctly. But I knew that before the soldiers who were busy with their horses in the courtyard had finished grooming them, the robe of mist would be cast aside. In the meantime, I could see only a bare hill, raising its lanky, rugged hump, already stripped clean of shadow, over the barracks. Through the open screenwork of hoarfrost, I could not take my eyes off this stranger who was looking at me for the first time. But once I had got into the habit of coming to the barracks, the awareness that the hill was there, and thus more real, even when I could not see it, than the hotel at Balbec, than our house in Paris, which I thought of as absent or dead friends, that is to say scarcely believing in their continued existence, meant that its reflected form never stopped silhouetting itself, even without my realizing it, against the slightest impressions I experienced at Doncières and among them, to start with this first morning, the agreeable impression of warmth conveyed by the cup of chocolate, prepared by Saint-Loup's batman in this comfortable room which seemed like a sort of optical centre from which to look out at the hill (the idea of being able to do anything other than gaze at it, the idea of actually climbing it, being rendered impossible by the presence of the mist). Absorbed into the shape of the hill, and associated with the taste of the chocolate and the whole web of my current thoughts, this mist, without my having given it the least thought, came to soak into all my thoughts of that time, just as something golden, massive and unchanging, had remained allied to my impressions of Balbec, or as the close presence of the darkened sandstone steps outside gave a greyish tinge to my impressions of Combray. Yet it did not linger on into the morning; the sun first threw a few vain darts at it, studding it with brilliants, then got the better of it. The hill could now expose its grey rump to the sunlight which, an hour later, when I went into the town, poured on to the red leaves of the trees, on to the reds and blues of the election posters on the walls, in an exaltation which put me in high spirits myself and made me sing and stamp on the paving-stones as I went, only just refraining from jumping for joy.

But after that first night I had to sleep at the hotel. And I knew beforehand that I was doomed to find it miserable. The sadness was like an unbreathable aroma which every unfamiliar bedroom, that is to say every bedroom, had exhaled for me for as long as I could remember: in my usual bedroom I was not really there, my mind stayed behind somewhere else and sent mere Habit to take its place. But I could not expect this less mindful servant to look after my needs in a new

place, where I had arrived in advance of him, alone, and where I had to face the world with that 'self' which I encountered only after years of absence, but which was always the same, the self that had never grown up since Combray, since my first arrival at Balbec, weeping inconsolably as it sat on the corner of an unpacked trunk.

But as it happened, I was wrong. I had no time to be miserable because I was never alone. The fact was that there remained of the old palace a surplus of luxurious features that were inappropriate to a modern hotel and, released from any practical use, their very uselessness had acquired a sort of life: passages winding back on themselves and which one was constantly crossing in their aimless wanderings, lobbies as long as corridors and as ornate as drawing-rooms, which gave the impression not so much of forming part of the dwelling but of simply being there, which could not be induced to enter any of the rooms but which roamed about outside my own and came at once to offer me their company – neighbours if you like, idle but never noisy, subservient ghosts of the past who had been allowed to stay quietly by the doors of the rooms let to guests, and who behaved towards me with silent deference whenever I came across them. In short, the idea of a lodging as a mere container for our existence of the moment, simply protecting us from the cold and from the sight of other people, was totally inapplicable to this dwelling, an assembly of rooms that were as real as a colony of people, living in silence, it is true, but which you were obliged to encounter, to avoid, to greet when you returned. You tried not to disturb, and were forced to look with respect upon the main drawing-room, which, since the eighteenth century, had formed the habit of reclining comfortably between its arm-rests of old gold beneath the clouds of its painted ceiling. And you were drawn by a more familiar sense of curiosity in regard to the smaller rooms which, without the least concern for symmetry, ran around it in vast numbers, in amazement, fleeing in disorder to the garden, easily accessible by the three broken steps which led down to it.

If I wished to go out or come in without taking the lift or being seen on the main staircase, a smaller private staircase, no longer in use, offered me its steps, so skilfully arranged, one close above the other, that their gradation seemed perfectly proportioned and similar in kind to that which in colours, scents and tastes often arouses a special sensuous pleasure. But the pleasure of going up and downstairs was one which I had had to come here to learn, as I had once learned in an alpine resort that the act of breathing, to which we habitually pay no attention, can be a constant source of pleasure. I was exempted from effort, an exemption usually granted to us only by the things with which long use has made us familiar, the first time I set my feet on those steps, familiar before I even knew them, as if they possessed something which had possibly been left and incorporated in them by former masters whom they used to welcome every day, the prospective charm of habits I had not yet contracted and which could only pale once they had become my own. I went into a room, the double doors closed behind me, the hangings ushered in a silence over which I felt myself to exert a sort of intoxicating regal authority; a marble fireplace with ornamental brass chasing, which it would have been wrong to see placed there solely as a statement of the art of the Directory, provided me with a fire, and a small low armchair helped me to warm myself as comfortably as if I had been sitting on the hearthrug. The walls clasped the room in a tight embrace, separating it from the rest of the world, and to let into it, to enclose inside it the things that made it complete, they stood aside to make way for the book-case, reserved a recess for the bed on either side of which columns provided light support for the unusually high ceiling of the alcove. And the room extended on in depth with two closets as wide as itself, the furthest one of which had hanging from its wall, to scent the withdrawal for which it was intended, a voluptuous rosary of orris-roots; the doors, if I left them open when I withdrew into this last retreat, were not only content to triple its dimensions without altering the harmony of its proportions, and not only allowed my eyes to enjoy the pleasures of extension after those of concentration, but also added to the pleasure of my solitude, which remained inviolable but no longer shut in, the sense of freedom. This closet overlooked a courtyard, a lone beauty whom I was glad to have as a neighbour when next morning I discovered her there, a captive between her high walls in which no other window opened, with only two yellowing trees to give a mauve softness to the clear sky.

Before going to bed I felt the need to leave my room and explore the whole of my enchanted domain. I walked down a long gallery which successively honoured me with all it had to offer if I could not sleep, an armchair, in a corner, a spinet, a blue porcelain vase filled with cinerarias on a console table, and, in an old frame, the ghost of a lady of long ago with powdered hair threaded with blue flowers, holding a bunch of pinks. When I came to the end, the bare wall in which no door opened said to me simply: 'Now you must go back, but you know, you are at home here,' while the soft carpet, not to be outdone, added that if I could not sleep that night I could perfectly well come along in bare feet, and the unshuttered windows looking out over the countryside assured me that they would spend a night without sleep and that, at whatever hour I wished to come, I need not be afraid of waking anyone. And behind a hanging curtain I discovered nothing more than a small closet whose escape had been blocked by the outer wall, hiding there rather sheepishly, staring at me in fright from its little round window, turned blue by the moonlight. I went to bed, but the presence of the eiderdown, the small columns, the tiny fireplace, heightening my attention beyond its usual pitch in Paris, prevented me from giving myself up to the normal routine of my idle thoughts. And since it is this particular state of attention that enfolds our sleeping hours, acts upon them, modifies them, puts them into contact with one or other of our various strands of memory, the images which filled my dreams that first night were borrowed from a memory quite distinct from the one that my sleeping hours normally drew upon. If, while I slept, I had been tempted to let myself be dragged back towards my usual patterns of memory, then the unfamiliar bed, the pleasurable attention I needed to pay to the position of my body when I turned over, were sufficient to regulate or to maintain the new thread of my dreams. The same is true of sleep as of our perception of the external world. It needs only some modification in our habits to make it poetic; we need only while undressing to have dozed off involuntarily on top of the bed for the dimensions of sleep to be altered and its beauty felt. We wake up, consult our watch and see it is four o'clock; it is only four in the morning, but we think that the whole day has gone by, so ready are we to regard this unsolicited few minutes' sleep as heaven-sent, issued by some divine right, as huge and weighty as an emperor's golden orb. In the morning, worried by the thought that my grandfather was ready and they were waiting for me for our Méséglise walk, I was woken by the blare of a military band which passed beneath my windows every day. But once or twice – and I am saying this because it is not possible to describe human life without bathing it in the sleep into which it plunges and which, night after night, encircles it like the sea around a promontory – the intervening barrier of sleep was resistant enough to withstand the impact of the blare and I heard nothing. On other mornings its resistance relaxed for a moment; but my consciousness, still smoothed over by sleep – like those organs which, after a preliminary anaesthetic, react to a cauterization first as something unfelt then, at the very end, as something like a faint smarting – was touched only gently by the shrillest notes of the fifes which caressed it distantly with a cool early-morning warble; and after this minimal intrusion in which the silence had turned to music, it joined my sleep again even before the dragoons had gone by, depriving me of the last blossoming sprays of the bouquet of surging sound. And the zone of my consciousness that had been brushed by its springing stems was so narrow, so hemmed in by sleep that later on, when Saint-Loup asked me if I had heard the band, I was not certain that the sound of the brass had not been as imaginary as that which I heard during the day rising up, after the slightest noise, above the paved streets of the town. Perhaps I had heard it only in a dream, out of fear of being awakened, or else of not being awakened and so not seeing the dragoons march past. For often when I remained asleep at the very moment when I had supposed that the noise would have awakened me, for the next hour I would imagine I was awake, while in fact I was still dozing, and I played out to myself in frail shadows on the screen of my sleeping consciousness the various scenes of which it deprived me but which I had the illusion of witnessing.

In fact it happens that things one meant to do during the day are only accomplished, when sleep intervenes, in one's dreams, that is after they have been diverted by drowsiness into a different path from the one they would have followed in waking life. The same story turns off towards a different destination. In the end, the world in which we live when we are asleep is so different that the foremost concern of people who have difficulty in going to sleep is to escape from the waking world. After they have closed their eyes and desperately mulled over, for hours on end, the same sort of thoughts that they would have had with their eyes open, they take heart again when they notice that the preceding minute has been dulled by a pattern of thought in strict contradiction to the laws of logic and present reality, this short 'absence' indicating that there is now an open door through which in a while they may perhaps be able to escape the perception of the real, reach a resting-place more or less distant from it, which will mean that they have a more or less 'good' night's sleep. But it is already a great step forward when we turn our backs on the real, when we reach the outer caves in which 'auto-suggestions', like witches, stir up the hell-broth of imaginary illnesses or a new wave of nervous disorders, and watch for the hour when the convulsions that have been building up during the unconsciousness of sleep break out with enough force to bring sleep to an end.

Not far from this point is the private garden in which various kinds of sleep, so different from each other, grow like unknown flowers: sleep induced by datura, by Indian hemp, by the multiple extracts of ether, the sleep of belladonna, of opium, of valerian, flowers which remain closed until the day when the predestined stranger comes to touch them open and to let loose for long hours the aroma of their special dreams upon an amazed and unsuspecting being. At the end of the garden stands the convent with open windows through which we hear voices repeating the lessons learned before we went to sleep, which we shall know only when we wake up; while, as a prediction of that moment, our inner alarm clock ticks on, so well regulated by our preoccupation that when our housekeeper comes in to tell us it is seven o'clock she will find us already awake. On the dark walls of that chamber which opens upon our dreams and within which that oblivion of the sorrows of love works away incessantly, its task sometimes interrupted and destroyed by a nightmare crowded with reminiscences, but soon resumed, the memories of our dreams are hung, even after we are awake; but they are so shrouded in darkness that often they become apparent to us for the first time only in the middle of the afternoon when the ray of a similar idea happens to strike them by chance; some of them, harmonious and clear while we slept, already so distorted that, having failed to recognize them, we can only hasten to lay them to earth, like corpses that have decomposed too soon or objects so seriously damaged and crumbling to dust that the most skilful restorer would be unable to reshape them or do anything with them.

Near to the railings is the quarry where deep sleep comes in search of substances which coat the brain with such a hard surface that, for the sleeper to awaken, his own will is obliged, even on a golden morning, to deliver mighty blows of the axe, like a young Siegfried. Beyond this are the nightmares, which doctors stupidly claim to be more exhausting than insomnia itself, whereas what they in fact do is to enable the thinker to escape from concentrated thought; nightmares, with their fanciful picture-albums in which our dead relatives are seen to be meeting with serious accidents and in which, at the same time, their speedy recovery is not ruled out. In the meantime, we keep them in a little rat-cage, in which they are smaller than white mice and, covered with big red spots each sprouting a feather, they harangue us with Ciceronian oratory. Next to this picture-album is the revolving disc of awakening, thanks to which we submit for a second to the annoyance of having to return in a while to a house that was demolished fifty years ago, the image of which is gradually effaced by several other images as sleep recedes, until we reach the one which only appears when the disc has ceased to spin and which coincides with what we shall see when we have opened our eyes.

Sometimes I heard nothing, having been immersed in the sort of sleep into which we fall as into a pit from which we are more than glad to be dragged a little later, heavy, overfed, digesting all that has been brought to us, like the food brought by the nymphs to the infant Hercules, by those agile vegetative powers whose activity is doubled while we sleep.

We call that a leaden sleep, and it seems as if, during the few minutes after such a sleep has ended, we have ourselves turned into mere figures of lead. Identity has vanished. So how then, searching for our thoughts, our identities as we search for lost objects, do we eventually recover our own self rather than any other? Why, when we regain consciousness, is it not an identity other than the one we had previously that is embodied in us? It is not clear what dictates the choice nor why, among the millions of human beings we might be, it is the being we were the day before that we unerringly grasp. What is it that guides us when there has been a genuine interruption (whether it be that we have been totally taken over by sleep or that our dreams have been utterly different from ourselves)? What has happened really is a death, as when the heart has ceased to beat and a rhythmical traction of the tongue revives us. No doubt the room, even if we have seen it only once before, awakens memories to which older memories cling; or possibly some of them lay dormant inside us and we now become conscious of them. The resurrection that takes place when we wake up – after that beneficent attack of mental derangement we call sleep – must in the end be similar to what happens when we recall a name, a line of poetry or a refrain we had forgotten. And perhaps the resurrection of the soul after death is to be thought of as a phenomenon of memory.

When I had finished sleeping, drawn by the sunny sky but held back by the chill of those last autumn mornings, so bright and sharp, which usher in the winter, in order to see the trees on which the only remaining sign of leaves was to be found in the few strokes of gold or pink that seemed to have been left in the air, on an invisible web, I raised my head and stretched out my neck, keeping my body half hidden beneath the bedclothes; like a chrysalis in the process of metamorphosis, I was a dual creature whose various parts were not at home in the same environment; for my eyes colour was enough, without warmth; my chest on the other hand was concerned with warmth and not colour. I got out of bed only when the fire had been lit and gazed at the picture, so transparent and soothing, of the mauve golden morning to which I had just artificially added the elements of warmth that it lacked, poking away at the fire which was burning and smoking like a good pipe and giving me, as the pipe would have done, a pleasure at once gross because it was based upon physical comfort and delicate because behind it were the blurred outlines of a pure vision. My bathroom was papered in a violent red dotted with black and white flowers which suggested that they would take some getting used to. But they affected me merely as something novel, forcing me to enter not into conflict but into contact with them, slightly changing my gaiety and my singing when I got up in the morning, imprisoning me in the heart of a sort of poppy from which I viewed the world, quite otherwise than in Paris, from behind the gay screen represented by this new abode, differently disposed from my parents' house, and with pure air flowing through it. On certain days, I was disturbed by the desire to see my grandmother again or by the fear that she might be ill; or by the memory of some unfinished business in Paris which was getting nowhere; or sometimes by some difficulty in which, even here, I had managed to become caught up. One or other of these worries could prevent me from sleeping, and I was powerless in the face of such anxiety, which could overshadow my existence in a mere second. If this happened, I would send someone from the hotel to the barracks with a message for Saint-Loup saying that if it was physically possible – and I knew it was extremely difficult for him – would he be good enough to stop by for a minute. An hour later he would appear; and hearing him ring at the door would set me free from my worries. I knew that if they were stronger than I, he was stronger then they, and my attention would be diverted from them towards him, who was the one to settle them. He had only to enter the room to surround me with the fresh air in which he had been busying himself so actively since the early morning, a vital atmosphere very different from that of my room and to which I responded immediately with appropriate reactions.

'I hope you don't mind too much me disturbing you like this. Something's bothering me. You probably guessed.

– Not really. I just thought you wanted to see me; and I thought that was very nice. I was delighted you sent for me. But what's wrong? things not good? What can I do to help?'

He would listen to me explaining, and respond pertinently; but before he had uttered a word he had transformed me into his own likeness; compared with the important duties which kept him so busy, so alert, so happy, the worries which a moment ago I had been unable to endure a second longer seemed to me as negligible as they did to him; I was like a man who, after being unable to open his eyes for days, sends for the doctor, who gently and adroitly raises his eyelid,

removes a grain of sand, and shows it to him; the patient is healed and reassured. All my worries resolved themselves in a telegram which Saint-Loup undertook to send for me. Life seemed so different, so wonderful, I was flooded with such an excess of strength that I needed action.

'What are you doing now? I asked Saint-Loup.

– I shall have to leave you. We're going on a route march in three-quarters of an hour and I have to be there.

– Then it's been awkward for you to come here?

– Not awkward at all. The captain was very understanding. He told me that if it was for you I must go at once. But I don't want to be seen to be abusing his kindness.

– But if I got up quickly and made my way to the place where you'll be training, it would interest me a lot and perhaps I could talk to you during the breaks.

– I wouldn't if I were you. You've been lying awake worrying yourself silly over something that I can assure you is not of the slightest importance, and now that you have stopped worrying about it you'd better turn over and go to sleep. It would do your demineralized nerve cells no end of good. But don't fall asleep too soon because our blasted band will be coming along under your windows. As soon as they've gone I think you'll be left in peace, and we shall see each other at dinner this evening.'

But shortly after this I often went to see the regiment doing field manoeuvres, as I started to get interested in the military theories expounded by Saint-Loup's friends over the dinner-table and my chief interest became to see their various leaders at closer quarters, just as someone who makes music his main area of study and spends his whole time in concert halls finds pleasure in frequenting the cafés where he can be surrounded by the life of the members of the orchestra. I had to walk a long way to reach the training-ground. In the evening after dinner the need for sleep would make my head droop from time to time as in a spell of dizziness. Next morning I would realize that I had not heard the band passing, just as, at Balbec, after the evenings when Saint-Loup had taken me to dinner at Rivebelle, I had not heard the concert on the beach. And when I wanted to get up I felt deliciously incapable of doing so; it was as if I were anchored in deep, invisible soil by the articulations of muscular and nourishing roots, of which my tiredness made me conscious. I felt full of strength, life seemed to stretch out more fully before me; I had in fact reverted to the healthy exhaustion of my childhood in Combray on the mornings after those walks along the Guermantes way the day before. Poets claim that we recapture for a moment the self we once were when we revisit some house or garden in which we lived when young. Such pilgrimages are extremely hazardous and they end as often in disappointment as in success. Those fixed places, which exist along with the changing years, are best discovered in ourselves. Great tiredness followed by a good night's rest can in part help us in this. To make us descend into the most subterranean galleries of sleep, where no reflection of the previous day, no flicker of memory is present to light up the interior monologue, if such monologue itself has not ceased, tiredness followed by rest so thoroughly turn over the soil and subsoil of our bodies that they enable us to rediscover, in a place where our muscles plunge down and twist around in their ramifications and breathe in new life, the garden where we lived as children. There is no need to travel to be able to see it again, we need to go deep into ourselves to find it. What once covered the earth is no longer above but beneath it, and it takes more than an excursion to visit the dead city; excavation is necessary. But we shall see how certain fugitive and fortuitous impressions can carry us more successfully back to the past, with sharper precision, in a flight more light-winged, immaterial, dizzy, unerring and timeless than such organic displacement.

At times my exhaustion was greater still: I had followed the manoeuvres for several days in a row, without being able to go to bed. What a blessing it was to return to the hotel! As I got into bed I seemed to have escaped at last from enchanters, from sorcerers, like those who inhabit the 'romances' seventeenth-century readers liked so much. My sleep and the long lie-in that followed it the next morning became a charming fairy-tale. Charming; but perhaps beneficial as well. I reminded myself that the worst hardships have their place of sanctuary, that when all else fails rest can be found. These thoughts carried me far.

On off-duty days when Saint-Loup had none the less to stay in the barracks, I would often go and visit him there. It was a long way; I had to leave the town and cross the viaduct with its immense views on either side. There was nearly always a strong wind over this high ground and it swept through the buildings that stood on three sides of the barracks square, which was always howling like a cavern of the winds. Robert would be occupied with some duty or other, and while I waited for him outside his door or in the mess, talking to friends of his to whom he had introduced me and whom I came to see from time to time, even when he was not going to be there, looking down from the window at the countryside three hundred feet below, bare but for a few recently sown fields, often still soaked with rain and lit by the sun, which added an occasional strip of green to it, brilliant green with the translucent limpidity of enamel, I would often hear him spoken of by others; and I soon learned how much he was liked and how popular he was. Among many of the volunteers from other squadrons, the sons of rich middle-class families who viewed aristocratic high society only from the outside and without access to it, the attraction that they spontaneously felt towards what they knew of Saint-Loup's character was reinforced by the glamour that attached in their eyes to the young man whom, when they went on leave to Paris, they had often seen on Saturday nights dining in the Café de la Paix with the Duc d'Uzès and the Prince d'Orléans. And this was why they now associated his handsome face, his gangling way of walking and saluting, his perpetually dancing monocle, the jaunty overstatement of his high caps and the trousers that were of too fine a cloth and too pink a shade, with a notion of stylishness which they certainly did not find among the best turned-out officers in the regiment, not even the majestic captain to whom I owed the privilege of sleeping in the barracks, who seemed, in comparison, too imposing and too obviously stylish.

One of them mentioned that the captain had bought a new horse. 'He can buy as many horses as he likes. I saw Saint-Loup on Sunday morning in the Allée des Acacias. Now *there's* a horseman with some style!' replied his companion; he knew what he was talking about, for these young men belonged to a class which, without frequenting the same elevated milieu, yet, thanks to its money and leisure, does not differ from the aristocracy in its experience of all the refinements of life that money can procure. At most their own elegance, in the matter of dress for instance, had something more contrived, more immaculate about it than the casual and careless elegance of Saint-Loup that my grandmother found so appealing. It gave quite a thrill to these sons of important bankers and stockbrokers, as they sat eating their oysters after the theatre, to see Sergeant Saint-Loup at a nearby table. And what a tale there was to tell in barracks on Monday, after a week-end leave, by one of them who was from Robert's squadron, and whom he had acknowledged 'really pleasantly', or by another who was not in the same squadron but was positive that in spite of this Saint-Loup had recognized him, since he had set his monocled eye in his direction two or three times.

'Yes, my brother saw him at the Café de la Paix,' said another, who had been spending the day with his mistress. 'Apparently his jacket was cut too loose and hung badly.

– What about his waistcoat?

– It wasn't a white one. He was wearing a mauve one with sort of palms on it – stunning!'

To the older soldiers (men of the people who had never heard of the Jockey Club and who simply placed Saint-Loup in the category of exceedingly rich non-commissioned officers, in which they ranked all those who, whether bankrupt or not, lived in a certain style, whose incomes or debts ran into several figures, and who were generous towards their men), Saint-Loup's gait, his monocle, his pants and caps, even if they saw nothing particularly aristocratic about them, held just as much interest and significance. They recognized in these details the character, the style that they had assigned once and for all to this most popular of the officers in the regiment, manners like no one else's, scorn for the opinion of his superior officers, which seemed to them to be the natural upshot of his kindness to his subordinates. The morning cup of coffee taken in the barrack-room, the afternoon rest, seemed more enjoyable when some old soldier served up to the greedy ears of the idle squad some savoury detail about one of Saint-Loup's caps.

'It was as high as my pack.

– 'Come off it, you're having us on. It couldn't have been as high as your pack,' broke in an arts graduate who used these slang terms to avoid being taken for a raw recruit and who had dared to make this contradiction so that he could hear confirmation of a detail which enchanted him.

'Oh, not as high as my pack, wasn't it? You measured it, did you? I can tell you this, the CO just stood there looking at him as if he'd have liked to clap him in clink. And you needn't think that made any impression on our great Saint-Loup, oh no! He just walked about the place, looked up, looked down, with that monocle of his doing its usual thing. We'll have to see what the captain's got to say about it. Probably nothing, but he's not going to be pleased about it, that's for sure. But there's nothing so special about that cap. They say he's got thirty of them or more at home in Paris.

– And how come you know that, pal? Through that bloody corp of ours?' asked the young graduate, pedantically flaunting the new grammatical forms he had only recently acquired and proud to let them adorn his conversation.

'How come I know? From his batman, who else d'you think?

– Now there's a bloke who knows when he's well off!

– You don't have to tell me! He's got more lolly than I have, I can tell you! And he gives him all his own things and everything. He wasn't getting enough to eat in the canteen according to him. So along comes old de Saint-Loup and gives cookie a piece of his mind: "I want him properly fed, and to hell with the cost." ' And the old soldier made up for the nondescript words by his spirited tone, in a pale imitation of Saint-Loup which scored an enormous success.

When I left the barracks I would take a stroll, then, to pass the time before I went, as I did every day, to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel where he and his friends took their meals, I went back to my own, as soon as the sun had gone down, so that I could rest and read for a couple of hours. In the square, the evening sky set little pink clouds on the pear-shaped turrets of the castle, matching the colour of the bricks, and the harmonious effect was completed by the softening reflection of the light upon them. So strong a current of vitality coursed through my veins that no amount of movement on my part could exhaust it; every step I took, as I walked on the paving-stones in the square, had a rebounding spring about it, and the wings of Mercury seemed to be attached to my heels. One of the fountains was filled with a red glow, and in the other the moonlight was already turning the water opal in colour. Between them were children at play, shouting shrilly and wheeling about in circles, obeying some inescapable impulse of the hour like swifts or bats. Next to the hotel, the former law-courts and the Louis XVI orangery which now housed the savings bank and the army corps offices, were lit from within by the pale golden globes of their gas-jets, already aglow, and their light, although it was still daylight outside, suited the huge, tall, eighteenth-century windows from which the gleam of the setting sun had not yet disappeared, as a yellow tortoise-shell ornament would have suited a complexion heightened with rouge, and persuaded me to get back to my fireside and to the lamp which, standing there alone in the façade of my hotel, was struggling with the oncoming darkness, and for whose sake I was returning before it was completely dark, for pleasure, like going home for tea. Inside my hotel, I retained the same fullness of sensation I had experienced out of doors. It gave such a full and rounded appearance to the suface of things that normally seem flat and lifeless – the yellow flame of the fire, the crude blue paper of the sky on which the evening light, like a schoolboy, had scrawled wiggly pink chalk-marks, the oddly-patterned cloth of the round table where a ream of essay paper and an inkpot awaited me in company with one of Bergotte's novels – that ever since that moment, these things have continued to seem laden with a particularly rich form of existence which I feel I could extract from them if I were given the chance to set eyes upon them again. I thought delightedly about the barracks I had just left and its weather-vane blown in all directions. Like a diver breathing through a tube which rises above the surface of the water, I felt I was somehow in contact with healthy, open-air life through my connection with these barracks, this high observatory dominating countryside furrowed with canals of green enamel, into whose various buildings I regarded it as a priceless privilege, one I hoped would last, to be free to go whenever I chose, always certain of a welcome.

At seven o'clock I dressed and went out again to dine with Saint-Loup at the hotel where he took his meals. I liked to go there on foot. It was now pitch-dark, and after the third day of my stay, as soon as night fell, an icy wind began to blow, like a sign that it was going to snow. As I walked, I ought, it would seem, to have kept Mme de Guermantes constantly in my mind; it was only an attempt to draw nearer to her that had brought me to Robert's garrison. But memories, griefs, are unstable things. There are days when they become so remote that we are scarcely aware of them, we think they have disappeared. And so we give our attention to other things. And the streets of this town had not yet become for me what streets are in our usual whereabouts, merely a means of getting from one place to another. The life led by the inhabitants of this unfamiliar world must be something wondrous, it seemed to me, and often the lighted windows of a building would keep me standing for a long time in the dark, motionless, laying before my eyes the genuine and mysterious scenes of lives I might not enter. Here the genie of fire showed me in a crimson tableau the booth of a chestnut-seller where a pair of non-commissioned officers, their belts abandoned on chairs, were playing cards, without suspecting that they had been conjured out of the darkness by a magician, like a stage apparition, and presented as they actually were at that very moment to the eyes of a stopping passer-by who was invisible to them. In a little junk shop, a half-spent candle projected its red glow on to an engraving and turned it to the colour of blood, while the light cast by a big lamp, struggling with the darkness, bronzed a fragment of leather, niello-ed a dagger with glittering spangles, spread a sheen of precious gold like the patina of the past or the varnish of a master over pictures which were only bad copies, and turned this whole hovel, in which there was nothing but cheap imitations and cast-off rubbish, into a marvellous Rembrandt painting. Occasionally I looked up towards some vast old apartment with its shutters still open and where amphibious men and women, adapting themselves each evening to living in an element different from their daytime one, swam about slowly in the dense liquid which at nightfall rises incessantly from the wells of lamps and fills the rooms to the brink of their walls of stone and glass, and as they moved about in it, their bodies sent forth unctuous golden ripples. I walked on, and often, in the dark alley that runs past the cathedral, as in the past on the road to Méséglise, the force of my desire made me pause; I felt that a woman must be about to appear and to satisfy it; if I suddenly felt a skirt brush past me in the darkness, the very intensity of the pleasure I experienced made it impossible for me to believe that the contact was unintentional, and I would attempt to put my arms round a terrified stranger. There was something so real to me about this Gothic alley that if I had managed to pick up and enjoy a woman there, I would have found it difficult not to believe it was the ancient voluptuous charm of the place that was bringing us together, even if she were no more than a street-walker, stationed there every evening, but invested with mystery by the wintry night, the strange place, the darkness and the medieval ambience. I began to think about what lay ahead: to try to put Mme de Guermantes out of my mind seemed really painful, but sensible, and for the first time possible, perhaps even easy. In the total quiet of this part of the town I could hear ahead of me words and laughter which must have been coming from people returning home half-drunk. I waited to see them and stood peering in the direction from which I had heard these sounds. But I had to wait for a long time because the surrounding silence was so deep that it had enabled sounds that were still a long way off to reach me with enormous clarity and force. Finally they did appear but not from in front, as I had supposed, but a long way behind me. Either the intersection of the streets and the position of the houses in between had created this acoustic error by refracting the sound, or, because it is very difficult to locate sound when its source is unknown, I had been as mistaken about distance as about direction.

The wind was blowing harder. It was grainy, spiked with coming snow; I returned to the main street and jumped on to the little tram, from the platform of which an officer was blindly returning the salutes of the blundering soldiers passing on the pavement, their faces painted bright with cold, reminding me, in this little town which the sudden leap from autumn into early winter seemed to have transported further north, of the rubicund faces which Bruegel gives to his joyful, carousing, frost-bitten peasants.

And indeed at the hotel where I was to meet Saint-Loup and his friends the beginning of the festive season was attracting a great many people from near and far; as I hastened across the courtyard with its glimpses of glowing kitchens in which chickens were turning on spits, pigs were roasting, and lobsters were being flung alive into what the landlord called the 'everlasting fire', I discovered an influx of new arrivals (worthy of some *Census of the People at Bethlehem* such as the Old Flemish Masters painted), gathering there in groups, asking the landlord or one of his staff (who, if they did not like the look of them; would recommend

accommodation elsewhere in the town) for board and lodging, while a kitchen-boy passed by holding a struggling fowl by its neck. Similarly, in the big dining-room, which I had passed through on my first day here on my way to the small room where my friend awaited me, one was again reminded of some Biblical feast, portrayed with the naïvety of former times and with Flemish exaggeration, because of the quantity of fish, chickens, grouse, woodcock, pigeons, brought in garnished and piping hot by breathless waiters who slid along the floor in their haste to set them down on the huge sideboard where they were carved immediately, but where – for many of the diners were finishing their meal as I arrived – they piled up untouched; it was as if their profusion and the haste of those who carried them in were prompted far less by the demands of those eating than by respect for the sacred text, scrupulously followed to the letter but naïvely illustrated by real details taken from local custom, and by a concern, both aesthetic and devotional, to make visible the splendour of the feast through the profusion of its victuals and the bustling attentiveness of those who served it. One of them stood lost in thought by a sideboard at the end of the room; and in order to find out from him, who alone appeared calm enough to give me an answer, where our table had been laid, I made my way forward through the various chafing-dishes that had been lit to keep warm the plates of latecomers (which did not prevent the desserts, in the centre of the room, from being displayed in the hands of a huge mannikin, sometimes supported on the wings of a duck, apparently made of crystal but actually of ice, carved each day with a hot iron by a sculptor-cook, in a truly Flemish manner), and, at the risk of being knocked down by the other waiters, went straight towards the calm one in whom I seemed to recognize a character traditionally present in these sacred subjects, since he reproduced with scrupulous accuracy the snub-nosed features, simple and badly drawn, and the dreamy expression of such a figure, already dimly aware of the miracle of a divine presence which the others have not yet begun to suspect. In addition, and doubtless in view of the approaching festive season, the tableau was reinforced by a celestial element recruited entirely from a personnel of cherubim and seraphim. A young angel musician, his fair hair framing a fourteen-year-old face, was not playing any instrument, it is true, but stood dreaming in front of a gong or a stack of plates, while less infantile angels were dancing attendance through the boundless expanse of the room, beating the air with the ceaseless flutter of the napkins, which hung from their bodies like the wings in primitive paintings, with pointed ends. Taking flight from these ill-defined regions, screened by a curtain of palms, from which the angelic waiters looked, from a distance, as if they had descended from the empyrean, I squeezed my way through to the small dining-room and to Saint-Loup's table. There I found several of his friends who dined with him regularly, nobles except for one or two commoners in whom the nobles had detected likely friends as early as their school-days, and with whom they had readily formed friendships, thus proving that they were not in principle hostile to the middle classes, even if they were Republican, provided they had clean hands and attended mass. On the very first of these evenings, before we sat down to dinner, I drew Saint-Loup into a corner, and with the others present, but out of earshot, said this to him:

'Robert, this is hardly the time or place to ask you, but it won't take a second. I keep forgetting to ask you when I'm at the barracks, but isn't it Mme de Guermantes's photograph that you have on your table?

– Why, yes, she's my darling aunt.

– But of course. How silly of me. I had known that, but I'd never really thought about it. Oh dear, your friends will be getting impatient. Let's be quick, they're looking at us. Another time will do, it's not important.

– That's all right, take your time. They can wait.

– No, no, I don't want to offend them; they're so nice. It really doesn't matter, I assure you.

– You know the splendid Oriane, then?'

'The splendid Oriane', as he might have said 'the good Oriane', did not imply that Saint-Loup regarded Mme de Guermantes as particularly good. In this case the words 'good', 'excellent', 'splendid', are no more than a means of emphasizing the definite article indicating someone who is known to both parties and whom the speaker is at a loss to discuss with someone outside the family. The word 'good' serves as a stopgap and allows the speaker time to hit upon 'Do you see much of her?' or 'I haven't seen her for months' or 'I'll be seeing her on Tuesday' or 'She's no longer as young as she used to be, I should think.'

'I can't tell you how funny it is that it should be her photograph, because we're living in her house now and I've been hearing the most astonishing things about her. (I would have been hard pressed to say what.) That has made me enormously interested in her, from a literary point of view, you understand, from a – how shall I put it? – from a Balzacian point of view. But I didn't need to spell that out to someone as clever as you, you already understood. But I must stop. Whatever will your friends think of my manners?

– They'll think nothing at all. I've told them you're a very special person and they're far more nervous than you are.

– You're too kind. But listen, what I really wanted to ask you was this: I suppose Mme de Guermantes hasn't any idea I know you, does she?

– I really have no idea. I haven't seen her since last summer because I've not been on leave when she's been in Paris.

– The fact is that I've been told that she regards me as an absolute idiot.

– I really can't believe that. Oriane is no genius, but all the same she's far from stupid.

– You know that as a rule I'm not at all keen for you to broadcast your good opinion of me. I'm not conceited. Which is why I'm sorry you've said flattering things about me to your friends here (we'll join them in two seconds). But Mme de Guermantes is different. If you could let her know what you think of me, even exaggerate it a little, I can't tell you how much pleasure it would give me.

– Why, of course I can. If that's all you're asking me to do, it's really not very difficult. But what difference can it make to you what she thinks of you? I suppose you couldn't really care less in fact. Anyway, if that's all you wanted to say, we can talk about it in front of the others or when we're on our own. I'm afraid you're going to tire yourself standing up talking and in such an awkward situation. We'll have plenty of opportunities to be together on our own.'

It was precisely this awkward situtaion that had given me the courage to speak to Robert; the presence of the others was a pretext for me to be able to say what I needed to in a brief and disjointed manner, which enabled me to disguise more easily the falsehood of telling my friend that I had forgotten his connection with the Duchesse and also to prevent him from having the time to ask questions about my reasons for wanting Mme de Guermantes to know I was his friend, that I was intelligent and so on, questions that would have been all the more disturbing to me in that I could not have answered them.

'Robert, I'm surprised that a man of your intelligence should fail to understand that one doesn't talk about the things that will please one's friends, one just does them. You could ask anything of me, and indeed I really wish you would ask me to do something for you, and I would demand no explanations, I assure you. I've gone further than I really intended; I have no desire to know Mme de Guermantes, but just to test you, I should have told you that I wanted to dine with Mme de Guermantes, and I'm sure you would never have arranged it.

– Not only would I have arranged it, but I will.

– When?

– As soon as I get back to Paris, in three weeks' time, I expect.

– We shall see. I'm sure she won't want it anyway. But I can't tell you how grateful I am.

– Don't mention it. It's nothing.

– Please don't say that. It's a great deal, because now I can see what a friend you are to me. Whether what I ask of you is important or not, disagreeable or not, whether I am being serious or simply testing you, it makes no difference. You say you will do it, and by saying that you show the sensitivity of your mind and heart. A stupid friend would have argued.'

This is precisely what he had just been doing; but perhaps I wanted to sway him by flattery; perhaps again I was being sincere, the only touchstone of merit seeming to me to be the way someone could be useful in connection with the one thing that seemed important – my love. Then, perhaps out of duplicity, or in a genuine surge of affection inspired by gratitude, by self-interest, and by all the physical features of Mme de Guermantes which nature had replicated in her nephew, I went on to add:

'But it really is time to join the others, and I've mentioned only one of the two things that I meant to ask you, the least important one. The other is more important to me, but I'm afraid you will say no. Would you mind if we were to call each other *tu*?

– Mind? I'd be delighted. *Joy! Tears of Joy! Undreamed-of happiness!*[14]

– 'Oh, thank you… thank you… After you! It's such a pleasure to me that you needn't bother about Mme de Guermantes if you'd prefer, calling each other *tu* is enough.

– I can do both.

– I say, Robert! Listen to me a minute,' I said to him later over dinner. 'It's really so silly, this erratic conversation we're having. I can't think why… But you remember the lady I was talking about just now?

– Yes.

– You're quite sure?

– Of course I am. What do you take me for? The village idiot? A half-wit?

– I suppose I couldn't ask you to give me her photograph, could I?'

I had meant to ask him only for the loan of it. But as I spoke I suddenly became shy, feeling that my request was indiscreet, and in order to conceal my embarrassment, I formulated it more bluntly and overstated it, as if it had been quite natural.

'No. I should have to ask her permission first,' came his reply.

He blushed as he said this. I could see that he had a reservation in his mind, that he suspected me of an ulterior motive, that he would serve the cause of my love only partially, subject to certain moral principles, and I hated him for it.

And yet I was touched to see how differently Saint-Loup treated me now that I was no longer alone with him and his friends were part of the company. His increased affability would have left me cold had I thought that it was deliberate; but I felt it was spontaneous and simply consisted of all the things that he was used to saying about me in my absence and not when I was alone with him. True, in our private conversations I could sense the pleasure he derived from talking to me, but that pleasure almost always remained unexpressed. Now, when I made the sort of remark which ordinarily he enjoyed without showing it, he watched from the corner of his eye to see if I produced on his friends the effect on which he had counted and which clearly corresponded to what he had led them to expect. The mother of a debutante could not have been more attentive to her daughter's repartee and its effect upon her listeners. When I made a remark at which, alone in my company, he would have merely smiled, but which he was presently afraid the others might not grasp, he kept saying 'What? What?' to make me repeat it, to attract their attention, and turning to them immediately with a hearty laugh, transforming himself inadvertently into the ringleader of their laughter, he presented me for the first time with the opinion he had of me and which he must often have expressed to them. So that I suddenly caught sight of myself from the outside, like someone who reads his name in the newspaper or sees himself in a mirror.

On one of these evenings, it occurred to me to tell a mildly amusing story about Mme Blandais, but I stopped myself immediately when I remembered that Saint-Loup knew it already and that when I had started to tell it to him the day after my arrival he had interrupted me with: 'You told it to me before, at Balbec.' So I was surprised to find him begging me to continue, assuring me that he did not know the story and that it would amuse him immensely. 'You've forgotten it for the moment,' I said, 'but you'll soon remember. – No, really, I swear, you're mistaken. You've never told it to me. Do go on.' And throughout the story he kept his excited and enraptured gaze fixed upon myself, and upon his friends. It was only when I had finished, amid general laughter, that I realized that it had occurred to him that this story would give his comrades an excellent impression of my wit, and this was why he had feigned ignorance. Such is friendship.

On the third evening, one of his friends to whom I had not had the opportunity of speaking on the previous occasions, talked with me at great length; and I then overheard him telling Saint-Loup how much he was enjoying himself. And in fact we sat talking together for most of the evening, in front of our neglected glasses of Sauternes, separated, protected from the others by the magnificent veils of one of those instinctive likings between men which, when they are not based on physical attraction, are the only ones that are altogether mysterious. Such had seemed to me to be the feeling, enigmatic in nature, that Saint-Loup had for me at Balbec, a feeling not to be confused with the interest of our conversations, free from any physical attachment, invisible, intangible, and yet experienced by him as the inner presence of a sort of phlogiston, or gas, sufficient to bring a smile to his lips when he referred to it. And perhaps there was something more surprising still in the mutual sympathy which had arisen here in a single evening, like a flower that had opened within minutes in the warmth of this small room. I could not refrain from asking Robert when he spoke to me about Balbec whether it was really settled that he was to marry Mlle d'Ambresac. He made it quite clear that not only was it not settled, but that there had never been any question of such a thing, that he had never set eyes on her, that he did not know who she was. If any of the society people who had told me of this forthcoming marriage had happened to be there at that moment, they would have simply announced the engagement of Mlle d'Ambresac to someone who was not Saint-Loup, and that of Saint-Loup to someone who was not Mlle d'Ambresac. I should have surprised them greatly had I reminded them of the discrepant predictions they had so recently made. So that this little game should continue multiplying its false reports and attaching the greatest possible number of them to every name in turn, nature has endowed those who play it with a memory as short as their gullibility is profound.

Saint-Loup had spoken to me about another of his comrades who was also of the party, and with whom he was on particularly good terms since they were the only two in the place to champion the reopening of the Dreyfus case.[15]

'Oh, him!' said my new friend. 'He's not like Saint-Loup. He's got the devil in him! He's not even sincere. At first he used to say: "You wait and see. There's a man I know well, a shrewd fellow, kind-hearted, Général de Boisdeffre. You can believe what he has to say beyond a doubt." But as soon as he heard that Boisdeffre had pronounced Dreyfus guilty, that was the end of Boisdeffre. Clericalism, the prejudices of the General Staff, prevented him from forming a genuine opinion, although there is, or rather was, before this Dreyfus business, no one as clerical as our friend here. The next thing he told us was that whatever happened we would get the truth, because the case was being put in the hands of Saussier, and he, Saussier, as a Republican soldier (I might add that our friend here comes from an ultra-monarchist family), was a man of steel with an unflinching conscience. But when Saussier pronounced Esterhazy innocent, he found fresh reasons to account for the verdict, ones that were damaging not to Dreyfus but to Général Saussier. Saussier was blinded by the militarist spirit (and note that our friend is as militarist as he is clerical, or at least was. I don't know what to make of him any more.) His family is really distressed to see him mixed up in such ideas.

– You know, it seems to me,' I said, half turning towards Saint-Loup so as not to appear to be excluding him from the conversation with his comrade, 'that the influence we attribute to environment is particularly true of an intellectual environment. We are men conditioned by ideas. There are far fewer ideas than men, so men with similar ideas are alike. Since there is nothing material in an idea, those who are only materially linked to a man with an idea in no way modify it.'

At this point I was interrupted by Saint-Loup because one of the young soldiers had smiled across to him and pointed to me with the words: 'Duroc! Duroc to a tee!' I had no idea what this meant but I sensed that the expression on the shy face of this young soldier was more than friendly. Saint-Loup was not satisfied with this comparison. In an outburst of delight which was no doubt intensified by the delight he took in showing me off to his friends, with extreme volubility, he

kept saying, as he patted me like a horse that has just come in first: 'You really are the cleverest man I know.' He corrected himself and added: 'Together with Elstir that is. I hope you're not offended. I'm only being scrupulously accurate. It's like saying to Balzac: "You're the greatest novelist of the century… together with Stendhal." I couldn't be more scrupulous, could I? But all the same, immense admiration. No? you don't agree about Stendhal?' he went on, with a naïve confidence in my judgment that was expressed by a charming look of smiling interrogation, almost childish, from his green eyes. 'Oh, good! I can see you share my view. Bloch can't stand Stendhal. Idiotic of him. After all, the *Chartreuse* is a stunning book, don't you think? I'm so glad you agree. What do you like best about the *Chartreuse?* come on, tell me,' he said with boyish enthusiasm. And his physical strength, present like a threat, made his question feel almost terrifying. 'Is it Mosca? Fabrice?' I answered timidly that there was something of M. de Norpois about Mosca. This provoked a storm of laughter from young Siegfried Saint-Loup. And no sooner had I added: 'But Mosca is far more intelligent, far less of a pedant,' than I heard Robert shout 'Bravo', actually clap his hands in helpless laughter and exclaim: 'That's perfect! Wonderful! You're extraordinary!' While I was speaking, even the approval of the others seemed superfluous to Saint-Loup. He demanded silence. And just as a conductor stops the orchestra with a rap from his baton because someone has made a noise, so he would reprimand the person responsible for any disturbance: 'Gibergue, you must be quiet when someone else is speaking. You can say what you have to say afterwards.' And to me: 'Do go on.'

I breathed a sigh of relief, for I had been afraid that he would make me go back and begin all over again.

'And since an idea,' I went on, 'is something separate from human interests and could not enjoy any of their advantages, men devoted to an idea are not affected by self-interest.

– That really leaves you floored, doesn't it, lads,' said Saint-Loup when I had finished; he had been following me with his eyes with the same nervous anxiety as if I had been walking a tightrope. 'What were you trying to say, Gibergue?

– I was saying that your friend reminded me a lot of Major Duroc. It was like hearing his voice.

– Why, I've often thought the same, replied Saint-Loup. They have several things in common, but you'll find that my friend here has a great many qualities Duroc hasn't.'

In the same way that a brother of this friend of Saint-Loup, a student at the Schola Cantorum, formed an opinion of every new work of music that differed entirely from the opinion of his father, his mother, his cousins, his club associates, but followed to the letter the views of all the other students at the Schola, likewise this non-commissioned nobleman (of whom Bloch formed an extraordinary opinion when I mentioned him, because, touched to hear that he was on the same side as himself, he none the less imagined him, on account of his aristocratic origins and his religious and military upbringing, as utterly different, endowed with the same sort of magic as a native of some distant country) had a 'mentality', as it was becoming fashionable to say, analogous to that of Dreyfusards in general and of Bloch in particular, upon which the traditions of his family and the interests of his career could exert no hold of any kind. As a similar instance of this sort of thing, one of Saint-Loup's cousins had married a young Eastern princess who was reputed to write poetry as fine as that of Victor Hugo or Alfred de Vigny, but who, in spite of this, was presumed to have a different type of mind to anything that could normally be conceived, the mind of an Eastern princess shut away in a palace out of the *Arabian Nights*. It was left to the writers who were privileged to meet her to taste the disappointment, or rather the delight, of listening to conversation that was reminiscent not of Scheherazade but of a person of genius like Alfred de Vigny or Victor Hugo.

It gave me particular pleasure to talk to this young man, as it did to Robert's other friends and to Robert himself, about the barracks, the garrison officers, and the army in general. Thanks to the enormously exaggerated scale on which we see even the things, however trifling they may be, in the midst of which we take our meals, talk and lead our real lives, thanks to the formidable enlargement that they undergo, and which means that the rest of the world, in its absence, cannot compete with them and assumes in comparison the flimsiness of a dream, I had started to take an interest in the various personalities of the barracks, in the officers I saw in the courtyard when I went to visit Saint-Loup, or, if I was awake at the time, when the regiment passed beneath my windows. I should have liked to know more about the major Saint-Loup admired so much, and the course in military history which would have fascinated me 'even from the aesthetic point of view'. I knew that Robert was all too often given to rather hollow wordiness, but this occasionally indicated the assimilation of profound ideas, which he was perfectly capable of grasping. Unfortunately, as far as army matters were concerned, Robert was chiefly preoccupied at this time by the Dreyfus case. He said very little about it, because he alone of the party at table was a Dreyfusard; the others were violently opposed to a fresh trial, apart from my neighbour at table, the new friend whose opinions seemed less fixed. A firm admirer of the colonel, who was regarded as an exceptional officer and had castigated the tide of unrest against the army in several of his regimental orders, thereby earning himself a reputation as an anti-Dreyfusard, my neighbour had heard that his commanding officer had been known to make certain remarks that suggested he had his doubts as to the guilt of Dreyfus and retained his admiration for Picquart. On this last point, at any rate, the rumour of the colonel's relative Dreyfusism was ill-grounded, like all rumours that arise out of thin air and come to surround any great scandal. For, shortly afterwards, this colonel, after being detailed to interrogate the former Chief of the Intelligence Branch, treated him with a previously unparalleled brutality and contempt. Whatever the truth of the matter, and although he had not taken the liberty of questioning the colonel about it directly, my neighbour had been kind enough to inform Saint-Loup – in the tone in which a Catholic lady might inform a Jewish one that her parish priest denounced the pogrom in Russia and admired the generosity of certain Jews – that the colonel was not, in regard to Dreyfusism – to a certain kind of Dreyfusism at least – the fanatical, narrow-minded opponent he had been taken to be.

'That doesn't surprise me,' said Saint-Loup, 'he's an intelligent man. But he's still blinded by the prejudices of his class and even more by his clericalism.' He turned to me: 'Ah, yes, Major Duroc, the man I was telling you about who lectures to us on military history. He's someone who, from all accounts, is deeply in support of our views. I'd have been surprised to learn that he wasn't, because he's not only supremely intelligent but a Radical-Socialist and a freemason as well.'

Out of respect for his friends, who found Saint-Loup's Dreyfusard declarations painful, but also because the subject was of more interest to me, I asked my neighbour if it were true that the major really did manage to present military history in a way that was aesthetically pleasing.

'It's absolutely true.

– But in what way?'

– Well, it's something like this: all that you read, for example, in the narrative of a military historian, the smallest facts, the most insignificant events, are merely the indications of an idea that has to be extracted and which often conceals other ideas, like a palimpsest. So that you have a body of material that is as intellectual as any science or any art, and one that is mentally satisfying.

– Would you be good enough to give me some examples?

– It's not that easy to explain, Saint-Loup broke in. You read, for instance, that such and such a corps has attempted… but before we go any further, the name of that corps, the way it is constituted, are not without their importance. If it isn't the first time the operation has been attempted, and if for the same operation we find a different corps being deployed, this could indicate that the previous corps has been wiped out or suffered serious casualities in the said operation, that it's no longer equipped to see the operation through successfully. So, we need to ask ourselves what this corps which has been wiped out consisted of; if it was made up of shock troops, held in reserve for major attacks, then a fresh corps of lesser efficiency will have little chance of succeeding where those troops have failed. And also, if we are not at the start of a campaign, the fresh corps may itself be made up of any old odds and ends, and this could provide an indication of the forces still available to the belligerent and the proximity of the moment when its forces will be inferior to the enemy's, which places the operation on which this corps is about to embark in a different focus, because, if it is no longer in a position to make good its losses, its successes themselves will, by simple arithmetic, drag it

towards its ultimate destruction. Moreover, the serial number of the opposing corps is of no less significance. If, for instance, it is a much weaker unit and has already exhausted several important units of the attacking force, the nature of the operation is completely changed, since, even if it culminates in the loss of the position held by the defending force, the very fact of holding it for any length of time can be a great success if a very small defending force has been sufficient to destroy considerable numbers on the other side. You can see that if, in the analysis of the corps engaged in this operation, there are all these important points, then the study of the position itself, of the roads and railways it commands, of the supply lines it protects, is of even greater importance. What you might call the whole geographical context needs to be thoroughly examined, he added with a laugh. (In fact he was so taken with this expression that every time he used it, even months later, he laughed in the same way.) While the operation is being set up by one of the belligerents, if you read that one of its patrols has been wiped out in the area around the position by the other belligerent, one of the conclusions you are entitled to draw is that one side was attempting to reconnoitre the defences with which the other was attempting to counter the attack. Particularly violent action at any given point may indicate the desire to capture that point, but equally the desire to keep the enemy from moving off from there, not to retaliate at the point at which you have been attacked; or it may simply indicate a dummy move in which intensified activity is a way of covering the withdrawal of troops in the area. (This was a classic feint in the Napoleonic Wars.) On the other hand, to gauge the significance of a manoeuvre, its probable objective and, as a consequence, the further manoeuvres that will accompany or follow it, it is not irrelevant to consult, not so much the announcements coming from the High Command, which may be intended to deceive the enemy or to mask a possible setback, as the field regulations of the country in question. One can always assume that the manoeuvre which an army has attempted to carry out is the one prescribed by the rules in force for analogous circumstances. If, for instance, the rules lay it down that a frontal attack must be accompanied by a flank attack and if, in the event of this flank attack having failed, the High Command claims that it had no connection with the main attack and was merely a diversion, then there is every likelihood that the truth will be found by consulting the field regulations rather than the statements made by Headquarters. And we need to consider not just the regulations that operate for each army, but their traditions, their habits, their doctrines. The study of diplomatic activity, which is constantly acting on or reacting to military activity, is another important factor. Apparently insignificant incidents, misinterpreted at the time, will explain to you how the enemy, counting on support which these incidents reveal to have been unforthcoming, was in fact able to carry out only a part of his strategic plan. So that if you know how to interpret military history, what is a jumbled account for the ordinary reader becomes a logical sequence which is as rational as a painting is for a lover of pictures who knows how to look at what a person is wearing in a portrait, what he is holding in his hands, whereas the ordinary visitor to an art gallery is bewildered and develops a headache amid the dizzying blur of colour. But just as with certain paintings in which it isn't enough to notice that the figure is holding a chalice, and you need to know why the painter put a chalice in his hands, what it's meant to symbolize, it's the same with these military operations; quite apart from their immediate objective, they're habitually modelled, in the mind of the general who is directing the campaign, on earlier battles which constitute, if I can put it like this, the past, the library holdings, the learning, the etymology, the aristocracy of the battles that are to come. And notice that I'm not talking for the moment about the local, the… how shall I say?… spatial identity of battles. That's a further factor. A battlefield has never been, nor ever will be throughout the centuries, simply the particular ground upon which a battle has been fought. If it has been a battlefield, it was because it featured certain conditions of geographical position, of geological formation, even of certain defects that could be used to hinder the enemy (for instance, a river dividing it), which made it a good battlefield. It was a good location, and it will continue to be. You don't create an artist's studio out of any old room, and you don't make a battlefield out of any old piece of ground. There are predestined sites. But I've strayed off the subject again. What I was really talking about was the type of battle that is taken as a model, a sort of strategic carbon copy, a pastiche of former tactics if you like, of battles like Ulm, Lodi, Leipzig, Cannae. I don't know whether there'll be another war in the future or what nations will be involved, but if there is, you can be certain that it will contain (and deliberately on the commander's part) another Cannae, an Austerlitz, a Rossbach, a Waterloo, and so on and so forth. Some people are quite outspoken on the subject. Marshal von Schlieffen and General von Falkenhausen have made advance plans for a Battle of Cannae against France, in the style of Hannibal, pinning down the enemy along the whole front and advancing on both flanks, especially on the right through Belgium, while Bernhardi prefers the oblique tactics of Frederick the Great, Leuthen rather than Cannae. Others air their views less crudely, but I can tell you one thing, my friend, and that's that Beauconseil, the squadron leader I introduced you to the other day and who's an officer with a great future in front of him, has swotted up his own little Pratzen attack; he knows it inside out and he's saving it up for the day when he has the opportunity to put it into practice; when that day comes, he's not going to botch his chances and we'll get it good and proper. And that breakthrough in the centre at Rivoli; the same thing will happen if there's another war. It's no more obsolete than the *Iliad*. I can tell you too that we're more or less condemned to frontal attacks now, because we can't afford to repeat the mistake we made in '70. We have to assume the offensive, nothing but the offensive. The only thing that worries me is that although I can see that the only resistance to this splendid doctrine comes from minds that are not quick on the uptake, there is one of the youngest of my masters, Mangin, a genius, who feels there ought to be a place, a provisional one of course, for the defensive. It's really not very easy to come back at him when he cites the example of Austerlitz, where the defensive was simply a prelude to attack and victory.'

Saint-Loup's theories put me in a cheerful mood. They encouraged me to believe that perhaps I was not falling prey, in my time at Doncières, with regard to these officers whom I heard being discussed as I sat drinking a Sauternes which cast the charm of its glimmering light upon them, to the same power of exaggeration that had affected me at Balbec and caused people to seem larger than life: the king and queen of the South Seas, the little group of the four gastronomes, the young gambler, Legrandin's brother-in-law, all of them now so reduced in my mind as to appear non-existent. What gave me pleasure today would not perhaps leave me indifferent tomorrow, as had always been the case so far; the person I still was at this moment was not perhaps fated to future destruction, since to the fierce and fugitive passion which I felt on these few evenings for everything to do with military life, Saint-Loup, by what he had just been telling me about the art of war, added an intellectual foundation, of a permanent nature, capable of absorbing me sufficiently for me to believe, without any attempt at self-deception, that once I had left Doncières I should continue to take an interest in the work of my friends there, and should visit them again before long. But in order to be quite sure that this art of war was really an art in the meaningful sense of the word, I said to Saint-Loup:

'What you say is interesting. Sorry, I should say it interests me enormously. But tell me, there's one thing that puzzles me. I feel that I could become fascinated by the art of war, but first I should need to be sure that it wasn't so very different from the other arts, that there was more involved in it than knowing the rules. You say that battles are modelled on former ones. I do find something aesthetic, as you put it, in seeing beneath a modern battle the plan of an older one. I can't tell you how pleasing that idea is to me. But does the genius of the commander really count for nothing? Does he really do no more than apply the rules? Or, given parity of knowledge, are there great generals as there are great surgeons, who, when the symptoms shown in two cases of illness are outwardly identical, none the less feel, for some merest hint of a reason, based perhaps on their experience but newly scrutinized, that in one case they need to do this, in another case that, that in one case they should operate, in another not?

– But of course! You find Napoleon not attacking when all the rules said he should, but some vague intuition warned him not to. Look at Austerlitz for instance, or his instructions to Lannes in 1806. But you'll find generals slavishly imitating one of Napoleon's manoeuvres and achieving a diametrically opposite result. I could give you ten examples of that in 1870. But even on the question of trying to interpret what the enemy *may* do, what he actually does is no more than a symptom which may point to any number of different things. Any one of them may turn out to be the right one, if you confine yourself to a rational, scientific approach, just as in certain difficult cases all the medical knowledge in the world will be powerless to decide whether an invisible tumour is fibrous or not, whether or not an operation ought to be performed. It's his flair for these things, his crystal-gazing, Madame-la-Clairvoyante side (you know what I mean) that's the deciding factor, for the great general as for the great doctor. To take a single example, I explained to you what a reconnaissance before a battle might mean. But it may mean a dozen other things as well, such as making the enemy think you're going to attack him at one point when you want to attack him at another, putting up a screen to prevent him from seeing the preparations for the real operation, forcing him to muster fresh troops, to position them there, to

immobilize them in a different place from where they are needed, estimating the forces at his disposal, sounding him out, forcing him to show his hand. Sometimes, even, the fact that you deploy large numbers of troops in an operation doesn't mean that the operation is really your main concern; you could in fact carry it out in earnest, even though it is only a feint, and so have a better chance of deceiving the enemy. If I had the time to describe all the Napoleonic Wars from this point of view, I can assure you that the simple classic movements that we are studying, and that you'll see us practising in the field, just for the pleasure of getting out a bit, you young blighter (I'm sorry. I *know* you're not well!), well, in a war, when you feel backed by the vigilance, the judgment, and the thorough knowledge of the High Command, the whole thing moves you as directly as the beams coming from a lighthouse, a purely physical light, but at the same time an emanation of the mind, scouring through space to warn ships of danger. But perhaps I'm wrong to talk to you only about the literature of war. In effect, as the formation of the soil, the direction of the wind and light tell us which way a tree will grow, so the conditions in which a campaign is conducted, the features of the terrain on which you manoeuvre, partially dictate and limit the various options that present themselves to the general. This means that along a mountain range, through a system of valleys, over certain plains, it's almost with the inevitability and grandiose beauty of an avalanche that you can predict the route an army will take.

– So now you're denying the commander's freedom of choice, the enemy's instinct to gauge the intentions of the other side, things which you granted me a moment ago.

– Not in the least! You remember that philosophy book we read together in Balbec, the richness of the world of possibility compared with the real world. Well, it's just the same with the art of war. In a given situation there will be four options available from which the general has had to chose, like the doctor who has to be prepared for the various courses taken by a disease. And here too, human weakness or human greatness are further causes for uncertainty. For of these four options let us assume that contingent factors (such as the attainment of minor objectives, or lack of time, or inferior numbers and inadequate supplies) persuade the general to adopt the first, which is less perfect but less costly, less time-consuming and involving as its terrain richer country for feeding his troops. After starting with this first plan, which the enemy, uncertain at first, will soon detect, he may not be able to carry it through because of the many obstacles involved – this is what I call the unpredictable element of human weakness – and so abandon it and attempt the second, third or fourth option. But it may be that he has tried the first plan – and this is what I call human greatness – merely as a feint to pin down the enemy and surprise him, at a point where he had not expected an attack. This is how Mack, at Ulm, expecting the enemy to attack from the west, was surrounded from the north where he thought he was under no threat. But in fact this isn't a very good example. Ulm is better as an example of the battle of encirclement and it's something we shall see repeated in the future, for it's not just a classic example from which generals will derive inspiration, but also a form of battle that has something inevitable about it (not exclusively so; there is some choice and variety) like a type of crystallization. But all that doesn't much matter, because these situations are ultimately artificial ones. To go back to our philosophy book; it's like the principles of logic or scientific laws; reality conforms to them more or less, but remember the great mathematician Poincaré: he's by no means certain that mathematics is a rigorously exact discipline. As to the rules themselves, which I mentioned to you, in the end they're of secondary importance, and besides they are changed from time to time. For instance, we cavalrymen live by the 1895 *Field Service*, a book that can be said to be out of date, given it's based on the old and obsolete doctrine which maintains that cavalry action has little more than a psychological effect by creating panic in the enemy ranks. Now the most intelligent of our teachers, all the best minds in the cavalry, and particularly the major I was speaking about, take the contrary view that the issue will be decided by a real free-for-all with sabre and lance, and that the side that can hold out longer will be the victor, not just in psychological terms by creating panic, but physically.

– Saint-Loup is right and it's likely that the next edition of *Field Service* will bear the stamp of these new ideas, my neighbour remarked.

– I'm glad to have your approval, since your opinions seem to impress my friend more than mine do,' said Saint-Loup with a smile, either because he was slightly miffed by the growing liking between his comrade and myself or because he thought it obliging to stamp it with his official recognition. 'Perhaps I've underestimated the importance of the rules. They do change, I admit. But in the meantime they do control the military situation, the plans of campaign and troop positioning. If they reflect a false conception of strategy they may be the initial cause of defeat. This is all a bit too technical for you, he said to me. Always remember that, in the end, what does most to accelerate the development of the art of war is wars themselves. In the course of a campaign, if it is at all prolonged, you find one belligerent benefiting from the lessons that emerge from the enemy's successes and mistakes, perfecting the methods of the opposing side, and the enemy in turn will go on improving these. But all that is past history. With the amazing advances in artillery, the wars of the future, if there are any, will be so short that peace will have been declared before there is time to put our lessons into practice.

– 'There is no need to be so touchy,' I told Saint-Loup, reverting to what he had said before this, 'I've been listening to you with a great deal of interest!'

– Please don't go into a huff, said his comrade, but allow me to add this to what you've been saying: if battles reproduce themselves in exactly the same form, it isn't merely because of the attitude of the commander. It can happen that a mistake on his part (his failure to appreciate the strength of the enemy, for instance) will lead him to demand excessive sacrifices from his troops, the sort of sacrifices which some units will make with such sublime self-denial that the part they play will parallel the role of some other unit in some other battle, and they'll be presented as interchangeable examples in history: if we stick to 1870, we have the Prussian Guard at Saint-Privat and the Turcos at Froeschviller and Wissembourg.

– Ah, interchangeable – exactly so! That's excellent! How very perceptive you are,' returned Saint-Loup.

I was not unimpressed by these last examples, as always when, beneath the particular detail, I was shown evidence of the general law. Yet what really interested me was the genius of the commander and I was keen to discover in what it consisted, how, in a given instance, when the uninspired commander was unable to resist the enemy, the commander of genius would set about redeeming his jeopardized situation, something which, in Saint-Loup's view, was quite feasible and had been achieved several times by Napoleon. And to understand what military excellence was, I asked for comparisons between the various generals whose names were familiar to me, which of them had the most obvious marks of a leader, the most striking tactical gifts, even if this meant boring my new friends, who in fact betrayed no signs of boredom and went on answering my questions with unstinting good-will.

I felt myself isolated – not only from the great icy expanse of darkness which spread out into the distance and in which we would occasionally hear the whistle of a train, which only intensified the pleasure of being where we were, or the chimes of an hour which was happily distant from the one at which these young men would have to take up their sabres and leave – but also from all external preoccupations, and almost from the memory of Mme de Guermantes, thanks to the kindness of Saint-Loup, to which the kindness of his friends seemed to add greater solidity, and also because of the warmth of that little dining-room, and the tastiness of the excellent food we were served. This gave as much pleasure to my imagination as to my liking for good food; occasionally the small fragment of nature from which the food had been extracted, the scaly-surfaced stoup of the oyster with its few remaining drops of sea water, or the gnarled stem and yellowed branches of a bunch of grapes, still enveloped it, inedible, poetic and distant as a landscape, evoking in the course of our meal the successive images of a siesta beneath a vine-trellis and a boat trip on the sea; on other evenings it was the chef alone who brought out these original properties of each dish, presenting it in its natural setting like a work of art; a fish cooked in a court-bouillon was brought in on a long earthenware dish, and because it was presented in relief on a bed of bluish herbs, intact but still contorted after being dropped alive into boiling water, surrounded by a ring of shell-fish, satellite animalcules, crabs, shrimps and mussels, it seemed to belong to one of Bernard Palissy's[16] ceramics.

'I'm furiously jealous,' Saint-Loup said to me, half joking, half in earnest, alluding to the huge amount of time I had devoted exclusively to talking with his friend. 'Is it because you find him more intelligent than me? Do you like him better? If that's the way things are, I suppose no one else will get a look-in?' (Men

who are enormously in love with a woman, who live in a society of women-lovers, permit themselves to joke in a way that others, less easily deceived by harmless pleasantry, would never dare to do.)

The moment the conversation became general, the subject of Dreyfus was avoided for fear of offending Saint-Loup. Yet a week later, two of his comrades remarked how odd it was that, for someone who lived in such a military environment, he was so enthusiastic a Dreyfusard, almost an anti-militarist. Not wanting to enter into details, I said that it was because the influence of environment is less important than people think. I intended of course to stop at that and not to reiterate the views I had presented to Saint-Loup a few days earlier. Yet since I had already said the same thing to him almost word for word, I was about to excuse myself by adding: 'Just as I was saying the other day…' But I had not reckoned with the other side of Robert's genial admiration for myself and certain other people. His admiration went hand in hand with so total an assimilation of their ideas that after a couple of days, he would have completely forgotten that those ideas were not his own. And so, in the matter of my modest thesis, Saint-Loup, for all the world as if it had always been part of his own mental property, and as though I were poaching his territory, felt duty-bound to greet my discovery with warm approval.

'But of course, environment is of no importance!'

And this was said with as much emphasis as if he were afraid I might interrupt him or misunderstand what he said:

'The real influence comes from the intellectual environment! One is conditioned by ideas!'

He paused for a moment and smiled like someone who has just finished a good meal, dropped his monocle, and, fixing me with a piercing look, said challengingly:

'All men with similar ideas are alike.' No doubt he had completely forgotten that I was the one who had said these words to him a few days earlier; the words themselves, he remembered very well.

I did not turn up at Saint-Loup's restaurant in the same frame of mind every evening. If a memory or a particular sadness we feel is capable of disappearing, to the point where we no longer notice it, it can also return and sometimes remain there for a long time. There were evenings when, as I crossed the town on my way to the restaurant, I felt so great a pang of longing for Mme de Guermantes that it took my breath away: it was as if part of my breast had been cut out by a skilled anatomist and replaced by an equal part of immaterial suffering, by an equivalent degree of nostalgia and love. And however neat the surgeon's stitches are, life is rather painful when longing for another person is substituted for the intestines; it seems to occupy more space than they do; it is a constantly felt presence; and then, how utterly unsettling it is to be obliged to *think* with part of the body! Yet it does somehow make us feel more authentic. The whisper of a breeze makes us sigh with oppression, but also with languor. I would look up at the sky. If it was cloudless, I would think: 'Perhaps she has gone to the country; she's looking at the same stars, and perhaps when I arrive at the restaurant Robert will say to me: "Good news. I've just heard from my aunt. She wants to see you. She's coming down here." ' My thoughts of Mme de Guermantes were not confined just to the sky above. A passing breath of air, sweeter than the rest, seemed to be bringing a message from her, as it once had from Gilberte in the cornfields of Méséglise: we do not change; we bring to the feeling we associate with a person the many dormant elements that person awakens in us but which are foreign to the person in question. And then there is always something in us that tries hard to make these strange sentiments more real, that is, to assimilate them to a more general feeling, shared by the whole of humanity, with which individuals and the pain they cause us are merely a means to allow us to communicate: what brought an element of pleasure with my pain was that I knew it to be a tiny measure of universal love. Because I seemed to recognize the same sorts of sadness I had experienced in connection with Gilberte, or on those occasions in Combray when Mama had not stayed in my room, and also when I recalled certain pages of Bergotte, from the pain I now felt, and to which Mme de Guermantes, her coldness, her absence, were not clearly linked as cause is to effect in the mind of a scientist, I did not therefore conclude, it is true, that she was not the cause of my suffering. Is there not such a thing as diffused bodily pain, radiating out into parts outside the affected area, but leaving them and disappearing completely the moment the practitioner lays his finger on the precise spot from which it springs? And yet, until that moment, the way it was diffused made it seem so vague and threatening that, powerless to explain or even locate it, we imagined it to be incurable. As I made my way to the restaurant, I was thinking: 'It's already a fortnight since I last saw Mme de Guermantes.' A fortnight: it seemed so little except to me who, where Mme de Guermantes was concerned, counted every minute. It was no longer just the stars and the breeze that assumed a painful and poetic aura, but the arithmetical divisions of time itself. Each day became like the crest of a hazy hill: on one side I felt I could descend towards forgetfulness, on the other, I was carried along by the need to see the Duchesse again. And I was continually swayed towards either slope, with no stable equilibrium. One day I thought: 'Perhaps there'll be a letter tonight', and as I arrived for dinner I plucked up my courage and asked Saint-Loup:

'You don't happen to have had any news from Paris, do you?

– 'Yes, I do,' he replied gloomily, 'bad news.'

I breathed a sigh of relief when I understood that it was only he who had cause for unhappiness and that the news was from his mistress. But I soon realized that one of the consequences of this bad news would be to prevent Robert from taking me to see his aunt for some time to come.

I learned that there had been a fierce quarrel between him and his mistress, either by letter or on some morning when she had come down by train on a flying visit. And the quarrels that had previously occurred between them, even less serious ones, had always seemed as though they were insoluble. For she had a bad temper and would stamp her foot and burst into tears for reasons as incomprehensible as those that make children shut themselves up in dark cupboards, absent themselves from dinner, refuse to give any explanation, and only cry the more when our patience is exhausted and we give them a slap. To say that Saint-Loup suffered dreadfully from this falling-out with his mistress would be an oversimplification and would give a false idea of the pain involved. When he found himself alone, with nothing else to think about than his mistress leaving him, impressed by the forceful energy she had seen in him, the anxieties he had suffered for the first few hours ceased in the face of the irretrievable situation, and the cessation of anxiety is such a welcome relief that the rupture, once it was a fact, assumed something of the same charm as a reconciliation. What he began to suffer from a little later was a secondary, unpredictable sort of grief, surging incessantly from inside himself, at the idea that perhaps she would have liked to make it up, that it was not inconceivable that she was waiting to hear from him, that in the meantime, by way of revenge, she would perhaps on a certain evening, in a certain place, do a certain thing, and that he had only to telegraph his arrival for it not to happen, that others might be taking advantage of the time he was letting slip, and that in a few days it would be too late to get her back, because she would already be with someone else. All these possibilities told him nothing; his mistress preserved a silence which eventually put him into such a frenzy of grief that he began to wonder whether she might not be in hiding in Doncières, or to have disappeared to the Indies.

It has been said that silence is a powerful weapon; in a quite different sense it has a terrible power when wielded by those who are loved. It increases the anxiety of the one who waits. Nothing so tempts us to approach another person as what is keeping us apart, and what greater barrier is there than silence? It has been said too that silence is torture, capable of driving the man condemned to it in a prison cell to madness. But what an even greater torture it is, greater than having to keep silent, to endure the silence of the person one loves! Robert asked himself: 'What can she be doing, to stay silent like this? Is it that she's being unfaithful to me?' And again: 'What have I done to make her keep so silent? Perhaps she hates me, and will go on hating me for ever.' And he blamed himself for it. So silence was in fact driving him mad, with jealousy and remorse. More cruel than the silence of the prison cell, the silence he endured was its own kind of prison. An intangible kind of enclosure, perhaps, but an impenetrable one, this segment of empty atmosphere between them, through which the visual rays of the abandoned lover cannot pass. Is there a more terrible form of illumination than silence, which casts its light on not one absent love but a thousand, each one involved in some new act of betrayal? Occasionally, in sudden moments of diminished stress, Robert would imagine that this silence was about to be broken, that

a letter from her was on its way. He saw it, it had arrived, he was alert to every sound, he was already appeased, he murmured: 'The letter! The letter!' After this glimpse of a mirage oasis of tender affection, he would find himself trudging once more across the real desert of uninterrupted silence.

He suffered in anticipation every single painful detail of a rupture which at other times he saw as something it was in his power to avoid, like people who set their affairs in order before an expatriation that will never take place, and whose minds, no longer certain where they will find themselves living the next day, throb on momentarily, no longer part of them, like a heart removed from a sick man and continuing to beat, though no longer part of his body. At all events, the hope that his mistress would return gave him the strength to persevere with the separation, as the belief in returning alive from battle helps to brave death. And since Habit, among all the plants that grow in human beings, is the one that has least need of nutritious soil in order to live, the first to appear on the most apparently arid rock, had he begun by treating the rupture as a pretence, he might eventually have become genuinely accustomed to it. But his uncertainty kept him in a state which, linked with the memory of the woman in question, was close to love. He none the less forced himself not to write to her, thinking perhaps that it was less agonizing to live without his mistress than with her in certain circumstances, or that, after the way in which they had parted, he needed to receive her apologies if she was to preserve what he thought she felt for him in terms, if not of love, then of esteem and regard. He went no further than to go to the telephone, recently installed in Doncières, to ask for news from, or to give instructions to, the maid he had placed in the service of his mistress. These calls were complicated and time-consuming because Robert's mistress, swayed by the views of her literary friends about the ugliness of the capital, but primarily concerned with the well-being of her pets, her dogs, her monkey, her canaries and her parrot, after her Paris landlord would no longer tolerate their incessant din, had just taken a little house in the neighbourhood of Versailles. Meanwhile he, in Doncières, could no longer sleep a wink all night. Once, when he was with me at the hotel, overcome by exhaustion, he did doze off for a while. But suddenly he began to speak, wanting to rush off and stop something from happening: 'I can hear her, you're not going to… you shan'…' were his words. He awoke. He told me that he had been dreaming he was in the country with the squadron sergeant-major. The latter had tried to keep him away from a certain part of the house. Saint-Loup had worked out that there was a lieutenant staying there, an extremely wealthy and lecherous man, whom he knew to harbour a violent passion for his mistress. And suddenly in his dream he had distinctly heard the intermittently regular cries which his mistress was apt to make at moments of orgasm. He had tried to force the sergeant-major to take him to her room. The man had held on to him to prevent him from going, with an expression of annoyance at such indiscretion, which Robert said he would never be able to forget.

'What a stupid dream,' he added, still quite choked.

But I was well aware, in the hour that followed, that he was several times on the point of telephoning his mistress to seek an end to their quarrel. My father now had a telephone, but I doubt whether that would have been of much use to Saint-Loup. Besides, it hardly seemed to be quite proper to make my parents, or even an appliance installed in their house, play the role of intermediary between Saint-Loup and his mistress, however refined and high-minded the latter might be. The bad dream gradually began to fade from his memory. With a fixed and absent stare, he came to see me on every single one of those dreadful days, and as one day followed another, they came to represent in my mind the magnificent sweep of a painfully forged staircase where Robert stood wondering what decision his mistress was going to take.

She finally asked him whether he would agree to forgive her. As soon as he realized that a rupture had been avoided, he saw all the disadvantages of a reconciliation. Besides, he was already suffering less and had almost come to accept a pain whose sharp stab he would have to experience again in a few months perhaps if their liaison were to be resumed. And perhaps he hesitated only because he was now certain of being able to recover his mistress, of being able to do so and therefore of doing it. The only thing she asked of him, in the interests of regaining her composure, was not to come to Paris until January 1st. And he did not have the heart to go to Paris without seeing her. On the other hand, she had made it clear that she was quite willing to go abroad with him, but for that he would need formal leave, which Captain de Borodino was unwilling to grant.

'I'm really sorry about it because it will mean putting off our visit to my aunt. I imagine I'll be back in Paris at Easter.

– We can't visit Mme de Guermantes then because I shall have already gone to Balbec. But it doesn't matter in the least.

– Balbec? But you didn't go there till August.

– I know. But this year I'm being sent there earlier, for health reasons.'

His main fear was that I might form a bad impression of his mistress after what he had told me. 'She seems violent only because she's too frank, too monopolized by her feelings. But she's a sublime creature. You can't imagine the poetic finesse she has. Every year she goes to spend All Souls' Day in Bruges. Rather fine, don't you think? If you ever meet her, you'll see what I mean; there's something noble about her…' And, since he was steeped in certain of the mannerisms current in the literary circles in which the lady moved: 'She has an astral quality, even something quite vatic. You grasp my meaning, the poet veering towards the status of priest.'

All through dinner, I hunted for a pretext that would enable Saint-Loup to ask his aunt to receive me without my having to wait until he was in Paris. And what finally furnished me with this pretext was my desire to see more paintings by Elstir, the famous painter whom Saint-Loup and I had met in Balbec. There was moreover an element of genuine interest involved, for if, on my visits to Elstir, what I had asked of his painting was that it should lead me to the understanding and love of things better than itself, a real thaw, an authentic provincial square, live women on the beach (at most I would have commissioned him to paint realities I had been unable to fathom, such as a hedge of hawthorns, not as a means of preserving their beauty but of revealing it to me), now, on the contrary, it was the originality, the attraction of the paintings themselves that aroused my desire, and what I most wanted to see were further examples of Elstir's work.

It seemed to me also that the least of his paintings represented something quite different from the masterpieces of painters even greater than himself. His work was like a world of its own whose frontiers could not be crossed, unique in substance. By eagerly tracking down the handful of periodicals that contained articles on his work, I had learned that landscapes and still lifes were only a recent feature of his painting and that he had started with mythological subjects (I had seen photographs of two of these in his studio) and had then passed through a long period of influence from Japanese art.

Some of the works most characteristic of his various styles were housed in provincial collections. A certain house in Les Andelys, where one of his finest landscapes was to be found, seemed to me as precious, made me as keen to go there, as a village in the Chartres area with a glorious stained-glass window set into one of its millstone walls would have done; and towards the possessor of this masterpiece, towards the man who, inside the rough stone walls of his house, on the main street, sat closeted like an astrologer as he studied one of those mirrors of the world which Elstir's paintings are, and who had perhaps paid many thousands of francs for it, I felt myself drawn by the closeness of feeling that unites the very hearts, the inmost natures of those who think alike upon some vital subject. Now three important works by my favourite painter were described in one of these periodicals as belonging to Mme de Guermantes. So that on the evening Saint-Loup told me about his mistress going to Bruges, it was possible, without being completely insincere, for me to say to him casually at dinner, in front of his friends, as if it had just occurred to me:

'Oh, by the way, if you don't mind, one final word on the subject of the lady we've talked about. You remember Elstir, the painter I met in Balbec?

– Yes, of course I do.

– You remember how much I admired his work?

– I do indeed. And the letter we sent him.

– Well, one of the reasons – not the main reason, it's a secondary one really – why I should like to meet the lady in question… you do know who I mean, don't you?

– Of course I do! Why all this circumlocution?

– Well, she has at least one very fine painting by Elstir in her house.

– Really? I never knew that.

– Elstir is likely to be in Balbec at Easter. You know that he now spends almost the entire year on that coast. I would really like to see that picture before I leave Paris. I don't know whether you're on close enough terms with your aunt, but do you think you could somehow contrive to give her the kind of impression of me that will make it difficult for her to refuse, and ask her to let me go and see the picture without you, since you won't be there?

– Certainly. I'll answer for her. Leave the matter in my hands.

– Oh, Robert, what a wonderful friend you are.

– It's very nice of you to say that, but it would be even nicer if you could carry on as you started and call me *tu* as you promised.

– I hope you two are not plotting your departure, one of Robert's friends said to me. You know, if Saint-Loup does go off on leave, it needn't make any difference to you, we shall still be here. It might not be so much fun, but we'll do our very best to make you forget he's not with us!'

As it happened, just when it had been assumed that Robert's mistress would be going to Bruges on her own, the news went round that Captain de Borodino, who had so far refused his permission, had authorized Sergeant Saint-Loup to go to Bruges on long leave. This is what had happened: the Prince, who was extremely proud of his abundant head of hair, was a devoted customer of the best barber in town, a former apprentice of the man who had been barber to Napoleon III. Captain de Borodino was on the best of terms with this barber, for, in spite of his airs and graces, he had the common touch. But his account was five years in arrears, with expenses like bottles of 'Eau de Portugal' and 'Eau des Souverains', curling-tongs, razors and strops on top of the usual ones for shampooings, haircutting and so forth, and the barber had a greater regard for Saint-Loup, who always paid on the nail and who kept several carriages and saddle-horses. Learning of Saint-Loup's problem of not being able to go with his mistress, he had mentioned it heatedly to the Prince just as the latter, trussed up in a white surplice, was having his head held back and his throat menaced by the barber's razor. This account of a young man's amatory adventures wrested a smile of Bonapartist indulgence from our Captain-Prince. It is unlikely that he had his unpaid bill in mind, but the barber's recommendation inclined him towards indulgence in the way that a duke's would have inclined him to be ill-disposed. With his chin still smothered in soap-lather, he promised leave there and then and the warrant was signed that evening. As for the barber, who was in the habit of boasting all the time and sustained his boasting by laying claim, with an extraordinary capacity for lying, to exploits that were entirely fictitious, having for once rendered a remarkable service to Saint-Loup, not only did he not claim public credit for it, but, as if vanity depended on lying and gives way to modesty when lies are unnecessary, he never mentioned the matter to Robert again.

All of Robert's friends made it clear to me that, for as long as I stayed in Doncières, or if I should come back there at any time, even in Robert's absence, their carriages, their horses, their quarters, their free time would be at my disposal, and I could feel how kind-heartedly these young men were offering to put their wealthy circumstances, their youth and vigour at the service of my poor state of health.

'But why,' they went on, after insisting that I stay, 'don't you come here every year? You can see how much you like this simple life of ours! You're quite the old soldier, the way you take an interest in all that goes on in the regiment.'

For I continued to ask them eagerly to rank the various officers whose names I knew in terms of the degree of admiration they felt to be appropriate, just as I once used to make my school-friends rank the actors of the Théâtre-Français. If, instead of one of the generals I was always hearing placed at the top of the list, like Gallifet or Négrier, one of Saint-Loup's friends happened to say, 'But Négrier is one of the most humdrum of our general officers', and then put forward the new, clean, appetizing name of Pau or Geslin de Bourgogne, I experienced the same happy sense of surprise as I did in the past when the outworn names of Thiron and Febvre were squashed by the sudden burgeoning of the unfamiliar name Amaury. 'Even better than Négrier? How? Give me an example.' I should have liked to see the existence of deep differences even between the junior officers of the regiment, and I hoped, in the reason for these differences, to grasp the essence of what constituted military superiority. One of the men I should have been most interested to hear discussed, because he was the one I had seen most often, was the Prince de Borodino. But neither Saint-Loup nor his friends, while recognizing him as a fine officer who maintained impeccably high standards in his squadron, liked him as a man. While they obviously did not speak about him in the same tone as they used for certain other officers, rankers and freemasons, who kept themselves to themselves and treated others with a brash, barrack-room manner, they still seemed not to rank M. de Borodino with the other officers of noble birth, from whom indeed he differed considerably in his attitude, even towards Saint-Loup. The noble officers themselves, taking advantage of the fact that Robert was only a non-commissioned officer and that his influential relatives might be happy to see him invited by superior officers whom they might otherwise have snubbed, lost no opportunity of having him to dine when they were entertaining any bigwig who might be of some use to a young cavalry sergeant. It was only Captain de Borodino whose relations with Robert – and they were excellent ones – were purely official. The fact was that the Prince, whose grandfather had been made a Maréchal and a Prince-Duc by the Emperor, into whose family he had subsequently married, and whose father had then married a cousin of Napoleon III and had twice been a minister after the *coup d'état*, felt that all of this meant very little to Saint-Loup and the Guermantes set, who in turn, since his outlook was very different from theirs, meant very little to him. He suspected that for Saint-Loup he represented, through his connection with the Hohenzollerns, someone who was not a true noble but the grandson of a farmer, but at the same time he saw Saint-Loup himself as the son of a man whose countship had been confirmed by the Emperor – one of those 'patched-up' counts, as they were known in the Faubourg Saint-Germain – from whom he had sought first a Prefecture and then some other post placed very low on the list of subordinates to His Highness the Prince de Borodino, Minister of State, who was to be addressed as 'Monseigneur' and was a nephew of the sovereign.

More than a nephew, perhaps. The first Princesse de Borodino was thought to have bestowed her favours on Napoleon I, whom she followed to the Isle of Elba, and the second hers on Napoleon III. And if, in the captain's features, there was something of Napoleon I – if not in his natural expression then at least in the studied majesty he adopted – the officer somehow reminded one too, particularly in his kindly, melancholic gaze and with his drooping moustache, of Napoleon III; this was so striking that when he asked permission to join the Emperor after Sedan[17] and had been summarily dismissed by Bismarck, into whose presence he had been ushered, the latter, happening to look up at the young man who was preparing to leave the room, was instantly struck by the likeness and, reconsidering the matter, called him back and granted the request which, like everyone else, he had just been refused.

If the Prince de Borodino was disinclined to make overtures either to Saint-Loup or to the other representatives of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in the regiment (whereas he often invited two lieutenants of humble origin whose company he found agreeable) it was because, judging them both from the heights of his Imperial grandeur, he drew the following distinction between these two species of inferiors: the first species were inferiors who were aware of the fact and with these he was delighted to associate, since beneath his majestic airs he was a man of simple, jovial nature; the second were inferiors who thought of themselves as superior, and this he could not tolerate. And so, while all the other officers in the regiment behaved warmly towards him, the Prince de Borodino, to whom Saint-Loup had been recommended by Marshal X, confined himself to being helpful towards him in professional matters, where Saint-Loup was in fact exemplary, but never invited him to his house, apart from one exceptional occasion when he was practically forced to do so, and since this occurred during my visit, he asked him to bring me too. On the evening in question, as I sat watching Saint-Loup at his captain's dinner-table, I found it easy to distinguish, even in the details of their respective manners and refinements, the difference between the two aristocracies: the old nobility and that of the Empire. As the product of a caste whose faults, even if he repudiated them with every ounce of his intellect, had passed into his blood, a caste which, after ceasing to exert any real authority for at least a century, no longer sees the patronizing affability inherent in its upbringing as anything more than an exercise, like horsemanship or fencing, cultivated without any

serious purpose, as a diversion, Saint-Loup, unlike those members of the bourgeoisie which the old nobility despises enough to believe they are flattered by its intimacy with them or would be honoured by its lack of formality, would take the hand of any bourgeois to whom he was introduced and whose name he had probably failed to catch, and in the course of their conversation (continually crossing and uncrossing his legs, lounging back in his seat in an unbuttoned manner with one foot in the palm of his hand) he would address him as 'my dear chap'. Conversely, as a product of a nobility whose titles were still meaningful, endowed as they still were with the fat emoluments given in reward for glorious services and recalling the high offices involving command of numerous men and a knowledge of how to deal with them, the Prince de Borodino – if not distinctly and as a matter of his own conscious awareness, but certainly in the revelatory attitudes and manners of his body – regarded his rank as a prerogative that carried weight; the same commoners whom Saint-Loup would have slapped on the shoulder and taken by the arm, were treated by him with a majestic affability, in which a reserve weighed down by grandeur tempered his naturally friendly disposition, and addressed in a tone marked at once by a genuine sense of kindness and a deliberate stand-offishness. No doubt this was due to his relative familiarity with the great embassies and with the Court, at which his father had held the highest posts and where the manners of Saint-Loup, with his elbow on the table and his foot in his hand, would have been frowned upon, but it was primarily due to the fact that he was less inclined to look down on the bourgeoisie, since it was the great reservoir from which the first Emperor had drawn his marshals and his nobles, in which the second had found a Fould or a Rouher.[18]

Whether or not he was the son or grandson of an Emperor, and with nothing more to do than to command a squadron, the preoccupations of his father and grandfather could not in fact, with no object on which to focus, be described as surviving in the mind of M. de Borodino. But as the spirit of an artist continues, many years after his death, to shape the statue he sculpted, so those preoccupations had become embodied in him in material, incarnate form, and it was them his face reflected. It was with the brusqueness of voice of the first Emperor that he reprimanded a corporal, with the pensive melancholy of the second that he exhaled a puff of cigarette smoke. When he walked through the streets of Doncières in civilian clothes, a special glint in his eye, beneath his bowler hat, created an aura of royal incognito about him; people trembled when he entered the squadron sergeant-major's office, followed by the warrant officer and the quartermaster, as though they were Berthier or Masséna.[19] When he chose the cloth for his squadron's breeches, the stare that he kept aimed at the master-tailor was capable of baffling Talleyrand and deceiving Alexander; and at times, in the middle of a kit inspection, he would pause, with a dreamy look in his striking blue eyes, and twist his moustache like a man intent on building up a new Prussia or a new Italy. But the next minute, reverting from Napoleon III to Napoleon I, he would be pointing out that the equipment was not properly polished, and asking to sample the men's rations. And at home, in his private life, it was for the wives of middle-class officers (provided they were not freemasons) that he would bring out not only crockery in royal-blue Sèvres, fit for an ambassador (given to his father by Napoleon and looking even more precious than they actually were in the rather humdrum house he inhabited on the mall, like those rare porcelains that tourists admire with particular pleasure in the rustic china-cabinet of some old manor that has been converted into a comfortable, prosperous farmhouse), but other gifts from the Emperor as well: the noble and charming manners – and they would have also gone down brilliantly in a diplomatic post abroad, if for some the mere fact of having a 'name' did not entail lifelong condemnation to the most unjust forms of ostracism – the easy gestures, the kindness, the graciousness and, enclosing images of glory in an enamel that was also royal-blue, the reliquary of his gaze, that mysterious, illuminated survival. And since we have mentioned the Prince's relations with the bourgeoisie of Doncières, we ought to add the following. The lieutenant-colonel was a wonderful pianist, the wife of the senior medical officer sang like a prize student from the Conservatoire. The latter couple, as well as the lieutenant-colonel and his wife, used to dine every week with M. de Borodino. They were undoubtedly flattered by this, in the knowledge that when the Prince went on leave to Paris he dined with Mme de Pourtalès, with the Murats and the like. 'But,' they said to themselves, 'he's only a captain, after all, and he's only too happy to have us as his guests. All the same, he's a very good friend to us.' But when M. de Borodino, who had long been taking steps to secure himself an appointment nearer to Paris, was posted to Beauvais, he packed up and went, and forgot all about the two musical couples in the same way that he forgot the Doncières theatre and the little restaurant to which he used to send out for his lunch, and to their great indignation, neither the lieutenant-colonel nor the senior medical officer, who had so often dined at his table, ever heard from him again for the rest of their lives.

One morning, Saint-Loup confessed that he had written to my grandmother to give her news of me and to suggest that, since there was a telephone service between Doncières and Paris, she might like to speak to me. In short, she was going to give me a call, and he advised me to be at the post-office at about a quarter to four. The telephone was not as commonly used then as it is today. And yet habit is so quick to demystify the sacred forces with which we are in contact that, because I was not connected immediately, my only reaction was to see it as all very time-consuming and inconvenient, and to be on the point of lodging a complaint: like everybody nowadays, I found it too slow for my liking, with its abrupt transformations, this admirable magic which needs only a few seconds to bring before us, unseen but present, the person to whom we wish to speak and who, seated at his table, in the town he inhabits (in my grandmother's case, Paris), under another sky than our own, in weather that is not necessarily the same, amid circumstances and preoccupations unknown to us and which he is about to reveal, finds himself suddenly transported hundreds of miles (he and all the surroundings in which he remains immersed) within reach of our hearing, at a particular moment dictated by our whim. And we are like the character in the fairy-tale at whose wish an enchantress conjures up, in a supernatural light, his grandmother or his betrothed as they turn the pages of a book, shed tears, gather flowers, very close to the spectator and yet very far away, in the place where they really are. For this miracle to happen, all we need do is to approach our lips to the magic panel and address our call – often with too much delay, I agree – to the Vigilant Virgins whose voices we hear every day but whose faces we never get to know, and who are the guardian angels of the dizzy darkness whose portals they jealously guard; the All-Powerful Ones who conjure absent beings to our presence without our being permitted to see them; the Danaids[20] of the unseen who constantly empty and refill and transmit to one another the urns of sound; the ironic Furies who, just as we are murmuring private words to a loved one in the hope we are not overheard, call out with brutal invasiveness: 'This is the operator speaking'; the forever fractious servants of the Mysteries, the shadowy priestesses of the Invisible, so quick to take offence, the Young Ladies of the Telephone!

And as soon as our call has rung out, in the darkness peopled with apparitions to which our ears alone are opened, a shred of sound – an abstract sound – the sound of distance suppressed – and the voice of the dear one speaks to us.

The dear one, the voice of the dear one speaking, are with us. But how far away they are! How often I have been unable to listen without anguish, as if, in the face of this impossibility of seeing, without long hours of travel, the woman whose voice was so close to my ear, I could feel more acutely how illusory the effect of such intimate proximity was, and at what a distance we can be from those we love at a moment when it seems we have only to stretch out our hand to retain them. A real presence, the voice that seems so close – but is in fact miles away! But it is also a foreglimpse of an eternal separation! Many times, as I listened in this way without seeing the woman who spoke to me from so far, I have felt that the voice was crying out to me from depths from which it would never emerge again, and I have experienced the anxiety which was one day to take hold of me when a voice would return like this (alone and no longer part of a body which I was never to see again) to murmur in my ear words I would dearly like to have kissed as they passed from lips forever turned to dust.

Alas, that afternoon in Doncières the miracle did not take place. When I arrived at the post-office, my grandmother had already put in her call; I stepped into the booth, the line was engaged, somebody was speaking who probably did not realize that there was nobody there to answer him, for as I took the receiver, the dead piece of wood began to speak like Punchinello; I silenced it, as I would a puppet, by putting it back on its hook, but, like Punchinello, as soon as I picked it up again it went on with its chatter. I eventually gave up in despair, hung up the receiver for good to stifle the convulsions of this vociferous stump that kept up its chatter to the very end, and went off in search of the telephonist, who advised me to wait a while; then I spoke, and after a few seconds of silence, I suddenly heard the voice I mistakenly thought I knew so well, for until then, whenever my grandmother had talked with me, I had always followed what she was saying on the open score of her face, in which her eyes were so predominant; but today what I was hearing for the first time was her actual voice. And because the

proportions of that voice seemed different the minute it was isolated, reaching me on its own in this way, unaccompanied by the facial features, I was aware for the first time how affectionate that voice was; and perhaps it had never been so affectionate, because my grandmother, sensing me to be far away and unhappy, felt that she could allow herself unrestrained expression of the affection which, in accordance with her 'principles' of upbringing, she normally contained and kept hidden. Her voice was sweet, but how sad it was, primarily because of its sweetness, and it was, more than all but a few human voices can ever have been, almost drained clear of every element of harshness, of resistance to others, of selfishness; frail by reason of its delicacy, it seemed constantly likely to become choked, to expire into an unbroken flood of tears, and with it alone beside me, experienced without the mask of her face, I noticed for the first time the way that pain had cracked it in the course of a lifetime.

But was it solely the voice, heard in isolation, that created the new impression which tore at my heart? Not at all; it was rather that the isolation of the voice was like a symbol, an evocation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated from me for the first time. The orders and interdictions she constantly addressed to me in the normal course of life, the tedium of obeying her or the fire of rebelling which neutralized my affection for her, were at this moment absent and might go on being absent (since my grandmother no longer insisted on having me with her under her control and was in fact in the process of expressing her hope that I would see out my stay in Doncières, or would at least extend it for as long as possible, for the benefit it was likely to give to my health and my work); so, what the little bell I held to my ear contained was our mutual affection, unencumbered by the conflicting pressures that had daily counteracted it, an irresistible fact from this moment on, utterly uplifting. By telling me to stay, my grandmother filled me with an anxious, desperate desire to return home. The freedom she was now granting me and to which I had never suspected she would consent, suddenly seemed as painful as the sort of freedom I might experience after her death (when I should still love her and she would have abandoned me for ever). I cried out: 'Grandmother! Grandmother!', and I wanted to kiss her; but all that I had beside me was her voice, a ghost as bodiless as the one that would perhaps come back and visit me when my grandmother was dead. 'Speak to me'; then, suddenly, I ceased to hear the voice, and was left even more alone. My grandmother could no longer hear me, was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to be in contact, to be audible to each other; I continued to call her, groping in the darkness, with the feeling that calls from her must also be going astray. I was throbbing with the same anguish I had felt before in the distant past when, as a small child, I lost her one day in a crowd, an anguish that was less connected to not finding her than to the thought that she was searching for me and telling herself that I was searching for her, an anguish not unlike the feeling I was to have later, on the day when we speak to those who are no longer able to reply and when we are anxious for them at least to hear all the things we have left unsaid to them, and our assurance that we are not unhappy. I felt as though it was already a beloved ghost that I had just allowed to disappear into the world of shadows, and standing there alone in front of the telephone I went on vainly calling: 'Grandmother! Grandmother!' like the abandoned Orpheus repeating the name of his dead wife. I decided to leave the post-office, go and find Robert in his restaurant and tell him that, as I was half expecting a telegram recalling me to Paris, I needed to know the times of the trains just in case that happened. And yet, before deciding upon this course of action, I felt I must make one last attempt to invoke the Daughters of the Night, the Messengers of the Word, the faceless divinities; but the fickle Guardians had been unwilling to open the miraculous Portals, or perhaps powerless to do so; untiringly though they invoked, as was their custom, the venerable inventor of printing and the young prince who championed Impressionist painting and motor-cars (a nephew of the Capitaine de Borodino), Gutenberg and Wagram[21] left their supplications unanswered, and I came away, feeling that the Invisible would continue to turn a deaf ear.

When I joined Robert and his friends, I made no confession that my heart was no longer with them, that my departure was already irrevocably settled. Saint-Loup appeared to believe what I said, but I learned later that he had immediately realized that my uncertainty was a pretence and that he would not see me again the next day. While he and his friends, letting their food grow cold, as they consulted the time-table for a train that would take me back to Paris, and while the whistling of the locomotives sounded in the cold, starry night, I certainly no longer felt the same peaceful contentment that I had derived on so many evenings in this place from the friendship of the company and the trains passing in the distance. Yet neither of these failed, this evening, to provide the same service, but in a different form. My departure weighed less heavily upon my mind when I was no longer obliged to think about it alone, when I felt that the more normal and healthier efforts of my energetic friends, Robert's comrades, were being applied to the matter in hand, and when I thought of those other strong creatures, the trains, whose comings and goings, morning and night, between Donciéres and Paris, broke up in retrospect what had been too compacted and unendurable about my long separation from my grandmother into daily possibilities of rejoining her.

'I quite believe what you say, and that you aren't thinking of leaving just yet, said Saint-Loup with a smile, but let's pretend you are going. Come and say good-bye to me tomorrow morning early, otherwise there's a risk I might not see you. I'm going out to lunch in fact. I've got leave from the captain. I shall have to be back in barracks by two because we're off on march for the rest of the day. I imagine the noble friend at whose house I'm lunching – it's three kilometres from here – will bring me back in time for two o'oclock.'

Scarcely had he said this than a messenger came for me from my hotel: the post-office had asked for me on the telephone. I rushed there, because it was about to close. The word 'trunk call' cropped up incessantly as the staff answered my questions. My anxiety was at fever pitch, for it was my grandmother who was trying to contact me. The post-office was on the point of closing. I was finally put through. 'Is that you, Grandmother?' A woman's voice with a strong English accent replied: 'Yes it's me, but I don't recognize your voice.' Neither did I recognize the voice that was speaking to me: and my grandmother certainly did not address me as *vous*. And then all was explained. The young man to whom his grandmother had put through a call had a name almost identical with mine and was staying in an annex of my hotel. Since this call had come on the very day I had been wanting to telephone my grandmother, I had never for a moment doubted that it was she who was asking for me. It was pure coincidence that both the post-office and the hotel had been jointly mistaken.

The following morning I managed to be late and failed to see Saint-Loup, who had already gone off to lunch in the nearby country house. Towards half-past one I was thinking of going to the barracks on the off-chance of being there when he returned; as I was crossing one of the avenues on my way there, I saw a tilbury coming up in the same direction as myself, and as it passed I was obliged to jump out of the way; it was being driven by an NCO with a monocle – Saint-Loup! By his side was the friend with whom he had lunched and whom I had met once before at the hotel where Robert dined. Since he was not alone I did not dare to shout to Robert, but in the hope that he would stop and give me a lift, I attracted his attention by a sweeping gesture of greeting, supposedly motivated by the presence of a stranger. I knew that Robert was short-sighted, but I imagined that if he saw me at all he could not fail to recognize me; he did see my gesture of greeting and returned it, but he did not stop; driving on at high speed, without a smile, without moving a muscle of his face, his only response was to keep his hand raised for a moment to the peak of his cap, as though he were acknowledging a trooper who was unknown to him. I rushed on to the barracks but it was still a long way; when I arrived, the regiment was forming up in the courtyard, where I was not allowed to remain, and I was heart-broken at not being able to say good-bye to Saint-Loup; I went up to his room and found it empty; I managed to inquire after him from a group of sick soldiers, recruits who had been excused route marches, the young graduate, one of the 'old soldiers', who were all watching the regiment gather.

'You haven't seen Sergeant Saint-Loup, have you? I asked.

– He's already gone down, Monsieur, said the old soldier.

– I didn't see him, said the graduate.

– You didn't see him! said the old soldier, losing all interest in me. You didn't see old Saint-Loup parading about the place in his new pants! Wait till our captain sees it, it's officer's cloth!

– Officer's cloth, is it? Tell us another one!' said the young graduate who lay sick in his room and was not going on the route march; he was trying, not without some misgivings, to take a bold tone with the veterans. 'It's not officer's cloth. Just ordinary old stuff.

– *What* did you say?' asked the old soldier angrily.

He was the one who had mentioned the pants and he was indignant that the young graduate should query the business of officer's cloth, but, being a Breton, born in a village that went by the name of Penguern-Stereden, and having learned French with as much difficulty as if it had been English or German, whenever he felt deeply upset he would repeat '*What* did you say?' several times in order to give himself the opportunity to find his words, then, after this preparatory move, he would launch into his own brand of eloquence, confining himself to the repetition of the few words he knew better than others, but without haste, taking care to play down his unfamiliarity with the pronunciation.

'So it's just ordinary old stuff, is it?' he exclaimed with a rage that increased in direct proportion to the dragging intensity of the way he spoke. 'Just ordinary old stuff, eh? When I tell you it's officer's cloth, when-I-tell-you, because-I'm-telling-you, it's because I know what I'm talking about, don't you think? Don't come to me with your cock-and-bull stories.

– Oh well, if you say so, said the young graduate, overcome by the force of this argument.

– Look, there's our captain now. No, but just think of Saint-Loup, the way he flings his legs, and that head of his. What sort of N C O is that? And that monocle – all over the ruddy place.'

I asked this group of soldiers, who were quite undisturbed by my presence, if I might also have a look out of the window. They made no objection but neither did they bother to move out of the way. I saw Captain de Borodino pass majestically by with his horse at a trot, as if he fancied himself taking part in the Battle of Austerlitz. A few passers-by had gathered at the gate to see the regiment file out. Sitting rigid on his horse, his face slightly chubby, his cheeks of an Imperial fullness, his gaze clear-sighted, the Prince must have been the victim of some hallucination, as I was myself whenever a tram had passed and the silence that followed its rumble seemed crossed and striped by some sort of musical palpitation. I was heart-broken not to have said good-bye to Saint-Loup, but I left nevertheless, for my sole concern was to return to my grandmother; up to this day, in this small town, whenever I thought of what my grandmother was doing on her own, I pictured her as she was when I was with her, but eliminating my own presence and not taking into account the effect upon her of this elimination; now, I had to free myself as quickly as possible, in her arms, from the ghostly image, unsuspected until now but suddenly evoked by her voice, of a grandmother who was really separated from me, resigned, getting on in years (something that had never occurred to me before), and who had just received a letter from me in the empty apartment in which I had already imagined Mama when I had left for Balbec.

Alas, it was this ghostly image that I saw when I entered the drawing-room, before my grandmother had been informed of my return, and found her there reading. I was there in the room, but in another way I was not there because she was ignorant of the fact, and, like a woman who has been caught unawares at some piece of handiwork that she will hide away if anyone comes in, she was absorbed in thoughts she had always kept hidden in my presence. The only part of myself that was present – in that privileged moment which does not last and in which, during the brief space of a return, we suddenly find ourselves able to perceive our own absence – was the witness, the observer, in travelling-coat and hat, the stranger to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places that will never be seen again. What my eyes did, automatically, in the moment I caught sight of my grandmother, was to take a photograph. We never see those who are dear to us except in the animated workings, the perpetual motion of our incessant love for them, which, before allowing the images their faces represent to reach us, draws them into its vortex, flings them back on to the idea of them we have always had, makes them adhere to it, coincide with it. How, since I had interpreted all that was most subtle and permanent in my grandmother's mind from her forehead and her cheeks, how, since every habitual glance is necromancy and every face we love a mirror of the past, how could I have done otherwise than to neglect what had become dulled and changed about her, given that in the most indifferent spectacles of daily life, our eyes, burdened with thought, pay no attention, as classical tragedy pays no attention, to any image that does not contribute to the action of the play and limits itself to those that have the power to make its purpose meaningful? But if, instead of our eyes, it should happen to be a purely material lens, a photographic plate, that has been watching things, then what we see, in the courtyard of the Institute for example, instead of an Academician emerging into the street to hail a cab, will be his tottering attempts to avoid falling on his back, the parabola of his fall, as though he were drunk or the ground covered in ice. Similarly, some cruel trick of chance may prevent the intelligent devotion of our affection from rushing forward in time to hide from our eyes what they ought never to linger upon, and, outstripped by chance, they get there first with the field to themselves and start to function mechanically like photographic film, showing us, not the beloved figure who has long ceased to exist and whose death our affection has never wanted to reveal, but the new person it has clothed, hundreds of times each day, in a lovingly deceptive likeness. And, like a sick man who has not looked in a mirror for a long time and who constantly composes the set of the features he never sees in accordance with the ideal image of his face he carries in his mind, then recoils when he catches sight in a mirror of a monumental red nose, slanting out of the arid desert of his face like an Egyptian pyramid, I, for whom my grandmother was still myself, I who had only ever seen her with my soul, always at the same point of the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly, in our drawing-room which had now become part of a new world, the world of Time, inhabited by the strangers we describe as 'ageing well', for the first time and for a mere second, since she vanished almost immediately, I saw, sitting there on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, ill, her mind in a daze, the slightly crazed eyes wandering over a book, a crushed old woman whom I did not know.

My request to gain access to Mme de Guermantes's collection of Elstir paintings had been met by Saint-Loup with: 'I'll answer for her.' And, unfortunately, it was he and he alone who did the answering. We find it easy enough to answer for other people when we set little images of them in our mind and manipulate them to suit our needs. No doubt even then we are mindful of the difficulties that arise from other people's natures being different from our own, and are ready enough to resort to whatever means that are powerful enough to influence them – self-interest, persuasion, emotion – and will cancel out any inclination to oppose our wishes. But these differences in other people's natures are still conceived by our own nature; the difficulties are raised by us; the compelling motives are measured by our own standards. So when we want to see the other person actually perform the actions we have made him rehearse in our mind's eye, things are quite different, we encounter unforeseen resistances which may be insuperable. Perhaps one of the strongest of these is the resistance that can grow, in a woman who is not in love, from the unconquerable and fetid repulsion she feels for the man who loves her: during the long weeks when Saint-Loup still did not come to Paris, his aunt, to whom I was certain he had written begging her to do so, did not once invite me to call and see her Elstirs.

I encountered signs of coldness on the part of another occupant of the building. This was Jupien. Did he feel that I ought to have gone in to greet him when I got back from Doncières, even before I went up to our own flat? My mother told me not to worry, that it was nothing unusual. Françoise had told her that he was like that, suddenly given to bad moods, for no reason at all. They always wore off after a while.

Meanwhile the winter was nearly over. One morning, after several weeks of showers and storms, I heard in my chimney, not the formless, elastic, sullen wind that made me restless for the sea, but the cooing of the pigeons nesting in the outside wall: iridescent and unexpected like a first hyacinth gently tearing open its nourishing heart to release its mauve and satined flower of sound, and, like an open window, letting into my still shuttered, darkened bedroom the warmth, the brightness, the fatigue of a first day of fine weather. That morning I caught myself humming a *café-concert* tune, forgotten since the year I was supposed to go to Florence and Venice. So profoundly, and so unpredictably, does the atmosphere work upon our organism and draw from the hidden reserves where they lie forgotten the melodies inscribed there which our memory has left unsung. A more conscious dreamer was soon to accompany this musician I could hear inside myself, without even any immediate recognition of what he was playing.

I was well aware that it was not for any reason peculiar to Balbec that on my arrival there I had no longer found its church as magical as it had been before I saw it; that in Florence or Parma or Venice too my imagination could not substitute itself for my eyes when I looked at things. I realized this. Similarly, on a January 1st evening at nightfall, standing before a column of playbills, I had discovered how illusory it is to think that certain feast-days are essentially different

from the ordinary run of days. And yet I could not prevent my memory of the time during which I had expected to spend Holy Week in Florence from continuing to transform that festival into something like the special atmosphere of the City of Flowers, attributing something Florentine to Easter Day and, at the same time, something paschal to Florence itself. Easter Week was still a long way off; but in the run of days that stretched out before me the days of Holy Week stood out more vividly than those that came between. Seen in a shaft of sunlight, like certain houses in a distant village caught in the effects of light and shade, they had retained all that brightness for themselves.

The weather had become milder. And this time it was my parents who, by urging me to take the fresh air, gave me the excuse for continuing my morning walks. I had wanted to stop taking them because they meant meeting Mme de Guermantes. But for that very reason they were constantly in my mind, and this made me go on finding further excuses for taking them, excuses that had nothing to do with Mme de Guermantes and which readily convinced me that, had she not existed, I should still have gone for a walk at the same time of day.

Alas, if for me meeting anyone other than herself would have been a matter of indifference, I felt that, for her, meeting anyone other than myself would have been perfectly tolerable. As it happened, in the course of her morning walks, she was greeted by any number of idiots whom she saw for what they were. But the fact that they crossed her path seemed to her to be, if not something to look forward to, then at least something purely accidental. And she occasionally stopped them, for there are moments when there is a need to escape self, to accept the hospitality of another person's soul, provided that soul, however modest and mean, belongs to someone else, whereas in mine she had the exasperating feeling that she would have found only herself. And so, even when my reason for taking the same route was nothing to do with seeing her, I would tremble with guilt as she came by; and sometimes, in order to play down anything that might seem excessive in my overtures, I would barely acknowledge her greeting, or stare at her mutely, managing only to irritate her even more and to set off the impression that I was rude and ill-bred.

She was now wearing lighter, or at least lighter-coloured dresses, and she would come down the street in which already, as if spring had come, in front of the narrow shops between the broad fronts of the old aristocratic mansions, awnings hung down over the booth of the butter-woman and over fruit and vegetable stalls, to protect them from the sun. I told myself that the woman I could see walking in the distance, opening her parasol, crossing the street, was, in the eyes of those who knew how to judge, the greatest living exponent of the art of performing such actions and transforming them into something exquisite. Meanwhile she was drawing nearer: unaware of this far-reaching celebrity of hers, her narrow, refractory body, which had gleaned nothing of it, was arched forward beneath a violet surah scarf; her sullen, bright eyes looked ahead absently and had perhaps caught sight of me; she was biting the corner of her lip; I watched her adjust her muff, give some money to a beggar, buy a bunch of violets from a flower-woman, with the same sort of interest I should have shown in the brush-strokes of a great painter at work. And as she passed me, she acknowledged me, sometimes with a faint smile, as if she had painted me a water-colour that was a masterpiece, and added a personal dedication to it. Each of her dresses seemed like a natural setting, inevitable, like the projection of a particular aspect of her soul. On one of these mornings in Lent as she was setting out for a lunch appointment, I ran into her wearing a dress of light-red velvet, cut slightly low at the neck. Her face seemed pensive beneath the fair hair. I felt less unhappy than usual because her melancholy expression, the way the vivid colour of her dress almost cut her off from the rest of the world, made her seem somehow lonely and unhappy, and I found this reassuring. I felt the dress to be the material form around her of the scarlet rays of emotions I did not know she felt and which I might have been able to console; seeking asylum in the mystical light of the garment's soft folds, she reminded me of some early Christian saint. So I felt ashamed of inflicting my presence on this holy martyr. 'But after all, the street belongs to everyone.'

'The street belongs to everyone.' I took up the words again, giving them a different meaning, and marvelled at the thought that in the crowded street, often drenched with rain and made precious like the streets of some old Italian towns, the Duchesse de Guermantes did indeed mingle the moments of her own secret life with the public world, on view to everybody, a mysterious presence jostled by everybody, with the splendid wantonness of the greatest works of art. Since I tended to go out in the morning after staying awake all night, in the afternoon my parents would tell me to go to bed for a while and try to get some sleep. It takes no great thought to know how to go to sleep, but habit is very useful, and even the absence of thought. But during these afternoons I lacked both. Before going to sleep, I spent so much time thinking that I should be unable to do so that even after I had gone to sleep a little of my thought remained. It was no more than a glimmer in almost total darkness, but it was enough to cast its reflection into my sleep, first the idea that I could not sleep, then, as a reflection of this reflection, that it was in my sleep that I sensed I was not asleep, then, by a further refraction, my awakening… to a new state of drowsiness in which I was trying to tell some friends who had entered the room that, a moment ago, when I was asleep, I had thought I was awake. These shadows were barely distinguishable: it would have required a great deal of subtlety, wasted subtlety, to perceive them clearly. Similarly, later in my life, in Venice, long after the sun had set, thanks to the imperceptible echo of a last note of light held indefinitely over the canals as though sustained by some optical pedal, I saw the reflections of the palaces unfurled as if for eternity in an even darker velvet over the twilight greyness of the water. One of my dreams was the synthesis of what my imagination had often tried to envisage, during my waking hours, of a particular landscape by the sea and its medieval past. In my sleep I saw a Gothic citadel rising from a sea whose waves were frozen still as in a stained-glass window. An inlet of the sea divided the town in two; the green water came right up to my feet; on the opposite shore it lapped around an oriental church, and around houses that already existed in the fourteenth century, so that to move across to them would have been to go backwards through the centuries. This dream in which nature had taken lessons from art, in which the sea had become Gothic, this dream in which I longed to reach, and believed I was reaching the impossible, was one I felt I had often dreamed before. But since it is the nature of what we imagine in sleep to multiply itself in the past and to appear familiar even when it is new, I supposed I was mistaken. What I did notice though was that I frequently had this dream.

Those compressions that characterize sleep were reflected in mine, but symbolically: the darkness made it impossible for me to distinguish the faces of the friends who were in the room, for we sleep with our eyes shut; I, who carried on endless verbal arguments with myself while I dreamed, as soon as I tried to speak to these friends, felt the words stick in my throat, for we do not speak distinctly in our sleep; I wanted to go to them and could not move my legs, for we do not walk when we are asleep either; then suddenly I felt ashamed to be seen by them, for we sleep without our clothes. And so, with blind eyes, sealed lips, legs held captive, naked body, the image of sleep projected by my own sleep was like the great allegorical figures of Giotto, once given me by Swann, among which Envy is depicted with a serpent in her mouth.

Saint-Loup did come to Paris, but only for a few hours. And he assured me that he had not yet been able to speak to his cousin: 'Oriane's not at all nice,' he told me without realizing he was going back on his previous words. 'She's not the Oriane she was, they've gone and changed her. It's not worth you bothering with her, I promise you. You overestimate her qualities. Why don't you let me introduce you to my cousin Poictiers?' he added, unconscious of the fact that this could not possibly give me any pleasure. 'Now *she's* an intelligent young woman you'd like. She's married to my cousin, the Duc de Poictiers. He's a good chap, but not quite bright enough for her. I've told her about you. She's asked me to invite you. She's pretty, but not in the same way as Oriane, and she's younger. She's a really nice person, you know, a really fine person.' There were expressions newly – and all the more enthusiastically – adopted by Robert, which indicated that the person in question was finely discriminating: 'I'm not saying she's a Dreyfusard. You only have to remember her background. But I did hear her say: "If he was innocent, how perfectly dreadful for him to have been imprisoned on Devil's Island!" You see what I mean, don't you? And then she's someone who does an awful lot for her old governesses. She's insisted that they are never to be made to use the servants' entrance. She's a really fine person, believe me. Oriane doesn't really like her because she can feel that she's more intelligent.'

Although she was much preoccupied by the pity she felt for one of the Guermantes footmen – who could not go and see his fiancée, even when the Duchesse was out, because it would immediately have been reported by the concierge – Françoise was upset to have been out when Saint-Loup had called, but the reason for this was that she was now in the habit of going out to call on people herself. She was certain to go out on the days when I most needed her. It was always to see her brother, her niece, and most often her own daughter, who had recently come to live in Paris. The family nature of these visits was an additional element in

the irritation I felt at being deprived of her services, for I foresaw that she would talk about them as duties that could not be shirked, according to the laws laid down at Saint-André-des-Champs. And so I never listened to her excuses without a grumpy attitude which was not at all fair to her and which was pushed to its peak by Francoise's way of saying not: 'I've been to see my brother', or 'I've been to see my niece' but: 'I've been to see the brother', 'I just popped in to say hello to the niece' (or 'to my niece the butcheress'). As for her daughter, Françoise would have liked to see her return to Combray. But the latter, now transformed into a Parisienne with a fashionable woman's taste for abbreviations, though her own were vulgar ones, had been heard to say that the week she was due to spend in Combray would seem more than long enough to be away from the columns of the '*Intran*'.[22] She was even less inclined to go to Françoise's sister, who lived in a mountain region, for, according to this daughter of Françoise, mountains were not really *interesting*, and she gave the word a new and dreadful meaning. She could not bring herself to go back to Méséglise, where 'everyone is so stupid', where the market gossips would claim cousinhood with her and say: 'Why, it's never poor dead Bazireau's daughter?' She would sooner die than go back and settle down there, 'now that she had tasted Parisian life', yet Françoise, for all her traditionalism, smiled complacently at the spirit of innovation embodied in this new 'Parisienne' saying to her: 'Well, Mother, if you don't get your day off, you can always send me a wire.'

The weather had turned cold again. 'Go out? What for? To catch your death?' said Françoise, who preferred to remain at home during the week her daughter, brother and butcher-niece had gone to spend in Combray. As the last disciple in whom my aunt Léonie's doctrine of natural philosophy dimly lived on, Françoise would add, in reference to this unseasonable weather: 'It's the left-overs of God's wrath!' My only response to her complaints was a languid smile; I was all the more indifferent to these predictions because whatever happened it would be fine for me; I could already see the morning sun shining on the slope of Fiesole, warming me in its rays; they were so strong that, smiling, I had to half-open, half-shut my eyelids, which, like alabaster lamps, were filled with a pink glow. It was not only the bells that came back to me from Italy, but Italy itself. My devoted hands would not be empty of flowers to honour the anniversary of the journey I ought to have made long ago, for since the weather had turned cold again in Paris as it had in another year when we were getting ready to go away at the end of Lent, in the liquid, icy air that bathed the chestnuts and planes on the boulevards and the tree in the courtyard of our house, the narcissi, the daffodils, the anemones of the Ponte Vecchio were already beginning to open as in a bowl of clear water.

My father had told us that, through A. J., he now knew where M. de Norpois was off to when he ran into him in our building.

'He goes to see Mme de Villeparisis. They're great friends. I had no idea. It seems she's a delightful person, an exceptional woman. You ought to go and call on her,' he said to me. And I was very surprised by the way he spoke of M. de Guermantes as a man of the highest distinction; I always thought him a boor myself. 'It seems that he is enormously well-informed and has perfect taste, only he's very proud of his name and his connections. But according to Norpois, he does command enormous respect, not only here but all over Europe. Apparently the Emperor of Austria and the Tsar treat him like a good friend. Old Norpois told me that Mme de Villeparisis was very fond of you, and that you would be able to meet interesting people at her gatherings. He was full of your praises. You'll meet him there too, and he may have good advice to give you even if you are going to be a writer. I can see your mind is set on it. It's a fine career in some people's eyes, but it's not the one I should have chosen for you myself. Anyway, you'll soon be a man now, we shan't always be here to look after you, and it's not for us to prevent you from following your vocation.'

If only I had been able to start writing! But, however I set about it (all too similarly, alas, to the resolve to give up alcohol, to go to bed early, to get enough sleep and to keep fit), whether it was in a spurt of activity, with method, with pleasure, in depriving myself of a walk, or postponing it and reserving it as a reward, taking advantage of an hour of feeling well, making use of the inaction forced upon me by a day's illness, the inevitable result of my efforts was a blank page, untouched by writing, as predestined as the forced card that you inevitably end up drawing in certain tricks, however thoroughly you have first shuffled the pack. I was merely the instrument of habits of not working, of not going to bed, of not sleeping, which had to fulfil themselves at any cost; if I offered no resistance, if I made do with the pretext they drew from the first opportunity that arose for them to act as they chose, I escaped without serious harm, I still slept for a few hours towards morning, I managed to read a little, I did not over-exert myself; but if I tried to resist them, by deciding to go to bed early, to drink only water, to work, they became annoyed, they resorted to strong measures, they made me really ill, I was obliged to double my dose of alcohol, I did not go to bed for two days, I could not even read, and I would vow to be more reasonable in future, that is to say less wise, like the victim who allows himself to be robbed for fear of being murdered if he puts up resistance.

In the meantime, my father had run into M. de Guermantes once or twice, and now that M. de Norpois had told him that the Duc was a remarkable man, he had started to pay more attention to what he said. In fact they had met in the courtyard and discussed Mme de Villeparisis. 'He told me she's his aunt. He pronounces the name "Vilparisi". She's an extraordinarily intelligent woman, he tells me. He went as far as to say that she keeps a Bureau of Wit,' my father added, impressed by the vagueness of this expression, which he had in fact come across once or twice in volumes of memoirs, but without attaching any precise meaning to it. My mother had so much respect for him that when she saw that he did not simply dismiss this Bureau of Wit of Mme de Villeparisis, she decided that it must be something of consequence. Although she had always known of the Marquise's worth through my grandmother's detailed accounts, she immediately rated it even higher. My grandmother, who was in rather poor health at this time, was not at first in favour of the proposed visit, and subsequently lost interest in the matter. Since we had moved into our new flat, Mme de Villeparisis had asked her to call on several occasions. And my grandmother had always written back to say that she was not calling on people at present, in one of the letters which, through some new habit of hers we did not understand, she no longer sealed herself but left Françoise to deal with. As for myself, lacking any very clear picture of this Bureau of Wit, it would not have come as any great surprise to find the old lady from Balbec installed behind a bureau, as in fact I eventually did.

My father would also very much have liked to know whether the ambassador's support would gain him many votes at the Institut,[23] for which he was thinking of standing as an independent candidate. The fact was that, while he did not go as far as to doubt that he would have M. de Norpois's support, he was not entirely certain of it. He had thought it to be simply malicious gossip when he had been told at the Ministry that M. de Norpois, wishing to be the sole representative of the Institut there, would put every possible obstacle in the way of a candidature which would cause him particular embarrassment at the moment since he was supporting another candidate. Yet when M. Leroy-Beaulieu had advised him to stand and calculated his chances, my father had been struck by the fact that, among the colleagues upon whom he could count for support, the eminent economist had not mentioned M. de Norpois. He dared not ask the former ambassador to his face, but hoped that I would return from my visit to Mme de Villeparisis with his election as good as assured. This visit was about to take place. Propaganda from M. de Norpois, capable of ensuring him the votes of at least two thirds of the Academy, seemed all the more probable to my father since the ambassador's willingness to oblige was proverbial, those who liked him least admitting that there was no one who took so much pleasure in being of service. And further, at the Ministry, his patronage extended itself to my father far more markedly than to any other official.

My father had another encounter too, but one that caused him not only a great deal of surprise, but also extreme indignation. He ran into Mme Sazerat, whose comparative poverty meant that her Parisian life was restricted to occasional visits to a friend. There was no one who irritated my father more than Mme Sazerat, so much so that Mama found it necessary to adopt a sweet and suppliant tone of voice when she made her yearly announcement to him: 'My dear, I really must invite Mme Sazerat here, just once. She won't stay long'; or even: 'Listen, dear, I've a very special request to ask of you. Please go and pay Mme Sazerat a little visit. You know how I hate bothering you, but it would be so nice of you.' He would laugh, slightly irritated by it all, then go and pay the visit. So when he ran into her this time, despite the fact that she left him cold, he went up to her and doffed his hat, but, to his astonishment, Mme Sazerat confined herself to the sort of stiff acknowledgement that is dictated by politeness towards someone who has done something disgraceful or who has been condemned to live in another hemisphere. My father arrived home speechless with anger. The following day my mother met Mme Sazerat in someone's house. She did not offer her hand, but

smiled at my mother with vague melancholy as one smiles at a playmate from one's childhood, but with whom all connection has been severed because she has lived a debauched life, married a jailbird or, worse still, a divorced man. Now, from time immemorial my parents had accorded to Mme Sazerat, and she to them, the profoundest respect. But what my mother did not know was that Mme Sazerat, alone of her kind in Combray, was a Dreyfusard. My father, a friend of M. Méline,[24] was convinced that Dreyfus was guilty. When some of his colleagues had asked him to sign a petition for a retrial, he had sharply sent them packing. He refused to speak to me for a week when he discovered that my own view did not coincide with his. His opinions were common knowledge. He came very near to being thought of as a Nationalist. As for my grandmother, the sole member of the family who seemed likely to be stirred by generous doubt, whenever anyone spoke to her of the possible innocence of Dreyfus, she would shake her head in a way that we did not understand at the time, but which was like the gesture of someone who has been interrupted when she has more serious things to think about. My mother, torn between her love for my father and the hope that I would develop into someone clever, remained unable to make up her mind and conveyed as much by her silence. And then my grandfather, who adored the army (although his duties with the National Guard had been the bugbear of his adulthood), could never see a regiment march past the garden railings in Combray without baring his head as the colonel and the colours passed. All this was enough for Mme Sazerat, who was perfectly aware of the disinterestedness and probity of my father and grandfather, to regard them as pillars of Injustice. We forgive the crimes of individuals, but not their participation in a collective crime. As soon as she knew my father was an anti-Dreyfusard, she put continents and centuries between herself and him. And this explains why, at such a distance of time and space, her greeting had appeared imperceptible to my father, and why it had not occurred to her to shake hands or to speak, since neither gesture could have crossed the worlds that stretched between them.

Saint-Loup, who was expected in Paris, had promised to take me to visit Mme de Villeparisis, and although I had not mentioned it to him, I hoped that we might meet Mme de Guermantes there. He invited me to lunch in a restaurant with his mistress, whom we were then to accompany to a rehearsal. We were to call for her in the morning at her house on the outskirts of Paris.

I had asked Saint-Loup whether it would be at all possible to lunch at a particular restaurant (in the lives of moneyed young noblemen the restaurant plays as important a part as the chests of rich fabric in Arabian tales), the one to which Aimé had told me he was going as head waiter until the start of the Balbec season. It held great charm for me, who dreamed of so many journeys and made so few, to be able to re-encounter someone who formed part not only of my memories of Balbec but of Balbec itself, who went there year after year and, when fatigue and my studies forced me to remain in Paris, would still be there during the long late afternoons of July, waiting for guests to come in to dinner, watching the sun descend and set in the sea, through the glass panels of the main dining-room behind which, when the light had gone, the motionless wings of distant bluish vessels looked like exotic moths in a display-case. Magnetized himself by his contact with the powerful magnet of Balbec, this head waiter became in turn a magnet for me. I hoped by talking to him to experience something of Balbec before the event, to have realized here in Paris something of the magic of travel.

I left the house first thing, leaving Françoise to bewail the footman-fiancé who had once again been prevented, the evening before, from going to see his wife-to-be. Françoise had found him in tears; he had been itching to go and hit the concierge, but had held back because it would have cost him his job.

Before reaching Saint-Loup's, where we had arranged for him to meet me at his door, I ran into Legrandin, of whom we had lost sight since Combray, and who, though now quite grey, still preserved his look of youthful candour. He stopped.

'So it's you!' he exclaimed, 'a man of fashion, and in a frock-coat too! Too uncomfortable a uniform for a man of my independent spirit. But you are a man of the world, I suppose, so you're always calling on people! To go and meditate, as I do, beside some half-ruined tomb, my floppy necktie and the jacket I wear are not inappropriate. You know how I admire the charming quality of your soul, which is my way of saying how deeply I regret that you should go forth and betray it among the Gentiles. Your ability to stay for a single moment in the nauseating atmosphere of the salons – it would suffocate me – is its own condemnation, its own damnation of your future in the eyes of the Prophet. I can see it all: you frequent the frivolous-minded society of gracious livers; it's the vice of the present bourgeoisie. Ah, those aristocrats! The Terror has a lot to answer for; it should have guillotined every one of them. They're a repulsive crowd even when they're not just dreary fools. Still, poor boy, if you like that sort of thing! While you're off to some society tea-party your old friend will be out there on his own in some remote suburb watching the pink moon rise in a violet sky, a happier man than you. The truth is that I scarcely belong to this earth where I feel myself to be such an exile; it takes the full force of the law of gravity to keep me here and stop me escaping into another sphere. I belong to a different planet. Farewell. Don't take offence at the traditional frankness of the Vivonne peasant, who has also remained a peasant of the Danube.[25] In token of my sincere regard, I shall send you a copy of my latest novel. You will not care for it; it is not deliquescent enough, not *fin-de-siècle* enough for you; it is too frank, too honest. What you need is Bergotte, you've admitted it, gamy fare for the jaded palates of refined voluptuaries. Your set must see me as very old hat; I've the misfortune to put my heart into what I write and that's no longer the done thing; and the life of ordinary people isn't distinguished enough to interest your little bunch of snobs. Anyway, try to recall occasionally what Christ said: "This do, and thou shalt live." Farewell, my friend.'

I left Legrandin without any particular ill-feeling towards him. Some memories are like friends in common, they can bring about reconciliations; set there amid fields of buttercups and the mounds of feudal ruins, the little wooden bridge still joined us, Legrandin and myself, as it joined the two banks of the Vivonne.

After we left Paris where, despite the onset of spring, the trees on the boulevards were barely in leaf, Saint-Loup and I were amazed, when the circle train set us down in the suburban village where his mistress was living, to see each small garden decked with the huge white altars of the flowering fruit trees. It was like one of those special local festivals, poetic, ephemeral, which people come a long way to see on set occasions, but this one was the spontaneous gift of nature. The cherry-blossom clings so closely to the branches, like a white sheath, that from a distance, among other trees that were scarcely in flower or leaf, one might have thought, on this sunny day that was still so cold, that it was snow, melted everywhere else, but still clinging there. But the tall pear trees enveloped each house, each humble courtyard, in a more extensive, more uniform and dazzling whiteness, as if all the dwellings, all the gardens in the village were making their first communion on the same day.

These villages around Paris are still gateways to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century parks which were the 'follies' of royal stewards and favourites. A horticulturist had used one of these, set on low ground beside the road, to grow fruit trees (or had perhaps simply preserved the plan of an immense orchard that dated back to the past). Laid out in quincunxes, these pear trees, more spaciously planted and less advanced than those I had seen, formed huge quadrilaterals – divided by low walls – of white blossom, with the light falling differently on each side, so that all these airy roofless chambers seemed to belong to some Palace of the Sun, such as might have been found somewhere like Crete; and they also reminded one of the various ponds of a reservoir or of those parts of the sea that have been subdivided by man for fisheries or oyster-beds, when one saw, depending on their exposure to it, the light playing upon the espaliers as it does on the waters in spring, and in places unfurling, amid the openings of the sky-studded trellis of the branches, the dazzling foamy whiteness of a creamy, sunlit flower.

It was an old village with its ancient *mairie* baked golden by the sun; in front of this, pretending they were maypoles and streamers, stood three tall pear trees, elegantly decked with white satin flags as if for some local civic festival.

Never had Robert spoken to me more lovingly of his mistress than during this journey. She alone was the only woman to have taken root in his heart; his future career in the army, his position in society, his family, all these were not, of course, matters of indifference to him, but they counted as nothing beside the least thing that had to do with her. This was all that mattered to him, infinitely more than the Guermantes and all the kings of the earth put together. I do not know whether he invented the notion that she was of a superior essence to the rest of the world, but I do know that he was exclusively preoccupied and concerned with what affected her. Through her he was capable of suffering, of being happy, perhaps of killing. There was really nothing that interested or excited him except what his mistress wanted, what she was going to do, what was going on, discernible at best in fleeting changes of expression, in the narrow expanse of her face

and behind her privileged brow. However scrupulous he was in everything else, he looked forward to the prospect of a brilliant marriage solely in order to be able to continue maintaining and keeping her. If one had asked oneself what value he set on her, I doubt whether one could have imagined a high enough figure. If he did not marry her, it was because his practical instincts warned him that as soon as she had nothing more to expect from him she would leave him, or would at least live as she pleased, and that he must retain his hold on her by playing on her expectations. The possibility that she did not love him had crossed his mind. No doubt the general ailment we call love must have forced him – as it forces all men – to believe at times that she did. But his sense of reality made him feel that her love for him did not exclude her remaining with him only for his money, and that the day she had nothing more to expect from him, the first thing she would do (as the dupe of her literary friends' theories, though still loving him, he thought) would be to leave him.

'Today, if she's nice,' he told me, 'I'm going to give her a present she'll really like. It's a necklace she saw at Boucheron'.[26] I can't really afford it at present – thirty thousand francs. But she doesn't have much pleasure in life, poor love. She'll be jolly pleased with it, I think. She mentioned it to me and told me she knew somebody who might give it to her. I don't think that's true but, just in case, I came to an arrangement with Boucheron – he's our family jeweller – and he reserved it for me. I'm so pleased to think that you're going to meet her. She's no stunning beauty, you know' (I could see he thought just the opposite and was only saying this to increase my admiration). 'But what she does have is a marvellous sense of judgment. She might not bring herself to say much while you're there, but it already makes me delighted to think what she'll say about you when you've gone. She comes out with things, you know, that keep you pondering for hours. There's really something quite Pythian about her!'

On our way to her house we passed a row of gardens, and I had to stop and look, for they were full of pear- and cherry-blossom; yesterday, no doubt, they were as empty and unlived-in as an unlet house, but now they were suddenly inhabited and embellished by these newcomers who had arrived the evening before and whose lovely white dresses could be seen through the railings along the garden paths.

'I'll tell you what, you stay here, said Robert. I can see you want to look at all this and play the poet. My friend's house is quite near, I'll go and fetch her.'

As I waited, I walked up and down the road, past these modest gardens. If I looked up, from time to time I could see groups of girls at the windows, but also outside in the open air, at the level of one of the small storeys, hanging there in the foliage, light and supple in their fresh mauve dresses, clusters of young lilacs swaying in the breeze without a thought for the passer-by who was looking up at their leafy mezzanine. I recognized in them the violet platoons posted beyond the little white gate at the entrance to the grounds of M. Swann's house on warm spring afternoons, forming an enchanting rustic tapestry. I followed a path which led into a field. It was swept by a cool breeze, as lively as the breeze in Combray; but in the middle of this rich, moist, rural plot, which might have been on the banks of the Vivonne, there had nevertheless sprung up, as punctually as the whole group of its companions, a great white pear tree, its blossom waving a smile in the face of the sun, like a curtain of light made material to the touch, convulsed by the wind yet smoothed with a silver glaze by the rays of sunlight.

Suddenly Saint-Loup appeared, accompanied by his mistress, and, in this woman who was for him the essence of love, of all the sweet possibilities of life, whose personality, mysteriously enshrined in a body as in a tabernacle, was the constant focus of my friend's imaginative attention, something he felt he would never really know as he went on asking himself what her inner self could be, behind the veil of eyes and flesh – in this woman I recognized at once 'Rachel when from the Lord',[27] the woman who, a few years ago (women change their status so rapidly in that world, when they do change), used to say to the procuress: 'Tomorrow evening, then, if you need me for someone, you'll send for me, won't you?'

And when she had been 'sent for' and she found herself alone in the room with this 'someone', she knew so well what she was expected to do that after locking the door, as the precaution of a prudent woman or a ritual gesture, she would start to remove all her clothes, as you do for the doctor who is going to examine you, and would only stop doing so if the 'someone', not caring for nudity, told her she could keep on her chemise, as some doctors do when they have expert hearing and are concerned about their patient's catching cold, and are happy to listen to the breathing or the heartbeat through the undergarments. I sensed that this woman, whose whole life, whose every thought, whose entire past and all the men by whom she must have been possessed, were so indifferent to me that, had she told me about them, I should have listened only out of politeness and with one ear, this woman was so much the focus of Saint-Loup's anxiety, his torment, his love, that she – for me a clockwork toy – had become for him the cause of endless suffering, an object of life-consuming cost. With these two disparate elements in mind (because I had known 'Rachel when from the Lord' in a brothel), I realized that many women to whom men devote everything, for whom they suffer and take their own lives, may be in themselves, or for others, what Rachel was for me. The idea that anyone could be painfully consumed with curiosity in regard to her life dumbfounded me. I could have told Robert a great deal about her promiscuity, which seemed to me to be the least interesting thing in the world. And how painful this would have been for him. And what had he not given to know about it, and to no end.

I realized how much a human imagination can put behind a tiny scrap of a face, such as this woman's, if it is the imagination that has been the first to know it; and, conversely, into what miserable, worthless material elements something which was once the target of countless dreams might be decomposed if, on the contrary, it had been perceived in a quite different manner, by the most coarse sort of acquaintance. I saw that what had seemed to me to be not worth twenty francs when it had been offered to me for twenty francs in a brothel, where I had simply seen it as a woman wanting to earn twenty francs, might be worth more than a million, more than family, more than the most coveted position, if I had started to imagine her as an intriguing being, interesting to know, difficult to seize and to hold. Undoubtedly Robert and I saw the same thin and narrow face. But we had come to it by two opposite paths which could never converge, and we would never see the same face. I had known this face from the outside, with its looks, its smiles, the movements of its mouth, as the face of some woman who would do anything I asked for twenty francs. And so for me, her looks, her smiles, the movements of her mouth had seemed meaningful merely as generalized actions with nothing individual about them, and beneath them I should not have had the curiosity to look for a person. But what to me had in a sense been offered from the outset, a consenting face, had been for Robert a goal towards which he had been struggling through endless hopes and doubts, suspicions and dreams. Now he was giving more than a million francs to possess, in order that others should not be offered it, what had been offered to me, and to the rest of the world, for twenty. The reason he had not had her at that price might have been due to the chance of a moment, the moment in which she who seemed ready to give herself withdraws, with another assignment perhaps, or some reason for being difficult on that particular day. If she is involved with a highly emotional man, even if she has not noticed it, and even more if she has, a really horrible game begins. Unable to swallow his disappointment, to forget about the woman, he chases after her again, she does everything to avoid him, to the point where a mere smile for which he no longer dared to hope is bought at a thousand times what total intimacy with her should have cost. It sometimes even happens in such a case, when a man has been mad enough, through a mixture of naive judgment and cowardice in the face of pain, to make an inaccessible idol out of a whore, that he will never obtain total intimacy, or even the first kiss, and no longer even ventures to ask for them for fear of compromising his assurances of Platonic love. And it then becomes horribly painful to leave the world without ever having experienced the embrace of the woman he has loved most. Luckily for Saint-Loup, he had managed to enjoy all Rachel's favours. True, had he known that they had been offered to all and sundry for a louis,[28] he would have suffered dreadfully, but would still have given a million francs to keep them, for nothing he had learned could have deflected him – what is beyond a man's power can only happen in spite of him, as the effect of some great natural law – from the path he had taken and from which that face could appear to him only through the dream world he had created. The immobility of that thin face, like that of a sheet of paper subjected to the colossal pressure of two atmospheres, seemed to me to be held in balance by two infinities which converged on her without meeting, for she held them apart. And indeed, as we looked at her, Robert and I, neither of us saw her from the same side of the mystery.

It was not so much that I found 'Rachel when from the Lord' of little consequence, but that I found the power of the human imagination, the illusion that fostered the pains of love, so momentous. Robert noticed that I seemed moved. I looked away towards the pear and cherry trees in the garden opposite to make him think that it was their beauty I was moved by. And it did move me in somewhat the same way, by bringing close to me those things we not only see with our eyes but also feel in our hearts. By likening the trees I had seen in the garden to strange gods, had I not made the same mistake as Mary Magdalene when, in another garden, on a day whose anniversary was fast approaching, she saw a human form, 'supposing him to be the gardener'? Guardians of the memories of the golden age, keepers of the promise that reality is not what we suppose, that the splendour of poetry, the magical light of innocence may shine in it and may be the reward which we strive to deserve, were they not, these great white creatures so magnificently stooped over the shade that invites us to rest, to fish, to read, were they not more like angels? I exchanged a few words with Saint-Loup's mistress. We cut across the village. The houses were sordid. But beside the most dilapidated of them, the ones that looked as if they had been scorched by a shower of brimstone, a mysterious traveller, making a day's stay in the cursed city, a resplendent angel, stood over it, stretching the dazzling protection of his widespread wings of innocence in blossom: a pear tree. Saint-Loup walked ahead with me a little way:

'I should have liked it to be just the two of us. In fact I'd much rather have had lunch just with you and stayed together until it was time to go to my aunt's. But it gives her so much pleasure, this dear girl of mine, and she's being so nice to me that I couldn't say no. Anyway, you'll like her, she's literary, so responsive, and it's such fun to lunch with her in a restaurant; she's so pleasant to be with, so simple, always so delighted with everything.'

Yet I seem to remember that it was on this very morning, probably the only time it happened, that Robert was able to stand aside for a second from the woman he had gradually created out of layer upon layer of affection, and suddenly distance himself enough to glimpse another Rachel, identical yet entirely different, whose behaviour was clearly that of a little tart. We had left the lovely fruit-blossoms and were on our way to catch the train back to Paris when, at the station, Rachel, who was walking on her own, was recognized and hailed by a pair of common little tarts like herself; thinking at first that she was alone, they called out: 'Hey there, Rachel, why don't you come with us? Lucienne and Germaine are on the train and there's room for you as well. Come on, we'll all go to the skating-rink together.' They were about to introduce her to the two shop-assistants who were with them, their lovers, when they noticed Rachel's slightly embarrassed manner, looked enquiringly beyond her, caught sight of us and bade her an apologetic good-bye, to which she responded somewhat uneasily but in a friendly enough tone. They were two poor little tarts with imitation otter-skin collars, looking more or less like Rachel must have looked when Saint-Loup first met her. He did not know them or their names, and seeing that they appeared to be on the friendliest terms with his mistress, it occurred to him that she might have had, and perhaps still had, a place in an unsuspected life, very different from the life she led with him, a life in which women were available for a louis, whereas Rachel cost him more than a hundred thousand francs a year. He not only glimpsed this life, but saw there in the midst of it a Rachel quite different from the one he knew, a Rachel like those two little tarts, Rachel at twenty francs a time. In short, Rachel had for a second become double for him; he had seen, at some distance from his own Rachel, Rachel the little tart, the real Rachel, if it is true that Rachel the tart was more real than the other. And it might have occurred to Robert that from the hell in which he was living, with the prospect and the necessity of a wealthy marriage, of the sale of his name, to enable him to go on giving Rachel a hundred thousand francs a year, he might easily have escaped and enjoyed the favours of his mistress, like those shop-assistants and their girls, for a mere song. But how? She had done nothing reprehensible. With less lavished upon her, she would be less nice to him, she would no longer say or write the things that moved him so much and which he would quote to his comrades with shy pride, taking care to emphasize how nice it was of her to say them, but omitting to point out that he was keeping her in luxury, or even that he gave her anything at all, that the declarations inscribed on photographs or the tender words at the end of telegrams represented the most meagre, yet the most precious transmutation of a hundred thousand francs. If he refrained from mentioning that these rare kindnesses on Rachel's part were all paid for, it would be wrong to say – and yet this oversimplification is directed, without any justification, at every lover who has to fork out the money, and at a great number of husbands – that he did so out of pride, out of vanity. Saint-Loup was intelligent enough to realize that all the pleasures of vanity were easily available to him in society where they would have cost him nothing, thanks to his distinguished name and handsome face, and that his liaison with Rachel had in fact tended to cut him off from society, made him less sought after. No, the pride which seeks to create the impression that the apparent signs of affection from the woman one loves are freely given, is simply a by-product of love, the need to see oneself, and to be seen by others, as being loved by the person whom one loves so much. Rachel rejoined us, leaving the two tarts to get into their compartment; but, no less than their imitation otter-skins and the self-conscious unease of their shop-boys, the names Lucienne and Germaine meant that the new image of Rachel lingered on for a second in Robert's mind. For a moment he imagined a life of haunting the Place Pigalle with anonymous friends, sordid pick-ups, afternoons of mindless pleasure, walks and outings, in a Paris where the sunny streets that run down from the Boulevard de Clichy seemed quite different from the solar brightness in which he strolled with his mistress, and inevitably so, for love, and the pain that is inseparable from it, have the power, like intoxication, to differentiate things for us. It was almost like an unknown Paris in the heart of Paris itself that he glimpsed; his relationship seemed like the exploration of a strange life, for if when she was with him Rachel was somewhat similar to himself, it was none the less a part of her real life that she lived with him, the most precious part even, given the reckless amount of money he spent on her, the part that made her so much the envy of her friends and would one day allow her to retire to the country or to make her name in the leading theatres, when she had feathered her nest. Robert would have liked to ask her who Lucienne and Germaine were, what they would have said to her if she had joined them on the train, how they would have all spent the day together, a day that would perhaps have ended, as a supreme treat, after the pleasures of the skating-rink, at the Taverne de l'Olympia,[29] if Robert and I not been there. For a second the area around the Olympia, which until them had seemed to him deadly dull, stirred his curiosity, and his anguish, and the thought of this spring day's sunshine falling on the rue Caumartin, where, if she had not known Robert, she might have gone later on to earn a louis, filled him with a vague longing to be there. But what use was it to question Rachel when he knew in advance that she would answer him with mere silence, or a lie, or with something extremely painful for him to hear, and which would explain nothing? The porters were shutting the doors; we climbed hurriedly into a first-class carriage; Rachel's magnificent pearls reminded Robert that she was a woman of great price; he embraced her, restored her to the place in his heart where he could contemplate her, from within, as he had always done up until now – apart from the brief moment when he had envisaged her in some Impressionist painter's Place Pigalle – and the train moved off.

It was true that she was 'literary'. She never stopped talking to me about books, Art Nouveau, Tolstoyism, except to criticize Robert for drinking too much wine.

'A year with me would do you the world of good! I'd make you drink water and you'd be much better for it.

– All right. Let's go away.

– But you know how much work I've got to do (she took her dramatic training very seriously). And what would your family have to say about it?'

And she began to criticize his family to me in terms that seemed completely to the point, and which Saint-Loup, who was all the while disobeying Rachel on the matter of champagne, endorsed. Since I was so concerned about the effect of wine on him and could feel the good influence of his mistress, I found myself quite prepared to tell him to let his family get off his back. And when I was rash enough to mention Dreyfus, tears sprang to the young woman's eyes.

'The poor man's a martyr, she almost sobbed. It will be the death of him, where they've put him.

– Calm down, Zézette. He'll come back. He'll be acquitted. They'll admit they made a mistake.

– But he'll be dead before they do! At least his children's name won't be blemished. But what he must be going through, I can't bear to think about it! And can you believe that Robert's mother, a religious woman, says that he ought to be left on Devil's Island even if he's innocent. Isn't that ghastly?

– Yes, it's absolutely true, she does say that, Robert confirmed. She's my mother, I can't go against her, but it's obvious that she's far less sensitive than Zézette.'

The truth of the matter was that these luncheons, which were supposed to be 'such a pleasure', were always an uncomfortable experience. For as soon as Saint-Loup found himself in public with his mistress, he got it into his head that she was eyeing all the men around her, and turned sullen; she would notice his bad mood and perhaps took pleasure in aggravating it, but more probably, out of a foolish sense of pride, feeling wounded by his tone, she did not wish to appear to be trying to diffuse it; she would pretend that she could not take her eyes off some man or other, and indeed this was not always just a pretence. In fact if the man sitting next to them in a theatre or a café, or even their cab-driver, happened to be remotely attractive, Robert, his attention heightened by jealousy, would notice it before his mistress; he immediately saw the man in question as one of those foul creatures he had spoken to me about in Balbec, who derive amusement from corrupting and dishonouring women, and he would beg his mistress to avert her eyes from the man, which was all that was needed to draw her attention to him. And sometimes she found that Robert had shown such good taste in his suspicions that she would eventually go so far as to stop teasing him so that he would calm down and consent to go off alone on some errand, which would give her time to enter into conversation with the stranger, often to make an assignation, sometimes even to have her way with him on the spot. I could see as soon as we entered the restaurant that Robert was looking troubled. For the first thing he noticed – and it had escaped our attention in Balbec – was that among his more ordinary colleagues Aimé had a certain distinction and exuded, quite unconsciously, the romantic appeal that stems, for a few years at least, from a head of fine hair and a Grecian nose, which is what made him stand out among the crowd of other waiters. These, most of them quite old, presented the typical features, extraordinarily ugly and exaggerated, of hypocritical priests, smarmy confessors, and particularly of comic actors of the old school, whose sugar-loaf foreheads are scarcely to be seen today outside the collections of portraits displayed in the humbly historic green-rooms of antiquated little theatres, where they are represented in the roles of valets or grand pontiffs, though this restaurant, through selected recruiting and possibly through some system of hereditary appointment, seemed to preserve their solemn characteristics in something like a School of Augurs. It was our ill luck to be recognized by Aimé and it was he who came across to take our order, while the cortège of the high priests from light opera moved past us to other tables. Aimé inquired after my grandmother's health; I asked for news of his wife and children. He provided it with feeling, being a family man. His manner was intelligent and spirited, but respectful. Robert's mistress started to eye him with unusual attention. But Aimé's sunken eyes, to which his slight short-sightedness gave a sort of hidden depth, betrayed no awareness of this in his motionless face. In the provincial hotel where he had worked for many years before he came to Balbec, the handsome picture of his face, now a touch discoloured and faded, which had been visible for years, always in the same place, like some engraved portrait of Prince Eugène,[30] at the far end of an almost empty dining-room, cannot have attracted many curious looks. And so for a long time, for want of connoisseurs no doubt, he had remained unaware of the artistic value of his face, and as a man of cold character, he was disinclined to draw attention to it. At most some passing Parisienne, who happened to be stopping in the town, had cast her eyes upon him and asked him to serve her in her room before she caught her next train and, in the translucent, deeply humdrum void of the existence of this caring husband and provincial hotel waiter, had buried the secret of a one-night whim which no one would ever reveal. And yet Aimé must have been conscious of the insistent gaze the young actress was directing at him now. It certainly did not escape Robert's attention, and I saw a flush begin to spread beneath his skin, not the purplish flush of sudden emotion, but something faint and fitful.

'Is there anything particularly interesting about the waiter, Zézette?' he asked his mistress when he had dismissed Aimé somewhat abruptly. 'You seem to be making quite a study of him.

– Here we go again. I knew it!

– You knew what, my love? If I've said something wrong, I take it all back, of course. But it's my right to warn you against that flunkey. I know him from Balbec, otherwise I wouldn't give a damn. He's one of the world's biggest scoundrels.'

She seemed concerned to concur with Robert and began to engage me in a literary conversation in which he joined. I was not bored by her conversation because she was well acquainted with the works I admired and shared more or less the same opinion of them; but since I had heard Mme de Villeparisis describe her as untalented, I attached little importance to her knowledge. She had witty things to say about a great many subjects and would have been genuinely entertaining had she not affected the irritating jargon of literary cliques and artists' studios. And she extended it to everything she talked about: for instance, having adopted the habit of saying of a painting, if it were Impressionist, or an opera, if it were Wagnerian, 'Oh! that's *good*,' one day when a young man kissed her on the ear and, as a reaction to her pretence of the thrill it gave her, affected modesty, she said: 'Yes, the sensation it gives me is decidedly *good*.' But what really did take me aback was that the expressions peculiar to Robert (who had probably derived them anyway from the literary men she knew) were used by her to him and by him to her as an inevitable form of language, without any sense of the sort of pointless originality which anyone can command.

She was so clumsy with her hands when she ate that one got the impression that she must appear extremely awkward on stage. She recovered her dexterity only when she was making love, with the touchingly intuitive foresight of women who are so in love with men's bodies that they immediately sense what will give most pleasure to those bodies, which are yet so different from their own.

I ceased to take part in the conversation when it turned to the theatre because of Rachel's excessive maliciousness on the subject. She did, it is true, come to the defence of La Berma, but in a commiserative tone – meant for Saint-Loup, and evidence that he was used to hearing Rachel attack the actress: 'Oh! she's a remarkable woman really. Of course, her way of doing things no longer appeals to us, it doesn't match up with what we're trying to do, but one needs to see her in the context of her early career; we owe her a great deal. She has done some good things, you know. Besides, she's such a wonderful person, so kind-hearted. I know she doesn't care for the things that interest us now, but in her day her face was quite impressive, and there was something pleasingly intelligent about her.' (Our fingers do not play the same accompaniment to all our aesthetic judgments. If we want to describe a painting as a fine, densely textured piece of work, we have only to stick out our thumb. But 'something pleasingly intelligent' demands more. It requires two fingers, or rather two finger-nails, as if we needed to flick away a speck of dust.) But, with this one exception, Saint-Loup's mistress spoke about all acting celebrities in a tone of ironic superiority, which irritated me because I believed – quite wrongly, as it happened – that it was she who was inferior to them. She was plainly aware that I must regard her as a mediocre actress and, conversely, hold in high esteem the ones she despised. But she showed no resentment, because in all great talent which is not yet recognized, as hers was not at the time, however self-confident it may be, there is an element of humility, and because we calculate the amount of esteem we expect from others not in terms of our latent potential but of our present achievements. (An hour later, at the theatre, I was to see Saint-Loup's mistress show great deference towards the very artists she now judged so harshly.) And so, whatever misgivings my silence must have conveyed to her, she nevertheless insisted on our dining together that evening, assuring me that never had anyone's conversation given her so much pleasure as mine. Although we were not yet in the theatre, to which we were to go after lunch, it felt as if we were in a green-room hung with the portraits of former members of the Palais-Royal company, so much did the waiter's faces resemble the kind of faces that seem to have disappeared along with a whole generation of outstanding actors. They bore a resemblance to Academicians too: one of them, standing in front of a sideboard, was examining a bowl of pears with an expression of detached curiosity that might have belonged to M. de Jussieu.[31] Others, standing beside him, cast their eyes about the room with the same cold scrutiny that those members of the Institute who have arrived in advance direct at the public, while they mutter inaudibly among themselves. To the regular customers, they were well-known faces. However, one of them was being pointed out, a priestlike newcomer with a furrowed nose and sanctimonious lips, who was a novice to the job, and everyone gazed with interest at this recently elected candidate. But after a while, perhaps to drive Robert away and be alone with Aimé, Rachel began making eyes at a young student who was lunching with a friend at one of the next tables.

'Zézette, would you mind not looking at that young man like that,' said Saint-Loup, on whose face the hesitant flush of a moment ago had by this time intensified into a blood-red cloud which dilated and darkened his strained features. 'If you have to make an exhibition of us like this I'd rather go off and lunch elsewhere and wait for you at the theatre afterwards.'

At this point someone came to inform Aimé that there was a gentleman requesting him for a word at the door of his carriage. Saint-Loup, still uneasy, and fearing that it was some amorous message intended for his mistress, looked out of the window to be greeted by the sight of M. de Charlus, sitting there in the back of his brougham, wearing tight white gloves with black stripes and a flower in his buttonhole.

'There, you see! he said to me, lowering his voice, my family track me down everywhere. Please, could you – I can't really do it myself – but since you know the head waiter so well, ask him not to go to the carriage. He's sure to give us away. Ask him to send some other waiter who doesn't know me. I know my uncle; if they tell him they don't know me, he won't come inside to look for me, he hates this sort of place. But it's pretty disgusting, isn't it? an old womanizer like him, and still at it, preaching at me and coming here to spy on me!'

Aimé, after receiving my instructions, sent one of his assistants to say that he was too busy to come and, should the gentleman ask for the Marquis de Saint-Loup, that they did not know anyone of that name. The carriage departed soon after. But Saint-Loup's mistress, who had failed to catch our whispered remarks and thought they were about the young man Robert had reproached her for ogling, unleashed a torrent of abuse.

'So, what is it now? it's that young man, isn't it? Thank you for warning me. It's just what I need to really enjoy my meal! Don't take any notice of him, she added, turning to me, he's a bit off his head today. He just says these things to be smart. He thinks it's aristocratic to behave as if he's jealous.'

And her hand and feet started to betray signs of irritation.

'But, Zézette, I'm the one who finds it unpleasant. You're making us look ridiculous in the eyes of that man. He's going to think that you're making advances, and he looks like a cad to me.

– Not to me, I think he's very attractive. For one thing, he's got the most lovely eyes, and a way of looking at women. You can feel he must really like them.

– You must be out of your mind! but you can at least keep quiet until I've left the room, Robert shouted. Waiter! my things.'

I did not know whether he expected me to follow him.

'No, I need to be on my own,' he told me in the same tone in which he had just spoken to his mistress and as if he were quite as furious with me. His anger was like a single musical phrase in an opera to which several lines of dialogue are sung, each of completely different character and meaning in the libretto, yet fused into an overall mood by the music. When Robert had gone, his mistress summoned Aimé and asked him various questions. She then wanted to know what I thought of him.

'He has an amusing expression, hasn't he? You know, it would intrigue me to discover what he really thinks. I'd like to have him wait on me often, to take him travelling. But that's as far as it goes. If we were obliged to love all the people we find attractive, things would be pretty ghastly, don't you think? It's wrong of Robert to get such ideas. None of these things have any reality outside my head. Robert really has no need to get so upset.' She still had her gaze fixed on Aimé. 'Do look at those dark eyes of his. I'd love to know what goes on behind them.'

After a while someone came to inform her that Robert was waiting for her in a private room where he had gone to finish his lunch, using another entrance to avoid passing through the restaurant again. So I remained alone until I too was summoned by Robert. I found his mistress lying on a sofa, laughing beneath the kisses and caresses he was showering upon her. They were drinking champagne. 'Hello, you!' she kept saying to him, using an expression she had recently picked up and which seemed to her to be the last word in witty affection. I had not enjoyed my lunch, I felt ill at ease, and although Legrandin's words had not really affected me, I was sorry to think that I was beginning this first afternoon of spring in the back room of a restaurant and would end it in the wings of a theatre. After checking the time to make sure that she would not make herself late, Rachel offered me some champagne, passed me one of her Turkish cigarettes and unpinned a rose for me from her bodice. At which point I thought: 'I needn't feel I've spent the day too badly; the time spent in the company of this young woman has not been wasted, since I have had from her – gracious things which cannot be bought too dear – a rose, a scented cigarette, a glass of champagne.' I thought this because it seemed to me that such thoughts would lend an aesthetic flavour to these hours of boredom, and so justify and redeem them. I ought perhaps to have been aware that the very need of a justification to make my boredom bearable was sufficient proof that my feelings were anything but aesthetic. Robert and his mistress, for their part, seemed to have utterly forgotten their quarrel of a few minutes earlier, and my presence at it. They made no allusion to it, offered no excuse for it, any more than for the contrast with it that their present behaviour indicated. As I drank champagne with them, I began to feel something of the intoxication I had experienced at Rivebelle, though probably not quite the same. Not only every kind of intoxication, from that which we get from the sun or travel to that which is brought on by exhaustion or wine, but every degree of intoxication – and each should have a different grading mark like sea depths on a map – lays bare in us, at the exact level affected, a particular sort of man. Saint-Loup's private dining-room was small, but the single mirror which hung in it was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect some thirty others, in an endless progression; and, when it was lit at night and followed by the procession of thirty or more reflections of itself, the light bulb placed at the top of the mirror-frame must have given the drinker, even when alone, the impression that the surrounding space was multiplying itself along with his own sensations, heightened by drink, and that, shut up by himself in this tiny room, he was nevertheless reigning over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a walkway in the Jardin de Paris.[32] And, at that moment, I *was* the drinker in question: suddenly, as I looked for him in the mirror, I saw him, a hideous stranger, staring back at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; out of gaiety or bravado, I smiled at him and found that my smile was simultaneously returned. And I felt myself to be so much under the ephemeral and powerful sway of this minute's intense sensation, that it is not clear to me whether the only disquieting element of the experience was not the thought that the hideous self I had just glimpsed was perhaps about to breathe his last, and that I should never meet this stranger again in my lifetime.

Robert was annoyed only because I showed no inclination to shine more in the eyes of his mistress.

'Come on, what about that gentleman you met this morning who's a mixture of snobbery and astronomy? Do tell her about him. I can't quite remember the story. He was watching her out of the corner of his eye.

– But, my dear fellow, there's nothing to tell. Apart from what you've just said.

– Don't be such a bore. Then tell her about Françoise in the Champs-Élysées. She'll love that.

– Please do! Bobby's told me so much about Françoise.' And taking Saint-Loup by the chin, she said once more, for lack of anything more original, as she drew this chin into the light: 'Hello, you!'

Ever since I had ceased to see actors solely as the depositories, in their diction and acting ability, of an artistic truth, they had begun to interest me in their own right; with the feeling that I was watching the characters from some old comic novel, I was amused to see the naïve heroine of a play, her attention drawn to the new face of some young duke who had just taken his seat in the theatre, listen abstractedly to the declaration of love the juvenile lead was addressing to her, while he, through the rolling passion of this declaration, was in turn directing an enamoured eye at an old lady seated in a stage box, whose magnificent pearls had caught his interest; and in this way, largely owing to what Saint-Loup had told me about the private lives of actors, I saw another drama, silent but telling, being played out beneath the words of the play that was being performed, yet the play itself, however uninspired, was still something that interested me too; for within it I could feel germinating and blossoming for an hour in the glare of the footlights, created out of the agglutination on the face of an actor of another face of grease-paint and pasteboard, and on his individual soul the words of a part, the ephemeral and spirited personalities, captivating too, who form the cast of a play, whom one loves, admires, pities, whom one would like to meet again after the play is over, but who by that time have already disintegrated into the actors who are no longer what they were in their roles, into a script which no longer shows the actors' faces, into a coloured powder that can be wiped off by a handkerchief, who

have reverted, in a word, to elements that contain nothing of them, because their dissolution is complete as soon as the play has ended, and this, like the dissolution of a loved one, causes one to doubt the reality of the self and to meditate on the mystery of death.

I found one part of the programme extremely painful. A young woman whom Rachel and several of her friends detested, was to make her debut in a recital of old songs, and she had based all her hopes for her future and her family on its success. This young woman had an unduly, almost absurdly prominent rump and a voice which was pretty but not full enough, a marked contrast to her muscular development and further enfeebled by her nerves. Rachel had placed a number of her friends, male and female, among the audience and instructed them to make sarcastic comments and disconcert the novice, who was known to be timid, to make her lose her head so that her performance would be a complete fiasco, with the result that the manager would refuse to give her a contract. Hardly had the poor woman sung a few notes than several of the male spectators, recruited for the purpose, began pointing at her backside and giggling, while certain women who were also involved in the plot laughed out loud, and with every fluty note that was sung the wilful hilarity increased until it verged on the scandalous. The unfortunate woman, sweating with discomfort under her grease-paint, struggled for a moment to ignore it all but then started to throw miserably angry looks among the audience, which served only to make them boo the louder. The instinct to do what others were doing, the desire to show off their own wit and audacity, caused several pretty actresses who knew nothing of the situation to join in, and they now exchanged with the others glances of malicious complicity, creased themselves into violent outbursts of laughter, so that by the end of the second song (and there were still five more on the programme) the stage manager rang down the curtain. I did my utmost not to dwell on this incident any more than I had dwelt on my grandmother's misery when my great-uncle used to tease her by making my grandfather drink brandy, finding the idea of intentional unkindness too painful to bear. And yet, in the same way that our pity for misfortune perhaps misses the point, since in our imagination we re-create an inflated idea of the pain which the sufferer is too busy combating to think of succumbing to self-pity, so unkindness in the minds of the unkind is probably devoid of the thrill of outright cruelty which we, at such painful cost to ourselves, imagine. Unkindness is inspired by hatred, anger fuels it into action in which there is no great joy; it would take sadism to turn it into something pleasurable; unkind people imagine themselves to be inflicting pain on someone equally unkind. Rachel certainly believed that the actress she was tormenting was far from talented, and that by having her booed, she was at least defending good taste and teaching a poor colleague a lesson. However, I chose not to speak of this incident since I had had neither the courage nor the power to prevent it; I would have found it too difficult to say anything good about the victim without making the feelings which incited the tormentors of the novice look like gratifications of cruelty.

But the beginning of this performance interested me for quite different reasons. It made me realize something about the nature of the illusion of which Saint-Loup was a victim in regard to Rachel, and which had set a gulf between the images we both had of his mistress when we saw her that very morning beneath the blossoming pear trees. Rachel had little more than a walk-on part in the short play. But seen thus, she was another woman. Rachel had one of those faces that distance – and not necessarily that between the auditorium and the stage, the world itself in this respect being merely a larger theatre – throws into sharp outline and which, seen close to, crumbles to dust. Close beside her, all you saw was a nebula, a milky way of freckles, of tiny spots, nothing more. At a respectable distance, all this ceased to be visible, and from the cheeks, now erased and reabsorbed into her features, there rose like a crescent moon, so fine and pure a nose that it made you want to be the object of Rachel's attention, to see her whenever you liked, to keep her near, provided you had not seen her differently and at close range. This was not the case for me, but it had been for Saint-Loup when he first saw her on stage. At that point he had asked himself how he might approach her, get to know her, a whole magical world had opened up inside him – the world in which she lived – and from which came exquisite radiance but into which he could not find a way. He left the theatre telling himself that it would be madness to write to her, that she would not reply, quite prepared to give his fortune and his name for the creature who now lived within him in a world so distinctly superior to such humdrum realities, a world enriched by desire and dream; and at that very moment he saw emerging from the stage-door of the theatre, itself a small old building that seemed to have stepped out of a stage set, the gay and charmingly hatted band of actresses who had just been playing. Young people who knew them stood there waiting for them. The number of pawns on the human chessboard being less than the number of positions they are capable of occupying, in a theatre where all the people we might know are absent, there turns out to be one whom we thought we would never chance to meet again and whose arrival on the scene is so exactly what we need that it seems a providential coincidence, although no doubt some other equally providential coincidence would have occurred had we not been in that place but in some other, where other desires would have arisen and another old acquaintance been there to support them. The golden portals of the world of dreams had closed upon Rachel before Saint-Loup saw her step out of the theatre, so that the freckles and spots did not really matter. Yet he did not like them, the more so because he was no longer alone with the same power to dream he had experienced in the theatre. But she, although he could no longer see it, continued to dictate his actions, like those stars which govern us by their attraction even at the times when they are not visible to us. And so his desire for the actress with the delicate features, which were now not even present in Robert's memory, caused him to foist himself upon the old friend who just happened to be on the spot and get himself introduced to the person with no features at all and with freckles into the bargain, since she was the same person, telling himself that in due course he would see to it that he found out which of the two this same lady really was. She was in a hurry, addressed not a single word to Saint-Loup on this occasion, and it was not until some days later that he finally managed to get her to leave her companions and to walk her home. He was already in love with her. The need for dreams, the desire to be made happy by the woman one has dreamed of, mean that it can take no time at all to settle all one's chances of happiness on someone who a few days earlier was no more than a fortuitous, unknown, commonplace apparition on the boards of a theatre.

When the curtain had fallen and we had moved on to the stage, my shyness at being there drove me to try and enter into a spirited conversation with Saint-Loup: in this way my conduct, since I did not know what sort of attitude to adopt in this unfamiliar setting, would be entirely dominated by our conversation, and people would think that I was so absorbed in it, so distracted, that it was quite natural for my face to express nothing of what was expected in such surroundings, which, deep in talk, I scarcely registered; acting quickly, I seized upon the first topic of conversation that entered my head:

'You know, I said to Robert, I did come to say good-bye the day I left Doncières. I've never had the opportunity to mention it. I waved to you in the street.

– Don't talk about it, Robert replied, I was so upset. I ran into you just by the barracks, but I couldn't stop because I was already so late. I felt really bad about it, believe me.'

So he had seen me! I could still see the utterly impersonal salute he had given me, with his hand raised to his cap and no sign of recognition in his eyes, no gesture to indicate that he was sorry he could not stop. Clearly the pretence of not recognizing me he had adopted at the time must have simplified matters for him greatly. But I was amazed that he had been able to adopt it so swiftly and before some instinctive response had betrayed his initial reaction. I had already observed in Balbec that, compared to the spontaneous sincerity of his face with that transparent skin which revealed the sudden surge of his emotions, his body had been admirably trained to perform a number of the dissimulations demanded by etiquette, and that, like a truly skilled actor, he had the ability, in his regimental and in his society life, to play a succession of different roles. In one of his roles he loved me deeply and behaved towards me almost like a brother; my brother he had been, and was now again, but for a moment that day he had been another person who did not know me and who, with the reins in his hand and his monocle stuck in his eye, without a look or a smile, had raised his other hand to the peak of his cap to give me the regulation military salute!

I moved around among the stage sets, which had not yet been dismantled; seen at close quarters without the effects of distance and lighting that the eminent artist who had painted them had included in his plan, they were a sorry sight, and Rachel, when I moved close to her, was subject to a no less destructive perspective. The curves of her charming nostrils, seen from the auditorium when she was on stage, had, like the scenery, stood out distinctly. Now she was no longer the same person: I recognized her only by her eyes, in which her identity had taken refuge. The form and radiance of this young star, so brilliant a moment ago, had disappeared. By contrast, as if we were to look more closely at the moon and to find that it was no longer pink and gold, on this face that had seemed so smooth before I could distinguish only protuberances, blemishes, hollows. Despite the incoherence into which both this woman's face and the painted backdrops

melted when seen from close to, I was happy to be where I was, to stroll among the sets, in surroundings which my love of nature would have once led me to regard as tiresome and artificial, although Goethe's depiction of them in *Wilhelm Meister*[33] had given them a certain beauty for me; and to my delight, I had already singled out, among the journalists or fashionable people, admirers of the actresses, who were exchanging greetings, talking, smoking, as if this was some gathering in town, a young man in a black velvet toque and hortensia-coloured skirt, his cheeks chalked red like a page from a Watteau album,[34] who with a smile on his lips and his eyes fixed aloft, tracing graceful patterns with the palms of his hands and springing lightly about, seemed so entirely of another species from the sensible people in conventional dress among whom he was pursuing his ecstatic trance like a madman, so removed from the preoccupations of their lives, so anterior to the customs of their civilization, so emancipated from the laws of nature, that it was as restful and refreshing as watching a butterfly fluttering through a crowd to let one's eyes follow, between the various border hangings, the natural arabesques he capriciously traced in his winged, grease-painted frolics. But in the same moment, Saint-Loup got it into his head that his mistress was directing her attention to this dancer, who was now running through a dance figure one last time before his ballet performance, and his face darkened.

'You could look the other way, he said to her darkly. You know that these dancers aren't worth the rope they'd do well to trip over and break their necks. The sort who go about bragging they've been noticed. Anyway, you've heard them tell you to go to your dressing-room and get changed. You'll miss your call again.'

Three men – journalists – noticing how furious Saint-Loup was looking, drew nearer with amusement on their faces to listen in to the conversation. And since some scenery was being set in place on the other side of us, we were pushed into close contact with them.

'Oh, but I know him! he's a friend of mine, cried Saint-Loup's mistress, with her eyes fixed on the dancer. Now there's a beautifully made man for you. Just look at those little hands dancing away like the rest of him!'

The dancer turned his head towards her, and the human being appeared beneath the sylph he was practising to be, the clear grey jelly of his eyes trembled brightly between the stiffened painted eyelashes, and a smile stretched the corners of his mouth in a face that was plastered in rouge; then, to amuse the young woman, like a singer who obligingly hums the tune of the song of hers we have told her we admire, he began to repeat the movement of his hands, mimicking himself in a clever pastiche with the good-humour of a child.

'Oh! isn't it sweet, the way he mimics himself! cried Rachel, clapping her hands.

– Sweetheart, *please*… said Saint-Loup, with utter misery in his voice, don't make an exhibition of yourself like this. I can't stand it. Another word, and I swear I won't go with you to your dressing-room. I'll leave. Come on, don't be difficult… Don't stand around in this cigar-smoke, it'll make you ill,' he added, turning to me with the solicitude he had shown for me since we met in Balbec.

'Oh! I'd be more than happy if you did leave!

– I'm warning you. I won't come back.

– I couldn't wish for anything better.

– Now look here, I promised you that necklace if you behaved nicely, but given the way you're treating me…

– Ah! that doesn't surprise me in the least, coming from you. You make me a promise, and I should have known you wouldn't keep it. You just want the world to know you're made of money. I set less store by it myself. You can keep your bloody necklace. I know someone else who'll give it to me.

– No one else *can* give it to you. I've told Boucheron to keep it for me and he's promised not to sell it to anyone else.

– So that's it! You were out to blackmail me, so you set it all up in advance. It's true what they say; Marsantes, *Mater Semita*, it smells of the race,' retorted Rachel, repeating an etymology based on a gross misinterpretation, for *Semita* means 'path' not 'Semite', but one which the Nationalists applied to Saint-Loup on account of his Dreyfusard views, which, ironically enough, he had borrowed from the actress. (She had less cause than anyone to attribute Jewish origin to Mme de Marsantes, in whom the social ethnographers could manage to find no trace of Jewishness other than her kinship with the Lévy-Mirepox family.) 'But you haven't heard the last of it, believe me. A promise like that is meaningless. You've gone behind my back. Boucheron shall be told about it and he'll be paid twice as much for his necklace. We'll soon see who's right, don't you worry.'

Robert was in the right a hundred times over. But circumstances are always so muddled that the man who is so much in the right might have been in the wrong for once in his life. And I could not help recalling the unpleasant and yet quite innocent remark he had made in Balbec: 'That is how I keep a hold over her.'

'You've got it wrong about the necklace. I made no binding promise to you about it. Once you start doing everything you can to make me leave you, of course I'm not going to give it to you, surely that's obvious. I don't know what you mean about me going behind your back, or setting store by money. No one can say I go about bragging that I'm made of money. I'm always telling you what an impoverished blighter I am. You're taking it all the wrong way, sweetest. You know very well what I set store by. One thing only, and that's you.

– Yes, yes… carry on, do,' she countered ironically with a cut-throat gesture which suggested she was bored to tears. She turned towards the dancer:

'Oh look! he's just wonderful with his hands. I couldn't do what he's doing there, even though I'm a woman.' She went up to the dancer and pointed to the torture written all over Robert's face: 'Look, he can't bear it,' she murmured, in a momentary burst of sadistic cruelty that had nothing at all to do with her genuine feelings of affection for Saint-Loup.

'Listen to me. I'm telling you for the last time. I promise you that you can try as hard as you like, but in a week's time you can be as sorry as you like and I shan't come back. I've had as much as I can take, do you hear, enough is enough. You'll be sorry one day, when it's too late.'

Perhaps his words were sincere and the torture of breaking with his mistress seemed less cruel than that of remaining with her in certain circumstances.

'But, my dear chap, he added, addressing himself to me, you really oughtn't to stay here you know, it'll make you start coughing.'

I pointed to the scenery which blocked my way. He touched his hat lightly and said to one of the journalists:

'Excuse me, would you mind throwing away your cigar? The smoke is bad for my friend.'

His mistress, not bothering to wait for him, was on her way to her dressing-room. She turned and addressed the dancer from backstage: 'Is that what they do with women too, those little hands of yours?' she called, in an artificially melodious tone of girlish innocence. 'You look like a woman yourself. I'm sure I could have a really exciting time with you and a girl I know.

– I'm not aware of any rule against smoking. If people are ill, they should stay at home,' said the journalist.

The dancer smiled mysteriously at the actress. 'Oh! Stop it! You're driving me crazy, she cried. The things we could do together!

– All the same, sir, you are not being very civil about it,' said Saint-Loup to the journalist, still in a mild and courteous tone, and with the matter-of-factness of someone retrospectively appraising the rights and wrongs of an incident that is now closed.

At that moment I saw Saint-Loup raise his arm vertically above his head as if he were signalling to someone I could not see, or like an orchestral conductor, and indeed – without any greater transition than when, in a symphony or a ballet, at the mere movement of a bow, violent rhythms take over from a graceful andante – after the courteous words he had just uttered, he brought down his hand and delivered a resounding smack on the journalist's cheek.

Now that the measured exchanges of the diplomats, the smiling arts of peace, had been followed by the furious onslaught of war, since blows lead to further blows, I should not have been surprised to see the combatants bathed in one another's blood. But what I could not comprehend (like people who feel that the rules

are being broken if a war breaks out between two countries over something which has so far been seen as merely a matter of adjusting a frontier, or if a sick man dies when there was supposedly nothing more to worry about than a swelling of the liver) was how Saint-Loup had been able to follow up his words, which carried a hint of affability, with a gesture which in no way arose out of them, which they had done nothing to anticipate, the gesture of an arm raised in defiance not only of people's rights but of the principle of causality, in a spontaneous generation of anger, a gesture created *ex nihilo*. Fortunately the journalist, who had turned pale and hesitated for a moment as he staggered from the violence of the blow, did not retaliate. As for his friends, one of them had immediately turned away and stared intently into the wings at some non-existent person; the second pretended there was a speck of dust in his eye and began to squeeze his eyelid and screw his face up with pain; the third had rushed away, exclaiming: 'Heavens, I think the curtain's about to go up. We'll never get back to our seats.'

I should have liked to say something to Saint-Loup, but he was so full of his indignation with the dancer that it was pasted all over his very eyes; it distended his cheeks as if they were stretched on an inner framework, so that the agitation within expressed itself in an outward and utter immobility and he had not even the elasticity, the 'play' necessary to take in a word I might say and answer it. The journalist's friends, seeing that the incident was over, returned to his side, still trembling. But, ashamed of having deserted him, they were absolutely determined he should be under the impression that they had noticed nothing. And so they talked at length, one about the dust in his eye, one about his false alarm that the curtain was going up, the third about the astonishing resemblance between someone who had walked by him and his own brother. And they even went as far as to show some disgruntlement that their colleague had not shared these emotional experiences.

'You mean you really didn't notice? Haven't you got eyes in your head?'

– You're a bunch of cowards, the lot of you,' growled the journalist who had been struck.

Heedless of the pretence they had adopted, for to be consistent with it they ought – but they did not think of it – to have made it seem that they did not understand what he meant, they resorted to the kinds of expression traditionally used in such circumstances: 'What's got into you? Keep your hair on. You seem a bit worked up.'

I had realized that morning beneath the pear-blossom that Robert's love for 'Rachel when from the Lord' was based on an illusion. Yet I was no less aware how real the pain arising from that love was. Gradually the relentless pain he had been suffering for the last hour diminished and withdrew inside him, and a zone of accessibility appeared in his eyes. The two of us left the theatre and walked for a while. I had lingered for a moment at a corner of the Avenue Gabriel from which I had often seen Gilberte appear in the past. I tried for a few seconds to recall those distant impressions, then as I moved on at a jog to catch up with Saint-Loup, I saw that a somewhat shabbily dressed gentleman appeared to be talking to him in a fairly confidential manner. I came to the conclusion that this was a personal friend of Robert; meanwhile they seemed to be drawing even closer to one another; suddenly, like some astral phenomenon appearing in the sky, I saw ovoid bodies assuming with dizzying speed all the positions they needed to form an unstable constellation in front of Saint-Loup. Hurled out like missiles from a catapult, there seemed to me to be at least seven of them. They were merely, however, Saint-Loup's two fists, multiplied by the speed with which they were changing place in this apparently ideal and decorative pattern. But this deceptive display was merely a series of punches Saint-Loup was delivering with nothing aesthetic about it, and its aggressive nature first became obvious to me when I saw the state of the shabbily dressed gentleman, who seemed to be losing his self-possession, his jaw and a great deal of blood. He gave false explanations to the people who came up to question him, turned his head to see Saint-Loup finally making off in my direction, stood gazing after him with an offended, crushed, but by no means furious expression on his face. It was Saint-Loup who was furious, although he had received no blow, and his eyes were still blazing with fury when he rejoined me. The incident was in no way connected, as I had supposed, with the assault in the theatre. The man had been loitering about with intent and, seeing Saint-Loup as the handsome soldier he was, had propositioned him. My friend could not get over the effrontery of this 'clique' who no longer even waited for the shades of night before they ventured out, and he spoke of the proposition that had been made with the same indignation that can be found in newspaper reports of armed assault and robbery in broad daylight in the centre of Paris. Yet the victim of Saint-Loup's blows was excusable in one respect: the downward slope brings desire quickly enough to the point of fulfilment for beauty alone to be seen as consent. That Saint-Loup was beautiful was beyond question. Beatings like the one he had just given have this value for men of the type that had accosted him: they make them reflect seriously on their behaviour, though never for long enough to enable them to mend their ways and escape punishment at the hands of the law. And so, although Saint-Loup had thrashed the man without much preliminary thought, all thrashings of this sort, even when they reinforce the law, do nothing to bring uniformity to morals.

These incidents, and particularly the one that most preoccupied him, seemed to have made Robert want to be on his own for a while. After a time he asked me to leave him and go by myself to call on Mme de Villeparisis; he would join me there but preferred that we should not go in together, in order to give the impression that he had only just arrived in Paris rather than that he had already spent part of the afternoon in my company.

As I had imagined before making the acquaintance of Mme de Villeparisis in Balbec, there was a considerable difference between the world in which she lived and that of Mme de Guermantes. Mme de Villeparisis was one of those women who, born of an illustrious family and marrying into another no less illustrious, do not for all that enjoy any great position in the social world, and, apart from a number of duchesses who are their nieces or sisters-in-law, even a crowned head or two, old family connections, entertain in their salons only third-rate guests drawn from the bourgeoisie and from a nobility that is either provincial or tainted, whose presence has long since distanced those of the fashionable and snobbish world who are not constrained to be there through ties of blood or through friendship too old to be slighted. Indeed it had taken me no more than a few minutes to understand, in Balbec, how Mme de Villeparisis had come to be so well informed, better informed than ourselves in fact, about the smallest details of the Spanish tour my father was making at the time with M. de Norpois. But, even knowing this, it was impossible to limit oneself to the notion that the intimacy – of more than twenty years' standing – between Mme de Villeparisis and the ambassador might have been the reason behind the Marquise's loss of status in a world where the most dazzling women made no secret of lovers far less respectable than him, quite apart from the fact that it was probably years since he had been anything more to the Marquise than an old friend. Was it that Mme de Villeparisis had had other affairs in the past? Being then of a more passionate disposition than now, in the appeasement of a pious old age which nevertheless owed something of its colouring to those ardent, vanished years, had she found it impossible, living in the provinces for so long, to avoid certain scandals unknown to a younger generation, which merely noted their effect in the mixed and defective company to be found in her salon, which would otherwise have been among those least contaminated by any base alloy? Had the 'sharp tongue' which her nephew attributed to her made her enemies in those early days? Had it driven her to use certain successes with men as a means to avenge herself on women? All this was possible: nor did the exquisitely sensitive way in which – with such delicate shading of both her words and her tone – Mme de Villparisis spoke of modesty and kindness do anything to invalidate such speculation about her; for those who speak approvingly of certain virtues and even feel their charm with perfect understanding (and will be able to paint a creditable picture of them in their memoirs) often come from, but do not themselves form part of, the silent, uncultivated, artless generation which practised them. They reflect their generation without continuing its ways. In place of the character it possessed, they display a sensibility, an intelligence divorced from their actual behaviour. And whether or not there had been scandals in the life of Mme de Villparisis which had been effaced by the glory of her name, it was her intelligence, the intelligence of a secondary writer far more than that of a woman of rank, that was the real reason for her social decline.

It is true that the qualities which Mme de Villeparisis especially favoured, such as level-headedness and moderation, had nothing very inspiring about them; but to be able to talk about moderation in an entirely convincing way, moderation itself is not enough, and certain of a writer's qualities which entail a somewhat immoderate sense of inspiration are needed; I had noticed in Balbec that the genius of various great artists eluded Mme de Villeparisis and that all she could do was to scoff genteelly at them and to disguise her incomprehension in graceful witticisms. The wit and the grace, to the extent to which they were developed in

her, became themselves – on a different level, and despite the fact that they were used to discredit works of high art – genuinely artistic qualities. Now the effect of such qualities on any social position is, in medical parlance, an elective morbid activity, and it is so unsettling that the most firmly established positions are very quickly affected by it. What artists call intelligence seems pure pretension to the fashionable world, which, incapable of adopting the sole perspective from which artists judge things, and failing to understand the particular attraction which leads them to choose an expression or to draw a parallel, feels their company to be over-demanding and irritating to the point of rapidly developing antipathy. Yet in her conversation, and the same is true of the memoirs that she published later, the kind of gracefulness that Mme de Villeparisis displayed was nothing if not eminently social. Passing over great works without considering them in detail, or sometimes without even noticing them, she retained from the period in which she had lived, and which she depicted with great accuracy and charm, scarcely more than its most frivolous aspects. But a piece of writing, even if it directs itself exclusively to subjects that are not intellectual, is still a work of the intelligence, and to achieve a perfect impression of frivolity in a book, or in a talk which is not dissimilar, requires a measure of seriousness which a purely frivolous person would not be able to muster. In some memoirs written by women and regarded as masterpieces, the sort of sentences people quote as models of unlaboured grace have always made me suspect that in order to achieve such lightness of touch the writer must once have possessed a rather weighty learning, a daunting culture, and that as a girl she probably seemed to her friends an insufferable bluestocking. And between certain literary qualities and lack of social success the connection is so inevitable that reading Mme de Villeparisis's memoirs today, any apposite epithet, any sustained metaphor will be enough for the reader to reconstruct the deep but icy bow that must have been given to the old Marquise on some embassy staircase by a snob like Mme Leroi, who may have left her card when she went to call on the Guermantes, but never set foot in her salon for fear of losing status by frequenting the wives of doctors and solicitors. A bluestocking Mme de Villeparisis may have been in her earliest youth, and, heady with her learning at the time, she had perhaps been unable to resist directing at society people, less intelligent and less educated than herself, the barbed remarks which the victim never forgets.

Again, talent is not a separate appendage which can be artificially attached to the other qualities which lead to social success to create the overall picture of what society people call a 'complete woman'. It is the living product of a particular mould of character which generally lacks a great many qualities and is dominated by a sensibility whose manifestations are not evident in a book but may make a fairly vivid impact in the course of a life: certain curious traits for instance, certain whims, the desire to go to this place or that for one's own pleasure and not with a view to the broadening, the maintenance or the mere exercise of social relations. In Balbec I had seen Mme de Villeparisis locked in her own circle and not even glancing at the people sitting in the hotel foyer. But I had the feeling that this abstention did not point to indifference on her part, and it seems that she had not always confined herself to it. She would suddenly get it into her head to make the acquaintance of some individual or other who had no claim to her society, sometimes because she thought him good-looking, or simply because she had been told he was amusing, or because he had seemed different from the people she knew, and they at the time, when she had not yet begun to appreciate them because she thought they would never abandon her, all belonged to the cream of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. To the bohemian or petit-bourgeois she had singled out with her favour she was obliged to address invitations, whose value he was unable to appreciate, with an insistence that gradually lowered her status in the eyes of the snobs who were in the habit of rating a salon by the people its mistress excluded rather than by those she received. Indeed, if at some stage in her youth Mme de Villeparisis, in blasé smugness at belonging to the flower of the aristocracy, had somehow amused herself by scandalizing the people of her world, and deliberately undermining her social status, she had begun to attach importance to that status once she had lost it. She had wanted to show the duchesses that she surpassed them all, by saying and doing all the things they dared not say or do. But now that they had ceased to call, apart from those who were closely related to her, she felt herself diminished and was anxious to regain her sovereignty, but by other means than her wit. She would have liked to attract all those whom she had taken such pains to distance from her. How many women's lives, lives so little known in fact (for we all know a different aspect of them according to our age, and the discretion of their elders prevents the young from having any real idea of the past and grasping a whole life-cycle), have been divided in this way into contrasting periods, the last entirely devoted to recuperating what in the second had been so blithely cast to the winds! Cast to the winds in what way? The young are all the less capable of imagining it, since what they see before them is an elderly and respectable Mme de Villeparisis and cannot conceive that the solemn memorialist of today, so dignified beneath her wig of white hair, might once have been the toast of supper-parties, who was perhaps the delight, who perhaps devoured the fortunes, of men long since in their graves. That she should have also worked, with the perseverance and the ingenuity that came naturally to her, to undo the social status she owed to her high birth does not in any way imply that, even in that remote period of her youth, Mme de Villeparisis did not attach great importance to her position. In the same way, the neurasthenic can contrive the web of isolation and inactivity in which he lives from morning to night without it seeming any the more bearable, and as he hastens to add another mesh to the net that holds him captive, it is possible that he is dreaming only of dancing, sport and travel. We constantly strive to give our life its form, but by copying, in spite ourselves, like a drawing, the features of the person we are and not the person we should like to be. Mme Leroi's disdainful acknowledgements might somehow indicate the true nature of Mme de Villeparisis; they in no way matched up to what she really wanted.

No doubt at the very moment when Mme Leroi was *cutting* her – to borrow an expression dear to Mme Swann – the Marquise could seek consolation by remembering how Queen Marie-Amélie had once said to her: 'You are like a daughter to me.' But royal favours of this kind, secret and undisclosed, existed for the Marquise alone, as dusty as the diploma of some former star pupil at the Conservatoire. The only real social advantages are those that create something living, and can disappear without the person who has benefited by them needing to try to cling to them or make them known, because in the same day a hundred more will take their place. Mme de Villeparisis might well remember the words of the Queen, but she would have traded them gladly for Mme Leroi's permanent ability to be invited everywhere, just as, in a restaurant, a talented but unknown artist whose genius is written neither in the features of his diffident face nor in the outmoded cut of his threadbare jacket, would readily change places with the young broker from the lowest ranks of society, but who is dining with two actresses at a neighbouring table and upon whom, in an obsequious and incessant bustle, owner, manager, waiters, pages dance attention; even the kitchen staff file out of the kitchen to salute him, as in fairy-tales, while the wine waiter comes forward, as dusty as his bottles, hobbling and dazed as if, coming up from the cellar, he had twisted his foot before emerging into the light of day.

Yet it must be said that if Mme Leroi's absence from Mme de Villeparisis's salon distressed the mistress of the house herself, it went unnoticed by a large number of her guests. They were completely ignorant of Mme Leroi's peculiar social position, which was known only to the fashionable world, and they never doubted that Mme de Villeparisis's receptions were, as the readers of her memoirs today are convinced that they must have been, the most brilliant in Paris.

On this first visit which, following the advice M. de Norpois had given to my father, I went to pay Mme de Villeparisis after leaving Saint-Loup, I found her in a drawing-room hung with yellow silk, against which the sofas and the admirable armchairs upholstered in Beauvais tapestry stood out with the almost violet pink of ripe raspberries. Side by side with portraits of the Guermantes and the Villeparisis were others – gifts from the sitters themselves – of Queen Marie-Amélie, of the Queen of the Belgians, of the Prince de Joinville and the Empress of Austria. Mme de Villeparisis, in an old-fashioned bonnet of black lace (which she insisted on wearing with the same shrewd instinct for local or historical colour as a Breton hotelier who, however Parisian his clientele may have become, sees it as more astute to keep his maids in coifs and wide sleeves), was seated at a little desk on which, along with her brushes, her palette and the beginnings of a water-colour of flowers, were a number of glasses, saucers and cups containing moss-roses, zinnias, maidenhair ferns, which she had stopped painting because of the present influx of visitors, and which looked like a display on a florist's counter from some eighteenth-century print. In this drawing-room, which had been deliberately slightly heated because the Marquise had caught cold on the way back from her country residence, among those present when I arrived were an archivist with whom Mme de Villeparisis had spent the morning sorting the autograph letters addressed to her by various historical figures which were to be presented in facsimile as documentary evidence in the memoirs she was preparing for publication, and a solemn, overawed historian who had heard that there was an inherited portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency in her possession and had come to ask her permission to reproduce it as a plate in his work on the Fronde,

these two guests being joined by my old school-friend Bloch, now an up and coming dramatist upon whom she counted to secure free performances from actors and actresses for her future afternoon receptions. It is true that the social kaleidoscope was in the process of shifting and that the Dreyfus case was about to hurl Jews to the lowest rung of the social ladder. But, for one thing, however fiercely the Dreyfus cyclone was raging, it is not at the onset of a storm that the waves are at their most violent. And then, Mme de Villeparisis, leaving a whole part of her family to thunder against the Jews, had so far kept utterly aloof from the affair and never gave it a second thought. Finally, a young man like Bloch who was unknown to the world could pass unnoticed, whereas important Jews representative of their side were already threatened. Bloch's chin was now punctuated by a goatee, he wore a pince-nez and a long frock coat, and in his hand he carried a glove like a roll of papyrus. The Rumanians, the Egyptians, the Turks may hate the Jews. But in a French salon the differences between those peoples are not so evident, and a Jew making his entry as though he were coming in from some remote part of the desert, his body bent forward like a hyena, his neck sloped forward, offering effusive 'salaams', satisfies in every way a taste for things oriental. The only requirement necessary is that the Jew in question should not 'belong' in social terms, otherwise he will quickly assume the demeanour of a lord and his manners become so Gallicized that his recalcitrant nose, growing like a nasturtium in unpredictable directions, will be more reminiscent of Mascarille[35] than of Solomon. But, for a lover of the exotic, Bloch, who had not been limbered up by the gymnastics of the Faubourg Saint-Germain or ennobled by cross blood from England or Spain, remained, in spite of his European dress, as strange and savoury a spectacle as a Jew in a painting by Decamps.[36] How admirable the power of the race which from the depths of time thrusts forward right into modern Paris, into the corridors of our theatres, behind the counters of our public offices, at a funeral, in the street, an inviolate phalanx, setting its mark on the styles of modern hairdressing, absorbing, making us forget, disciplining the frock coat, which in the end has remained identical with the garment of the Assyrian scribes as they are depicted in their ceremonial robes on the frieze of a monument at Susa in front of the gates of the palace of Darius.[37] (An hour later, Bloch was to read anti-semitic malice into M. de Charlus's asking him whether his first name was Jewish, whereas it was simply from aesthetic interest and love of local colour.) But in any case, to speak of racial continuity is to give an inaccurate picture of the impression we receive from the Jews, the Greeks, the Persians, from all those races we would do better to leave to their variousness. We know the faces of the ancient Greeks from classical paintings, we have seen Assyrians on the pediment of the palace at Susa. And so when we actually meet Orientals belonging to a particular group, we feel that we are in the presence of creatures spirited before our eyes by necromancy. Our image of them so far has been a superficial one; now it has acquired depth, it has become three-dimensional, it moves. The young Greek banker's daughter who is such a society favourite at present, seems like one of those dancers in a ballet, at once historical and aesthetic, who symbolize Hellenic art in flesh and blood; yet the theatre setting makes these images seem banal; by contrast, the spectacle before us when a Turkish lady or a Jewish gentleman enters a drawing-room and their features are set in motion is stranger still, as if they really were creatures evoked by the efforts of a medium. It is the soul (or rather the tiny shred to which the soul is reduced, up until now at least, in this sort of materialization), it is the soul we have so far glimpsed only in museums, the soul of the ancient Greeks, the ancient Hebrews, torn from a life at once insignificant and transcendental, which seems to be performing this disconcerting pantomime in our presence. What we seek in vain to embrace in this elusive young Greek woman is the figure we admired long ago on the side of a vase. I felt that if I had taken some photographs of Bloch against the background of Mme de Villeparisis's salon, they would have produced an image of Israel like the images in spirit photographs – so disturbing because they do not appear to emanate from humanity, so disappointing because they none the less resemble humanity too closely. And more generally, there is nothing, not even the insignificance of the remarks made by the people among whom we spend our lives, that does not offer a sense of the supernatural, in our poor everyday world where even a man of genius from whom, as we gather around him like a séance table, we wait to hear the secret of the infinite, simply utters the words – words which had just escaped from Bloch: 'Take care of my top hat.'

'Good gracious, ministers, my dear sir,' Mme de Villeparisis was saying, directing her remarks at my old school-friend as she resumed the thread of a conversation which my arrival had interrupted, 'nobody wanted to see ministers. I was only a child at the time, but I can still remember the King begging my grandfather to invite M. Decazes[38] to a rout at which my father was to dance with the Duchesse de Berry. "It will give me pleasure, Florimond," said the King. My grandfather, who was a little deaf, thought he had said M. de Castries, and so found nothing unusual about the request. When he understood it was M. Decazes, he bridled at first then complied and wrote the same evening to M. Decazes, begging him to favour him with the honour of his presence at the ball which he was giving the following week. For we had manners in those days, sir, and no hostess would have dreamed of merely sending her card and writing on it "Tea" or "Tea dance" or "Music". But if we knew about manners, impertinence was not unknown to us either. M. Decazes accepted, but the day before the ball people were informed that my grandfather was indisposed and had cancelled the rout. He had obeyed the King, but he had not had M. Decazes at his ball… Yes, I remember M. Molé[39] very well indeed. He was a man of wit, as he showed when he received M. de Vigny at the Académie, but he stood too much on ceremony. I can see him now coming down to dinner in his own house with his top hat in his hand.

– Ah! it all evokes a rather pernicious, philistine period. It was undoubtedly a universal habit to carry one's hat in one's own house,' said Bloch, who was keen to make the most of this rare opportunity to acquaint himself with the details of former aristocratic life from an eyewitness, while the archivist, in his capacity as a sort of occasional secretary to the Marquise, threw tender glances in her direction as if to convey to us: 'There, you can see what she's like, she knows everything, she's known everybody, you can ask her about anything, she's an extraordinary woman.'

'It was certainly not,' replied Mme de Villeparisis as she drew towards her the glass containing the maidenhair fern which she would continue painting presently. 'It was just something particular to M. de Molé. I never saw my father carrying his hat in the house, except of course when the King came, because the King is at home wherever he is, and the master of a house then becomes a mere visitor to his own drawing-room.

– 'Aristotle tells us in chapter two of…' ventured M. Pierre, the Fronde historian, but so timidly that no one paid any attention. He had been suffering for some weeks from nervous insomnia which resisted every kind of treatment, had given up going to bed and, crippled with exhaustion, went out only when his work made it necessary. Incapable of repeating too often the expeditions which others find so simple but which cost him as much effort as if he had to come down from the moon, he was frequently surprised by the fact that other people's lives were not organized in some permanent way to provide maximum utility to his own sudden bursts of activity. Sometimes he would find a library closed after setting out to visit it, something he achieved only by planting himself artificially on his feet and into a frock coat like a character from a story by Wells.[40] Luckily he had found Mme de Villeparisis at home and was to be shown the portrait.

Bloch cut him short.

'Really,' he interrupted, responding to Mme de Villeparisis's remarks about the etiquette observed for royal visits, 'I never knew that' (as though it were strange for him not to know).

'Since we're on the subject of royal visits, do you know the stupid joke my nephew Basin played on me yesterday morning? Mme de Villeparisis asked the archivist. Instead of announcing his arrival, he sent word to say that the Queen of Sweden had called to see me.

– What? Just like that with a straight face! What a joker!' exclaimed Bloch, guffawing with laughter, while the historian confined himself shyly to a stately smile.

– I was rather surprised, because I had only been back from the country for a few days. I wanted to be left in peace for a while and I had given instructions that no one was to be told I was in Paris. So I wondered how the Queen of Sweden could know of my presence so soon,' continued Mme de Villeparisis, leaving her visitors with the startled intelligence that a visit from the Queen of Sweden was nothing out of the ordinary for their hostess.

If Mme de Villeparisis had spent the morning sifting through the documentation of her memoirs, she was now unconsciously gauging the sort of spell they might cast on an average audience, typical of the public from whom she would one day draw her readers. Her salon might be different from a truly fashionable

one, which would not be frequented by many of the bourgeois ladies she entertained and in which one would have encountered instead the sort of brilliant women that Mme Leroi had finally managed to attract, but nothing of this is perceptible in her memoirs, where certain dull acquaintances of the author's have disappeared because there is no reason for them to be included; and the visitors who did not frequent her salon leave no gap in her work because, in the necessarily restricted space available, there is room for only a few figures, and if they happen to be royal personages, historic personalities, then the utmost impression of elegance that any memoir can present to the public has been achieved. In Mme Leroi's opinion, Mme de Villeparisis's salon was third-rate; and Mme de Villeparisis was stung by that opinion. But hardly anyone today knows who Mme Leroi was, her opinions have completely vanished, and it is the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, frequented by the Queen of Sweden, and before her by the Duc d'Aumale, the Duc de Broglie, Thiers, Montalambert, Mgr Dupanloup, which will be regarded as one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century by that posterity which has not changed since the days of Homer and Pindar, and in whose eyes the enviable signs of status are high birth, royal or quasi-royal, the friendship of kings, of leaders of the people and renowned men generally.

Now of all these Mme de Villeparisis had a smattering in her present salon and in her memories – sometimes slightly embellished ones – by means of which she extended it into the past. And then there was M. de Norpois, who was not able to restore his friend to any genuine position in society, but who nevertheless provided her with foreign or French statesmen who were in need of his support and who knew that the only effective way of gaining it was to court him by frequenting Mme de Villeparisis. Perhaps Mme Leroi also knew these European celebrities. But as an amiable woman who avoided any hint of bluestocking behaviour, she would no more have allowed herself to mention the Eastern question to a prime minister than she would have discussed love with a novelist or a philosopher. 'Love?' she had once replied to a pretentious lady who had asked for her views on the subject, 'I make love often but I never discuss it.' Like the Duchesse de Guermantes, when she received literary or political celebrities, she limited herself to having them play poker. They often preferred this to the serious conversations on general ideas Mme de Villeparisis forced upon them. But conversations of this kind, however ridiculous in society gatherings, have provided the 'Souvenirs' of Mme de Villeparisis with excellent passages, those political dissertations which read as well in memoirs as they do in Cornelian tragedy. And again, the salons of the Mme de Villeparisis of this world are the only ones that are destined for posterity because the Mme Lerois of this world are not writers, and if they were they would not have the time for it. And if the literary disposition of Mme de Villeparisis and her kind is the cause of the disdain of the Mme Lerois, in its turn the disdain of the Mme Lerois performs a singular service to the literary disposition of the Mme de Villeparisis by creating the leisure that bluestocking ladies require for the pursuit of their literary careers. Thus God, whose will it is that a few well-written books should exist, breathes disdain into the hearts of the Mme Lerois, for he knows that should they invite the Mme de Villeparisis to dinner, then these would immediately leave their writing-desks and order their carriages for eight o'clock.

Shortly afterwards an old lady entered with slow and solemn steps; she was tall in stature and beneath the raised brim of her straw hat she revealed a monumental pile of white hair, dressed in the style of Marie-Antoinette. I did not know at the time that she was one of three women still to be seen in Parisian society who, like Mme de Villeparisis, while of noble birth, had been reduced, for reasons now lost in the mists of time and known only to some old beau of their generation, to receiving only the dregs of society who were not welcome elsewhere. Each of these ladies had her 'Duchesse de Guermantes', the brilliant niece who dutifully paid her respects, but none of them could have managed to attract to her house the 'Duchesse de Guermantes' of either of the others. Mme de Villeparisis saw much of these three ladies, but she did not like them. Perhaps the similarity between their position and her own created a disagreeable impression for her. There was also the fact that they were soured bluestockings who sought, through the number of theatrical entertainments they hosted, to delude themselves they kept a salon, and there was a rivalry between them, which the considerable erosion of their fortunes in the course of their rather unruly lives, by obliging them to watch their purse strings and to rely on the charity of the actors they used, transformed into a sort of life struggle. And again, the lady with the Marie-Antoinette coiffure, whenever she set eyes on Mme de Villeparisis, could not help being reminded of the fact that the Duchesse de Guermantes did not come to her own Friday receptions. She was consoled by the unfailing presence at these Fridays of hers of her dutiful relation, the Princess de Poix, her own special Guermantes, who never went near Mme de Villeparisis, despite the fact that she was an intimate friend of the Duchesse.

Nevertheless from the mansion on the Quai Malaquais to the salons of the rue de Tournon, the rue de la Chaise and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, a bond as strong as it was hateful united these three fallen divinities and I should have been keen to learn, from the pages of some dictionary of society mythology, what amorous adventure, what sacrilegious presumption, had brought about their punishment. The same distinguished origins, the same present fall from favour, were no doubt largely responsible for the sort of compunction that drove them, while hating each other, to seek one another's society. And indeed each one found in the others a convenient way of flattering her guests. How could such guests fail to imagine that they had entered the innermost circle of the Faubourg when they were presented to a lady with a whole string of titles whose sister was married to a Duc de Sagan or a Prince de Ligne? Especially since there was infinitely more newspaper coverage of these bogus salons than of the genuine ones. Even the upper-crust nephews of these ladies – with Saint-Loup first and foremost – when asked by a friend to introduce him into society, would say: 'I'll take you to my aunt Villeparisis's, or to my aunt X's. You meet interesting people in their salon.' They were only too well aware that this would give them less trouble than getting their friends invited by the fashionable nieces or sisters-in-law of these ladies. I was told by old men whose memories went back a long way, and by young women who had heard it from these old men, that if these ladies were now socially excluded it was because of their extraordinarily dissolute past, and, when I objected that dissolute conduct was no obstacle to social success, they painted a picture of it as something utterly in excess of anything to be met with today. On the lips of those who told the tale, the misconduct of these solemn, poker-backed ladies became something I was incapable of imagining, something on a prehistoric scale belonging to the age of the mammoth. In a word, these three Fates with their white or blue or pink hair had spun the ruin of innumerable gentlemen. It occurred to me that men of today exaggerated the vices of the fabled past, like the Greeks who created Icarus, Theseus, Hercules out of men who were not so different from those who turned them into gods long after. But the list of a person's vices is compiled only when he has almost ceased to able to indulge them, when from the extent of his social punishment, which is nearing its end and which is the only available evidence, we measure, we imagine, we exaggerate the magnitude of the crime that has been committed. In the gallery of symbolic figures which constitutes 'society', the really dissolute women, the dedicated Messalinas,[41] always appear as a lady of at least seventy, solemn and haughty, who receives everyone she can but not everyone she would like to, her society shunned by women whose own conduct is not above reproach, a regular recipient of the papal 'Golden Rose',[42] and as often as not the author of a book on Lamartine's early years that has been crowned by the Académie française. 'Alix, how are you?' said Mme de Villeparisis, greeting the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair, the which lady scoured the assembled company in search of some item in this salon which might be of value to her own, in which case she would have to discover it for herself, for Mme de Villeparisis, she had no doubt, would be cunning enough to try and hide it from her. This is why Mme de Villeparisis took good care not to introduce Bloch to the old lady in case she asked him for the same theatricals he was producing here for her own salon on the Quai Malaquais. Besides, it was a mere matter of giving as good as she got. For the evening before the old lady had had Mme Ristori[43] reciting poetry and made sure that Mme de Villeparisis, from whom she had filched the Italian artist, remained in ignorance of the event until it was over. So that she should not read about it in the papers and feel offended, the old lady had come along to tell her about it, as if there were no question of guilt involved. Judging that to introduce me to her would not entail the same drawbacks as the introduction of Bloch, Mme de Villeparisis made me known to the Marie-Antoinette of the Quai Malaquais. This lady, who sought, by making the fewest possible movements, to preserve in her old age the goddess-like contour of a Coysevox[44] sculpture which had cast its spell on the fashionable youth of years ago and which was still celebrated in rhyming verse by literary hacks – and who had acquired the habit of that haughty, compensatory stiffness shared by all those whose ill-favoured looks oblige them to be the ones who are continually making advances – almost imperceptibly bowed her head with icy majesty, turned away and took no more notice of me than if I had not existed. This dual attitude seemed to be a way of conveying to Mme de Villeparisis: 'You see, I'm not *that* short of acquaintances, and young men don't interest me – in any sense, you mean

old bat.' But fifteen minutes later when she took her leave, she took advantage of the hubbub of voices and slipped into my ear an invitation to join her box on the following Friday with another of the three whose illustrious name – she had been born a Choiseul in fact – made a prodigious impression on me.

'I do believe, M'sieur, that you want to write somethin' on Mme la Duchesse de Montmorency,' said Mme de Villeparisis to the Fronde historian in the gruff manner in which her enormous kindness was unwittingly scrunched up by the shrivelled sulkiness and physiological frustration of old age, as well as her foible for imitating the almost rustic parlance of the old aristocracy. 'I'll show you her portrait, the original of the copy in the Louvre.'

She put down her brushes beside the flowers and rose to her feet, revealing the little apron at her waist which she used to keep the paint from her dress and which heightened still further the almost rustic impression created by her bonnet and her big spectacles, in sharp contrast to the luxury of her household, the butler who had brought in the tea and cakes, the liveried footman for whom she rang to light up the portrait of the Duchesse de Montmorency, abbess of one of the most famous chapters in Eastern France.[45] Everyone had risen to their feet. 'It's amusin' to think, she said, that these chapters where our great aunts were often abbesses would not have admitted the daughters of the King of France. They were very exclusive. – Not admitted the King's daughters! exclaimed Bloch in amazement, Why ever not? – Why, because the House of France had insufficient quarterings after that misalliance.' Bloch's amazement increased. 'A misalliance in the House of France? But when? – When they married into the Medicis, of course, replied Mme de Villeparisis in the most natural tone in the world. It's a fine portrait, don't you think? and perfectly preserved,' she added.

'My dear,' said the lady with the Marie-Antoinette hair, 'don't you remember when I brought Liszt to see you? He said that this one was the copy.

– I bow to Liszt's judgment of music, but not to his judgment of painting! Besides, he was already gaga at the time, and I don't remember him saying any such thing. But it wasn't you who brought him here. I had dined with him a dozen times before at the Princess de Sayn-Wittgenstein's.'

Alix's jibe had backfired. She said no more and stood there motionless. Her face was plastered with layers of powder and looked like a face of stone. And with her noble profile, she seemed, on the triangular, moss-covered pedestal hidden by her cape, like a crumbling goddess in a park.

'Ah! I can see another fine portrait,' said the historian.

The door opened and the Duchesse de Guermantes entered the room.

'Oh, good evening,' said Mme de Villeparisis, greeting her without so much as a nod of the head and taking from her apron pocket a hand which she held out to the new guest; then, ceasing at once to pay further attention to her, she turned back to the historian. 'That is the portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld …'

A young servant with a bold manner and a charming face (but so finely pared down in its perfection that the nose was a little red and the skin slightly inflamed as if they were still smarting from the recent effects of the sculptor's chisel) came in with a card on a salver.

'It's the gentleman who has already called several times to see Mme la Marquise.

– Did you tell him I was at home?

– He heard the voices.

– Oh, very well then, show him in. It's a gentleman who was introduced to me, said Mme de Villeparisis. He told me he would very much like to be allowed to call on me. I certainly didn't say he might do so. But he's taken the trouble to call five times now, and one shouldn't hurt people's feelings. Monsieur, she said to me, and you, Monsieur, to the Fronde historian, let me introduce my niece, the Duchesse de Guermantes.'

The historian joined me in making a low bow and, apparently thinking that some sort of friendly form of words ought to follow, his eyes livened and he was just about to speak when his spirit was dampened by the demeanour of Mme de Guermantes, who had taken advantage of the independence of her torso to throw it forward with exaggerated politeness and bring it exactly back into position without letting her face or eyes give any indication that anyone was there before them; after a little sigh the only other sign she gave of the nonentity of the impression made on her by the sight of the historian and myself was to perform various movements of her nostrils with a precision that was clear enough proof of the total inertia of her attention: it had nothing better to do.

The importunate visitor came into the room and made straight for Mme de Villeparisis in an artless, fervent manner: it was Legrandin.

'It is so very kind of you to allow me to call, Madame,' he said, with great emphasis on the word 'very'. The pleasure it gives to an old solitary like myself is of a rare and subtle quality. You may be sure that its repercussion…'

He stopped short as he caught sight of me.

'I was just showing this gentleman my fine portrait of the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, the wife of the author of the *Maximes*. It's a family heirloom.'

Meanwhile Mme de Guermantes greeted Alix and presented her apologies for having been prevented, that year as in every previous year, from calling on her. 'I hear all about you from Madeleine,' she added.

'She lunched with me at home today,' said the Marquise of the Quai Malaquais, basking in the thought that Mme de Villeparisis could never say the same.

Meanwhile I had been talking to Bloch, and fearing, from what I had been told of his father's change of attitude towards him, that he might be envying my life, I said to him how much happier his own must be. My remark was simply an attempt to be friendly. But people who have a high opinion of themselves are quick to respond to such friendliness as a confirmation of their own good fortune, or feel the need to convince others of it. 'Yes, I do live a charmed life, Bloch responded smugly. I've three really good friends – quite enough for me – and an adorable mistress. I couldn't be happier. Rare is the mortal to whom Father Zeus grants so much felicity.' I think his main intention was to congratulate himself and make me envious. But there was perhaps some desire to be original in his optimism. It was obvious that he did not want to trot out the same banalities as everyone else – 'Oh, it was nothing really' and so forth – when I asked him: 'Was it nice?' in relation to an afternoon dance at his house which I had been unable to attend, and he replied with studied indifference, as if it were someone else's dance: 'Why, yes, it was very nice, couldn't have been more successful. Enchanting, now I think about it.'

'What you are telling us interests me enormously, said Legrandin to Mme de Villeparisis. In fact I was saying to myself only the other day that you bore a strong resemblance to him in the clarity and alertness of your turn of phrase, in something which I will express in two contradictory terms: succinct rapidity and immortal instantaneousness. I should like to have noted down all the things you have said this afternoon; but I shall remember them. As Joubert[46] puts it – I think it's Joubert – they are conducive to the memory. You've never read Joubert? Oh! he would have been such an admirer of yours! I shall take the liberty of sending you his works this very evening. It will be an honour to introduce you to his mind. He lacked your vigour. But like you he had great elegance of expression.'

I had wanted to go and greet Legrandin at once, but he kept himself as far away from me as he could, no doubt in the hope that I might not hear the highly refined flatteries he kept lavishing on Mme de Villeparisis at every turn of their exchange.

She shrugged her shoulders with a smile, as though he had been making fun of her, and turned to the historian.

'And this is the famous Marie de Rohan, Duchesse de Chevreuse, whose first husband was M. de Luynes.

– My dear, Mme de Luynes reminds me of Yolande; she was with me yesterday. If I'd known you weren't engaged yesterday evening, I'd have sent word for you to come. Mme Ristori was there as it happened, and recited some poems by Queen Carmen Sylva[47] in the author's presence. Too too beautiful!'

'Treacherous woman! *That's* what she was whispering about the other day with Mme de Beaulaincourt and Mme de Chaponay,' thought Mme de Villeparisis. She replied: 'I was free in fact, but I would not have come anyway. I heard Mme Ristori in her great days before she was the wreck she is now. And I hate Carmen

Sylva's poetry. Ristori came here once – the Duchesse d'Aoste brought her – to recite a canto of Dante's *Inferno*. In that sort of poetry she's incomparable.'

Alix bore the blow without flinching. A block of marble. Her gaze was piercing and blank, her nose nobly arched. But one cheek was flaking. A hint of strange green and pink vegetation was invading her chin. Another winter perhaps would lay her low.

'If you're fond of painting, Monsieur, then do take a look at the portrait of Mme de Montmorency,' said Mme de Villeparisis to Legrandin in an attempt to stall off a renewed flurry of compliments.

Taking advantage of his moving away, Mme de Guermantes indicated him to her aunt with an ironical, questioning movement of her eyes.

'It's M. Legrandin, murmured Mme de Villeparisis. He has a sister called Mme de Cambremer, not that it will mean any more to you than it does to me.

– What! But it does. I know her very well!' exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, clapping her hand to her mouth. 'Or rather, I don't know her, but Basin, who for some reason or other meets the husband heaven knows where, took it into his head to tell the vile woman to call on me. Call she did. I can't begin to tell you. She told me she had been to London and gave me an endless catalogue of every picture in the British Museum. And just as you see me now, the moment I leave here, I'm going to drop my card on the monster. And she's no easy monster to deal with, believe me, because on the pretext that she's at death's door she's always at home. You can call at seven at night or nine in the morning and there she is, ready for you with her strawberry tarts. No, but I mean what I say, she really is a monster, said Mme de Guermantes as she met her aunt's questioning glance. She's an impossible woman. She uses words like "pen-pushing", that sort of thing. – What does "pen-pushing" mean? Mme de Villeparisis asked her niece. – I haven't the faintest idea! exclaimed the Duchesse in mock indignation. I don't want to know. I don't speak that sort of language.' And seeing that her aunt really did not know what the word meant, to give herself the satisfaction of showing off her learning as well as her purism, and to make fun of her aunt after making fun of Mme de Cambremer, she said with a stifled laugh which was controlled by the last traces of her mock ill-humour: 'But of course I know, everyone knows: a pen-pusher is a writer, someone who wields a pen. But it's a horrible word. It's enough to make you lose your wisdom teeth. I'll never be persuaded to use a word like that … So that's her brother, is it? I still can't get the idea into my head. But then it's not utterly beyond belief, I suppose. They both have that door-mat humility and the mental resources of a circulating library. She's just as sycophantic and just as annoying as he is. I think I begin to see the family likeness.

– Sit down and have some tea, said Mme de Villeparisis to Mme de Guermantes. Help yourself. You don't want to spend your time looking at the portraits of your great-grandmothers. You know them as well as I do.'

After a while, Mme de Villeparisis went back to sit down at her painting. Everyone gathered round her and I took this opportunity to go up to Legrandin; without any sense that there was anything reprehensible in his presence in Mme de Villeparisis's salon, I said, never dreaming how much my words would both hurt him and cause him to believe that this was my intention, 'Well, Monsieur, I feel almost excused from being in a salon now that I find you in one too.' Legrandin drew the conclusion from this (at least this is what he accused me of a few days later) that I was a thoroughly spiteful young person who delighted only in being nasty.

'You might at least have the manners to say good day to me first,' he replied, without offering me his hand and in a coarse and angry voice I did not know he possessed and which, though it bore no rational connection with his normal manner of speaking, conveyed something more immediately striking about what he was feeling. It is true that, since we are always concerned to hide our feelings, we never think about the manner in which we express them. Then suddenly there is this obscene and unfamiliar animal inside us making itself heard, in a voice that can sometimes even manage to frighten the recipient of the involuntary, elliptical and almost irresistible disclosure of our defect or vice, as much as the sudden avowal indirectly and weirdly blurted by a criminal, who cannot refrain from confessing to a murder of which no one had ever thought him guilty. I knew of course that idealism, even subjective idealism, did not prevent great philosophers from remaining gourmands or from endless attempts to be elected to the Académie. But Legrandin really had no need to remind people so often that he belonged to another planet when all his violent impulses of anger or affability were governed by his desire for social status on this one.

'Naturally, when people pester me time and time again for my company, he went on in hushed tones, although I'm perfectly free to do what I choose, I can't really behave like a boor.'

Mme de Guermantes had sat down. Her name, accompanied as it was by her title, gave to her physical person the added projection of her duchy, which brought the shaded, golden freshness of the Guermantes woods to dominate this drawing-room, all around the pouffe on which she was sitting. I was surprised only that the likeness of these woods was not more evident on the face of the Duchesse, which had nothing suggestive of vegetation and on which only her blotchy cheeks – they ought, one felt, to have been emblazoned with the name Guermantes – gave any sign of the effect, not the reflection, of long gallops in the open air. Later, when I had become indifferent to her, I was to know many of the Duchesse's distinctive features, notably (to keep for the moment to what already charmed me at the time without me being able to recognize it) her eyes, which captured like a picture the blue sky of an afternoon in the French countryside, broad and expansive, drenched in light even when there was no sun; and a voice which one would have thought, from its first hoarse sounds, to be almost common, in which there lingered, as on the steps of the Combray church or the pâtisserie on the square there, the lazy, rich gold of provincial sunlight. But on this first occasion I recognized nothing, my impassioned attention immediately dispelled the little I might have been able to take in to help me try and grasp something of the name Guermantes. What I did manage to tell myself was that this was the person designated for the whole world by the title Duchesse de Guermantes: the inconceivable life behind that name was indeed contained by this body which had just introduced that life into a gathering of various different people, in this salon which enclosed it on every side and on which it produced so vivid an effect that I felt I could see, at the point at which this life ceased to radiate, a fringe of effervescence outlining its frontiers – within the circumference of the circle marked out on the carpet by her ballooning skirt of painted blue silk, and in the bright eyes of the Duchesse at the intersection point of the preoccupations, the memories, the incomprehensible, scornful, amused and curious thoughts that filled them, and the external images reflected on their surface. It is possible that I should not have been quite so deeply stirred had I met her at one of Mme de Villeparisis's evening parties, instead of seeing her like this at one of the Marquise's 'at homes', one of those tea-parties which for women represent no more than a brief pause in their outings, during which they keep on the hats in which they have been doing their shopping and bring the flavour of the air outside into a whole succession of salons, offering a better view of Paris in the late afternoon than the tall open windows through which the rumble of victorias can be heard: Mme de Guermantes wore a straw hat trimmed with cornflowers; and what they evoked for me was not the sunlight of distant years falling on the tilled fields of Combray, where I had so often gathered them on the slope along the Tansonville hedge, but the scent and dust of twilight as they had been a little earlier when Mme de Guermantes walked through them down the rue de la Paix. With a smiling, disdainful, abstracted air, and a pout on her pursed lips, she was tracing circles on the carpet with the tip of her sunshade, as with the extreme point of an antenna of her mysterious life, then, with that indifferent attention which begins by obliterating every point of contact between what one is gazing at and oneself, her eyes fastened upon each of us in turn, then inspected the sofas and chairs, but softened now by that human sympathy which is aroused by the presence, however insignificant, of a familiar object, an object which is almost a person; the furniture was not like us, it belonged vaguely to her world, it was associated with the life of her aunt; then, from a Beauvais chair her eyes were brought back to the person sitting on it, and assumed once more the same perspicacious gaze of a disapproval which the respect Mme de Guermantes felt for her aunt would have prevented her from voicing, but which she would have felt had she noticed on the chairs, not our presence, but that of a spot of grease or a layer of dust.

The excellent writer G*** entered the room; he had come to pay a call on Mme de Villeparisis, something he regarded as an irksome duty. The Duchesse, who was delighted to see him again, gave no hint of greeting, but he instinctively made his way towards her, since her charm and tact singled her out for him as a woman of intelligence. In any case, common politeness demanded that he should go and talk to her for, since he was a pleasant and celebrated character, Mme de Guermantes often had him to lunch even when her husband and herself were alone, or would take advantage of her intimacy with him to invite him to dine

occasionally, when she was at Guermantes in the autumn, with members of royalty who were curious to meet him. For the Duchesse liked to entertain certain distinguished men, but only if they were bachelors, a role they always adopted for her even when they were married, for since their wives, who were invariably more or less humdrum, would have cast a slur on a salon graced only by the most fashionable beauties in Paris, their husbands were always invited on their own; and the Duc, to avert any hurt feelings, would explain to these reluctant widowers that the Duchesse never received women, could not endure feminine company, almost as if he were repeating doctor's orders on the matter, and as he might have said that she could not stay in a room where there were smells, take too much salt in her food, travel with her back to the engine or wear a corset. It is true that at the Guermantes' these distinguished men would see the Princess of Parma, the Princesse de Sagan (whom Françoise, hearing the name so frequently mentioned, had taken to calling 'La Sagante' in the belief that grammar demanded a feminine ending), and many more besides, but were told that the presence of these women was justified by the fact that they were relations, or such very old friends that it was impossible to exclude them. Whether or not they were convinced by the explanations given by the Duc de Guermantes about the Duchesse's singular phobia towards the company of women, the great men duly transmitted them to their wives. Some of these wives were of the opinion that the phobia was nothing more than an excuse to conceal her jealousy, because the Duchesse wanted to reign unrivalled over a court of worshippers. Others who were even more simple-minded thought that perhaps the Duchesse was so peculiar, or even had so scandalous a past, that women were loath to visit her, and that what she called caprice was in fact some failing she could do nothing to change. The more astute among them, hearing their husbands recount marvels about the Duchesse's wit, came to the conclusion that she must be so superior to other women that she was bored in their company because they were incapable of intelligent conversation. And it was true that the Duchesse was bored by other women, unless their princely status aroused her particular interest. But the excluded wives were wrong to imagine that she chose to entertain men only in order to discuss literature, science and philosophy with them. For she never spoke about such subjects, at least not in the company of great intellectuals. If, by virtue of the same sort of family tradition that makes the daughters of great soldiers preserve a respect for military matters even when they are at their most frivolous, she felt, as the granddaughter of women who had been on good terms with Thiers,[48] Mérimée and Augier,[49] that there must always be a place in her salon for men of intellect, she had at the same time retained from the manner, both condescending and familiar, in which those famous men had been received at Guermantes, the habit of treating men of talent as family friends whose talent does not blind one to them, to whom one does not speak of their work, and who would be bored if one did. Again, the type of mind that is characteristic of Mérimée and Meilhac and Halévy, and was also hers, led her, in contrast to the verbal sentimentality of an earlier generation, to adopt a style of conversation that rejects everything to do with grandiloquence and the expression of lofty feeling, so that when she was with a musician or a poet she made it seem somehow stylish to talk only of the food they were eating or the card-game that was to follow. For a stranger not really familiar with her manner, this abstention had a disturbing, even mystifying effect. If Mme de Guermantes asked him if he would like to be invited with some famous poet, he would arrive at the appointed hour, devoured by curiosity. The Duchesse would talk to the poet about the weather. They would then pass to table. 'Do you like eggs cooked in this way?' she would ask the poet. If he approved, and it was an approval she shared, for everything in her house seemed exquisite to her, even the dreadful cider she had sent from Guermantes: 'Give Monsieur some more eggs,' she would tell the butler, while the anxious third party sat waiting for what surely must have been what she and the poet had met to discuss, since they had squeezed in this meeting with great difficulty before the latter's departure from Paris. But the meal would go on, the courses be cleared away one after the other, providing Mme de Guermantes with plentiful opportunities for witty humour or telling anecdotes. Meanwhile the poet would go on eating without either the Duc or the Duchesse showing any sign of remembering that he was a poet. Eventually the lunch would be over and farewells exchanged, without a word having been said about poetry, which they nevertheless all admired but to which, out of a reserve similar to that of which Swann had given me a foretaste, no one referred. The reserve was simply a matter of good form. But to an outsider, if he gave any thought to it, there was something deeply depressing about it, and these meals with the Guermantes would then seem rather like the hours which diffident lovers often spend together discussing trivialities until it is time to part, without – whether from shyness, modesty or awkwardness – the great secret which they would have been happier to disclose ever passing from their hearts to their lips. Yet it must be said that this silence on deep matters that one was always waiting in vain to hear addressed, even if it could be seen as characteristic of the Duchesse, was not an unbending rule with her. Mme de Guermantes had spent her girlhood in a somewhat different environment, equally aristocratic but less glittering and above all less futile than her present one, and highly cultured. This meant that her present frivolity was grounded in a sort of firmer bedrock, an invisible nourishment to which the Duchesse had recourse (very rarely in fact, for she loathed pedantry) when she needed a quotation from Victor Hugo or Lamartine; the quotation was always perfectly to the point, uttered with a look of conviction from her lovely eyes, and it never failed to surprise and charm people. On occasion, unassumingly and with pertinent directness, she would even give some dramatist and Academician a piece of shrewd advice, make him modify an element of his plot or change the ending of his play.

If, in the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, as in the Combray church on the day of Mlle Percepied's wedding, I had difficulty rediscovering in the lovely, all too human face of Mme de Guermantes the enigma of her name, I thought at least that when she spoke, her conversation would be profound and mysterious, strange as a mediaeval tapestry or a Gothic window. For me to avoid being disappointed by the words I should hear uttered by someone who called herself Mme de Guermantes, even if I had not been in love with her, those words would have had to be more than subtle, beautiful and profound, they would have had to reflect the amaranth colouring of the last syllable of her name, the colour which, since I first set eyes upon her, I had been amazed not to find in her person and had then relegated to her mind. True, I had heard Mme de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup, people of quite ordinary intelligence, pronounce the name Guermantes unguardedly, simply as the name of someone who was coming to visit them or with whom they were to dine, without seeming to feel that the name carried with it wooded slopes of yellowing leaves and a whole mysterious corner of the country. But this must have been an affectation on their part, as when classical poets give us no warning of the profound intention they nevertheless had, an affectation I tried hard to imitate by saying as naturally as I could: 'The Duchesse de Guermantes', as though it were a name like any other. Besides, other people asserted that she was a very intelligent woman, a witty conversationalist, living in a small coterie of highly interesting people: words which came to collude with my dream. For when they spoke of a coterie of intelligent people, of witty exchange, it was in no way intelligence as I knew it that I imagined, not even the intelligence of the greatest minds; it was not at all people like Bergotte that I imagined in this coterie. No, intelligence in this context meant for me an ineffable, golden faculty, impregnated with the cool of the forest. And had she made the most intelligent remarks (in the sense I gave the word when it was applied to philosophers or critics), Mme de Guermantes would perhaps have dashed my expectation of so special a faculty even more keenly than if, in the course of a casual conversation, she had confined herself to talking about cooking recipes or the furnishings of a country house, to listing the names of her neighbours or relatives, in an attempt to give me a picture of her life.

'I thought Basin would be here. He was meaning to come and see you, said Mme de Guermantes to her aunt.

– I haven't seen your husband for several days, replied Mme de Villeparisis in a hurt and angry voice. Indeed, I haven't seen him – or perhaps I have once – since that charming joke of having himself announced as the Queen of Sweden.'

By way of a smile, Mme de Guermantes pinched up the corners of her lips as though she were biting her veil.

'We had dinner with her last night at Blanche Leroi's. You wouldn't have recognized her. She's put on an enormous amount of weight. I'm sure she must be ill.

– I was just telling these gentlemen that you thought she looked like a frog.'

Mme de Guermantes made some kind of hoarse sound which indicated that she was laughing for form's sake.

'I don't remember making such a charming comparison, but if I likened her to a frog, then she's now a frog that has managed to swell to the size of an ox.[50] But that's not very well put, because all the swelling is concentrated on her stomach. So let's call her a frog in an interesting condition.

– Oh. I do find the comparison funny,' said Mme de Villeparisis, secretly proud that her guests should be sampling her niece's wit.

‘It is purely arbitrary, all the same,’ replied Mme de Guermantes, ironically emphasizing her choice of adjective as Swann would have done, ‘for I have to say that I’ve never seen a frog about to give birth. Be that as it may, the frog in question has no need of a king. I’ve never seen her so frisky as she’s been since her husband died, and she’s coming to dine with us one day next week. I said I’d let you know just in case.’

Mme de Villeparisis let out something like a muffled groan and said:

‘I know she was dining the night before last at Mme de Mecklenburg’s. Hannibal de Bréauté was there. He came and told me about it. I have to say his account was quite amusing.

– There was someone there who is far wittier than Babal,’ said Mme de Guermantes, who, close friend though she was of M. de Bréauté-Consalvi’s, felt the need to advertise the fact by using this pet name. ‘I mean M. Bergotte.’

It had never occurred to me that Bergotte could be regarded as witty; what is more, I thought of him as one of the world’s intellects, by which I mean infinitely removed from the mysterious realm I had glimpsed beneath the purple hangings of a theatre box in which M. de Bréauté had been making the Duchesse laugh and holding with her, in the language of the gods, that unimaginable thing: a conversation between people of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. I was distressed to see the balance upset and Bergotte ranking above M. de Bréauté. But above all I was devastated to think that I had avoided Bergotte on the evening of *Phèdre*, that I had not gone to speak with him, when I heard Mme de Guermantes, in whom one could always, as in the turn of a mental tide, see the flow of curiosity about famous intellectuals sweep past the ebb of her aristocratic snobbery, go on to say to Mme de Villeparisis:

‘He’s the one person I would really like to know. It would be such a pleasure.’

With Bergotte at my side – and his presence would have been easy to secure, had I not imagined that it would give Mme de Guermantes a bad impression of me – I would no doubt have ended up being invited to join her in her box and asked to bring the great writer along to lunch one day.

‘I gather he behaved rather badly. He was presented to M. de Cobourg and didn’t address a word to him,’ Mme de Guermantes continued, stressing this peculiar fact as she might have recounted that a Chinese had blown his nose on a piece of paper. ‘He never once called him “Your Highness”,’ she added, apparently amused at this detail, as significant to her as the refusal of a Protestant, in the course of an audience with the Pope, to go down on his knees before His Holiness.

Although she stressed these peculiarities of Bergotte’s, she did not, however, appear to find them reprehensible, but seemed rather to find merit in them, though quite why she would have found it hard to say. Despite her odd way of appreciating Bergotte’s eccentricity, the fact that, greatly to the surprise of many people, Mme de Guermantes found Bergotte wittier than M. de Bréauté, was to strike me later as not entirely negligible. It so happens that such subversive judgments, infrequent but – contrary to expectation – right, are made in the world of society by those rare people who are superior to the rest. And they provide the first rough outlines for the hierarchy of values as the next generation will establish it, instead of holding on eternally to the old.

The Comte d’ Argencourt, the Chargé d’ Affaires at the Belgian Embassy and a second cousin by marriage of Mme de Villeparisis, came limping into the room, followed shortly after by two young men, the Baron de Guermantes and H. H. the Duc de Châtellerault, whom Mme de Guermantes greeted with a ‘Good evening, my dear Châtellerault’; this was uttered in an abstracted manner and without moving from her pouffe, for she was great friend of the young man’s mother, and so since his childhood he had had the deepest respect for her. Tall, slim, with golden hair and skin, utterly Guermantes in type, these two young men seemed to condense in their persons the light of the spring evening which was flooding the large drawing-room. Following a fashionable quirk of the time, they set their top hats on the floor beside them. The Fronde historian saw this as a sign of embarrassment, as if they were peasants entering the mayor’s chambers and not knowing what to do with their hats. Feeling that he ought out of charity to come to the rescue of what he saw as their awkwardness and diffidence, he protested: ‘No, no, don’t leave them on the floor, they’ll be trodden on.’

A glance from the Baron de Guermantes, tilting the plane of his pupils, shot from them a sudden flash of unadulterated, piercing blue which froze the well-intentioned historian.

‘What is that gentleman’s name?’ the Baron asked me (Mme de Villeparisis had just introduced us).

‘M. Pierre, I whispered.

– Pierre what?

– Pierre is his surname. He’s a highly rated historian.

– Really? Is that so…

– No, it’s a new fashion with these gentlemen to put their hats on the floor, Mme de Villeparisis explained. I’m like you, I can’t get used to it. But it’s better than my nephew Robert, who always leaves his in the hall. When he comes in hatless, I tell him he looks like a clockmaker and ask him if he’s come to wind the clocks.

– You were speaking earlier, Madame la Marquise, of M. Molé’s hat. We shall soon be able, like Aristotle, to write a whole chapter on the subject,’ said the Fronde historian, now somewhat reassured by Mme de Villeparisis’s remarks, but in so faint a voice that no one heard him except me.

‘Our little Duchesse is really astonishing,’ said M. d’Argencourt, pointing to Mme de Guermantes talking to G***. ‘The minute there’s a prominent man in the room, you’ll always find him talking to her. That obviously has to be today’s pundit with her there now. It can’t always be M. de Borelli, or M. Schlumberger or M. d’Avenel. And if it’s not, it’s got to be M. Pierre Loti or M. Edmond Rostand.[51] Yesterday evening at the Doudeauvilles’ – she was looking splendid by the way in her emerald tiara and a pink dress with a long train – she had M. Deschanel[52] on one side and the German Ambassador on the other. She was proving their equal in a discussion about China. Lesser minds, at a respectful distance where they couldn’t hear the conversation, were wondering whether there wasn’t going to be a war. She really was like a queen enthralling the circle around her.’

People had gathered around Mme de Villeparisis to watch her paint.

‘Those flowers are a really celestial pink, said Legrandin, or rather sky-pink. Sky-pink does exist, you know, like sky-blue. But, he added in a murmur, in the hope that only the Marquise would hear, I think I am even more in favour of the silkiness, the living rosy tints of your way of painting them. Ah, you leave those over-detailed, lifeless plant depictions of Pisanello and van Huysum[53] far behind.’

An artist, however ordinary, is always ready to be set above his rivals, but does try to ensure that they get the appreciation they deserve.

‘Your impression of them stems from the fact that they painted flowers of their time which are no longer familiar to us, but they did it with enormous skill.

– Ah, flowers of their time! exclaimed Legrandin, What an ingenious idea!

– I see you’re painting some lovely cherry blossoms… or are they mayflowers?’ said the Fronde historian, in some doubt about which flower, but with a note of confidence in his voice, now that the business of the hats was beginning to fade from his mind.

‘No, they’re apple-blossom, said the Duchesse de Guermantes, addressing her aunt.

– Ah, I can see you’re a good countrywoman like me. You know your flowers.

– Why, yes, of course they are! but I thought the apple-blossom season was already over, hazarded the Fronde historian, to cover his blunder.

– Quite the contrary, in fact. The trees aren't in blossom yet. It will take another fortnight, even three weeks,' said the archivist, who had some slight connection with the management of Mme de Villeparisis's estates and was better informed on country matters.

'Yes, and even around Paris, they are very early, said the Duchesse. In Normandy, you know, at his father's place, she added, pointing to the Duc de Châtellerault, there are some magnificent apple trees near the sea, like a Japanese screen. They never turn really pink until after the twentieth of May.

– I never get to see them,' said the young Duc. Can you believe it, they give me hay fever.

– Hay fever? I've not heard of that before, said the historian.

– It's the fashionable complaint at the moment, said the archivist.

– It all depends: you're unlikely to get it if it's a good year for apples. You know what they say in Normandy: "When it's a good year for apples",' said M. d'Argencourt, who, not being French, was always trying to behave like a Parisian.

'You're quite right, Mme de Villeparisis replied to her niece, these blossoms are from the south. They were sent by a florist who asked me to accept them as a present. You're surprised, M. Vallenères, she said turning to the archivist, that a florist should send me branches of apple-blossom? I may be an old woman, but I do still have a few friends in the world,' she added with a smile that most people might have taken as a sign of her simplicity, though it seemed to me that it arose from the fact that she found it titillating to pride herself on friendship with a mere florist when she had such grand connections.

Bloch got up and came across in his turn to admire the flowers that Mme de Villeparisis was painting.

'Never mind, Marquise, said the historian, sitting down again, even if we were to have another of those revolutions which have stained so much of our history with blood – and, Heaven help us, these days one can never tell,' he added, looking circumspectly around the room, as if to make sure that there were no 'heretics' in the company, though he was sure that there were not, 'with a talent like yours and the five languages you speak, no harm could ever come to you.' The Fronde historian was feeling somewhat at ease, his insomnia forgotten. But he suddenly remembered that he had not slept for six days, at which juncture a deep weariness, mentally induced, took hold of his legs and bowed his shoulders, while his distressed face drooped like a old man's.

Bloch was anxious to express his admiration with some suitable gesture, but managed only to knock over the vase containing the spray of blossom with his elbow, and all the water was spilled on the carpet.

'You really have a magic touch,' the historian said to the Marquise, turning his back as he spoke, and not noticing Bloch's clumsy gaffe.

But Bloch thought the remark had been addressed to himself, and to cover his shame, retorted insolently: 'There's not the least cause for alarm. The water didn't touch me.'

Mme de Villeparisis rang and a footman appeared to wipe the carpet and pick up the pieces of glass. She invited the two young men to an afternoon party she was giving, and also Mme de Guermantes, whom she instructed as follows:

'Don't forget to tell Gisèle and Berthe' (the Duchesse d'Auberjon and the Duchesse de Portefin) 'to be there a little before two o'clock so that they can help me,' as she might have instructed hired waiters to come early and do the fruit arrangements.

She behaved towards her princely relatives, as she behaved towards M. de Norpois, with none of the tokens of affability she showed to the historian, Cottard, Bloch and myself, and seemed to regard them merely as useful fodder for our curiosity. This was because she knew that she need not put herself out for people who regarded her not as a more or less brilliant woman, but as the sister of their father or uncle, a touchy woman who required careful handling. It would have been pointless for her to try and shine in their presence; there was no way of deceiving them about the strength or weakness of her social position, for they knew her whole story all too well and respected her illustrious origins. But, above all, she had come to regard them as dead stock which would never bear fruit again; they would never introduce her to their new friends, or share their pleasures with her. All they could give her was their presence or the possibility of speaking about them at her five o'clock receptions, as she did later on in the pages of her memoirs, for which these receptions were only a sort of rehearsal, a preliminary reading aloud of the material before a select audience. And the group of people which all these noble relations enabled her to interest, to dazzle, to enslave, the Cottards, the Blochs, the well-known dramatists, the historians of the Fronde and so forth, these were the people who, for Mme de Villeparisis – in the absence of that section of fashionable society which did not go to her house – created movement, novelty, entertainment and life; these were the people from whom she was able to derive social advantages (which made it worth her while to let them meet the Duchesse de Guermantes every now and then, yet without ever getting to know her): dinners with distinguished men whose work had interested her, a light opera or a pantomime staged complete by its author in her salon, boxes for entertainments of special interest. Bloch got up to go. He had said aloud that the business of the broken flower-vase did not matter in the least, but what he said under his breath was different, and more different still what he thought: 'If people can't train their servants to put vases where they won't risk soaking or even injuring their guests, then they oughtn't to surround themselves with such luxuries,' he muttered crossly. He was one of those touchy, highly-strung people who cannot bear to have made a blunder, will not admit it to themselves, and whose whole day is ruined by it. He was in a black rage that was dissuading him from ever going into society again. Some distraction was crucial at that moment. Fortunately, Mme de Villeparisis was about to press him to stay. Either because she was aware of the views of her friends and the rising tide of anti-semitism, or simply out of absent-mindedness, she had not introduced him to anyone in the room. But he, with his relative lack of social experience, felt that it was the done thing to take his leave of them, out of politeness, but without warmth; he bowed his head several times, thrusting his bearded chin into his stiff collar, and eyed everyone there in turn through his pince-nez with cold dissatisfaction. But Mme de Villeparisis detained him; she still needed to discuss the little play that was to be performed in her house, and she did not want him to leave before she had given him the satisfaction of meeting M. de Norpois (whose failure to appear surprised her); this introduction to Norpois was in fact an unnecessary inducement, for Bloch had already made up his mind to persuade the two actresses he had mentioned to come and sing at the Marquise's for free, in the interest of boosting their careers at one of those receptions frequented by the elite of European society. He had even proposed, as an additional attraction, a tragic actress 'with blue-green eyes, beautiful as Hera', who would recite lyrical prose with a feeling for 'plastic beauty'. But when she heard the actress's name Mme de Villeparisis had declined. It was the name of Saint-Loup's mistress.

She whispered in my ear: 'I have better news. I think the whole thing is on its last legs and that it won't be long before they break with each other. In spite of the officer who has played such an abominable part in the whole affair,' she added. (For Robert's family were beginning to resent M. de Borodino with a vengeance; he had given Robert leave, at the hairdresser's entreaty, to go to Bruges, and they accused him of furthering a scandalous liaison.) 'He's a very wicked man,' said Mme de Villeparisis in that virtuous tone of voice common to all the Guermantes, even the most depraved. 'Very, very wicked,' she repeated, rolling her rs emphatically. It seemed to imply that she had no doubt that the man was present at all their orgies. But since her overriding quality was kindness, the Marquise's expression of frowning severity towards the dreadful captain, whose name she uttered with an ironical emphasis: 'The Prince de Borodino!' as a woman for whom the Empire carried no weight, melted into a gentle smile towards me, and a mechanical twitch of the eyelid indicating a vague complicity between us.

'I used to have a lot of time for de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, said Bloch, dirty rascal that he is, because he's extremely well-bred. Now I don't. But I do like well-bred people very much, they're so rare,' he went on, without realizing, with his own distinctive lack of breeding, how offensive his words were. 'I'll give you an example, a very striking one in my view, of his perfect breeding. I once met him with a young man just as he was about to leap into his wheelèd chariot, after he himself had buckled the splendid harness on two steeds nourished with oats and barley, who had no need of the flashing whip to urge them on. He introduced us, but I didn't catch the young man's name. In fact you never catch people's names when they are introduced, he added with a laugh, this being one of his father's

witty remarks. De Saint-Loup-en-Bray didn't stand on ceremony, made no fuss about the young man, seemed absolutely at ease. And by pure chance I found out a few days later that the young man was the son of Sir Rufus Israels!'

The end of this story sounded less shocking than its beginning, since it remained incomprehensible to everyone in the room. The fact was that Sir Rufus Israels, whom Bloch and his father regarded as an almost royal figure, one to be trembled at by the likes of Saint-Loup, was in the eyes of the Guermantes world merely a foreign upstart, socially tolerated, but not a man whose friendship was anything to boast about – quite the contrary!

'I found out, said Bloch, from Sir Rufus Israels's representative, a friend of my father's and a quite remarkable man. An outstanding individual in fact,' he added with the assertive force and enthusiastic tone we bring only to convictions that are not our own. 'But tell me, he asked me, lowering his voice, how much money do you think Saint-Loup has? Not that it matters to me a hoot, you understand. I'm only asking from a Balzacian point of view. You don't happen to know what it's in, do you? French stocks? Foreign ones? Land or what?'

I could give him no information whatsoever. Returning to his normal voice, Bloch asked very loudly if he might open the windows, and without waiting for an answer, went to do so. Mme de Villeparisis said that it was out of the question because of her cold. 'Oh, well, if it's bad for you! said Bloch dispiritedly. But it's like a hothouse in here!' And breaking into a laugh, he cast his eyes about the room in an appeal for support against Mme de Villeparisis. He found none, from these well-bred people. His blazing eyes, after failing to seduce the other guests, reverted in resignation to their previously grave expression; he acknowledged defeat with: 'The temperature's at least twenty-two. Twenty-five even? I'm not surprised. I'm practically dripping all over. And unlike the sage Antenor, son of the river Alpheus, I do not have the power to bathe my sweat in the paternal wave, then lay my body in a bath of polished marble and anoint myself with fragrant oils.' And with the need that people feel to outline for the benefit of others medical theories that might be suitably applied to their own state of health: 'Well, if you think it's good for you! I really can't see it myself, quite the opposite in fact. It's exactly what is giving you your cold.'

Bloch had expressed delight at the idea of being introduced to M. de Norpois. He would like, he said, to get him to talk about the Dreyfus case.

'I find his way of thinking rather difficult to understand and it would be stimulating to have an interview with such an important diplomat,' he said with sarcasm, to avoid any suggestion that he might consider himself inferior to the ambassador.

Mme de Villeparisis was embarrassed that he had said this so loud but forgot her embarrassment when she saw that the archivist, whose Nationalist views kept her, so to speak, on a leash, was standing too far off to have overheard. But what offended her more was to hear Bloch, led on by the demon of the ill breeding which made him blind to the effect of what he said, asking her with a laugh as he mimicked his father's jesting manner:

'Haven't I read some learned work of his in which he gives a string of irrefutable arguments to prove that the Russo-Japanese war was bound to end in a Russian victory and a Japanese defeat? And isn't he getting a bit past it? I'm sure he's the one I saw taking aim at his chair before sliding his way over to it as if he was on castors.

– Most certainly not! Just wait a minute, said the Marquise, I can't think what he can be doing.'

She rang, and when the servant appeared, since she made no secret of the fact, indeed liked to broadcast it, that her old friend spent most of his time in her house, she gave him an order:

'Go and tell M. de Norpois to come. He's sorting some papers in my study and he said it would take twenty minutes. I've been waiting for an hour and three-quarters. He'll talk to you about the Dreyfus case or about anything you care to discuss, she said to Bloch in an offended voice. He doesn't really approve of what's happening.'

For M. de Norpois was not on good terms with the ministry of the time, and Mme de Villeparisis, although he had never taken the liberty of bringing government figures to her house (as a great lady of the aristocracy she still remained aloof, outside and above the relations he was obliged to cultivate in his work), was kept informed by him of what was going on. Likewise, these politicians of the present regime would not have dared to ask M. de Norpois to introduce them to Mme de Villeparisis. But several of them had gone to see him at her country house when they needed his advice at points of crisis. They knew the address. They went to the house. They did not see the house's mistress. But at dinner she would say: 'I hear they've been here bothering you. Are things any better?'

'You're not too pressed for time? Mme de Villeparisis asked Bloch.

– Not at all. I was thinking of leaving because I'm not very well. In fact I may well have to take a cure at Vichy for my gall bladder, he replied, articulating these words with wicked irony.

– Why, that's just where my great-nephew Châtellerault has to go. You ought to fix it up together. Is he still here? He's such a nice young man, you know,' said Mme de Villeparisis, sincerely perhaps, thinking that two people she knew had no reason not to be friends with each other.

'Oh, I don't know that he would care for that, I don't… I hardly know him. He's over there,' said Bloch, not knowing where to turn in his delight.

The butler cannot have carried out the orders he had been given about M. de Norpois correctly. For the diplomat, to give the impression that he had just come in from the street and had not yet seen his hostess, had picked up the first hat he saw in the vestibule and came up to kiss Mme de Villeparisis's hand with much ado, enquiring after her health as attentively as people do after a long separation. He had no idea that the Marquise had completely undermined the plausibility of this charade prior to his appearance, and she now put an end to it by leading M. de Norpois and Bloch into an adjoining room. Bloch, who had noticed all the polite attention that was being paid to a man he did not yet know to be M. de Norpois, and the formal, gracious, deep bows with which the ambassador responded, was feeling inferior to all this ceremonial and vexed to think that it would never be addressed to him; as a way of appearing to be at ease, he had said to me: 'Who is that old fool?' It was also possible that all this deference to M. de Norpois had really shocked the better part of Bloch's nature, the freer and more spontaneous manner of the modern generation, and that he was partly sincere in scoffing at it. Be that as it may, his ridicule turned to delight the moment he himself became the object of such attention.

'Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, said Mme de Villeparisis, I should like you to meet this gentleman. Monsieur Bloch, Monsieur le Marquis de Norpois.' She always made a point, despite the way she bullied M. de Norpois, of addressing him as 'Monsieur l'Ambassadeur' as a point of etiquette, out of an exaggerated respect for his position as ambassador, a respect which the Marquis had inculcated in her, and also with the intention of treating one particular man with those less familiar, more ceremonious marks of respect which, in the salon of a distinguished woman, in contrast to the freedom with which she treats her other regular guests, mark out that man immediately as her lover.

M. de Norpois sank his blue gaze into his white beard, bent his tall body down deeply as if he were bowing before all the renowned and imposing resonances of the name Bloch, and murmured: 'I'm honoured', while his young interlocutor, moved, but feeling that the distinguished diplomat was going too far, hastened to correct him: 'But no! On the contrary, it is I who am honoured!' But this ceremony, which M. de Norpois, out of friendship for Mme de Villeparisis, repeated for the benefit of every unfamiliar face his old friend introduced to him, seemed to her to be insufficiently cordial for someone like Bloch, to whom she said:

'Now just ask him anything you want to know. Take him aside if it suits you better. He'll be delighted to talk to you. Didn't you want to talk to him about the Dreyfus case?' she added, no more considering whether this would be agreeable to M. de Norpois than she would have thought of seeking the consent of the Duchesse de Montmorency's portrait before having it lighted up for the historian, or of the tea before she offered a cup of it to someone.

'You'll need to speak up, she said to Bloch, he's a little deaf, but he'll tell you all you want to know. He knew Bismarck very well, and Cavour. It's true, is it not?' she said, raising her voice, 'you knew Bismarck well.

– Are you busy writing something at the moment?' Monsieur de Norpois asked me knowingly as he shook my hand warmly. I took advantage of this to relieve him of the hat which he had felt obliged to bring with him as a sign of formality; I had just noticed that it was my own that he had picked up at random. 'You once showed me a rather over-written little piece, rather too finicky in manner. I gave you my frank opinion: what you had done was not worth the paper it was written on. But perhaps you are preparing something for us now? You're very taken with Bergotte, if I remember rightly. – I won't hear a bad word against Bergotte! exclaimed the Duchesse. – I don't deny his painterly gifts, Duchesse. Who would? He knows all about engraving and etching, even brushwork on a large scale, like M. Cherbuliez.[54] But in my view there is a confusion about genre these days; a novelist's business is to weave a plot and inspire his readers' emotions, not to fuss about the detail of a frontispiece or tailpiece in dry point. I shall be seeing your father on Sunday at our good friend A. J.'s,' he added, turning to me.

I had hoped for a moment, when I saw him talking to Mme de Guermantes, that he would perhaps help me to get myself invited by her in the way he had not done in regard to Mme Swann. 'Elstir is another of my great favourites, I said to him. I gather that the Duchesse de Guermantes has some wonderful paintings by him, particularly that one of a bunch of radishes I saw at the Exhibition. I'd love to see it again. What a masterpiece it is!' And indeed, had I been a prominent figure and asked to say which was my favourite painting, I should have said Elstir's bunch of radishes.

'A masterpiece! exclaimed M. de Norpois in astonished disapproval. It can't even claim to be a picture. It's a mere sketch.' (He was right.) 'If you call an eye-catching trifle like that a masterpiece, what will you have to say about Hébert's *Virgin* or Dagnan-Bouveret?[55]

– I heard you refusing to receive Robert's lady friend,' said Mme de Guermantes to her aunt, after Bloch had taken the ambassador aside. 'I don't think you'll be missing much. A perfect horror, you know. Not an ounce of talent, and grotesque to look at.

– Are you telling us that you know her, Duchesse? said M. d'Argencourt.

– Indeed I am. Haven't you heard that she performed at my house before anyone else's? Not that that's anything to be proud of,' replied the Duchesse with a laugh, happy none the less, since the actress was the subject of conversation, to let it be known that she had been the first to sample her absurdities. 'Oh well, I suppose I'd better be going,' she added, without moving.

She had just seen her husband enter the room, and her last words were an allusion to the comic aspect of them appearing to be paying a call together like a newly married couple, and not to the often strained relations that existed between her and this strapping pleasure-seeker, who was getting on in years, but who still led the life of a young bachelor. Scanning the considerable crowd of people gathered around the tea-table with the affable, roguish gaze – slightly dazzled by the rays of the setting sun – of the small round pupils lodged right in the centre of his eyes, like the bull's-eye targets which his expertise as a marksman never failed to hit to perfection, the Duc picked his way slowly through the room with caution and wonderment, as though, intimidated by such a brilliant gathering, he was afraid of treading on ladies' skirts and interrupting conversations. The fixed smile on his face, suggestive of a slightly tipsy Good King Wenceslas, and the half-open hand floating like a shark's fin at his side, which he allowed to be clasped indiscriminately by his old friends and by the strangers who were introduced to him, enabled him, without having to make a single movement or to interrupt the genial leisureliness of his royal progress, to respond more than adequately to the pressing attentions of all by simply murmuring: 'Evening, old boy; evening, my dear chap; delighted, Monsieur Bloch; evening, Argencour'; and when he got to me and heard my name, I was the most favoured of all: 'Good evening, my young neighbour, is your father well? Such an admirable man!' He became effusive only for Mme de Villeparisis, who greeted him with a nod of the head, taking her hand from the pocket of her little apron.

As a man who was formidably wealthy in a world where people were becoming less so, and having long accustomed himself to the idea of his enormous fortune, he had the vanity both of the great nobleman and of the man of means, the refined breeding of the former only just managing to hold in check the smug assurance of the latter. But it was also possible to see that his success with women, which caused such grief to his wife, was not due simply to his name and his fortune, for he was still a very handsome man with a profile that retained the purity, the firmness of outline of a Greek god's.

'So she actually performed at your house? M. d' Argencourt asked the Duchesse.

– Well, how can I put it? She came to recite with a bunch of lilies in her hand, and more lilies *awn'er* dress.' (Mme de Guermantes, like Mme de Villeparisis, affected an extremely rustic pronunciation for certain words but, unlike her aunt, she never rolled her *r*s.)

Before M. de Norpois, forced to comply with his hostess's wishes, took Bloch into the small recess where they could talk together, I went up to the old diplomat for a moment and put in a word about my father's academic chair. His first reaction was to try and postpone the conversation to some future occasion. I made the point that I would soon be leaving for Balbec. 'What? Off to Balbec again? What a globe-trotter you are!' He then gave me his attention. At the name Leroy-Beaulieu, M. de Norpois shot me a suspicious look. It crossed my mind that he had said something disparaging about my father to M. Leroy-Beaulieu and feared that the economist had repeated it to him. All at once, he seemed to be stirred by a genuine affection for my father. And after one of those lulls in speech out of which a word suddenly explodes, apparently in spite of the speaker, whose irresistible conviction overrides his stuttering efforts at silence: 'No, no, he said to me with some feeling, your father *must not* stand. In his own interest he must not, for his own sake, out of respect for his merits, which are great, and would be compromised by such a perilous undertaking. He is worth more than that. Were he elected, he would have everything to lose and nothing to gain. He is not an orator, thank heaven. And that is the one thing that counts with my beloved colleagues, even if it means an endless rehash of the same thing. Your father has an important goal in life; he should march straight towards it and not beat about the bush, even the bushes of the groves of Academe, which are more thorny than flowery. Besides, he would not get many votes. The Academy likes to keep its postulants waiting before admitting them to its bosom. For the moment, there is nothing to be done. Later on, I can't say. But it has to be the Society itself that comes to seek him out. It observes that *Farà da sé* [56] of our neighbours across the Alps with more fetishism than success. Leroy-Beaulieu spoke to me about it all in a way I found distasteful. I should have said at a guess that he was hand in glove with your father… I made it plain to him, a little sharply perhaps, that as a man accustomed to dealing with textiles and metals, he could not be expected to understand the part played by imponderables, as Bismarck used to say. What must be avoided at all costs is your father putting himself forward as a candidate: *Principiis obsta*.[57] His friends would find themselves in a delicate position if he presented them with a *fait accompli*. Listen, he said with a sudden frankness of manner, fixing his blue eyes upon me, I am going to tell you something that will surprise you coming from me, such a devoted friend of your father's. Well, precisely because I am such a devoted friend (the two of us are inseparable, *Arcades ambo*,[58] precisely because I know what he can give to his country, the wreckage he can avoid by remaining at the helm, I would not vote for him, out of affection, high regard for him, and out of patriotism. And I also think I've given him to understand as much.' (And here I fancied that I could see in his eyes the stern, Assyrian profile of Leroy-Beaulieu.) 'So to give him my vote now would be a sort of recantation on my part.' M. de Norpois very frequently treated his colleagues as fossils. Other reasons apart, every member of a club or academy likes to attribute to his fellow-members the type of character most opposed to his own, less for the benefit of being able to say: 'Ah! If the matter only rested with me!' than for the satisfaction of making whatever honour he himself has received seem harder to obtain and thus more flattering. 'I must tell you, he concluded, that in the best interests of you all, I should prefer to see your father triumphantly elected in ten or fifteen years' time.' Words that I took as being dictated, if not by jealousy, then by a total lack of willingness to oblige, and which were later, in the actual event, to acquire a different meaning.

'Have you ever thought of giving the Institut a paper on the price of bread during the Fronde? the historian of the movement timidly enquired of M. de Norpois. It would be highly successful, I think' (which meant 'bolster my own reputation enormously'), he added, timorously risking a tender smile at the ambassador which made him raise his eyelids and disclose eyes as wide as the sky. I seemed to have seen this look before, yet I had met the historian for the first

time today. It came to me suddenly: I had seen this same expression in the eyes of a Brazilian doctor who claimed to be able to cure bouts of breathlessness of the kind from which I suffered by ridiculous inhalations of plant essences. In the hope that he would pay more attention to my case, I had told him that I knew Professor Cottard and he had replied, ostensibly speaking in Cottard's interest: 'Were you to tell him about this treatment of mine, it would provide him with material for the most sensational paper at the Academy of Medicine!' He had not gone so far as to labour the point but had gazed at me with the same questioning look, timid, self-seeking and urgent, that had just startled me on the face of the Fronde historian. It is true that the two men were not acquainted and had little or nothing in common, but psychological laws, like physical laws, have a more or less general relevance. And if the appropriate conditions are the same, the same expression lights up the eyes of different human animals, just as the same morning sky lights up places that are remote from each other and have no connection. I did not hear what the ambassador said in reply because of the general hubbub of people who were making their way towards Mme de Villeparisis to see her painting.

'Do you know who we're talking about, Basin? the Duchesse asked her husband.

– I can make a good guess, said the Duc. I'm afraid she's not an actress of what we would call the great tradition.

– You can't imagine just how ridiculous it was, Mme de Guermantes continued, addressing herself to M. d'Argencourt.

– One might even call it burlesque,' broke in M. de Guermantes, whose odd vocabulary allowed society people to declare that he was no fool and literary people to regard him as a complete imbecile.

'I really can't understand how Robert ever came to fall in love with her, the Duchesse went on. Oh, I know one must never discuss that sort of thing!' she added, with the charming philosophical pout of a sentimentalist with no more illusions left. 'I know that anybody can fall in love with anybody else. And, she added – for if she still made fun of modern literature, it had still insinuated itself into her mind to a degree, possibly through newspaper popularization or though certain conversations she had had – that is the beautiful thing about love, because it's what makes it so "mysterious".

– Mysterious? Well, cousin, I have to admit that's a bit beyond me, said the Comte d'Argencourt.

– But it is, it's a very mysterious thing, love,' the Duchesse continued, with the sweet smile of a good-natured woman of the world, but also with the unshakeable conviction of a Wagnerian assuring a friend that there is more than just noise in the *Walküre*. 'And in the end, one never does know why somebody falls in love with somebody else. It may not be at all for the reasons we infer,' she added with a smile, her words thus suddenly rejecting the idea she had just put forward. 'After all, one never knows anything really, she concluded with a look of weary scepticism. So it's wiser, don't you think, never to discuss people's choices in love.'

But immediately after she had laid down this principle she ignored it by criticizing Saint-Loup's choice.

'All the same, I have to say I find it extraordinary that people can find attraction in a ridiculous person.'

Hearing Saint-Loup's name mentioned and gathering that he was in Paris, Bloch began to slander him so violently that everyone was appalled. He was beginning to nurture hatreds, and one felt he would stop at nothing to gratify them. After establishing the principle that he himself was a person of great moral integrity and that the sort of people who frequented La Boulie (a sporting club he took to be fashionable) deserved to do hard labour, he regarded any harm he could do them as commendable. He once reached the point of threatening to bring a lawsuit against one of his La Boulie friends. In the course of the trial he proposed to give false evidence which the defendant would be unable to discredit. In this way Bloch, who never in fact put his plan into action, thought he could drive his friend even further to despair and panic. What harm could there be in it, since the man he sought to harm in this way was a La Boulie man devoted only to fashion, and against people of that sort any weapon was justified, particularly one wielded by a saint such as Bloch himself?

'And yet what about Swann?' objected M. d'Argencourt, who had finally managed to grasp the point of his cousin's remarks and, impressed by how acute they were, was now combing his memory for examples of people falling in love with others whom he himself would not have found attractive.

'Oh, but things were quite different in Swann's case, the Duchesse protested. It was extraordinary, I know, because she was something of an idiot, but she was never ridiculous, and at one time she was pretty.

– Pooh! Pooh! muttered Mme de Villeparisis.

– You didn't think so? I did. She had some charming features, very fine eyes, lovely hair, and she dressed wonderfully. She still does. She's become loathsome, I agree, but she was a ravishing woman in her time. Not that I was any less sorry when Charles married her, because it was so unnecessary.' The Duchesse was not aware of having said anything remarkable, but since M. d'Argencourt began to laugh she repeated her last phrase – either because she found it amusing or because she found it nice of him to laugh – and turned a caressing gaze in his direction, to add soft enchantment to that of her wit. She went on: 'It wasn't worth the trouble, was it? Still, she was not without charm and I can quite understand why people might fall for her, whereas Robert's lady… well, let me tell you, you'd just die laughing. Oh, I know somebody's going to quote that thing of Augier's at me: "Does the bottle matter, if it gets one drunk?" [59] Well, Robert may have got drunk right enough, but he hasn't shown much taste in his choice of bottle! The first thing she wanted me to do, can you believe, was to rig up a staircase bang in the middle of my drawing-room. A trifling inconvenience, wouldn't you say! Then she announced that she was going to lie flat on her stomach on the steps. And if you could have heard the thing she recited! I can only remember one scene, but I'm sure nobody could imagine anything like it. It was called *The Seven Princesses*.[60]

– *Seven* of them! Dear me, what a snob she must be!' cried M. d' Argencourt. But, just a minute, I know the whole thing. The author sent a copy to the King, who couldn't follow a word of it and asked me to explain it to him.

– It's not something by Sâr Péladan [61] by any chance?' asked the Fronde historian, in an attempt to convey that he was intimately in touch with the latest literary developments, but so softly that his question went unnoticed.

– So you know *The Seven Princesses* then? the Duchesse replied to M. d'Argencourt. My congratulations! I only know one myself, and one's quite enough. I have no wish to make the acquaintance of the six others. Especially if they're anything like the one I've seen!'

'What a bird-brained woman!'I thought to myself, still smarting from the icy greeting she had given me. I found a sort of grim satisfaction in this evidence of her total incomprehension of Maeterlinck. 'So this is the woman I walk miles to see every morning, and out of the kindness of my heart! Well, now it's my turn to turn the cold shoulder.' This is what I said to myself, but my words had nothing to do with what I really thought; they were purely conversational, like the words we utter to ourselves when we are too agitated to remain on our own and feel the need, in the absence of a listener, to talk to ourselves idly, as we would to a stranger.

'I can't tell you what it was like, the Duchesse continued. I thought I'd die laughing. Most people did, rather too much, and young madam was not at all pleased. Robert has never really forgiven me. But I can't honestly say I'm sorry, because if the whole thing had been a success madam would perhaps have returned, and I don't think Marie-Aynard would have been exactly enchanted.'

Marie-Aynard was the name the family gave to Robert's mother, Mme de Marsantes, the widow of Aynard de Saint-Loup, to distinguish her from her cousin, the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière, also a Marie, to whose first name her nephews, cousins and brothers-in-law added, to avoid confusion, either the first name of her husband or another of her own, which made her Marie-Gilbert or Marie-Hedwige.

'To begin with, there was a sort of rehearsal the night before, a quite amazing business! Mme de Guermantes went on ironically. Can you imagine, she uttered a sentence, no, not even a sentence, a quarter of one, then she stopped; and for the next five minutes – I'm not exaggerating – she stood there without a word.

– Oh, deary, deary me! exclaimed M. d'Argencourt.

– I took the liberty of suggesting to her, as politely as possible, that this might take people somewhat aback. And she said – I quote verbatim – "One ought always to recite a thing as if one were in the process of composing it oneself." What a monumental thing to say, when you come to think of it!

– But I understood she was quite good at reciting poetry, said one of the two young men.

– She hasn't the least idea what poetry is, replied Mme de Guermantes. I didn't need to listen to her to tell that. It was quite enough to see her arriving with those lilies! I knew at once that she had no talent when I saw those lilies!'

Everybody laughed.

'Aunt, I do hope my little joke the other day about the Queen of Sweden didn't offend you. I've come to beg forgiveness.

– No, I'm not offended. You're even allowed to have some tea, if you're hungry.

– Come along, M. Vallenères, you're the daughter of the house,' said Mme de Villeparisis to the archivist, repeating a long-established joke.

M. de Guermantes sat up in the armchair he had sunk into, his hat on the carpet by his side, and examined with satisfaction the plate of petits fours he was offered.

'Why, certainly, now that I'm beginning to feel at home in this distinguished company. I'll have a sponge-cake, they look excellent.

– The gentleman makes an admirable daughter of the house,' said M. d' Argencourt, imitating Mme de Villeparisis and pursuing her little joke.

The archivist handed the plate of cakes to the Fronde historian.

'You perform your functions admirably,' said the latter timidly in an attempt to win the sympathy of the gathering.

And he cast a covert glance of complicity at those who had already pursued the joke.

'Tell me, dear Aunt, M. de Guermantes asked Mme de Villeparisis, who was that rather impressive gentleman who was leaving as I came in? I must know him, because he gave me a great bow, but I couldn't place him. You know I have no memory for names. It's a great nuisance, he said complacently.

– M. Legrandin.

– Oh, but Oriane has a cousin whose mother, if I'm not mistaken, was born a Grandin. Yes indeed, a Grandin de l'Eprevier.

– No, replied Mme de Villeparisis, there's no connection. These are plain Grandins. Grandins of nothing at all. But they'd like nothing better than to be Grandins of anything you'd care to name. This one has a sister called Mme de Cambremer.

– Come now, Basin, you know quite well who my aunt means, exclaimed the Duchesse indignantly. He's the brother of that great ruminant you took it into your head to get to call on me the other day. She stayed a whole hour and I thought I'd go mad. But I'd begun by thinking that she was the one who was mad when I saw a complete stranger come trundling into the room looking just like a cow.

– Listen, Oriane, she asked me what day you were at home and I couldn't very well be rude to her. And anyway, you're exaggerating, she's not in the least like a cow,' he added dolefully, but taking care to smile furtively at his audience.

He knew that his wife's witty eloquence needed the stimulus of contradiction, the contradiction of common sense that protests, for instance, that a woman cannot be mistaken for a cow (and it was this that provoked Mme de Guermantes to exploit her initial image and produce some of her best witticisms). The Duc would be there with this literal-minded approach secretly to ensure the success of her witticisms, like the unacknowledged partner of a three-card trickster in a railway compartment.

'You're right; she doesn't look like a cow. She looks like a whole herd of them, exclaimed Mme de Guermantes. Believe me, I was hard put to it to know what to do when I saw those cows come lumbering into my drawing-room in a hat asking me how I was. I had half a mind to say: "Please, cows, there must be some mistake. How can we possibly be acquainted; you're a herd of cows." But after racking my brains I came to the conclusion that your Cambremer woman was the Infanta Dorothea. She said she was coming to see me one day and she looks rather *bovine* herself. So I was about to address her as "Your Royal Highness" and use the third person to a herd of cows. And she's got a girth on her like the Queen of Sweden. In fact this mass attack had been prepared by long-range artillery fire. She knows all the rules of war. I don't know how long I was bombarded with calling-cards. They were everywhere, on tables, on chairs, like publicity leaflets. I couldn't imagine what such advertisement was for. The house was drowned in "Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer" with an address I've forgotten, but you can be sure I shall never use it.

– But it's very flattering to be taken for a queen, said the Fronde historian.

– My dear sir, kings and queens don't add up to much these days!' said M. de Guermantes, wanting to be thought broad-minded and modern, but also attempting not to be seen attaching any importance to his own royal connections, which he valued immensely.

Bloch and M. de Norpois had left their seats and were now standing within earshot.

'So, Monsieur, said Mme de Villeparisis, have you been talking to him about the Dreyfus case?'

M. de Norpois raised his eyes to the ceiling, but with a smile, as though he were inviting heaven to witness the extravagant whims imposed upon him by his Dulcinea. Nevertheless he spoke to Bloch very graciously about the dreadful, even fatal period through which France was passing. Since this presumably meant that M. de Norpois (to whom Bloch had confessed his belief in Dreyfus's innocence) was a convinced anti-Dreyfusard, the ambassador's genial manner, his way of suggesting that his interlocutor was in the right, of never doubting that they were both of the same opinion, of joining forces with him to denigrate the government, flattered Bloch's vanity and aroused his curiosity. What were the important points which M. de Norpois left unspecified but on which he seemed implicitly to be saying that he and Bloch were in agreement? And what opinion did he hold of the case that the two of them could share? Bloch was all the more astonished at the mysterious sympathy that seemed to exist between the two of them, in that it was not confined to politics, Mme de Villeparisis having spoken at some length to M. de Norpois about Bloch's literary activity.

'You don't belong to your age, the former ambassador told him, and I congratulate you upon the fact. You don't belong to an age in which disinterested study no longer exists, in which the public is offered nothing but obscenity or inept rubbish. Efforts such as yours ought to be encouraged. They would be, with the right government.'

Bloch was flattered to think of himself as swimming alone amid universal shipwreck. But once again he would have liked more details, more about the inept rubbish mentioned by M. de Norpois. Bloch had the feeling that he was working along the same lines as a good many others; he had never thought of himself as being so exceptional. He reverted to the Dreyfus case, but did not manage to disentangle M. de Norpois's real views. He tried to get him to talk about the officers whose names were constantly appearing in the newspapers at that time; they aroused more curiosity than the politicians involved in the case, because, unlike the former, they were not already established figures; in their special uniform, emerging from the depths of an unfamiliar life and a religiously guarded silence, they had only just come forward to speak, like Lohengrin stepping on to land from his swan-drawn bark.[62] Thanks to a nationalist lawyer he knew, Bloch had been able to attend several hearings of the Zola trial.[63] He would arrive there in the morning and stay all day, with a supply of sandwiches and a flask of coffee, as

though at a day-long examination session; this change of routine stimulated a nervous excitement which was exacerbated by the coffee and the turbulence of the trial, and he would come away in such a passionate state about the day's proceedings that when he returned home in the evening he longed to immerse himself again in the thrill of it all; so he would hurry out to a restaurant frequented by both parties in search of friends with whom he would rehearse the day's events for hours on end and compensate, by a supper ordered in an imperious tone which gave him the illusion of power, for the hunger and exhaustion of a day begun so early and spent with no lunch. Perpetually hovering between the two planes of experience and imagination, the human mind seeks to sound out the ideal life of the people it knows and to know the people whose life it has had to imagine. To Bloch's questions M. de Norpois replied:

'There are two officers involved in the present case whom I once heard mentioned by a man whose judgment inspired me with the greatest confidence. I mean M. de Miribel.[64] He had a high opinion of them both. They are Lieutenant-Colonel Henry[65] and Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart.

– But, exclaimed Bloch, the divine Athena, daughter of Zeus, has put in the mind of each the opposite of what is in the mind of the other. And they are fighting each other like two lions. Colonel Picquart had a high position in the army, but his Moira[66] has led him to the wrong side. The sword of the Nationalists will carve his tender flesh and serve it up as food for beasts of prey and birds that feed on the fat of dead men.'

M. de Norpois made no reply.

'What are those two waffling about over there?' M. de Guermantes asked Mme de Villeparisis, pointing to M. de Norpois and Bloch. 'The Dreyfus case.

– Damn me! you're right. By the way, do you know who is a rabid supporter of Dreyfus? I give you a thousand guesses. My nephew Robert! When the Jockey Club heard of the stand he was taking they were really up in arms. There was a regular outcry, I can tell you. And he's coming up for election next week…

– Of course, the Duchesse broke in, if they're all like Gilbert, who's always maintained that all Jews ought to be sent back to Jerusalem…

– Ah! then the Prince de Guermantes is a man of my own heart,' M. d'Argencourt interjected.

The Duc used his wife as a decoration, but he did not love her. His inflated self-importance made him hate to be interrupted, and he was in the habit of being brutally curt with her in private. Quivering with the twofold rage of a bad husband who is not to be spoken to and a gifted talker whose words go unnoticed, he stopped short and glared at the Duchesse in a manner that made everyone feel uncomfortable.

'What makes you think we want to hear about Gilbert and Jerusalem? he said at last. It's got nothing to do with it. But, he went on in a gentler tone, you'd be the first to admit that if one of our family were to be refused membership of the Jockey, especially Robert, whose father was president for ten years, it would be an outrage. What do you expect, my dear, it's made them all stop in their tracks and take a good look around them. I don't blame them, either. Personally, I have no racial prejudice, you know that. That sort of thing is all very out of date to me, and I like to be thought of as moving with the times. But God damn it! with a name like the Marquis de Saint-Loup, one isn't a Dreyfusard. And that's all there is to it.'

M. de Guermantes uttered the words 'with a name like the Marquis de Saint-Loup' with particular emphasis. He was well aware that it was far more important to have a name like the Duc de Guermantes. But if his self-esteem was apt to exaggerate if anything the superiority of his own title, in this case it was perhaps not so much the rules of good taste as the laws of the imagination that prompted him to draw no attention to it. Everyone sees in a brighter light what he sees at a distance, what he sees in others. For the general laws that govern the perspective of the imagination apply just as much to dukes as to other men. And not only the laws of imagination, but those of speech. Now, one or other of two laws of speech might apply here. One of them demands that we should express ourselves like others in our mental category and not of our caste. By this token M. de Guermantes might, in his choice of expression, even when he wished to talk about the nobility, be indebted to the humblest class of tradesmen, who would have said: 'With a name like the Duc de Guermantes', whereas an educated man like Swann or Legrandin would not have said it. A duke may write novels in the language of a grocer, even about life in high society, without the help of titles and pedigrees, and a plebeian may write things that deserve to be called 'aristocratic'. So from what inferior person had M. de Guermantes borrowed the expression: 'with a name like'? He probably had no idea. But another law of speech is that from time to time, just as certain diseases appear, vanish and are never heard of again, there somehow arise (either spontaneously or by some accident like the one that brought into France that American weed the seeds of which, caught in the wool of a travelling rug, fell on a railway embankment) modes of expression which one hears in the same decade on the lips of people who have in no way concerted their efforts to use them. So, just as one year I heard Bloch speak about himself in the following terms: 'The most charming, brilliant, well-placed and discerning people had discovered that there was only one man whom they felt to be intelligent and agreeable, whom they could not do without – namely Bloch', and heard the same formulation repeated by countless other young people who did not know him and who simply replaced his name with their own, so I was often to come across this 'with a name like'.

'If that's his attitude, the Duc went on, what do you expect? It's quite understandable.

– It does have its funny side, the Duchesse replied, when you think of his mother's ideas, the way she bores us to tears with her *Patrie française*,[67] morning, noon and night.

– But it's not only his mother. You mustn't palm us off with that. There's that dreadful bed-hopping young miss of his. She has more influence over him. *And* she just happens to be a compatriot of our M. Dreyfus. She's infected Robert with her way of thinking.

– You may not have heard, Monsieur le Duc, but there's a new word to describe that sort of attitude, said the archivist, who acted as secretary to various anti-revisionist committees. It's "mentality". It means exactly the same thing, but it's useful in that nobody knows what you're talking about. It's the last word in sophistication, the "latest thing", as they say.'

Meanwhile, having heard Bloch's name, he watched him question M. de Norpois with a disquiet that itself aroused strong misgiving, but for other reasons, in the Marquise. Trembling before the archivist as she played the anti-Dreyfusard in his presence, she dreaded what he would say were he to discover that she had invited to her house a Jew who was more or less affiliated to the 'Syndicate'.[68]

'So that's the word: "mentality", said the Duc. I must make a note of it and keep it for the right moment.' (This was literally true. The Duc had a little note-book filled with 'quotations' which he used to consult before dinner-parties.) 'I like "mentality". There are quite a few new words like that which become fashionable, but they never last. I read recently that a writer was "talentuous". Whatever that's supposed to mean. I haven't seen the word since.

– But "mentality" is more widely used than "talentuous", said the Fronde historian, anxious to be part of the conversation. I'm on a committee at the Ministry of Education where I've heard it on several occasions, and also at my club, the Volney, and even at dinner at M. Émile Ollivier's.[69]

– As someone who has not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education,' the Duc replied with false humility but with a vanity so deep-seated that his lips could not refrain from a smile, nor his eyes from embracing his audience with expressions of sparkling glee, the ironical impact of which made the poor historian blush, 'as someone who has not the honour to belong to the Ministry of Education, he repeated, revelling in the sound of his own voice, nor to the Volney club… My only clubs are the Union and the Jockey… I don't believe you belong to the Jockey, Monsieur?' he asked the historian, who, blushing deeper red, sensing the insult but not understanding it, began to tremble from head to foot; '… as someone who has not even been invited to dine with M. Émile Ollivier, I confess I've not come across the word "mentality". I feel sure you're in the same position too, Argencourt… You know why they can't publicize the proofs of Dreyfus's guilt, don't you? Apparently it's because he's the lover of the War Minister's wife, or so it's mooted.

– Oh! I thought it was the Prime Minister's wife, said M. d'Argencourt.

– I find you all as deadly boring as each other about the entire thing,' said the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, in social terms, was always anxious to demonstrate that she did not allow herself to be led by anyone. 'The case can't make any difference to me so far as the Jews are concerned, for the very good reason that I don't know any and I intend to remain in that state of blissful ignorance. But I do find it intolerable to have Marie-Aynard or Victurnienne thrusting a whole host of Durands and Dubois upon us, women we should otherwise never have known, just because they're supposed to be right-minded and don't use Jewish tradesmen, or have "Death to Jews" written on their parasols. I went to see Marie-Aynard the day before yesterday. It used to be a pleasure. Now she entertains all the people one has spent one's life trying to avoid, with the excuse that they're anti-Dreyfusard, and there are others of whom you have no idea who they are.

– No, it's the wife of the War Minister. At least, that's one of the rumours at court,' continued the Duc, who favoured turns of phrase that seemed to him old-fashioned. 'Anyway, as everyone knows, I personally take just the opposite view to my cousin Gilbert. There's nothing of the feudal overlord about me. I'd be happy to be seen with a negro if he was a friend of mine, and I shouldn't give two hoots what anyone thought. But all the same, you must agree with me that with a name like Saint-Loup, it's not done to fly in the face of public opinion. The public has more sense than Voltaire and certainly more than my nephew. And one certainly doesn't indulge in – how shall I put it? – contortions of conscience a week before one's membership of a club is to be decided. It's a bit stiff! No, it's that little tart of his who's put ideas into his head. She's probably persuaded him that he would be classed as an "intellectual". An "intellectual" is *the* catchword among those people. I've got a rather good pun from that quarter, but it's very wicked.'

And, lowering his voice for the benefit of his wife and M. d'Argencourt, he told them about *Mater Semita*, which was already going the rounds of the Jockey Club, for of all the seeds that fly about the world, the one with the most solid wings, enabling it to be scattered at the greatest distance from its point of origin, is still a joke.

'We might ask this gentleman to explain it to us. He looks so e-erudite, he said, pointing to the historian. But it's better not to repeat it, especially since the facts are completely untrue. I'm less ambitious than my cousin Mirepoix, who claims that she can trace her family back before Christ to the tribe of Levi, and I

am quite capable of proving that there's never been a drop of Jewish blood in our family. But still, don't let's fool ourselves; the charming views of my nephew are going to land him in queer street. Particularly with Fezensac ill at the moment. That means Duras will be running the election, and you know how he likes to bluff,' said the Duc, who had never managed to learn the precise meaning of certain words and thought that bluffing meant, not shooting a line, but creating complications.

'I must say, if this Dreyfus is innocent, the Duchesse broke in, 'he isn't doing much to prove it. Those idiotic, heavy-handed letters he writes from his island! I don't know whether M. Esterhazy is any better, but at least there is more style about the way he writes, more of a sense of tone. M Dreyfus's supporters can't be very pleased about it. What a pity they can't just change their innocent victim for one with more style.' Everyone burst out laughing. 'Did you hear what Oriane just said? the Duc de Guermantes asked Mme de Villeparisis in an eager voice – Yes, most amusing.' This was not enough for the Duc: 'Well, I can't say I thought it very amusing myself. What I mean is that it doesn't make an ounce of difference to me whether a thing is amusing or not. Wit means nothing to me.' M. d'Argencourt protested. 'He doesn't mean a word he says,' murmured the Duchesse. 'It's probably because I've been a member of parliament and listened to brilliant speeches which meant nothing. It principally taught me to value logic in such matters. That's probably why I wasn't re-elected. Wit leaves me cold. – Basin, stop playing the humbug, my dear, you know quite well that no one appreciates wit more than you do. – Please let me finish. It's precisely because a certain type of trivial humour leaves me unmoved that I very often find it possible to value my wife's wit. It is usually based upon sound observation. She reasons like a man and expresses herself like a writer.'

Meanwhile Bloch was trying to press M. de Norpois on Colonel Picquart.

'There can be no question, replied M. de Norpois, that his evidence was necessary. I am well aware that my opinion in this matter set more than one of my colleagues squawking, but, as I saw it, the government had a duty to let the colonel speak. One can't break out of that sort of deadlock by some evasive turn, otherwise one risks falling into a quagmire. As for the officer himself, his statement made the most favourable impression at the first hearing. When one saw him come into court in that well-fitting chasseur uniform, heard him relate in a perfectly simple and direct manner what he had seen and deduced, and then say: "On my honour as a soldier" '(here M. de Norpois's voice quavered with a faint patriotic throb) ' "this is what I truly believe", it is impossible to deny that he made a deep impression.'

'So, he's a Dreyfusard, beyond a shadow of a doubt,' thought Bloch.

'But it was his confrontation with the registrar, Gribelin, that alienated all the initial sympathy he had managed to attract. When one heard that old public servant, a man of his word if there ever was one' (and M. de Norpois began stressing his words with the energy of sincere conviction), 'when one saw him look his superior officer in the face, not afraid to make him pay dearly, and say to him in a tone that wouldn't take no for an answer: "Come now, Colonel, you know that I have never told a lie, and you're well aware at this moment that I am telling the truth", then the wind changed. M. Picquart did his utmost to move heaven and earth in the subsequent hearings, but it turned out to be a complete fiasco for him.'

'No, he's definitely an anti-Dreyfusard, it's obvious, said Bloch to himself. But if he thinks Picquart is a lying traitor, how can he give credit to his revelations, and quote them as if he found them charming and believed them to be sincere? And if, on the other hand, he sees him as an honest man unburdening his conscience, how can he suppose that he was lying in his exchange with Gribelin?'

Perhaps the reason why M. de Norpois spoke to Bloch in this way as if the two of them were in agreement arose from the fact that he himself was such a fierce anti-Dreyfusard that, finding the government insufficiently so, he was its enemy as much as the Dreyfusards were. Perhaps it was because his cherished aim in politics was something deeper, situated on another plane, from which Dreyfusism appeared as an unimportant issue unworthy of the attention of a patriot concerned with weighty matters of foreign policy. Perhaps, rather, it was because the maxims of his political wisdom were applicable only to questions of form, of procedure, of expediency, and not powerful enough to solve fundamental issues, as in philosophy pure logic is not enough to tackle the problems of existence; or because his very wisdom made it seem dangerous to him to deal with such matters and so, in his caution, he preferred to talk only about side-issues. But Bloch was wrong to assume that M. de Norpois, even had he been less cautious by nature and of a less rigidly formal cast of mind, could, had he wished, have told him the truth about the part played by Henry, Picquart or Paty de Clam,[70] or about any of the aspects of the case. For Bloch was in no doubt that M. de Norpois knew the truth about all these matters. How could he fail to know it, given that he was a friend of all the ministers? Indeed, Bloch was of the opinion that political reality could be approximately reconstructed by the most lucid minds, but he also imagined, like the man in the street, that it resided, beyond dispute and in material form, in the secret files of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, who divulged it to the Cabinet. But in reality, even when a political truth is recorded in documents, these seldom have any more value than a radiographic plate on which the layman imagines that the patient's disease is inscribed in some obvious way, whereas the plate simply provides a single element for inspection that needs to be combined with many others, all to be submitted to the doctor's analysis before he can reach a diagnosis. And so political reality, even when one goes to well-informed men and seems about to grasp it, is elusive. Even the later events of the Dreyfus case, if we confine ourselves to that, like the startling confession of Henry and his subsequent suicide, were immediately interpreted in opposite ways by Dreyfusard ministers and by Cavaignac and Cuignet,[71] who had themselves discovered the forgery and conducted the interrogation; and even among the Dreyfusard ministers themselves, men of the same shade of opinion who were judging not only from the same documents but in the same spirit, the part played by Henry was explained in two entirely different ways, some ministers seeing him as an accomplice of Esterhazy, others assigning that role to Paty de Clam, thus rallying to the view of their opponent Cuignet in complete opposition to their supporter Reinach.[72] The only information Bloch could draw from M. de Norpois was that, if it were true that the Chief of the General Staff, M. de Boisdeffre, had had a secret communication sent to M. Rochefort, it was clear that something singularly regrettable had occurred.

'You can take it from me that the War Minister must, *in petto*[73] at least, have wished his Chief of Staff to burn in hell. To my mind, an official disclaimer would not have come amiss. But the War Minister expresses himself very bluntly on the matter *inter pocula*.[74] And there are certain matters about which it is highly imprudent to stir up trouble and then lose control of them.

– But those documents are obviously false,' said Bloch.

Instead of replying to this, M. de Norpois declared that he did not approve of the public demonstrations of Prince Henri d'Orléans:[75]

'They can only disturb the objective judgment of the praetorium and encourage upheavals of a deplorable kind, whichever way you look at it. Certainly we need to put a stop to the anti-militarist machinations, but neither do we want a rumpus encouraged by those elements on the Right who do a disservice to the patriotic ideal by thinking only about how it can serve their own ends. France, thank God, is not some replica of South America, and no one has yet felt the need for a military pronunciamento.'

Bloch could not get him to say anything about the question of Dreyfus's guilt, or about the likely judgment in the civil trial then under way. On the other hand, M. de Norpois seemed only too pleased to speculate upon the consequences of the verdict.

'If it's a conviction, he said, it will probably be quashed. In a case with so many witnesses, it is rare not to find some flaw in the procedure which counsel can raise on appeal. But to come back to that angry explosion from Prince Henri d'Orléans, I very much doubt that it met with his father's approval.

– You think Chartres[76] is on Dreyfus's side? the Duchesse enquired with a smile, her eyes wide open, a flush on her cheeks, her nose buried in her plate of petits fours, and a scandalized air about her.

– Not at all. I simply meant that the whole family, on that side, has a political sense of which we have seen the *nec plus ultra* in the admirable Princesse Clémentine,[77] and which her son, Prince Ferdinand, has kept as a treasured heritage. You would never have found the Prince de Bulgarie hugging Major Esterhazy.

– He would have preferred a private soldier,' murmured Mme de Guermantes, who often met the Bulgarian at the Prince de Joinville's dinner-parties and had once said to him, when he asked if she was not jealous: 'Yes, Your Highness, of your bracelets.'

'You're not going to Mme de Sagan's ball this evening?' M. de Norpois asked Mme de Villeparisis, to cut short his conversation with Bloch. The latter had made a not unpleasing impression on the ambassador, who told us afterwards, somewhat naïvely, remembering perhaps the few surviving traces in Bloch's speech of the neo-Homeric manner he had largely outgrown: 'He is rather amusing, with that slightly outmoded, solemn manner of speaking he has. You expect him to start saying things like "the Learned Sisters", like Lamartine or Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. It's rare enough in our present youth, as indeed it was in the generation before them. We ourselves were somewhat given to Romanticism.' But however novel his interlocutor may have seemed, M. de Norpois felt that the conversation had gone on for far too long.

'No, I don't go to balls any more, she replied with an old lady's winning smile. Are the rest of you going? You're the right age for balls,' she added, her eyes embracing M. de Châtellerault, his friend and Bloch. 'I was asked too,' she continued, coyly pretending to be flattered by the invitation. 'They even made a point of coming round to invite me.' ('They' being the Princesse de Sagan.)

'I haven't had a printed invitation,' said Bloch, thinking that Mme de Villeparisis would procure him one, and that Mme de Sagan would be happy to welcome the friend of a woman on whom she had called in person to invite.

The Marquise made no answer, and Bloch did not press the matter, for he had something more serious to discuss with her and, with this in mind, had already asked her whether he might call again in a couple of days. After hearing the two young men say that they had resigned from the rue Royale club now that it was admitting just anyone off the streets, he wanted to ask Mme de Villeparisis if she could get him elected to it.

'Aren't they rather pretentious, and rather snobbish with it, these Sagans? he said sarcastically.

– Not at all. They're the best we can do for you in that line, replied M. d'Argencourt, who had adopted all the witty quips of Parisian society.

– So I can assume that it's one of the *solemnities*, one of the big *social events* of the season!' said Bloch half ironically.

Mme de Villeparisis turned smilingly to Mme de Guermantes: 'Tell us, is it a great social solemnity, Mme de Sagan's ball?

– I'm not the one you should be asking, came the Duchesse's ironical reply, I've never managed to discover what a social solemnity is. Society is not exactly my forte.

– Oh, I thought it was quite the opposite,' said Bloch, who had taken her at her word.

He continued to ply M. de Norpois with questions about the Dreyfus case, much to the latter's frustration. M. de Norpois declared that his 'broad impression' of Colonel du Paty de Clam was of someone with a woolly mind, perhaps not the happiest choice of person to conduct such a delicate matter as a judicial inquiry, which requires so much level-headedness and discernment.

'I know that the Socialist Party are clamouring for his head, and for the immediate release of the Devil's Island prisoner. But I don't think we are at the stage where our only option is to pass through the Caudine Forks of MM. Gérault-Richard and company.[78] The case so far is about as clear as mud. I'm not saying that there isn't some pretty dirty business to be hushed up on both sides. That certain of your client's more or less disinterested protectors may be well-intentioned, I don't seek to deny, but you know that hell is paved with good intentions, he added with a shrewd look. It is imperative that the government should make it apparent that it is no more in the hands of the factions of the Left than it is forced to surrender, bound hand and foot, to the demands of some praetorian guard or other which, mark my words, is not the same thing as the army. It goes without saying that, should any fresh evidence come to light, there would be further proceedings. It's as clear as daylight; to demand it is to labour the obvious. When that day comes the government will say what it has to say, otherwise it would be turning what is its essential prerogative to woman's work. Beating about the bush is no longer enough. We need judges to try Dreyfus. And that will be an easy matter because, although we have become accustomed in our beloved country, where we are fond of maligning ourselves, to thinking or letting it be thought that in order to hear the words Truth or Justice we need to cross the Channel, which is often merely a roundabout way of reaching the Spree, there are judges to be found outside Berlin. But once the machinery of government has been set in motion, will you actually listen to what the government has to say? When it calls upon you to perform your duty as a citizen, will you rally to it? When it makes its patriotic appeal, instead of turning a deaf ear, will you be able to answer: "Present!"?'

M. de Norpois put these questions to my friend Bloch with a vehemence that both alarmed and flattered him; for the ambassador seemed to be addressing Bloch as if he represented a whole party, to be interrogating him as though he might have been in the confidence of that party and capable of assuming responsibility for the decisions it would adopt. 'Should you fail to disarm,' M. de Norpois continued without waiting for Bloch's collective answer, 'should you fail to do so, even before the ink has dried on the decree ordering the retrial, in obedience to I know not what insidious word of command, and group yourselves in that fruitless opposition which for some is the *ultima ratio* of politics, should you retire to your tents and burn your boats, it would be to your own detriment. Are you a prisoner of those who preach disorder? Have you pledged yourself to them?' Bloch was at a loss for an answer. M. de Norpois gave him no time for one. 'If the opposite be true, as I'd like to think it was, and if you have a little of what seems to me to be badly lacking in some of your leaders and friends, namely political sense, then, on the day when the Criminal Court has the facts before it, if you do not allow yourselves to be recruited by the fishers in troubled waters, the day will be yours. I am not saying that the whole of the General Staff is going to come out of it unscathed, but if some of them at least can save their faces without setting the bonfire alight, it will be all to the good. And it goes without saying that it is the government's business to pronounce judgment and to close the long list of unpunished crimes. And without responding to pressure from Socialist agitators or any old army rabble either, he added, looking Bloch straight in the eye, perhaps with the instinct that leads all Conservatives to seek support in the enemy's camp. Government action must not be dictated by outbidding tactics, wherever the bids may come from. The government is not distracted, thank God, by Colonel Driant nor, at the opposite end of the scale, by M. Clemenceau. We need to bring professional agitators to heel and prevent them from raising their heads again. The vast majority of French people want to be able to work in orderly conditions. For me, that is an article of faith. But we must not be afraid to enlighten public opinion; and if a few sheep, of the kind that Rabelais knew so well, should rush headlong into the water, it would be appropriate to point out to them that they are rushing into troubled water, deliberately troubled by an alien mob of people, in order to conceal the dangers lurking in its depths. And the government must not give the impression that it is emerging from its passivity with the greatest reluctance when it exercises the right which is essentially its own, I mean the setting in motion of the wheels of justice. The government will listen to all your suggestions. If a judicial error is recognized, it is certain that an overwhelming consensus would ensure it a fair hearing.

– You, Monsieur,' said Bloch, turning to M. d'Argencourt, to whom he had been introduced with the rest of the party, 'are a Dreyfusard of course. Everyone is, abroad.

– It is a question that concerns only the French themselves, don't you think?' replied M. d'Argencourt with that particular brand of insolence that consists in attributing to the other speaker an opinion which one knows full well he does not share because he has just expressed the contrary view.

Bloch coloured; M. d'Argencourt smiled and looked round the room, and if his smile, as he directed it at the other guests, had a malicious intention in regard to Bloch, when it finally came to rest on the face of my friend, he tempered it with cordiality so that there should be no excuse for annoyance at the words just

uttered, though the words remained no less cruel. Mme de Guermantes whispered something in M. d'Argencourt's ear which I could not catch but which must have been something to do with Bloch's religion, because there flitted over the Duchesse's face at that moment the sort of expression to which the fear of being noticed by the person one is talking about gives a certain hesitancy and falseness, combined with the inquisitive, malicious amusement inspired by a category of people experienced as fundamentally different from oneself. In an attempt to save face, Bloch turned to the Duc de Châtellerault: 'As a Frenchman, Monsieur, you must be aware that people abroad are all Dreyfusards, although we're always pretending in France that we never know what is going on abroad. I know that I can say this sort of thing to you. Saint-Loup told me so.' But the young Duc, who could feel that everyone was turning against Bloch, and who, like many society people, was a coward, replied with an affected and mordant form of wit he seemed to have inherited somewhere along the line from M. de Charlus: 'Do forgive me, Monsieur, if I don't discuss Dreyfus with you. I make a point of discussing it only with Japhetics.'[79] Everyone smiled, except Bloch, not that he was not himself in the habit of referring ironically to his Jewish origin, to that side of his family which came from somewhere near Sinai. But instead of an ironical remark of this sort (doubtless he did not have one to hand), something clicked in Bloch's inner mechanism and triggered off a rather different response. All that was intelligible was this: 'But *how* did you know? Who told you?' as though he had been the son of a convict. Yet, given his name, which was not exactly Christian in flavour, and his face, there was something rather naïve about his startled words.

Not entirely satisfied by what M. de Norpois had said, he went up to the archivist and asked him whether M. Paty de Clam or M. Joseph Reinach were not sometimes to be seen at Mme de Villeparisis's. The archivist said nothing; he was a Nationalist and was constantly feeding Mme de Villeparisis with the line that the social revolution might break out at any moment and that she should be more circumspect in her choice of acquaintances. He wondered whether Bloch might not be a secret emissary of the Syndicate, come to gather information, and went off at once to Mme de Villeparisis to repeat what Bloch had said. She came to the conclusion that Bloch's sense of good breeding left much to be desired and that he could be a compromising person for M. de Norpois to know. She also wanted to humour the archivist, the only person she was somewhat afraid of, and by whom she was being indoctrinated, though without much success (every morning he read her M. Judet's article in *Le Petit Journal*).[80] So she decided to make it clear to Bloch that he need not come to the house again and had no difficulty in selecting from her social repertory the scene in which the great lady shows someone the door, a scene that in no way involves the raised finger and the blazing eyes people imagine. As Bloch came up to her to take his leave, sunk deep in her large armchair, she seemed only half-awakened from a vague drowsiness. Her misted eyes had the faint and charming gleam of pearls. Bloch's farewells drew the merest hint of a languid smile from the wrinkles of the Marquise's face, but no word, and she did not offer him her hand. The scene left Bloch utterly astonished, but since he was surrounded by a circle of onlookers he saw no way of prolonging it without embarrassment to himself, so, to force the Marquise, he thrust out the hand which she had refused to shake. Mme de Villeparisis was shocked. But doubtless, while she was still concerned to humour the archivist and the anti-Dreyfus clan, she also wished to think to the future, so she merely let her eyelids droop over her half-closed eyes.

'I think she's asleep,' said Bloch to the archivist, who, feeling that he had the support of the Marquise, adopted an indignant attitude. 'Good-bye, Madame,' Bloch shouted.

The Marquise moved her lips slightly like a dying woman who wants to open her mouth but whose eyes show no sign of recognition. Then she turned, brimming with renewed vitality, to the Marquis d'Argencourt, while Bloch left the room, convinced that she must be 'soft' in the head. He came to see her a few days later, burning with curiosity and intent on unearthing the reason for her strange behaviour towards him. She received him with great friendliness, because she was a good-natured woman, because the archivist was absent, because she very much wanted Bloch to put on his little play for her, and because she had now played out the act of great lady which she had felt that the circumstances required; it had been admired and commented upon the very same evening in various salons, but in a version that had already ceased to bear any relation to the truth.

'You were talking about *The Seven Princesses, Duchesse*. This is nothing to be proud of, but did you know that the author of that… what shall I call it?… that contrivance is one of my fellow-countrymen?' said M. d'Argencourt with an irony that was mingled with the satisfaction of knowing more than anyone else present about the author of a work that had been a talking-point. 'Yes, he's of Belgian nationality, he added.

– Is that so? No, we are not accusing you of being remotely responsible for *The Seven Princesses*. Fortunately for yourself and your compatriots you bear no resemblance to the author of that nonsense. I know some charming Belgians, yourself, your king – he's rather shy but very witty – my Ligne cousins and many others, and I'm glad to say that none of you speaks the same language as the author of *The Seven Princesses*. If you really want my opinion, we shouldn't waste words on it because there's nothing in it to waste words on. Authors like that love to cultivate a reputation for obscurity, even if it means making themselves ridiculous in order to conceal the fact that there's not a single idea in their heads. If there was anything behind it all, then I would be in a position to say that I am not averse to bold innovation, she added in a serious tone, but there has to be some thought content. I don't know whether you've seen Borrelli's play. It shocked some people. Personally, even if I am stoned for saying it,' she went on, heedless of the fact that she ran no such risk, 'I found it immensely intriguing. But *The Seven Princesses*! One of those princesses may be well-disposed towards my nephew, but my sense of family feeling won't extend to…'

The Duchesse broke off abruptly, for the lady who had just come into the room was the Vicomtesse de Marsantes, Robert's mother. Mme de Marsantes was thought of in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as a superior being endowed with the kindness and tolerance of a saint. I had been told as much and had no particular reason to be surprised by the fact, since I was unaware at the time that she was in fact the sister of the Duc de Guermantes. Later, I found myself constantly surprised to discover that the melancholy, pure, self-renouncing women of that social world, venerated like ideal saints in stained-glass windows, had flowered from the same genealogical stock as brothers who were brutal, debauched and vile. It seemed to me that brothers and sisters like the Duc de Guermantes and Mme de Marsantes, who share identical features, ought to have a single intellect in common, the same emotions, like a person who may have good or bad moments, but in whom nevertheless one cannot expect to find wide-ranging views if he is narrow-minded or supreme self-denial if he is hard-hearted.

Mme de Marsantes was following Brunetière's course of lectures.[81] She inspired the Faubourg Saint-Germain with enthusiasm and, by her saintly life, edified it as well. But the morphological connection of handsome nose and penetrating gaze led me to classify Mme de Marsantes in the same intellectual and moral family as her brother the Duc. I could not believe that the mere fact of being a woman, and perhaps of having had an unhappy life and winning everyone's estimation, could make a person so different from the rest of her family, as in the medieval epics where all the virtues and graces are embodied in the sister of brutish brothers. It seemed to me that nature, with less licence than the old poets, must restrict herself almost exclusively to elements common to the family, and I was not able to credit her with enough power of invention to produce, out of materials like those that produced a fool and a lout, a great mind without a hint of foolishness, a saint without a stain of brutality. Mme de Marsantes was wearing a dress of white Indian silk with a motif of large palms, to which were attached black flowers in another material. The black was for her cousin, M. de Montmorency, whom she had lost three weeks earlier, and although her bereavement did not prevent her from paying calls or going to small dinner-parties, she went in mourning. She was a great lady. Her lineage filled her soul with the frivolity of generations of life at court, with all that implies about superficiality and punctiliousness. Mme de Marsantes had not had the strength to mourn her father and mother for any extended period, but nothing would have induced her to wear colours in the month following the death of a cousin. She was especially friendly to me because I was Robert's friend, and also because I did not move in the same world as Robert. The friendliness was accompanied by a pretence of shyness, by a sort of sporadic withdrawal of the voice, the eyes, the attention, as though she were gathering up the folds of a troublesome skirt, so as not to take up too much room, to remain poised even when she relaxed, as good breeding demands. And this good breeding must not be taken too literally, since many of these ladies lapse very quickly into loose living without ever losing the almost childlike correctness of their manners. Mme de Marsantes was somewhat irritating to talk to because, whenever a commoner like Bergotte or Elstir was mentioned, she would say, isolating the word emphatically, intoning it on two different notes with a

modulation peculiar to the Guermantes: 'I have had the *honour*, the great *hon*-our of meeting Monsieur Bergotte, of making the acquaintance of Monsieur Elstir,' either to impress people with her humility, or from the same tendency that M. de Guermantes had to revert to obsolete forms in protest at the slipshod usages of the present day, in which people failed to assert sufficiently how 'honoured' they were. Whichever of these was the true reason, whenever Mme de Marsantes said: 'I have the *honour*, the great *hon*-our,' one had the impression that she felt herself to be playing out a grand role and showing that she could accommodate the names of important men as she would have welcomed the men themselves at her country estate, had they happened to be in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, since she was devoted to her extensive family and since, being slow of speech and fond of explaining things at length, she was always trying to make clear the various degrees of kinship involved, she found herself (without any desire to impress and while genuinely happy to talk only about the sweetness of country folk or the sublimity of gamekeepers) alluding incessantly to all the families of Europe under allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire, which people of less illustrious origin could not forgive her and, if they were at all intellectual, scorned as a sign of stupidity.

In the country, Mme de Marsantes was adored for her good works, but primarily because the purity of blood which for several generations had flowed only with what was greatest in the history of France had divested her manner of anything ordinary people call 'airs and graces' and had endowed her with perfect simplicity. She did not shrink from embracing a poor woman who was in trouble, and would tell her to come up to the house for a cartload of wood. She was, as people said, the perfect Christian. She was anxious to find Robert an immensely rich wife. Being a great lady means playing the great lady, which in turn means, partly at least, playing at simplicity. It is an extremely costly game, all the more so because simplicity delights people only on condition that they know you are capable of its opposite, namely that you are very rich. Someone said to me later, when I mentioned that I had met her: 'You must have realized how lovely she was as a young woman.' But real beauty is so individual, so unfamiliar at first sight, that it is not recognized as beauty. All I noticed that afternoon was that she had a tiny nose, very blue eyes, a long neck and a sad expression.

'I must just mention something to you, said Mme de Villeparisis to the Duchesse de Guermantes. I'm expecting someone whom you've no desire to know. I thought I'd better warn you, to avoid any awkwardness. But you can rest assured, you won't find her here in future. I couldn't avoid having her today. It's Swann's wife.'

Mme Swann, who had realized the growing impact of the Dreyfus case and become fearful that her husband's origins might turn to her disadvantage, had begged him never again to mention the condemned man's innocence. When he was not present, she went a step further and professed the most ardent nationalism; and here she was merely following the example of Mme Verdurin, in whom a latent bourgeois anti-semitism had awakened and grown to a positive frenzy. Mme Swann's attitude had won her the right of entry to several of the anti-semitic leagues of society women that were being formed, and she had established relations with several members of the aristocracy. It may seem strange that the Duchesse de Guermantes, such a great friend of Swann, had not followed suit and had in fact always resisted his unconcealed desire to introduce his wife to her. But it will be clear in due course that this attitude arose from the peculiar character of the Duchesse, from her conviction that she was not 'bound to' do this or that, and from the despotic manner in which she imposed what had been decided by her social 'free will', highly arbitrary though that was.

'Thank you for warning me, replied the Duchesse. It would certainly be most disagreeable. But since I know her by sight, I'll be able to leave at the right moment.

– Believe me, Oriane, she's very nice. She's an excellent woman, said Mme de Marsantes.

– I dare say she is, but I feel no need to convince myself of the fact in person.

– Have you been invited to Lady Israels'?' Mme de Villeparisis asked the Duchesse, to change the subject.

'Mercifully I don't know her, replied Mme de Guermantes. It's Marie-Aynard you ought to be asking. She knows her. I've always wondered why.

– In fact, I did used to know her, for my sins, said Mme de Marsantes. But I decided to break off relations. It seems she's one of the very worst of them and makes no secret of the fact. Besides, we've all been too trusting, too hospitable. I shall never go near anyone of that race again. While we closed our doors to old country cousins, our own flesh and blood, we opened them to Jews. Now we can see what thanks we get for it. Dear me! I'm not supposed to open my mouth with that adorable son of mine who goes round talking the most impossible nonsense, young fool that he is,' she added, after catching M. d'Argencourt saying something about Robert. 'But, talking of Robert, have you not seen him? she asked Mme de Villeparisis. It's Saturday and I thought he might have come to Paris for the day, in which case he would have been sure to pay you a visit.'

In reality, Mme de Marsantes thought that her son would not be on leave; but knowing that, even if he was, he would not have come to call on Mme de Villeparisis, she hoped, by this pretence of expecting to find him there, to make his sticklish aunt forgive him for all the visits he had failed to make.

'Robert come here! I haven't had as much as a word from him. I don't think I've seen him since Balbec.

– He is so busy. He has so much to do,' said Mme de Marsantes.

The hint of a smile made Mme de Guermantes's eyelashes quiver as she studied the circle she was tracing on the carpet with the tip of her parasol. Whenever the Duc had been too obviously unfaithful to his wife, Mme de Marsantes had always made a great point of siding with her sister-in-law against her own brother. Her sister-in-law retained a grudgingly grateful memory of this support, and was not inclined to find Robert's pranks seriously offensive. At this point the door opened again and Robert himself entered the room.

'Well, talk of the devil! and here is the Saint-Loup himself,'[82] said Mme de Guermantes.

Mme de Marsantes, who had her back to the door, had not seen her son come in. When she did see him, all her motherly feelings fluttered with joy, her body half rose from her seat, her face quivered and she fastened on Robert eyes that were spellbound:

'You've actually come! What a delight! What a surprise!

– Ah! The *devil… the Saint-Loup*. Oh yes, I see! said the Belgian diplomat in an explosion of laughter.

– Delightful, isn't it?' the Duchesse retorted dryly. She detested wordplay and had only indulged in it as a self-mocking gesture. 'Hello, Robert,' she said. 'So this is how we forget our aunt.'

They talked for a moment, doubtless about me, for as Saint-Loup went to join his mother, Mme de Guermantes turned to me.

'Good evening, how are you?' she said.

She let all the light of her blue eyes fall upon me, hesitated for a second, unfolded the stem of her arm towards me, and leant her body forward; then it sprang back with the rapidity of a flattened bush, released to its natural position. Her behaviour was dictated by the fire in Saint-Loup's eyes, watching her from a distance and making frantic efforts to get his aunt to be more accommodating. Fearing that our conversation might come to nothing, he came over to fuel it and answered for me:

'He's not very well, he gets rather tired. And it would do him a great deal of good if he saw you more often. I won't hide the fact that he enjoys seeing you very much.

– Oh, how very sweet of him,' said Mme de Guermantes in a tone of voice that was deliberately humdrum, as if I had brought her coat. 'I'm most flattered.

– I must go and talk to my mother for a minute, so have my chair,' said Saint-Loup, thus obliging me to sit down next to his aunt.

We were both silent.

'I sometimes see you in the morning,' she said, as though she were telling me something new and as though I myself never saw her. 'It's so good for one's health to take a walk.

– Oriane, said Mme de Marsantes in a low voice, you said you were on your way to see Mme de Saint-Ferréol. Would you be so kind as to tell her not to expect me for dinner? I shall stay at home now that Robert's here. And while I think of it, could I possibly ask you to see that someone sends out at once for those cigars Robert likes? "Coronas" they're called. There are none in the house.'

Robert came up to us. He had caught only the name of Mme de Saint-Ferréol.

'And who on earth is Mme de Saint-Ferréol?' he asked with calculated surprise, for he affected ignorance of everything to do with society.

'But you know perfectly well who she is, darling, said his mother. She's Vermandois's sister, the one who gave you those lovely billiards you liked so much.'

– 'So she's Vermandois's sister. I had no idea. Really, my family are extraordinary,' he said, half turning to me and unconsciously adopting Bloch's intonation, just as he borrowed his ideas, 'they know the most unlikely people, people with names like Saint-Ferréol (emphasizing the final consonant of each word), they go to balls, they drive out in victorias, they lead a fabulous existence. It's prodigious.'

Mme de Guermantes made the slight, short, harsh sound in her throat of something like forced laughter choked back, which was her way of showing that she acknowledged her nephew's wit to the degree that kinship demanded. A servant came in to announce that the Prince de Faffenheim-Munsterburg-Weinigen sent word of his arrival to M. de Norpois.

'Go and fetch him, Monsieur,' said Mme de Villeparisis to the ex-ambassador, who set off to greet the German prime minister.

But the Marquise called him back:

'Just a moment, Monsieur. Should I show him the miniature of the Empress Charlotte?

– Why, I think he'd be delighted, said the ambassador in a tone of deep conviction, as though he envied the fortunate minister the favour in store for him.

– Oh, I know he's very *sound*, said Mme de Marsantes, and that is so rare among foreigners. But I've taken the trouble to find out. He's anti-semitism personified.'

The Prince's name, with the bold attack – in musical terms – of its opening syllables, and the stammering repetition that marked them, preserved the vigour, the mannered simplicity, the heavy-handed 'refinements' of the Germanic race, projected like greenish boughs over the 'Heim' of dark-blue enamel, which shed the mystic gleam of a Rhenish stained-glass window behind the pale and finely chiselled gildings of the German eighteenth century. The name included, among the several names of which it was composed, that of a little German spa-town I had visited with my grandmother as a child, beneath a mountain distinguished by the fact that Goethe had walked there; from its vineyards we used to drink at the Kurhof the illustrious vintages with their compound and sonorous names, like the epithets that Homer gives to his heroes. And so, scarcely had I heard it uttered, and before I had recalled the spa-town, the Prince's name seemed to shrink, to become charged with humanity, to accommodate itself comfortably in a small corner in my memory where it stayed, familiar, earthbound, picturesque, appetizing, light, somehow authorized and prescribed. And in addition to this, M. de Guermantes, in explaining who the Prince was, referred at length to a number of his titles, and I recognized the name of the village with the river running through it on which, at the end of a day's treatment, I used to go boating amid the mosquitoes, and the name of a forest far enough away for the doctor not to allow me to make the journey. And in effect it was understandable that the suzerainty of this nobleman should extend to the surrounding places and that the enumeration of his titles should associate afresh the various names that could be read side by side on a map. Thus beneath the visor of a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire and knight of Franconia, what I saw was the face of a beloved land, where the light of the evening sun had often lingered on for me, at least before the Prince, Rhinegrave and Elector Palatine had entered the room. For I speedily learned that the revenues he drew from the forest and the river inhabited by gnomes and water-sprites, from the magic mountain on which rose the ancient Burg that still held memories of Luther and Louis the German, were spent on running five Charron motor-cars, on a house in Paris and another in London, a Monday-night box at the Opéra and another for the Tuesday-night performances at the Théâtre français. He did not seem to me, nor did he seem to think himself, any different from other men of similar wealth and age with less poetic origins. He had the same culture, the same ideals, he was proud of his rank but purely because of the advantages it brought him, and he had only one remaining ambition in life, to be elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which was why he had come to call on Mme de Villeparisis. If the Prince, whose wife reigned over the most exclusive set in Berlin, had solicited an introduction to the Marquise, his principal reason had nothing to do with his desire to make her acquaintance. For years now he had been consumed by his ambition to be elected to the Institut, but unfortunately he had never had more than five Academicians prepared to vote for him. He knew that M. de Norpois could by himself command ten or more votes and was capable, by skilful negotiation, of increasing the number. And so the Prince, who had known him in Russia when they had both been there as ambassadors, had been to see him and done everything possible to win him over. But try as he might to ply the Marquis with friendly gestures, to secure Russian decorations for him, to quote him in articles on foreign policy, he had been faced with the response of an ungrateful man, for whom these kindnesses seemed to count as nothing, who had not furthered his cause as a candidate one inch, had not even assured him of his own vote. It is true that M. de Norpois had received him extremely courteously, to the point of not wanting him to put himself out and 'take the trouble to come so far out of his way to see him'; he went himself to the Prince's mansion, and when the Teutonic knight came straight out with: 'I should very much like to be your colleague', he had replied with deep emotion: 'Ah! I should be most happy!' And no doubt a simple-minded person like Dr Cottard would have thought: 'Well, here he is in my house. He was the one who insisted on coming because he regards me as a more important person than himself. He tells me he'd be happy to see me in the Academy. He can't be saying it for nothing, damn it! If he's not offering to vote for me, then perhaps it just hasn't occurred to him. He has so much to say about my powerful influence that he must think everything just falls into my lap, that I've all the votes I need. That's why he doesn't offer me his. So what I need to do is to corner him now, while there are just the two of us, say to him: "Right, vote for me", and he'll have no alternative.'

But the Prince was not simple-minded. He was what Dr Cottard would have called 'a shrewd diplomat' and he knew that M. de Norpois was a no less shrewd one, a man who did not need to be told that he could do a favour to a candidate by voting for him. In his ambassadorial functions and as Foreign Minister, the Prince had conducted conversations, not on his own behalf as now, but on behalf of his country, in which one knows beforehand how far one is prepared to go and the extent to which one is willing to commit oneself. He was well aware that in the language of diplomacy to talk means to offer. And this was why he had arranged for M. de Norpois to receive the Order of Saint Andrew. But had he been obliged to report to his government the conversation with M. de Norpois that followed, he would have stated in his dispatch: 'I realized I had used the wrong approach.' For as soon as he had returned to the subject of the Institut, M. de Norpois had repeated:

'It would give me a great deal of pleasure, and a great deal of pleasure to my colleagues. They must, I think, feel deeply honoured that you should have thought of them. It's a really interesting candidature, somewhat outside our normal practice. The Academy is very set in its ways, you know, and it takes fright at anything with an unfamiliar ring to it. Personally, I find this deplorable. I don't know how many times I've implied as much to my colleagues. I'm not even sure, God forgive me, that I didn't once let the term "stick-in-the-mud" pass from my lips,' he had added with a scandalized smile and in an undertone, almost a theatrical aside, as he shot the Prince a sidelong glance from his blue eyes, like an experienced actor judging the effect he has made. 'You will understand, Prince, that I should not care to allow such an eminent personality as yourself to embark on a venture that was fated from the start. So long as my colleagues' thinking remains

so far behind the times, it would seem to me wiser to abstain. But you may rest assured that if I ever sense a slightly more modern, a slightly more adventurous spirit in that learned body, which is tending to turn into a mausoleum, if I felt you had a real chance of success, I should be the first to let you know.'

'The Order of Saint Andrew was a mistake, thought the Prince. The negotiations have not moved forward one step. That's not what he wanted. I haven't yet laid my hand on the right key.'

This was the sort of reasoning of which M. de Norpois, trained in the same school as the Prince, would himself have been capable. It is easy to laugh at the silly pedantry which makes diplomats like Norpois go into ecstasies over some more or less trivial piece of official wording. But there is another side to this childish enjoyment: diplomats know that on the scales that ensure that balance – European or otherwise – we call peace, good feeling, fine speeches, urgent entreaty count for very little; the heavier side of the balance, the real determinant is something else, the scope the opponent has (if he is strong enough) or does not have, to satisfy a desire in exchange for something else. This was the order of truths, which an entirely disinterested person, such as my grandmother for instance, would not have understood, with which M. de Norpois and the Prince von *** had had frequently to wrestle. As chargé d'affaires in countries with which we had been within an inch of going to war, M. de Norpois, in his anxiety as to the possible turn of events, knew that it was not by the word 'Peace', or by the word 'War', that it would be revealed to him, but by some other, ostensibly commonplace word, a word of terror or blessing, which the diplomat's code of language would immediately know how to interpret, and to which, in order to safeguard the dignity of France, he would respond with another equally commonplace word, which the minister of the enemy nation would immediately decipher as 'War'. Furthermore, in accordance with a long-established custom, similar to the one that gave to the first meeting of two people promised to each other in marriage the form of a chance encounter at a performance at the Théâtre du Gymnase, the dialogue fated to dictate the word 'War' or 'Peace' took place, as a rule, not in the ministerial office, but on a bench in a Kurgarten where the minister and M. de Norpois went independently to a thermal spring to drink their little glasses of curative water straight from the source. By a sort of unspoken agreement, they met at the hour appointed for the cure, and began taking a walk together which, though it looked harmless enough, the two interlocutors knew to be as tragic as an order for mobilization. And so, in a private matter like this nomination to the Institut, the Prince had employed the same system of inference as he had used in his diplomatic career, the same method of reading beneath superimposed symbols.

And it certainly cannot be said that my grandmother and the few people like her would have been alone in their failure to understand this sort of calculated manoeuvre. For one thing, the average run of people who follow professions with long-established codes of procedure, are, with their lack of intuition, very like my grandmother in the ignorance which she owed to her principled disinterestedness. You usually have to descend to the category of 'kept' persons, male or female, to find ulterior motives behind actions or words that are ostensibly innocent, for purposes of self-interest or survival. What man is ignorant of the fact that when a woman he is going to pay says to him: 'Don't let's talk about money', the words need to be taken as a 'silent bar', as they say in music, and that if, later on, she declares: 'You make me too unhappy, you're always keeping things from me. I can't stand it any more', he needs to understand it as: 'Someone else is offering her more'? And this is only the language of a kept woman, not so far removed from society women. Criminal types offer more striking examples. But M. de Norpois and the German Prince, even if criminal types were unknown to them, had grown accustomed to living on the same plane as nations, and nations too, for all their greatness, are creatures of selfishness and cunning, tamed only by force, by consideration for their interests which may drive them to murder, and often symbolic murder, since the mere hesitation or refusal to fight may mean for a nation: 'Perish.' But since all this is not set out in the various documents of official policy or elsewhere, nations tend to be peace-loving; if they are warlike, it is through instinct, from hatred, from a sense of grievance, and not for the reasons that determine their leaders on the advice of someone like Norpois.

The following winter the Prince fell seriously ill. He recovered but his heart was permanently affected.

'Curse it!' he said to himself, 'I can't afford to lose any more time over the Institut. If I take too long, I may be dead before they elect me. That's the last thing I want.'

He wrote a piece for the *Revue des deux mondes* on politics over the past twenty years with several extremely flattering references to M. de Norpois. The latter called to thank him. He added that he did not know how to express his gratitude. The Prince said to himself, like a man who had just tried to fit another key into a difficult lock: 'Still not the right one', and, feeling a little out of breath as he showed M. de Norpois out, thought: 'Good God! these fellows will see me dead before they let me in. Time to speed things up.'

That very evening he ran into M. de Norpois again at the Opéra:

'My dear Ambassador, he said to him, you said this morning you didn't know how to express your gratitude. It's quite unnecessary, you owe me none. But I'm going to make bold enough to take you at your word.'

M. de Norpois had no less esteem for the Prince's tactfulness than the Prince had for his. He understood at once that it was not a request that the Prince von Faffenheim was about to put to him, but an offer, and he prepared himself for it by breaking into an affable smile.

'You're going to think me very indiscreet. But there are two people to whom I am greatly attached – in quite different ways, as you will see in a moment. They have both recently come to live in Paris, which is where they intend to stay from now on. I'm talking about my wife and the Grand Duchess John. They are to give a few dinners, notably in honour of the King and Queen of England, and their dream would have been to provide their two guests with the company of someone whom they greatly admire, but whom neither have met. I have to say that I had no idea how to gratify their wish until I learned just now, by pure chance, that you knew just such a person. I know that she lives a very retired life and sees only a very few people – a *happy few* – but if you, with the kindness you have always shown me, were to give me your support, I feel sure that she would allow you to present me to her so that I might convey the wish of the Grand Duchess and the Princess. She might even consent to dine with the Queen of England and then – who knows? – if we don't bore her too much, to come and spend the Easter vacation with us at Beaulieu, at the Grand Duchess John's. I'm talking about the Marquise de Villeparisis. I admit that the hope of becoming an habitué of such a bureau of wit would console me, make it less difficult for me to face abandoning my candidature for the Institut. Her salon too is a centre of intellectual intercourse and intelligent discussion.'

With an inexpressible sense of pleasure the Prince felt that the lock was no longer resistant and that he had at last found the right key.

'Such an alternative is completely unnecessary, my dear Prince, replied M. de Norpois. Nothing could be more of a match for the Institut than the salon you mention. It's a positive breeding-ground of Academicians. I shall convey your request to Mme la Marquise de Villeparisis. She will most certainly be flattered. As to your dinner, she goes out very little, and it will perhaps be more difficult to arrange. But I shall introduce you to her and you can then plead your cause in person. But on no account must you give up the Academy. It just so happens that, a fortnight tomorrow, I am lunching with Leroy-Beaulieu before the two of us go on to an important meeting, and without his help nobody can be elected. I have already mentioned your name to him in this connection and, naturally, it's a name that is perfectly familiar to him. He did raise certain objections. But, as it happens, he needs the support of my group at the next election, and so I intend to press him further. I shall tell him frankly of the warm bonds that unite us, and I shall make no secret of the fact that, if you were to stand, I should ask all my friends to vote for you (the Prince heaved a deep sigh of relief at this point), and he knows that I have friends. If I could manage to obtain his co-operation, then I think that your chances would be very real. Meet me at six that evening at Mme de Villeparisis's. I'll introduce you to her, and I'll also be able to give you an account of my morning meeting.'

And this is how the Prince von Faffenheim came to find himself calling on Mme de Villeparisis. Deep disillusion set in for me when he started to speak. It had never occurred to me that, if a given period has features, both localized and general, which are more accentuated than those of nationality, so that in the sort of

illustrated dictionary which even includes an authentic portrait of Minerva, Leibniz in his wig and fraise looks very much the same as Marivaux or Samuel Bernard,[83] then a nationality has particular features more accentuated than those of a caste. In the present instance, these were made apparent to me not in a discourse in which I had expected to hear the rustling of elves and the dance of the kobolds, but in a transposition that bore the imprint of that poetic origin no less markedly: the fact that as he made his bow to Mme de Villeparisis, this short, red-faced, pot-bellied Rhingrave said to her: 'Gut-tay, Matame la Marquise', in the accent of a concierge from Alsace.

'Can't I tempt you to a cup of tea or a little of this tart, it's very good?' Mme de Guermantes asked me, anxious to have behaved in as friendly a manner as possible. 'I do the honours here as if I were in my own home,' she explained in an ironical tone which made her voice slightly guttural, as though she were stifling a hoarse laugh.

'Monsieur, said Mme de Villeparisis to M. de Norpois, you won't forget you have something to say to the Prince about the Academy?'

Mme de Guermantes lowered her eyes and half turned her wrist to look at the time.

'Good gracious! It's time I said good-bye to my aunt if I'm to get to Mme de Saint-Ferréol's, and I'm dining with Mme Leroi.'

She rose without bidding me good-bye. She had just caught sight of Mme Swann, who seemed somewhat embarrassed by my presence. Doubtless she remembered that she had been the first to assure me that she was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence.

'I don't want my mother to introduce me to Mme Swann, Saint-Loup said to me. She's an ex-prostitute. Her husband's a Jew and she comes here to parade as a Nationalist. Hello, there's my Uncle Palamède.'

I was particularly interested to see Mme Swann there on account of something that had occurred a few days earlier and which it is necessary to relate because of the consequences it was to have much later, the details of which will follow in due course. A few days before my present visit to Mme de Villeparisis, I had myself received a visitor, one whom I barely expected, Charles Morel, the son – unknown to me – of my great-uncle's former valet. The great-uncle in question (the one in whose house I had met the lady in pink) had died the year before. His valet had more than once expressed his intention of coming to see me; I had no idea why, but I welcomed the idea of seeing him, for I had learned from Françoise that he held my uncle's memory in genuine veneration and made a regular pilgrimage to his grave. But he had been obliged to retire to his home in the country for reasons of health, and since he expected to remain there for some time, he had sent his son in his stead. I was surprised to see a handsome young man of eighteen come into the room, dressed expensively rather than with taste, yet looking, for all that, like anything but a servant. And he made a point, from the very start, of distancing himself from his menial origins by informing me with a complacent smile that he had won a first prize at the Conservatoire. The reason he had come was this: his father had found various mementoes among the effects of my Uncle Adolphe which he considered it inappropriate to send to my parents, and had set them aside as something that might interest a young man of my age. These were photographs of the famous actresses, the great courtesans my uncle had known, the last images of the rakish proclivities he kept hermetically sealed from his family life. While the young Morel was showing them to me, I became aware that he affected to speak to me as an equal. The pleasure he derived from addressing me as 'you' and using 'Monsieur' as little as possible was that of a man whose father had only ever used the third person to address my parents. Almost all the photographs bore inscriptions like: 'To my dearest friend'. One actress, less grateful and more shrewd than the others, had written: 'To the best of friends', which enabled her (so I have been assured) to say that my uncle was far from being her best friend in any sense, but that he had been the friend who had done the most to oblige her in all sorts of small ways, the friend she made use of, a really kind man, a big silly almost. However much the young Morel tried to escape his background, one felt that the ghost of my Uncle Adolphe, who had been so venerable and loomed so large in the eyes of his old valet, had never ceased to hover like something sacred over the childhood and youth of the son. While I was examining the photographs, Charles Morel was taking stock of my room. And as I was looking for somewhere to put them, 'How is it, he asked me (in a tone in which the reproach had no need to be stressed, so implicit was it in the words themselves), that I don't see a single photograph of your uncle in the room?' I felt the blood rise to my cheeks and stammered: 'Why, I don't even think I have one. – What, you haven't a single photograph of the uncle who was so fond of you! I'll send you one of the old man's, he's got loads. I hope you'll give it the place of honour above the chest of drawers there, which just so happens to have come to you from your uncle.' It is true that, since there was not even a photograph of my mother or father in my room, there was nothing so very shocking about not having one of my Uncle Adolphe. But it was easy enough to see that for old Morel, who had brought up his son to his own way of thinking, my uncle was the important person in the family, and my parents only dull reflections of his glorious figure. I was more privileged, because my uncle was always saying to his valet that I would turn out to be another Racine or Vaulabelle,[84] and Morel regarded me, as a favourite child of my uncle, as something like an adopted son. It did not take me long to realize that Morel's son was very much a 'go-getter'. In fact on this particular occasion he asked me, being something of a composer as well and capable of setting the odd poem to music, whether I knew of any poet who was well in with 'aristo' society. I named one. He had not read this poet nor had he ever heard of him, and he noted down the name. I discovered shortly afterwards that he had written to the poet as a fanatical admirer of his work to tell him that he had set one of his sonnets to music and that he would be very grateful if the author would arrange to have it performed at the Comtesse ***. Such undue haste exposed his real intentions. The poet took offence and made no reply.

Together with his ambition, Charles Morel seemed to have a marked leaning towards more concrete realities. Coming through the courtyard, he had noticed Jupien's niece at work upon a waistcoat, and although he told me nothing more than that he just happened to need a fancy waistcoat at that moment, I felt that the young woman had made a vivid impression on him. He had no scruples about asking me to come downstairs and introduce him to her, 'but not in connection with your family, if you see what I mean. I rely on your discretion not to mention my father. Just say that I'm a distinguished artist friend of yours. You know how important it is to make a good impression on tradespeople.' He managed to convey that he quite understood I did not know him well enough to address him as 'dear friend' but that I might refer to him in front of the young woman in some such terms as 'not my dear maestro, of course… although… well, dear virtuoso, if you like'; but when we were in the shop, I avoided 'qualifying' him, as Saint-Simon would have said, and restricted myself to a purely formal style of address between us. From the various samples of velvet presented, he went for one that was so bright-red and so loud that, for all his bad taste, he was never able to bring himself to wear the waistcoat that was made up from it. The young woman settled down to work again with her two 'apprentices', but it seemed to me that the interest had been mutual and that Charles Morel, whom she regarded as of my 'station' (only smarter and richer), had struck her as singularly attractive. Since I had been greatly surprised to find among the photographs his father had sent one of Elstir's portrait of Miss Sacripant (namely Odette), I said to Charles Morel as I accompanied him to the courtyard entrance: 'I don't suppose you can help me, but did my uncle know this lady well? I'm not clear what stage of his life she belongs to, and it interests me because of M. Swann… – But oh yes, I nearly forget to tell you that my father particularly asked me to draw your attention to that one. She's the very demi-mondaine who was lunching with him on the last occasion you saw him. My father was not at all sure about letting you in. It seems that you made a great impression on that loose lady, and she hoped to see you again. But it all coincided with some family row, from what my father tells me, and you never set eyes on your uncle again.' He broke off at this point to give Jupien's niece a smile of farewell from where he was standing. She was gazing after him, doubtless admiring his thin but regular features, his fine hair and his sparkling eyes. And I, as I shook his hand, was thinking of Mme Swann, realizing with amazement, so far apart, so different were they in my memory, that I should now have to identify her with the 'lady in pink'.

M. de Charlus was soon seated next to Mme Swann. At every social gathering he attended he scorned the men, was courted by the women, and promptly attached himself to the most elegant woman he could find, with the feeling that her stylishness somehow embellished him. The Baron's frock coat or tails recalled some great colourist's portrait of a man dressed in black but with a brilliantly coloured cloak thrown over a chair beside him, and which he is about to wear to a fancy dress ball. M. de Charlus's tête-à-têtes, usually with some royal lady, secured him a number of valued privileges. For instance, one of the consequences of

them was that when his hostesses put on some special entertainment, he was the only man allowed to have a front seat in a row of ladies, while the other men were crowded into the back of the room. Again, when he was – to all intents and purposes – deeply absorbed in telling amusing stories to some enraptured lady at the top of his voice, M. de Charlus was dispensed from having to pay his respects to any of the others, and thus free of any social duties. Behind the scented screen that the chosen beauty provided for him, he was as protected in the middle of a social gathering as he would have been in a box at the theatre, and whenever anyone came up to greet him, through the screen, as it were, of his beautiful companion, it was permissible for him to reply in the curtest manner without interrupting his conversation with the lady in question. Mme Swann, it is true, was scarcely to be classed among the people with whom he liked to flaunt himself in this way. But he professed admiration for her and friendship for Swann, knew that she would be flattered by his attentions, and was himself flattered at being compromised by the prettiest woman in the room.

Mme de Villeparisis was none too pleased to be receiving a visit from M. de Charlus. He himself, while he saw great defects in his aunt's character, was extremely fond of her. But every now and then in a fit of anger or imaginary grievance, without any attempt to resist his impulses, he would send her letters full of violent abuse, in which he made mountains out of the most trivial incidents which seemed to have completely escaped his attention until then. Among other examples of this, I mention the following one, which was brought to my attention during my stay in Balbec: Mme de Villeparisis, worried that she had not brought enough money to Balbec to extend her holiday there, and, as a thrifty woman who avoided spending more than she had to, reluctant to have money sent from Paris, had borrowed three thousand francs from M. de Charlus. A month later, annoyed with his aunt for some trivial reason, he had asked her to pay the money back and wire it to him. He received a money order for two thousand nine hundred and ninety-odd francs. A few days later he ran into his aunt in Paris, and in the course of a friendly conversation he drew her attention very discreetly to the mistake made by the bank responsible for the transaction. 'But there was no mistake, said Mme de Villeparisis, the money order costs six francs seventy-five. – Ah, well, if it was intentional, that's fine, replied M. de Charlus. I simply mentioned it in case you didn't know, because in that case, had they done the same thing to someone who didn't know you as well as I do, it could have been upsetting for you. – No, no, there was no mistake. – Actually, you were quite right,' M. de Charlus concluded gaily, tenderly kissing his aunt's hand. In fact there was absolutely no grudge on his part, only amusement at her petty stinginess. But some time later, convinced that his aunt had been trying to cheat him in some family matter and had 'mounted a whole conspiracy against him', and since she was foolish enough to take shelter behind the professional advisers with whom he suspected her of plotting against him, he had written her a letter seething with insolence and rage. The postscript read: I shall not be satisfied with having my revenge. I shall make you a laughing-stock. Tomorrow I shall tell everyone about the money order and the six francs seventy-five you kept back out of the three thousand I lent you. You won't be able to hold your face up in public.' He had done nothing of the sort and had gone to his Aunt Villeparisis the next day to apologize for the dreadful language he had used in the letter. And anyway, to whom could he have told the story of the money order at this point? Since he wanted not vengeance, but genuine reconciliation, this would have been the time for him to say nothing about it. But he had already told the story everywhere anyway, while still on good terms with his aunt, told it without spite, as a joke, and because he was the soul of indiscretion. He had told it without Mme de Villeparisis's knowledge. So that when she read in his letter that he planned to disgrace her by divulging a transaction in which he had assured her personally that she had acted quite rightly, she had concluded that he had been insincere with her at the time and had lied when he pretended to be fond of her. All this had now died down, but neither of them knew exactly where they stood with each other. This was of course one of those rather unusual quarrels which happen from time to time. The quarrels of Bloch and his friends were of a different order. And of a different order again were those of M. de Charlus with people quite unlike Mme de Villeparisis, as we shall see. In spite of this we need to bear in mind that our opinion of other people, our ties with friends or family, have only the semblance of fixity and are, in fact, as eternally fluid as the sea. Whence all the rumours of divorce between couples who have always seemed so perfectly united and who soon afterwards speak of each other with affection; all the slander uttered by one friend of another from whom he seemed inseparable and with whom we shall find him reconciled before we have time to recover from our surprise; all the sudden reversals of alliances between nations.

'I say, things are hotting up between my uncle and Mme Swann, Saint-Loup observed to me. And here comes my innocent Mama to disturb them. To the pure all things are pure!'

I turned my attention to M. de Charlus. The tuft of his grey hair, the twinkling eye beneath the eyebrow pushed up by his monocle, the red flowers in his buttonhole, were like three mobile apexes in a convulsive and striking triangle. I had not been bold enough to greet him, since he had given me no sign of recognition. Yet though he was not facing in my direction, I was convinced that he had seen me; while he sat there recounting some anecdote to Mme Swann, whose magnificent pansy-coloured cape drifted over his knee, the Baron's roving eyes, like those of a street hawker constantly on the look-out for the 'cops' to appear, had certainly explored every corner of the room and taken in everybody there. M. de Châtellerault came over to say good evening without M. de Charlus's face showing any sign of recognition until the young Duc was standing in front of him. In this way, in fairly large receptions like the present one, M. de Charlus adopted an almost permanent smile, directed at nothing or no one in particular, which, by pre-existing the greetings of newcomers, could not be interpreted as a sign of friendliness towards them as they entered its orbit. Nevertheless, I felt obliged to go across and say good evening to Mme Swann. But since she was not certain whether I knew Mme de Marsantes or M. de Charlus, she was distinctly cold, fearing no doubt that I might ask her to introduce them to me. I then went up to M. de Charlus and immediately regretted it, because though he could not have helped seeing me, he showed no sign at all of having done so. As I bowed I discovered, at a distance from his body which it prevented me from approaching by the full length of his outstretched arm, a finger which seemed only to lack the Episcopal ring he appeared to be offering as the consecrated site for a kiss, and I was made to look as if I had penetrated, without the Baron's leave and through some act of trespass for which he left me responsible, the permanence, the anonymous, vacant dispersion of his smile. This coldness was hardly calculated to urge Mme Swann out of hers.

'You're looking tired and upset,' said Mme de Marsantes to her son, who had come over to say good evening to M. de Charlus.

And it was true that every now and then the expression in Robert's eyes seemed to reach down into the depths and then rise again like a diver who has touched bottom. These depths, which were so painful for Robert to visit that he left them the moment he entered them and then returned to them a moment later, were his thoughts about the rift with his mistress.

'Never mind, his mother continued, stroking his cheek, never mind, it's good to see my little boy again.'

But since her affection seemed to irritate Robert, Mme de Marsantes took her son off to the other end of the room into an alcove hung with yellow silk where a group of Beauvais armchairs clustered their purplish upholstery like mauve irises in a field of buttercups. Mme Swann, finding herself alone and having realized that I was a friend of Saint-Loup, beckoned me to come and sit beside her. It was so long since I had seen her that I was at a loss for what to talk to her about. I kept my eye on my hat among all those that were there on the carpet, wondering with interest to whom one of them could belong; its lining bore a *G*, surmounted by a ducal coronet, but it was not the Duc de Guermantes's. I knew who everyone there was and could not think of anyone whose hat this might be.

'What a nice person M. de Norpois is, I remarked to Mme Swann as I pointed him out to her. I know that Robert de Saint-Loup thinks he's a pest, but…

– And he's quite right there,' she replied.

Seeing from her look that she was keeping something from me, I plied her with questions. Pleased, perhaps, to appear to be deeply absorbed in conversation with someone in a room where she hardly knew a soul, she drew me into a corner.

'I'm sure this is what M. de Saint-Loup meant, she said in answer to my questions, but you mustn't tell him I said so. He would think me indiscreet and I value his esteem a great deal. I like to observe the proprieties, you know. The other day, Charlus was dining at the Princesse de Guermantes's, and for some reason or

other your name came into the conversation. M. de Norpois seems to have told them – it's all too silly, so don't get yourself into a state about it, no one paid any attention, they knew exactly the sort of person who would say such a thing – that you were a hysterical little flatterer.'

I mentioned a long way back how stupefied I was to discover that a friend of my father like M. de Norpois could have said such things about me. I was even more stupefied to learn that my feelings on that occasion long ago, when I had spoken about Mme Swann and Gilberte, were known to the Princesse de Guermantes, whom I took to be unaware of my existence. Each of our actions, our words, our attitudes is cut off from the 'world', from the people who have not directly perceived them, by an ambience whose permeability is infinitely variable and unknown to us; when we learn from experience that some important remark we dearly hoped would be spread about (like the enthusiastic things I used to say at one time to everyone and at every opportunity about Mme Swann, thinking that among so many scattered seeds at least one would germinate) has at once, often because we hoped too hard, been consigned to darkness, then we are hardly likely to start believing that some tiny remark we have forgotten, which we may not have even uttered ourselves but which was formed in the course of events by the imperfect refraction of different words, could be transported, unhindered, infinite distances away – in the present case to the Princesse de Guermantes – to divert at our expense the banquet of the gods. What we remember of our conduct remains unknown to our nearest neighbour; the things we had forgotten we had said, or even those we never did say, travel far off to provoke hilarity on another planet, and the image other people form of our actions and exploits no more corresponds to our own than an inaccurate tracing does to the original drawing, with empty spaces where there were black lines and inexplicable shapes where there were blank spaces. But it can happen that what has not been transcribed was non-existent anyway, something we conjured up purely out of self-esteem or, conversely, that the elements that seem to us to have been added are in fact very much a part of us, but so ingrained that they escape us. So this strange tracing which seems to bear so little resemblance to us has the same sort of truth about it – unflattering, certainly, but also profound and useful – as an X-ray photograph. Not that this is any reason why we should recognize ourselves in it. A man who is used to smiling in the mirror at his handsome face and figure will, if he is shown an X-ray of them, entertain the same suspicion of error at the sight of the rosary of bones presented as an image of himself as the visitor to an exhibition looking at the portrait of a young woman and reading in the catalogue: 'Camel resting'. I was later to realize that this discrepancy between our own image of ourselves and the image others draw of us was felt not only by myself; there were people who lived unruffled amid the photographs they had taken of themselves, while round about them grinned the most fearful faces, invisible to them as a rule, but stunning them with amazement the moment the chance words 'It's you' revealed them for what they were.

A few years earlier I should have been only too glad to tell Mme Swann in what connection I had poured my heart out to M. de Norpois, since it had been to do with my desire to get to know her. But this was something I no longer felt; I was no longer in love with Gilberte. There was also the fact that I found it hard to identify Mme Swann with the lady in pink of my childhood. So I spoke to her about the woman who occupied my thoughts at the moment.

'Did you see the Duchesse de Guermantes just now?' I asked Mme Swann.

But since the Duchesse was not in the habit of acknowledging her, Mme Swann adopted the pretence of regarding her as a person of no interest, whose presence one did not even notice.

'I don't know. I didn't *realize* she was here,' she replied peevishly, using the verb in its English sense.

But I was anxious for information with regard not only to Mme de Guermantes but to all the people in her entourage, and, just like Bloch, with the tactlessness of those who seek in their conversation not to give pleasure to others but selfishly to elucidate what interests them personally, in my attempt to form an exact picture of the life of Mme de Guermantes, I questioned Mme de Villeparisis about Mme Leroi.

'Yes, I know the woman you mean, she replied with affected disdain, the daughter of those wealthy timber merchants. I know she's much in demand lately, but I must say I'm rather old now to start making new acquaintances. I've known such interesting, such delightful people in my time that I can't really think that Mme Leroi could add anything further to that.'

Mme de Marsantes, who was playing lady-in-waiting to the Marquise, presented me to the Prince, and scarcely had she done so than M. de Norpois presented me as well, in the most glowing terms. Perhaps he found it easy to pay me a compliment which could not discredit him in the least, since I had just been introduced anyway; perhaps he thought that a foreigner, even a distinguished one, was less familiar with French salon life and might think he was being introduced to a young man from high society; perhaps he was exercising one of his prerogatives, that of adding the weight of his personal recommendation as an ambassador; or perhaps, in his taste for the archaic, to revive in the Prince's honour the old custom, flattering to his royal station, which entailed the necessity of two sponsors if one was to be presented.

Mme de Villeparisis called across to M. de Norpois, feeling it important that I should have it from him that she had nothing to regret in not knowing Mme Leroi.

'Isn't it true, M. l'Ambassadeur, that Mme Leroi is someone of no interest, very inferior to all the people who come here, and that I'm quite right not to have cultivated her?'

Whether he was keeping his own counsel or because he was tired, M. de Norpois replied merely with a bow that was full of respect but devoid of meaning.

'Monsieur, said Mme de Villeparisis with a laugh, there are some absurd people about. Would you believe that I was visited this afternoon by a gentleman who tried to persuade me that he found more pleasure in kissing my hand than a young woman's?'

I guessed immediately that this must have been Legrandin. M. de Norpois smiled with a slight tremor of the eyelid, as if he felt that the remark arose from a concupiscence so natural that the person who felt it could be forgiven, almost as though it were the beginning of a romance which he was prepared to dismiss, or even encourage, with the perverse indulgence of a Voisenon or a Crébillon fils.[85]

'Many young women's hands would be incapable of doing what I see there,' said the Prince, pointing to Mme de Villeparisis's unfinished water-colours.

And he asked her whether she had seen the recent exhibition of flower paintings by Fantin-Latour.

'They are first-class, the work, as they say nowadays, of a fine painter, one of the masters of the palette, declared M. de Norpois. But in my view, they do not stand comparison with those of Mme de Villeparisis, which capture the colouring of a flower more successfully.'

Even supposing that the partiality of an old lover, the habit of flattery, the views acceptable to a given social circle, had dictated the ex-ambassador's remarks, they were none the less proof of the extent to which the artistic judgment of society people is based on a total absence of real taste, and so arbitrary that the merest trifle can push it into arrant nonsense, unchecked by any genuinely felt impression.

'I claim no credit for my knowledge of flowers, I've always lived among them, replied Mme de Villeparisis modestly. But, she added graciously to the Prince, if, when I was very young, I regarded them slightly more seriously than other country children, I owe it to a distinguished compatriot of yours, M. de Schlegel.[86] I met him at Broglie where I was taken by my Aunt Cordélia, the Maréchale de Castellane. I have a very clear memory of M. Lebrun, M. de Salvandy, M. Daudan, getting him to talk about flowers. I was only a small girl, and I couldn't understand everything he said. But he liked playing with me, and when he went back to your country he sent me a lovely botany book as a reminder of the drive we took in a phaeton to the Val Richer, when I fell asleep on his knees. I've always kept the book, and it has taught me to observe a lot of things about flowers which I should not have noticed otherwise. When de Barante published some of Mme de Broglie's letters, charming and affected like she was herself, I hoped to find among them some record of those conversations with M. de Schlegel. But she was a woman who looked to nature only for arguments in support of religion.'

Robert called me away to the other end of the room where he and his mother were.

'How very kind you've been, I said, I don't know how to thank you. Can we dine together tomorrow?

– Yes, tomorrow if you like, but it will have to be with Bloch. I met him on his way out. He was rather cold with me for a moment. I'd somehow forgotten to answer his last two letters (he didn't say that was why he was put out, but I guessed). But he behaved so warmly with me subsequently that I can't say no to him. I think it's friendship for life between us, on his part at least.'

I do not think that Robert was altogether mistaken. To fulminate against someone was often Bloch's way of showing a keen sympathy which he had supposed was not reciprocal. And as he had little imagination about other people's lives, and never dreamed that one might have been ill, away from home and so forth, he was quick to interpret a week's silence as a deliberate rebuff. For this reason I never believed that his most violent outbursts as a friend, or later as a writer, went very deep. They were exacerbated if one responded to them with frosty decorum, or with the sort of platitude that encouraged him to redouble his onslaughts, but often they melted into the warmth of friendship. 'As for my kindness to you, Saint-Loup went on, I haven't really been kind at all. My aunt says that it's you who avoid her, that you never even speak to her. She wonders whether you have anything against her.'

Fortunately for myself, if I had been taken in by these words, my sense of our imminent departure for Balbec would have stopped me making any attempt to see Mme de Guermantes again, to assure her that I had nothing against her, and thereby put her under the obligation to show that it was she who had something against me. But I needed only to remind myself that she had not even offered to let me see her Elstirs. None of this came as a real disappointment; I had never expected her to talk to me about the paintings; I knew I had no appeal for her, and no chance of ever making her like me; the most I had been able to hope for was that, since I should not be seeing her again before leaving Paris, her kindness would leave me with a deeply soothing impression of her, which I could take with me to Balbec as something of indefinitely lasting value, intact, and not as a memory mixed with anxiety and dejection.

Mme de Marsantes kept interrupting her conversation with Robert to tell me how often he had spoken to her about me, how fond he was of me; her solicitous behaviour made me feel quite uncomfortable because I felt it to be dictated by the fear of falling out with her son because of me, the son she had not seen all day, with whom she was anxious to be alone, and over whom she must have supposed that she had less influence than I did, and therefore needed to humour me. Having heard me earlier asking Bloch for news of his uncle, M. Nissim Bernard, Mme de Marsantes enquired whether it was he who had once lived in Nice.

'In which case he would have known M. de Marsantes there before our marriage, Mme de Marsantes told me. My husband often mentioned him to me as an excellent man, with such a discerning, generous nature.'

'To think that for once in his life he wasn't lying! Amazing!' Bloch would have thought.

All this time I should have liked to tell Mme de Marsantes that Robert was far far fonder of her than he was of me, and that even if she had shown hostility towards me, it was not in my nature to try and set him against her or to take him away from her. But now that Mme de Guermantes had gone, I had more time to observe Robert, and it was only then I noticed that he seemed once more possessed by a sort of anger, which had risen to the surface of his hardened, sombre face. My fear was that the memory of the scene earlier in the afternoon when he had allowed himself to be treated so harshly by his mistress without any retaliation on his part had made him feel humiliated in my presence.

He suddenly broke away from his mother, who had put her arm around his neck, and, coming towards me, took me off behind the little desk with the flowers at which Mme de Villeparisis had now sat down again and beckoned me to follow him into the small drawing-room. As I was hurrying after him M. de Charlus, perhaps under the impression that I was leaving, brought his conversation with M. de Faffenheim to an abrupt end and wheeled round rapidly to face me. I was alarmed to see that he had taken the hat with the *G* and the ducal coronet in the lining. In the doorway to the small drawing-room he said without looking at me:

'Now that I see you have taken to going into society, you must give me the pleasure of a visit. But it's all rather complicated,' he added with casual purposefulness, as if this pleasure was something he feared he might not encounter again once he had let slip the opportunity of arranging with me the means of securing it. 'I am rarely at home. You will have to write to me. But I'd prefer to explain it all to you in quieter surroundings. I'm leaving soon. Will you walk a little way with me? I shall only keep you for a moment.

– Do take care, Monsieur,' I said. You've picked up the wrong hat by mistake.

– You want to stop me taking my own hat?'

I assumed, since the same mishap had recently happened to me, that someone else had gone away with his hat and his instinctive reaction had been to pick up one at random so as not to go home bare-headed, and that my remark had embarrassed him by exposing his ruse. So I did not pursue the matter. I told him that I needed to say a few words to Saint-Loup before I left. 'He's talking to that stupid Duc de Guermantes, I added. – What a charming thing to say. I shall tell my brother. – Oh! you think that would interest M. de Charlus?' (I simply supposed that, if he had a brother, the brother must be called M. de Charlus too. Saint-Loup had in fact explained the family connections to me in Balbec, but I had forgotten them.) 'What do you mean, M. de Charlus? replied the Baron contemptuously. Go and speak to Robert. I know you were there this morning at one of those orgiastic lunches he has with a woman who is disgracing him. You would do well to use your influence with him and get him to see how much pain he is causing his poor mother and all of us by dragging our name in the mud.'

I should have liked to reply that this degrading lunch-party had been entirely given over to a discussion of Emerson, Ibsen and Tolstoy, and that the young woman in question had lectured Robert about not drinking alcohol. In the hope of soothing Robert, whose pride I thought had been wounded, I sought to excuse his mistress. I did not know as I did so that, in spite of his anger with her, it was himself that he was reproaching. It always happens, even in quarrels between a good man and a spiteful woman when the right is all on one side, that some trifle crops up which enables the woman to appear not to have been in the wrong on one particular matter. And since she ignores all the other points of the argument, if the man feels he needs her, if he is upset by the rift between them, his weakness will make him scrupulous, he will remember the absurd reproaches that have been levelled against him and ask himself whether they are not somehow justified.

'I think I was wrong about that business of the necklace, said Robert. I know I didn't do it with any nasty motive, but other people don't see things in the same way. I'm well aware of that. She had a very hard childhood. I'm bound to seem to her like the rich man who can buy anything with money and against whom a poor man can't compete, whether it's persuading Boucheron or winning a lawsuit. I know she's been horribly unkind to me, when I've never thought of anything but her good. But I can see that she really thought I wanted to make her feel that I could keep a hold on her with money, and it's not true. She's so fond of me – what must she be thinking? The poor darling, if you only knew how kind and thoughtful she is, I can't tell you what adorable things she's done for me. She must be feeling really wretched! Anyway, whatever happens, I don't want her to think I'm a cad. I'm going to dash off to Boucheron's and get that necklace. Who knows? Perhaps when she sees what I've done, she'll admit it was partly her fault. It's the idea that she's suffering at this moment that I can't bear, can you see that? What one suffers oneself one knows, and it's nothing. But the thought that *she's* suffering without being able to imagine what she feels is enough to drive one mad. I'd rather not see her ever again than let her suffer. All I ask is that she be happy, without me if need be. You know, for me everything that concerns her is immensely important, it becomes something cosmic. I shall rush off to the jeweller's and then go and ask her to forgive me. Until I get to her, what can she be thinking of me? If only she knew I was on my way! Perhaps it would be a good idea for you to come too. Perhaps everything will be all right. Perhaps,' he said with a smile, as if he hardly dared to believe such a thing possible, 'the three of us can go and dine in the country. But I can't really tell. I'm so bad at treating her properly. Poor sweet, I may hurt her feelings again. Besides, she may have already made up her mind for good.'

Robert swept me back to his mother.

'Good-bye, he said to her. I have to go now. I don't know when my next leave will be. Probably not for a month. I'll write as soon as I know.'

Certainly Robert was not at all the sort of son who, when he accompanies his mother into society, feels it necessary to adopt an exasperated attitude towards her as a counterbalance to the smiles and greetings he addresses to strangers. Nothing is more common than this hateful form of vengeance on the part of those who appear to believe that rudeness to family is the natural complement to formal behaviour. Whatever the wretched mother may say, the son, as though he had been brought along against his will and wished her to pay dearly for it, immediately counters any timidly ventured assertion with some sarcastic contradiction, which cruelly hits home; the mother at once conforms to the opinion of this superior being, though this does nothing to make him relent, and she will go on vaunting his delightful nature to the whole world in his absence, while he continues to wound her with his most barbed remarks. Saint-Loup was not at all like this, but the anguish provoked by Rachel's absence caused him, for different reasons, to be no less harsh with his mother than the sort of son I have described. And as she listened to him I saw the same tremor, like the beating of a wing, which Mme de Marsantes had been unable to repress when her son first entered the room, run through her whole body once more; but this time it was an anxious face and distressed gaze that she fastened on him.

'You're not leaving, Robert? Not seriously? Darling! – on the one day I might have seen something of you!'

And then quite softly, in the most natural voice, from which she tried hard to banish any hint of sadness so as not to make her son feel any sense of pity which would perhaps have been painful to him, or else useless and simply sent to irritate him, she added, as a merely common-sense proposition:

'You know that it's not very nice of you.'

But in this simple remark there was so much timidity, to reassure him that she was not trespassing on his freedom, and so much affection, so that he should not reproach her with interfering with his pleasures, that Saint-Loup could not help but feel that he might himself succumb to an affectionate response, in other words to an obstacle to his spending the evening with his mistress. So he responded angrily:

'It's unfortunate, but nice or not nice, that's the way it is.'

And he heaped on his mother the reproaches he no doubt felt he perhaps deserved himself; thus it is that egoists always have the last word; starting from the premise that their resolution is unshakeable, the more susceptible the feeling to which one appeals in them to make them abandon their resolve, the more objectionable they find, not themselves and their resistance to that appeal, but those who put them under pressure to resist, so that their own unbending behaviour may be carried to extremes of cruelty without them seeing the matter as anything more than the aggravated culpability of the person who is so indelicate as to feel hurt, to be in the right, and who thus lets them down by making them feel the pain of acting against their natural sense of compassion. But Mme de Marsantes let the matter drop of her own accord, for she sensed that she would be unable to dissuade him.

'I'm off, he said to me, but, Mama, please don't keep him long. He's got to pay another call in a while.'

I felt certain that Mme de Marsantes would not derive any pleasure from my company, but I was glad not to give her the impression by leaving with Robert that I was involved in the pleasures which deprived her of him. I should have liked to find some excuse for her son's behaviour, less from affection for him than from sympathy with her. But it was she who spoke first:

'Poor boy, she said, I'm sure I must have hurt his feelings. You see, Monsieur, mothers are such selfish creatures. And he hasn't many pleasures in life, he comes so seldom to Paris. Oh dear, if he hadn't left already I should have liked to have caught him for a minute, not to keep him with me of course, but just to tell him that I'm not cross, that I think he was quite right. Would you mind if I go and look over the staircase?'

We went together.

'Robert! Robert! she called. No, he's left. I've missed him.'

At that moment I would have undertaken a mission to make Robert break with his mistress as readily as I had been to make him go and live with her permanently a few hours earlier. In the one case Saint-Loup would have regarded me as a false friend, in the other his family would have called me his evil genius. Yet in that interval of a few hours I was the same man.

We returned to the drawing-room. Seeing that Saint-Loup had not returned with us, Mme de Villeparisis exchanged with M. de Norpois one of those sceptical, wry and barely sympathetic glances reserved for over-jealous wives and over-fond mothers (stock targets of amusement), as much as to say: 'Well, well, there's been trouble there all right.'

Robert went to his mistress, taking with him the splendid piece of jewellery which, in terms of the rules they had set each other, he ought not to have given her. But it came to the same thing, for she would have nothing to do with it, and even subsequently he could never persuade her to accept it. Some of Robert's friends thought that such shows of disinterestedness on her part were deliberately calculated to bind him to her. But in fact she was not really interested in money, except perhaps in order to be able to spend it without counting every penny. I have known her to lavish wild amounts of money on people she thought were in need. 'At this moment,' Robert's friends would say to him, in an attempt to counter with their malicious words some disinterested deed of Rachel's, 'at this moment she'll be haunting the promenade gallery of the Folies-Bergère. She's an enigma, that Rachel, a real sphinx.' And yet one sees any number of mercenary women, women kept by men, taking it upon themselves to set limits on the generosity of their lovers in countless small ways, out of a consideration for others which flowers in the midst of their dubious style of life!

Robert was unaware of almost all the infidelities of his mistress, and tormented himself over what were mere nothings compared with the reality of Rachel's life, a life which began every day only after he had left her. He was unaware of almost all these infidelities. One could have told him about them without shaking his confidence in Rachel; for it is a charming law of nature, and one which is evident in the heart of the most complex societies, that we live in perfect ignorance of those we love. On one side of the glass the lover says to himself: 'She is an angel, she will never give herself to me, I may as well die. And yet she loves me; she loves me so much that perhaps … but no, it can never happen!' And in the rapture of his desire, in the anguish of his expectation, what jewels he flings at the feet of this woman, how he runs to borrow money to save her from financial embarrassment! Meanwhile, on the other side of the glass partition, through which these words will no more carry than those exchanged by visitors in front of an aquarium, people are saying: 'You don't know her? Then you're lucky. She has robbed and ruined I don't know how many men. As such women go she's the dregs. Nothing but a swindler. And crafty with it!' And perhaps this last epithet is not absolutely wrong, for even the sceptical man who is not really in love with the woman, who merely finds her attractive, says to his friends: 'No, no, my dear chap, she's certainly no cocotte. I'm not saying she hasn't had an adventure or two in her time, but she's not a woman who takes money, and if she did it would be a pricey business. With her it's fifty thousand francs or nothing.' The reality is that he himself has spent fifty thousand francs to have her once, but she, finding a willing accomplice in the man himself, in his own self-regard, has managed to persuade him that he is one of the men who has had her for nothing. Such is society, where every being is double, and where the most transparent person, the most notorious, will be known to others only from within a protective shell, a sweet cocoon, as a charming natural curiosity. There were in Paris two utterly decent men whom Saint-Loup would no longer acknowledge, and whom he never mentioned without a tremor in his voice, referring to them as exploiters of women: this was because they had both been ruined by Rachel.

There is one thing I reproach myself for, Mme de Marsantes said to me in a subdued voice. I wish I hadn't told him it wasn't nice of him. He's such an adorable son, so special, there's no one like him in the world. To have told him, the one time I see him, that he wasn't being nice to me! I'd rather have been given a beating, because I'm sure that however much he enjoys this evening, and he hasn't much time to enjoy himself, it will be spoiled for him by what I said. It was uncalled-for. But I mustn't keep you, Monsieur, you're in a hurry.'

Mme de Marsantes bade me an anxious good-bye. Her feelings concerned Robert, and they were sincere. But the sincerity ceased as she became a grand lady again:

'I have been so *interested*, so *happy*, so *honoured* to have had this little chat with you. Thank you so very much!'

And with an air of humility she gazed at me in ecstatic gratitude, as though my conversation had been one of the greatest pleasures of her life. Her gaze admirably matched the black flowers on her leaf-patterned white dress; it came from a *grande dame* who knew exactly how to conduct herself.

'I'm really in no hurry, Madame, I replied. In fact I'm waiting for M. de Charlus. We're leaving together.'

Mme de Villeparisis overheard these last words. She seemed put out by them. Had it not been something that could not have involved such a reaction, I should have thought that Mme de Villeparisis's apparent alarm at that moment had to do with her sense of decency. But this hypothesis never even entered my mind. I was feeling delighted with Mme de Guermantes, with Saint-Loup, with Mme de Marsantes, with M. de Charlus, with Mme de Villeparisis; I did not stop to think, and I spoke light-heartedly, saying whatever came into my head.

'You're leaving with my nephew Palamède?' she asked me.

Thinking that it might produce a highly favourable impression on Mme de Villeparisis if she thought that I was on friendly terms with a nephew she esteemed so greatly, I replied gaily: 'He has asked me to walk home with him. I'm delighted. And we're better friends than you think, Madame. In fact I've made up my mind that we shall be better friends still.'

Mme de Villeparisis's displeasure now seemed to turn to anxiety: 'Don't bother to wait for him, she said as if she had something on her mind. He's talking to M. de Faffenheim. He's already forgotten what he said to you. Why don't you slip off while his back is turned?'

In different circumstances, this initial reaction of Mme de Villeparisis would have seemed to arise from a sense of what was decent. To judge by the expression on her face, her insistent objection could have been dictated by probity. I was not myself in any great hurry to join Robert and his mistress. But Mme de Villeparisis seemed so anxious for me to leave that, under the impression that she had some important business to discusss with her nephew, I bade her farewell. The hefty figure of M. de Guermantes was seated beside her, proud and Olympian. One got the impression that the notion of his vast riches was omnipresent in all his limbs, giving him an extraordinary density, as though they had been smelted in a crucible into a single human ingot to create this man who was worth so much. When I said good-bye to him he rose politely to his feet, and I could sense the inert mass of thirty millions being activated and raised up by old-fashioned French breeding until it stood before me. I seemed to be looking at the statue of Olympian Zeus which Phidias is said to have cast in solid gold. Such was the power a Jesuit education exercised over M. de Guermantes, or at least over his body, for it did not extend to mastery of the ducal mind. M. de Guermantes laughed at his own jokes, but did not blink an eyelid at other people's.

On my way downstairs I heard someone calling out to me from behind:

> 'So this is what you call waiting for me, is it?'
> It was M. de Charlus.

'You don't mind if we go a little way on foot? he asked drily, when we reached the courtyard. We'll walk until I find a cab that is to my liking.

– You wished to speak to me, Monsieur?

– Ah, yes, there were indeed several things I wanted to say to you, but I'm no longer sure that I shall. For you, I feel they could be the beginning of inestimable benefits. But I can also see that they would bring into my existence, at an age when one starts to value a quiet life, a great deal of wasted time, all kinds of inconvenience. I ask myself whether you are worth all the trouble I should need to take in your case, and I haven't the pleasure of knowing you well enough to be able to decide. And it may be that you are insufficiently interested in what I could do for you for me to put myself to so much trouble. So let me say again quite frankly, Monsieur, that for me it can mean nothing but trouble.'

I protested that, in that case, he must not dream of it. Such a brusque end to negotiations did not seem to be to his liking.

'That sort of politeness means nothing, he said harshly. There is nothing more agreeable than putting oneself out for someone who deserves it. For the best of us, the study of the arts, a liking for old things, collections, gardens, are merely ersatz, surrogates, alibis. From the depths of our tub, like Diogenes,[87] we are looking for a man. We grow begonias, we trim yew trees, for lack of anything better to do, because yews and begonias submit to it. But we should prefer to give our time to a human plant, were we sure it was worth the trouble. That is the whole question. You must know yourself a little. Are you worth the trouble or not?

– The last thing I'd want, Monsieur, would be to be a cause of anxiety to you, I told him, but so far as I'm concerned, you may be sure that everything that comes to me from you will give me very great pleasure. I'm deeply touched that you should take such a kind interest in me in this way and want to help me.'

To my great surprise, he thanked me for these words almost effusively. Slipping his arm through mine with the same sporadic familiarity which had already struck me in Balbec, and which was in such contrast with the harshness of his tone, he said:

'With the lack of consideration typical of your years, you are liable to say things at times which could create an unbridgeable gap between us. But what you have just said is precisely the sort of thing that is capable of touching me, and persuading me to do a great deal for you.'

As he walked arm in arm with me, uttering these words which, though tinged with condescension, were so affectionate, M. de Charlus at times fastened his gaze on me with the intense stare, the piercing scrutiny that had struck me the first morning I saw him outside the casino in Balbec, and in fact many years before that, as he stood beside Mme Swann, whom I took to be his mistress, near the pink hawthorn bush in the Tansonville park, at others let it stray around him and examine the considerable number of cabs passing at this busy hour, staring at them so insistently that several stopped, their drivers assuming that he wished to engage them. But M. de Charlus immediately sent them away.

'None of them will do, he said to me, it's all a question of their lamps, the direction they're going home in. I hope, Monsieur, he went on, that you won't misinterpret the purely disinterested and charitable nature of the proposal I'm about to make to you.'

I was struck, even more than I had been in Balbec, by the way his diction resembled Swann's.

'You are intelligent enough, I assume, not to imagine that it is inspired by a "lack of connections", by fear of solitude and boredom. There is no need for me to speak to you about my family, for it seems to me that a young man of your age who belongs to the lower middle class' (he emphasized the phrase with satisfaction) 'must know his French history. It is the people of my world who read nothing and are as ignorant as lackeys. There was a time when the King's valets were recruited among the nobility, and now the nobility are scarcely better than valets themselves. But young middle-class people like you do read, and I'm sure you know Michelet's fine words about my family: "I see them as very great, these powerful Guermantes. And what is the poor little King of France, shut up in his palace in Paris, compared to them?"[88] As for what I am personally, that, Monsieur, is a subject I do not much care to talk about, but you may have heard – it was alluded to in an article in *The Times* which caused a considerable stir – that the Emperor of Austria, who has always honoured me with his kind attention and is good enough to maintain cousinly relations with me, declared recently in an interview which was made public that if the Comte de Chambord had had the services of a man as thoroughly apprised of the undercurrents of European politics as myself, he would today be King of France. I have often thought, Monsieur, that there was in me, thanks not to my humble gifts but to circumstances which you may one day have occasion to learn, a wealth of experience, a kind of secret dossier of inestimable worth, which I have not felt it proper to use for my own purposes, but which would be of priceless benefit to a young man to whom I would

hand over in a matter of months what it has taken me more than thirty years to acquire, and which I am perhaps alone in possessing. I do not speak of the intellectual enjoyment you would gain in learning certain secrets which a present-day Michelet would give years of his life to discover, and in the light of which certain events would assume an entirely different aspect. And I do not speak only of events which have already occurred, but of the chain of circumstances.' (This was a favourite expression of M. de Charlus's, and often, when he used it, he joined his hands in prayer, but with his fingers out straight, as though this complexus were there to illustrate the circumstances in question, which he did not specify, and the links between them.) 'I could give you an explanation no one has ever dreamed of, not only of the past but of the future.'

M. de Charlus broke off to question me about Bloch, whom he had heard discussed, but without appearing to be listening, at Mme de Villeparisis's salon. And in that tone which he was so artful at detaching from what he was saying that he seemed to be thinking of something completely different, and to be speaking automatically, simply out of politeness, he asked if my school-friend was young, good-looking and so forth. Had he heard him, Bloch would have been even more hard put to it than he was with M. de Norpois, but for very different reasons, to decide whether M. de Charlus was for or against Dreyfus. 'It's no bad thing, if you wish to learn about life, said M. de Charlus when he had finished questioning me about Bloch, to have a few foreigners among your friends.' I told him that Bloch was French. 'Is that so? said M. de Charlus, I took him to be Jewish.' His assertion of such an incompatibility led me to believe that M. de Charlus was more anti-Dreyfusard than anyone I had met. And yet he went on to protest against the charge of treason levelled against Dreyfus. But he did so in these terms: 'I believe that according to the newspapers Dreyfus has committed a crime against his country – that is what I understand, but I pay no attention to newspapers; I read them as I wash my hands, and I don't think they deserve any more interest than that. In any case, the crime is non-existent. This compatriot of your friend would have committed a crime against his country if he had betrayed Judaea, but what has that got to do with France?' I pointed out that if there were to be a war the Jews would be mobilized just like everyone else. 'That may be, and I am not sure that it would not be imprudent. If we bring over Senegalese or Malagasies, I can't really see that their hearts will be set on defending France, and that's natural enough. It might be as well to convict your Dreyfus of a breach in the laws of hospitality. But enough of that. Perhaps you could ask your friend to get me invited to some attractive festival in the Temple, a circumcision, or some Hebrew chants. He might perhaps hire a hall and provide me with some biblical entertainment, like the young ladies of Saint-Cyr[89] who performed scenes taken from Racine's *Psaumes* to amuse Louis XIV. You might even arrange some comic turns. For instance, a contest between your friend and his father, in which he would smite him as David smote Goliath. That would make quite an amusing farce. He might even, while he was about it, give his mother a good thrashing, the old hag or, as my old nurse would say, "the old bag". It would make an excellent spectacle, the sort of thing we like, eh, my young friend, with our taste for the exotic, and to thrash that non-European bitch would be giving the old cow what she deserves.' As he made these dreadful, almost deranged remarks, M. de Charlus squeezed my arm until it hurt. I reminded myself of all that the Baron's family had told me about his wonderful kindness to this old nurse of his, whose Molièresque turns of phrase he had just recalled, and reflected that the connections, scantily investigated to date, I felt, between goodness and evil in the same heart, various as they might be, would be an interesting area of study.

I drew his attention to the fact that in any case Mme Bloch was no longer living, and in M. Bloch's case, I questioned to what extent he would enjoy an activity which might easily result in his eyes being put out. M. de Charlus seemed annoyed. 'That,' he said, 'is a woman who made a big mistake by dying. As for blinding the husband, surely the Synagogue itself is blind: it does not perceive the truth of the Gospel. Besides, just think, at this time when all those unfortunate Jews are trembling before the stupid fury of the Christians, what an honour it would be for them to see a man like myself bending to enjoy their little games!' At this point I caught sight of M. Bloch senior passing by, probably on the way to meet his son. He did not notice us, but I offered M. de Charlus the opportunity of making his acquaintance. I little suspected the fury which this was to unleash in my companion: 'Make his acquaintance! But you must have very little idea of social values! People do not make my acquaintance as easily as that. In the present instance there would be two reasons for impropriety: the youth of the person making the introduction and the unworthiness of the person introduced. At the very most, if I am ever to enjoy the Asiatic entertainment I outlined to you, I might spare this dreadful fellow a few kind-sounding words. But on condition that he should have allowed himself to be thoroughly thrashed by his son. I might go so far as to express my satisfaction.' But as it happened, M. Bloch was paying no attention to us. He was busy greeting Mme Sazerat effusively, to her great delight. This startled me, for previously in Combray she was so anti-semitic that she had been indignant with my parents for allowing young Bloch into the house. But Dreyfusism, like a strong gust of wind, had blown M. Bloch right up against her a few days before this. My friend's father had found Mme Sazerat charming and was particularly gratified by the lady's anti-semitism, which he saw as a proof of the sincerity of her faith and the authenticity of her Dreyfusard views, and which also enhanced the value of the call she had authorized him to pay her. He had not even been wounded when she had said to him without thinking: 'M. Drumont[90] has the nerve to put the Revisionists in the same bag as the Protestants and the Jews! A delightful hotchpotch!' 'Bernard,' he had said proudly to M. Nisim Bernard when he got home, 'there's a woman with prejudice for you!' But M. Nissim Bernard had said nothing and had raised his eyes to heaven angelically. Saddened by the misfortune of the Jews, remembering his friendship with Christians, increasingly mannered and affected as time went on for reasons to be revealed in due course, he now looked like a pre-Raphaelite worm on to which hairs had been indecently grafted, like threads in the depths of an opal.

'This whole Dreyfus business, the Baron continued, still clasping my arm, has only one drawback. It is destroying society (I don't mean polite society – society has long ceased to deserve such a laudatory epithet) by the influx of Mr and Mrs Cow, Cowshed and Cow-dung, insignificant people whom I find even in the houses of my own cousins, because they belong to the Patriotic League, the anti-Jewish League, or some other such league, as if a political opinion entitled them to social standing.'

This frivolous attitude of M. de Charlus accentuated his family likeness to the Duchesse de Guermantes. I pointed out the resemblance to him. Since he was under the impression that I did not know her, I reminded him of the evening at the Opéra when he seemed to be trying to avoid me. He assured me so forcefully that he had never seen me there that I should have ended up believing it had not a trifling incident presently occurred and led me to think that M. de Charlus, in his overweening pride perhaps, preferred not to be seen in my company.

'To get back to yourself, he said, and my plans for you. Monsieur, there exists among certain men a freemasonry which I can't describe to you now, but which numbers in its ranks four of the present sovereigns in Europe. Now, the entourage of one of them, the Emperor of Germany, is trying to cure him of his whims. This is a very serious matter and may lead to war. Yes, Monsieur, I mean what I say. You know the story of the man who believed he had the Princess of China shut up in a bottle. It was a mad belief. He was cured of it. But as soon as he ceased to be mad, he became stupid. There are some sicknesses we must not seek to cure because they are our only protection from others that are more serious. One of my cousins had a stomach complaint. He could digest nothing. The most experienced stomach specialists treated him with no effect. I took him to a certain doctor (another extremely interesting man, incidentally, about whom there is a lot I could tell you). He guessed at once that it was a nervous ailment, advised him to eat whatever he wanted without misgivings and that it would be easily digested. But my cousin also had nephritis. What the stomach digested perfectly well, the kidneys could no longer eliminate after a time, and my cousin, instead of living to a ripe old age with an imaginary stomach ailment which obliged him to stick to a diet, died at forty with his stomach cured but his kidneys ruined. Given an exceptional lead over your fellow-beings, who knows, you may perhaps become what some eminent man of the past might have been if a beneficent spirit had revealed to him, among men who knew nothing of them, the secrets of steam and electricity. Don't be foolish and refuse out of a sense of tact. I want you to understand that, if I do you a great service, I do not consider you to be doing me any less a one. Society people have long ceased to interest me. I have only one passion left, to attempt to redeem the mistakes of my life by giving the benefit of my knowledge to a soul that is still innocent and capable of being fired by virtue. I have experienced great sorrow, Monsieur, and I'll perhaps tell you about it one day; I lost my wife, the loveliest, noblest, most perfect creature imaginable. I have young relatives who are not – I won't say worthy, but capable of accepting the spiritual heritage I have been speaking of. Who knows but that you may be the person into whose hands it is to pass, the one whose life I shall be able to guide and raise to so high a plane? My own would gain into the bargain.

Perhaps by teaching you the great secrets of diplomacy I might rekindle a taste for them in myself, and finally begin to do important things in which you would have an equal share. But before I can decide this, I need to see you often, very often, every day.'

I was thinking of taking advantage of these unexpectedly kind inclinations on M. de Charlus's part to ask him whether he could not arrange for me to meet his sister-in-law when suddenly my arm was violently jerked by something like an electric shock. M. de Charlus had hurriedly withdrawn his arm from mine. Although as he talked his eyes travelled everywhere, he had only just seen M. d'Argencourt emerging from a side-street. As he caught sight of us, M. d'Argencourt appeared annoyed, cast a look of distrust in my direction, almost the same look intended for a creature of another race which Mme de Guermantes had reserved for Bloch, and tried to avoid us. But it seemed as if M. de Charlus was determined to show him that he was not at all anxious not to be seen by him, for he called over to him, merely to make an utterly insignificant remark. And fearing perhaps that M. d'Argencourt did not recognize me, M. de Charlus informed him that I was a great friend of Mme de Villeparisis, of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of Robert de Saint-Loup, and that he, Charlus, was an old friend of my grandmother, and happy to show her grandson a little of the affection he felt for her. Nevertheless I noted that M. d'Argencourt, to whom I had barely been introduced at Mme de Villeparisis's and to whom M. de Charlus had now spoken at length about my family, was appreciably colder to me than he had been an hour ago, and subsequently, for a long time, he behaved with the same reserve whenever we met. On this occasion, he examined me with a curiosity in which there was no hint of friendliness, and it was even as if he had to overcome a sense of distaste when, on leaving us, after some hesitation, he held out a hand to me which he immediately withdrew.

'An unfortunate encounter, said M. de Charlus. That fellow Argencourt is well born but ill bred, a worse than second-rate diplomat, a loathsome husband and a womanizer, a double-faced stage character. He's one of those men who is incapable of understanding but perfectly capable of destroying the high things in life. I hope that our friendship will be one of them, if it is ever to establish itself, and I hope too that you will do me the honour of protecting it, as I shall, from the heels of those donkeys who, for lack of anything better to do, from clumsiness or spite, trample on what seemed made to endure. Unfortunately, most society people have been cast into that mould.

– The Duchesse de Guermantes appears to be a very intelligent woman. We were talking earlier about the possibility of war. It seems she is especially knowledgeable on the subject.

– She is nothing of the sort, replied M. de Charlus sharply. Women, and many men for that matter, understand nothing about the things I wished to speak to you of. My sister-in-law is a charming woman who imagines she is still living in the days of Balzac's fiction, when women had political influence. Her society could at present only have an unfortunate effect on you, as for that matter all association with high society. That is precisely what I was about to say when that fool interrupted me. The first sacrifice you must make for me – I shall demand them in proportion to the gifts I bestow on you – is to give up society life. It pained me earlier to see you at that ridiculous gathering. You will tell me I was there myself, but for me it was not a social occasion, merely a family visit. Later on, when your position is established, if it amuses you to stoop to that sort of social activity, there may be no harm in it. And then I have no need to tell you how invaluable my services can be. The "Open Sesame" to the Guermantes mansion, and any others worthy of throwing open their doors to you, lies with me. I shall be the judge of that, and I intend to remain in control of the situation. For the time being you are a novice. There was something scandalous about your presence up there. You must avoid impropriety at all costs.'

Since M. de Charlus was on the subject of this visit to Mme de Villeparisis's, I wanted to ask him about his exact relationship to the Marquise, about her birth, but formulated my question in a manner that deflected my intention, and I asked him instead what the Villeparisis family was.

'Oh dear, that's not a very easy question to answer,' M. de Charlus replied in a voice that seemed to skate over his words. 'It's as if you'd asked me to tell you what nothing was. My aunt, who does exactly what she pleases, took it into her head to get remarried to some little man, a certain M. Thirion, and so plunge the greatest name in France into oblivion. This Thirion thought that he could adopt some defunct aristocratic name with impunity, as people do in novels. History doesn't tell us whether he was tempted by La Tour d'Auvergne, whether he hesitated between Toulouse and Montmorency. Anyway, he made a different choice and became M. de Villeparisis. Since there have been no Villeparisis since 1702, I imagined that he meant to indicate modestly that he was a gentleman from Villeparisis, a tiny locality near Paris, that he had a solicitor's practice or a barber's shop in Villeparisis. But my aunt had other ideas in mind – though these days she's reaching an age when she has scarcely an idea left in her head. She made the claim that this marquisate already existed in the family, wrote to us all and wanted to put things on a proper footing, for some reason or other. If one lays claim to a name to which one is not entitled, then it's better not to make a song and dance about it, like our very good friend, the so-called Comtesse de M. who, against the advice of Mme Alphonse Rothschild, refused to pay the price of religious conversion for a title which it would have done nothing further to authenticate in any case. The funny side of it is that ever since then my aunt has claimed monopoly of all the paintings connected with the real Villeparisis family, to whom the late Thirion was in no way related. Her country house has become something like an exclusive repository for their portraits, genuine or not, and the rising tide of them has meant that some of the Guermantes and Condé portraits – by no means small beer – have been swamped. The picture dealers manufacture new ones for her every year. And in the dining-room of her country house there is even a portrait of Saint-Simon because of his niece's first marriage to a M. de Villeparisis, as if the author of the *Mémoires* mightn't have other claims on the interest of visitors than not to have been the great-grandfather of M. Thirion.'

The fact that Mme de Villeparisis was merely Mme Thirion completed her downfall in my estimation, which had begun when I saw the uneven gathering of people in her salon. I found it unfair that a woman whose very title and name were of relatively recent origin should be able to delude her contemporaries and might delude posterity by virtue of her friendships with royalty. Now that she had been restored to what she had seemed to me in my childhood, someone with nothing aristocratic about her, the distinguished relatives by whom she was surrounded seemed suddenly foreign to her world. She did not cease to charm us as a result of this. I continued to visit her occasionally and from time to time she sent me tokens of remembrance. But in no way did it seem to me that she was part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and if I had needed any information about it, she was one of the last people I should have asked.

'At present, M. de Charlus continued, by going into society you will only damage your position, warp your mind and character. And while we're about it, you must be particularly careful in your choice of friends. Take mistresses if your family raise no objection; it's none of my business and I would go so far as to encourage it, you young rascal, a young rascal who will soon have to start shaving,' he added, fingering my chin. 'But your choice of men friends is particularly important. Eight out of ten young men are real scoundrels, little wretches capable of doing you irreparable harm. My nephew Saint-Loup, now, he might be the right sort of friend for you at a pinch. As far as your future is concerned, he can be of no conceivable use to you, but I can look after that. Yes, now I come to think about it, as a person to go about with, at times when you've had enough of me, he presents no serious drawbacks as far as I can see. At least he's a proper man, not one of those effeminate creatures one comes across everywhere nowadays, who look just like rent boys capable of bringing their innocent victims to a sorry end at the drop of a hat.' (I did not know the meaning of this slang expression, 'rent boy'. Anyone who had known it would have shared my astonishment. Society people are only too pleased to talk slang, and people who may be suspected of certain things like to show that they are not afraid to mention them. A proof of innocence in their eyes. But they have lost their sense of proportion and no longer realize the point at which a particular joke remark will become too specific, too outrageous, and turn into evidence of corruption rather than of ingenuousness.) 'He's not one of that sort. He's very nice, very serious.'

I could not repress a smile at this epithet 'serious', to which the intonation that M. de Charlus gave it seemed to imply the sense of 'virtuous', of 'orderly', in the way we call a young shop-girl 'serious'. At that moment a cab passed by, careering all over the place; a young cabman, who had deserted his box, was driving it from inside, seated on the cushions in what looked like a half-tipsy state. M. de Charlus hailed him immediately. The driver negotiated with him briefly.

'Which way are you going?

– The same way as you.' (This astonished me, because M. de Charlus had already refused several cabs with similarly coloured lamps.)

'But I don't want to get up on the box. Does it bother you if I stay inside?'

– No, but lower the hood. So, think over my proposal, said M. de Charlus as he prepared to leave me, I give you a few days to reflect on it. Write to me. But remember, I shall need to see you every day, and to have from you a guarantee of loyalty and discretion, though I do admit that that is what you seem to be offering. But I have been so deceived by appearances in the course of my life that I no longer care to trust in them. Damn me, it's the least I can expect before giving up a priceless gift that I should know into whose hands it is going. So make sure you bear in mind what I'm offering you. You're like Hercules at the parting of the ways, though unfortunately for you, you don't seem to me to have the same muscular development. Try to avoid having to regret for the rest of your life that you didn't choose the path that leads to virtue. I say,' he said, addressing the cabman, haven't you put the hood down yet? I'll see to it myself. And I think I'd better drive, given the state you seem to be in.'

He jumped in beside the driver at the back of the cab, and off they set at a brisk trot.

I, for my part, returned home and no sooner had I done so than I came across the pendant to the conversation that had taken place a little earlier between Bloch and M. de Norpois, but in another form, brief, inverted and nasty: this was a dispute between our butler, a Dreyfusard, and the Guermantes butler, an anti-Dreyfusard. The truths and counter-truths which clashed together on high among the intellectuals of the two Leagues, the Patrie française and the Droits de l'homme,[91] were in fact spreading downwards into popular opinion. M. Reinach's influence was taking its effect on the feelings of people he had never set eyes on, even though for him the Dreyfus case presented itself to his reason merely as an irrefutable theorem which he went on to 'demonstrate' by the most astonishing victory for rational politics (a victory at France's expense, according to some) that has ever been seen. In two years he replaced a Billot ministry[92] by a Clemenceau ministry,[93] brought about a complete change in public opinion, got Picquart out of prison to appoint him, for no thanks, to the Ministry of War. Perhaps this rationalist manipulator of crowds was himself manipulated by his ancestry. When the most truthful philosophical systems are dictated to their originators, in the last analysis, by emotional causes, how are we to suppose that in a simple case of politics like the Dreyfus Affair similar causes may not, unbeknown to the reasoner, have governed his reason? Bloch believed that he had become a Dreyfusard for logical reasons, yet he knew that his nose, his skin and his hair had been imposed upon him by his race. No doubt reason has a certain freedom; yet it obeys some laws that it has not chosen itself. The case of the Guermantes butler and our own was peculiar. The waves from the two currents of Dreyfusism and anti-Dreyfusism now splitting the country from top to bottom were largely silent, but the occasional echoes they sent out were genuine. When, in the middle of some talk that was deliberately avoiding mention of the affair, you heard someone furtively announce an item of political news, generally false but always indicative of wish-fulfilment, you could induce from the nature of his predictions where his sympathies lay. Thus, on certain points, there came into conflict, on the one side a timid apostolate, on the other a righteous indignation. The two butlers I heard arguing on my way in were an exception to the rule. Ours insinuated that Dreyfus was guilty, the Guermantes' that he was innocent. They behaved in this manner not to hide their convictions, but out of shrewd, hard-headed competition. Our butler, who was not sure that there would be a retrial, wanted to compensate in advance for not winning the argument by denying the Guermantes' butler the satisfaction of seeing a just cause crushed. The Guermantes' butler thought that if a retrial was refused, ours would be more incensed by the continued detention of an innocent man on Devil's Island. The concierge was there as an observer. I had the impression that it was not he who was the cause of friction in the Guermantes household.

I went up and found my grandmother far from well, more so than previously. For some time now, without knowing quite what was wrong, she had been complaining of her health. It is illness that makes us recognize that we do not live in isolation but are chained to a being from a different realm, worlds apart from us, with no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. Were we to meet a brigand on the road, we might manage to make him conscious of his own personal interest if not of our plight. But to ask pity of our body is like talking to an octopus, for which our words can have no more meaning than the sound of the sea, and with which we should be terrified to find ourselves condemned to live. My grandmother's bouts of feeling unwell often escaped her attention, which was always directed at us. When they really troubled her, in the hope of curing them she tried in vain to understand them. If the morbid phenomena acted out in her body remained obscure and elusive to her own mind, they were clearly intelligible to certain beings belonging to the same natural realm as themselves, the ones whom the human mind has gradually learned to address in order to understand what the body is saying to it, just as we deal with a foreigner's words by seeking out someone from his country who will act as interpreter. These beings can talk to our body, can tell us if its anger is serious or will soon die down. Cottard, who had been called in to examine my grandmother – and who had tried our patience by asking with a wry smile, the moment we told him she was ill: 'Ill? You're sure it's not what they call a diplomatic illness?' – put his patient on a milk diet in an attempt to soothe her feverishness. But the endless bowls of milky soup brought no relief, because my grandmother was liberal with the salt, the dangerous effects of which were then unknown (Widal[94] not yet having made his discoveries). For, medicine being a compendium of the successive and contradictory mistakes of doctors, even when we call in the best of them, the chances are that we may be staking our hopes on some medical theory that will be proved false in a few years' time. So that to believe in medicine would be utter madness, were not to believe in it a greater madness still, for from this accumulation of errors a few valid theories have emerged in the long run. Cottard had suggested that we take her temperature. A thermometer was brought. Almost the whole length of the tube was empty of mercury. It was almost impossible to detect the silver salamander lurking at the bottom of the tiny reservoir. It seemed dead. The little glass pipe was placed in my grandmother's mouth. We had no need to leave it there long; the little sorceress did not take long to cast her horoscope. We found her motionless, perched half-way up her tower and sticking there, showing us with precision the reading for which we had consulted her, a figure which all the attention that my grandmother's mind could have focused on itself would not have been remotely capable of providing: 101°. For the first time we felt some anxiety. We shook the thermometer vigorously to blot out the fateful sign, as if by so doing it were possible to reduce the fever along with the temperature reading. Alas, it was more than obvious that the little sibyl, though devoid of reason, had not made an arbitrary forecast, because the next day, scarcely had the thermometer been replaced between my grandmother's lips when almost at once, as though in a single bound, with proud certainty and intuition of a fact that was hidden from us, the little prophetess had come to a halt at the same point, with implacable immobility, and indicated once again that reading of 101° with her glistening wand. She had nothing else to tell us, and in vain had we longed, wished, prayed; she turned a deaf ear to us and it seemed as though this were her final threatening word of warning. Then, in an attempt to constrain her to alter her pronouncement, we turned to another creature of the same kingdom, but a more powerful one, which is not content with questioning the body but capable of commanding it, a febrifuge of the same order as aspirin, which had not yet come into use at the time. We had not brought the thermometer down below 99.5°, in the hope that it would not have to rise from there. We got my grandmother to take this febrifuge, then inserted the thermometer again. Like an implacable warder presented with a permit from a higher authority whose protection one has secured, who finds it in order and replies: 'Very well, there's no problem. With that you may pass', this time the vigilant wardress of the mercury column did not move. But she seemed to be saying, sullenly: 'What good will this do you? Since you're friends of quinine, she'll give me the order not to move up once, ten times, twenty times. Then, if I know anything about it, she'll grow tired of telling me. It won't last for ever. And where will that have got you?' And so my grandmother felt the presence within her of a creature who knew the human body better than she, the presence of a contemporary of vanished races, the presence of earth's first inhabitant – far earlier than the creation of thinking man; she could feel that age-old ally probing into her, a little roughly even, into her brain, her heart, her elbow, reconnoitring the ground, preparing everything for the prehistoric combat which took place immediately afterwards. In a very short time, like a crushed Python,[95] the fever was conquered by the powerful force of a chemical, and my grandmother, across the kingdoms, passing beyond all vegetable and animal life, would have liked to be able to show it her gratitude. And she remained deeply affected by this encounter she had just had, across so many centuries, with something anterior to the creation even of plants. Meanwhile the thermometer, like one of the Fates momentarily subdued by a more ancient god, held its silver spindle motionless. Alas, other inferior creatures, trained by man

to hunt the mysterious prey which he himself is unable to pursue in the depths of his being, were unkind enough to bring us a daily albumin count, not a large one, but steady enough for it also to seem connected to some persistent, undetectable illness. Bergotte had jolted my instinctive and scrupulous refusal to grant my intellect pride of place when he spoke to me of Dr du Boulbon as a practitioner who would not bore me, who would discover methods of treatment which, however strange they might appear, would adjust themselves to my particular way of thinking. But ideas transform themselves in us, they overcome our initial resistance to them, and feed upon rich reserves of intellect which existed ready-made for them without our knowing. So, as happens whenever remarks we have heard about someone we do not know have managed to awaken in us the idea of a great talent, of some kind of genius, in my inmost thoughts I now conferred upon Dr du Boulbon that unbounded confidence inspired in us by a man who, with greater acuity than his fellows, perceives the truth. It is true that I knew him to be more of a specialist in nervous diseases, the man to whom Charcot[96] before his death had predicted that he would be the foremost authority in neurology and psychiatry. 'Ah, I don't know about that. It's more than likely,' remarked Françoise, who happened to be in the room and was hearing Charcot's name, and du Boulbon's, for the first time. Not that this prevented her in the least from remarking: 'It's likely.' Her 'likelys', 'perhapses' and 'I don't knows' were extremely irritating at such moments. One felt like retorting; 'Of course you don't know, since you haven't a clue what we're talking about. How can you even say whether it's likely or not, when you know nothing about it? Anyhow, you can't go on saying you don't know what Charcot said to du Boulbon and the rest of it. You know now because we've told you, and your "perhapses" and "likelys" are out of place, because it's a fact.'

In spite of his more specialized competence in the cerebral and nervous fields, since I knew that du Boulbon was a great doctor, a superior man of inventive and penetrating intellect, I entreated my mother to send for him, and the hope that, by a clear perception of what was wrong, he might cure the malady, finally prevailed over our fear that by calling in a consultant we would alarm my grandmother. What finally decided my mother was the fact that, unconsciously encouraged by Cottard, my grandmother no longer went out, scarcely left her bed. It was no use her answering us by quoting Mme de Sévigné's letter on Mme de La Fayette: 'People said she was mad not to want to go out. I said to these persons of hasty judgment: "Mme de La Fayette is not mad" and confined myself to that. It has taken her death to make it plain that she was quite right not to go out.'[97] When du Boulbon was called in, he disagreed, if not with Mme de Sévigné, whom we did not quote to him, then with my grandmother at least. Instead of taking out his stethoscope, he fixed his wonderful eyes upon her, perhaps creating the illusion that he was making a thorough examination of his patient, or expressing the desire to give her that illusion (it seemed spontaneous but must have been something he had automatically developed), or else the desire not to let her see that he had something completely different on his mind, or to exert his authority over her – and he began to talk about Bergotte.

'Ah yes, Madame, he's wonderful, and how right you are to admire him! But which of his books is your favourite? Oh, really? Well, well, perhaps that is the best one in the end. It's certainly his most well-constructed novel. Claire is a charming character. Which of the male characters do you find most appealing?'

I thought at first that he was getting her to talk about literature in this way because he himself found medicine boring, perhaps also to parade his wide interests and even, with a more therapeutic intention, to restore confidence to his patient, show her he was not alarmed, take her mind off her illness. But I realized afterwards that, as a doctor who was chiefly distinguished as a specialist in mental illness and for his work on the brain, he had been using these questions to see if my grandmother's memory was functioning properly. He asked her a few apparently reluctant questions about her daily routine, his eyes unflinching and stern. Then suddenly, as though he had glimpsed the truth and was determined to reach it at all costs, with a preliminary nod of the head, which seemed to be shaking off with some difficulty the flood of lingering hesitations that might have occurred to him and any objections we might have raised, looking my grandmother in the eye with his mind made up, as though he were at last on solid ground, punctuating his words in a quietly convincing tone with every inflection finely shaded by intelligence (and his voice, throughout his visit, remained what it naturally was, caressing, while under his bushy eyebrows his ironic eyes brimmed with kindness), he said:

'You will get well, Madame, on whatever day you realize – and it is entirely up to you whether it is today or not – that there is nothing wrong with you and resume your normal life. You say you have not been eating, not going out?

– But, doctor, I have a temperature.'

He felt her hand.

'You certainly haven't at this moment. Besides, what a convenient excuse! Didn't you know that we make sufferers from tuberculosis with temperatures up to 102° eat hearty meals and expose them to the open air?

– But I have a little albumin as well.

– That's not for you to decide. You have what I call "mental albumin". We've all of us suffered from our little albumin problems when we've been ill, and had them prolonged by our doctor fussing around and drawing our attention to them. For every one disorder that doctors cure with medication (it does happen occasionally, I'm told) there are ten others they provoke in healthy patients by inoculating them with that pathogenic agent a thousand times more virulent than all the germs you can name, the idea that one is ill. That conviction has a powerful effect on anyone, but particularly on neurotic people. Tell them that a closed window is open behind them, and they'll begin to sneeze; pretend you've put magnesia in their soup, and they'll have a bout of colic; or that their coffee was stronger than usual, and they'll not sleep a wink all night. Do you suppose, Madame, that I needed to do more than look into your eyes, listen to the way you express yourself, and, if I may say so, observe your daughter and your grandson who are so like you, to know what was the matter with you?

– Your grandmother might perhaps go and sit, with the doctor's permission, along one of the quieter walks of the Champs-Élysées, near that clump of laurels where you used to play when you were small,' my mother suggested to me, thus indirectly consulting du Boulbon, and therefore assuming a tone of shy deference which would have been absent had she been addressing me alone. The doctor turned to my grandmother and, being a man of letters no less than a man of science, addressed her in this way:

'Go to the Champs-Élysées, Madame, and the clump of laurels your grandson likes so much. Laurel will be healthy for you. It purifies. When Apollo rid the world of the serpent Python, it was with a laurel branch in his hand that he made his entry into Delphi. He used it to ward off the deadly germs of the venomous creature. So you see that the laurel is the most ancient, the most venerable and, I may add – as something of therapeutic as well as prophylactic value – the most excellent of antiseptics.'

In so far as a great part of what doctors know is taught them by their patients, they are apt to believe that such knowledge is common to every patient they see, so they delude themselves when they think that they can impress any patient of the moment with some remark they have gleaned from a previous one. And so it was with the shrewd smile of a Parisian in conversation with a country person and hoping to impress by using a piece of rustic lore, that Dr du Boulbon said to my grandmother: 'Probably windy weather will manage to get you to sleep when the strongest sleeping drugs have no effect. – Quite the opposite, the wind stops me sleeping completely.' But doctors have their sensitive points. 'Ach!' muttered du Boulbon with a frown, as if someone had trodden on his toe and my grandmother's sleeplessness on blustery nights were a personal insult to himself. All the same, he was not unduly self-opinionated, and since, as a 'superior' person, he felt himself bound not to put all his faith in medicine, he quickly regained his philosophic serenity.

My mother, desperately anxious to be reassured by Bergotte's friend, added her support to his diagnosis by telling him that a first cousin of my grandmother's, who suffered from a nervous complaint, had stayed shut up in her bedroom in Combray for seven years, without getting up more than once or twice a week.

'There we are, Madame, I didn't know that, yet I could have told you as much.

– But, Doctor, I'm not at all like her. On the contrary, my doctor can't get me to stay in bed,' said my grandmother, either because she was slightly irritated by du Boulbon's theories, or because she was anxious to lay before him possible objections to them, in the hope that he would refute these and that, once he had gone, she would no longer have any doubts about his heartening diagnosis.

'But of course you're not, Madame. It isn't possible to have every single form of mental disturbance, if you'll forgive the expression. Yours are different, but not like hers. Yesterday I visited a home for neurasthenics. I saw a man standing on a bench, motionless as a fakir, his neck bent down in a position that must have been really painful. When I asked him what he was doing there, he replied without moving a muscle or turning his head: "Well, Doctor, I get very bad rheumatism and I catch cold very easily. I've been taking too much exercise and stupidly getting myself too hot, with my neck touching my flannels. If I move it away from my flannels now before I cool down, I'm bound to get a stiff neck and even catch bronchitis." Which he would have done in fact. "A real neurotic, that's what you are," I told him. And do you know the reason he gave to prove me wrong? It went like this: all the other patients in the home were obsessed with weighing themselves, to the point where the weighing-machine had to be padlocked to stop them from spending all day on it, while he had to be forced on to the machine, given his aversion to being weighed. He prided himself on not being obsessed like the others, oblivious of the fact that he had his own obsession and that it was this that protected him from one of a different kind. Please don't be offended by the comparison, Madame, for that man who dared not turn his neck for fear of catching a cold is the greatest poet of our time. That poor maniac is the highest intellect that I know. Feel comfortable to be called a neurotic. You belong to that splendid, pitiable family which is the salt of the earth. Everything we think of as great has come to us from neurotics. They and they alone are the ones who have founded religions and created great works of art. The world will never realize how much it is indebted to them, particularly how much they have suffered in order to present it with their gifts. We appreciate good music, fine paintings, a thousand exquisite things, without knowing what they cost those who created them in terms of insomnia, tears, fitful laughter, nettle rash, asthma, epilepsy, and worse still, a fear of dying, which you perhaps have experienced yourself, Madame, he added with a smile at my grandmother, for when I came, admit it now, you were not at your most self-assured. You thought you were ill, dangerously ill, perhaps. Heaven only knows what you thought you had the symptoms of. You were not mistaken, you did have them. Nervous disorders have a genius for mimicry. There is no illness they can't counterfeit to perfection. They will produce lifelike imitations of dyspeptic swelling, morning sickness, irregular heartbeat, tubercular fever. If this can deceive the doctor, how much the more so the patient? Please don't think I'm pooh-poohing your sufferings. I shouldn't undertake to treat them unless I understood them properly. And let me say this: all real confessions are reciprocal ones. I said that without nervous disorder there can be no great artist. But, he added, raising a solemn index finger, there can be no great man of science either. I will go even further and say that, unless he himself is prone to nervous trouble, there is no – I won't say good doctor – but I do say the right doctor to treat nervous disorders. In the pathology of nervous diseases, a doctor who doesn't talk too much nonsense is a half-cured patient, just as a critic is a poet who has stopped writing poems and a policeman a burglar who has left his thieving behind. I, Madame, do not, like you, fancy myself to be suffering from albuminaria, nor do I have your neurotic fear of food and fresh air, but I can never get to sleep at night without getting out of bed at least twenty times to see if the door is locked. And yesterday I went to that nursing-home where I discovered a poet who wouldn't move his neck, because I wanted to book a room; just between you and me, I spend my holidays there getting treatment at times when I have made my own troubles worse by wearing myself out curing other people's.

– But, doctor, ought I to take the same sort of cure? asked my grandmother, horrified.

– There is absolutely no need for that, Madame. The symptoms you show will disappear at my command. Besides, you have the company of a very effective person whom I appoint as your doctor from now on. I mean your illness itself, your nervous hyperactivity. If I knew how to cure it, I'd take good care not to. All I need to do is to keep it under control. I can see one of Bergotte's books on your table there. Cured of your nervous complaint, you would no longer have any taste for it. Now, what right have I to supplant the pleasure it gives you with a nervous stability which would be quite incapable of giving you such pleasure? The pleasure itself is a powerful remedy, the most powerful of all perhaps. No, I have no quarrel with your nervous energy. All I ask is that it should hear what I have to say; I leave you in its charge. It needs to reverse its drive. The power it has been using to prevent you from leaving the house and eating properly needs to be used to make you eat, make you read, go out, and take as much pleasure in life as you can. Don't tell me that you feel tired. Tiredness is the body's reaction to a preconceived idea. Begin by removing it from your thoughts. And if ever you are slightly unwell, as everyone is at times, you won't feel as if you are, because your nervous energy will have provided you with what M. de Talleyrand shrewdly called "imaginary good health". See, it's begun to cure you already. You've been sitting up in bed listening to me without once lying back, your eyes are bright, and there's colour in your cheeks. I've been talking to you for a good half-hour and you haven't even noticed the time. So, Madame, I shall now take my leave of you.'

When I had seen Dr du Boulbon to the door and returned to the bedroom, where I found my mother alone, the distress that had been weighing upon me for several weeks suddenly lifted; I sensed that my mother was going to give vent to her own joy and would be able to see mine too, and I felt that incapacity to bear the suspense when someone is on the point of giving way to their emotion in our presence; this, though different, is not unlike the fear of knowing that someone is about to come in through a closed door and give us a fright; I tried to speak to Mama but my voice faltered and, bursting into tears, I stayed there a long time with my head on her shoulder, bewailing, savouring, accepting, cherishing my grief, now that I knew it had gone out of my life, in the same way that we like to get carried away by good intentions which circumstances do not permit us to put into execution. Françoise annoyed me by not sharing in our joy. She was in a state of great excitement because a terrible scene had exploded between the footman and the telltale concierge. The Duchesse had had to intervene benevolently, restore a semblance of good-will and forgive the footman. For she was a kind woman, and her role as mistress would have been ideal had she not listened to idle chit-chat.

For several days now people had begun to learn of my grandmother's illness and to ask after her. Saint-Loup had written to me: 'It is not my wish to intrude on this time when your dear grandmother is unwell by writing to reproach you, more than reproach you in fact, for something which has nothing to do with her. But I would be lying were I to say to you, if only obliquely, that I shall ever forget your perfidious conduct, or that I can ever forgive your letting me down so treacherously.' But some other friends, who were under the impression that my grandmother was not seriously ill or unaware that she was ill at all, had asked me to meet up with them the next day in the Champs-Élysées, to go on from there to visit someone and then to a dinner-party in the country, an idea that appealed to me. There was no longer any reason to forgo these two pleasures. When my grandmother had been told that she should now go out as much as possible, in accordance with Dr du Boulbon's orders, she had herself at once suggested the Champs-Élysées. It would be easy for me to accompany her and, while she sat reading, to arrange with my friends where to meet them later; and there would still be time, if I hurried, to catch the train to Ville-d'Avray with them. When the time came, my grandmother did not want to go out because she felt tired. But my mother, acting on du Boulbon's instructions, had the strength of mind to be firm and not to take no for an answer. The thought that my grandmother might relapse into her nervous debility and never recover from it brought her near to tears. The fine, warm weather that day could not have been more suitable for going out. As it moved through the sky, the sun dispersed its flimsy muslins here and there through the broken solidity of the balcony and coated the freestone ledge in warmth, in a blurred halo of gold. As Françoise had not had time to send a 'wire' to her daughter, she went off immediately after lunch. She found she had done quite enough as it was by going to Jupien's earlier on to get a stitch put in the cape my grandmother was going to wear to go out. I was returning from my morning walk at the time and accompanied her into the waistcoat-maker's shop. 'Has the young master brought you here, Jupien asked Françoise, have you brought him to see me, or is it a fair wind and Dame Fortune that brings you both?' For all his lack of schooling, Jupien respected the rules of syntax as instinctively as M. de Guermantes, in spite of much effort, broke them. With Françoise gone and the cape mended, it was time for my grandmother to go and get ready. After obstinately refusing to let Mama stay and help her, left on her own she took an endless time to dress, and now that I knew she was not ill, with that strange indifference we show towards our family during their lifetime, which makes them the last people to be taken into consideration, I thought it very selfish of her to take so long and to risk making me late when she knew that I had to meet my friends and

was going off to dinner in Ville-d'Avray. In my impatience I finally went down ahead of her, after being told twice that she was nearly ready. She joined me at last, without her usual apology for keeping me waiting like this, red-faced and confused like someone in a hurry who has left half her things behind, just as I was reaching the half-open glass door which let in the liquid, chirping warmth from outside, as though a supply of heat had been released between the glacial walls of the house, without bringing any warmth to them at all.

'Oh dear, I could have worn another cape if you're going to meet your friends. This one's rather drab.'

I was startled to see her so flushed, and took it that her lateness had put her into a great rush. Soon after we left the cab at the corner of the avenue Gabriel on the Champs-Élysées, I watched my grandmother turn away without a word and make for the little old-fashioned pavilion with the green metal trellis-work where I had once waited for Françoise. The same park-keeper who had been there then was still there talking to the 'Marquise' as I followed my grandmother, who, doubtless because she was feeling sick, was holding her hand to her mouth, and went up the steps of this little rustic theatre that had been erected in the middle of the gardens. At the entrance, as in those travelling circuses where the clown, dressed for the ring and with his face caked in white powder, takes the ticket-money at the door himself, the 'Marquise' was still there taking the money with her huge, irregular snout of a face smeared with cheap make-up and the little bonnet of red flowers and black lace propped on her ginger wig. But I do not think she recognized me. The park-keeper had abandoned his supervision of the green surroundings matching the colour of his uniform, and was sitting beside her chatting.

'So, he was saying, you're still here. You haven't thought of retirement?

– And why would I want to do that, Monsieur? Can you tell me where I'd be better off than here, where I'd be more nice and cosy? And then there's all the comings and goings, all the enjoyment of it. My little Paris is what I call it. My customers keep me in touch with what's going on. I mean, there's one of them went out just now, can't have been more than five minutes ago; he's a judge, and a high-up one, I can tell you. Well!' she broke out heatedly, as though she would have driven home her assertion with violence, had any agent of authority shown signs of challenging its accuracy, 'he's been coming here for the last eight years, I'm telling you, every single day God made, on the dot of three, always polite, never raising his voice, never dirtying a thing. He stays half an hour or so reading his papers while he spends a penny. Then one day he didn't come. I didn't notice it at the time, but that evening I suddenly thought: "That gentleman didn't come today, did he? Perhaps he's dead." I get attached to people when they behave nicely and it gave me quite a turn. So I was really glad to see him come back the day after. I said to him: "Monsieur, nothing bad happened to you yesterday, I hope?" And he told me straight that nothing had happened to *him*, it was his wife that had died, and it had upset him so much he hadn't been able to come. Of course he looked sad – well, you know, people who've been married twenty-five years – but even so, he seemed pleased to be back. You could tell that his little routine had been quite put out. I tried to cheer him up. I told him: "Monsieur, you mustn't let yourself go. You keep coming here like you did before. It'll take your mind off things a bit, in the sad state you're in." '

The 'Marquise' resumed a gentler tone, for she had noticed that the guardian of shrubs and lawns was listening to her benignly with no thought of crossing her, keeping his sword, which looked more like a gardening implement or some horticultural token, harmlessly in its sheath.

'And I'm choosy about my customers, you know, she went on, I don't let just anyone into my parlours, as I call them. Don't you think it looks like a parlour with my flowers there? I've got some really nice customers; there's always somebody bringing me a nice little spray of lilac or jasmine, or roses – my favourites, roses.'

The thought that this lady held us in low esteem because we never brought her lilac or fine roses brought a blush to my cheeks, and in the hope of escaping physically from an adverse judgment, or of being judged only in my absence, I moved towards the exit. But it is not always life's givers of fine roses who receive our friendliest attention, for the 'Marquise', thinking that I was bored, turned to me:

'You wouldn't like me to open up one of the little closets for you?'

And, when I declined:

'No? you're quite sure?' she added with a smile. 'You're very welcome to it, but I know how it is; it takes more than not having to pay to make you want to spend a penny.'

At this point a shabbily dressed woman rushed in who seemed to be in need of doing just that. But she did not belong to the right world for the 'Marquise', who said to her curtly with a snobbish bite in her voice:

'There's nothing vacant, Madame.

– Will I have to wait long? asked the poor lady, red-faced beneath the yellow flowers in her hat.

– Madame, I'd try somewhere else if I were you. You can see that these two gentlemen are still waiting, she replied, pointing to the park-keeper and myself. I've only one closet. The others are out of order… She looked like a bad payer to me,' she said to us afterwards. 'Not the sort we want here. They're not clean, no respect for the place. I'd have been the one to have to spend the next hour cleaning up after her ladyship. She can keep her small change.'

At last my grandmother came out, and the thought that she might not give a generous enough tip to draw attention away from her indiscretion at taking so long made me beat a retreat to avoid any exposure to the scorn the 'Marquise' would no doubt greet her with, and I started to stroll down one of the paths, but slowly, so that my grandmother should be able to catch me up without difficulty. And it was not long before she did so. I was expecting her to say: 'I' m afraid I've kept you waiting. I hope you'll still be in time for your friends', but she didn't say a word, and since I found this slightly hurtful, I was reluctant to be the first to speak. When I finally looked up at her, I noticed that as she walked beside me she kept her face turned the other way. I was afraid she might be feeling sick again. On closer inspection I was taken aback by the uneven way she was walking. Her hat was crooked, her cape dirty, she had the dishevelled and dejected

appearance, the flushed, dazed look of someone who has just been knocked over by a carriage or pulled out of a ditch.

'I was afraid you were feeling sick, Grandmama. Are you feeling any better now?' I asked.

No doubt she thought it would be impossible for her not to answer without causing me alarm.

'I heard the whole of that conversation between the "Marquise" and the park-keeper, she said. She couldn't have been more like the Guermantes or that little Verdurin clan if she tried. What a genteel way of putting such things!' And she went on to add an apposite remark from her own special Marquise, Mme de Sévigné: 'As I listened to them I thought they were preparing to bid me a delightful farewell.'

This was her answer to me, and into it she had put all her refinement, her taste for quotations, her memory of classical literature, more deliberately even than she would normally have done, and as if to prove that she was still very much in possession of all these faculties. But I guessed rather than heard what she said, so mumbled were her words as she clenched her teeth more than could be accounted for by the fear of vomiting.

'Come! I said, lightly enough not to seem to be making too much of her illness, since you're feeling a bit sick, we'll go home if you like. I don't want to make a grandmother with indigestion have to walk around the Champs-Élysées.

– I didn't like to suggest it because of your friends, she replied. Poor boy! But since you don't mind, I think it would be wiser.'

I was suddenly afraid that she might notice the odd way in which she was uttering her words.

'Come, I said briskly, you're not to tire yourself out talking when you're feeling sick, it's silly. Let's get home first.'

She smiled at me sadly and gripped my hand. She had realized she had no need to hide from me what I had guessed straight away, that she had had a slight stroke.

PART II

CHAPTER 1

My grandmother's illness – Bergotte's illness – The Duc and the Doctor – My grandmother's decline – Her death

We made our way back along the avenue Gabriel through the crowd of people out walking. I installed my grandmother on a bench and went off to look for a cab. I had always been accustomed to place myself in her heart in order to form an opinion of the most insignificant person, but now she was a closed book to me, a part of the external world, and I was obliged to hide from her, more than from any casual passer-by, what I thought about her state of health, and to betray no sign of my anxiety. I could not have mentioned it to her with any more confidence than to a stranger. She had suddenly restored to my keeping the thoughts, the sorrows, which I had entrusted to her for ever since I was a child. She was not yet dead. But I was already alone. And even those references she had made to the Guermantes, to Molière, to our conversations about the little clan, now seemed baseless, random, outlandish, because they arose from the non-reality of this same being who tomorrow perhaps would no longer exist, for whom they would cease to have any meaning, from the non-being – incapable of making such references – which my grandmother would soon be.

'Monsieur, I am not saying no, but you have no appointment, no number. And this is not my day for seeing patients. You must have a doctor of your own. I cannot stand in for him, unless he asks me to act as a consultant. It's a question of professional ethics…'

Just as I was hailing a cab, I had run into the famous Professor E***, not quite a friend of my father and grandfather, but certainly acquainted with them at all events, who lived in the avenue Gabriel, and a sudden stroke of inspiration had made me stop him just as he was entering his house, thinking that he would perhaps be the very person for my grandmother to consult. But he was in a hurry and, after collecting his mail, he clearly wanted to be rid of me, so the only way I could speak to him was by accompanying him up in the lift, with him begging me to be allowed to press the buttons himself, a little quirk of his.

'But, Doctor, I'm not asking you to see my grandmother here and now, as you will realize when I've explained to you that she isn't in a fit state to come. I'm asking you to call at our house in half an hour's time, when I've taken her home.

– Call at your house? Monsieur, that is unthinkable. I'm dining with the Minister of Commerce. Before that I have a call to make. I must dress at once, and to make matters worse one of my tail-coats is torn and the other has no buttonhole for my decorations. I beg you, please don't touch the lift-buttons. You don't know how the lift works. One should always proceed with caution. This buttonhole is going to delay me still further. But, out of friendship for your family, if your grandmother comes at once, I'll see her. I warn you though, I shan't be able to give her a minute more than a quarter of an hour.'

I was on my way at once, without even getting out of the lift, which Professor E*** had himself set in motion to take me down, eyeing me distrustfully as he pushed the button.

We make a point of telling ourselves that death can come at any moment, but when we do so we think of that moment as something vague and distant, not as something that can have anything to do with the day that has already begun or might mean that death – or the first signs of its partial possession of us, after which it will never loosen its hold again – will occur this very afternoon, the almost inevitable afternoon with its hourly activities prescribed in advance. We look forward to our daily outing as a means of getting our month's supply of fresh air; we have hesitated over which coat to wear, which cabman to hail; we are in the cab, the whole day is spread before us, a short one because we need to get back home early enough for the visit of a friend; we hope that it will be as fine again tomorrow; and we have no suspicion that death, accompanying us in some obscure way, has chosen this very day to make its appearance, in a few minutes' time, roughly at the moment when the carriage reaches the Champs-Élysées. Perhaps people who are normally haunted by the fear of the utter strangeness of death will find something reassuring about this kind of death – about this kind of initial contact with death – in that it assumes a known, familiar, everyday character. It has been preceded by a good lunch and the same sort of outing that is made by perfectly healthy people. A drive home in an open carriage covers over its first attack; ill as my grandmother was, there were still several people who could bear witness to the fact that at six o'clock, as we returned from the Champs-Élysées, they had raised their hats to her as she drove by in an open carriage, on a beautiful day. Legrandin, making his way towards the place de la Concorde, doffed his hat to us, and stopped with a surprised look on his face. I, who was not yet removed from life, asked my grandmother if she had acknowledged him, reminding her how touchy he was. My grandmother, finding my question no doubt very trivial, raised her hand in a gesture that seemed to convey: 'What does it matter? It's of no importance whatsoever.'

Yes, people could have borne witness to the fact that a little earlier, while I was looking for a cab, my grandmother was seated on a bench in the avenue Gabriel, that a little later she had driven past in an open carriage. But would it have been really true? For a bench to stand there on an avenue – although it too may be subject to certain conditions of equilibrium – there is no need of energy. But for a living being to to be stable, even when supported by a bench or in a carriage, there must be a taut balance of forces we do not usually perceive, any more than we perceive (because it acts ubiquitously) atmospheric pressure. Perhaps if a vacuum were created inside us and we were left to bear the pressure of the air, we should feel, for a split second before our extinction, the terrible weight which now had nothing else to neutralize its effect. Similarly, when the dreadful depths of sickness and death open up inside us and we have nothing left to defy the havoc into which the world and our own bodies hurl us, then to sustain even the weight of our muscles, even the shudder that strikes us to the very marrow, and even to keep still, in what we would normally regard as no more than a strained posture, all this demands, if we want our head to remain erect and our expression to keep its composure, a good deal of vital energy, and so turns into an exhausting struggle.

And if Legrandin had looked at us with astonishment on his face, it was because to him, as to others who passed us at the time, in the cab in which my grandmother was apparently sitting back, she had seemed to be sinking down, slithering into the abyss, desperately clinging to the cushions which could scarcely hold back the impetus of her falling body, her hair dishevelled, a distraught look in her eyes, which were no longer capable of focusing on the onrush of images their pupils could bear no more. She had seemed, even with me sitting beside her, to be plunged into that unknown world in which she had already received the blows whose marks I had noticed earlier in the Champs-Élysées when I saw her hat, her face, her coat thrown into disarray by the hand of the invisible angel with whom she had wrestled.

It has occurred to me subsequently that this moment of her stroke cannot have come as a complete surprise to my grandmother, that she had possibly even foreseen it well before it occurred, lived with the thought that it would happen. She had not known, of course, when this fatal moment would come, of that she was unsure, as lovers are when a similar sense of uncertainty leads them to base unreasonable hopes and, in turn, unjustified suspicions on the fidelity of their mistresses. But these serious illnesses, like the one that had at last just struck her full in the face, seldom take up residence in a sick person for long before they kill him, and during this time, like 'friendly' neighbours, they are quick to make themselves known to him. It is a terrible acquaintance, less for the suffering involved than for the novel strangeness of the terminal restrictions it imposes on life. We see ourselves dying, in this instance, when death has come to inhabit us

as a hideous presence, not at the actual moment of death, but for months, or sometimes years before that. The sick woman makes her acquaintance with this stranger, whose comings and goings she hears in her brain. She does not know what he looks like, of course, but from the regular sounds she hears him make she gains an idea of his habits. Is he up to no good? One morning, she can no longer hear him. He has gone. Ah! if only he were gone for good! By evening, he is back. What are his plans? The consultant, questioned on the matter like an adored mistress, replies with assurances that are believed one day, mistrusted the next. Indeed, it is not so much the mistress's role as the role of questioned servants that the doctor plays. They are only third parties. The person we press for an answer, the one we suspect of being about to betray us, is life itself, and although we feel it to be no longer the same, we still believe in it, or at least we remain uncertain about it until the day it finally abandons us.

I got my grandmother into Professor E***'s lift, and a moment later he came to take us into his consulting-room. And there, pressed for time though he was, his haughty manner dropped, such is the force of habit, and with his patients his habit was to be friendly, not to say jovial. Knowing that my grandmother was a great reader, and being one himself, he devoted two or three minutes to quoting various lines of poetry appropriate to the glorious summer weather. He had placed her in an armchair and seated himself with his back to the light so that he could see her properly. He gave her a thorough examination during which I was even obliged to leave the room for a moment. He went on with it when I returned and, when he had finished, he started to ply my grandmother with further quotations, even though the quarter of an hour was almost at an end. He even made a few rather subtle jokes, which I would have preferred to hear on some other occasion, but the tone of amusement in which he uttered them completely set my mind at rest. At this point I remembered that M. Fallières, the president of the Senate, had had a false stroke a number of years ago, and that to the dismay of his rivals he had resumed his duties again three days later and, it was said, had even started to make preparations to stand – in the more or less distant future – for President of the Republic. My confidence in my grandmother's prompt recovery was further boosted by the fact that, as I was recalling the case of M. Fallières, I was distracted from pursuing the parallel by a hearty burst of laughter at the end of one of Professor E***'s jokes. At which point he took out his watch, frowned frantically when he saw he was five minutes late, and, as he bade us farewell, rang for his dress-clothes to be brought immediately. I waited for my grandmother to leave the room, closed the door and asked the specialist to tell me the truth.

'There is no hope for your grandmother, he told me. The stroke was brought on by uraemia. Uraemia in itself is not inevitably fatal, but this seems a hopeless case to me. I don't need to tell you that I hope I am mistaken. And with Cottard, you're in excellent hands. Now if you'll excuse me,' he added as he saw the maid come into the room with his tail-coat over her arm. 'As I said earlier, I'm dining with the Minister of Commerce, and I have a call to pay before that. Ah! life is not a just a bed of roses, as people of your age are inclined to think.'

And he graciously offered me his hand. I had shut the door behind me, and a footman was seeing us to the hall, when my grandmother and I heard angry shouting. The maid had forgotten to see to the buttonhole for the decorations. This would take another ten minutes. The Professor raged away as I stood on the landing gazing at my grandmother, for whom there was no hope left. Each of us is very much alone. We set off back home.

The sun was going down; its glare lit up a never-ending wall along which our cab had to pass before it reached the street where we lived, a wall against which the shadow of horse and carriage cast by the setting sun stood out in black on a reddish background, like a funeral chariot on a piece of terracotta from Pompeii. We finally arrived home. I sat the sick woman down in the hall at the bottom of the staircase and went up to warn my mother. I told her that my grandmother had come home feeling slightly unwell, after a spell of dizziness. No sooner had I started to speak than my mother's face was stricken with a paroxysm of despair, yet a despair already so resigned that I realized she had been holding it in readiness for years against an uncertain but decisive day. She asked me no questions; it seemed as if, with the same passion malice expends on intensifying the suffering of others, her love did not want to admit that her mother was seriously ill, especially with a disease that might affect her mind. Mama was shuddering, weeping with a tearless face, and she ran to ask for the doctor to be fetched; but when Françoise asked who was ill, she could not answer, the words stuck in her throat. She hurried downstairs with me, erasing from her face the sob that creased it up. My grandmother was waiting below on the sofa in the hall, but as soon as she heard us coming, she straightened her posture, stood up, and waved cheerfully to Mama. I had wrapped part of her head in a white lace shawl and told her it was to prevent her from catching cold on the stairs. I did not want my mother's attention too obviously drawn to the changed face, the distortion of the mouth; my precaution proved unnecessary: my mother went up to my grandmother, kissed her hand as though it were the hand of her God, supported her upright as far as the lift, with infinite care which revealed, together with the fear of being clumsy and hurting her, the humility of someone who felt unworthy to touch what was for her the most precious thing she knew; but not once did she raise her eyes to the sick woman's face. Perhaps this was to prevent my grandmother from being saddened by the thought that her daughter had been alarmed by the sight of her face. Perhaps from fear of pain so excessive that she did not dare to confront it. Perhaps out of respect, because she felt it unacceptably impious to take note of any trace of mental debilitation on that revered face. Perhaps to be better able to preserve intact in her memory the true face of her mother, beaming with intelligence and kindness. So they went up side by side, my grandmother half-hidden in her shawl, my mother averting her gaze.

All this time, there was one person who could not avert hers from what could be glimpsed of my grandmother's altered features at which her daughter dared not look, someone whose eyes were fixed upon them dumbfoundedly, indiscreetly, and with an ominous stare: this was Françoise. Not that she was not genuinely fond of my grandmother (indeed she had been disappointed and almost scandalized by Mama's coldness and would have preferred to see her throw herself weeping into her mother's arms), but she had this tendency to see only the worst side of things and had retained from her childhood two characteristics which would seem to be mutually exclusive: the impulsive reactions of uneducated people who make no attempt to hide the impression or even the painful alarm aroused in them by the sight of a physical change it would be more discreet to appear not to have noticed, and the insensitive brutishness of the peasant woman who tears the wings off dragonflies until she gets the chance to wring the necks of chickens and lacks the sense of modesty to make her conceal the interest she feels at the sight of suffering flesh.

When my grandmother had been put to bed, thanks to Françoise's perfect care, she discovered she could speak more easily, the slight bursting or obstruction of a blood-vessel brought on by the uraemia having apparently been very minor. And at once she was concerned to be there for Mama, to help her through the most cruel moments she had yet experienced.

'Well, well, my dear,' she said, taking her daughter's hand in her own, and keeping the other in front of her mouth as a means of accounting for the slight difficulty she still had in pronouncing certain words, 'so this the sort of pity you show your mother! You look as if you thought indigestion was something rather enjoyable!'

At this, for the first time, my mother's eyes fixed themselves passionately on my grandmother's, not wishing to see the rest of her face, and she replied with the first in the list of those false solemn promises we are unable to keep:

'Mama, you'll soon be well again, your daughter will make sure of that.'

And enveloping her strongest love, her utter determination that her mother should get well, in the kiss to which she entrusted them, accompanying it with her thoughts and her whole being until it reached her lips, she bent to bestow it humbly, reverently, on the treasured forehead.

My grandmother complained that she could feel something like an alluvial deposit of bedclothes constantly gathering on the same side of the bed over her left leg, and which she could not manage to shift. But she did not realize that she was herself responsible for it (which meant that every day she unjustly accused Françoise of not 'doing' her bed properly). With a jerky movement, she kept throwing to that side of the bed the whole frothy flood of the fine woollen blankets, which accumulated there like sand in a bay very soon transformed into a beach (unless a sea-wall is built) by the successive deposits of the waves.

My mother and I (our lies exposed before we uttered them by the unwelcome shrewdness of Françoise) would not even admit that my grandmother was seriously ill, as though to do so would give pleasure to her enemies (not that she had any), as if it were kinder to pretend that she was not really that ill; in short we followed the same instinctive feeling which had led me to suppose that Andrée pitied Albertine too much to be really fond of her. You see the same phenomenon reproduced on a large scale, in situations of crisis. In a war, a man who does not love his country says nothing against it, but regards it as doomed, pities it, sees everything in the blackest terms.

Françoise was a precious boon to us in that she could do without sleep and perform the most arduous tasks. And if, when she had gone to bed after several nights spent on duty, we were obliged to call her a quarter of an hour after she had fallen asleep, she was so happy to be able to carry out the most ungrateful tasks as if they had been the simplest things in the world that, far from doing them with bad grace, she expressed signs of modest satisfaction. It was only when it was time for mass, or breakfast, that Françoise would have slipped away to be there on time, even if my grandmother had been in her death throes. She neither could nor would let her place be taken by her young footman. It was true that she brought with her from Combray a very elevated idea of everyone's duty towards our family; she would not have tolerated any our servants 'failing' us. This had made her into such a noble, imperious and efficient instructress that we had never had a servant, however corrupt, who had not quickly modified and purged his conception of life to the point of shunning the customary tips from tradesmen and of running – however unobliging they had been previously – to relieve me of the smallest parcel and not to let me tire myself by carrying it. But in Combray Françoise had also contracted the habit, which she had imported to Paris, of not being able to bear anyone helping her in her work. To be seen with a helper seemed like humiliation, and servants spent weeks without any response to the morning greeting they gave her, had even gone off on their holidays without her saying good-bye or their guessing why this was, when it was simply because they had offered to do part of her work on a day she had been poorly. And particularly now, when my grandmother was so ill, Françoise saw her duties as hers and no one else's. She had no desire, in her official position, to be done out of her role during these gala days. And so her young footman, pushed to one side, did not know what to do with himself and, not content with having followed Victor's example and supplied himself with writing-paper from my desk, he had gone further and started to borrow volumes of poetry from my book-case. He spent a good half of the day reading them, out of admiration for the poets who had written them, but also so that, during the rest of his time, he could embellish the letters he wrote to his friends in his native village with a sprinkling of quotations. Indeed, he thought this would dazzle them. But since his train of thought was rather muddled, he somehow got it into his head that these poems, randomly selected from my shelves, were common currency and everyday points of reference. So much so that in writing to these village people he hoped to stun, he interspersed his own remarks with lines from Lamartine as if they were the equivalent of expressions like 'What will be will be' or merely 'Hello'.

Because of the pain she was suffering my grandmother was put on morphine. The trouble was that while this relieved the pain, it also increased her albumin count. The blows we aimed at the evil disease which had settled inside her always fell wide of the mark; it was she, it was her poor body standing in the way that became the target, yet her only complaint was never more than a faint groan. And we were unable to compensate for the pain we caused her by doing anything beneficial. The ferocious disease we would have liked to exterminate we were barely able to get anywhere near; we merely increased its virulence and perhaps hastened the moment when its captive would be devoured by it. On days when the albumin count rose too high, Cottard, after some hesitation, stopped the morphine. In the brief moments of deliberation, when the relative dangers of various possible courses of treatment fought it out in his mind until he settled on one of them, this unprepossessing, commonplace man assumed something of the impressiveness of a general who, while unexceptional in all other respects, is a gifted strategist and, at a time of crisis, after a moment's reflection, can decide upon the wisest course of action in military terms and issue the order: 'Advance eastwards.' In medical terms, however little hope there was of putting an end to this attack of uraemia, it was important not to put a strain on the kidneys. But, on the other hand, when my grandmother was taken off morphine, the pain became intolerable; she would constantly attempt to move in a particular way which it was difficult for her to do without groaning: pain is largely a kind of need felt by the organism to acquaint itself with an unfamiliar state that is troubling it, to adjust its responses to that state. This origin of pain can be seen in the case of the sort of discomfort which affects only certain people. Two men come into a room filled with acrid smoke and go about their business, impervious to it; a third, with a more sensitive constitution, betrays constant discomfort. His nostrils never stop anxiously sniffing the smell which he ought, it seems, to try not to notice and which he will keep on seeking to assimilate, through closer acquaintance, to his troubled sense of smell. Hence the fact no doubt that deep preoccupation will prevent people from complaining of toothache. When my grandmother was in this sort of pain, the sweat trickled down her high mauve forehead, sticking strands of her white hair to it, and if she thought that there was no one in the room she would cry out: 'Oh, this is dreadful!'; but if she caught sight of my mother, she would immediately devote all her energy to removing any sign of pain from her face or, conversely, go on repeating the same words of complaint but adding explanations which altered, in retrospect, the meaning of the words my mother had overheard:

'Oh! my dear, it's dreadful to have to stay in bed on a fine sunny day like this when it would be good to be outside. Your instructions are making me weep with frustration.'

But she could not hide the groaning pain in her eyes, the sweat on her forehead, the jerky spasm, repressed the minute it began, of her limbs.

'I'm not in pain. I'm complaining because I'm not lying comfortably, I feel my hair is a mess, I feel sick, I knocked my head against the wall.'

And my mother, at the foot of the bed, riveted to this suffering as though, by piercing through with her gaze the pained forehead, the body where the disease lay hidden, she must eventually reach and remove it, my mother said:

'No, dear Mama, we won't let you suffer like this, we'll find something to help you, just be patient for a moment. Let me give you a kiss; but you're not to move.'

And stooping over the bed, with her knees bent, almost kneeling, as if the humility of her posture would facilitate the acceptability of this passionate gift of herself, she bent her face down towards my grandmother with the whole of her life contained in it, like a ciborium she was holding out to her, decorated with folds and dimples so enamoured, so sorrowful and so sweet that there was no way of telling whether they had been engraved on it by a kiss, a sob or a smile. My grandmother too tried to lift up her face to Mama's. It was so changed that, had she been strong enough to go out, she would probably have been recognized only by the feather in her hat. Her features, as in a modelling session, seemed to be straining, in one undivided effort of concentration, to conform to a particular pattern which bore no resemblance to anything we recognized. The sculptor's work was nearing its end, and if my grandmother's face had grown smaller, it had also hardened. The veins that crossed it were not like veins of marble, but of some rougher stone. Constantly bent forward in an attempt to breathe properly, but also shrinking into itself through exhaustion, her face, eroded, diminished, terrifyingly expressive, seemed like the rough, purplish, ruddy, desperate face of some fierce guardian of a tomb in a primitive, almost prehistoric sculpture. But the work was not yet completed. Later, the sculpture would have to be smashed, then lowered into the tomb which had been so painfully guarded by those harshly contracted features. At one point when, as the saying goes, we did not know which way to turn, because my grandmother was coughing and sneezing a lot, we took the advice of a relative who assured us that, if we brought in the specialist X, the trouble would be over in a matter of days. This is the sort of thing society people say about their doctors, and we believe them, just as Françoise believed newspaper advertisements. The specialist arrived, his bag packed with all the coughs and sneezes of his other patients, like Aeolus with his goatskin.[1] My grandmother bluntly refused to be examined. And we, in our embarrassment at having called out this doctor for nothing, deferred to his desire to examine our respective noses, although there was nothing wrong with them. He was of a contrary opinion; migraine and colic, heart disease and diabetes were all diseases of the nose that had been wrongly diagnosed. He said to each of us in turn: 'I should like to take another look at that little hooter of yours. Don't put it off too long. A little ignipuncture, and I'll soon get rid of it for you.' We had other things on our mind, yet we still asked ourselves: 'Get rid of what?' In a word, all our noses

were infected; his only mistake was to have used the present tense. For by the next day his examination and provisional treatment had taken effect. We all got catarrh. And when he ran into my father having a coughing fit in the street, the thought that an ignorant person might attribute the attack to his intervention brought a smile to his lips. He had examined us at a moment when we were already ill.

My grandmother's illness occasioned excessive or inadequate expressions of sympathy from a number of people, which surprised us quite as much as the sort of chance discovery, made through one or other of them, of connecting links of circumstance, or even friendship, which we would have never suspected. And the signs of interest shown by the constant stream of callers who came to the house to enquire made us aware of the gravity of an illness which, until then, we had not sufficiently seen for what it was, or detached from the countless painful impressions we now experienced in my grandmother's presence. When informed by telegram, her sisters stayed in Combray. They had discovered a musician there who provided them with excellent chamber recitals, and they felt that by listening to these, rather than by sitting at their sick sister's bedside, they were better able to achieve a sense of contemplation and exalted grief, which did nothing to alter the highly unusual form this assumed. Mme Sazerat wrote to Mama, but in the tone of one whose abruptly broken engagement (the rupture being Dreyfusism in this case) has alienated from one for ever. By contrast, Bergotte came every day and spent several hours with me.

He had always liked to come regularly and spend a few hours in a house where he had no need to stand on ceremony. But in the past he had come in order to talk without being interrupted; now he came to sit in silence for long periods without being asked to say anything. For he was very ill, with albuminaria like my grandmother, some people said. According to others, he had a tumour. He was growing weaker by the day; he found it difficult to climb our staircase and even more difficult to go down. Although he clung to the banisters, he often stumbled, and I believe he would have stayed at home had he not been afraid of losing completely the habit of going out and the possibility of doing so, he, the 'man with the goatee' I remembered as so alert not so very long ago. His eyesight had completely gone and he often had difficulty with his speech.

But at the same time, in stark contrast to this, his books, once known only to literary milieux at a time when Mme Swann used to support various feeble efforts to disseminate them, but now grown in stature and strength in the eyes of all, had become increasingly popular with the general public, and to an impressive extent. No doubt it is often only after his death that a writer achieves fame. But in this case it was while he was still alive and slowly crawling towards the death that awaited him still, that the writer watched the progress of his work towards Fame. A dead author can at least enjoy fame without fatigue. The celebrity of his name stops short at his tombstone. In the deafness of eternal sleep, he is not importuned by Glory. But for Bergotte this antithesis was not yet the case. He was still alive enough to suffer from the uproar. He still moved about, however painfully, while his books, bouncing around the place like daughters who are loved but whose impetuous youth and noisy pleasures are exhausting, brought a daily succession of fresh admirers rather too close to his bedside.

The visits he now paid us came several years too late for me, for I no longer had the same admiration for his work. This was not incompatible with the growth of his reputation. A writer's work is seldom completely understood and established before the work of another writer, still relatively unknown, has begun to replace it, among a handful of exacting minds, with a new cult, different from the one that has almost ceased to command allegiance. In Bergotte's books, which I constantly reread, the sentences were as clear to me as my own thoughts, I perceived them as distinctly as the furniture in my room and the carriages in the streets. Everything was easily visible, if not as one had always seen it, then certainly as one was accustomed to see it now. But a new writer had just started to publish work in which the relations between things were so different from those that connected them for me, that I could understand almost nothing in his writing. For instance, he would write: 'The hosepipes admired the careful upkeep of the roads' (this was easy to grasp, I followed smoothly along these roads) 'which set out every five minutes from Briand and Claudel.' At this point I failed to understand, because I had expected the name of a town and been given the name of a person instead. Only I felt that it was not the sentence that was badly constructed, but that I myself lacked the energy and agility to see it through to the end. I would make a fresh start, working really hard to reach the point where I could see the new connections between things. At each attempt, about half-way through the sentence, I would fall back defeated, as I did later in the army in horizontal bar exercises. Yet I still felt for the new writer the same admiration experienced by a clumsy boy who comes bottom of the class in gymnastics when he watches another more agile than himself. From then on I felt less admiration for Bergotte, whose transparency struck me as a shortcoming. There was a time when people recognized things easily when they were depicted by Fromentin[2] and failed to recognize them at all when they were painted by Renoir. Today, people of taste tell us that Renoir is a great eighteenth-century painter. But when they say this they forget Time, and that it took a great deal of time, even in the middle of the nineteenth century, for Renoir to be hailed as a great artist. To gain this sort of recognition, an original painter or an original writer follows the path of the occultist. Their painting or their prose acts upon us like a course of treatment which is not always agreeable. When it is over, the practitioner says to us: 'Now look.' And at this point the world (which was not created once and for all, but as often as an original artist is born) appears utterly different from the one we knew, but perfectly clear. Women pass in the street, different from those we used to see, because they are Renoirs, the same Renoirs we once refused to see as women. The carriages are also Renoirs, and the water, and the sky: we want to go for a walk in a forest like the one which, when we first saw it, was anything but a forest, more like a tapestry for instance, with innumerable shades of colour but lacking precisely the colours appropriate to forests. Such is the new and perishable universe that has just been created. It will last until the next geological catastrophe unleashed by a new painter or writer with an original view of the world.

The writer who had supplanted Bergotte in my estimation sapped my energy not by the incoherence but by the novelty – perfectly coherent – of associations I was not used to making. Because I always felt myself falter in the same place, it was clear that I needed to perform the same feat of endeavour each time. And when I did, very occasionally, manage to follow the author to the end of his sentence, what I discovered was always a humour, a truthfulness, a charm similar to those I had once found reading Bergotte, only more delightful. I reflected that it was not so long ago that a renewal of the world, similar to the one I expected from his successor, had been brought about for me by Bergotte. And I started to wonder whether there was some truth in the distinction we are always making between art, which is no more advanced now than it was in Homer's time, and science with its continuous progress. Perhaps, on the contrary, art was now like science in this respect; each new writer of originality seemed to me to have progressed beyond his predecessors; and who was to say whether in twenty years' time, when I should be able to follow today's newcomer effortlessly, another might not emerge and leave the present newcomer to go the way of Bergotte? I spoke to the latter about the new writer. He dampened my enthusiasm not so much by assuring me that his art was unpolished, facile and hollow, as by telling me that he had seen him and very nearly mistaken him for Bloch. The image of Bloch then started to loom over the pages I read and I no longer felt any compulsion to take the trouble to understand them. If Bergotte had denigrated his work to me, it was less, I think, through jealousy of his success than through lack of familiarity with his work. He read almost nothing any more. The bulk of his thought had already passed from his brain into his books. He had grown thin, as if they had been removed from from him by surgery. His reproductive instinct no longer stirred him to any activity now that he had created an autonomous existence for the greater part of his thought. He led the vegetative life of a convalescent, of a woman after childbirth; his striking eyes now remained motionless, vaguely dazed, like the eyes of a man lying by the sea-shore and watching, in a vague day-dream, only each tiny wave. And if I was now less interested in talking to him than I used to be, I felt no twinge of conscience about it. He was such a creature of habit that an inclination towards simplicity, or towards utter extravagance, would become indispensable to him for a certain time. I do not know what made him come to our house that first time, but subsequently he came every day simply because he had been there the day before. He would turn up as he might have entered a café, in order that no one should talk to him or – very rarely – so that he might talk himself, and there was no way of telling in the end whether he was moved by our grief or whether he just enjoyed my company, had we wanted to find a reason for these assiduous visits of his. My mother was not indifferent to them, sensitive as she was to anything that might be seen as an act of homage to her sick mother. And every day she reminded me: 'Make sure you don't forget to thank him properly.'

We had the pleasure of a visit – a discreet feminine touch like the tea and cake offered us, between sittings, by a painter's mistress – a courtesy extra, over and above the calls paid by her husband, from Mme Cottard. She came to offer us her 'lady in waiting' or, if we preferred the services of a man, she would 'scour the

field' for one; and when we declined, she said she did hope that this was not some 'setback' on our part, a word which in her terms signified a false excuse for not accepting an invitation. She assured us that the Professor, who never mentioned his patients at home, was as distressed as if it had been she herself who was ill. It will be clear in due course that, even if this had been true, it would have meant very little and at the same time a great deal, coming as it did from one of the most unfaithful and most appreciative of husbands.

Equally helpful offers, and infinitely more touching ones in the way they were expressed (a blend of the highest intelligence, the warmest sympathy and a rare gift for putting them into words), were addressed to me by the heir to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. I had met him in Balbec when he had come to visit one of his aunts, the Princess of Luxembourg, at a time when he himself was merely the Comte de Nassau. A few months later, he had married the beautiful daughter of another Luxembourg princess, and as the only daughter of a prince who owned a huge flour-manufacturing business, she was inordinately wealthy. At this juncture, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, who had no children of his own and was devoted to his nephew Nassau, had obtained parliamentary approval for making him his heir. As with all marriages of this kind, the source of the bride's fortune was the problem, just as it was the motivating cause. I recalled the Comte de Nassau as one of the most striking young men I had ever met, already consumed at the time by a darkly blazing passion for his fiancée. I was deeply touched by the regular flow of letters he wrote me during my grandmother's illness, and Mama herself, equally moved, would sadly voice one of her mother's expressions: 'Sévigné could not have put it better.'

On the sixth day, Mama, in response to my grandmother's entreaties, left her for a while and pretended to go and rest. I should have liked Françoise to stay quietly at her bedside, so that my grandmother could go to sleep. In spite of my pleas, she left the room; she was fond of my grandmother; with her perceptiveness and her sense of pessimism she regarded her as a doomed woman. This made her anxious to provide her with every possible care and attention. But she had just learned that the electrician had arrived, a man long-established with his firm, which was run by his brother-in-law, and who was highly esteemed throughout our building, where he had been coming for years, particularly by Jupien. We had sent for this workman before my grandmother fell ill. It seemed to me that he could have been sent away or asked to wait. But Françoise's sense of protocol did not permit this; it would have been to show a lack of consideration for this excellent man; my grandmother's state of health was suddenly irrelevant. When, after a quarter of an hour, I lost patience and went to look for her in the kitchen, I found her chatting with the electrician on the landing of the back stairs with the door open, a precaution which had the advantage, should any of us arrive on the scene, of allowing them to pretend they were saying good-bye, but the drawback of letting in a terrible draught. So Françoise parted with the workman, but not before she had shouted after him to convey various greetings to his wife and brother-in-law she had overlooked. This concern, characteristic of Combray, not to be found lacking in good manners was something Françoise extended even to foreign policy. People foolishly imagine that the large-scale dimensions of social phenomena provide an excellent opportunity to penetrate further into the human soul; they ought, on the contrary, to realize that it is by sounding the depths of a single individual that they might have a chance of understanding those phenomena. Françoise had told the gardener in Combray a thousand times that war was the most senseless of crimes, that life was the only thing that mattered. Yet, when the Russo-Japanese conflict broke out, she felt ashamed, in relation to the Tsar, that we had not gone to war to help 'the poor Russians' because, as she said, 'we're allianced to them'. She thought it discourteous to Nicholas II, who had always 'said such nice things about us'; as a token of the same code, she would not have allowed herself to refuse a quick drink with Jupien, even though she knew it would 'upset her digestion', and all of this meant that by not going in person to make her apologies to this worthy electrician who had been put to so much trouble, even with my grandmother at death's door, she would have felt she was committing the same sort of discourtesy she imputed to France's neutrality towards Japan.

Luckily, we were very soon rid of Françoise's daughter, who had to spend several weeks away. To the habitual pieces of advice Combray people give to the family of an invalid: 'Have you thought of going away for a while… a change of air… getting your appetite back… and so forth,' she had added the almost unique idea, which she had thought up specially and which she repeated doggedly every time we saw her, as though she needed to drive it into people's heads: 'She ought to have taken *radical* care of herself from the start.' She did not recommend one sort of treatment over another, provided it was *radical*. As for Françoise herself, she observed that my grandmother was being given very little medication. Since, in her view, medicines only ruined the stomach, she was glad about this, but more obviously humiliated by it. She had some cousins in the south of France – people who were quite well-off – whose daughter, after falling ill in mid-adolescence, died when she was twenty-three; for several years before her decease the father and mother had spent a fortune on drugs and doctors, on pilgrimages from one thermal spa to another. Now for Françoise, for the parents concerned, all this seemed somehow luxurious, as if they had owned race-horses or a country manor-house. The parents, however afflicted they felt, derived a certain pride from the amount of money they had spent. They were left with nothing, least of all their most treasured possession, their child, but they were fond of repeating how they had done as much for her, more than as much, as the wealthiest people in existence. The ultraviolet rays to which the poor girl had been subjected several times a day for months on end were a particular source of pride. At times the father, his vanity flattered by some sense of glorious sacrifice surrounding his grief, would even reach the point of speaking of his daughter as though she had been a famous opera singer for whose sake he had been brought to ruin. Françoise was not unmoved by such theatricality; the staging of my grandmother's illness seemed to her to be rather thin in comparison, better suited to the boards of a minor provincial theatre.

There came a moment when my grandmother's eyes were affected by her uraemic disorders. For a few days she could not see at all. Her eyes were in no way like those of a blind person and remained unchanged. And I realized that she could not see only from the strangeness of a certain smile of welcome she adopted the moment any of us came into the room, a smile which lasted until one had taken her hand in greeting, begun too soon and remaining stereotyped on her lips, fixed, but always face on, and endeavouring to be visible to everyone, because it could no longer rely on the eyes to control it, to indicate the right moment and direction, to focus it, to enable it to adjust itself to the change of position or facial expression of whoever had come in; because it existed in isolation, unaccompanied by a smile in her eyes which would have diverted the visitor's attention from it for a second, its awkwardness drew undue attention to it and gave the impression of forced amiability. Then her eyesight returned completely, and from her eyes the nomadic illness passed to her ears. For a few days my grandmother was deaf. And because she was afraid of being startled by the sudden appearance of someone she might not have heard enter, although she was lying with her face to the wall, she would constantly keep turning her head sharply to the door. But her neck movements were awkward, for it takes more than a few days to adapt to such a change of reflex and, if not exactly to see sounds, then to listen with one's eyes. Finally the pain diminished, but her difficulty in speaking increased. We were obliged to ask my grandmother to repeat almost everything she said.

And now that she sensed we could no longer understand her, she stopped speaking altogether and lay there motionless. When she caught sight of me she gave a sort of start like someone who is suddenly unable to breathe, but her desire to speak to me resulted only in unintelligible sounds. Then, overcome by sheer helplessness, she would let her head fall back, lie out flat on the bed, grave and stony-faced, her hands motionless on the sheet or engaged in some purely physical action like wiping her fingers on her handkerchief. She had no desire to think. This would be followed by a state of constant restlessness. She would incessantly want to get up. But we dissuaded her as far as we could, for fear she would realize how paralysed she was. One day when she had been left alone for a moment, I discovered her on her feet, in her night-dress, trying to open the window. In Balbec, once, when a widow who had flung herself into the sea had been rescued against her will, my grandmother had said to me (moved perhaps by one of those forebodings we sometimes sense in the otherwise highly obscure mystery of our organic life, where the future is none the less reflected, it seems) that she could think of nothing so cruel as to snatch a desperate woman from the death she had deliberately sought and to bring her back to a life of torture.

We were only just in time to grab hold of my grandmother; she put up an almost violent struggle against my mother, then, overpowered, forcibly made to sit in an armchair, she ceased to will, to regret, her face became impassive once more and she began meticulously to pick off the hairs left on her night-dress by the fur coat we had thrown over her shoulders.

The look in her eyes changed completely: often anxious, doleful, wild, it was no longer the look we knew, but the sullen expression of a drivelling old woman.

By repeatedly asking her whether she would like her to see to her hair, Françoise ended up by persuading herself that the request had come from my grandmother herself. She brought brushes, combs, eau de Cologne, a gown, and remarked: 'It can't do Madame Amédée any harm if I comb her hair. No one's too weak to have their hair combed.' Which meant, no one is ever too weak for someone else to be able, for that someone else's own comfort, to comb their hair. But when I came into the room, I saw in the cruel hands of Françoise, as delighted as if she were restoring my grandmother to health, beneath the grief-stricken strands of aged hair which lacked the strength to bear contact with a comb, a head which was incapable of maintaining the position demanded of it and was falling about in a constant whirl in which exhaustion alternated with pain. I could feel that Françoise was coming to the end of her task, and I dared not hasten it by saying: 'That's enough,' in case she disobeyed me. But I did rush forward when Françoise, who wanted my grandmother to see whether her hair had been done properly, was about to hand her, in callous innocence, a mirror. I was initially glad that I had managed to snatch it away from her in time, before my grandmother, whom we had carefully kept away from mirrors, caught even a stray glimpse of a reflection she would have been unable to recognize. But alas, when, a moment later, I bent to kiss the handsome forehead which had undergone such exhausting treatment, she looked up at me in astonishment, distrustful and deeply shocked: she had failed to recognize me.

In the opinion of our doctor, this was a symptom that the congestion of her brain was increasing. It must be relieved. Cottard was in two minds. Françoise hoped for a second that they were going to use 'clarified' cupping-glasses. She looked up the effects of this treatment in my dictionary but could find no reference to it. Had she said 'scarified' instead of 'clarified' she still would not have found any reference to this adjective, since she did not look it up under *C* any more than under *S*; in fact she said 'clarified' but wrote (and therefore assumed that the written form was) 'esclarified.' Cottard, to her disappointment, decided, without much hope, to use leeches. A few hours later, when I went into my grandmother's room, fastened to her neck, her temples, her ears, the tiny black reptiles were writhing in her blood-stained hair, Medusa-like. But in her pale face, now pacified and utterly motionless, I saw her beautiful eyes, wide open, luminous and calm as they once used to be (perhaps even more brimming with intelligence than they had been before her illness, since, being unable to speak and forbidden to move, it was to her eyes alone that she entrusted her thought, that thought which holds such immense sway inside us and offers us unexpected treasures, or which can seem reduced to nothing and then be reborn, as if by spontaneous generation, thanks to the removal of a few drops of blood), her eyes, soft and liquid as oil, in which the rekindled fire which was now burning lit up for the sick woman the recaptured universe. Her calm was no longer the wisdom of despair but of hope. She realized she was feeling better, was anxious to be prudent and not to move, did no more than to bestow a lovely smile on me so that I should know she was feeling better, and gently pressed my hand.

I knew the disgust my grandmother felt at the sight of certain creatures, not to mention being touched by them. I knew it was out of respect for the advantageous relief they would bring that she endured the leeches. And so it infuriated me to hear Françoise chuckling at her as to a child who has to be humoured, and repeating: 'Oh, look at the little beasties crawling all over Madame!' Furthermore, this was to treat our invalid with a lack of respect, as though she had in fact slipped into second childhood. But my grandmother, whose face now wore the calm forbearance of a stoic, did not even seem to hear.

Alas, no sooner had the leeches been removed than the congestion returned and grew steadily worse. At this critical stage of my grandmother's illness, it amazed me that Françoise was constantly going off somewhere. And why? She had ordered herself a mourning outfit and did not want to keep the dressmaker waiting. In most women's lives, everything, even the greatest sorrow, comes down to a question of 'I haven't got a thing to wear.'

A few days later, while I was asleep, my mother came to call me in the middle of the night. With the tender concern of the grief-stricken, evident even in extremity, for the petty comforts of others, she said:

'Forgive me for disturbing your sleep.

– I wasn't asleep,' I answered as I awoke.

I said this quite genuinely. The great modification brought about by awakening is not so much our entry into the clear life of consciousness as the loss of all memory of the slightly more subdued light in which our mind had been resting, as in the opaline depths of the sea. The half-veiled thoughts on which we were still drifting a moment ago involved us in quite enough motion for us to refer to them as wakefulness. But then our awakenings themselves involve an interruption of memory. A short time later we describe what preceded them as sleep because we no longer remember it. And when the bright star which, at the moment of waking, lights up behind the sleeper the whole expanse of his sleep, begins to shine, it creates the momentary illusion that he was not sleeping but awake; a shooting star in reality, which dispels along with its fading light both the illusory existence and the contours of the dream and merely enables the waking man to say: 'I've been asleep.'

In a voice so gentle that it seemed to be afraid of doing me harm, my mother asked whether it would tire me too much to get up, and, stroking my hands, she added:

'Poor boy, you have only your Papa and Mama to rely on now.'

We went into the bedroom. Bent in a semi-circle on the bed, a creature other than my grandmother, a sort of beast who had donned the same hair and nestled among the same bedclothes, lay panting, whimpering, making the blankets heave with its convulsions. The eyelids were closed, and it was because they did not shut properly rather than because they opened that they revealed a small corner of eyeball, misted, rheumy, reflecting dimness of organic vision and inner pain. All this agitation was not intended for our benefit; she neither saw nor knew us. But if it was only a beast that was stirring there, where was my grandmother? And yet the shape of her nose was still recognizable, bearing no relation now to the rest of her face, but with its beauty spot still there in one corner, and so was her hand as it pushed aside the bedclothes with a gesture which would have once meant that those bedclothes bothered her but now meant nothing.

Mama asked me to fetch a little water and vinegar to bathe my grandmother's forehead. It was the only thing that refreshed her, thought Mama, who could see that she was trying to push back her hair from her face. But I was being beckoned from the doorway. The news that my grandmother was close to death had spread through the house at once. One of those 'extra pairs of hands', employed at exceptional times to take the burden off the regular servants (which means that deathbeds start resembling parties), had just opened the door to the Duc de Guermantes, who was now waiting in the hall asking for me; I had no alternative.

'My dear sir, I have just heard your macabre news. As a mark of sympathy, I should like to shake your father by the hand.'

I replied that I was very sorry, but it was a difficult moment for him to be disturbed. M. de Guermantes was like a caller who turns up just as one is about to go off somewhere. But he was so conscious of the importance of the courtesy he was showing us that it blinded him to everything else, and he insisted on being shown into the drawing-room. As a rule, he tended to make a point of carrying out punctiliously the formalities with which he had decided to honour a person and took little heed of things like packed trunks or coffins standing in readiness.

'Have you sent for Dieulafoy? No? That was a serious oversight. Had you asked me, he would have come on my behalf. He never refuses me anything, although he has been known to refuse the Duchesse de Chartres. I clearly take precedence over a Princess of the Blood, it would seem. But we are all equals in the face of death,' he added, not to assure me that my grandmother was becoming his equal but possibly because he felt that a prolonged conversation about his power over Dieulafoy and his precedence over the Duchesse de Chartres would not be in very good taste. His advice did not in the least surprise me. I knew that among the Guermantes Dieulafoy's name was always referred to (only with slightly more respect) in exactly the same way as any other top-quality caterer or supplier. And the old Duchesse de Mortemart, a Guermantes by birth (I never could understand why a duchess is invariably referred to as 'The old duchess X' or, conversely, if the duchess is young, in delicate Watteau-like tones, as 'The little duchess Y'), could almost always be relied on, in serious cases, to give a wink of

recommendation and come out with: 'Dieulafoy, Dieulafoy!' in the same way that for ices she would say 'Poiré Blanche' or for high-class confectionery 'Rebattet, Rebattet!' But what I did not know was that my father had in fact just sent for Dieulafoy.

At this juncture my mother, who was waiting impatiently for the arrival of oxygen cylinders which would help my grandmother to breathe more easily, came out herself into the hall, where she little expected to find M. de Guermantes. I would have done anything to make him disappear. But convinced that nothing was more important, could be more flattering to her or more indispensable to maintaining his reputation as a perfect gentleman, he seized me violently by the arm and, despite my repeated protestations of 'Sir, Sir, Sir' in the face of this near-assault, dragged me across to Mama with the words: 'Would you do me the great honour of presenting me to your lady mother?', his voice wavering slightly on the word 'mother'. And it was so obvious to him that the honour was hers that he could not hide a smile even while he was adopting a suitably serious expression. I had no alternative but to effect an introduction, which immediately set him hopping about in a series of low bows, ready to begin the whole ritual of salutation. He even seemed inclined to enter into conversation, but my mother, beside herself with grief, told me to come quickly and did not even reply to the remarks made by M. de Guermantes, who, expecting to be received as a visitor and finding himself left alone in the hall instead, would have departed had he not at that moment caught sight of Saint-Loup, who had arrived in Paris that morning and come rushing to see us when he heard the news. 'I say, what a pleasant surprise!' cried the Duc joyfully, grabbing his nephew by the sleeve and nearly tearing it off, heedless of the presence of my mother, who was again crossing through the hall. Saint-Loup was not altogether sorry, I think, despite his genuine sympathy, to avoid seeing me, given his attitude towards me. He was dragged off by his uncle, who had something important to say to him which he had been on the point of going to Doncières to impart, and was absolutely delighted to have saved himself the expense and trouble. 'Now if anyone had told me I had only to cross the courtyard to find you, I'd have thought they were taking me for a ride. As your friend M. Bloch would put it, it's a rather "droll" coincidence.' And as he disappeared with his arm round Robert's shoulder: 'All the same,' he went on, 'I've obviously touched the hangman's rope or whatever; I do have the devil's own luck.' It was not that the Duc de Guermantes was bad-mannered. Far from it. But he was one of those men who are incapable of putting themselves in the place of others, similar in this respect to undertakers and the majority of doctors, who, after composing their faces and saying 'This is a very painful time for you', perhaps even embracing you and recommending rest, then revert to treating a deathbed or a funeral just like some social gathering of a more or less restricted kind at which, with the joviality they have just momentarily repressed, they scan the room for someone they can talk to about their humdrum affairs or ask to introduce them to someone else or offer a lift home in their carriage. The Duc de Guermantes, while congratulating himself on the 'favourable wind' that had blown him to his nephew, was still so taken aback by the reception he had been given by my mother, quite understandable though it had been, that he later declared her to be as disagreeable as my father was civil, prone to 'blanks' during which she seemed not to hear a single word you said to her and, in his opinion, off colour and perhaps even not quite in her right mind. At the same time, from what I was told, he was willing to put it down partly to 'the circumstances' and to admit that my mother had been greatly 'affected' by the sad event. But his limbs were still twitching with a whole residue of gestures of greeting and backward bows he had been prevented from fully accomplishing, and he was so impervious to the real nature of my mother's grief that he asked me, the day before the funeral, if I was doing anything to take her mind off things.

A brother-in-law of my grandmother's, a monk whom I had never met, had telegraphed the head of his order in Austria and, having obtained special dispensation to come, arrived that day. Weighed down by grief, he sat by the bedside reading prayers and meditations yet never once shifting his penetrating gaze from the invalid. At one point when my grandmother had fallen unconscious, the sight of this priest's grief pained me, and my eyes came to rest on him. He seemed startled by my pity, and then an odd thing happened. He covered his face with his hands like a man absorbed in doleful meditation but, taking it for granted that I would look away, he had left a small gap between his fingers, and I noticed it. And just as I was looking away, I glimpsed his sharp eye, which had been taking advantage of his sheltering hands to observe whether my sympathy was sincere. He was lying there in wait like a priest in the shadow of a confession box. He saw that I had noticed and instantly shut tight the grill he had not quite closed. I met him again later, but never did we mention what had happened in that minute. It was tacitly agreed that I had not noticed him spying on me. Priests, like specialists in mental disorders, always have something of the examining magistrate about them. Besides, what friend is there, however dear, in whose past, as in ours, there has not been some similar incident we find it more convenient to believe he has forgotten?

The doctor gave a morphine injection and to make her breathing less painful ordered oxygen cylinders. My mother, the doctor, the nurse held these in their hands; as soon as one was empty they were handed another. I had left the room briefly. When I returned I found myself in the presence of something like a miracle. Accompanied by a subdued incessant murmur, my grandmother seemed to be singing us a long, happy song which filled the room, rapid and musical. I soon realized that it was scarcely less unconscious than, as purely mechanical as, the hoarse rattle I had heard earlier. Perhaps it faintly reflected some improvement induced by the morphine. It was mainly the result, since the air was not passing in quite the same way through the bronchial tubes, of a change of register in her breathing. Released by the twofold effect of oxygen and morphine, my grandmother's breath was no longer a laboured groan but, swift and light, it was gliding like a skater towards the delicious fluid. Perhaps the breath, imperceptibly, like the wind breathing into the stem of a reed, was mingled in this song with some of those more human sighs which, released at the approach of death, suggest impressions of pain or pleasure in those who can no longer feel and which came now to give a more melodious stress, but without changing its rhythm, to the long phrase which rose higher and higher, then descended, before issuing forth again from the lightened chest in its search for oxygen. And after reaching such a pitch, sustaining itself so vigorously, this song, mingled in its voluptuousness with a murmur of supplication, seemed at times to stop completely like a spring run dry.

When she experienced great grief, Françoise felt the need (so futile) to express it but lacked the art (so simple) to do so. Having made up her mind that my grandmother was doomed, what she was most anxious to impart to us was what she, Françoise, felt. And all she could do was to repeat: 'It's had a nasty effect on me,' in the same tone in which she would say, when she had had too much cabbage soup, 'There's something weighing on my stomach,' which, in both cases, was more natural than she seemed to think. However feebly expressed it was, her grief was none the less considerable and it was made even worse by the fact that her daughter was detained in Combray (which this young Parisienne now referred to as 'the back of beyond' where she felt herself becoming 'a country bumpkin') and unlikely to be able to return in time for the funeral ceremony, which, Françoise felt certain, would be a grand occasion. Knowing that we were not in the habit of showing our emotions, she had taken the precaution of summoning Jupien in advance to spend every evening that week in her company. She knew he would not be free at the time of the funeral. She wanted at least to have the opportunity to 'tell him all about it' when he got back.

For several nights now my father, my grandfather and one of our cousins had been keeping watch at the bedside and no longer left the house. Their continuous devotion eventually assumed a mask of indifference, and the interminable whiling away of time around this deathbed led them to indulge in the sort of small talk that inevitably accompanies prolonged confinement in a railway carriage. The cousin in question (a nephew of my great aunt) aroused in me a degree of antipathy equal to the esteem he deserved and generally enjoyed.

He was always somewhere in the background on important occasions and was so assiduous in his solicitude for the dying that the families concerned, on the pretext that he was delicate, despite his robust appearance, his bass voice and flourishing beard, invariably begged him, with customary evasiveness of expression, not to come to the cemetery. I knew already that Mama, thoughtful for others despite her immense grief, would soon be telling him in different terms what he was accustomed to hear said on all such occasions:

'Promise me you won't come "tomorrow". Do it for "her sake". If not, then there's no need for you to attend "the last part". It's what she would have wanted.'

It was no use; he was always the first to arrive 'at the house' and for this reason he had been given, in another circle and unbeknown to us, the nickname 'No flowers by request'. And before attending 'everything' he had always 'looked after everything', which earned him the reaction from people: 'We don't even have to

thank *you*.'

'What was that?' asked my grandfather loudly. He had grown rather deaf and had not managed to catch something my cousin had just said to my father.

'Oh, nothing, answered the cousin. I was just saying that I'd had a letter from Combray this morning. They're having dreadful weather there, and here it's almost too hot.

– And yet the barometer is very low, said my father.

– Where did you say they're having bad weather? asked my grandfather.

– In Combray.

– Ah! I'm not surprised. Whenever the weather's bad here, it's fine in Combray and vice versa. Oh lord! talking of Combray, has anyone remembered to tell Legrandin?

– Yes, there's no need to worry, it's been done,' said my cousin, whose cheeks, bronzed by a heavy growth of beard, gave the merest hint of a satisfied smile at having thought of it.

At this point my father rushed from the room. My immediate reaction was that there had been a change for better or worse. In fact it was merely that Dr Dieulafoy had just arrived. My father went off to the adjoining drawing-room to receive him, the latest actor to step into the drama. He had been sent for not to tend the patient but to certify, almost like a lawyer. Dr Dieulafoy may indeed have been a great physician, a wonderful professor of medicine; to these roles, in which he excelled, he added another, in which he remained for forty years unchallenged, a role as original as that of the actor representing the voice of reason, scaramouche or the noble father, and which consisted in coming to certify that a patient was on the point of death, or dead. His very name hinted at the dignity with which he would fulfil his role, and when the maid announced: 'M. Dieulafoy', it was like something out of a play by Molière. The dignity of his bearing was bolstered, unobtrusively, by his lithe and attractive build. The over-handsome face was redeemed by a decorum appropriate to distressing circumstances. With unaffected gravity, the Professor would enter the room in his distinguished black frock-coat, utter not one word of condolence which could have been construed as insincere and do nothing that breached the rules of tact in the slightest way. At the foot of a deathbed it was he, not the Duc de Guermantes, who was the great nobleman. After examining my grandmother without fatiguing her and with more than enough restraint to show respect to the acting doctor, he murmured a few words to my father and bowed respectfully to my mother, to whom I felt it was all my father could do not to say: 'Professor Dieulafoy.' But already the Professor had turned away, not wishing to seem intrusive, and made a perfect exit, simply accepting the sealed envelope that was slipped into his hand. He did not seem to have seen it, and even we were left wondering for a moment whether we had really given it to him, so dextrously had he made it disappear, like a conjurer, yet without losing a single trace of the gravity – if anything, it was accentuated – of the eminent consultant in his long frock-coat with its silk lapels, his handsome face weighed down with the most dignified commiseration. Both his poise and his deftness indicated that, however many other calls he had to make, he had no wish to appear to be in a hurry. For he was the embodiment of tact, intelligence and kindness. This eminent man is no longer. Other doctors, other professors may have equalled or even surpassed him. But the 'function' in which his knowledge, his physical endowments and his excellent manners made him supreme no longer exists, for want of successors capable of performing it. Mama had not even noticed M. Dieulafoy: everything apart from my grandmother had ceased to exist. I remember (I am anticipating here) that at the cemetery, where we saw her, like a supernatural apparition, edge diffidently towards the grave, her eyes seemingly gazing after a being who had flown off and was already far away, my father said: 'Old Norpois came to the house, to the church and he's now here at the cemetery. He missed a very important meeting to get here. You ought to say a word to him, he'd be very touched,' and all that my mother could do, when the ambassador bowed to her, was gently to incline her face, on which there was no sign of tears. Two days earlier – to anticipate again before I return to the bedside of my dying grandmother – while we were watching over her dead body, Françoise, who half-believed in ghosts and was terrified by the least sound, had said: 'I think that's her.' But it was not fear, rather an infinite sweetness that these words aroused in my mother, who would have longed for the dead to return and to have her mother with her sometimes still.

To return to those hours of dying:

'You heard about the telegram her sisters sent? my grandfather asked my cousin.

– Yes, that Beethoven business. I was told about it. It ought to be framed. But I'm not surprised.

– And my poor wife was so fond of them, said my grandfather, wiping away a tear. We mustn't hold it against them though. They're stark raving mad, the pair of them. I've always said so. What's the matter? Aren't you continuing with the oxygen?'

My mother said:

'But won't Mama start having difficulty with her breathing again?'

The doctor reassured her:

'Don't worry. The effect of the oxygen will last a good while yet. We can go on with it again presently.'

It seemed to me that he would not have said this of a dying woman, that if the good effect was going to last it meant that it was possible to do something to keep her alive. The hiss of the oxygen stopped for a few minutes. But the happy lament of her breathing still issued from her, light, disquieted, incomplete, beginning over and over again. At times it seemed as if it was all over: her breath stopped, either because of one of those shifts of octave that occur in the respiration of a sleeper or because of some natural interruption, an effect of anaesthesia, developing asphyxia, a failure of the heart. The doctor took my grandmother's pulse once more, but already, as if a tributary had come to irrigate the dried-up river bed, a new tune had taken up the interrupted phrase. It took over in another key with the same inexhaustible impetus. Who knows whether, without my grandmother even being conscious of them, a host of happy and tender experiences constricted by suffering were not escaping from her now, like those lighter gases which have been kept under pressure for a long time? It was as if everything she had to tell us was pouring out, that it was us she was addressing with this prolixity, this eagerness, this effusion. At the foot of the bed, convulsed by every gasp of the dying woman, not weeping but at moments drowned in tears, my mother stood with the heedless desolation of leaves lashed by the rain and torn back by the wind. I was made to dry my eyes before I went to kiss my grandmother.

'But I thought she could no longer see, said my father.

– One can never tell,' replied the doctor.

When my lips touched her face, my grandmother's hands quivered and a long shudder ran through her whole body – possibly an automatic reflex, or perhaps it is that certain forms of affection are hypersensitive enough to recognize through the veil of unconsciousness what they scarcely need the senses to enable them to love. Suddenly my grandmother started up, made a violent effort, like someone struggling to hold on to her life. Françoise was unable to offer any resistance to the sight of this and burst out sobbing. Remembering what the doctor had said, I tried to make her leave the room. At that moment my grandmother opened her eyes. I hurriedly thrust myself in front of Françoise to hide her tears while my parents were speaking to the dying woman. The hissing drone of oxygen had stopped; the doctor moved away from the bedside. My grandmother was dead.

A few hours later, Françoise was able for the last time, and without causing pain, to comb that beautiful hair which was only slightly greying and had thus far seemed much younger than my grandmother herself. But this was now reversed: the hair was the only feature to set the crown of age on a face grown young again, free of the wrinkles, the shrinkage, the puffiness, the tensions, the sagging flesh which pain had brought to it for so long. As in the distant days when her

parents had chosen a husband for her, her features were delicately traced by purity and submission, her cheeks glowed with a chaste expectation, a dream of happiness, an innocent gaiety even, which the years had gradually destroyed. As it ebbed from her, life had borne away its disillusions. A smile seemed to hover on my grandmother's lips. On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor of the Middle Ages, had laid her to rest with the face of a young girl.

CHAPTER 2

A visit from Albertine – The prospect of a wealthy marriage for some of Saint-Loup's friends – Guermantes wit and the Princess of Parma – A curious visit to M. de Charlus – I fail increasingly to understand his character – The Duchesse's red shoes

Although it was simply a Sunday in autumn, I had just been reborn, life stretched out uninterruptedly before me, for that morning, after a series of mild days, there had been a chilly fog which had not cleared until around midday. And a change in the weather is enough to create the world and ourselves afresh. In the past, when the wind swept down my chimney, I would listen to the blows it struck on the flue-trap with as much emotion as if, like the famous motif on the strings which opens the Fifth Symphony,[3] they had been the irresistible calls of a mysterious destiny. Every change in the natural scene offers us a similar transformation by adapting our desires to harmonize with the fresh shape of things. The mist, from the moment I woke up, had turned me, not into the centrifugal being of fine days, but into a man of reclusion, hankering after the fireside corner and the shared bed, an Adam sensitive to cold in quest of a sedentary Eve, in this changed world.

Between the soft grey light of a morning landscape and the taste of a cup of chocolate I instated all that was distinctive about the physical, intellectual and moral life I had taken with me to Doncières about a year earlier and which, blazoned with the oblong shape of a bare hillside – always present even when it was invisible – represented a series of pleasures that were utterly distinct from any others, incommunicable to friends in the sense that the impressions, richly interwoven with one another, which orchestrated them were more typical of them for me, in an unconscious way, than any facts about them I could have related to others. From this point of view the new world into which I had been plunged by the morning mist was a world already known to me (which only made it more real) and forgotten for some time (which restored all its freshness). And I was able to study several of the pictures of misty landscapes acquired by my memory, notably a series of 'Mornings in Doncières', including my first morning in the barracks there and another in a nearby country house where I had gone with Saint-Loup to spend the night: from the windows of both, when I had drawn back the curtains at dawn before getting back into bed, in the first a cavalryman, in the second (at the narrow margin of a pond and a wood, all the rest of which was engulfed in the uniform and liquid softness of the mist) a coachman polishing a harness strap, had appeared like those rare figures, scarcely visible to the eye – forced to adapt itself to the mysterious blur of the half-light – which emerge from a worn fresco.

It was from my bed that I was now contemplating these memories, for I had returned to it to wait until evening when, taking advantage of the absence of my parents who had gone to Combray for a few days, I proposed to attend a little play which was being put on at Mme de Villeparisis's house. Had they returned, I should not have dared to do this; my mother, in the niceties of her respect for my grandmother's memory, wished any token of regret paid to it to be spontaneous and genuine; she would not have forbidden me to go but she would have disapproved. From Combray, on the contrary, had I consulted her about this, she would not have replied with a doleful: 'Do what you wish, you're old enough now to know your own mind,' but, reproaching herself for having left me alone in Paris and gauging my grief from her own, she would have wished it could have been distracted by pleasures she would not have allowed herself and which she convinced herself that my grandmother, in her overriding concern for my health and nervous stability, would have been the first to recommend.

That morning the newly installed heating boiler had been lit. The disagreeable noise it made – a sort of spasmodic hiccup – was in no way connected to my memories of Doncières, but its prolonged encounter with them inside me that afternoon was to force it into such an affinity with them that, after I thought I had more or less forgotten it, whenever I heard the central heating, it would bring them back to me.

I was alone in the house with Françoise. The grey daylight, falling like fine rain, wove an endless succession of transparent webs through which the Sunday strollers appeared in a silvery haze. I had cast the *Figaro* to the foot of the bed; I had been having it delivered punctiliously ever since I had sent in an article which had not yet appeared; despite the absence of sun, it was clear from the amount of daylight that we were still only half-way through the afternoon. The tulle window-curtains, misted and friable as they would not have been on a fine day, had that same mixture of softness and brittleness as a dragonfly's wing and Venetian glass. I was all the more downcast to be spending this Sunday alone because that morning I had sent a note to Mlle de Stermaria. Robert de Saint-Loup, whose mother had at last managed – after various painful and abortive attempts – to get him to leave his mistress, and who had straightway been sent to Morocco to forget the woman he had in fact ceased to love for some time, had sent me a line, which I had received the day before, announcing his imminent arrival in France for a short spell of leave. Since he would only be passing through Paris (where his family were doubtless afraid of him taking up again with Rachel), to show that he had been thinking of me, his letter informed me that in Tangiers he had met Mlle or rather Mme de Stermaria, given that she had divorced her husband after three months of marriage. Remembering what I had said to him in Balbec, Robert had asked for an assignation with the young woman on my behalf. She would be delighted to dine with me, she had told him, on one of the days she was spending in Paris before returning to Brittany. He told me to lose no time writing to Mme de Stermaria, since she had almost certainly arrived. Saint-Loup's letter had come as no surprise, even though I had had no news from him since his letter accusing me of perfidy and treachery, written at the time of my grandmother's illness. I had immediately grasped what must have happened. Rachel, who liked to provoke his jealousy – she also had other causes for resentment against me – had persuaded her lover that I had made sly attempts to have relations with her in his absence. It was likely that he still believed this to be true, but he had ceased to be smitten with her, which meant that, true or not, it had become a matter of utter indifference to him, and our friendship alone was what continued to be important. On one occasion when I saw him afterwards, I tried to broach the question of his accusations, and he merely smiled with benign affection in what seemed to be an apology, then changed the subject. None of this means that, a little later, he did not sometimes see Rachel when he was in Paris. The creatures who have played an important part in one's life rarely drop out of it for good, just like that. They come back into it from time to time (so much so that people start believing in the renewal of former love) before leaving it for ever. Saint-Loup's break-up with Rachel had very soon become less painful to him, thanks to the soothing pleasure her constant demands for money provided. Jealousy, which protracts the experience of love, is not capable of containing many more elements than any other form of imagination. If, at the start of a journey, we go off with three or four images, which in any case will be lost on the way (the lilies and anemones on the Ponte Vecchio, the Persian church seen through the mist and so forth), our trunk is already pretty full. When we leave our mistress, we would prefer her, until we have begun to forget, not to become the property of the three or four potential lovers we picture keeping her, in other words, of whom we are jealous: all those we do not picture count for nothing. Now frequent demands for money from a former mistress give no more idea of her life in its entirety than high figures on a temperature chart would give of her illness. But the latter would at least indicate that she was ill and the former create the presumption, a vague enough one it is true, that the woman in question – forsaken or forsaker – cannot have found much in the way of a rich protector. And so each demand is greeted with the joy that arises from a lull in the jealous man's torment and is met with an immediate dispatch of money, for we would not like to think of her being in want of anything, except lovers (one of the three we picture), until such time as we have been able to regain some composure and to discover our successor's name without flinching. Sometimes Rachel got back so late that it was possible for her to ask her former lover's permission to sleep beside him until morning. This was a great solace to Robert, for a simple fact like her not in the least disturbing his sleep when he himself occupied the greater part of the bed would make him realize just how intimately they had lived together. He could see that she was more comfortable close to his body than she would have been elsewhere, that, lying there beside him, she felt, even in a hotel, as if she were in a bedroom known from way back, a familiar setting in which one sleeps more soundly. He felt that his shoulders, his legs, his whole body, even when insomnia or preoccupation with work made him inordinately restless, were for her so entirely usual that they could not disturb her and that her awareness of them added still further to her own sense of repose.

To go back a little. I had been all the more aroused by Saint-Loup's letter from Morocco in that I could read between the lines the things he had not dared to write more explicitly. 'You need have no qualms about asking her to dine in private,' he wrote. 'She is a charming young woman with a delightful nature. You will get on splendidly with her, and I feel sure you will spend an enjoyable evening in her company.' Since my parents were coming back at the end of the week, on Saturday or Sunday, and I should be obliged after that to dine at home every evening, I had written at once to Mme de Stermaria to propose any evening that would suit her up to Friday. A message was brought back to say that I should get a written reply from her at about eight o'clock that very evening. The time would have passed quickly enough had it been made easier by a visit from someone else during the course of the intervening afternoon. When the hours are enveloped in conversation we become oblivious to the clock, do not even notice the time, and it slips away until suddenly, way beyond the point at which it escaped our attention, the nimble runaway reappears. But if we are alone, the thing on which our mind is set, by placing before us its still distant and ever awaited occurrence with tick-tock regularity, divides, or rather multiplies the hours by all the minutes we would have left uncounted in the company of friends. And pointed as it was, by the never-ending return of my desire, towards the throbbing pleasure I would enjoy (not for some days though, alas!) in Mme de Stermaria's company, this afternoon, which I was going to have to spend alone, seemed to me very empty and very melancholy.

Every now and then I heard the sound of the lift coming up, but it was followed by another sound, not the one I was hoping for (its stopping on our floor) but a quite different one which it made in its journey up to the floors above and which, because it invariably meant the desertion of my landing when I was expecting a visit, stayed with me subsequently, even at a time when I no longer wanted any visitors, as a sound that was in itself painful, resounding with something like a sentence to solitary confinement. Weary, resigned, with several hours still of its immemorial task to do, the grey day stitched away at its pearly braidwork, and I was filled with the gloomy thought that I was to remain alone in close contact with it, and with no more degree of acquaintance between us than I would have had with a seamstress sitting by the window to work in a better light, and taking absolutely no notice of the person there with her in the room. Suddenly, without my having heard the bell, Françoise opened the door to show Albertine into the room; she came in smiling, silent, plump, containing in the plenitude of her body, in readiness for me to continue living them, come to find out where I was, the days spent in that Balbec to which I had never since returned. No doubt, whenever we re-encounter someone with whom our relations – however trivial they may be – have now changed, it is like two distinct periods in time coming together. It does not take the visit of a former mistress who is now a friend to effect this, but simply the arrival in Paris of someone we have known on a daily basis in a certain kind of life and the fact that this life had now ceased, if only a week ago. On each of Albertine's smiling, questioning, hesitant features I could spell out the questions: 'And what about Mme de Villeparisis? And the dancing-master? And the confectioner?' When she sat down, her back seemed to be saying: 'There are no cliffs here, I know, but you don't mind if I sit beside you, as I used to in Balbec, do you?' She was like an enchantress representing a mirror of time. In this, she was like all the people we now only rarely see but with whom we once lived on more intimate terms. Yet with Albertine, there was something more. True, even in our daily encounters in Balbec, I was always surprised when I caught sight of her; she changed so much from day to day. But now she was hardly recognizable. No longer bathed in a pink haze, her features now stood out like those of a statue. She had another face, or rather she had a real face at last; her body had developed. There was almost nothing left of the sheath in which she had been enclosed and which, in Balbec, had almost completely masked her future figure.

This year, Albertine was back in Paris earlier than usual. Normally she did not arrive until spring, so that, already disturbed for some weeks by the storms that were crushing the first flowers, I could not distinguish, in my pleasure, between Albertine's return and that of the fine weather. It was enough to hear that she was in Paris and that she had called on me, for me to see her again like a rose by the sea. I am not quite sure whether it was the desire for Balbec or for her that took hold of me then; perhaps my desire for her was itself a lazy, cowardly, incomplete way of possessing Balbec, as if to possess a thing materially, to take up residence in a town, were equivalent to possessing it spiritually. And even materially, when she was not being swayed in my imagination before a horizon of sea but sitting there motionless beside me, she seemed to me often to be a very poor sort of rose, and I would have preferred to shut my eyes to avoid seeing the various blemishes on its petals and to imagine instead that I was breathing sea air.

I can say all this here, although I was not aware at the time of what was to happen later. Certainly, it is more reasonable to devote one's life to women than to postage stamps, old snuff-boxes, or even to paintings and statues. Yet these examples of collectors' pieces should alert us to variety, to having not a single woman but many. The charming associations between a young girl and the sea-shore or the braided hair of a church statue, an old print or anything that makes one love her, become rather unstable the moment she steps into the room like a delightful picture. Establish your life with this woman and you will cease to see anything of what made you love her; yet it is true that the two dissociated elements can be reunited by jealousy. If, after a long period of living together, I was to end up seeing Albertine as no more than an ordinary woman, an intrigue between her and someone she had loved in Balbec would possibly have been enough to reincorporate within her the amalgamation of sea-shore and breaking waves. But such secondary associations no longer captivate the eye; it is to the heart that they speak in their deadly way. It is not possible, in so dangerous a guise, to regard the renewal of the miracle as a thing to be desired. But I am anticipating the course of events. And here I need only voice my regret that I did not have the sense simply to keep my collection of women as someone might keep a collection of antique opera-glasses, never so complete, behind the glass of their cabinet, that there is not always room for another pair, rarer still.

Breaking with the normal pattern of her holiday arrangements, this year she had come straight from Balbec and had not stayed on there nearly so long as usual. I had not seen her for a long time. And since I did not know, even by name, the people she mixed with in Paris, I knew nothing of her life during the periods when she did not come to see me. They were often quite long. Then, one fine day, in would burst Albertine, a pink apparition on one of those silent visits who gave me little or no idea of what she had been doing in the interval, which remained plunged in the darkness of a life my eyes felt little interest in penetrating.

On this visit, however, certain signs seemed to indicate that some new experience must have taken place in that life. But perhaps the only thing one was entitled to conclude from them was that girls of Albertine's age change very quickly. For instance, her intelligence was more noticeable, and when I reminded her of the day she had insisted so heatedly that her idea of making Sophocles write 'My dear Racine' was best, she was the first to laugh quite genuinely. 'Andrée got it right. I was the stupid one,' she admitted, 'Sophocles ought to have written: "Sir." ' I replied that Andrée's 'Sir' and 'Dear Sir' were no less comic than her own 'My dear Racine' or Gisèle's 'My dear friend', but that in the end the really stupid people were the teachers who set letters from Sophocles to Racine. Here, Albertine lost track. She was unable to see what was stupid about it; her intelligence was opening up but not fully developed. There were other, more attractive new changes in her; I sensed, in this same pretty girl who had just sat down by my bed, something that was different and, in the lines which, in the gaze and the facial features, express someone's familiar purposes, a change of approach, a partial conversion, as if there had been something to break down those resistances I had met with in Balbec one now distant evening when we had formed a couple symmetrical with but the converse of the one we now formed this afternoon, for then it had been she who was lying down and I by her bedside. Wanting and not daring to find out whether she would now let herself be kissed, each time she rose to leave I asked her to stay a little longer. This was rather difficult, for although she had nothing to do (if she had, she would have rushed off to do it), she was set in her ways and in fact not very obliging towards me, as if she no longer took much pleasure in my company. Yet each time, after consulting her watch, she sat down again at my request, so that in the end she had spent several hours with me without my having demanded anything of her; the things I said to her were related to those I had said during the preceding hours, were totally unconnected with what I was thinking about, what I desired, and remained doggedly parallel to all this. There is nothing like desire for obstructing any resemblance between what one says and what one has on one's mind. Time presses, and yet it seems as though we were trying to gain time by speaking about things that are utterly alien to the one thing that preoccupies us. We chatter away, whereas the words we should like to utter would have by now been accompanied by a gesture, if indeed we have not – to give ourselves the pleasure of immediate action and to slake the curiosity we feel about the ensuing reactions to it – without a word, without so much as a by-your-leave, already made this gesture. It is true that I was not in the least in love with Albertine: born from the mist outside, she could do no more than satisfy the fanciful desire awakened in me by the change in the weather, poised midway between

the desires that are satisfied by culinary arts and by monumental sculpture respectively, because it made me dream both of mingling my flesh with a substance that was different and warm, and of attaching to some point of my recumbent body a divergent body, as Eve's body is barely attached by the feet to the side of Adam, to whose body hers is almost perpendicular in the Romanesque bas-reliefs in the Balbec cathedral, representing in so noble and so placid a fashion, still almost like a classical frieze, the creation of woman; in them God is followed everywhere, as by two ministers, by two little angels recalling – like the winged, swirling creatures of the summer that winter has caught by surprise and spared – cupids from Herculaneum still surviving well into the thirteenth century, flagging now in their last flight, weary, but never relinquishing the grace we might expect of them, over the whole front of the porch.

In regard to the pleasure which would have released me from fantasies like these by fulfilling my desire and which I would have sought quite as readily from any other pretty woman, had I been asked upon what – in the course of this endless chatter I used to hide from Albertine the one thing that was on my mind – my optimistic assumption about the likelihood of her obliging me was based, I should probably have replied that this assumption was provoked (as the forgotten elements of Albertine's voice retraced for me the contour of her personality) by the emergence of certain words which had not previously formed part of her vocabulary, at least not in the sense she now gave them. When, for instance, she said that Elstir was stupid and I protested:

'You don't understand, she answered with a smile, I mean that he was stupid in this one case, but I'm perfectly well aware that he is a very distinguished man in reality.'

Likewise, to indicate how smart the Fontainebleau golf club was, she declared:

'It's quite a selection, in fact.'

In relation to a duel I had fought, she said of my seconds: 'What choice seconds,' and looking at my face confessed that she would like to see me 'sport a moustache'. She even went so far – and here my chances seemed to me to be considerable – as to use an expression that I would have sworn was unknown to her the year before and to say that a certain 'lapse of time' had gone by since she last saw Gisèle. This was not to say that Albertine had not possessed, when I was in Balbec, a fairly respectable batch of those expressions which immediately reveal a well-to-do family background and which, from year to year, a mother passes on to her daughter just as she makes her a present on important occasions, as the girl grows up, of her own jewellery. It was apparent that Albertine had ceased to be a little girl when one day, to express her thanks for a present given her by a lady she did not know, she had said: 'I really don't know how to thank you.' Mme Bontemps had been unable to stop herself exchanging glances with her husband, whose response had been:

'My word, and she's only about to turn fourteen.'

Her more pronounced nubility came to the fore when Albertine, speaking of another girl who had no idea how to behave, remarked: 'You can't even tell whether she's pretty, she cakes her face in so much make-up.' Finally, though still only a girl, she already adopted the manner of a grown woman of her background and class when she responded to someone who was pulling faces with the words: 'I can't bear to look at him, because it makes me want to do the same thing,' or, to someone who was doing funny imitations: 'What really amuses me is that when you imitate her, you start to look exactly like her.' All this is drawn from the social treasury. But what struck me was that Albertine's background was not likely to have provided her with the word 'distinguished' in the sense that my father used it of the odd colleague he had not yet met but whose great intelligence he had heard praised, to say: 'He's said to be a very distinguished person.' 'Selection' too, even when used of a golf club, seemed as out of place in the Simonet family as it would be preceded by the adjective 'natural' in a text published centuries before Darwin's researches. 'Lapse of time' seemed more promising still. Finally came evidence of upheavals whose nature was unknown to me but sufficient to justify all my hopes, as Albertine said, with the confidence of a person whose opinion is not to be disregarded:

'*To my mind*, it is the best thing that could possibly happen… I see it as the best way out, the stylish solution.'

This was so novel, so clearly an alluvial deposit hinting at such capricious explorations on territory hitherto unknown to her, that no sooner were the words 'to my mind' out of her mouth than I drew Albertine towards me, and at 'I see it as' sat her down on my bed. It is no doubt the case that women with a smattering of culture, marrying a well-read man, receive such expressions as part of their dowry. And shortly after the metamorphosis which follows the wedding night, when they start paying calls and becoming distant with their old friends, they have only to emphasize the two *l*s in the word when they denote someone as 'intelligent' to impress upon their astonished audience that they have become married women; but this is precisely the sign of a changed state, and it seemed to me that just such a thing had happened with Albertine's vocabulary, a vocabulary in which the most daring expressions I had previously heard were to say of any rather odd person: 'He's a bit of a character,' or, if you suggested a game of cards: 'I don't have money to throw away,' or else, if any of her friends reproached her with something she felt to be unjustified: 'That's a fine thing for *you* to say!', expressions dictated in such cases by a middle-class tradition almost as old as the *Magnificat* itself, which a girl who is slightly miffed and sure she is in the right uses 'quite naturally', as they say, in other words because she has learned them from her mother, just as she has learned to say her prayers or how to greet people politely. All these expressions she had learned from Mme Bontemps along with a hatred of Jews and a respect for the colour black because it is always suitable and never out of place, without any formal instruction on Mme Bontemps's part but in the way that baby goldfinches model their twitter on that of their parents and so turn into true goldfinches themselves. Despite all this, 'selection' struck me as foreign and 'I see it as' seemed inviting. Albertine was no longer the same and perhaps might not act, or react, in the same way.

Not only did I no longer feel any love for her but I no longer ran the risk, as I might have done in Balbec, of wrecking her affection for me, since it no longer existed. There could be no doubt that she had long become quite indifferent to me. I realized that for her I was no longer in any way a member of the 'little gang' into which I had once been so keen to seek admission and then so happy to have done so. And since she had not even retained the openness and good-nature she had shown in Balbec, I felt no major scruples; but I think it was one last philological discovery that settled matters. As I continued to add further links to the chain of irrelevant remarks beneath which I hid my inner desire, with Albertine now secure on the corner of my bed, I talked about one of the girls from the little gang who was less prominent than the others but whom I none the less thought quite pretty: 'Yes,' said Albertine, 'she's like a little *mousmé*.'[4] Obviously, when I first knew Albertine, the word *mousmé* was unknown to her. It was likely that in the normal course of events she would never have learned it, and as far as I was concerned that would have been fine, for there is no word that rankles more. The very sound of it sets your teeth on edge like too large a piece of ice in the mouth. But coming from Albertine, pretty as she was, not even *mousmé* could displease me. On the contrary, it seemed like a revelation, if not of an external initiation, then of some internal development. Unfortunately it was now time to say good-bye to her if I wanted her to get home in time for dinner and myself to be up in time for mine. Françoise was preparing it; she did not like it to be delayed and must have already been thinking that one of the articles of her code had been contravened in that Albertine, in the absence of my parents, should be paying me so long a visit, and one that was going to make everything late. But in the face of *mousmé* all these arguments fell away and I hastened to say:

'You know, I'm not in the least ticklish. You could tickle me for a whole hour and I wouldn't feel a thing.

– Is that so?

– I promise you.'

She no doubt understood that this was the clumsy expression of a desire, for, like someone who offers to give you an introduction you have not dared to solicit but to whom your words have indicated that it could be useful to you, she said with womanly meekness:

'Would you like me to try?

– If you'd like to, but it would be easier if you lay down properly on the bed.

– Like this?

– No, further in.

– Are you sure I'm not too heavy?'

As she said this, the door opened and Françoise walked in carrying a lamp. Albertine just had time to regain her chair. Perhaps Françoise had chosen this moment to startle us, after listening at the door or even peeping through the keyhole. But I had no need to suppose anything of the sort, she might well have disdained the use of her eyes to ascertain what her instinct must have adequately enough detected, for, throughout her service with me and my parents, fear, prudence, alertness and cunning had finally taught her that instinctive and almost divinatory knowledge of us that the sailor has of the sea, the quarry of the hunter, and if not the doctor then often the patient of the disease. All the knowledge she was in the habit of acquiring would have astounded anyone for as good a reason as the advanced state of certain areas of knowledge among the ancients, given the almost negligible means of information at their disposal (hers were no less so: a handful of chance remarks forming barely a twentieth part of our conversation at dinner, gleaned in passing by the butler and inaccurately transmitted to the staff quarters). Even her mistakes resulted, like theirs, like the fables in which Plato believed, from a false conception of the world and from preconceived ideas rather than from an inadequacy of material resources. Similarly, even today, the most important discoveries about insect behaviour have been made by a scientist with no laboratory, no apparatus at his disposal. But if the drawbacks of her position as a servant had not prevented her from acquiring the learning indispensable to the art which was its ultimate goal – the art of confounding us by communicating the results of her discoveries – the constraints on her time had been even more effective; here hindrance had not merely been content not to paralyse her enthusiasm, it had powerfully fired it. And of course Françoise neglected no auxiliary stimulant, like diction and attitude for instance. While she never believed anything we said to her when we wanted her to believe it, and since she accepted beyond a shadow of doubt the absurdest things anyone of her own status told her which might at the same time offend our views, in the same way that her manner of listening to our assertions pointed to her incredulity, so the tone she used to report (indirection enabling her to fling the most offensive insults at us with impunity) a cook's account of threatening her employers and forcing any number of concessions out of them by treating them like dirt in public, indicated that she treated the story as gospel truth. Françoise even went so far as to add: 'If *I'd* been the mistress, I'd have been very put out, I can tell you.' However much, despite our initial dislike of the lady on the fourth floor, we might shrug our shoulders at this unedifying tale as if it were an unlikely fable, its teller knew just how to invest her tone with all the trenchant punch of the most unshakeable and infuriating confidence in what she was saying.

But above all, just as writers, when their hands are tied by the tyranny of a monarch or of poetic convention, by the strict rules of prosody or state religion, often achieve a power of concentration they would not have done under a system of political freedom or literary anarchy, so Françoise, by not being free to respond to us in an explicit manner, spoke like Tiresias and would have written like Tacitus.[5] She knew how to contain everything she could not express directly in a sentence we could not denounce without casting aspersions on ourselves, in less than a sentence in fact, in a silence, in the way she placed an object.

For instance, whenever I inadvertently left on my table, among other letters, one which should have been kept from her eyes, because, say, it spoke about her in a malevolent way which suggested that the malevolence was shared by the recipient as well as the writer, the same evening, if I returned home with a feeling of uneasiness and went straight to my room, there on top of my letters, arranged in the right order in a neat pile, the compromising document would be the first thing to catch my eye as it could not have failed to catch the eye of Françoise, placed by her right on the top, almost separately, with a obviousness that was a form of speech with an eloquence all of its own which, as soon as I came into the room, startled me like a sudden shout. She excelled in setting up these stage effects, intended to provide the spectator, in her absence, with sufficient information to realize that she knew everything by the time she made her entry. Her art of making inanimate objects speak in this way had all the inspired diligence of Irving and Frédérick Lemaître.[6] In the present instance, holding over Albertine and myself the lighted lamp which missed none of the still visible dents in the quilt left by the girl's body, Françoise looked like *Justice Shedding Light on Crime*.[7] Albertine's face lost nothing in the lamp-light. It revealed on her cheeks the same sun-glazed surface I had found so attractive in Balbec. In the light of the lamp, this face of hers, which sometimes, out of doors, looked pallid and wan, now showed surfaces so glowingly and evenly coloured, so firm and so smooth, that they might have been compared to the sustained flesh tints of certain flowers. But Françoise's unexpected entry had startled me, and I cried out:

'What, the lamp already? Goodness, it's very bright!'

My intention might well have been in the second of these remarks to cover my confusion, and in the first to excuse the fact that I was late. Françoise replied with barbed ambiguity:

'Am I to snuff it "orf" then, sir?

– ' "Orf?" "Off" surely? She's the one who's "off" if you ask me…' Albertine whispered in my ear, leaving me charmed by the familiar quickness of mind with which, taking me at once for master and accomplice, she insinuated this psychological affirmation in the interrogative mood of a grammatical question.[8]

When Françoise had left the room and Albertine was seated once again on my bed, I said to her:

'What really worries me is that if we go on like this I may have to kiss you.

– What a lucky misfortune that would be.'

I did not respond at once to this invitation. Another person might even have found it superfluous, for Albertine's way of pronouncing her words was so carnal and so soft that her speech alone was like a kiss. A word from her lips was a favour, and her conversation smothered you in kisses. And yet her invitation was very gratifying. It would have been so, coming from any pretty girl of the same age; but that Albertine should now be so easily accessible to me gave me more than pleasure, it presented me with a series of images instilled with beauty. I remembered Albertine first of all against the sea-shore, almost painted upon a background of sea, no more real for me than those theatrical tableaux where it is not clear whether one is looking at the actress billed to appear, at an understudy who is standing in for her, or simply at a projection. Then the real woman had detached herself from the beam of light, come towards me, but only for me to perceive that in the real world she had none of the amorous accessibility she had seemed to possess in the magic tableau. I had learned that it was not possible to touch her, to kiss her, that all one could do was to talk to her, that for me she was no more a woman than a cluster of jade grapes, that inedible table decoration so fashionable at one time, are really grapes at all. And now she was appearing to me on a third level, real as in my second experience of her, but available as she had been in the first; available in a way that was all the more delicious for having imagined for so long that she was not. My surplus of knowledge about life (life less uniform, less simple than I had first imagined) inclined me provisionally towards agnosticism. What can one claim with any certainty, when the thing one thought probable at first has then turned out to be false and, in a third instance, to be true? (And alas, I was far from finished with my discoveries about Albertine.) In any case, even if there had not been the romantic attraction of this discovery of a greater wealth of planes revealed one after another by life (an attraction the opposite of the one experienced by Saint-Loup during the dinners in Rivebelle when he recognized, beneath the masks which life had superimposed on a calm face, features to which his lips had once been pressed), the knowledge that to kiss Albertine's cheeks was something possible gave me perhaps greater pleasure than the fact of kissing them. What a difference there is between possessing a woman with one's body alone, because she is no more than a piece of flesh, and possessing the girl one used to see on the beach with her friends on certain days, without even knowing why it was on those days and not on others, so that one trembled to think one might not see her again. Life had been so kind as to reveal the whole extent of this young girl's life, had lent first one optical instrument, then another, to see her with and then added to carnal desire the accompaniment, multiplying and diversifying it, of other desires, more spiritual and less easily satisfied, which lie inert and unaffected when it is merely a question of the conquest of a piece of flesh, but which, when they want to gain possession of a whole field of memories from which they have felt nostalgically exiled, surge up wildly around carnal desire, extend it, are unable to follow it to the fulfilment, the assimilation, impossible in the form in which it is sought, of an immaterial reality, but wait for this desire half-way and, the moment the memory of it returns, are there to escort it once

more; to kiss, not the cheeks of the first woman who comes along – anonymous, devoid of mystery and glamour, however cool and fresh those cheeks may be – but those of which I had so long been dreaming, would be to know the taste, the savour, of a colour I had so often contemplated. One sees a woman, a mere image in life's scene, like Albertine silhouetted against the sea, and then it becomes possible to detach that image, bring it close, and gradually to observe its volume, its colours, as though it had been placed behind the lenses of a stereoscope. For this reason, women who tend to be resistant and cannot be possessed at once, of whom indeed it is not immediately clear that they can ever be possessed at all, are the only interesting ones. For to know them, to approach them, to conquer them, is to make the human image vary in shape, in size, in relief, a lesson in relativity in the appreciation of a woman's body, a joy to see anew when it has regained its slender outline against the back-drop of reality. Women who are first encountered in a brothel are of no interest because they remain static.

There was also the fact that Albertine held in an unbroken ring around her all the impressions of a series of sea-scapes that were particularly dear to me. I felt that kissing this girl's cheeks I should be kissing the whole Balbec sea-shore.

'If you're really going to let me kiss you, I'd rather reserve it for the right moment. Only you mustn't forget that you've said I may. I want a voucher: "Valid for one kiss."

– Do I have to sign it?

– But if I took it now, should I have another one for later?

– You do make me laugh with your vouchers. I shall issue a new one every now and then.

– One more thing. You know, in Balbec, before I got to know you, you used to have a hard, canny look. You couldn't tell me what you were thinking about when you looked like that?

– No, I don't remember at all.

– Well, this may remind you. One day your friend Gisèle jumped with her feet together over the chair an old gentleman was sitting in. Can you remember what was in your mind at that moment?

– Gisèle was the one we saw least of. She was part of the gang in a way, but not really. I was probably thinking how common and bad-mannered she was.

– Oh, is that all?'

I should really have liked, before kissing her, to have been able to re-create in her the mystery she had held for me on the beach before I knew her, to discover in her the place where she had lived before that; in default of such mystery, I could at least insinuate all the memories of the time we had spent in Balbec, the sound of the waves breaking beneath my window, the shouts of the children. But as I let my gaze wander over the lovely pink globe of her cheeks, whose gently curving surfaces merged into the first low folds of her beautiful black hair which ran in animated ridges, rose into steep foothills and moulded the hollows and slopes of its valleys, I could not help saying to myself: 'Now at last, after failing in Balbec, I am going to discover the taste of the unknown rose in Albertine's cheeks. And since the circles through which we are able to make things and people pass in the course of our existence are not that numerous, perhaps I shall be able to consider my own in some sense fulfilled when I have taken the blossoming face to which I had given pride of place out of its distant setting, brought it on to this new plane and at last have knowledge of it through the lips.' I told myself this because I believed there was such a thing as knowledge through the lips; I told myself that I was going to know the taste of this bodily rose, because it had not occurred to me that man, a creature clearly less rudimentary than the sea-urchin or even the whale, nevertheless lacks a certain number of essential organs, and notably possesses none that will serve for kissing. For this absent organ he substitutes his lips, and thus perhaps manages to achieve a more satisfactory result than if he were reduced to caressing the beloved with a horny tusk. But the lips, designed to bring to the palate the taste that lures them, have to be content, without understanding their mistake or admitting their disappointment, with drifting over the surface and coming up against the barrier of the cheek's desirable impenetrability. And at the moment of actual contact with the flesh, the lips, even supposing they might become more expert and talented, would doubtless be unable to enjoy any more fully the flavour which nature prevents them grasping spontaneously, for in the desolate zone in which they are unable to find their rightful nourishment they are alone, long since abandoned by the eyes and then the nose in turn. For a start, as my mouth began to move towards the cheeks my eyes had led it to want to kiss, my eyes changed position and saw different cheeks; the neck, observed at closer range and as if through a magnifying glass, became coarse-grained and showed a sturdiness which altered the character of the face.

Apart from the latest developments in photography – which lay down at the foot of a cathedral all the houses that so often, from close to, seemed to us to be as high as towers, which deploy like a regiment, in file, in organized dispersion, in serried masses, the same monuments, bring together the two columns on the Piazzetta that were so far apart a while back, distance the nearby Salute and, on a pale and lifeless background, manage to contain an immense horizon beneath the arch of a bridge, in a single window-frame, between the leaves of a tree in the foreground that is more vigorous in tone, frame a single church successively in the arcades of all the others – I know of nothing that is able, to the same degree as a kiss, to conjure up from what we believed to be something with one definite aspect, the hundred other things it may equally well be, since each is related to a no less valid perspective. In short, just as in Balbec Albertine had often seemed different to me, now, as if, by magically accelerating the speed of the changes of perspective and colouring a person offers us in the course of our various encounters, I had tried to contain them all within the space of a few seconds in order to re-create experimentally the phenomenon which diversifies a person's individuality and to draw out separately, as from a slip-case, all the possibilities it contains – now what I saw, in the brief trajectory of my lips towards her cheek, was ten Albertines; because this one girl was like a many-headed goddess, the head I had seen last, when I tried to draw near, gave way to another. As long as I had not touched it, I could at least see this head, and a faint perfume came to me from it. But alas – for when we kiss our nostrils and eyes are as ill-placed as our lips are ill-made – suddenly, my eyes ceased to see, and my nose in turn, crushed against her cheek, no longer smelled anything, so, without my efforts bringing me any clearer notion of the taste of the rose I desired, I discovered, from these abominable signs, that I was finally in the process of kissing Albertine's cheek.

Was it because we were playing out a reversal of our scene together in Balbec (figured by the rotation of a solid body), because I was the one lying in bed and she the one who was not, in a good position to evade a rough pass and to control how far things went, that she now allowed me to take so easily what she had formerly refused with such a stern look? (Doubtless from that earlier look the voluptuous expression her face assumed now as my lips approached it differed only by an infinitesimal deviation of its lines, but one which can accommodate all the difference there is between putting an end to a wounded man's life or nursing his wounds, between a sublime portrait and a grotesque one.) Not knowing whether I had to give credit and owed gratitude for this change of attitude to some benefactor who, in these last months, in Paris or in Balbec, had been unwittingly working on my behalf, I mainly attributed it to the present positioning of our bodies. But Albertine provided me with another explanation; precisely this: 'Oh, well, when we were in Balbec, I didn't really know you. For all I could tell, you might have had wicked designs on me.' This explanation left me perplexed. No doubt Albertine was being sincere. It is by no means easy for a woman to recognize in the movements of her limbs, in the sensations experienced by her body, during a close conversation with a male friend, the unknown sin she trembled to think a stranger might be planning for her downfall!

At all events, whatever changes might have occurred recently in Albertine's life (and might possibly have explained why she should have so easily granted to my momentary and purely physical desire what she had refused with horror to my love when we were in Balbec), an even more startling one became apparent that very evening, as soon as her caresses had satisfied me in a way she could not have failed to notice and which I had even feared might provoke her to the slight gesture of revulsion and offended modesty Gilberte had made in similar circumstances behind the laurel bushes in the Champs-Élysées.

The exact opposite happened. Already, when I had made her lie on my bed and begun to fondle her, Albertine had adopted an expression, unfamiliar to me on her part, of docile compliance, of almost childish simplicity. By effacing all her customary preoccupations and pretensions, the moment preceding sexual

pleasure, similar in this respect to the moment that follows death, had restored her rejuvenated features to something like the innocence of earliest childhood. And perhaps everyone whose particular talent is brought into play becomes modest, intent and charming; especially if such talent gives us great pleasure, makes the giver happy and anxious that we should enjoy it to the full. But this new expression on Albertine's face contained more than disinterestedness, professional diligence and generosity, there was a kind of onrush of anticipated involvement; and she had gone back further than to her own childhood; she had returned to the early days of her race. Whereas I had looked for nothing more than physical relief, and finally secured it, Albertine seemed to feel that it would be somehow coarse of her to think that this physical pleasure could be devoid of moral sense or conclusive in itself. And when I reminded her of her dinner, she, who had been in so great a hurry earlier on, now, doubtless because she felt that kissing implied love and that love was the most important commitment there is, remarked:

'Oh, it really doesn't matter. I've got plenty of time.'

She seemed embarrassed by the idea of getting up and going after what had just happened, embarrassed out of a sense of acceptable behaviour, just as Françoise, without feeling thirsty, had felt bound to accept with polite cheerfulness the glass of wine that Jupien offered her and would never have dared just to drink up and go, however urgent the call of duty. Albertine – and this was perhaps, with another which will be clear in due course, one of the reasons which had made me unconsciously desire her – was one of the incarnations of the charming little French country-girl typified in stone in Saint-André-des-Champs. I recognized in her, as I did in Françoise, who was soon none the less to become her deadly enemy, a courtesy towards host and stranger, a sense of propriety, a respectful bedside manner.

In the months preceding her daughter's marriage, Françoise, who after the death of my aunt felt obliged to speak only in tones of lamentation, would have felt shocked if the young woman had not taken her fiancé's arm when the two of them walked out together. Albertine, lying motionless beside me, said:

'What nice hair you have, what nice eyes. You're sweet.'

I pointed out to her that it was getting late, and when I added: 'You don't believe me?', she replied, in words that were perhaps true, but only since a couple of minutes ago and for the next few hours:

'I always believe you.'

She spoke about myself, my family, my social background. 'Oh, I know your parents know some very nice people,' she said. 'You're a friend of Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage.' For a minute these names meant absolutely nothing to me. Then suddenly I remembered that I did once use to play with Robert Forestier in the Champs-Élysées and had never seen him since. As for Suzanne Delage, she was the great-niece of Mme Blandais, and I had once been meant to go to a dancing-lesson, and even to play a small part in theatricals at her parents' house. But the fear of having a giggling bout or a nose-bleed had prevented me, so that in fact I had never set eyes on her. At the very most I had some notion that I had once heard that the Swanns' feather-hatted governess had been with the Delages at one time, but perhaps it was her sister or some friend. I protested to Albertine that Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage occupied a very small place in my life. 'That may well be, but your mothers are close friends and that helps to place you. I often run into Suzanne Delage in the avenue de Messine. She has a lot of style.' Our mothers were acquainted only in the imagination of Mme Bontemps, who had learned that I had once been a playmate of Robert Forestier, to whom, it appeared, I used to recite poetry, and had concluded from this that we were bound by family ties. I have been told that the mere mention of my mother's name was enough for her to come out with: 'Oh yes, she moves with people like the Delages, the Forestiers… ', awarding my parents high marks they had done nothing to deserve.

Quite apart from all this, Albertine entertained some extremely silly social notions. She classed the Simonnets with a double *n* as inferior not only to those with a single *n* but to everyone else in the world. That someone else should be called by the same name as yourself and not belong to your family, is ample reason for despising him. Of course there are exceptions. It may happen that two Simonnets (introduced to each other on the sort of social occasion when people experience the urge to talk, about no matter what, and feel particularly well-disposed towards each other, for instance in a funeral procession on its way to the cemetery), finding they have the same name, will seek, with mutual good-will and to no effect, to discover some evidence of kinship. But that is only an exception. There are plenty of dishonourable men in the world, but we neither know nor care. Yet if a similarity of names causes letters addressed to them to be dropped through our letter-box, or vice versa, we start to feel mistrust, often justified, as to their moral worth. We are afraid of being confused with them and forestall possible confusion with a scowl of disgust when anyone mentions them to us. When we read our own name, as borne by them, in the newspaper, they seem to have usurped it. The misdemeanours of other members of the social body are a matter of indifference to us. It is our namesakes we make to bear the brunt for them. The hatred we channel towards the other Simonnets is all the more intense for not being personal but hereditarily transmitted. Two generations pass and we remember only the scowl of disgust our grandparents kept for the other Simonnets; we know nothing of the reason behind it; it would come as no surprise to learn that the whole thing had begun with a murder. Until the day comes – and it is by no means unheard of – when a male Simonnet and a female Simonnet who are in no way related bring matters to a close by getting married.

Not only did Albertine speak to me about Robert Forestier and Suzanne Delage, but quite spontaneously, with the urge to confide induced by the proximity of two bodies, initially at least, during a first phase before it has engendered a special duplicity and secrecy in one party towards the other, she told me a story about her family and one of Andrée's uncles, which in Balbec she had refused to divulge at all; but now she felt she ought not to appear to have any secrets from me. At present, had her dearest friend said anything against me, she would have felt duty-bound to repeat it to me. I insisted she go home, and she eventually did so, but she was so discomfited on my account by my lack of courtesy that she laughed almost as though she were apologizing for me, like a hostess who has admitted an improperly dressed guest but has her qualms about it.

'Why are you laughing? I asked.

– I'm not laughing, I'm smiling at you, she replied affectionately. When shall I see you again?' she added in a way that suggested she did not regard what we had just done (generally the crowning moment) as even the prelude to a great affection, a pre-existent affection we owed it to ourselves to discover, to confess, and which alone could account for what we had just indulged in.

'Since you give your permission, I'll send word for you to come when I can.'

I dared not let her know that I was putting the chance of seeing Mme de Stermaria before everything else.

'It will have to be on the spur of the moment, I'm afraid. I never know beforehand. Would it be possible to send round for you on the evenings I'm free?

– It will be quite possible shortly, because I shall have my own entrance at my aunt's. But for the moment it's not. Anyway, I'll just come round on the off-chance tomorrow or the day after in the afternoon. You needn't see me if you're busy.'

When she got to the door, surprised that I had not gone to open it for her, she offered me her cheek, now that she felt there was no need for any gross physical desire to make us kiss. Since our brief pass a while back was the sort of thing that is sometimes induced by deep intimacy and heartfelt choice, Albertine had felt it her duty to improvise and add temporarily to the kisses we had exchanged on my bed the emotion which such kisses would symbolize for a knight and his lady in the songs of a Gothic jongleur.

After the departure of this young Picarde, who might have been a figurine carved on the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs by its sculptor, Françoise came and handed me a letter which filled me with joy, for it was from Mme de Stermaria, accepting to dine with me on Wednesday. From Mme de Stermaria, that is, for me, not so much from the real Mme de Stermaria as from the one who had been on my mind all day before Albertine's arrival. It is the wicked deception of

love that it begins by making us dwell not upon a woman in the outside world but upon a doll inside our head, the only woman who is always available in fact, the only one we shall ever possess, whom the arbitrary nature of memory, almost as absolute as that of the imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as the real Balbec had been from the Balbec I imagined; a dummy creation which little by little, to our own detriment, we shall force the real woman to resemble.

Albertine had made me so late that the play had just finished when I arrived at Mme de Villeparisis's; and since I had little desire to get caught up in the stream of guests who were pouring out of the room discussing what was on everyone's mind – the separation, said to be already effected, between the Duc de Guermantes and the Duchesse – I had occupied a vacant wing chair in the outer room to wait for an opportunity of greeting my hostess, when from the main salon, where she had doubtless been sitting in the front row, I saw emerging, majestic, fully swathed and drawn to her full height in a long gown of yellow satin with huge black poppies stitched on to it in relief, no less a person than the Duchesse herself. To catch sight of her no longer disturbed me in the least. There had been a day when, placing her hands on my forehead (as she did when she was afraid of hurting my feelings) and saying: 'These outings you make in the hope of meeting Mme de Guermantes have to stop. You're getting quite a reputation for yourself. Besides, you can see how ill your grandmother is. You have more serious things to think about than to hang round after a woman who couldn't care less about you anyway,' instantaneously, like a hypnotist returning you from the distant country you thought you were in and opening your eyes, or like a doctor recalling you to a sense of duty and reality and curing you of the imaginary disease in which you had been wallowing, my mother had woken me up from a dream that had gone on for too long. The rest of the day had been devoted to a final farewell to this disease I was renouncing; I had sung the words of Schubert's '*Lebewohl*' for hours on end and with tears in my eyes:

'Farewell, strange voices call thee,
Sweet sister of the angels, far from me.'

And then it was over. I had given up my morning walks, and with so little effort that my prognosis, which we shall see was to turn out to be false, led me to believe that it would be easy for me, in the course of my life, to give up seeing a woman. And then, after Françoise had told me that Jupien, who was eager to find larger premises, was looking out for a shop in the neighbourhood, anxious to try and find one for him (and quite happy too – while ambling along the street I had already heard from my bed in luminous clamour like a beach – to see behind the raised iron shutters of their shops the young dairy-women in their white sleeves), I had reason to start taking these morning walks again. And quite uninhibitedly this time; for I was aware that I was no longer going out to catch a glimpse of Mme de Guermantes; I was rather like a woman who takes infinite precautions as long as she has a lover and, from the day she breaks with him, leaves his letters lying about the place, at the risk of disclosing to her husband a guilty secret which ceased to alarm her the minute she ceased to harbour it.

What it hurt me to see was that there were unhappy people in almost every house I passed. In one the wife was always in tears because her husband was unfaithful. In the next it was the reverse. In another a hardworking mother, beaten up by her drunkard son, tried to conceal her misery from the eyes of the neighbours. Half of humanity spent its life in tears. And when I was better acquainted with it, so exasperating did I find it that I wondered whether the people in the right might not be the adulterous husband and wife, who were unfaithful only because their rightful happiness had been denied them and who behaved in a charming and loyal way to everyone but their own partner. After a while I no longer even had the excuse of helping Jupien to take me on my morning peregrinations. For news circulated that the cabinet-maker in our courtyard, whose workrooms were separated from Jupien's shop only by the thinnest of partitions, was about to be given notice by the agent because his hammering made too much noise. Jupien could have hoped for nothing better; the workrooms had a basement for storing timber, which adjoined our cellars. He would keep his coal there and knock down the partition to make one big shop. One further related detail: since Jupien, who found that M. de Guermantes was asking an exorbitant rent and let people be shown over the premises in the hope that the Duc, discouraged by his failure to find a tenant, would come round to reducing the rental for him, Françoise, after noticing that the concierge left the door of the shop with the 'To Let' sign on the latch well past the usual hours for showing people around, scented a trap laid by him to lure the fiancée of the Guermantes footman (the couple would find a lovers' hideaway there) and to catch the pair out.

However that might be, and although I no longer had any need to search for premises for Jupien, I continued to go out for walks before lunch. In the course of them, I would often encounter M. de Norpois. And he was often quite capable, as he conversed with a colleague, of inspecting me from top to toe and then looking back towards his interlocutor without so much as a smile in my direction or any more sign of acknowledgement than if he had never set eyes on me before. For as far as these important diplomats are concerned, to look at you in a certain way is intended to convey to you not that they have seen you but that they have not, and that they have some serious matter to discuss with their colleague. A tall woman I often ran into near the house was less discreet. For although I did not know her, she would turn round after me, linger – to no avail – in shop windows, smile as though she were going to kiss me, make suggestive gestures of availability. All this turned to ice the moment she encountered anyone she knew. For a long time now on these morning errands, depending on what I had to do, even if it was merely buying a newspaper, I had taken the most direct route, with no regret if it lay outside the usual ambit of the Duchesse's walks, and if on the contrary our paths coincided, I felt no sense of misgiving or dissimulation, because this no longer seemed to me to be the forbidden path on which I wrenched from an unwelcoming woman the favour of setting eyes on her against her will. But it had never entered my mind that my recovery, by restoring me to a normal attitude towards Mme de Guermantes, would effect a similar change in her and open up the possibility of a friendliness, even a friendship, which I no longer cared about. Up to this point, the joint efforts of the whole world to bring me into contact with her would have come to nothing in the face of the evil fate projected by unrequited love. Fairies more powerful than humans have decreed that in such cases there is nothing to be done until the day our hearts sincerely utter the magic words: 'I am no longer in love.' I had resented the fact that Saint-Loup had not taken me to see his aunt. But he was no more capable than anyone else of breaking a spell. So long as I was in love with Mme de Guermantes, I was pained by the marks of affection, the compliments I received from others, not just because they did not come from her but because they never reached her ears. And had she known of them, it would not have made an ounce of difference. Yet if attachment is involved, even the slightest details, an absence, declining a dinner invitation, an unintentional, unconscious stiffening of behaviour make more difference than all the cosmetics and fine clothes in the world. More people would climb the social ladder if these things were taught as part of the art of social success.

As she crossed the room in which I was sitting, her mind intent on memories of friends I did not know and whom she would perhaps be seeing again in a while at another party, Mme de Guermantes caught sight of me in my wing chair, truly indifferent and seeking only to be polite, whereas before, while I was in love, I had tried so hard, and without success, to appear indifferent; she left the stream of guests, came over to address me, with the same smile she had worn that evening at the Opéra, which the painful feeling of being the object of a love she did not return was no longer there to efface:

'No, don't move. You don't mind if I sit down with you for a moment?' she said as she gracefully gathered up the folds of her immense skirt which would otherwise have occupied the whole chair.

She was taller than I and made even bigger by the bulk of her dress, and I found myself almost touching her lovely bare arm, on which an almost invisible ubiquitous down seemed to create a perpetual golden rising haze, and the blond coils of her hair as I caught their scent. With scarcely any room to sit down, she could not easily turn to face me and, obliged to look straight in front of her rather than at me, she assumed the dreamy, soft expression you see in portraits.

'Have you any news of Robert?' she asked.

At that moment Mme de Villeparisis passed by us.

'Well, what a fine time to arrive when for once we do see you here!'

And noticing that I was in conversation with her niece, and imagining perhaps that we were more intimate than she had realized:

‘But don’t let me interrupt your conversation with Oriane, she added (for the good offices of a procuress are among the duties of a hostess). You wouldn’t care to dine with her here on Wednesday?’

This was the day on which I was to dine with Mme de Stermaria, and I declined.

‘Saturday then?’

Since my mother was returning on Saturday or Sunday, it would have been rather tactless not to stay at home and dine with her in the evening. So I declined again.

‘Ah, you’re not an easy person to invite.’

‘Why do you never come and see me?’ said Mme de Guermantes when Mme de Villeparisis had moved off to congratulate the performers and present the leading lady with a bouquet of roses whose value lay entirely in the hand that offered it, given that it had cost only twenty francs. (This, by the way, was as high as she was prepared to go when an artist had performed only once. Those who gave their services at all her afternoon and evening receptions received roses painted by the Marquise.) ‘It’s so tedious never to meet except in other people’s houses. Since you won’t dine with me at my aunt’s, why don’t you come and dine with me at home?’

Various people who had lingered on to the last possible moment on some pretext or other but were now on their way out, seeing that the Duchesse had sat down to talk to a young man on a seat so narrow that there was only room for two people, thought they had been misinformed, and that it was not the Duchesse but the Duc who was seeking a separation, on my account, at which point they lost no time in making the fact known. I was in a better position than anyone to know how false it was. But it none the less surprised me that in one of those awkward periods when a separation is in process but not yet finalized, the Duchesse, instead of withdrawing from social life, should actually choose to invite someone who was a comparative stranger. It crossed my mind that it was the Duc alone who had resisted her having me in the house and that, now he was leaving her, she saw no further reason why she should not surround herself with the people she liked.

Two minutes earlier I should had been dumbfounded had anyone told me that Mme de Guermantes was going to invite me to visit her, let alone dine with her. It was one thing to realize that the Guermantes salon was incapable of providing the special qualities I had extracted from the name, but the fact that I had been forbidden entry, by obliging me to see it as we see the salons described in a novel or pictured in a dream, made me imagine it, even when I felt sure it was just like any other, as something quite different; between myself and it stood the dividing-line at which reality ends. To dine with the Guermantes was to undertake a journey long hoped for, to make a desire pass from my head and appear before my eyes, and to become acquainted with a dream. It might well have occurred to me to think that the dinner in question was one of those dinners to which the hosts invite someone with the words: ‘Do come. There’ll be absolutely no one but ourselves, I promise you,’ thus deceitfully attributing to the pariah their own fear of his mixing with their friends and even seeking to transform into an enviable privilege, exclusively reserved for their closest friends, the quarantine they have imposed on the ostracized man, who becomes both unfit for society and favoured without any choice in the matter. I felt on the contrary that Mme de Guermantes was anxious for me to sample the choicest she had to offer when she went on to ask me, presenting me with something like the prospect of the purplish delight of a visit to Fabrice’s aunt and the miracle of an introduction to Count Mosca:[9]

‘Do you happen to be free on Friday, for a small dinner-party? It would be so nice. There’ll be the Princess of Parma, such a charming person. Not that I’d invite you to meet people who were anything other than agreeable.’

Cast off by the intermediate social world in its perpetual rise to betterment, the family still plays an important part in more static milieux like the lower middle classes or the princely aristocracy, incapable of rising higher because above it, from its own special point of view, there is nothing more. The friendship shown me by her ‘aunt Villeparisis’ and by Robert had perhaps made me, for Mme de Guermantes and her friends, who fed on their own company and frequented the same little circle, an object of their curious scrutiny, quite unbeknown to myself.

Her relations with these two relatives had a homely familiarity about them, daily and down-to-earth, very different from the sort of thing we imagine, relations in which, if we happen to be included, our actions, far from being ejected from the picture like a speck of dust from the eye or a drop of water from the windpipe, may remain engraved, and will still be recounted and commented upon years after we ourselves have forgotten them, in the palace in which we are amazed to find them preserved like a letter in our own hand among a priceless collection of autographs.

Merely fashionable people may have to defend their doors from excessive invasion. But the Guermantes door had no need of that. Hardly ever did an outsider have occasion to present himself at it. On the rare occasions the Duchesse had one pointed out to her she would never have dreamed of bothering about the social credit he might bring, since this was something she conferred and could not receive. She thought only of his real qualities. Mme de Villeparisis and Saint-Loup had assured her of mine. And no doubt she would not have believed them had she not also observed that they could never manage to secure my presence when they wanted it, that I therefore attached no importance to society, which seemed to the Duchesse a sign that an outsider was to be ranked with people she thought of as ‘agreeable’.

It was quite a picture, in the course of conversation about women for whom she did not care, to see the way her face changed at the mention, in connection with one of these, of, say, her sister-in-law. ‘Oh, *she’s* charming,’ she would say with discriminating assurance. The only reason she advanced for this statement was that the lady in question had refused to be introduced to the Marquise de Chaussegros and the Princesse de Silistrie. What she did not add was that the lady had refused to be introduced to herself, the Duchesse de Guermantes. This was nevertheless what had happened, and ever since the Duchesse’s mind had been busy trying to fathom the motives of this lady who was so choosy about her acquaintances. She was dying to be invited to her house. Society people are so used to being sought after that anyone who shuns them becomes a rare bird and monopolizes their attention.

Was Mme de Guermantes’s true motive for inviting me (now that I was no longer in love with her) that I did not seek out the society of her relatives, however much they sought after my own? I have no idea. At all events, once she had decided to invite me, she was anxious to do me the full honours of her establishment and to keep away any of her friends whose company might have discouraged me from further visits, the friends she knew to be boring. I had been at a loss to account for the Duchesse’s change of direction, when I had seen her deviate from her path among the stars, come to sit down beside me and invite me to dinner; it was swayed by causes unknown to me. For want of any special sense of guidance in these matters, we imagine that the people we know only slightly – as I knew the Duchesse – think of us only on the rare occasions they see us. Yet this mental oblivion in which we deem ourselves to be held is purely arbitrary. So much so in fact, that, while we inhabit the silence of solitude, which is like the silence of a clear night sky, imagining the various queens of society pursuing their course in the heavens at an infinite distance from us, we are unable to resist a sudden start of alarm or delight if there falls upon us from on high, like an aerolith engraved with our name, which we thought was unknown on Venus or Cassiopeia, an invitation to dinner or a snippet of wicked gossip.

Perhaps there had been times when, following the example of the Persian princes who, according to the Book of Esther, had the books of records read out to them in which were inscribed the names of certain subjects who had shown zeal in their service, Mme de Guermantes had consulted her list of worthy people and stopped at my name with the words: ‘He’s someone we ought to ask to dine with us at some point.’ But other thoughts had distracted her

(De soins tumultueux un prince environné
Vers de nouveaux objets est sans cesse entraîné.)

until the moment she had caught sight of me sitting there alone like Mordecai at the palace gate; and once the sight of me had refreshed her memory, she wished, like Ahasuerus, to lavish her gifts upon me.[10]

But I have to say that an utterly different sort of surprise was in store for me after the one I had experienced when Mme de Guermantes issued her invitation. Since I had felt it would be more modest of me, and more grateful also, not to conceal this initial surprise but rather to exaggerate the joy it gave me, Mme de Guermantes, who was getting ready to move on to her last party of the evening, had said to me, almost as a justification and for fear that I might not be altogether certain who she was, given my apparent astonishment at her invitation: 'You know I'm the aunt of Robert de Saint-Loup who is so fond of you, and we've already met each other here, of course.' Replying to this in the affirmative, I added that I also knew M. de Charlus, 'who had been very kind to me in Balbec and in Paris'. Mme de Guermantes reacted with great surprise and her eyes seemed to revert, for verification of my words, to some much earlier page of her internal register. 'I see, so you know Palamède, do you?' This name sounded very sweet coming from the lips of Mme de Guermantes, because of the instinctive simplicity with which she spoke of a man who was so brilliant a figure in the eyes of the world, but for her was no more than her brother-in-law and the cousin with whom she had grown up. Into the indistinct greyness which the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes represented for me, the name Palamède introduced something like the brightness of the long summer days she had spent playing with him as a girl in the garden at Guermantes. Moreover, in this long-distant period of their lives, Oriane de Guermantes and her cousin Palamède had been very different from what they had since become; particularly M. de Charlus, who had indulged to the full in the artistic tastes he had so carefully curbed in later life that I was amazed to learn that it was he who had painted the huge fan decorated with black and yellow irises the Duchesse was now unfolding. She could also have shown me a little sonatina he had once composed for her. I was completely unaware of all these talents, which the Baron never mentioned. Let it be said in passing that M. de Charlus did not at all relish being called Palamède by his family. One could certainly understand why its short form 'Mémé' might displease him. Such silly abbreviations are a sign of the aristocracy's inability to appreciate its own poetry (and the same thing is true of Jewry: Lady Rufus Israels's nephew Moses was commonly referred to as 'Momo') as well as its concern not be seen attaching importance to anything aristocratic. Now in this matter of poetry M. de Charlus had more imagination and a more blatant sense of pride. But this was not the reason he so disliked 'Mémé', since he also disliked the handsome name Palamède. The truth was that, considering himself, knowing himself, to be from a princely family, he would have liked his brother and sister-in-law to address him as 'Charlus', just as Queen Marie-Amélie or the Duc d'Orléans might speak of their sons and grandsons, nephews and brothers as 'Joinville, Nemours, Chartres, Paris'.

'What a dark horse that Mémé is!' she exclaimed. 'We spent hours talking to him about you, and he told us that he would be delighted to make your acquaintance, as if he'd never met you in his life. You must admit he's odd, and – though it's not very nice of me to say such a thing about a brother-in-law I'm very fond of and admire immensely – a little bit mad at times.'

I was particularly struck with the word 'mad' used of M. de Charlus and it occurred to me that this semi-madness might perhaps account for certain things, like his apparent delight at the idea of asking Bloch to beat his own mother. I came to the conclusion, not only from the things he said but from the way he said them, that M. de Charlus must be a trifle mad. The first experience of hearing a barrister or an actor speaking is striking because the tone is so different from conversation. But because everyone else seems to find this quite natural, you say nothing about it, to them or to yourself, and concentrate instead on the degree of skill involved. The very most one might think, of an actor at the Théâtre-Français, is: 'Why, instead of letting his raised arm fall naturally, did he take ten minutes to bring it down in a staccato movement broken by pauses?' or of a Labori:[11] 'Why, the minute he opened his mouth, did he use those tragic, unexpected sounds to say the simplest things?' But since everyone takes these things for granted, they come as no shock. In the same way, on reflection, M. de Charlus spoke of himself very grandiloquently, in a tone which had nothing to do with ordinary speech. It felt as if he constantly needed to be told: 'But why are you shouting so loud? Why are you so brazen about yourself?' Yet everyone seemed to be in tacit agreement that things were perfectly all right as they were. So you got caught up in a circle of people who danced to the tune of his inflated manner of speaking. But certainly there were moments when a stranger might have thought he was listening to a raving lunatic. 'But,' the Duchesse continued with the hint of effrontery that stemmed from her characteristic directness, 'are you absolutely sure you're not thinking of someone else? Can you really be talking about my brother-in-law Palamède? I know he loves mystery, but this seems to be taking things a bit far, I must say!…'

I replied that I was absolutely sure and that M. de Charlus must have misheard my name.

'Oh well, I must be leaving you, said Mme de Guermantes with what sounded like regret. I have to look in on the Princesse de Ligne for a moment. You're not going on there? No? You don't care for society? You're quite right, it's too tedious for words. Would that I didn't have to go! But she's my cousin, it would be rude. I'm sorry for my own sake, quite selfishly, because I could have taken you and even brought you back afterwards. Well, good-bye then. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to Friday.'

That M. de Charlus should have blushed to be seen in my company by M. d'Argencourt was one thing. But that to his own sister-in-law, and a woman who had such a high opinion of him, he should deny all acquaintance with me, acquaintance that would have been quite natural since I knew both his aunt and his nephew, was beyond my comprehension.

I shall close this episode by remarking that from one point of view there was something of true grandeur about Mme de Guermantes in that she had the capacity to efface utterly from her memory the things that other people would have only partially forgotten. Even if she had never experienced me pestering her, following her, tracking her down on her morning walks, if she had never had to acknowledge my daily greeting with riled impatience, or to send Saint-Loup packing when he begged her to invite me, she could not have behaved towards me with more gracious and natural charm. Not only did she waste no time on post-mortems, hints, meaningful smiles and innuendoes, not only did her present affability, by not dwelling on the past or showing the least reticence, have something as proudly upright about it as her own majestic stature, but the grudges she might have borne anyone in the past were so completely reduced to ashes, and the ashes were themselves cast so far from her memory or at least from her behaviour, that to look at her face, whenever she needed to treat with the most admirable simplicity what for so many people would have been a pretext for rekindling smouldering resentments and recriminations, was to experience something like a process of purification.

But if I was surprised by the change which had occurred in her attitude towards me, how much more did it surprise me to discover the even greater change in my feeling towards her! Had there not been a time when I could remuster life and strength only if, in my endless invention of new strategies, I could find someone to secure me an invitation from her and, after this initial boon, to procure many others for my increasingly demanding emotions? It was the impossibility of any advance in this direction that had made me leave for Doncières to visit Saint-Loup. And now, strangely enough, it was through the effects of a letter from him that I was agitated, but this time on account not of Mme de Guermantes, but of Mme de Stermaria.

Let me add, as a final word in my account of this evening, that something happened in the course of it, which was denied a few days later but which really startled me at the time, caused a short rift between myself and Bloch, and which in itself constitutes one of those curious anomalies which will be explained at the end of this volume (*Sodome I*).[12] At this evening party at Mme de Villeparisis's, Bloch kept on boasting to me about the friendly manner shown him by M. de Charlus, the which Charlus, when he passed him in the street, looked him straight in the face as though he recognized him, was anxious to make his acquaintance, knew very well who he was. This made me smile at first, because Bloch had expressed himself so vehemently in Balbec on the subject of the very same M. de Charlus. And I merely concluded that Bloch, like his father in regard to Bergotte, knew the Baron 'without actually knowing him'. What he had taken for a friendly glance was in fact an absent-minded one. But in the end Bloch gave so many precise details and seemed so sure that on two or three occasions M. de Charlus had wished to address him that, remembering I had spoken about my friend to the Baron, who had asked me various questions about him as we were

walking away together from Mme de Villeparisis's in fact, I assumed that Bloch was not lying, that M. de Charlus had heard his name, realized that he was my friend, and so on. And so, some time later, at the theatre, I asked M. de Charlus if I might introduce Bloch to him, and when he assented, I went off in search of my friend. But the minute M. de Charlus set eyes on him, a look of astonishment appeared on his face, where it was instantly repressed to become one of blazing fury. Not only did he not offer Bloch his hand, but whenever Bloch addressed him he replied in the most insolent manner, in a peevish and hurtful tone of voice. So that Bloch, to whom, from what he had said, the Baron had been all smiles until then, was under the impression that I had spoken ill of him rather than recommended him during the brief conversation which, knowing M. de Charlus's liking for etiquette, I had had with him about my friend before I introduced the two of them. Bloch left us, worn down by his efforts, like someone who has been trying to mount a horse which is constantly on the point of taking the bit between its teeth, or to swim against waves that continually fling him back on the shingle, and did not speak to me again for six months.

There was nothing delightful about the days preceding my dinner engagement with Mme de Stermaria; I found them unbearable. For, as a general rule, the shorter the time that separates us from the project we have in mind the longer it seems, because we measure it on a more reduced scale or simply because of the fact that we even bother to measure it. The papacy, we are told, measures time by the century and may in fact not think to measure it at all, since its goal is eternity. My own being no more than three days in front of me, I counted the seconds, I indulged in the fantasies that are the mere beginnings of caresses, caresses filled with the frustration of not being able to have the woman herself there to respond (precisely those caresses, and no others). And in the end, if it is true that in general the difficulty of attaining the object of desire increases that desire (the difficulty, not the impossibility, for that suppresses it entirely), then with a desire that is purely physical, the certainty that it will be realized at a definite point on the horizon is hardly less of a stimulant than uncertainty; almost as much as the anxiety of doubt, the absence of doubt makes waiting for inevitable pleasure intolerable, because it turns the period of waiting into an endless series of imagined fulfilments and, by the frequency of our anticipated representations of them, divides time into as many tiny sections as any that could be devised by the anguish of doubt itself.

What I needed was to possess Mme de Stermaria: for several days now my desires had been unflaggingly active rehearsing this pleasure in my imagination, to the exclusion of any other; any other sort of gratification (pleasure with another woman) would not have been sufficiently prepared for, since pleasure is merely the realization of a prior urge which is not always the same and changes in accordance with the multiple variations of one's fantasies, the random functions of memory, one's sexual needs at the time, the particular desires available, since the most recently fulfilled of them lie dormant until the disappointment they brought has been more or less forgotten; I had already left the high road of general desires and turned off along the path of a more specific one; had I wanted to change my mind in favour of another assignation, I should have had to retrace my steps too far to get back to the high road and take another path. To possess Mme de Stermaria on the island in the Bois de Boulogne where I had asked her to dine with me, this was the pleasure that constantly occupied my imagination. It would have been destroyed, of course, if I had dined there without her; but perhaps equally diminished had I dined, even with her, somewhere else. And indeed, the attitudes involved in our way of envisaging any sexual pleasure come before the woman herself, the type of woman who is suitable for the purpose. They dictate the pleasure, and the setting too; and for this reason they give alternate prominence in our capricious minds to this or that woman, this or that place, this or that bedroom, which in other weeks we should have spurned with disdain. Born from our attitude at the time, certain women are incomplete without the double bed in which we find appeasement at their side, while others, to be caressed with a more secret intention, need leaves blown by the wind, the sound of water in the dark, things as light and evasive as they are.

There had been a time, long before I received Saint-Loup's letter and before any Mme de Stermaria had appeared in my life, when the island in the Bois had seemed to be the perfect setting for pleasure, probably because I found myself going there to bewail the fact that I had no pleasure to conceal in its shelter. The edges of the lake from which you get to the island and along which, in the last weeks of summer, Parisian ladies who have not yet left the city go to stroll, are where you wander about, not knowing how to find her or whether indeed she has not already left Paris, in the hope of seeing the girl you fell in love with at the last ball of the season and will not have the opportunity of seeing again at any evening party before next spring. Sensing it to be the day before, if not the day after, the beloved's departure, you follow the beautiful paths beside the shimmering water and see a first red leaf already blooming like a last rose; you scan that horizon where, through some artifice the opposite of that used in the panoramas beneath whose rotundas wax figures in the foreground create on the painted canvas behind the illusory impression of depth and volume, your eyes travel uninterruptedly from the cultivated park to the natural heights of Meudon and the Mont Valérien without knowing where to draw the boundary, and make the real countryside intrude upon the creation of the gardener, whose artificial charm they project well beyond its own limits; like those rare birds reared to roam free in a botanical garden and which, every day, wherever they happen to alight on their winged journeys, lend an exotic note to the surroundings, even as far as the outlying woods. Between the last of the summer parties and winter exile, you roam anxiously through this romantic domain of chance encounters and lovers' melancholy, and it would come as no surprise to discover that it was situated outside charted territory, any more than if, looking down from the terrace at Versailles, an observatory around which the clouds gather against the blue sky as they do in a Van der Meulen painting,[13] after leaving nature behind by standing up there above it, you were to be told that at the point where the natural scene begins again at the end of the great canal, the villages hidden in the distance, on a horizon as dazzling as the sea, are called Fleurus and Nijmegen.

Then, once the last carriage has gone by and you have the painful feeling that she will not come now, you go to dine on the island; above the quivering poplars, reminding you endlessly of the mysteries of evening rather than responding to them, a pink cloud adds a last patch of living colour to the now tranquil sky. A few drops of rain fall noiselessly on the ancient water which, in its divine infancy, still changes constantly with the conditions of the moment and continually forgets the reflections of clouds and flowers. And after the geraniums, by intensifying their brilliant colour, have put up a vain struggle against the gathering twilight, a mist comes to envelop the island as it falls into slumber; you walk in the moist darkness along the water's edge, where the only thing likely to startle you is the silent passage of a swan, like the briefly wide-open eyes and smile of a child in bed at night whom you thought was asleep. And because you feel alone and the world can seem far away, you long all the more to have a lover walking beside you.

But to this island, where even in summer there was often a mist, how much happier I would have been to bring Mme de Stermaria now that the cold season, the end of autumn had come! If the weather since Sunday had not in itself made the places in which my imagination was living greyish and maritime – as other seasons made them balmy, luminous, Italian – the hope of possessing Mme de Stermaria in a few days' time would have been enough to raise, twenty times an hour, the curtain of mist in my monotonously pining imagination. In any case the fog, which had extended even to Paris since the previous day, not only made me think incessantly about the native province of the young woman I had invited, but since it was likely that it would invade the Bois by evening, especially the edges of the lake, far more thickly than the centre of the city, I felt that it would turn the Ile des Cygnes into something of the Breton island whose marine and misty atmosphere had always clung like a garment to the pale silhouette of Mme de Stermaria in the mental picture I had of her. Of course when we are young, at the age I was at the time of my walks along the Méséglise way, our desires and convictions confer on a woman's clothing a unique character, an irreducible essence. We chase after the reality of a thing. But by the very fact of constantly letting it elude us we end up noticing that, after all the vain attempts which have led to nothing, there is something solid there after all, which is what we have been pursuing. We begin to distinguish, to identify what it is we love, we try to procure it for ourselves, if only by artificial means. Then, in the absence of any convincing reality, costume comes to replace that reality by creating a deliberate illusion. I was perfectly aware that within half an hour's distance from home I should not be in Brittany. But by walking arm in arm with Mme de Stermaria in the dusk of the island, by the water's edge, I should be behaving in the same way as other men who, unable to actually penetrate a convent, do at least, before possessing a woman, dress her up as a nun.

I was even able to entertain the hope of listening to something like the lapping of the waves with the young woman, for, the day before our dinner engagement, the weather turned stormy. I was starting to shave before going to the island to reserve a private dining-room (although at this time of year the island was empty

and the restaurant deserted) and fix on the menu for our dinner next day when Françoise announced the arrival of Albertine. I had her shown in at once, unconcerned that she would see the unsightly dark stubble on my chin, whereas in Balbec I had never felt smart enough for her and there she had cost me as much agitation and worry as Mme de Stermaria did now. I was anxious that the latter should retain the best possible impression from the evening we were to spend together. And so I asked Albertine to come with me to the island straight away to help me select the menu. The woman to whom one devotes oneself entirely is so rapidly replaced by another that it comes as a surprise to discover one is devoting oneself all over again, all the time, without any hope it will come to anything. In response to my proposal, Albertine's smiling pink face beneath the flat toque she was wearing and which came down very low above her eyes, seemed to hesitate. She must have had other plans in mind; but if so, she found no difficulty in abandoning them for me, to my great satisfaction, for I attached a great deal of importance to the presence of a young housewife who would be able to order dinner far better than I could.

It is certain that she had represented something quite different for me in Balbec. But even when we consider it insufficient at the time, our intimacy with the woman we love creates between her and us, despite its painful shortcomings, social ties which outlast our love and even the memory of that love. Then, in the woman who is now no more to us than a means, a path towards others, we are just as astonished and amused to discover in our memory the original special appeal of her name for the other being we once were, as if, after giving a cabman an address on the boulevard des Capucines or in the rue du Bac, thinking only of the person we are going to see there, we were to remind ourselves that these names were once those of the Capuchin nuns whose convent stood there and of the ferry across the Seine.

All the same, my Balbec desires had brought Albertine's body to such a degree of maturity, accumulated such fresh sweet savours in it that, during our excursion to the Bois, while the wind like a careful gardener shook the trees, brought down the fruit, swept up the dead leaves, I told myself that had there been any risk of Saint-Loup's being mistaken or of my having misunderstood his letter, so that my dinner with Mme de Stermaria might lead to nothing, I should have made an assignation for very late the same evening with Albertine, in order to forget during an hour of purely sensual indulgence, by holding in my arms a body whose now abundant charms my curiosity had once calculated and weighed up in detail, the emotions and possible disappointments of this incipient love for Mme de Stermaria. And of course, had I imagined that Mme de Stermaria would grant me none of her favours at this first meeting, my picture of an evening spent in her company would have been a rather disappointing one. I knew only too well from experience how strangely the two successive stages of our incipient love for a woman we have desired without knowing her, loving her for the particular world she inhabits rather than for her still unfamiliar self – how strangely these two stages are reflected in the domain of reality, that is to say no longer in ourselves but in our meetings with her. Without ever having spoken with her, we have hesitated, tempted as we were by the poetic fantasy she represented for us. Shall it be this woman or some other? And at once our dreams focus upon her, become an integral part of her. The first meeting with her, shortly to follow, ought to reflect this onset of love. Far from it. As if material reality also needed its first stage, loving her already, we talk to her in the most inconsequential fashion: 'I invited you to dine on this island because I thought you would like the setting. It's not because there's anything particular I want to say to you. But I'm afraid it's rather damp, and you may be rather cold. – But not at all. – You're saying that out of politeness. Rather than annoying you by dwelling on the subject, I shall allow you, Madame, to carry on braving the cold for another quarter of an hour, but then I shall oblige you to leave with me. I don't want to be responsible for your catching a chill.' And without really having talked to her at all, we take her home, remembering nothing of her except perhaps a certain look in her eyes, but thinking only of seeing her again. Then at the second meeting (when even that look in her eyes, our sole memory of her, has vanished, but, for all that, we are still thinking only thinking about seeing her again) the first stage is left behind. Nothing has happened in the interval. And yet, instead of talking about the suitability of the surroundings, we say, without causing surprise to the new person, whom we find unattractive but to whom we should like to have our name mentioned at every moment of the day: 'It's going to be hard for us to deal with all the obstacles that stand in the way of our feelings. Do you think we shall be able to do that? Shall we be able to show our friends they were wrong and live happily together in the future?' But these contrasting conversations, the first inconsequential, the second alluding to love, would not take place; Saint-Loup's letter was sufficient assurance of that. Mme de Stermaria would give herself on the very first evening, so I should have no need to summon Albertine to the house as a last resort at the end of the evening. It would be unnecessary; Robert never exaggerated, and his letter was clear!

Albertine spoke very little, sensing that I had things on my mind. We went a little way on foot into the greenish, almost submarine grotto of a cluster of tall trees on the dome of which we heard the wind lashing and the rain splashing. I trod down dead leaves, which sank into the soil like sea-shells, and poked with my stick at chestnuts, prickly as sea-urchins.

The remaining leaves on the trees, convulsed in the wind, followed it only as far as their stems would permit, but sometimes these broke and the leaves fell to the ground, where they then rushed to catch up with the wind again. I had the joyous thought that, if this weather lasted, the island would feel that much more remote the following day and in any case completely deserted. We returned to our carriage, and since the gusting wind had died down, Albertine asked me to go on as far as Saint-Cloud. Like the dead leaves on the ground, the clouds in the sky were following the wind. And a flock of migrant evenings, their various layers – pink, blue, green – made visible by a sort of conic section cut into the sky, were stationed there in readiness for departure to warmer climes. To get a closer view of a marble goddess in the posture of springing from her pedestal and, alone in a great wood that seemed to be consecrated to her, filling it with the mythological terror, half animal, half sacred, of her frenzied leaps, Albertine climbed up on to a mound while I waited for her on the road. Seen from below in this way, she herself, no longer coarse and fleshy as she had been a few days earlier on my bed when the texture of her neck was seen close to under the magnifying glass of my eyes, but finely chiselled, seemed like a small statue on which the happy days in Balbec had left their patina. When I found myself alone again at home, reminding myself that I had spent the afternoon on an excursion with Albertine, that I was dining in two days' time with Mme de Guermantes, and that I needed to answer a letter from Gilberte, three woman I had loved, it occurred to me that our social life, like an artist's studio, is filled with abandoned sketches depicting our momentary attempts to capture our need for a great love, but what did not occur to me was that sometimes, if the sketch is not too old, we may return to it and transform it into a completely different work, possibly more important than the one we had originally planned.

The next day the weather was cold and fine: winter was in the air (and in fact autumn was so far advanced that it was a miracle we had been able to find a few domes of green gold in the already ravaged Bois). As I awoke I saw, as I had from the window of the Doncières barracks, a carpet of dull white mist hanging gaily in the sunlight, thick and soft as spun sugar. Then the sun disappeared and the mist became denser in the afternoon. Darkness fell early, and I dressed for the evening, but it was still too soon to leave the house; I decided to send a carriage for Mme de Stermaria. I was reluctant to accompany the carriage myself, not wishing to force my company upon her during the journey, but I sent a note with the driver to ask her whether I might come and collect her. In the meantime I lay down on my bed, closed my eyes for a second, then opened them again. Above the curtains there was now only a thin strip of daylight growing steadily dimmer. This idle time of the day was familiar, the long hallway to pleasure whose dark, delicious emptiness I had become acquainted with in Balbec when, alone in my room as I was now, while everyone else was at dinner, I felt no sadness as I saw the daylight fade above the curtains, knowing that in a while, after a night of polar brevity, it would be resuscitated in the more dazzling brightness of the blazing lights at Rivebelle. I sprang from my bed, put on my black tie, gave my hair a brush, the final gestures of last-minute presentability, performed in Balbec not for myself but for the women I should see in Rivebelle, as I smiled at them in anticipation in the corner mirror of my room, and for this reason gestures which had remained in my mind as signs of a forthcoming entertainment involving lights and music. They conjured it up like magic signs, even brought it into being already, and thanks to them I had as clear an idea of its reality, as complete an enjoyment of its heady, frivolous charm, as I used to have in July at Combray when I heard the packer's hammer-blows and enjoyed the warmth and sunlight in the cool darkness of my room.

And so it was no longer just Mme de Stermaria I should have wished to see. Forced now to spend my evening with her, I should have preferred, since this was my last evening before my parents returned, to have it free and to be able to seek out some of the women I had seen in Rivebelle. I washed my hands one last time

and, moving round the apartment propelled by my sense of pleasure, I went to dry them in the dim light of the dining-room. I thought it was open on to the lighted hall, but what I had taken to be the bright space of the doorway (the door was in fact closed) turned out to be the reflection of my white towel in a mirror placed against the wall waiting to be put up before Mama's return. I thought back to all the other illusions such as this which I had discovered in the apartment, not exclusively optical ones, for when we first arrived I thought that our neighbour had a dog on account of the prolonged, almost human yapping which came from a kitchen pipe whenever the tap was turned on. And the door to the landing never closed by itself, very slowly, against the draughts on the staircase without giving a performance of the voluptuous, doleful broken phrases played above the Pilgrims' Chorus towards the end of the overture to *Tannhäuser*. As it happened, just after I had put my towel back in its place, I had the opportunity of hearing a fresh performance of this dazzling piece of symphonic composition, for the bell rang and I rushed to open the entrance door to the driver who was bringing me the answer to my note. I expected the message to be: 'The lady is downstairs', or 'The lady is awaiting you'. Instead he had a letter in his hand. I wavered for a moment before reading to see what Mme de Stermaria had written, which as long as she held the pen in her hand might have been different, but was now, once she had sent it off, a force of destiny pursuing its course alone, and which she could do nothing further to change. I asked the driver to wait downstairs for a moment, despite the fact that he grumbled about the fog. As soon as he was gone I opened the envelope. The printed card inside read *Vicomtesse Alix de Stermaria*, and on it my guest had written: 'My deepest apologies. Something has come up which means I am unable to dine with you this evening on the Ile du Bois. I was so looking forward to it. I will write to you properly from Stermaria. I'm so very sorry. Kindest regards.' I stood there motionless, stunned by the shock. At my feet lay the card and envelope, discarded like the wad in a firearm after the shot has been fired. I picked them up and scrutinized her message. 'She says she is unable to dine with me on the Ile du Bois. Perhaps that means she might be able to dine with me somewhere else. It would be too indiscreet of me to go and collect her, but at least that is one possible interpretation of her message.' And the Ile du Bois, where my thoughts had been installed in advance with Mme de Stermaria for the last four days, was where they obstinately remained. My desire automatically returned to the path it had been bent on following for so many hours now, and in spite of this message, which was too recent to override the force of desire, I went on instinctively preparing to leave the house, like a student who tries to answer just one question more even after the examiners have failed him. I eventually decided to tell Françoise to go down and pay the driver. I went down the passage, and failing to find her, passed through the dining-room; suddenly my footsteps ceased to resound on the wooden floor as they had been doing up to this point and were muffled in a silence which, even before I had realized its cause, made me feel stifled and confined. It was the carpets which, in preparation for my parents' return, were in the process of being relaid, carpets which look so good on bright mornings when the sun awaits you amid their disorder like a friend come to take you out to lunch in the country and shines down on them in a forest light, but which now on the contrary represented the first stage of preparation for the prison of winter which, as one who was shortly to be obliged to take his meals at home, I should no longer be free to leave when I chose.

'Take care you don't trip over, Monsieur. They're not tacked down properly yet, Françoise called out. I ought to have lit the rooms. It's the end of "September" already. The fine days are over.'

Winter on its way; at the corner of the window, as in a piece of Gallé glass, an encrusted vein of snow; and even in the Champs-Élysées, instead of the girls one expects to find there, nothing but solitary sparrows.

What added to my despair at not seeing Mme de Stermaria was that her answer led me to believe that while I, hour after hour since Sunday, had been living for this dinner alone, she had probably never given it a second thought. I learned later on that she had married, an absurd love match with a young man she must have already been seeing at this time and who had probably made her forget my invitation. For had she remembered it she would presumably not have waited for the carriage, which I had not sent through any previous arrangement, before sending me word that she was otherwise engaged. My fantasies of a young feudal maiden on a misty island had paved the way to a love that did not yet exist. Now my disappointment, my anger, my desperate desire to recapture the woman who had just refused me, enabled me, by bringing my sensibility into the picture, actually to focus upon the possible love which up to this point my imagination alone had conjured up, though rather more lamely.

How many of them there are in our memories, how many more have we forgotten – those faces of girls and young women, all of them different, which we have endowed with charm and the frenzied desire to see them again, simply because they eluded us at the last minute! In the case of Mme de Stermaria much more was involved, and all I needed now, in order to love her, was to see her again and renew those impressions, so vivid but far too short-lived, which my memory would otherwise be powerless to sustain in her absence. Circumstances were not in my favour; I did not see her again. It was not she that I loved, but it could well have been. And possibly one of the most painful things about the great love affair I was shortly to have was remembering the present evening and telling myself that, had circumstances been very slightly different, my love might have directed itself elsewhere, to Mme de Stermaria in fact; and that, directed to the woman who was to inspire it so soon afterwards, it was therefore not – as I was so anxious, so needed to believe – absolutely inevitable and predestined.

Françoise had left me on my own in the dining-room, after telling me how unwise of me it was to stay there before she had lit the fire. She was on her way to prepare something for dinner, for from this very evening, even before my parents returned, my seclusion was beginning. My attention turned to a huge bundle of carpets, still rolled up, propped against a corner of the sideboard, and, burying my head in it, swallowing the dust together with my own tears, as the Jews once covered their heads with ashes in times of mourning, I started to sob. I was shivering, not only because the room was cold, but because a clear drop in temperature (against the danger of being discovered and, it has to be said, the even slightly agreeable feeling we make no attempt to resist) is brought about by certain kinds of tears that fall from our eyes, drop by drop, like a fine, penetrating, icy rain, and seem as if they will never cease. Suddenly I heard a voice:

'May I come in? Françoise told me you were likely to be in the dining-room. I came by to see whether you would like to come and have dinner somewhere, if you're up to it. There's a fog outside you could cut with a knife.'

It was Robert de Saint-Loup, who had arrived in town that morning, when I thought he was in Morocco or on his way back by sea.

I have already said (and it was precisely Robert de Saint-Loup who had, quite unbeknown to himself, helped me to clarify my thoughts on the matter) what I think about friendship: namely that it adds up to so little that I find it hard to understand how men with some claim to genius, like Nietzsche for instance, can have been naïve enough to credit it with a certain intellectual value and as a result to deny themselves friendships in which no intellectual esteem was involved. Yes, it has never failed to surprise me that a man whose degree of self-honesty even led him to cut himself off from Wagner's music out of scruples of conscience could have imagined that truth can be attained by the mode of expression, intrinsically vague and inadequate, represented by actions in general and friendships in particular, or that there can be any sort of sense in an act like putting one's work aside to go and see a friend in order to share one's grief at the false report that the Louvre has gone up in flames. I had reached the point, in Balbec, of thinking that the pleasure of playing with a group of girls has a less pernicious effect on the life of the mind, to which at least it remains foreign, than friendship, which is totally bent on making us sacrifice the only part of ourselves that is real and incommunicable (except through art) to a superficial self which, unlike the other, finds no joy on its own; what it finds instead is a vague, sentimental satisfaction at being cherished by external support, hospitalized in the individuality of another person where, in gratitude for the protection afforded by this, it radiates approval of its well-being and marvels at qualities it would castigate as failings and seek to correct in itself. Moreover, the denigrators of friendship can, without any illusions and with some remorse, be the finest friends in the world, in the same way as an artist who is nurturing a masterpiece and feels it his duty to devote his life to his work, can nevertheless, in order not to appear or to run the risk of being selfish, give his life over to a futile cause and give it all the more courageously in that the reasons for which he would have preferred to do the opposite were disinterested ones. But whatever my view of friendship, to mention only the pleasure it procured me, so mediocre in quality that it seemed to fall half-way between fatigue and boredom, there is no potion so deadly that it cannot in certain circumstances become precious and restorative by providing us with just the boost we needed and the warmth we are unable to muster of our own accord.

The desire to ask Saint-Loup to take me to see some of the Rivebelle women, as I had wanted to do an hour ago, was of course far from my mind; the aftermath of my disappointment about Mme de Stermaria was there to stay, but Saint-Loup's presence, at a moment when any reason for happiness had left my heart, was like the arrival of kindness, gaiety, life, external to me no doubt, but offered to me, asking only to be made mine. He did not himself grasp the significance of my cry of gratitude and my tears of affection. And what can be more paradoxically affectionate than one of those friends – a diplomat, an explorer, an airman, or a soldier like Saint-Loup – who, obliged to leave again next day for the country and from there for God knows where, seem to derive from a single evening in our company, and to our great surprise, given the rare and fleeting nature of such evenings, an impression of such enjoyment and yet (also to our surprise, since they have enjoyed themselves so much) do not seek to prolong the experience or to repeat it more often? Something as ordinary as a meal with us provides these travellers with the same exotic and exquisite pleasure as our boulevards provide for someone from Asia. We left together to go and dine, and as I went downstairs I thought back to Doncières, where every evening I used to join Robert at a restaurant, and the little dining-rooms there I had forgotten. I remembered one I had utterly forgotten, not in the hotel where Saint-Loup dined but in a more modest one, half inn half boarding-house, where the landlady and one of her servants waited at table. The snow had forced me to stop there. Robert was not dining at the hotel that evening in any case and I had not wanted to walk on any further. My meal was served in a little panelled room upstairs. The lamp went out during dinner and the serving-maid lit two candles. Pretending that I could not see very well as I held out my plate while she helped me to potatoes, I took her bare forearm in my hand as if I were guiding it. Seeing that she made no attempt to withdraw it, I began to fondle it, then, without a word, I drew her whole body close, blew out the candles and told her to grope about me for some money. For the next few days, the adequate enjoyment of physical pleasure seemed to me to require not only this serving-maid but the panelled dining-room and its conducive seclusion. Yet out of habit and from friendship and until I left Doncières, I went back every evening to the other restaurant where Saint-Loup and his friends dined. But even this hotel where he boarded with his friends had been absent from my thoughts for a long time. We put our experience to very little use and fail to make the most of those hours on long summer evenings or unseasonal wintry nights when it nevertheless seemed to us that they might contain some grain of peace or pleasure. But such time is not entirely wasted. When new moments of pleasure announce themselves in their turn, ones which could pass by in the same way, similarly tenuous and linear, former moments return and bring with them the well-grounded basis for rich orchestration. They develop in this way into one of those typical instances of happiness which we recapture only occasionally but which continue to exist; in the present instance it was the abandonment of everything else to go and dine in comfortable surroundings, whose physical reality memory helps to endow with the enticements of travel, in the company of a friend who is going to rouse up our dormant life with all his energy, all his affection, to communicate to us a glow of pleasure, quite different from anything we might owe to our own efforts or to social distractions; we are going to devote ourselves entirely to him, to make professions of friendship which, born within the confines of the hour and remaining enclosed within it, will perhaps be forgotten the following day; but these were professions I could make without misgivings to Saint-Loup since, with a courage that embodied a great deal of wise experience and the hunch that friendship cannot be probed in detail, the following day he would be gone.

If as I came downstairs I relived those evenings in Doncières, suddenly, when we reached the street, the almost total darkness, in which the fog seemed to have extinguished the street-lamps (they were visible, and even then very faintly, only from close to), took me back to some dim memory of arrival in Combray by night, when the town was lit only at distant intervals and you groped your way through a humid, warm, holy crib-like darkness in which the lamps flickered here and there with no more light than from a candle. Between that year (whichever year it was) and the evenings in Rivebelle, reflected a while back above the curtains in my bedroom, what a world of difference! As I took note of this I felt a sense of inspired exhilaration, which might have resulted in something had I remained alone and so avoided the detour of the many futile years I was yet to spend before discovering the invisible vocation which is the subject of this book. Had this discovery been made that evening, the carriage I found myself in would have deserved to rank as more memorable than Dr Percepied's, in which I had composed the little descriptive piece about the Martinville steeples, recently unearthed, as it happened, and which I had reworked and offered without success to the *Figaro*. Is it because we relive past years not in their continuous sequence, day by day, but by fixing our memory on the coolness or sunshine of one particular morning or evening spent in the shade of some isolated setting, enclosed, static, arrested, lost, remote from everything else, and because the changes gradually effected not only in the world outside but in our dreams and in our developing personality, changes which have carried us along through life from one phase to a wholly different one without our noticing, are therefore nullified, that, if we relive another memory taken from a different year, the gaps, the immense stretches of oblivion between the two, make us feel something like a huge gulf of difference in altitude or the incompatibility of two utterly dissimilar qualities of breathed atmosphere and surrounding coloration? But between the successive memories of Combray, Doncières and Rivebelle which had recently occurred, I now felt that, much more than a distance in time, there was the sort of distance there would be between different universes whose substance was not the same. Had I wanted to reproduce in writing the material in which my slightest memories of Rivebelle were carved, I should have had to take the substance which had up until now resembled the sombre, rugged sandstone of Combray, vein it in pink, and suddenly transform it into something translucent, dense, cool and resonant. But Robert had finished giving his instructions to the driver and now joined me in the carriage. The ideas that had been passing through my mind were dispelled. They are goddesses who sometimes deign to make themselves visible to a solitary mortal, at a cross-roads or even in his bedroom while he sleeps, and they stand in the doorway to bring him their annunciation. But as soon as he is no longer alone, they vanish in a refusal to appear to more than one person at a time. So instead I found myself thrown back on friendship.

Robert had warned me when he arrived that it was very foggy outside, but as we were talking the fog had grown steadily thicker. It was now no longer merely the light mist which I had been hoping to see rise from the island and envelop Mme de Stermaria and myself. Once you moved a foot or two away from them, the street-lamps were invisible and it became as dark as night in an open field, in a forest, or preferably on the mellow Breton island where I should have liked to be; I was as lost as if I were on the coast of some northern sea, risking my life a score of times before reaching the safety of the solitary inn; no longer a mirage that is sought after, the fog was becoming one of those dangers to be fought off, so that finding our way safely to our destination meant that we experienced the difficulties, the anxiety and finally the delight which the sense of safety – so much taken for granted by those who are not threatened by the loss if it – confers upon the perplexed and disoriented traveller. Only one thing threatened to mar my pleasure during our adventurous carriage journey, by throwing me into a momentary spell of angry amazement. 'You know, said Saint-Loup, I told Bloch you weren't that keen on him, that you found him rather vulgar. You know me, I like things to be clear-cut,' he concluded smugly in a tone of voice that brooked no argument. I was dumbfounded. Not only did I have the most absolute confidence in Saint-Loup, in the loyalty of his friendship, and he had betrayed it by what he had said to Bloch, but it also seemed to me that he ought to have been held back from doing this by his defects as much as by his good qualities, by that extraordinary fund of good breeding which could carry politeness to the point of unwarranted reticence. Was the triumphant manner he adopted the sort of manner we assume to conceal a sense of embarrassment when we have admitted something we know we ought not to have done? Was it simply heedlessness? Or stupidity, making a virtue out of a defect of his of which I was unaware? Or a passing bout of ill-humour towards me, prompting him to try and end our friendship? Or else a passing bout of ill-humour directed at Bloch, to whom he had wanted to say something hurtful even if it meant compromising me? At all events, his face was marred, while he uttered these vulgar words, by a horribly twisted expression, which I encountered only once or twice in all the time I knew him and which began by running more or less down the middle of his face before it reached his lips and contorted them into a hideous low smirk, almost bestial for a second, and no doubt inherited. Such moments, which probably occurred only once or twice a year, must have represented a partial eclipse of his true self, due to the passage across it of the personality of some ancestor reflecting itself upon him. Like the smug expression on Robert's face, the words 'I like things to be clear-cut' fed equally into my misgivings and should have incurred a similar condemnation. I felt like telling him that a liking for clear-cut situations ought to entail restricting outbursts of plain speaking to one's own affairs and not making a cheap virtue out of them at the expense of other people's feelings. But the carriage had already drawn up outside the huge, brightly lit glass front of the

restaurant, the sole point of light in the murky darkness. The fog itself, in the brightness cast by the comfortably lit interior, seemed to be standing there on the pavement to usher you in like footmen whose faces reflect the joyful hospitality of their master; it was shot through with the most delicate glints of light and pointed the way in like the pillar of fire that guided the Hebrews.[14] As a matter of fact, there were many of these among the evening's diners. For this was the restaurant to which Bloch and his friends had been coming for a long time to meet up in the evening, intoxicated by their fast of coffee and political curiosity, more famished than they are after their ritual fast, which occurs only once a year. Because all mental excitement creates some dominant cause of attachment, something superior to the habits involved in it, there is no taste at all enthusiastically pursued that does not gather around it thus a group of people which it unites and in which the general esteem is what each member devotes most of his life to seeking. In one place, be it only some little provincial town, you will find a group of enthused music-lovers; the greater part of their time and money is spent on chamber-music sessions, on meetings devoted to musical discussion, in cafés where they find themselves surrounded by music-lovers and rub shoulders with musicians. Another group, keen on flying, devote their attentions to being well in with the old waiter in the glass bar perched above the aerodrome; sheltered from the wind in this glass lighthouse cage, they can follow, in the company of an airman who is not flying that day, the moves of a pilot looping the loop, or another, who was invisible a moment ago, suddenly coming in to land and hitting the runway with the great roaring wings of the Roc.[15] The little group which met to try to perpetuate and delve into the swift turn of emotions involved in the Zola trial attached a similar importance to the café we were in. But they were not well received by the young aristocrats who composed the other half of the clientele and had taken to frequenting a second room in the café, separated from the other by a narrow parapet supporting a row of plants. They viewed Dreyfus and his supporters as traitors, although twenty-five years later, when people's ideas had had time to sort themselves out and Dreyfusism to acquire a certain glamour in the light of history, the Bolshevistic and dance-obsessed sons of these same young aristocrats would declare to the 'intellectuals' who questioned them that, had they had been alive at the time, they would have undoubtedly been pro-Dreyfus, despite the fact that they had no more clue about the significance of the affair than Comtesse Edmond de Pourtalès or the Marquise de Galliffet,[16] further shining examples of glamour already extinct by the time these noble sons were born. For on the night of the fog, the aristocrats of the café, who were later to become the fathers of these retrospectively Dreyfusard young intellectuals, were still bachelors. Clearly a rich marriage was envisaged for them by all their families, but none of them had so far achieved it. Still only a virtual reality, this rich marriage, which was a common goal several of them shared (there were indeed several 'suitable matches' in view, but when it came down to it the number of big dowries available was considerably lower than the number of aspirants involved), merely served to create a certain amount of rivalry between these young men.

Since Saint-Loup stayed outside for a few minutes to give the driver instructions to collect us after dinner, it was my misfortune to have to enter the place on my own. And, to begin with, once I had engaged with the unfamiliar workings of the turning door, I became alarmed that I should never get out of it. (Let me add, for the lovers of precise vocabulary, that the drum-shaped entrance in question, despite its harmless appearance, is known as a 'revolver', from the English term 'revolving door'.) That evening the proprietor, unwilling either to brave the damp fog outside or to abandon his customers, nevertheless remained posted by the entrance so that he could enjoy the joyful grievances of new arrivals, their faces positively glowing with the satisfaction of people who had had difficulty getting there and been afraid of getting lost. But the smiling cordiality of his welcome vanished at the sight of a stranger trying to disengage himself from the revolving glass panels of the door. This flagrant sign of ignorance made him frown like an examiner who is totally disinclined to utter the words: *Dignus est intrare*.[17] To cap it all, I went and sat down in the room reserved for the young aristocrats, from which he made no bones about coming to oust me, pointing me, with a rudeness from which all the other waiters immediately took their cue, to a place in the other room. This was all the less to my liking because I found myself sitting on an already crowded wall seat staring straight at the door reserved for the Hebrews, which did not revolve, but opened and closed continuously, exposing me to a horrible draught. But the proprietor refused my request for another seat with the words: 'Monsieur, I really can't disturb other people just on your account.' Yet he soon forgot me, his late and troublesome client, in his fascination with the arrival of each new-comer who, before ordering his beer, his cold chicken-wing or his hot toddy (it was long past the hour for dining), was first obliged, as in old tales, to pay his dues by recounting his adventure as soon as he entered this sanctuary of warmth and safety, where the contrast with perils just escaped created the mood of gaiety and comradeship you find in cheerful partnership around a camp fire.

One of the arrivals reported that his carriage, thinking it had reached the Pont de la Concorde, had managed to circle the Invalides three times, another that his, as it tried to make its way down the avenue des Champs-Élysées, had driven into a clump of trees at the Rond-Point and taken three-quarters of an hour to find its way back to the road. There then followed various lamentations about the fog, the cold, the deathly silence of the streets, all delivered and received with the same unexpected joviality that was connected with the pleasant atmosphere of the room, which, except for where I was sitting, was warm, the bright lights which dazzled people's eyes to life again after their experience of foggy blindness, and the buzz of talk which brought back sound to muffled ears.

New arrivals were hard put to it to keep silent. Their unusual adventures, which each of them thought unique, set their tongues on fire, and their eyes scoured the place in search of someone to engage in conversation. The proprietor himself lost all sense of social distinctions: 'Monsieur le Prince de Foix got lost three times on his way from the Porte Saint-Martin,' he said, laughing unabashedly and actually pointing out the famous aristocrat, as if he were about to effect an introduction, to a Jewish barrister who on any other evening would have been separated from him by a barrier far harder to surmount than the parapet and its row of plants. 'Three times! Well I never!' said the barrister touching his hat. These words of friendly interest were not something the Prince appreciated. He belonged to an aristocratic group which seemed to be solely preoccupied with the over-stepping of social boundaries, even in regard to nobles who were not of the very highest rank. Not to respond to a greeting; if the polite person in question repeated the offence, to snigger contemptuously or fling back one's head in fury; to affect not to know an elderly man who had done them a favour in the past; to reserve their hand-shakes and greetings for dukes and the really intimate friends to whom these dukes introduced them: such was the attitude of these young men, and more particularly of the Prince de Foix. This attitude was fostered by the muddled conduct of early manhood (a stage of life, even for the middle class, when someone's behaviour can come across as ungrateful and loutish because he has long put off writing to a benefactor who had just lost his wife and, to simplify matters, decides to ignore him when they meet), but what really lay behind it was an acute caste snobbery. It is true that, like the manifestations of certain nervous disorders which become less pronounced in later life, this snobbery would usually lose some of its offensive manner in these men who had been so intolerable when they were young. Once he has outgrown his youth, a man will rarely remain a prisoner to his insolence. He had thought it was the only way to behave; then he suddenly discovers that, even for a prince, there are such things as music, literature, not to speak of standing for the post of deputy. And so his scale of human values changes and he starts talking to people who were once the target of his dismissive gaze. And good luck to such spurned people if they have had the patience to wait until their forties and are mature enough – if 'mature' is the word – to enjoy the civility and polite acknowledgement so cuttingly refused them when they were twenty!

And since we are on the subject of the Prince de Foix, it is worth mentioning that he belonged to a set of a dozen or fifteen young men and to a more intimate group of four. The dozen or fifteen shared the characteristic, from which the Prince was, I think, exempt, that each of them presented a dual aspect to the world. Riddled with debt, they were regarded as complete nobodies by their tradesmen, despite the pleasure these took in addressing them as 'Monsieur le comte', 'Monsieur le marquis', 'Monsieur le duc' and so forth. They hoped to solve their problems by means of the famous 'rich marriage' ('a fat windfall', as the expression still was) and, since only four or five of the large dowries they coveted existed, several of them were secretly setting their sights on the same marriage partner. The secret was so well kept that when one of them arrived at the café and announced: 'My dear chaps, I'm too fond of you all to hold back the news of my engagement to Mlle d'Ambresac,' there would be an outburst of exclamation, several of the group being under the impression that their chances of marriage to Mlle d'Ambresac were as good as settled and therefore lacking the necessary composure to stifle at source their cries of rage and stupefaction: 'So it's marriage you're after, is it, Bibi?' the Prince de Châtellerault could not help exploding, dropping his fork in surprise and despair, for he had been fully expecting the engagement of this same Mme d'Ambresac to be made public, but with himself, Châtellerault, named as the future husband. And yet God only knows all that his

father had been slyly implying to the Ambresacs about Bibi's mother. He could not help himself repeating the same sort of remark again: 'So you think it will be fun to get married, do you?', but Bibi, better prepared now that he had had plenty of time to adopt an appropriate attitude since the semi-official stage of the engagement, replied with a smile: 'I'm pleased, not to be getting married, which I didn't particularly want to do, but to be marrying Daisy d'Ambresac, who is utterly delightful.' It took no more time than the duration of this sentence for M. de Châtellerault to regain his composure, but he was already thinking that he must immediately change his tactics and set his sights on Mlle de la Canourgue or Miss Foster, numbers two and three on the dowry list, pacify the creditors who were setting store by the Ambresac marriage, and, finally, explain to the people to whom he had sung Mlle d'Ambresac's praises that this marriage was all very well for Bibi, but that if he himself had married her, he would have had all his family set at odds with him. Mme Soléon, he would claim, had in fact gone so far as to say that she would close her doors to the couple.

But if in the eyes of tradesmen, restaurant proprietors and so forth they seemed of little account, by contrast, as men of dual personality, as soon as they appeared in society they were no longer judged by the dilapidated state of their fortunes and the pathetic way they worked to repair them. They were once more M. le Prince X, M. le Duc de Y, and were esteemed only by their quarterings. They would take precedence over a nobleman who was almost a multi-millionaire and seemingly a man who lacked nothing because, as heads of their house, they were by descent sovereign princes of small territories where they were entitled to do things like minting money and so forth. Often, in the café, one of them would lower his eyes when another came in order to avoid exchanging the usual statutory greetings. This was because his imaginative pursuit of riches had involved inviting a banker to dine with him. Every time a society gentleman gets involved with a banker in such circumstances, it leaves him poorer by a hundred thousand francs, which does nothing to stop him repeating the process with another. Nothing stops us continuing to light candles in church or to consult doctors.

But the Prince de Foix, himself a rich man, belonged not only to this fashionable set of fifteen or so young men but to a more exclusive and closely-knit group of four, which included Saint-Loup. Known as the four gigolos, they were never invited to anything separately, were always to be seen riding together at the country houses where their hostesses provided them with adjoining bedrooms; as a result, especially since the four of them were extremely good-looking, rumours circulated about the nature of their intimacy. So far as Saint-Loup was concerned, I was in a position to denounce such rumours categorically. But the curious thing is that if it eventually came to light that the rumours were true of all four of them, then each one had been utterly unaware of the facts in relation to the other three. Yet each had done his utmost to inform himself about the others, either to gratify a desire or, more likely, a grudge, to prevent a marriage, or to have the upper hand over the friend whose secret he had uncovered. A fifth member (for in groups of four there are always more than four) had joined this platonic quartet, a man far more suspect than the others. But religious scruple had held him back until long after the group had broken up and he himself was a married man, the father of a family, one minute rushing off to Lourdes to pray that the next baby might be a boy or a girl, and the next flinging himself at soldiers.

Despite the Prince's character, the fact that the barrister had made his remark without really addressing him directly made him less angry than he would have been otherwise. There was also the fact that this evening was a rather exceptional one. And indeed the barrister was no more likely to become acquainted with the Prince de Foix than the driver who had taken his lordship to the café. And so the Prince felt that he might even permit himself to reply – contemptuously of course, and as if to no one in particular – to this man who had addressed him and who, thanks to the fog, was rather like a fellow traveller encountered on some beach at the ends of the earth, a place battered by wind or shrouded in mist: 'Losing one's way is nothing: the problem is finding it again.' These words of wisdom impressed the proprietor, for he had heard them several times already that evening.

In fact he had the constant habit of comparing what he had heard or read with things that were already familiar to him, and if he could detect no difference between the two, he felt a stir of admiration. This sort of mental response is not to be ignored, for, applied to political conversation, to the reading of newspapers, it shapes public opinion and thus contributes to the greatest events in the world. Many German café-owners, simply through being impressed by a customer or a newspaper informing them that France, England and Russia were 'on the warpath' against Germany, made war possible, at the time of Agadir, even if no war actually happened.[18] If historians have not been wrong to renounce their method of approaching the actions of nations as determined by the will of kings, they ought to substitute for the latter the psychology of the individual and the humblest individual at that.

In the matter of politics, the proprietor of the café into which I had just walked had for some time been applying his learning-by-rote mentality exclusively to a number of set-pieces on the Dreyfus case. If the terms he had committed to memory did not figure in the remarks of a customer or the columns of a newspaper, then he would declare that the article bored him to tears or that the customer was not giving a true picture. But the Prince de Foix's words aroused such admiration in him that he barely gave the Prince time to finish his sentence. 'Well said, Prince, well said,' (which effectively meant 'faultlessly recited') 'how true, how very true,' he exclaimed, 'swelling into ecstasies of satisfaction', as the *Arabian Nights* puts it. But the Prince had already departed into the smaller room. And, since life returns to normal even after the most singular events, those who had emerged from the sea of fog began to order their drinks or their food; among them were a party of young men from the Jockey Club who, in view of the exceptional circumstances, made no bones about installing themselves at a couple of tables in the larger room and were therefore quite close to me. Thus the cataclysm had established, even between the smaller room and the larger one, among all these people stimulated by the comfort of the restaurant after their long wanderings through the ocean of fog, a familiarity from which I alone was excluded and which must have been something like the spirit that prevailed in Noah's ark. I suddenly caught sight of the proprietor bowing and scraping, and the full complement of waiters rushed forward to do likewise, with the eyes of the whole restaurant turned upon this scene. 'Quick, send Cyprien to me, a table for M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup,' cried the proprietor, for whom Robert was not only a great nobleman, highly esteemed even by the Prince de Foix, but a customer of wildly lavish tastes who spent a good deal of money in this restaurant. Those dining in the big room looked on with curiosity, while those in the smaller one all tried to be the first to hail their friend as he finished wiping his shoes. But just as he was about to enter the smaller room he caught sight of me in the big one. 'Good God! he exclaimed, what *are* you doing in there in front of a wide-open door?' As he said this he cast a furious glance at the proprietor, who ran to shut the door, deflecting the blame on to his waiters: 'I'm always telling them to keep it closed.'

In order to join Saint-Loup I had had to disturb the people sitting at the same table and those sitting at the tables in front of mine. 'Why did you move? Would you prefer to dine here rather than in the small room? You'll be freezing, you poor fellow. You'll be good enough to keep that door permanently out of use, he said to the proprietor. – I'll see to it at once, Monsieur le Marquis. Any new customers will simply have to pass through the smaller room.' And to emphasize his eagerness to dance attendance, he commandeered the services of a head waiter and several others for the purpose, issuing vociferous threats about the consequences of neglecting his orders. To make me forget that marks of respect towards me had not been forthcoming until Saint-Loup's arrival on the scene, he became excessively attentive, and, just in case I should think that this was prompted by the fact that his rich and noble client was clearly my friend, he smuggled in a series of private little smiles in an attempt to convey a truly personal liking for me.

A remark made by one of the diners behind me made me turn my head for a second. Instead of the words: 'Yes, I'll have the chicken-wing and a little champagne too, but not too dry,' I thought I had heard: 'I should prefer glycerine. Yes, hot, that's right.' I was anxious to take a look at the ascetic who was inflicting such a diet upon himself, but I quickly turned back to Saint-Loup to avoid being recognized by the man with the strange appetite. It was simply a doctor I knew whose advice was being asked by another customer, who had taken advantage of the fog to pin him down in this café. Like stockbrokers, doctors use the first person singular.

Meanwhile I looked at Robert and various thoughts passed through my mind. There were in this café, and I had come across them elsewhere, a large number of foreigners, intellectuals, would-be artists, who were resigned to the laughter aroused by their pretentious capes, their 1830s neckties and even more by their clumsy way of carrying themselves, and often deliberately provoked that laughter in order to show that it meant nothing to them; yet they were men of real

intellectual and moral worth, profoundly conscious of the world. To people who could not endure any oddity or eccentricity of appearance they were unacceptable (as Bloch was to Albertine), the Jews among them in particular, the unassimilated ones of course – the others are not relevant here. With hindsight, it was generally realized that, even if their hair was too long, their noses and eyes too big, their gestures theatrical and jerky, and that this did nothing to endear them to people, it was infantile to judge them on this account, that they were highly intelligent and good-hearted men who, in the long run, could become profoundly endearing. Among the Jews especially there were few whose parents had not a kindness of heart, a broadmindedness, an honesty, in comparison with which Saint-Loup's mother and the Duc de Guermantes came across as the sorriest of moral figures in their desiccated emotions, the surface religiosity they cultivated only to condemn scandal, and their clannish apology for a Christianity which never failed to lead (through the unexpected channels of the intellect at the expense of all else) to colossally wealthy marriages. But for all this, Saint-Loup, in whatever way the faults of his parents had combined to create a new set of qualities, was governed by a delightful openness of mind and heart. And whenever – to the undying glory of France, let it be said – such qualities are found in a pure-blooded Frenchman, whether he belongs to the aristocracy or to the people, they flower – flourish would be too strong a word for something so persistently controlled and contained – with a grace which even the most admired foreigner cannot offer to us. Of course others have their intellectual and moral qualities too, and if to appreciate them we have first to put behind us what we see as unacceptable, shocking and risible, they remain no less precious. But it is none the less a pleasant thing, and perhaps something exclusively French, that what is spontaneously judged to be fine, what carries conviction to the mind and the heart, should be first of all pleasing to the eye, delicately coloured, perfectly chiselled, and should embody its inner perfection in substance and shape. I looked at Saint-Loup and thought what a pleasant thing it is when there is no physical impediment to hinder a person's inner grace, and when the curves of the nostrils are as delicate and as perfectly formed as the wings of the tiny butterflies that settle on flowers in the fields around Combray; I thought too that the true *opus francigenum*,[19] the secret of which was not lost in the thirteenth century and would not perish along with our churches, is not to be found so much in the stone angels of Saint-André-des-Champs as in those young Frenchmen, nobles, bourgeois or peasants, whose faces are sculpted with the same delicacy and boldness as those on the famous porch, traditional and still alive.

After leaving us for a moment to bestow his personal supervision upon the closing of the door and our orders for dinner (he laid great stress on our choosing 'butcher's meat', which presumably meant that the poultry was rather indifferent), the proprietor came back to inform us that the Prince de Foix would be honoured to be allowed to dine at a table next to M. le Marquis. 'But they are all taken, said Robert, as he inspected the tables that were blocking the way to mine. – There is really no problem, the proprietor announced. If M. le Marquis is agreeable, I can easily ask these people to move. It is always such an honour to oblige Monsieur le Marquis! – You're the one who has to decide, said Saint-Loup to me. Foix is a good chap. I don't know whether he'd bore you, but he's less of a fool than most of them.' I told Robert that of course I should be happy with such company but that now that I was having the rare pleasure of dining with him at all, I should be just as pleased to dine with him on my own. 'That's a very fine cloak the Prince has,' the proprietor interjected as the two of us deliberated. 'Yes, I know,' said Saint-Loup. I wanted to tell Robert that M. de Charlus had concealed from his sister-in-law that he knew me and to ask him what the reason might be, but the arrival of M. de Foix put paid to this. He had come over to see whether his request had been welcomed, and we saw him standing a few feet away. Robert introduced us, but made it quite clear that the two of us had things to talk about and would prefer to be left alone. As the Prince moved away he added to the farewell bow he made me a smile in Saint-Loup's direction, which seemed to express regret that my friend had wished to curtail a meeting which the Prince himself would have liked to see prolonged. But at this point Robert suddenly seemed gripped by some idea he had, moved off with his friend, left me with the words: 'Do sit down and start your dinner, I'll be back in a moment,' and disappeared into the smaller room. I, meanwhile, as a stranger, endured the painful experience of hearing the smart young men around me telling the most improbable and nasty stories about the adoptive Grand Duke of Luxembourg (the former Comte de Nassau), whom I had met in Balbec and who had expressed such delicate proofs of sympathy during my grandmother's illness. One of these young men was claiming that the Grand Duke had said to the Duchesse de Guermantes: 'I expect everyone to rise to their feet when my wife arrives,' and that she had returned the remark: 'So we are to stand for your wife, are we? Rather different from her grandmother, I must say – men were expected to lie down for her,' a remark that, had it been made at all, would have been lacking not only in wit but in truth, since the grandmother of the young princess had always been a paragon of propriety. Then someone told a story about the Grand Duke once going to Balbec to visit his aunt, the Princess of Luxembourg, putting up at the Grand Hotel and complaining to the manager (my friend) that the Luxembourg standard was not being flown on the front; and because this standard was less familiar and less in use than the British or Italian flag, it had taken several days to find one, much to the Grand Duke's annoyance. I did not believe a word of this, but I was determined, once I went to Balbec, to ask the manager and to satisfy myself that it was pure invention.

While I was waiting for Saint-Loup, I asked the restaurant proprietor to bring me some bread. 'But of course, M. le Baron, at once, came the obsequious reply. – I'm not M. le Baron, I returned with mock regret. – I do beg your pardon, M. le Comte!' I had no time to launch a second protest, which would almost certainly have promoted me to the rank of Marquis: Saint-Loup, as he had promised, had returned promptly and appeared in the doorway holding the big vicuna cloak belonging to the Prince de Foix, from whom he had clearly borrowed it to keep me warm. He signalled to me not to move and started to come towards me; but either my table would have to be moved again or I would need to change my seat if he was going to sit down. No sooner had he entered the big room than he sprang lightly on to one of the red plush benches running round its walls and on which, apart from myself, three or four young Jockey Club members were sitting, friends of his, who had not been able to find places in the smaller room. Between the tables there were electric wires, placed fairly high; Saint-Loup jumped nimbly and safely over them like a steeplechaser clearing a fence; embarrassed though I was that it was being done wholly for my benefit and to save me from a trifling inconvenience, the sure-footedness of my friend's acrobatic feat none the less amazed me; and I was not alone in this; for although they would probably have been only mildly appreciative of a similar feat on the part of a less distinguished and less generous client, the proprietor and his staff stood by in fascination, like racing enthusiasts at the enclosure; one of the assistant waiters stood rooted to the spot, holding a dish that was awaited at a table nearby; and when Saint-Loup, who needed to pass behind his friends, climbed on to the back of their bench and moved along it in a balancing act, muffled applause broke out from the body of the room. When he reached my seat he brought himself to a halt with the precision of a chieftain paying tribute before the throne of a sovereign and, stooping down, he courteously and submissively handed me the vicuna cloak, which, a moment later, when he had sat down beside me, he arranged around my shoulders as a light, warm shawl, without my having to lift a finger.

'Oh yes, while I think of it, said Robert, my uncle Charlus has something to say to you. I promised I'd get you to go and see him tomorrow evening.

– Funny, I was just going to mention him to you. But tomorrow evening I'm dining with your aunt Guermantes.

– Ah yes, there's a whopping great blowout at Oriane's tomorrow. I'm not invited. But my Uncle Palamède doesn't want you to go. Can't you get out of it? Anyway, go and see my uncle afterwards. He seems anxious to see you. You could get there by eleven, don't you think? Eleven o'clock, don't forget. I'll tell him that. He's very touchy about these things. If you don't turn up he'll be really put out. Oriane's does never finish very late. Actually I need to go and see Oriane about getting a transfer from Morocco. She's so good about that sort of thing, and she can twist Général de Saint-Joseph round her little finger. He's the man in charge of these things. But don't say anything about it to her. I've mentioned it to the Princess of Parma and there should be no problem. Interesting place, Morocco. I could tell you a lot about it. Some very decent chaps out there. Mental equals and all that.

– You don't think the Germans are going to go to war over it?

– No, not really. They're annoyed with us, and they've every right to be. But the Kaiser wants a state of peace. They're always making us think they want war, to force us to give in. It's like a game of poker. The Prince of Monaco, one of Wilhelm II's agents, comes and tells us in confidence that Germany will attack if we don't give in. So we give in. But even if we were to refuse, there would be no war of any description. You need only to think what a cosmic thing a war would be today. It would be more catastrophic than the Flood and the *Götterdämmerung*[20] put together. Only it wouldn't last so long.'

He talked to me about friendship, special affinities with people, about missing them (even though, like all travellers of his kind, he was going off again the next day to spend some months in the country and returning to Paris for only a couple of days on his way back to Morocco, or elsewhere); but the words he let fall that evening kindled a pleasant glow of thoughts in the warmth of my heart. Our rare conversations alone together, and this one in particular, have assumed, in retrospect, the status of important turning-points. For him, as for me, this was the evening of friendship. And yet the friendship I felt for him at this moment was scarcely, I feared (with some remorse), what he would have liked to inspire. Still in the throes of the pleasure it had given me to see him come cantering towards me and gracefully reaching his goal, I felt that this pleasure arose from the fact that each of his movements as he had moved along the wall-bench possibly derived its meaning from, was motivated by, something very personal to Saint-Loup himself, but that what really lay behind it was something he had inherited, by birth and upbringing, from his race.

Certainty of taste (with regard not to aesthetics but to personal behaviour) in a man of refinement, allowing him, when faced with a novel set of circumstances, to adopt instinctively – like a musician who is asked to perform a piece he has never seen – the appropriate attitude and action and to apply the right mechanism and technique, then enabling him to exercise his taste without the inhibitions that would have paralysed so many young middle-class men with the fear both of making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of strangers through their unconventional behaviour and of appearing too ready to show off in the eyes of their friends, a fear which, in Robert's case, was replaced by a disdain he had certainly never felt in his heart but had received by inheritance in his body (it had moulded the attitudes of his ancestors into a familiarity which, as they saw it, could only flatter and enchant those to whom it was addressed); along with this went a noble liberality which, instead of flaunting his considerable material advantages (lavish expenditure in this restaurant had succeeded in making him, here as elsewhere, its most fashionable and favoured customer, as was made quite evident by the deference shown him not only by the waiters but by all its most distinguished young patrons), led him in fact to trample them underfoot, just as he had trampled, physically and symbolically, upon those plush benches, which seemed to this friend of mine to represent some sumptuous processional path, important to him only because it enabled him join me with more grace and speed; these then were the

inherently aristocratic qualities that shone through his body – not opaque and dim as mine would have been, but meaningful and limpid – as the industrious energy and power that created it shines through a work of art, and translated the movements of the light-footed acrobatics Robert had conducted along the wall into movements as intelligible and charming as those of horsemen on a marble frieze. Robert's response to this might have been: 'Was it really worth it to have grown up despising birth, honouring only justice and intellect, choosing companions, outside the friends imposed upon me, who were awkward and ill-dressed but eloquent, only to discover that I come across solely, and am fondly remembered, not as the person the worthy efforts of my will have modelled to my likeness, but as a person not of my making, not even myself, the one I've always despised and striven to overcome? Was it worth while to love my best friend as I have done, only to find that his greatest pleasure when he is with me is to discover something far more general than myself, a pleasure which has nothing to do with friendship (as he says himself, but cannot seriously believe it) but something intellectual and detached, a kind of artistic appreciation?' This is what I now fear Saint-Loup may have thought at times. In which case, he was mistaken. If he had not (although he in fact had) loved something more exalted than the innate suppleness of his body, if he had not been detached for so long from aristocratic arrogance, then there would have been something more self-conscious, more heavy-handed about his very agility, and a vulgar self-advertisement in his behaviour. In the same way that Mme de Villeparisis, on an intellectual level, had needed a great deal of serious thought in order to convey a sense of the frivolous in her conversation and in her *Memoirs*, so, in order for Saint-Loup's body to carry so much nobility, all ideas of nobility had first to leave his mind, which was intent on higher things, before returning to his body to re-establish themselves there as noble attributes of an utterly unstudied kind. In this way his distinction of mind went largely hand in hand with a physical distinction which would have not been complete without it. An artist has no need to express his thought directly in a work for the work to reflect its quality; it has even been said the highest praise of God is to be found in the denial of him by the atheist, who considers creation to be perfect enough to dispense with a creator. And I was more than aware, too, that it was not merely a work of art I was admiring in this young horseman unfolding along the wall the frieze of his cantering path; the young prince (a descendant of Catherine de Foix, Queen of Navarre and granddaughter of Charles VII) he had just left to be alone with me, the privileges of birth and fortune he was putting second to me, the proud and nimble ancestry which lay behind the assurance, agility and courtesy with which he had wrapped the warm vicuna cloak around my shivering body – were not all these things like friends of longer standing in his life, on account of whom I might have expected that we should be always kept apart, but whom he was none the less sacrificing to me out of choice, the sort of choice that can be made only by a lofty mind, with that supreme liberty reflected in Robert's impulses and in which perfect friendship thrives?

The crass arrogance that was to be detected behind the familiarity of the Guermantes manner – in contrast to the distinction it assumed in Robert's code of conduct, in which hereditary disdain was merely the outward manifestation, transformed in his case into an unconscious grace, of a genuine moral humility – had been impressed upon me, not by M. de Charlus, in whom certain defects of character which I still found rather impenetrable were superimposed on his aristocratic habits, but by the Duc de Guermantes. Yet he too, despite the overall impression of vulgarity my grandmother had found so distasteful when she had encountered him years earlier at Mme de Villeparisis's, showed traces of ancient grandeur, as I was to discover when I went to dine at his house the day after my evening with Saint-Loup.

These were not the traces I had noticed, either in himself or the Duchesse, when I first met them at their aunt's, any more than I had noticed the differences that set La Berma apart from her colleagues when I saw her for the first time, although in her case any distinctive qualities were infinitely more striking than those of society people, since the more focused they are, the more evident such qualities become, the more accessible to the mind. And yet, however subtle shades of social distinction may be (subtle enough for an acute observer like Sainte-Beuve, in his attempt to portray the shades of difference between the salons of Mme Geoffrin, Mme Récamier and Mme de Boigne, to make them appear so alike that the essential point to emerge from his inquiry, unintentionally, is that salon life is vacuous),[21] for the same reason as with La Berma, by the time the glamour of the Guermantes had worn off for me and my imagination no longer busied itself distilling the droplet of whatever originality they had, I was able to ponder that droplet in all its incomprehensible mystery.

Since the Duchesse had made no mention of her husband at her aunt's evening party, I wondered whether, given the flurry of rumours about divorce, he would be present at the dinner. But I did not have to wait long to find out, for through the bevy of footmen who were standing about in the hall and who (since they must until then have regarded me much in the same way as they did the children of the cabinet-maker, that is in a kindlier light than their master, but as someone he could not possibly receive in his house) must have been asking themselves what had brought about this revolutionary change in the order of things, I saw M. de Guermantes threading his way towards me; he had been watching out for my arrival so that he could greet me on his own threshold and take my coat himself.

'Mme de Guermantes will be overjoyed, he said to me in an artfully persuasive tone. Please let me help you off with your clobber. (He felt it both chummy and comic to use popular expressions.) My wife was just a wee bit afraid you might opt out, even though you had fixed a date. We've been saying to each other all day: "You'll see, he won't come." I have to say that Mme de Guermantes had more faith in you than I did. You're not an easy person to pin down, and I was sure you were going to do a bunk on us.'

And the Duc was such a bad husband, even a brutal one according to some, that you felt grateful to him, as you do towards nasty people for any sign of kindness they show, for referring to her as 'Mme de Guermantes', words which seemed to spread a protective wing over the Duchesse and to create the impression that they were inseparable. Meanwhile, taking me familiarly by the hand, he made it his duty to guide me around the reception rooms. A common expression from the lips of a peasant may seem attractive to us if it points to the survival of some local custom or bears the trace of some historic event, unknown perhaps to the speaker; likewise, the politeness shown me by M. de Guermantes – and it was to be sustained throughout the evening – charmed me as a survival of habits that were many centuries old, seventeenth-century habits in particular. People of past centuries seem infinitely remote from us. We cannot venture to assign to them any underlying motives beyond the ones they formally express; it amazes us to discover some sentiment that is roughly akin to our own feelings in a Homeric hero, or some skilful tactical feint by Hannibal during the battle of Cannae, where he let his flank retreat in order to encircle his enemy by surprise; it is as if we imagined these two figures, the epic poet and the general, to be as remote as animals at the zoo. Even with some of the courtiers of Louis XIV, when we find signs of courtesy in letters written by them to some man of inferior rank who could be of no service to them at all, their letters leave us astonished because they come as a sudden revelation that these great noblemen believed in a whole host of things they never express directly but which govern their conduct, in particular the belief that they are honour bound to feign certain sentiments and to fulfil with the utmost punctiliousness certain codes of polite behaviour.

This imagined remoteness of the past perhaps partially explains how even great writers have prized the works of mediocre mystifiers like Ossian as examples of inspired beauty.[22] We are so astonished that bards from the distant past should have modern ideas that if, in what we assume to be an old Gaelic poem, we come across an idea we should have thought of as highly ingenious in a contemporary, we fall back in amazement. A gifted translator has only to introduce into an ancient text he is reconstructing more or less faithfully, a few passages which, signed with a contemporary name and published separately, would seem no more than agreeable, and the immediate effect is to assign a moving grandeur to his poet, who is thus made to perform on the keyboards of several centuries at once. The translator himself could have written only a mediocre book, had that book been published as his original work. Offered as a translation, it seems a masterpiece. Not only is the past not so elusive, it actually stays put. It is not only months after the outbreak of a war that laws passed without haste can effectively influence its course, it is not only fifteen years after an unexplained crime that a magistrate can still find the evidence that will throw light on it; after hundreds and hundreds of years, the scholarly study of the place-names and customs of some remote region can still unearth from them some legend that long pre-dates Christianity, already unintelligible, perhaps even forgotten at the time of Herodotus, which in the name given to a rock, in a religious ritual, still lives on in the present, like an emanation now charged with even greater meaning, stretching far far back into the past, unflinching. There was an emanation too, far less ancient,

of court life, if not in the manners of M. de Guermantes (they were often vulgar), then in the mind that controlled them. I was to experience it again, like a scent of the past, when I rejoined him a little later in the drawing-room. For I did not go there at once.

As we were leaving the hall, I had mentioned to M. de Guermantes that I was very keen to see his Elstirs. 'Then I shall be pleased to show you them. Is M. Elstir one of your friends, then? How untoward of me not to have known. I do have some slight acquaintance with him. He's an amiable man, what our fathers used to call a "gentleman". I could even have asked him to honour us with his presence at dinner tonight. He would have been most flattered to spend an evening in your company, I'm sure.' When the Duc tried to force the manner of the Ancien Régime in this way he was unconvincing; but the next minute he had slipped back into it persuasively without conscious effort. After asking whether I should like him to show me the pictures, he conducted me to them, graciously standing aside at each door, full of apologies when he was obliged to precede me in order to show me the way, a little scene which, since the occasion described by Saint-Simon on which an ancestor of the Guermantes did him the honours of his house with the same punctilious performance of a gentleman's frivolous duties, and before it filtered through to the present day, must have been enacted by many another Guermantes for many another visitor. And as I had told the Duc that I would very much like to be left alone for a while with the pictures, he discreetly withdrew, telling me that I should find him in the drawing-room when I was ready.

But the moment I was left alone with the Elstirs, I completely forgot about time and dinner; once again, as in Balbec, I had before me fragments of that world of strange new colours, the projection of the great painter's particular vision, which his speech in no way conveyed. The parts of the walls that were covered by his paintings, each of them part of a homogeneous whole, were like the luminous images of a magic lantern which, in this instance, was the mind of the artist, the strangeness of which one would never have suspected from simply knowing the man, in other words so long as one had seen only the lantern shielding the lamp before any coloured slide had been inserted. Among these pictures, several of the ones that society people found most absurd interested me more than the rest because they re-created the optical illusions which make it clear that we should never be able to identify objects if we did not have recourse to some process of reasoning. On just how many occasions, as we are moving along in a carriage, have we not seen a bright street opening up a few metres away, when what our eyes are really confronting is merely a patch of wall in the full glare of sunlight creating the mirage of depth. Bearing this in mind, it surely makes sense – not from any artifice of symbolism but from a sincere desire to return to the root of our impression – to represent one thing by the other for which, in an initial flash of illusion, we mistook it. Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names which our memory imposes on things once we have recognized them. Elstir was trying to wrench the immediacy of his impression away from what he already knew; he had often struggled to undo the various mental assumptions we impose upon the visual process.

The people who detested these 'horrors' were startled to discover that Elstir admired Chardin, Perronneau,[23] and many other painters whom they themselves, with their feet firmly on the ground, liked. They had no conception of the fact that Elstir's effort to reproduce reality (along with his own distinctive taste for certain experiments) was the same as the effort made by Chardin and Perronneau and that consequently, when he was not absorbed in his own work, he admired theirs as an attempt similar to his own, as something like a collection of fragments anticipating his own achievement. But it did not occur to society people to bring to Elstir's work the temporal perspective which enabled them to like, or at least to look painlessly at, the paintings of Chardin. And yet the older ones among them might have reminded themselves that in the course of their lives they had gradually seen, as the years distanced them from it, the unbridgeable gap between what they regarded as a masterpiece by Ingres and something they supposed must for ever remain a horror (Manet's *Olympia*, for example) diminish to the point where the two canvases seemed like twins.[24] But in our inability to move back from the particular to the general we never learn, and are always imagining ourselves to be faced with some experience that has no precedents in the past.

In two of the pictures (more realist in manner and from an earlier period) I was touched to discover the same person, portrayed in one of them in evening dress in his drawing-room, and in the other wearing a coat and top hat at a working-class festivity by the riverside where he was clearly out of place, which proved that for Elstir he was not only a regular sitter but a friend, even a patron, whom he liked to introduce into his paintings, as Carpaccio once introduced – with the most perfect likeness – Venetian noblemen into his, or as Beethoven liked to inscribe at the head of a favourite work the beloved name of the Archduke Rudolph. There was something magical about this waterside carnival. The river, the women's dresses, the sails of the boats, the numerous reflections between the various elements in the painting all fitted together on the square of canvas Elstir had cut out of a wonderful afternoon. The marvellous shimmer on the dress of a woman who had stopped dancing for a moment because she was hot and out of breath was reflected too, in the same way, in the cloth of a motionless sail, in the water of the little port, in the wooden landing-stage, in the leaves on trees and in the sky. In one of the pictures I had seen in Balbec, the hospital, as beautiful beneath its lapis lazuli sky as the cathedral itself, with a daring that surpassed Elstir the theorist, Elstir the man of taste, the lover of medieval culture, seemed to be singing out: 'There is no such thing as Gothic, as a masterpiece; a humdrum hospital is every bit as good as an illustrious porch'; what I now heard was: 'The slightly vulgar lady whom the man with an eye for women wouldn't bother to look at as he passed by and would exclude from the poetic scene nature presents to his eyes, is beautiful too; the light on her dress is the same light that falls on the sail of that boat, everything is equally precious, the tawdry dress and the sail that is beautiful in itself are both mirrors of the same light. All the worth they have is conferred upon them by the painter's eye.' And this eye had been able to arrest the passage of the hours for all time in this luminous moment when the lady had felt hot and stopped dancing, when the tree was encircled by a ring of shade, when the sails seemed to be gliding over a glaze of gold. But precisely because that moment had such a forceful impact, the fixity of the canvas conveyed the impression of something highly elusive: you felt that the lady would soon return home, the boats vanish from the scene, the shadow shift, night begin to fall; that pleasure fades away, that life passes, and that the instant, illuminated by multiple and simultaneous plays of light, cannot be recaptured. I recognized yet another, admittedly different, aspect of the Instant, in a collection of water-colours on mythological themes, early works of Elstir, which also hung on the walls of this room. Society people with 'advanced' views went 'as far as' these early works, but no further. They were certainly not his finest achievement, but already the honesty with which the subject matter had been thought out took away its chill. So the Muses, for example, were depicted as though they were creatures belonging to a now fossilized species but as figures who could easily have been encountered, in mythological times, in groups of two or three, along some mountain path in the evening. In some of the pictures a poet, depicted as the sort of specimen who would have also been of particular interest to a zoologist (on account of a rather sexless appearance), strolled with a Muse, like those creatures of different but kindred species in the natural world that move about together. In one of these water-colours, a poet, exhausted by a long journey in the mountains, has encountered a Centaur, who, pitying his exhaustion, is carrying him home on his back. In others, the vast landscape (in which the mythical scene, the legendary heroes occupy a tiny place and seem almost lost) is rendered, from the mountain-tops to the sea, with an exactitude which conveys the time of day not to the hour but to the very minute, by depicting the precise angle of the setting sun and the fleeting fidelity of the shadows. And by making the symbolic world of legend instantaneous in this way, the artist gives it a sort of lived historical reality, painting and relating it as a vivid instance of the past.

While I was examining Elstir's paintings, the arrival of the other guests had been signalled by repeated rings at the door-bell, which had lulled me into a sweet oblivion. But the silence which followed the rings at the door and had already lasted for some time finally succeeded – less rapidly, it is true – in rousing me from my musings, as the silence following Lindor's music wakes Bartholo from his sleep.[25] Fearing I might have been forgotten and that they had already passed to table, I hurried to the drawing-room. At the door of the Elstir collection I found a servant waiting for me, white-haired or powdered I could not tell, and looking like a Spanish minister, though he treated me with the same respect he would have shown to a king. His manner gave me the impression that he would have waited for me for another hour, and I felt alarm at the thought that I had delayed dinner, especially since I had promised to be with M. de Charlus by eleven.

The Spanish minister conducted me to the drawing-room (not before I had encountered on the way the footman plagued by our concierge; he was radiant with delight when I inquired after his fiancée, told me that, as it happened, they both had the day off tomorrow and would be able to spend the whole of it together, and sang the praises of Mme de Guermantes). I feared that I should find M. de Guermantes in a bad mood. On the contrary, he welcomed me with a delight that was obviously partly assumed and dictated by politeness, but was otherwise sincere, prompted both by his stomach, famished by the long delay, and by his awareness that his impatience was shared by the rest of his guests who completely filled the room. I learned later that I had kept them waiting for nearly three-quarters of an hour. The Duc de Guermantes probably thought that it would do no harm to prolong the general torment for a couple of minutes, and that since his politeness had driven him to postpone moving to table for so long, it would be more consummate still if, by not having dinner announced immediately, he could persuade me that I was not late and had not kept people waiting. And so he asked me, as if we had an hour to kill before dinner and some of the guests had not yet arrived, what I thought of the Elstirs. But in the same breath, taking care not to let his hunger pangs become too obvious, and in order not to lose another second, he began, in concert with the Duchesse, to start introducing me to the guests. It was only then that I became aware (I, who until this evening – apart from my introductory spell in Mme Swann's salon – had been accustomed, in my mother's drawing-room in Combray or Paris, to the patronizing or defensive gaze of strait-laced bourgeois ladies who treated me as a child) of a change of surroundings comparable to Parsifal's sudden introduction to the world of the flower-maidens.[26] The flower-maidens who surrounded me now, in extremely low-cut gowns (their naked flesh appearing on either side of a twisting spray of mimosa or the broad petals of a rose), greeted me only with long, caressing glances, as though shyness alone held them back from kissing me. Which is not to say that the majority of them were not highly respectable, morally speaking; the majority, but not all, for even the more virtuous among them did not share the revulsion my mother would have felt towards those of easier virtue. In the Guermantes world, vagary of conduct, denied by saintly friends in the face of the evidence, seemed to matter much less than the maintenance of social relations. People feigned ignorance of their hostess's sexual availability, provided that there were no embarrassing omissions on her guest-list. Since the Duc paid little attention to his other guests (from whom he had long had no more to learn, and vice versa) but a great deal to me, whose particular brand of superiority was unfamiliar to him and inspired the sort of respect which the great noblemen at the court of Louis XIV used to feel for bourgeois ministers, he clearly considered that my not knowing the people present was a matter of no importance – to me, if not to them – and while I was worried, on his account, about the impression I might make on them, he was thinking only of the impression they would make on me.

And the very first thing that happened was a miniature twofold imbroglio. Indeed, no sooner than I had entered the drawing-room than M. de Guermantes, without even giving me the opportunity of paying my respects to the Duchesse, led me, as though he wanted to give a pleasant surprise to the person in question, to whom he seemed to be saying: 'Here's your friend; you see, I'm bringing him along by the scruff of his neck,' towards a lady of rather diminutive proportions. Well before the Duc had propelled me towards her, the large, soft, dark eyes of this lady had been turned in my direction, fixed upon me with the sort of knowing smile we address to an old friend who has perhaps not recognized us. Given that this was indeed the case with me and I could not remember for the life of me who she was, I averted my gaze as I moved towards her, in order not to have to respond until our introduction released me from the awkward situation. Meanwhile the lady continued to maintain in precarious balance the smile she was fixing upon me. She seemed eager to be relieved of it, and to hear me say: 'Ah, Madame, of course! How happy Mama will be to hear that we've met again!' I was as impatient to know her name as she was to see that I did greet her with every sign of recognition, so that her smile, after being indefinitely prolonged like some sustained musical note, might finally drop. But M. de Guermantes so mismanaged our introduction (or so it seemed to me) that I ended up with the impression that he had named only me and I was still left in ignorance as to the identity of this unknown friend I was supposed to know; nor did she have the good sense to name herself, so obvious did the grounds of our intimacy seem to her, however obscure they were to me. Indeed, as soon as I drew close, she did not offer me her hand, but clasped mine as if she had known me all her life, and spoke to me as if the happy memories to which her mind reverted were as much mine as hers. She told me how sorry Albert (her son, it seemed) would be not to have been present. I racked my brains for a school-friend called Albert and could think only of Bloch, but this could not be Bloch's mother since she had been dead for many years. I struggled in vain to imagine the past experience common to her and to me to which her thoughts were taking her back. But I could no more identify it through the jet-black translucence of the wide, soft pupils which allowed only her smile to pierce the surface, than one can distinguish a landscape from behind a pane of blackened glass, even when the sun is blazing on it. She asked me whether my father was not working too hard, if I would like to go with Albert to the theatre some time, if I was in better health, and as my replies fumbled through the mental darkness I found myself in and became distinct only when I explained that I was not feeling very well that evening, she drew up a chair for me herself, putting herself out in ways I had never known from other friends of my parents. The clue to my puzzlement was finally supplied by the Duc: 'She thinks you're charming,' he murmured in my ear. I somehow felt I had heard these words before. They were the words Mme de Villeparisis had spoken to my grandmother and myself after we had made the acquaintance of the Princess of Luxembourg. The situation was now clear to me: the present lady had nothing in common with Mme de Luxembourg, but from the words uttered by the man who had served her up to me, I recognized what sort of species of creature I was dealing with. Someone of royal blood. She had never once heard of my family or myself, but, as a daughter of the noblest race and someone with the greatest fortune in the world (she was the daughter of the Prince of Parma and had married an equally princely cousin), she was always anxious, out of gratitude to her Creator, to prove to her neighbour, however poor or humble he might be, that she did not look down on him. And indeed I ought to have guessed this from her way of smiling, for I had already observed this sort of behaviour when I saw the Princess of Luxembourg buying rye-bread rolls on the beach in Balbec to give to my grandmother, as though to a deer at the zoo. But this was only the second princess of royal blood to whom I had been presented, and I might have been excused for my failure to recognize in her the characteristic affability of the great. Besides, had not the great themselves gone out of their way to warn me not to overestimate this affability, since the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had gestured such lavish greetings to me at the Opéra, had looked so much askance when I acknowledged her in the street subsequently, like someone who has given a person a gold piece and feels that this releases her from any further obligation. As for M. de Charlus, his changes of mood were even more sharply contrasted. And as the reader will learn, I was later to know highnesses and majesties of a quite different sort, queens who play at being queens and speak not after the conventions of their kind, but like queens in Sardou's plays.[27]

If M. de Guermantes had been in so much haste to present me, it was because the presence of anyone not personally known to a royal personage is an intolerable state of affairs and must not continue for a second more than it has to. It was the same haste Saint-Loup had shown to be introduced to my grandmother. A further point: in a fragmentary survival of court life, known as social etiquette and which, far from being superficial, operates an outside-in reversal through which it is the surface that becomes essential and profound, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes saw it as their duty (more incumbent upon them, more inflexible than the duties of charity, chastity, pity and justice, which at least one of them all too often neglected) to make sure that when they addressed the Princess of Parma, they hardly ever did so other than in the third person.

As a compensation for the visit to Parma I had never made (and which I had wanted to make ever since certain Easter holidays well back in the past now), meeting its princess – who, I knew, owned the finest palazzo in that unique city where in fact everything must be homogeneous, isolated as it was from the rest of the world within its polished walls, in the atmosphere, stifling as an airless summer evening on the piazza of a small Italian town, of its dense and cloying name – ought to have brought about a sudden revelation, in place of what I had tried so long to imagine, of all that was real about Parma, in a sort of fragmentary arrival there without ever having made the journey; it was, in terms of the algebra of my journey to the city of Giorgione,[28] something like a simple equation with Parma as the unknown factor. But if for years now, like a perfumer adding fragrance to a solid block of fat, I had been drenching this name, Princess of Parma, with the scent of thousands of violets, my efforts were merely rewarded, when I set eyes on the Princess, who until then I would have sworn must be no less than La Sanseverina herself,[29] by the onset of a further process (not completed, let me say, until a few months later), which consisted in expelling, by means of fresh chemical additives, all the essential oil of violets and all the Stendhalian perfume from her name, and replacing them with the image of a little dark lady, bent on

good works, and so humbly amiable that it did not take more than a moment to sense the lofty pride from which such amiability stemmed. And while she was essentially similar to any other great lady, she was no more Stendhalian than, say, the rue de Parme in the Quartier del'Europe,[30] which bears far less resemblance to the name of Parma than it does to the other neighbouring streets and reminds one less of the Charterhouse in which Fabrice dies than of the concourse in the Gare Saint-Lazare.

There were two explanations for her amiability. The first and more general one was to do with the way this daughter of kings had been brought up. Her mother (not merely related to all the royal families of Europe but also – in contrast to the ducal house of Parma – richer than any reigning princess) had instilled into her from her earliest childhood the arrogantly humble precepts of an evangelical snobbery; with the result that every line of her daughter's face, the curve of her shoulders, the movements of her arms, seemed to repeat those precepts: 'Never forget that if God has caused you to be born on the steps of a throne you must not make that an excuse for looking down upon those to whom Divine Providence has willed (praise the Lord) that you should be superior by birth and fortune. On the contrary, you must be kind to those of humble station. Your ancestors were Princes of Cleves and Juliers from the year 647; God in his bounty has decreed that you should hold the vast majority of the shares in the Suez Canal and three times as many Royal Dutch as Edmond de Rothschild; your pedigree in a direct line had been established by genealogists from the year 63 of the Christian era; you have two empresses as sisters-in-law. So never speak to anyone as if you were mindful of these great privileges, not that they are unstable (for nothing can alter the antiquity of blood and the world will always need oil), but because it is unnecessary to draw attention to the fact that you are of nobler birth than others or that your investments are gilt-edged, since everyone knows this already. Support the needy. Give to all those whom the bounty of heaven has been gracious enough to put beneath you all that you can afford to give without debasing your rank, that is to say help in the form of money, even tending to the sick, but of course never any invitations to your receptions, which would do them no good and, by diminishing your prestige, would detract from the effectiveness of your good deeds.'

And so, even at times when she could not do good, the Princess endeavoured to make it plain, or rather to let it be thought, by a whole external play of sign-language, that she did not consider herself superior to the people she was with. She treated each of them with the charming politeness with which well-bred people treat their inferiors and was continually trying to oblige by pushing back her chair to make more room, holding my gloves, offering me all the helpful attention which a middle-class person would frown upon but which is willingly bestowed by sovereign ladies or, instinctively and out of professional habit, by trusty servants.

The other reason for the amiability shown me by the Princess of Parma was more specific, yet in no way dictated by some mysterious liking for me. But I did not have the opportunity to dwell on it at the time. For already the Duc, who seemed to be in a hurry to complete the round of introductions, had whisked me off to another of the flower-maidens. When I heard her name I mentioned that I had passed by her château, not far from Balbec. 'Oh, I should have been so delighted to show you round,' she replied almost in a whisper as though to emphasize her modesty, yet in a tone deliberately chosen to express her deep regret at the loss of an opportunity to enjoy so exceptional a pleasure, and she added with a meaningful look: 'I do so hope that another visit is not entirely out of the question. But I have to say that what would interest you even more is my aunt Brancas's château. It was built by Mansard[31] and it's the jewel of the area.' It was not only she herself who would have been happy to show me her place, but her aunt Brancas would have been no less delighted to do me the honours of hers, or so I was assured by this lady, who was evidently of the opinion that, especially at a time when the land looked like passing into the hands of financiers with their vulgar habits, it was important that the great should maintain the lofty traditions of lordly hospitality, by issuing promises which did not commit them to anything. It was also because she was anxious, like everyone else in her world, to say the things that would give most pleasure to the person she was addressing, to give him the highest idea of himself, to make him think that he flattered people by writing to them, that his hosts were honoured by his presence, that he was a most sought-after guest. The desire to give people this comforting picture of themselves does, it is true, sometimes exist even among the middle classes. They too can have the same amiable disposition, in the form of an individual quality compensating for some defect, if not, alas, in the case of the most reliable male friends among them, then at least in the most agreeable of the female ones. But with the middle classes, such a disposition flourishes only in isolated cases. In an important section of the aristocracy, on the contrary, this characteristic has ceased to be individual; cultivated by upbringing, sustained by the idea of a personal grandeur that need fear no humiliation, that knows no rival, realizes that affability can put people at their ease and is happy to be affable, it has become the generic feature of a class. And even those whose personal shortcomings are too contrary for them to feel it in their hearts bear the unconscious trace of it in their words or gestures.

'She's a very good-hearted woman,' said the Duc de Guermantes of the Princess of Parma, 'and she knows how to play the *grande dame* better than anyone.'

While I was being introduced to the ladies in the room, one of the gentlemen there had been showing constant signs of agitation: this was Comte Hannibal de Bréauté-Consalvi. Arriving late, he had not had time to find out who the other guests were, and when I entered the room, not recognizing me as a guest who was one of the Duchesse's regular circle and who must therefore have some extraordinary claim to admission, he settled his monocle beneath the vaulted arch of his eyebrow, in the firm belief that this would enable him to see what manner of man I was. He was aware that Mme de Guermantes had a 'salon' (the invaluable prerogative of really superior women), which meant that from time to time she added to the people of her own set some celebrity who had lately come into the public eye after discovering a new cure or producing a masterpiece. The Faubourg Saint-Germain had not yet recovered from the shock of learning that the Duchesse had not been afraid to invite M. Detaille[32] to the reception given for the King and Queen of England. The more intelligent women of the Faubourg were not easily consolable for not having been invited, so deliciously exciting would it have been to come into contact with that strange genius. Mme de Courvoisier claimed that M. Ribot[33] had also been of the party, but this was mere invention, designed to make people believe that Oriane was plotting an embassy for her husband. And to top it all, M. de Guermantes, with a gallantry that put him in the same league as the Maréchal de Saxe,[34] had presented himself at the stage-door of the Comédie-Française and begged Mlle de Reichenberg[35] to come and recite before the King, something she had duly done and which constituted an event without precedent in the long tradition of society receptions. As he recalled all these unexpected turns of event (and they had his entire approval, since he himself was an ornament to any salon and, in the same way as the Duchesse de Guermantes, but with the difference of gender, a figure who set the seal of distinction upon it) M. de Bréauté, when he asked himself who I could be, felt that the field of possibility was very wide. For an instant the name of M. Widor[36] passed through his mind, but he concluded that I was too young to be an organist, and M. Widor not sufficiently acclaimed to be received. It seemed more plausible to regard me simply as the new attaché at the Swedish Legation who had been mentioned to him, and he was preparing to enquire about King Oscar, by whom he had several times been very hospitably received; but by the time the Duc introduced me and gave my name, M. de Bréauté, even though the name was completely unknown to him, had decided that since I was there, I must be some sort of celebrity. It was utterly typical of Oriane, who had the knack of attracting to her salon men who were in the public eye; one of them to a hundred of her own of course, otherwise the tone would have been lowered. Satisfied on this point, M. de Bréauté began to lick his chops and to sniff the air hungrily, his appetite whetted not only by the certainty of a good dinner but by the character of the party, which my presence could not fail to make interesting and which would add spice to his table-talk next day when he went to luncheon at the Duc de Chartres's. He had not quite decided whether I was the man who had been making those experiments with a serum against cancer, or the author of the new 'curtain-raiser' currently in rehearsal at the Théâtre-Français, but, as a great intellectual, a great collector of 'travellers' tales', he kept constantly bowing in my direction, sending me signs of mutual understanding, smiles filtered through his monocle; either he had the mistaken notion that someone of distinction would esteem him more highly if he could manage to convey the illusion that for him, the Comte de Bréauté-Consalvi, the privileges of the mind were no less worthy of respect than those of birth, or he simply needed to express his satisfaction and found it difficult to do so, in his ignorance of the language in which he ought to address me; the overall impression was of someone who found himself face to face with one of the 'natives' of an undiscovered country on which his raft had

landed, from whom, in the hope of gain, he would endeavour, as he observed their customs with interest and made sure he maintained demonstrations of friendship by uttering loud cries of benevolence like themselves, to obtain ostrich eggs and spices in exchange for glass beads. Having responded as best I could to his joyous satisfaction, I went on to shake hands with the Duc de Châtellerault, whom I had already met at Mme de Villeparisis's and who remarked that she was a shrewd old bird. He was a Guermantes through and through with his fair hair, his aquiline profile, the skin blemishes on his cheeks, all of these traits of the Guermantes family portraits which have come down to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But since I was no longer in love with the Duchesse, her reincarnation in the features of a young man offered me no attraction. I read the hook in the Duc de Châtellerault's nose as the signature of a painter whose work I had long studied but who no longer interested me at all. I then said good evening also to the Prince de Foix and was rash enough to submit my knuckles to the vice-like grip of the Prince von Faffenheim's German handshake, accompanied by an ironical or good-natured smile, from which they emerged the worse for wear; this was M. de Norpois's friend, who, thanks to the craze for nicknames dominant in this circle, was known so universally as Prince Von that he himself would sign his letters 'Prince Von' or, when he was writing to his intimates, 'Von'. The abbreviation at least had the merit of being understandable, given his triple-barrelled name. It was less easy to understand the reasons for replacing 'Elizabeth' with 'Lili' or 'Bebeth', like the swarm of 'Kikis' that flourished in a very different social world. One can understand how people, idle and frivolous though they are in general, might have adopted 'Quiou' in order not to waste the time it would have taken to say 'Montesquiou.' But it is less easy to see what they gained by nicknaming one of their cousins 'Dinand' instead of 'Ferdinand.' It would none the less be wrong to suppose that in the invention of nicknames the Guermantes invariably proceeded by syllabic cuckoo-ing. For instance, two sisters, the Comtesse de Montpeyroux and the Vicomtesse de Vélude, both of them enormously fat women, were never known to be addressed, without the least trace of annoyance on their part or of amusement on anyone else's, so ingrained was the habit, as anything other than 'Petite' and 'Mignonne' respectively. Mme de Guermantes, who adored Mme de Montpeyroux, would, if the latter had been seriously ill, have asked her sister with tears in her eyes if 'Petite' was dreadfully poorly. Mme de l'Eclin, who parted her hair in the middle and brought it down to cover her ears entirely, was always known as 'Starving belly'.[37] Sometimes an *-a* was simply added to the surname or first name of the husband to designate the wife. For instance, the most miserly, most sordid, most inhuman man in the Faubourg was called Raphael; his charming lady, his flower springing also from the rock, always signed herself 'Raphaela'. But these are just a few specimens of the many many name-games to which we can always return if need be, and explain some of them.

I then asked the Duc to introduce me to the Prince d'Agrigente. 'You mean to tell me that you've not met our wonderful Gri-gri!' he exclaimed and gave M. d' Agrigente my name. The Prince's own, so often dropped by Françoise, had always seemed to me like a transparent sheet of glass, through which I could see, struck by the slanting rays of a golden sun, on the shore of the violet sea, the pink cubes of an ancient city of which I did not doubt that the Prince – who happened by some brief miracle to be passing through Paris – was himself the actual sovereign, as luminously Sicilian and shiny with age as the city itself. Alas, the vulgar bumbler to whom I was introduced and who wheeled round to bid me good evening with a heavy-handed nonchalance he mistook for elegance, was as remote from his name as he was from a work of art he might have owned without betraying any reflection of it, or without ever having looked at it. The Prince d'Agrigente was so entirely devoid of anything princely, anything remotely reminiscent of Agrigento, that one began to imagine that it was his name alone, utterly distinct from himself, bound in no way to his person, that had been able to draw into itself anything vaguely poetic there might have been about this man, as about any other, and then to have imprisoned it in its magic syllables. If such a process had occurred, then it had done so most successfully, for there remained not an atom of charm to be elicited from this kinsman of the Guermantes. With the result that he found himself at one and the same time the only man in the world who was the Prince d'Agrigente and of all the men in the world the one who was perhaps least so. For all that, he was very happy to be what he was, but as a banker is happy to hold a number of shares in a mine, without caring whether the mine answers to the charming name of Ivanhoe or Primrose or is simply called Mine Number One. These introductions have taken so long to recount, but in fact they only lasted a few moments after my entry into the room; as they were drawing to a close, and Mme de Guermantes was saying to me in an almost imploring voice: 'I'm sure Basin is tiring you out, dragging you around from person to person; we want you to meet our friends, but we are particularly anxious not to tire you. We so much want you to come again often,' the Duc, with a somewhat awkward and timorous gesture, gave the signal (which he would gladly have given at any point during the hour I had spent with the Elstirs) for dinner to be served.

I should mention that one of the guests was still missing, M. de Grouchy, whose wife, née Guermantes, had arrived on her own, her husband being due to come straight from the country, where he had been shooting all day. This M. de Grouchy, a descendant of the First Empire Grouchy, of whom it has been falsely said that his absence at the start of the Battle of Waterloo was the principal cause of Napoleon's defeat, came from an excellent family, though not excellent enough for those obsessed with blue blood. Thus the Duc de Guermantes, who was to prove less fastidious about such matters in later life in regard to himself, was in the habit of saying to his nieces: 'What a misfortune for that poor Mme de Guermantes (the Vicomtesse de Guermantes, Mme de Grouchy's mother) that she has never succeeded in marrying off any of her children. – But, uncle, the eldest girl married M. de Grouchy. – I don't call that a husband! But it seems that your uncle François has proposed to the youngest one, so perhaps they won't all be left to live as old maids.'

No sooner had the order to serve dinner been given than with a vast gyratory swish, multiple and simultaneous, the double doors of the dining-room swung open; a butler who looked like a court chamberlain bowed before the Princess of Parma to announce: '*Madame est servie*', in the same tone of voice he would have used to say 'Madame is in her death throes'; this, however, did nothing to cast gloom over the party, for it was with the sprightly air of summer frolics at Robinson[38] that the couples advanced behind each other towards the dining-room, separating only when they reached their places and the footmen settled them in their seats; last of all, Mme de Guermantes advanced towards me to be taken in to dinner, without my feeling the least shadow of possible timidity, for, like a huntress whose great muscular dexterity has given her a natural grace of movement, and no doubt observing that I had placed myself on the wrong side of her, she pivoted round me so skilfully that I found her arm resting on my own and fell quite naturally into her rhythm of precise and noble deportment. I yielded to this all the more readily because the Guermantes attached no more importance to it than a truly learned man does to his learning, with the result that one is less intimidated in his company than in that of an ignoramus; other doors swung open to admit the steaming soup, as though the dinner were taking place in an artfully contrived puppet-theatre, where, at a signal from the puppet-master, the late arrival of the young guest set all the machinery in motion.

The signal from the Duc which had set in motion that vast, ingenious, obedient and sumptuous human clockwork had been timid, not majestically imposing. As far as I was concerned, the indecisiveness of the gesture did not detract from the effect of the spectacle it commanded. For I sensed that what had made it hesitant and uneasy was the fear of letting me see that they had been waiting only for me to begin dinner and that they had been waiting for a long time, in the same way that Mme de Guermantes was afraid that, after looking at so many pictures, a continuous flow of introductions would tire me out and prevent me from relaxing in their company. So that it was the absence of grandeur in this gesture that disclosed the Duc's true grandeur and his indifference to the splendour of his surroundings, his consideration for a guest, however insignificant, whom he wished to honour. It was not that there was anything particularly extraordinary about M. de Guermantes in many ways, nor that he was exempt from the absurd foibles of a man with too much money and from the arrogance one would expect from an upstart, which he certainly was not. But just as a public official or a priest sees his own humble talents multiplied to infinity (as a wave is by the whole mass of sea behind it) by the forces that stand behind him, the machinery of French Government or the Catholic Church, so M. de Guermantes was carried along by that other force, the genteel manners of the aristocracy in their truest form. This courteous gentility excluded a great many people. Mme de Guermantes would have not have admitted Mme de Cambremer or M. de Forcheville to her society. But the moment that anyone appeared eligible for admission to the Guermantes circle (as was the case with me), this courtesy disclosed a wealth of hospitable simplicity more splendid still, if such a thing is possible, than those historic rooms and their marvellous furniture.

When he wished to give pleasure to someone, by skilfully turning to advantage the particular circumstances and place, M. de Guermantes saw to it that the person in question felt he was the centre of attention. No doubt at Guermantes his 'distinctions' and 'favours' would have assumed another form. He would have ordered his carriage to take me for a drive alone with himself before dinner. Such as they were, there was something touching about his attentions, as there is, when one reads the memoirs of the period, about the courtesy of Louis XIV when he responds in a kindly manner, with a smile and slight bow, to someone who has come to solicit his favour. At the same time, we need to bear in mind that, in both instances, such politeness did not extend beyond the strict sense of the word.

Louis XIV (much as he is reproached for his scant regard for etiquette by those of his contemporaries who were obsessed with true nobility, so much so that, according to Saint-Simon, he ranked very low as a king beside Philippe de Valois, Charles V and the like) had the most meticulous instructions drawn up in order that princes of the blood and ambassadors should know to what sovereigns they ought to give precedence. In certain cases, when agreement cannot be reached, a compromise solution is provided: the son of Louis XIV, Monseigneur, will receive such and such a sovereign out of doors, in the open, so that it may not be said that in entering the palace one of them had preceded the other; and the Elector Palatine, entertaining the Duc de Chevreuse to dinner, in order not to let his guest take precedence, pretends to be taken ill and dines with him lying down, thus solving the difficulty. When Monsieur le Duc avoids the occasions when he must wait upon Monsieur, the latter, on the advice of the King, his brother, who is deeply attached to him, finds some excuse for making his cousin attend his levee and forcing him to put on the royal shirt. But as soon as deeper feelings are involved, matters of the heart, this sort of duty, so inflexible when etiquette alone prevails, changes entirely. A few hours after the death of this brother, one of the people he loved most dearly, when Monsieur was 'still warm' (as the Duc de Montfort puts it), Louis XIV is to be found singing tunes from operas, amazed that the Duchesse de Bourgogne, who can scarcely conceal her grief, should be looking so melancholy, and, in an attempt to restore gaiety to his court at once, ordering the Duc de Bourgogne to start a game of *brelan* in order to get his courtiers back to the card-tables. Now, M. de Guermantes showed a similar contrast, not only in his social and more public activities, but in his most spontaneous utterances, his preoccupations, his daily routine: the Guermantes were no more prone to grief than other mortals, and it could even be said that they were really less sensitive to it; yet one saw their names every day in the social columns of the *Gaulois* on account of the incredible number of funerals at which they would have felt it culpable not to have their presence recorded. Like a traveller discovering the almost identical turf-roofed houses and the terraces which may have greeted the eyes of Xenophon or St Paul, I discovered still intact after two centuries in the manners of M. de Guermantes, a man of touching kindness and unspeakable inflexibility, a slave to the most petty obligations yet not to the most sacred commitments, the same aberration that typified court life under Louis XIV, which removes scruples of conscience from the domain of the affections and morality and transforms them into questions of pure form.

Another reason for the friendliness shown me by the Princess of Parma, a more specific one again, was that she was convinced beforehand that everything she saw at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, people and things alike, was superior to anything she had herself. It is true that she behaved in the same way at everyone else's house; the simplest dish, the most ordinary flowers sent her into raptures, and she would ask if she might send round her head cook or head gardener the next morning to copy out the recipe or to examine the species of flower in question, to the chagrin of both cook and gardener, who were highly paid, kept their own carriages and, more importantly, jealously guarded their professional reputations; they found it deeply humiliating to have to come and inquire about a dish they despised or to adopt a variety of carnation that was not half as fine or as variegated, did not produce as large a blossom as the ones they had long been growing for the Princess. But if, on the one hand, her astonishment at the sight of the most ordinary things was contrived and intended to show that her superior rank and riches did not spur her to the arrogant pride forbidden by her early instructors, masked by her mother and intolerable in the eyes of her Creator, on the other, she regarded the Duchesse de Guermantes's drawing-room, in all sincerity, as a privileged place in which she could move only from surprise to delight. The Guermantes were certainly different from the rest of society (they were more precious and rare), but not enough to justify such a reaction. My first impression of them had been quite the opposite; I had found them very ordinary, just like anyone else, but this was because before actually meeting them I had seen them, as I saw Balbec, Florence and Parma, as magical names. And of course all the women in this drawing-room, whom I had imagined as Dresden figures, turned out to be like the great majority of women. But, in the same way as Balbec or Florence, the Guermantes, after initially disappointing the imagination by having more in common with the rest of humanity than with their name, were subsequently capable, though to a lesser degree, of presenting various distinctive characteristics as food for thought. Their actual physique, the colour (a peculiar pink merging at times into purple) of their skin, a particular sort of almost luminous, fine blond hair, even in the men, massed in soft, golden tufts, half-way between wall lichen and cats' fur (a strikingly bright feature which went hand in hand with a certain intellectual brightness, for if people spoke of a Guermantes complexion, Guermantes hair, they also spoke of Guermantes wit, as of the wit of the Mortemart family – a certain social quality of superior refinement dating back well before Louis XIV and all the more widely recognized in that they promulgated it themselves), all this meant that in the very core material, however precious it might be, of the aristocratic society in which they were to be found embedded here and there, the Guermantes remained recognizable, easy to detect and to follow, like the streaks of paleness in jasper and onyx, or better still, like the supple waves of the tresses of light whose unbraided hairs run like flexible rays inside moss-agate.

The Guermantes – those at least who were worthy of the name – were not only graced with an exquisite quality of flesh, of hair, of limpid gaze, but had a way of holding themselves, of walking, of bowing, of looking at you before shaking your hand, which made them as different in all these respects from any ordinary member of fashionable society as he himself was from a peasant in a smock. And despite their affability one was apt to think: 'Is it not true that they have the right, though they do not show it, when they see us walk, bow, leave a room, or do any of the things which, when done by them, become as graceful as the flight of a swallow or a swaying rose, to think: "These people are of a different breed from us, and we are the princes of the universe"?' Later on, I realized that the Guermantes did indeed think of me as belonging to a different breed, but one that aroused their envy because I possessed merits of which I was unaware and which they professed to regard as the only things that mattered. Later still I came to feel that this profession of faith was only half sincere and that in their responses to things admiration and envy went hand in hand with scorn and astonishment. The bodily flexibility peculiar to the Guermantes was twofold: on the one hand it was always in action, at every moment, so that if, for example, a male of the Guermantes species were about to bow to a lady, he offered a silhouette of himself in which there was a precarious balance between asymmetry of movement and nervous attempt to compensate for it, one leg dragging a little, either deliberately or because it had been broken so often in the hunting-field that, in its effort to keep pace with the other leg, it caused a slump in the trunk of the body which was counterpoised by the upward thrust of one shoulder, while the monocle was inserted in the eye to raise the eyebrow just as the tuft of hair on the forehead fell forward in the bowing movement; on the other hand, like the shape which wave, wind or wake have permanently bequeathed to a shell or a boat, the other manifestation of this flexibility was, so to speak, stylized into a sort of fixed mobility, curving the arched nose which, beneath the blue, protruding eyes, above the over-thin lips from which, in the women, there emerged a husky voice, recalled the legendary origin fawningly attributed in the sixteenth century by parasitic and Hellenizing genealogists to this family, ancient beyond question, but not to the extent they claimed when they gave as its source the mythological coupling of a nymph and a divine Bird.

The Guermantes were no less odd from the intellectual than from the physical point of view. Apart from Prince Gilbert (the husband of 'Marie-Gilbert', a man of antiquated ideas, who made his wife sit on his left when they went out in their carriage because her blood, though royal, was inferior to his own, and who was in any case an exception, a laughing-stock to the rest of his family when he was not present and the butt of endlessly invented anecdotes), the Guermantes, while they moved among the cream of the aristocracy, affected to set no store by nobility. The theories of the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, admittedly, by virtue of being a Guermantes, had become something rather different and more appealing, set intelligence so far above everything else and were so socialist politically that one wondered where in her mansion the genie in charge of the aristocratic way of life had room to hide; always invisible, yet clearly lurking about the place, in the entrance hall, in the drawing-room, in her dressing-room, this genie reminded the servants of this woman who did not believe in titles to address her as 'Madame

la Duchesse', and reminded the woman herself, who cared only for reading and was no respecter of persons, to go out to dinner with her sister-in-law when the clock struck eight, and to put on a low-cut dress for the occasion.

The same family genie presented Mme de Guermantes with a picture of the social duties of duchesses (or at least of the grandest among them who like herself were also multi-millionaires), of hours sacrificed to boring tea-parties, society dinners and festivities, when they might have been spent reading interesting books, as tiresome necessities comparable to rainy days and to which Mme de Guermantes acquiesced with a sparkle of rebellious humour, but without going so far as to examine the reasons for her acquiescence. Yet the curious coincidence by which Mme de Guermantes's butler addressed her always as 'Mme la Duchesse' did not appear to shock this woman who believed only in the intellect. It never occurred to her to ask him to address her simply as 'Madame'. Giving her the utmost benefit of the doubt, it was just credible that absent-mindedness caused her to catch only the word 'Madame' and that the other words appended to it passed unheard. But though she might feign deafness, she was not dumb. And of course, whenever she had a message to give to her husband, she would say to the butler: 'Remind Monsieur le Duc…'

The family genie had other functions as well, one of which was to prompt them to hold forth on morality. It is true that there were Guermantes who cultivated intellect and Guermantes who cultivated morals, and the two tendencies were usually distinct. But the former – including a Guermantes who had forged cheques, who cheated at cards and was the most delightful of them all, open to every new and plausible idea – had more intelligent things to say about morals than the latter, and in the same mode as Mme de Villeparisis, when the family genie chose to express itself through the lips of the old lady. When it expressed itself through them, you would suddenly find the Guermantes adopting a tone almost as antiquated, as good-natured, and (because of their superior charm) more touching than that of the Marquise, to say of a servant: 'One feels that she is basically very sound, not at all a common girl; she must come from a decent family, a girl who's never got into trouble, certainly.' At such moments the family genie displayed itself as a tone of voice. But at times it manifested itself in a person's bearing too, in facial expression, the same in the Duchesse as in her grandfather the Maréchal, a sort of mercurial convulsion (like that of the Serpent, the genius of the Carthaginian Barca family) [39] which had more than once made my heart jump on those morning walks of mine when, before I had recognized Mme de Guermantes, I could feel her eyes fixed upon me from inside a small cheesemonger's. This genie had intervened in a situation which was far from insignificant not merely for the Guermantes but for the Courvoisiers, a rival branch of the family and, though from as noble stock as the Guermantes (it was in fact to his Courvoisier grandmother that the Guermantes attributed the strong bias shown by the Prince de Guermantes to speak of birth and titles as the only things that mattered), their opposite in every sense. Not only did the Courvoisiers not assign to intelligence the same importance as the Guermantes, they had a different notion of what it was. For a Guermantes (even a stupid one), to be intelligent meant to have a scathing tongue, to be capable of making tart comments, of not taking no for an answer; it also meant the ability to hold one's own in painting, music and architecture alike, and to speak English. The Courvoisiers had a less exalted notion of intelligence and, unless one belonged to their world, being intelligent came near to meaning 'having probably murdered one's parents'. For them intelligence was the sort of burglar's jemmy by means of which people one did not know from Adam forced their way in to the most distinguished salons, and the Courvoisiers knew to their cost that you always ended up rueing the day you allowed people of 'that sort' into your circle. The most trivial statements made by intelligent people outside the 'society' world met with the Courvoisiers' systematic distrust. When someone once happened to remark: 'But Swann is younger than Palamède,' Mme de Gallardon had retorted: 'That's what *he* told you and coming from him, you may be sure it's in his interest to have said so.' Better still, when someone remarked, in relation to two highly distinguished foreign ladies whom the Guermantes were entertaining, that one of them had been received first because she was the elder, Mme de Gallardon had enquired: 'But is she really the elder?', not in a positive manner indicating that such persons did not have an age, but as if they were in all likelihood devoid of any civil or religious status, any familiar mould, and were therefore more or less of an age, like two kittens from the same litter which only a veterinary surgeon would be able to distinguish from each other. Yet in a sense, the Courvoisiers, more than the Guermantes, preserved the integrity of the titled class, through both the narrowness of their minds and the malevolence of their hearts. Just as the Guermantes (for whom, below the royal families and a few others like the Lignes, the La Trémoïlles and their kind, all the others were a vague jumble of small fry) were insolent towards people of ancient stock who lived in the vicinity of Guermantes, precisely because they paid no attention to the second-rate qualities so prized by the Courvoisiers, so the absence of such qualities was of little matter in their eyes. Certain women who did not enjoy a particularly exalted rank in their native provinces but had made brilliant marriages and were rich, pretty, the darlings of duchesses, became highly desirable, elegant imports in Paris, where people are never particularly awake to who one's 'father and mother' were. It might even happen, though this was rare, that such women were received, through the good offices of the Princess of Parma, or by virtue of their own attractions, by certain members of the Guermantes family. But the indignation with which the Courvoisiers regarded them was relentless. To meet with such people between five and six in the afternoon at their cousin's, people with whose relatives their own did not care to be seen associating at home in the Perche, became a growing source of rage and endless ranting. For instance, the minute the charming Comtesse G*** entered the Guermantes drawing-room, Mme de Villebon's face assumed exactly the expression required of it had she been compelled to recite the line:

Et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là,[40]

a line which, as it happened, was unknown to her. Almost every Monday, this Courvoisier had tucked into cream-stuffed éclairs within a few feet of the Comtesse G***, but to no consequence. And Mme de Villebon confessed in secret that she was at a loss to understand how her cousin Guermantes could receive into her society a woman who, in Châteaudun, did not belong even to the ranks of the second-best. 'Why my cousin should be so particular about whom she knows, I really can't imagine – what *does* she think she's about!' was Mme de Villebon's conclusion, accompanied by a change of facial expression, this time smilingly sardonic in its exasperation, which, in a game of charades, would have merited another line of verse, no more familiar to her than the first:

Grâce aux dieux! Mon malheur passe mon espérance.[41]

And let us anticipate events to comment that the *persévérance* (which rhymes with *espérance* in the following line) shown by Mme de Villebon in snubbing Mme G*** was not entirely without its effect. In the eyes of Mme G*** it endowed Mme de Villebon with a distinction so exalted (and so imaginary) that when the time came for Mme G***'s daughter, the prettiest girl and the wealthiest one too in the ball-rooms of that season, to marry, people were astonished to see her turn down a whole string of dukes. And this was because her mother, remembering the weekly humiliations she had to endure in the rue de Grenelle in memory of Châteaudun, could conceive of only one possible husband for her daughter – a Villebon son.

A single point at which the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers converged was the art – and such a various art it is – of keeping one's distance. The Guermantes way of doing this was not entirely uniform throughout the family. And yet, to take an example, all of them, all those who were true Guermantes, that is, when you were introduced to them, indulged in a kind of ceremony, almost as though by holding out their hands to you they were performing an act as weighty as conferring a knighthood upon you. The moment he heard your name uttered by the person introducing you, a Guermantes, even a twenty-year-old Guermantes, but treading already in the footsteps of his elders, let fall upon you, as though he had not made up his mind to acknowledge you, a gaze which was generally blue and always as cold as a steel blade seemingly destined to plunge into the deepest recesses of your heart. And this is just what the Guermantes imagined themselves to be doing, since they all regarded themselves as first-class psychologists. They also felt that this inspection intensified the affability of the greeting which was to follow it and would not be delivered without a shrewd idea of your worth. All this occurred at a distance from yourself which would have been too close for a passage of arms, but seemed immense for a hand-shake and was as chilling in the latter case as it would have been in the former, so that when the Guermantes in question, after a lightning tour of the last hiding-places of your soul and your integrity, had deemed you worthy to consort with him in future, his

hand, directed towards you at the end of an arm stretched out to its full length, seemed to be presenting a rapier for single combat, and the hand was in fact placed so far in front of the Guermantes himself at that moment that when he proceeded to bow his head it was difficult to distinguish whether it was yourself or his own hand he was acknowledging. Some of the Guermantes who lacked any sense of moderation or were incapable of refraining from repeating themselves incessantly, went even further and repeated this ceremony every time they met you. Given that they had no further need to proceed with the preliminary psychological scrutiny for which the 'family genie' had delegated its powers to them and whose findings they had presumably kept in mind, the persistence of the delving gaze preceding the handshake could be explained only in terms of an automatic reflex the gaze had acquired or by some hypnotic power they believed themselves to possess. The Courvoisiers, whose physique was different, had tried in vain to adopt the same penetrating gaze and had been forced to fall back upon a haughty starchiness or a hurried offhandedness. On the other hand, it was from the Courvoisiers that a rare handful of Guermantes women seemed to have borrowed the feminine form of greeting. So that when you were presented to one of them, she made you a sweeping bow in which she carried towards you, almost at an angle of forty-five degrees, her head and bust, while the rest of her body (which was very tall) up to the pivot-point of her belt remained stationary. But no sooner had she projected the upper part of her person towards you in this way than she thrust it backwards beyond the vertical in a brusque withdrawal of roughly equal length. This subsequent reversal neutralized what seemed to have been conceded to you, the ground you believed yourself to have gained did not even remain with you as in a duel, the original positions were retained. The same annulment of affability through retreat into distance (originating with the Courvoisiers and intended to show that the initial advances made were no more than a momentary feint) was equally evident in the letters you received from ladies of both the Courvoisier and Guermantes families, and particularly in the early days of acquaintance with them. The 'body' of the letter might contain the sort of things you would be likely to write only to a friend, but you would have been hard put to it to see yourself as a friend of the lady in question, since the letter would open with: '*Monsieur*' and end with '*Croyez, Monsieur, à mes sentiments distingués*'. Yet between this cold opening and the icy formula of conclusion which altered the meaning of everything else, there might (if it were in answer to a letter of condolence) be a series of the most touching accounts of the grief experienced by the Guermantes lady at the loss of her sister, of the closeness that had existed between them, of the beauty of the place where she was staying, of the consolation she derived from her delightful grandchildren, in short it was simply a letter such as one finds in printed collections, the intimate character of which implied no more intimacy between yourself and the writer than if she had been Pliny the Younger or Mme de Simiane.[42]

It is true that certain Guermantes ladies wrote to you from the first as 'My dear friend', or 'Dear friend': and these were not inevitably the most unaffected of them, but rather those who, living among kings and being at the same time women of 'easy virtue', assumed in their pride the certainty that everything that came from them gave pleasure and in their corruption the habit of not grudging you any of the satisfactions they had to offer. Yet since to have had a common great-great-grandmother in the reign of Louis XIII was enough for a young Guermantes to be able to refer to the Marquise de Guermantes as 'Aunt Adam', the Guermantes were so numerous that even in simple rituals, like the form of salutation given to a new-comer for example, they had a whole repertory of different forms. Each sub-group of any refinement had its own ritual and it was handed down from parents to children like a recipe for a healing poultice or a special way of making jam. Thus we have seen Saint-Loup ready to unleash his hand-shake in an almost involuntary gesture as soon as he heard one's name, without any concomitant eye movement, without any additional form of greeting. Any unfortunate commoner who happened to be presented to a member of the Saint-Loup sub-group for some particular reason – though this rarely occurred – would scratch his head over this abrupt and minimal greeting with its deliberately adopted stance of non-recognition, wondering what it was that this Guermantes (male or female) had against him. And he would be mightily surprised to learn that the Guermantes in question had thought fit to make a special point of writing to the person responsible for introducing them in order to tell him how delighted he or she had been with the stranger and what a pleasure it would be to meet him again. As idiosyncratic as this mechanical gesture of Saint-Loup was the rush of complicated hopping and skipping practised by the Marquis de Fierbois (condemned as ludicrous by M. de Charlus) or the gravely measured paces of the Prince de Guermantes. But given the sheer size of the corps de ballet involved, it is not possible to describe here the richness of this Guermantes choreography.

To return to the lively antipathy which set the Courvoisiers against the Duchesse de Guermantes, the former might have had the consolation of feeling sorry for her so long as she was still unmarried, for at that stage of her life she was by no means wealthy. Unfortunately, a sort of smoky haze of its own peculiar kind had always enveloped and concealed from view the wealth of the Courvoisiers, which, however great it might be, remained obscure. If an extremely wealthy daughter of the Courvoisier family married very advantageously, it did her little good; it was invariably the case that the young couple had no house of their own in Paris, would 'descend on' their in-laws there, and spend the rest of the year in the provinces in the midst of a society that was unadulterated but dull. While Saint-Loup, who had almost nothing to his name but debts, dazzled Doncières with his carriages and horses, a Courvoisier who was rolling in money always took the tram. And (though many years earlier, of course) a Guermantes of the opposite sex, Mlle de Guermantes (Oriane), who had hardly a penny, created more of a stir by the way she dressed than all the Courvoisiers put together. The very outrageousness of her remarks was a sort of advertisement for her style of dressing and doing her hair. She had had the audacity to say to the Russian Grand Duke: 'Well, sir, it seems that you would like to have Tolstoy assassinated?' at a dinner-party to which none of the Courvoisiers, who knew next to nothing about Tolstoy, had been invited. They knew even less about the Greek authors, if we may judge by the example of the Dowager Duchesse de Gallardon (mother-in-law of the Princess de Gallardon, herself a young girl at the time), whom Oriane had not honoured with a single visit in all of five years, replying to someone who had asked why Oriane failed to put in an appearance: 'It seems that she recites Aristotle (meaning Aristophanes) in society. I won't have that sort of thing in my house!'

One can imagine how greatly this 'sally' by Mme de Guermantes on the subject of Tolstoy, if it infuriated the Courvoisiers, commanded the admiration of the Guermantes and, beyond them, everyone who was not merely closely but even remotely attached to them. The Dowager Comtesse d'Argencourt, née Seineport, who received almost everyone because she was a blue-stocking and in the face of her son's terrible snobbery, passed on the remark to her literary friends with the comment: 'You know, Oriane de Guermantes is as sharp as a needle and clever as a monkey, a widely gifted woman who produces water-colours worthy of a great painter and better poetry than most great poets; and she couldn't come from a better family: her grandmother was Mlle de Montpensier, and she's the eighteenth Oriane de Guermantes, without any misalliance; it's the purest, the oldest blood in the whole of France.' And so the bogus men of letters, the half-baked intellectuals entertained by Mme d'Argencourt, picturing Oriane de Guermantes, whom they would never have the opportunity of knowing personally, as something more wonderful and more extraordinary than the princess Bedr-el-Budur,[43] not only felt ready to die for her when they learned that so noble a person worshipped Tolstoy above all others, but also felt their minds renewed with fresh strength in their love of Tolstoy, in their will to resist Tsarism. These liberal ideas of theirs might well have become enfeebled, they might have begun to doubt the superiority of them, no longer daring to confess to them, when suddenly along came Mme de Guermantes herself, that is to say a girl of such unmistakable culture and authority, who wore her hair flat on her forehead (something no Courvoisier would ever have dreamed of doing), and gave them this strong boost. A certain number of things, good or bad in themselves, gain enormously in this way by receiving the support of people who have authority over us. For instance, among the Courvoisiers, the rituals of civil behaviour in the street consisted in a certain manner of greeting people, very unbecoming and far from civil in itself, which was nevertheless recognized as the distinguished way of bidding someone good-day, with the result that everyone else, effacing their natural smiles of greeting, forced themselves to imitate these frigid gymnastics. But the Guermantes in general and Oriane in particular, even though they were thoroughly conversant with these rituals, did not hesitate, if they caught sight of you from a carriage, to greet you with a friendly wave, and in a drawing-room, leaving the Courvoisiers to give their stiff, self-conscious bows, they themselves bowed in the most charming way, held out their hands as though to an old friend with a smile in their blue eyes, so that suddenly, thanks to the Guermantes, the substance of stylish manners, previously rather dry and empty, was enhanced with everything that people would have naturally wished it to be but had forced themselves to shut out, a true welcome, an expression of genuine friendliness, something spontaneous. In a similar fashion, but by a process of rehabilitation which in this case is less easy to justify, people who are most prone to an instinctive taste for bad music and for tunes, however trite, which have something easy and alluring about them,

manage to stifle this penchant of theirs by schooling themselves in symphonic music. But once they have arrived at this point, when they find a musician like Richard Strauss, whose dazzling orchestral palette they quite rightly admire, adopting the most vulgar motifs with an indulgence worthy of Auber, the original preferences of these people in the hands of so high an authority suddenly find a justification which delights them, and when they listen to *Salomé* they have no qualms about going into ecstasies, and with a twofold gratitude, about the sort of thing it would now be inadmissible for them to enjoy in *Les Diamants de la Couronne*.[44]

Whether it was authentic or not, Mlle de Guermantes's heckling remark to the Grand Duke, peddled from house to house, provided an opportunity to talk about the excessive elegance of Oriane's style of dress at the dinner-party in question. But if such splendour (and this is precisely what made it inaccessible to the Courvoisiers) springs not from wealth but from extravagance, then the latter nevertheless lasts longer if it is supported by the former, which allows it to come fully into its own with all lights ablaze. Now, given the principles openly paraded not only by Oriane but by Mme de Villeparisis, namely that nobility is of no importance, that it is ridiculous to concern oneself with rank, that money does not mean happiness, that intellect, feeling, talent are the only things that matter, the Courvoisiers were justified in hoping that, as a result of the formative influence of the Marquise, Oriane would marry someone who was not a society figure, an artist, a former criminal, a tramp, a free thinker, and that she would join the ranks, for good and all, of people the Courvoisiers referred to as having gone 'wildly astray'. Their expectation was all the more justified because Mme de Villeparisis, who was at that time experiencing an awkward crisis socially (none of the brilliant personalities I was to meet in her salon had at that point started to frequent it again), made no bones about displaying her intense horror of the society which excluded her. Even when she spoke of her nephew, the Prince de Guermantes, whom she did still see, she could not taunt him enough for his infatuation with his noble birth. But the moment it became a matter of finding a husband for Oriane, the operation was no longer guided by the principles paraded by aunt and niece, but by the mysterious 'family genie'. As unerringly as if Mme de Villeparisis and Oriane had never discussed anything but sources of income and family pedigrees as opposed to matters of literary quality and evaluation of character, and as if for a few days the Marquise had been – as she would be in the end – dead and lying in her coffin in the Combray church, where each member of the family became simply a Guermantes, devoid of individuality and first names (as attested by the single *G* in purple surmounted by the ducal coronet on the extensive black pall), it was on the wealthiest and the most nobly born, on the most eligible man in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on the eldest son of the Duc de Guermantes, the Prince des Laumes, that the family genie had directed the sights of the intellectual, the defiant, the evangelical Mme de Villeparisis. And for two hours, on the day of the wedding, Mme de Villeparisis was at home to all the noble persons she was accustomed to pour scorn upon and whom she did scorn in the company of the few close middle-class friends she had invited and among whom the Prince des Laumes immediately left his visiting-card, only to sever connections with them the following year. And as a final disaster as far as the Courvoisiers were concerned, the same maxims about intellect and talent as the sole markers of social superiority began to be trotted out once again in the household of the Princess des Laumes immediately after her marriage. And in this respect, incidentally, the attitude maintained by Saint-Loup when he was living with Rachel, frequenting friends of Rachel and hoping to marry Rachel, whatever horror it provoked in the family, was less fraught with falsehood than that of the Guermantes young misses in general, in the way they sang the praises of the intellect, barely allowing the possibility that anyone could cast doubt upon the equality of mankind, all of which led, when it came to the point, to the same result as if they had clung to the opposite principles, which is to say to marrying an extremely wealthy duke. Saint-Loup, on the contrary, acted on what he believed, which led people to say that he was heading for a sorry downfall. Certainly, from a moral standpoint, Rachel left a lot to be desired. But it is by no means certain, had she been no better than what she was but had ranked as a duchess or millionairess, that Mme de Marsantes would not have been in favour of the match.

However, to return to Mme de Laumes (shortly afterwards, on the death of her father-in-law, to become the Duchesse de Guermantes), it was an added disaster for the Courvoisiers that the theories of the young Princesse, by remaining confined to her speech, should in no way have guided her conduct; for this philosophy (if this is what we are to call it) did absolutely nothing to detract from the elegance of the Guermantes salon. No doubt all those who were not received by Mme de Guermantes imagined that it was because they were not clever enough, and there was a rich American lady who had never owned a single book apart from an ancient little copy, never opened, of Parny's poems,[45] set in place on one of the tables in her small drawing-room because it belonged to the same period as the furniture, whose way of showing what store she set by the things of the mind was to rivet her gaze on to the Duchesse when the latter made her appearance at the Opéra. And again, no doubt Mme de Guermantes was sincere when she singled out someone on account of their intelligence. When she said of a woman: 'It seems she's quite charming,' or of a man that he was 'one of the cleverest people alive', she imagined herself to have no other reason for admitting them to her circle than the charm or the intelligence in question, unless the family genie intervened at the last moment; deeper under the surface, at the dark entrance to the domain where the Guermantes exercised their judgment, this vigilant genie debarred them from finding this man clever or that woman charming if they were without social merit, actual or potential. The man was pronounced learned, but in the sense that a dictionary is learned, or, on the contrary, as common, with the mind of a commercial traveller, the woman pretty, but with an appalling sense of style or too talkative. As for the people of indeterminate social status, they were just too dreadful – and what snobs they were! M. de Bréauté, whose country house was very near Guermantes, consorted with no one below the rank of Highness. But he was utterly unaffected by all that and longed only to spend his time in museums. And so when anyone described M. de Bréauté as a snob, Mme de Guermantes became indignant. 'Babal a snob! But my dear man, you must have taken leave of your senses; he's just the opposite. He loathes smart people. He won't let himself be introduced to any of them. Even in my house! If I invite him along with someone he doesn't know, he'll come, but he never stops grumbling about it.'

This is not to say that, even in practice, the Guermantes did not attribute a great deal more value to intelligence than the Courvoisiers. In a positive sense, the difference between the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers in this respect had already begun to bear very promising fruit. For example, the Duchesse de Guermantes, enveloped moreover in a mystery which had set so many poets dreaming from afar, had given the ball I have already mentioned, at which the King of England had never enjoyed himself so much ever before, for she had had the idea, which would never have occurred to any Courvoisier, and the audacity, which would have daunted the courage of all the Courvoisiers put together, of inviting, apart from the personages referred to earlier, the musician Gaston Lemaire and the dramatist Grandmougin.[46] But these intellectual leanings came across chiefly in a negative light. If the necessary quota of intelligence and charm declined steadily as the rank of the person who was anxious to be received by the Duchesse de Guermantes became more exalted, descending to zero when significant crowned heads of royalty were involved, by contrast, the further it fell below this royal level the more demanding this quota became. For instance, when the Princess of Parma received, there were a number of people whom Her Royal Highness would receive because she had known them since childhood, or because they were related to some duchess or other, or part of the entourage of some sovereign, regardless of whether these people were unattractive or boring; now, as far as a Courvoisier hostess was concerned, reasons such as 'a favourite of the Princess of Parma', or 'a half-sister of the Duchesse d'Arpajon on the mother's side', or 'spends three months every year with the Queen of Spain', would have been sufficient to make her invite such people, but Mme de Guermantes, who had politely acknowledged their greetings at the Princess of Parma's for ten years, had never once allowed them to cross her threshold, since she was of the view that the same rule applied to a drawing-room in a social as in a physical sense: it would take only a few pieces of furniture which were not particularly pleasing, but had been put there to fill the room and as a sign of the owner's wealth, to turn it into something dreadful. A drawing-room of this sort is like a book in which the author cannot refrain from using language to parade his own learning, brilliance, fluent ease. Like a book, like a house, the quality of a salon, Mme de Guermantes quite rightly thought, depended essentially on what you excluded.

Many of the friends of the Princess of Parma, and whom the Duchesse de Guermantes had acknowledged for years with no more than the same conventional greeting or an exchange of calling-cards without ever receiving them at her house or going to their receptions, complained about this in undertones to Her Highness, who, on days when M. de Guermantes came to visit her on his own, would drop a hint in his direction. But the wily nobleman, a bad husband to the

Duchesse in that he kept mistresses, but her most reliable accomplice when it came to the proper functioning of her salon (and of Oriane's own witty sense of humour, which was the salon's chief attraction), would come out with: 'But does my wife know her? Oh, well, I suppose she ought to. But the truth is, Madame, that Oriane doesn't care for female conversation. She is surrounded by a court of superior minds – I'm not her husband, I'm only the senior valet. Apart from a handful of really witty women, the female sex bores her. And, Madame, Your Highness with all Her shrewd judgment is surely not going to tell me that the Marquise de Souvré is a witty woman. Yes, I quite understand, Your Highness receives her out of the goodness of Her heart. And then, Your Highness knows her. You tell me that Oriane has met her. It's quite possible, but only once or twice, I assure you. And then, I must explain to Your Highness, I'm rather to blame for all this. My wife is very easily tired, and she's always so very anxious to be friendly that if I let her have her way she would never stop calling on people. Only yesterday evening, despite the fact that she was running a temperature, she was afraid of offending the Duchesse de Bourbon by not paying her a visit. I had to put my foot down and forbid them to send the carriage round. Do you know, Madame, I've a very good mind not to tell Oriane that you've mentioned Mme de Souvré to me. Oriane is so devoted to Your Highness that she'll go at once to invite Mme de Souvré. That will mean another call to be made, it will oblige us to make ourselves known to the sister, whose husband I know well. I'd rather not mention it to Oriane at all, if Your Highness has no objection. We'll save her a great deal of fatigue and flurry. And I assure you, it will be no loss to Mme de Souvré. She has a wide acquaintance, moves in the most brilliant circles. We hardly entertain at all, really, just a few little dinner-parties. Mme de Souvré would be bored to death.' The Princess of Parma, naïvely convinced that the Duc de Guermantes would not pass on her request to the Duchesse and dismayed at her failure to procure the invitation solicited by Mme de Souvré, was all the more flattered to think that she was one of the habitués of such an exclusive salon. This flattering state of affairs was certainly not without its problems. Thus whenever the Princess of Parma invited Mme de Guermantes, she had to rack her brains to be sure that there was no one among her other guests whose presence might offend the Duchesse and make her decline further invitations.

On ordinary weekdays (after dinner, to which she always invited a few people, very early, for she held on to old customs), the Princess of Parma's drawing-room was open to her regular guests and, generally speaking, to the whole of the higher aristocracy, French and foreign. The order of her receptions was for her to leave the dining-room, to sit down on a sofa in front of a large round table and chat with a couple of the most important ladies who had dined with her, or else to cast her eyes over a magazine, or to play cards (or pretend to play, in accordance with a German court custom), either a game of patience or a game with some prominent partner – real or imaginary – of her choice. Towards nine o'clock the double doors of the big drawing-room were constantly opening and closing and opening up again to admit the visitors who had bolted their dinner (or, if they had dined out, skipped coffee with a promise to return later, after intending only 'to go in at one door and out through another') in order to accommodate themselves to the Princess's time-table. She, meanwhile, absorbed in her game or her conversation, pretended not to notice the new arrivals, and it was only when they were standing a few feet away that she rose graciously from the sofa with a benevolent smile for the women. The latter would then make a deep curtsey before Her Highness, who would stand there to receive what was tantamount to a genuflection, and this involved them bringing their lips down to the level of her handsome hand, held very low, and kissing it. At this point the Princess, just as if she had been surprised each time by a formality with which she was in fact perfectly familiar, would raise the kneeling lady almost bodily, with incomparable grace and sweetness, and kiss her on both cheeks. A grace and sweetness that were conditional, one might say, upon the meekness with which the arriving guest bent her knee. This was probably the case; and it seems that in an egalitarian society social etiquette would disappear, not, as people imagine, through lack of breeding, but because the one side would lose the deference due to a prestige which must be imaginary to be effective, while, more importantly, the other would lose the affability that is generously dispensed and cultivated when it is felt to be infinitely precious to the recipient, a sense of the precious which, in a world based on equality, would suddenly die a death, like everything that has only a fiduciary value. But this disappearance of social etiquette in a transformed society is by no means a certainty, and we are occasionally too ready to believe that present circumstances are the only ones in which certain phenomena can thrive. People of great intelligence believed that there could not be any diplomacy or foreign alliances in a republic, and that the peasant class would not tolerate the separation of Church and State. After all, the existence of social etiquette in an egalitarian society would be no more miraculous than the success of the railways or the use of the aeroplane in war. And then, if etiquette were to disappear, there is nothing to show that this would be a bad thing. And would not a society become secretly more hierarchical as it became ostensibly more democratic? Very possibly. The political power of the Popes has increased enormously since they ceased to possess either States or an army; cathedrals meant far less to a devout Catholic of the seventeenth century than they do for a twentieth-century atheist, and if the Princess of Parma had been the sovereign ruler of a State, no doubt it would have occurred to me to speak of her about as much as of a President of the Republic, which is to say not at all.

Once the postulant had been raised up and embraced by the Princess, the latter sat down again to her game of patience, unless the new-comer was a lady of some importance, in which case she sat her down in an armchair and talked to her for a while.

When the drawing-room became too crowded, the lady-in-waiting whose duty it was to act as a steward cleared some space by leading the guests into an immense hall on to which the room opened, a place filled with portraits and various trophies relating to the House of Bourbon. At this point the Princess's closest friends were quite willing to chaperone people around this hall and provide interesting commentaries, to which the younger guests had not the patience to listen, being more absorbed in the spectacle of living royalty (and the chance of getting themselves presented to it by the lady-in-waiting and her attendants) than in studying the relics of dead sovereigns. Too busy with the thought of meeting important people and angling for invitations, they had no idea, even after several years, of the contents of this priceless museum of the archives of the monarchy and held only a blurred memory of it as a place decorated with cacti and giant palms, which made this centre of social elegance look like the palmarium at the Paris Zoo.

Of course the Duchesse de Guermantes, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, did occasionally appear on these evenings to pay an after-dinner call on the Princess, who kept her all to herself for the whole evening, while engaging in banter with the Duc. But when the Duchesse came to dine, the Princess took care not to invite her regular guests and closed her doors to the world after dinner, in the fear that too indiscriminate a choice of guests might incur the displeasure of the fastidious Duchesse. On such evenings, should any of the faithful who had not been warned present themselves at Her Highness's doors, the porter would inform them: 'Her Royal Highness is not at home this evening,' and they would turn away. But many of the Princess's friends would have known in advance that on that particular day they would not be invited to call. These were special social occasions, ones that were barred to many who must have longed for admission. Those who were excluded were fairly certain who figured in the ranks of the elect, and would murmur among themselves in a fit of pique: 'You know, of course, that Oriane de Guermantes never goes anywhere without her entire general staff.' With the help of this body, the Princess of Parma attempted to surround the Duchesse with a sort of protective rampart against those whose chances of impressing her were in any way slight. But there were several of the Duchesse's preferred friends, several members of this glamorous 'general staff', towards whom the Princess of Parma found it difficult to be affable, seeing that they displayed scant affability towards herself. It is very likely that the Princess of Parma would have been the first to admit that people might derive more pleasure from the company of the Duchesse de Guermantes than from her own. She could not ignore the fact that there was always a dense throng of people at the Duchesse's 'at homes', or that she herself would often encounter three or four members of royalty there who thought that she deserved no more than to receive their visiting-cards. And however much she might memorize Oriane's witticisms, copy her style of dress, serve identical strawberry tartlets at her own tea-parties, there were still occasions when she was left by herself all day in the sole company of her lady-in-waiting or some counsellor from a foreign legation. And so, whenever someone never let a day pass without going to spend a couple of hours at the Duchesse's (as Swann had done, for instance, at an earlier period) yet only set foot at the Princess of Parma's once in every two years, the latter was not particularly inclined, even for the sake of humouring Oriane, to make 'advances' to this Swann or whoever by inviting him to dinner. In short, inviting the Duchesse to her house was for the Princess of Parma a rather vexed business, so strongly was she beset by fear that Oriane would find fault with everything. But by contrast, and for the same reason, when the Princess of Parma came to dine with Mme de Guermantes, she could be

certain in advance that everything would be perfect, delightful, and she had only one misgiving, the fear of being unable to understand, remember, engage people, of being unable to assimilate ideas and personalities. On this score, my presence aroused her attention and stimulated her cupidity, in exactly the same way that a novel style of decorating a dinner-table with garlands of fruit might have done, uncertain as she was which of the two – the table decoration or my presence – was more distinctive as one of those charms which were the secret of the success of Oriane's receptions, and, in her uncertainty, firmly resolved to try to have them both at the next dinner-party she gave. In fact what fully justified the ecstatic curiosity the Princess of Parma brought to the Duchesse's house was that element of the comical, the dangerous, the exciting into which the Princess would plunge in a kind of timidity, a thrill of shock and delight (as at the seaside when the waves are heavy and the bathing-attendants warn people of the danger for the simple reason that none of them can swim), and from which she would emerge feeling braced, happy, rejuvenated – the element known as the Guermantes wit. This wit of the Guermantes – something as non-existent as the squared circle in the eyes of the Duchesse, who regarded herself as the only Guermantes to possess it – had the same sort of repute as *rillettes de Tours* or biscuits made in Rheims. All the same, it is probable (since an intellectual characteristic does not propagate itself through the same channels as the colour of someone's hair or complexion) that various close friends of the Duchesse, who were not of her blood, possessed the same wit, which, by contrast, had failed to inculcate itself into certain members of the Guermantes family who were all too impervious to wit of any kind. Generally speaking, those who were endowed with the Guermantes wit and not related to the Duchesse shared the characteristic feature of having been brilliant men, well equipped for a career either in the arts, diplomacy, parliamentary eloquence or the army, to which they had preferred a clannish society life. Perhaps such a preference could be explained by a certain lack of originality, initiative, will-power, health, luck – or by snobbishness.

For some of them (though these, it must be said, were the exception), if the Guermantes salon had been the stumbling-block in their careers, it had been against their will. So, for instance, a doctor, a painter and a diplomat with a fine career before him had failed to achieve the sort of success for which they were none the less more brilliantly equipped than most, because their friendship with the Guermantes meant that the first two were regarded as men of fashion and the third as a reactionary, and this had prevented all three from earning the recognition of their peers. The old-fashioned gown and red cap still donned by the electoral bodies of the university faculties are – or at least were, until fairly recently – something more than a purely external survival from a narrow-minded past and an unyielding sectarianism. Beneath the cap with its golden tassels, like the high priests of the Jews in their conical headgear, the 'professors' were still, in the years that preceded the Dreyfus case, deeply rooted in strictly pharisaical ideas. Du Boulbon was at heart an artist, but he was safe because he did not care for society. Cottard belonged to the Verdurin circle, but Mme Verdurin was one of his patients, then was further protected by his vulgarity while at his own house he entertained no one outside the Faculty, at banquets bathed in a whiff of carbolic acid. But in staunchly corporate bodies, where in fact rigid prejudice is simply the price to be paid for a spotless reputation, for the most lofty conceptions of morality, which falter in more tolerant, liberal (and ultimately more corrupt) milieux, a professor in his gown of scarlet faced with ermine, like that of a Doge of Venice (that is to say the equivalent of a duke) shut away in the ducal palace, was as virtuous, as committed to noble principles, but as merciless towards any outside element as that other admirable but fearsome Duc, M. de Saint-Simon. The outsider here was the fashionable society doctor with his alien manner, his different social connections. To make good, the unfortunate man of whom we are now speaking, so as not to be accused by his colleagues of scorning them (who but a man of fashion would think of such a thing!) by keeping the Duchesse de Guermantes from them, would hope to disarm them by throwing mixed dinner-parties at which the quota of medical guests was outnumbered by the fashionable ones. He was unaware that this was a way of signing his own death-warrant, or rather he discovered as much when the Council of Ten[47] (a little larger in number) had to appoint to a vacant chair, when it was inevitably the name of another doctor, a more regular if more mediocre one, that emerged from the fatal ballot, and the 'Veto' echoed around the ancient Faculty, as solemn, as absurd, and as terrible as the 'Juro' that spelt the death of Molière.[48] The same was true of the painter who was permanently labelled a 'society figure', when those members of fashionable society who dabbled in art had managed to get themselves labelled as artists; the same was true of the diplomat who had too many ties with reactionaries.

But such cases were extremely rare. The typical kind of distinguished man who formed the backbone of the Guermantes salon was someone who had voluntarily (as he saw it at least) renounced all else, everything that was incompatible with the Guermantes wit, the Guermantes code of manners, with the subtle charm that was odious to any 'body' of people who were in the least 'corporate'.

And the people who were cognizant of the fact that one of the habitués of the Duchesse's drawing-room had once been awarded the gold medal of the Salon, that another, Secretary to the Bar Council, had made a brilliant debut in the Chamber, that a third had ably served France as chargé d'affaires, might well have found themselves regarding people who had now done nothing for twenty years as 'failures'. But few of them were apprised of such facts, and the persons concerned would have been the last to remind anyone, since precisely by keeping step with the very spirit of the Guermantes wit, they considered these former claims to distinction as valueless: was it not just such wit that encouraged them to denounce as a toadying bore and as a shop-boy respectively, a couple of eminent ministers, one a trifle solemn, the other with a taste for puns, whose praises were sung by the newspapers, but in whose company Mme de Guermantes would begin to yawn and show signs of impatience if a hostess had unwisely sat them next to her at dinner? Since to be a high-ranking statesman was in no sense a recommendation in the eyes of the Duchesse, those of her friends who had resigned from a 'career' in the diplomatic services or the army, who had never stood for parliament, as they came day after day to lunch and talk with their great friend, or when they encountered her in the houses of royalty (held by them, as it happened, in low esteem – or so they said), felt that they had made the right choice, however much their melancholy air, amid all the gaiety, seemed to suggest that the reality of their feeling was slightly different.

And it must be said that the refinements of society life, the sparkle of conversation at the Guermantes', did have something real about it, even tenuously so. No official office was worth more than the personal charm of certain of Mme de Guermantes's favourites, whom the most powerful ministers would have failed to attract to their houses. If in this salon so many intellectual ambitions and even noble endeavours had been buried for ever, then at least from their dust the rarest flowering of society sophistication had blossomed. Indeed witty men, like Swann for instance, regarded themselves as superior to men of merit, whom they despised, but that was because what the Duchesse prized above all else was not intelligence but – intelligence in a superior form, in her view, rarer, more exquisite, elevating it to a verbal species of talent – wit. And in the past at the Verdurins', when Swann branded Brichot and Elstir as a pedant and an oaf respectively, in the face of all the learning of the one and the genius of the other, it was the infiltration of the Guermantes spirit that had led him to classify them in these terms. Never would he have ventured to present either of them to the Duchesse, in his instinctive awareness of the manner in which she would have received Brichot's verbal onslaughts and Elstir's 'tosh', since to the Guermantes mind pretentious and prolix speech in a serious or farcical vein was consigned to the category of the most intolerable imbecility.

As for those Guermantes of the true flesh and blood, if the Guermantes spirit had not infected them as completely in a way that is familiar in literary coteries for example, where everyone has identical pronunciation, enunciation and, as a consequence of this, the same way of thinking, it was certainly not because originality is more strongly ingrained in society circles and therefore inhibits imitation. But imitation requires not only the absence of any unsuppressible originality, but also a relatively skilful ear enabling you first of all to discern what you will then go on to imitate. And there were Guermantes who lacked this musical sense just as completely as the Courvoisiers.

To take as an example the activity that is known (in another sense of the word imitation) as 'giving an imitation of someone' (the Guermantes called it 'doing take-offs'), Mme de Guermantes could do these to perfection until she dropped, and still the Courvoisiers were as incapable of realizing what was going on as if they had been a bunch of rabbits instead of men and women, because they had never managed to observe the particular defect or accent the Duchesse was endeavouring to impersonate. When she 'took off' the Duc de Limoges, the Courvoisiers would protest: 'Oh, no, he doesn't really speak like that. I dined with him

again at Bebeth's last night and he talked to me all evening. He didn't speak like that at all!' whereas any Guermantes who had a smattering of culture would exclaim: 'My word, how droll Oriane is! The startling thing is that when she's mimicking him she actually looks like him! It's as if he's in the room. Oriane, do give us a little more Limoges!' Now Guermantes like these (without even including those utterly remarkable members of the family who greeted the Duchesse's impersonations of the Duc de Limoges with the admiring remarks: 'Oh, you really have got him off to a tee!' or 'You do get him exactly right!') might well be devoid of wit in Mme de Guer mantes's eyes (and she was right about this), but by dint of hearing and repeating the Duchesse's words they had managed, more or less, to end up imitating her way of expressing herself, of judging people, everything that Swann, like the Duchesse herself, would have called her way of 'editing' what she said, so that in their conversation they presented something which seemed to the Courvoisiers to be uncomfortably close to Oriane's wit, and which they themselves regarded as Guermantes wit. Since such Guermantes were to her not only kinsfolk but admirers into the bargain, Oriane (who kept the rest of the family strictly at arm's length and now used her disdain to avenge the spitefulness they had shown her in her girlhood) went to call on them now and again, generally accompanied by the Duc, when she drove out with him in the summer months. These visits were quite something. As she entertained her guests in her large drawing-room on the ground floor, the Princesse d'Épinay's heart would miss a beat when she saw from a distance, like the first glimmer of a harmless enough fire or the 'scouting party' of an unexpected invasion, making her way slowly across the courtyard in a diagonal, the Duchesse wearing a stunning hat and tilting a parasol which wafted summer fragrance. 'Why, it's Oriane,' she would remark, as if she were saying 'On guard!' as a prudent warning to her lady visitors, so that they should have time to retreat in an orderly manner and evacuate the drawing-rooms without panic. Half the people present did not dare to stay and would rise to go. 'But please, why? Do sit down again, you really must do me the pleasure of staying a little longer,' the Princesse would say in an off-hand, easy manner (to show she was a grande dame) but in a voice that now rang false. 'You may well have things to say to each other. – No? you're in a hurry? Oh, very well, I shall come and see you,' the lady of the house would reply to those whom she would just as soon see take their departure. The Duc and the Duchesse would give a very courteous greeting to the people they had been seeing there for years though without ever coming to know them any better, while for their part the people concerned had the good sense scarcely to muster a good-day. Scarcely had they left the room before the Duc would begin to enquire benignly who they were, to give the impression that he was taking an interest in the intrinsic quality of people he never received on account of the malevolence of fate or the state of Oriane's nerves, on which the company of women had a harmful effect: 'Tell me, who *was* that little woman in the pink hat? – But, my dear cousin, you've seen her hundreds of times, she's the Vicomtesse de Tours, one of the Lamarzelles by birth. – But what I'm saying is she was pretty and she has a lively look about her. If it weren't for a slight defect in her upper lip, I'd say she was quite stunning. If there's a Vicomte de Tours, the man can't have a dull moment. Oriane, do you know who her eyebrows and hair line reminded me of? Your cousin Hedwige de Ligne.' The Duchesse de Guermantes, who was apt to become listless whenever mention was made of any woman other than herself, let the subject drop. She had not reckoned with her husband's weakness for letting it be known that he knew all about the people he did not personally receive, a trait of his which convinced him that he showed himself to be more 'serious' than his wife. 'But, he would suddenly exclaim emphatically, you mentioned the name Lamarzelle. I remember, when I was in the Chamber, hearing a remarkable speech made … – That was the uncle of the young woman you saw a moment ago. – Indeed! What talent!… No, my dear girl,' he assured the Vicomtesse d'Egremont, whom Mme de Guermantes could not endure but who, in her refusal to budge from the Princesse d'Épinay's drawing-room, where she willingly demeaned herself in the role of parlour-maid (even if this did not stop her from slapping her own when she returned home), stayed there, abashed and tearful, but stayed there all the same, when the ducal couple were present, taking their cloaks, trying to make herself useful, discreetly offering to retire to the next room, 'you're not to make tea for us, let's just sit and talk together, we're unassuming people, no fuss. Besides,' he went on, turning to the Princesse d'Épinay (leaving Mistress d'Egremont to her blushes, abasement, ambition and zealous attentiveness), 'we can only spare you a quarter of an hour.' This quarter of an hour would be entirely devoted to a sort of exhibition of the witty remarks made by the Duchesse during the previous week and which she herself would have certainly made no mention of had not her husband, by appearing, with great adroitness, to scold her by alluding to the incidents that had provoked them, obliged her to repeat them as though reluctantly.

The Princesse d'Épinay, who was fond of her cousin and knew that she had a weakness for compliments, would go into raptures over her hat, her parasol, her witty remarks. 'You can talk to her as long as you like about her clothes,' the Duc would say in the gruff tone he had assumed and then tempered with a wicked smile so that his gruffness should not be taken seriously, 'but for heaven's sake don't speak to her about her wit. I could well do without having such a witty wife. You're probably thinking of the disgraceful pun she made about my brother Palamède,' he added, knowing quite well that the Princesse and the rest of the family had not yet heard it, and delighted to have an excuse for showing off his wife. 'In the first place, I find it quite disgraceful that someone who, I have to admit, has occasionally said some quite good things, should make bad puns, but especially about my brother, who is very touchy, and if it's going to lead to any unpleasantness between us, that would really be taking things too far!

– But we've no idea! One of Oriane's puns? It's sure to be outstanding. Oh, do tell us?

– No, no, rejoined the Duc, still gruff but his face lighting up with a smile. I'm more than glad you haven't heard it. Seriously now, I'm very fond of my brother.

– Look here, Basin,' the Duchesse would exclaim, the moment having come for her to take up her husband's cue, 'I can't think why on earth you should say that it might annoy Palamdè, you know quite well it would do nothing of the sort. He's far too intelligent to take umbrage at a stupid joke which has nothing offensive about it. You'll make people think I said something nasty when I simply came out with something that wasn't in the least funny. You're the one who's making a mountain out of it by getting so indignant. I simply don't understand you.

– You're intriguing us horribly. What's it all about?

– Oh, obviously nothing serious! exclaimed M. de Guermantes. You may have heard that my brother wanted to give Brézé, the country house he got from his wife, to his sister Marsantes.

– Indeed, but we were told that she didn't want it, that she didn't care for that part of the country, that the climate didn't suit her.

– Exactly. Well, someone told my wife all about it and said that if my brother was giving this house to our sister it wasn't so much to please her as to tease her. What this person actually said was that Charlus was such a tease. Well, you know Brézé is fit for a king. It must be worth millions. It used to be crown property and it has one of the finest forests in France. There are plenty of people who'd be only too delighted to be teased about something like that. And so when she heard the word "tease" applied to Charlus because he was giving away such a marvellous property, Oriane couldn't stop herself bursting out, quite involuntarily, I have to say, without any hint of malice – it came out like a flash of lightning – with the words: "A tease? A teaser? Then he must be Teaser Augustus!" You understand,' he went on, resuming his gruff tone, but not before he had cast a sweeping glance round the room to see how his wife's witticism had been taken – and in some doubt as to the extent of Mme d'Épinay's knowledge of ancient history, 'you understand, it's an allusion to Augustus Caesar, the Roman Emperor. It's rather stupid, a bad play on words, quite unworthy of Oriane. But then I'm more circumspect than my wife. I may be less witty, but I think of the consequences. Should the remark reach my brother's ears by some ghastly misfortune, life won't be worth living. All the more so, he added, because Palamède as you know is very high and mighty and a great stickler in these matters, very sensitive to gossip. You have to admit that, quite apart from this business of Brézé, "Teaser Augustus" suits him really quite well. That's what redeems my wife's witticisms: even when she stoops to feeble puns, she's always witty and she really does describe people rather well.'

And so, thanks on one occasion to 'Teaser Augustus', on another to something else, the visits the Duc and Duchesse paid to their kinsfolk replenished the stock of anecdotes, and the excitement they caused lasted long after the witty lady and her impresario had left. The hostess in question would begin by lingering delightedly with the privileged guests who had been at the entertainment (those who had remained, that is) upon the clever things Oriane had come out with. 'You

hadn't heard "Teaser Augustus"? the Princesse d'Épinay would ask. – But of course, the Marquise de Bavano would reply with a blush, the Princesse de Sarsina-La Rochefoucauld told me about it, but not in quite the same terms. But it must have been so much more interesting to hear it repeated like that in the company of my cousin,' she added, as though she had been speaking of a song accompanied by the composer himself. 'We were speaking about Oriane's latest sally – she was here just now, people would say to some recently arrived caller who was bound to be extremely upset that she had not come an hour earlier.

– What! has Oriane been here?

– Yes indeed, if you'd come a little earlier…' the Princesse d'Épinay would reply, not exactly reproachfully, but making it clear how much the blunderer had missed. She had only herself to blame if she had not been present at the creation of the world or at Mme Carvalho's latest performance.[49] 'What do you think of Oriane's latest? I must say I really like "Teaser Augustus",' and the witticism would be served up again cold at lunch the next day in the company of a few close friends invited for the purpose, and would reappear with different sauces throughout the rest of the week. Indeed that very week Mme d'Épinay, in the course of her annual visit to the Princess of Parma, seized the opportunity to ask whether Her Royal Highness had heard the witticism, and repeated it to her. 'Ah! "Teaser Augustus",' said the Princess of Parma, wide-eyed with admiration aforethought, but begging for complementary glosses which Mme d' Épinay was by no means loth to furnish. 'I have to admit that I like Teaser Augustus enormously as a piece of "editing",' the Princesse concluded. In fact the word 'editing' was not at all appropriate for the pun in question, but the Princesse d'Épinay, who had the temerity to believe that she had inherited part of the Guermantes wit, had borrowed the expressions 'original edition' and 'editing' from Oriane and used them rather indiscriminately. Now the Princess of Parma, who was not over-fond of Mme d'Épinay, whom she considered ill-favoured, knew to be penny-pinching and believed, on the authority of the Courvoisiers, to be malicious, recognized the word 'editing', which she had heard Mme de Guermantes use but would not herself have known how or when to apply. She came to the vague conclusion that it must indeed have been the 'original editing' that formed the attraction of 'Teaser Augustus' and, without quite forgetting her antipathy towards her plain and miserly guest, could not repress a hint of admiration for a person endowed to such a degree with the Guermantes wit, so much so that she was on the point of inviting the Princesse d'Épinay to the Opéra. She was held back by the thought that it would perhaps be wiser to consult Mme de Guermantes first. As for Mme d'Épinay, who, unlike the Courvoisiers, was for ever going out of her way to be obliging to Oriane and was genuinely fond of her, though jealous of her fashionable friends and slightly irritated by the fun the Duchesse made of her in front of everyone on account of her meanness, she reported, when she returned home, how hard the Princess of Parma had found it to grasp the point of 'Teaser Augustus' and declared what a snob Oriane must be to number such a cuckoo among her friends. 'I should never have been able to call regularly on the Princess of Parma even if I'd wanted to, she told the friends who were dining with her, because M. d'Épinay would have never allowed it on account of her immorality,' alluding to certain purely fictive excesses on the Princess's part. 'But even if I had had a more lenient husband, I have to say that I could never have called on her on a regular basis. I don't know how Oriane can support going to see her so frequently. I go there once a year, and it's all I can do to stay to the end of my call.' As for those of the Courvoisiers who happened to be at Victurnienne's[50] on the day of Mme de Guermantes's visit, the Duchesse's arrival put most of them to flight on account of their exasperation at the 'high-fangled salaams' people directed at Oriane. One alone remained on the day of 'Teaser Augustus'. He did not quite see the point, but he half-understood it, being an educated man. And the Courvoisiers went about repeating that Oriane had called Uncle Palamède 'Caesar Augustus', which was, according to them, a good enough description of him. 'But why all this endless fuss about Oriane, they pursued. People couldn't create more fuss if she were a queen. After all, what is Oriane? I'm not saying that the Guermantes aren't an old family, but the Courvoisiers are in no way inferior to them, neither in illustriousness, antiquity nor marriage alliances. It must not be forgotten that on the Field of the Cloth of Gold,[51] when the King of England asked François I who was the noblest of the lords there present, the King of France replied, "Courvoisier, Sire." ' But even if all the Courvoisiers had stayed in the room to hear them, Oriane's words would have fallen on deaf ears, since the incidents that usually gave rise to them would have been regarded by them from a totally different point of view. If, for instance, a Courvoisier found herself running out of chairs in the middle of a reception she was giving, or if she mistook the name when she was talking to a guest whose face she did not recall, or if one of her servants said something stupid, the Courvoisier lady, extremely annoyed, flushed, quivering with agitation, would deplore so unfortunate an occurrence. And when she had a gentleman visitor in the room and Oriane was expected, she would ask in an anxious and imperious tone: 'Do you know her?', fearing that if her visitor was not acquainted with her, his presence might make a bad impression on Oriane. But on the contrary, Mme de Guermantes used such incidents as opportunities to invent stories which would make the Guermantes laugh until the tears ran down their cheeks, so that one was forced to envy the lady in question for having run out of chairs, for having made a gaffe or allowing her servant to make one, for having received someone no one else knew, as one is forced to be thankful that famous authors have been kept at a distance and betrayed by women when their humiliations and sufferings have been, if not the actual goad to their genius, then at least the subject matter of their writings.

The Courvoisiers were equally incapable of rising to the spirit of innovation the Duchesse de Guermantes introduced into society life and which, adapted by her with unerring instinct to the demands of the moment, made it into something artistic, when the purely mechanical application of hard and fast rules would have produced results as unfortunate as those faced by a man who, anxious to succeed in love or in politics, had in his own life followed the exploits of Bussy d'Amboise[52] to the letter. If the Courvoisiers gave a family dinner or a dinner-party to meet some prince, the additional presence of some man of wit or some friend of their son seemed to them sufficiently anomalous to produce the direst consequences. A Courvoisier lady, whose father had been a minister under the Empire and who had to give an afternoon reception in honour of the Princesse Mathilde, deduced with geometrical logic that she could invite only Bonapartists. She knew practically none. All the smart women of her acquaintance, all the presentable men she knew, were ruthlessly barred because, with their Legitimist views or affiliations, they might, according to Courvoisier logic, have given offence to Her Imperial Highness. The latter, who in her own house was accustomed to receive the flower of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, was somewhat surprised when all she found at Mme de Courvoisier's was a notorious old sponger, a widow whose husband had been a *préfet* under the Empire, the widow of the Postmaster General and a handful of other people known for their loyalty to Napoleon III, for their stupidity and dreariness. Yet the Princesse Mathilde was far from chary with her flow of sweetness and sovereign grace towards these disastrous plain Janes, whom the Duchesse de Guermantes, for her part, took good care not to invite when it was her turn to entertain the Princesse, but invited instead, without any a priori reasoning about Bonapartism, the most choice assembly of all the beautiful women, of every cast of mind, of every celebrity whom, by some flair, some subtle sense of tact, she felt likely to be acceptable to the niece of the Emperor, even when they actually belonged to the Royal House. Even the Duc d'Aumale was present, and when, as she made her exit, the Princesse raised Mme de Guermantes from her deep curtsey and her attempt to kiss her hand, and kissed her on both cheeks, it was from the bottom of her heart that she was able to assure the Duchesse that she had never spent so agreeable an afternoon nor attended so successful a party. The Princess of Parma was a Courvoisier in that she was incapable of innovation in social matters, but unlike the Courvoisiers in that the surprises the Duchesse de Guermantes perpetually held in store for her engendered in her not, as in them, antipathy but a sense of wonder. This reaction was further intensified by the fact that the Princess's state of culture lagged enormously behind the times. Mme de Guermantes was herself a great deal less advanced than the Princess supposed. But it only needed for her to be the tiniest bit more advanced than Mme de Parme to astound the latter, and, as each generation of critics confines itself to maintaining a diametrically opposite view of the truths espoused by its predecessors, she had only to say that Flaubert, that enemy of the bourgeois, was a bourgeois to his finger-tips or that there was a great deal of Italian music in Wagner, to expose the Princess, at the cost of constantly renewed mental exhaustion, as the swimmer's eyes are exposed in a stormy sea, to horizons that seemed to her to be unimaginable and condemned to remain dim. Stupefaction was also caused by the paradoxes uttered not merely in connection with works of art but with persons of their acquaintance and with current goings-on in society. No doubt the incapacity that prevented Mme de Parme from distinguishing the genuine Guermantes wit from certain crudely acquired manifestations of it (this tended to make her believe in the high intellectual worth of certain Guermantes, especially certain female members of the family, whom she later found herself bewildered to hear described by the Duchesse as utter dimwits), was one of the causes of the astonishment the Princess

invariably felt when she heard Mme de Guermantes pass judgment on other people. But there was also a further reason, one which I, who knew more about books than people at that time, more about literature than about life, explained to myself with the thought that the Duchesse, by thriving on this worldly life, the idleness and sterility of which are to real social activity what, in art, criticism is to creativity, extended to the members of her circle the instability of viewpoint, the unhealthy thirst, of the quibbler who, in order to slake a mind too desiccated, goes in search of any old paradox that is at all fresh and will not hesitate to uphold the thirst-quenching opinion that the great *Iphigénie* is Piccini's and not Gluck's, and at a pinch that the true *Phèdre* is the one by Pradon.[53]

When an intelligent, educated, witty woman had married a diffident lout who was seldom seen and never heard, Mme de Guermantes would get it into her head one fine day to indulge in an intellectual thrill not only by decrying the wife but in 'discovering' the husband. In regard to the Cambremer household, for instance, had she found herself living in such a section of society at the time, she would have decreed that Mme de Cambremer was stupid, and by contrast, that the interesting party, misunderstood and delightful, condemned to silence by a prattling wife but worth a thousand of her kind himself, was the Marquis, and by declaring this the Duchesse would have felt the same sense of refreshing relief as the critic who, after people had been admiring *Hernani* for seventy years, confesses to a preference for *Le Lion amoureux*.[54] From this same morbid need of arbitrary novelty, if there was a model wife, a saintly woman whom people had been pitying since her youth for being married to a scoundrel, a day would come when it would occur to Mme de Guermantes to assert that this scoundrel was perhaps a frivolous man but one with a heart of gold, and that he had been driven to utterly irresponsible behaviour by the implacable harshness of his wife. I knew that in the long course of the centuries it was not only with the works of different artists but actually with the various works of one artist, that critics had enjoyed pushing back into the shade what for too long had been radiant, and bringing into the light what had seemed doomed to permanent obscurity. Not only had I seen Bellini, Winterhalter, the Jesuit architects, a Restoration cabinet maker,[55] come to take the place of men of genius, who were described as tired simply because idle intellectuals had grown tired of them, in the same way that neurasthenics are tired and faddish. I had seen Sainte-Beuve preferred alternately as critic and poet, Musset rejected for his verse apart from a few insignificant pieces, and vaunted as a writer of stories. No doubt it is wrong of certain essayists to set above the most famous scenes of *Le Cid* or *Polyeucte* some speech from *Le Menteur*[56] which, like an old plan, gives us information about the Paris of the day, but their predilection, justified if not by aesthetic considerations then by documentary interest, is still too rational for the irrationality of critical taste. It will give away all of Molière for a single line of L'*Étourdi*,[57] and, even when it pronounces Wagner's *Tristan* to be deadly boring, will make an exception of 'a charming note on the horns' at the point where the hunt goes by. This depravity of judgment helped me to understand the similar tendency in Mme de Guermantes which led her to conclude that a man of their circle, who was recognized as a good chap but a fool, was a monster of egoism, shrewder than people thought, that another, who was well known for his generosity, might be taken as the personification of avarice, that a good mother had no time for her children, and that a woman who was thought to be loose was really someone of the noblest sentiments. As though vitiated by the inanity of society life, Mme de Guermantes's intelligence and sensibility were too vacillating for disgust not to follow pretty swiftly in the wake of infatuation (even if it meant that she was still ready to be attracted once more by the kind of cleverness which she had alternately sought and abandoned) and for the charm she had seen in some kind-hearted man not to change, if he came to see her too often or took it too much for granted that she would be able to guide him in a way she could not, into an irritation she believed came from her admirer but which was due in effect to the utter impossibility of finding pleasure when one spends all one's time looking for it. The Duchesse's vagaries of judgment spared no one, except her husband. He alone had never loved her; in him she had always sensed a soul of iron, indifferent to her caprices, disdainful of her beauty, violent, one of those unbendable wills under whose domination alone highly-strung people can set themselves at rest. For his own part, M. de Guermantes, pursuing a single model of feminine beauty but seeking it in mistresses whom he regularly replaced, had, once he had left them, as his accomplice in mocking them, one lasting and identical associate whose chatter often irritated him, but whom he knew that everyone regarded as the most beautiful, the most virtuous, the cleverest, the most cultured woman among the aristocracy, as a wife whom he, M. de Guermantes, was only too lucky to have found, who covered up for all his carryings-on, entertained like no one else in the world and sustained the reputation of their salon as the foremost one in the whole Faubourg Saint-Germain. This was a common opinion that he himself shared; often out of sorts with his wife, he was proud of her. If, being as tight with money as he was ostentatious, he refused her the most petty sums for charities or for the servants, he insisted on her having the most sumptuous clothes and the finest equipages to be had. Finally, he was anxious to show off his wife's wit. Now, whenever Mme de Guermantes had just thought up some new and savoury paradox suddenly setting askew the merits and defects of one of their friends, she would be dying to try it out on those who were capable of appreciating it, to bring out the full flavour of its psychological originality and the brilliance of its lapidary malice. These new opinions probably and usually contained no more truth than previous ones, often less; but this very element of the arbitrary and the unexpected gave them something intellectual which made them thrilling to communicate. Only, the patient on whom the Duchesse had exercised her psychological gifts was normally an intimate friend in regard to whom the people she was keen to present with her discovery were utterly unaware that he did not still figure at the centre of her good books; and there was also the fact that Mme de Guermantes's reputation for being an incomparable friend, feeling, tender and devoted, made it difficult for her to launch the attack herself; the most she could do was to intervene later, as though under constraint, by taking up her cue in order to appease and, to all effects and purposes, to contradict but to actually support a partner who had taken it upon himself to provoke her; this was precisely the role in which M. de Guermantes excelled.

As for social behaviour, Mme de Guermantes experienced yet another arbitrarily theatrical pleasure in expressing some of those views on the subject which whipped the Princess of Parma into a state of perpetual and delicious surprise. But the particular pleasure the Duchesse experienced in this area was something whose nature I tried to comprehend not so much with the help of literary criticism as with instances of political life and the reports of parliamentary debates. Since the flow of contradictory edicts by which Mme de Guermantes constantly reversed the scale of values among the people of her world was no longer enough to distract her, she also sought, in the way she conducted her own social behaviour and accounted for her own most trifling decisions on society matters, to savour those artificial emotions, to fulfil those artificial duties which stir the feelings of parliaments and impress themselves on the minds of those who dabble in politics. We know that when a minister explains to the Chamber that he believed he was doing the right thing in following a line of conduct which actually seems quite straightforward to the common-sense person who sees the report of the sitting in his newspaper the next morning, nevertheless this common-sense reader feels suddenly stirred, and begins to doubt whether he was right to approve the minister's conduct, when he reads that the latter's speech was heard amid an uproar and punctuated with expressions of reprehension such as: 'It's a disgrace!' uttered by a deputy whose name and titles take up so much space in the report and are followed by an account of such emphatic reactions on his part, that in the space devoted to describing this outburst, the words 'It's a disgrace!' occupy less room than a hemistitch in an alexandrine. For instance in the days when M. de Guermantes, the Prince des Laumes, sat in the Chamber, one would read the following sort of thing in the Paris newspapers, though what one was reading was intended primarily for the Méséglise constituency, to show the electorate there that they had not given their votes to an inactive or dumb representative:

MONSIEUR DE GUERMANTES-BOUILLON, PRINCE DES LAUMES: 'This is a serious matter, gentlemen.' (*Hear, hear! from the centre and from some of the benches on the right, loud exclamations from the extreme left.*)

The common-sense reader still retains a glimmer of loyalty to the wise minister, but finds his heart stirred by fresh palpitations when he reads the first words of the speaker who rises to reply to this:

'The astonishment, or should one say stupor even (*tangible stirrings on the right side of the House*) caused me by the words of one who is still, I presume, a member of the Government…' (*thunderous applause; several deputies then rush forward towards the ministerial bench; the Under-Secretary of State for Postal and Telegraphic Services, without rising from his seat, gives a nod of approval.*)

This 'thunderous applause' banishes the last vestige of resistance from the mind of the common-sense reader; he regards as an insult to the Chamber, a monstrous insult, what is in fact a way of proceeding that is intrinsically insignificant; it may be some quite predictable item, such as wanting to make the wealthy pay more than the poor, the exposure of some iniquity, the preference for peace over war, and he will find it scandalous and see it as going against certain principles to which he had actually never given a thought, principles not engraved in the heart of man, but ones that move him strongly on account of the acclamations they provoke and the close-knit majorities they rally together.

It must at the same time be recognized that this subtlety on the part of politicians which served to explain the Guermantes circle to me and, at a later stage, other social groups, is no more than the perversion of a particular nicety of interpretation often described by the expression 'reading between the lines'. If representative assemblies contain elements of this absurdity, brought about by the perversion of such nicety of distinction, they also contain elements of stupidity, brought about by the lack of it, in the public, who take everything literally, who do not suspect dismissal when a high dignitary is relieved of his office 'at his own request', and say: 'He cannot have been dismissed, because he was the one who asked to go,' nor suspect defeat when, in the face of the Japanese advance, the Russians strategically fall back on stronger positions, prepared in advance, nor a refusal when a province has demanded its independence from the German Emperor and he cedes it religious autonomy. But to revert to these sessions in the Chamber, it is also possible that when they commence, the deputies themselves are like the common-sense person who will read the report in the newspapers. Informed that a group of workers on strike have sent their delegates to parley with a minister, they may ask themselves naïvely: 'Well, well, I wonder what they've been talking about? Let's hope it's all settled,' at the very moment the minister rises to address the Chamber in a solemn silence that is already setting the tone for artificial emotions. The minister's first words ('There is no need for me to inform the Chamber that I have too high a sense of government duty to have received a deputation which the authority invested in me is under no obligation to take into account') produce a dramatic effect, for this was the one hypothesis that the common sense of the deputies had failed to anticipate. But precisely because of its dramatic effect, it is greeted with such applause that it takes several minutes before the minister can make himself heard again, and he will return to his bench to be congratulated by his colleagues. They are as deeply moved as they were on the day he failed to invite the chairman of the municipal council, a man who supported the Opposition, to a grand official reception, and his colleagues declare that on this occasion as on the previous one he has acted like a true statesman.

At this period of his life, M. de Guermantes had, to the great scandal of the Courvoisiers, often been among the crowd of colleagues who came forward to congratulate the minister. I later heard it said that even at a time when he was playing a fairly important role in the Chamber and was being thought of as a likely candidate for ministerial office or for an embassy, when a friend came to ask him a favour, he was infinitely less affected, and his political behaviour a great deal less that of a person of importance, than anyone else who did not happen to be the Duc de Guermantes. For if he said that nobility was of little account, that he considered his colleagues to be his equals, he actually believed no such thing. He sought, and pretended to value but in fact despised political status, and since in his own eyes he remained M. de Guermantes, it did not cocoon his person in the sort of starchiness of high office which affects others and makes them unapproachable. And in this respect his pride was a protection against every assault not only for his behaviour, which was ostentatiously familiar, but for any genuine simplicity he might actually possess. To return to the artificial, dramatic decisions of his wife, so like those of politicians, Mme de Guermantes was no less disconcerting to the Guermantes, the Courvoisiers, the Faubourg in general and the Princess of Parma most especially, in her habit of issuing unexpected decrees behind which one sensed certain principles, all the more impressive the less one was aware of them. If the new Greek Minister gave a fancy dress ball, everyone chose a costume and everyone wondered what the Duchesse would wear. One lady imagined that she would appear as the Duchesse de Bourgogne, another suggested the Princess of Deryabar[58] as a likelihood, a third as Psyche. Finally a Courvoisier asked: 'What are you going as, Oriane?' and received the tart rejoinder: 'Why, nothing at all!', the only response no one had thought of, and one which set every tongue wagging in relation to what was seen as something that revealed Oriane's opinion as to the true social position of the new Greek Minister and the proper form to be adopted towards him, that is to say the opinion which ought to have been anticipated, namely that a Duchesse 'was not obliged' to attend the fancy dress ball given by this new minister. 'I don't see that there's any necessity to go to the Greek Minister's: I don't know him; I'm not Greek; so why should I go to his house? I have no cause for social intercourse in such a place,' said the Duchesse.

'But everyone's going, it will be charming, from everything I hear, cried Mme de Gallardon.

– But it's also just as charming to stay at home by one's own fireside,' rejoined Mme de Guermantes.

The Courvoisiers could not get over this, but the Guermantes, without following suit with their cousin, approved: 'Of course, not everyone's in a position like Oriane to flout convention so utterly. But in a sense you can't say she's wrong in her desire to show that we do rather overstep the mark in grovelling before these foreigners, when we're not always sure quite where they come from.'

Naturally Mme de Guermantes, perfectly aware of the string of comments which either attitude would provoke, derived as much pleasure from appearing at a party at which the hostess dared not rely on her presence as she did by staying at home or spending the evening at the theatre with her husband, on the night of a party to which 'everyone was going', or else, when people imagined that she would put the finest diamonds to shame by wearing some antique historic tiara, by making her entrance without a single jewel and wearing a style of dress quite different from the one that people had wrongly supposed to be obligatory for the occasion in hand. Although she was anti-Dreyfusard (while believing Dreyfus to be innocent, just as she devoted her time to society life while believing only in

the life of the mind), she had created a stunning sensation at a party given by the Princesse de Ligne, first of all by remaining seated when all the ladies present had risen to their feet as Général Mercier[59] entered the room, and then by getting up and asking for her carriage in a voice for all to hear when a nationalist speaker had started to hold forth, thereby showing that in her opinion talking politics had no place in the world of society; all heads had turned in her direction at a Good Friday concert at which, although a Voltairean, she had felt it indecent to bring Christ on to the stage. We know how important, even for the great queens of society, that time of year is when the social calendar commences: so much so that the Marquise d'Amoncourt, who, with her burning need to say something (a psychological quirk, and a lack of sensitivity to boot), always ended up making a fool of herself, had even gone so far as to reply to someone who had called to offer their condolences on the death of her father, M. de Montmorency: 'I think what makes such grief more difficult to bear is that it should come at a time when one's mantelpiece is simply smothered in invitation cards.' Well, at this point in the social calendar, when anyone invited the Duchesse de Guermantes to dine, with great urgency in case she was already engaged, she would turn down the invitation with the one excuse which no society person would ever have thought of: she was about to set off on a cruise – 'quite fascinating, my dear!' – of the Norwegian fjords. Society people were thunderstruck by this, and, without any notion of following the Duchesse's example, nevertheless derived from her project the sense of relief you get when you read Kant and when, after the most rigorous demonstration of determinism, it transpires that above the world of necessity there is the world of freedom. Every really original invention stirs the interest even of people who can derive no benefit from it. The invention of steam navigation was almost nothing when compared to the implementation of steam navigation at that sedentary time of the year known as 'the season'. The idea that anyone could turn down a hundred dinners or luncheon-parties on purpose, twice as many tea-parties, three times as many receptions, the most brilliant Mondays at the Opéra and Tuesdays at the Théâtre Français to visit the Norwegian fjords was no more explicable to the Courvoisiers than the idea of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, but it conveyed to them a similar impression of independence and charm. So that not a day passed without somebody being heard to ask, not merely: 'You've heard Oriane's latest quip?' but 'You know Oriane's latest?' And following upon 'Oriane's latest?' and 'Oriane's latest quip', people would say: 'How typical of Oriane!', 'Isn't that sterling Oriane for you?' For instance, Oriane's latest might be that, finding herself obliged to write on behalf of some patriotic circle to Cardinal X, Bishop of Mâcon (normally referred to by M. de Guermantes as 'Monsieur de Mascon', because he thought this to be more 'traditional'), when everybody was trying to figure out what form her letter would take, and had no problem as to the opening address, the choice being between 'Eminence' and 'Monseigneur', but was in a quandary as to the rest, Oriane's letter, to the general astonishment, began: 'Monsieur le Cardinal', following an old Academic formula, or 'My cousin', this term being in use among the Princes of the Church, the Guermantes and crowned heads of state, who were accustomed to praying God to take each and all of them into 'His fit and holy keeping'. All that was needed to start people talking about 'Oriane's latest' was to be in a theatre at which everyone who was anyone in Paris was present for the performance of some charming play, to look for Mme de Guermantes in the Princess of Parma's box, in the box of the Princesse de Guermantes, or in those of countless others who might have invited her, and to discover her sitting by herself, dressed in black, wearing a diminutive hat, in a stall in which she had taken up her seat before the curtain went up. 'You can hear better, when it's a play that's worth listening to,' she would explain to the scandalized Courvoisiers, the admiringly bewildered Guermantes and the Princess of Parma, who suddenly became convinced that the 'fashion' for hearing the beginning of a play was more up to date, betokened more originality and intelligence (no surprise coming from Oriane) than late arrival for the last act after a grand dinner-party and a look-in at some reception or other. These then were the various ways of astonishing people for which the Princess of Parma knew she ought to be prepared if she asked Mme de Guermantes about some literary or society matter, and which meant that, during these dinner-parties at the Duchesse's, Her Royal Highness never broached the slightest subject unless it was with the uneasy and titillating caution of the bather emerging from between two knife-edged breakers.

Among the elements that were absent from the two or three other roughly equivalent leading salons of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and differentiated the Duchesse's own from them, just as Leibniz allows that each monad reflects the whole universe and also adds to it something of its own, one of the least attractive was normally furnished by one or two extremely beautiful women who had no other claim to be there but their beauty and the use to which M. de Guermantes had put it, and whose presence revealed at once, as does the presence of otherwise unaccountable paintings in other salons, that in this one the husband was a passionate connoisseur of the feminine graces. These women were all more or less the same; for the Duc had a taste for tall women, at once statuesque and nonchalant, of a type half-way between the Venus de Milo and the Winged Mercury; often fair-haired, rarely dark, occasionally auburn, like the most recent addition, who was at this dinner, the very Vicomtesse d'Arpajon with whom he had been so enamoured that for a long time he had obliged her to send him as many as ten telegrams a day (to the Duchesse's mild irritation) and corresponded with her by carrier pigeon when he was staying at Guermantes, and from whose company in fact he had long been so incapable of tearing himself away that, one winter which he had been forced to spend in Parma, he travelled back to Paris every week, making a two-day journey in order to see her.

In the normal run of events, these bit-part beauties had once been his mistresses but no longer were (as in the case of Mme d'Arpajon) or were on the point of ceasing to be. It may well have been that the glamour the Duchesse held in their eyes and the hope of being invited to her salon, though they themselves came from highly aristocratic backgrounds, however second-rank, had prompted them, even more than the good looks and generosity of the Duc, to yield to his desires. Not that the Duchesse would have imposed any insurmountable obstacle in the way of their being admitted to her society; she was aware that in more than one of them she had found an ally, thanks to whom she had obtained countless things she wanted and which M. de Guermantes pitilessly refused to his wife so long as he was not in love with someone else. And so the reason they were not received by the Duchesse until a liaison was already far advanced was essentially to do with the fact that the Duc, each time he embarked on a full-scale love affair, had expected it to be no more than a brief fling, in exchange for which he considered an invitation from his wife to be excessive. And yet he found himself offering just this as the reward for far less, for a first kiss for instance, because he had met with unexpected resistance or, conversely, because there had been no resistance. In love, it often happens that gratitude, the desire to give pleasure, causes us to be generous beyond the limits of what hope and self-interest had envisaged. But then the implementation of this offer would become hindered by further complications. For a start, all the women who had responded to M. de Guermantes's love, and occasionally even when they had not yet yielded to it, he had kept cut off from the world one after the other. He no longer allowed them to see anyone, spent almost all his time in their company, looked after the education of their children, to whom he sometimes, if one was to judge by certain glaring resemblances later on, had occasion to present a little brother or sister. And if, at the start of the liaison, the idea of an introduction to Mme de Guermantes, utterly absent from the Duc's intentions, had played a part in the mind of the mistress in question, in the course of the liaison the lady's views had altered; the Duc was no longer for her the husband of the most fashionable woman in Paris but a man whom the new mistress was in love with, and a man who had given her the means and the inclination for a more luxurious style of life and had turned upside down her notions of the relative importance of questions of social snobbery and material advantage; and occasionally these mistresses of the Duc were animated by a jealousy of Mme de Guermantes, in which all these factors played a part. But this was extremely rare; besides, when the day set aside for the introduction eventually came round (usually at a time when it had become a matter of more or less indifference to the Duc, whose behaviour, like everyone else's, was more often dictated by previous behaviour than by the original motive for the introduction, which had ceased to operate), it frequently happened that it was Mme de Guermantes who had sought the acquaintance of the mistress, in whom she hoped, and was so very anxious, to find a precious ally against her dreadful husband. None of this means that in their own house, except on rare occasions, when, if the Duchesse talked too much, he let fall a few words or, more dreadful still, maintained an excruciatingly meaningful silence, M. de Guermantes failed in the keeping up of 'outward appearances' towards his wife. People who did not know them might easily be taken in. Sometimes, in the autumn, between the Deauville races, taking the waters, and departure for the hunting-season in Guermantes, in the few weeks which people spend in Paris, since the Duchesse was fond of *café-concerts*, the Duc would accompany her to one in the evening. The audience noticed at once, in one of the little open boxes where there is just enough room for two people, this Hercules in his '*smoking*' (for in France anything that is the least bit British gets given the name it happens not to have in England),[60] his monocle scrunched into his eye, a fat cigar, from which he now and then took a puff,

in his fleshy but finely-shaped hand, on the ring-finger of which a sapphire sparkled, keeping his eyes mostly turned towards the stage, but, when he did let them fall upon the audience, in which there was absolutely no one he knew, softening them with a gentle look, reserved, polite and respectful. When a refrain struck him as amusing and not too risqué, the Duc turned round to his wife with a smile and would share with her, with a twinkle of indulgent complicity, the innocent merriment the new song had aroused in him. And the spectators might well have believed that there was no better husband in the world, nor anyone more enviable than the Duchesse – this woman who was excluded from all the real interests in the Duc's life, the woman he did not love and to whom he had never once stopped being unfaithful; when the Duchesse felt tired, the audience would see M. de Guermantes rise to his feet, put on her wrap with his own hands, arranging her necklaces so that they did not catch in the lining, and clear the way for her to the exit with an attentive show of care which she received with the haughty chill of a woman of the world who takes such behaviour for granted, simply as conventional good manners, at times even regards it with the slightly ironical bitterness of the disabused wife who has no illusions left to shatter. Despite these outward appearances – another of the aspects of that politeness which has transferred, at some remote point in time which has never come to an end for those who have survived it, a deep-seated sense of duty from the depths to the surface – the Duchesse did not have an easy life. M. de Guermantes reverted to humane behaviour and generosity only when there was a new mistress, who would, as it happened, more often than not side with the Duchesse: the latter could then see opportunities opening up for her once more to be generous towards inferiors, charitable towards the poor and even, later on, to buy herself a fabulous new motor-car. But the irritation which generally arose fairly rapidly in Mme de Guermantes in regard to persons she found too submissive did not spare the Duc's mistresses. The Duchesse very soon grew tired of them. As it happened, at that time too, the Duc's liaison with Mme d'Arpajon was coming to an end. There was another mistress in the offing.

No doubt the love M. de Guermantes had borne each of them in turn would one day make itself felt anew: for a start this love, as it faded away, bequeathed his mistresses to the surroundings like beautiful marble statues – beautiful to the Duc at least, since part of him became an artist in this respect, because he had loved them and was appreciative now of contours he would not have noticed without making love to them – which juxtaposed, in the Duchesse's drawing-room, their various forms, which had long been hostile to one another, eaten up with jealousies and quarrels, but were finally reconciled in the peace of amity; and then this amity was itself an effect of the love which had caused M. de Guermantes to observe, in the women who had been his mistresses, virtues shared by all human beings but perceptible only to the lover's sensuality, to the point where an ex-mistress who has become 'a really close friend' and would do anything in the world for one has become a cliché, like the doctor or father who is not a doctor or a father but a friend. But during the initial stages of rupture, the woman whom M. de Guermantes was on the point of abandoning would make a fuss, create scenes, become demanding, appear indiscreet and pestering. The Duc would begin to take a sudden dislike to her. At this stage Mme de Guermantes would have the opportunity to bring to light the real or imagined defects of a person who annoyed her. Known to be kind, Mme de Guermantes would take the constant telephone calls from the abandoned mistress, receive her confidences, offer a shoulder to cry on, without complaint. She would laugh about it with her husband, then with a few close friends. And imagining that the sympathy she showed towards the unfortunate woman gave her the right to make fun of her, even to her face, whatever the lady in question might say, provided it could be kept within the bounds of the absurd behaviour that the Duc and herself had recently decided to ascribe to her, Mme de Guermantes had no qualms about exchanging ironically knowing glances on the matter with her husband.

Meanwhile, as she took her place at table, the Princess of Parma suddenly remembered that she had thought of inviting Mme d'Heudicourt to the Opéra, and, seeking assurance about any offence to Mme de Guermantes that might be involved, she was looking for an opportunity to sound her out on the matter. At this point M. de Grouchy came into the room, his train having been held up for an hour owing to a derailment. He offered his apologies as best he could. Had she been a Courvoisier, his wife would have died of shame. But Mme de Grouchy was not a Guermantes for nothing. As her husband was offering his excuses, she broke in:

'I see that even in small matters, arriving late is a tradition in your family.

– Sit down, Grouchy, and don't let them disparage you, said the Duc. While I move with the times, I have to admit that the Battle of Waterloo had its good side, since it brought about the Bourbon Restoration and, better still, in a way that made them unpopular. But it seems to me that you're a real Nimrod![61]

– As it happens, I did get quite a good bag. You'll allow me, of course, to send six brace of pheasant to the Duchesse tomorrow?'

Some thought seemed to flicker in Mme de Guermantes's eyes. She insisted that M. de Grouchy must not put himself to the trouble of sending the pheasants. And signalling to the footman with a fiancée with whom I had chatted on my way from the Elstir room, she said to him:

'You'll go and collect M. le Comte's pheasants tomorrow and bring them straight back. Grouchy, you won't mind if I give a few of them away, will you? Basin and I can't eat a dozen pheasants by ourselves.

– But the day after tomorrow will be soon enough, said M. de Grouchy.

– No, I'd rather it were tomorrow,' the Duchesse insisted. Poullein had turned pale; he would miss his meeting with his fiancée. This was adequate opportunity for the Duchesse to divert the conversation; she liked to cultivate the common touch with people.

'I know it's your day off, she said to Poullein, all you need to do is to change with Georges. He can take tomorrow off and stay here on duty the day after.'

But the day after, Poullein's fiancée would not be free. He had no interest at all in having the day off then. As soon as Poullein had left the room, everyone complimented the Duchesse on her kindness towards her servants.

'But I only treat them as I'd like people to treat me.

– But that's just it. They have every reason to say they've found a good position in this house.

– Nothing so very special about that. But I think they all like me. That one is a trifle irritating because he's in love. He finds it fitting to go about with a lovesick look on his face.'

At this point Poullein re-entered the room.

'You're right, said M. de Grouchy, he doesn't look very cheerful. One needs to be kind to these people, but not too kind.

– I realize that I'm not very good with servants. He'll have nothing to do all day but go and fetch your pheasants, sit around the house doing nothing, then eat his share of the treat.

– There are plenty of people who would be glad to be in his place, said M. de Grouchy. Envy makes people blind.

– Oriane, said the Princess of Parma, I had a visit from your cousin Heudicourt the other day. Of course she's a highly intelligent woman. She's a Guermantes – need one say more? – but they tell me she has a wicked tongue…'

The Duc's eyes met his wife's in a prolonged gaze of deliberate stupefaction. Mme de Guermantes began to laugh. The Princess took some time to become aware of this.

'But… do you mean… you don't agree with me?… she said with some misgiving.

– Really, Madame, it's too good of you to pay any attention to the faces Basin makes. Now, Basin, you're not to insinuate anything nasty about our relatives.

– Does he think she's over-malicious? the Princess asked pointedly.

– Oh, certainly not! came the Duchesse's reply. I don't know who told Your Highness she was malicious. Quite the contrary. She's an excellent creature who never spoke ill of or did any harm to a soul.

– Oh, I see, said Mme de Parme, much relieved, it was not something I had noticed myself either. But I know it's difficult not to be malicious when one has a great deal of wit…

– Ah! now wit is a quality of which she has even less.

– What, less wit? … asked the Princess, stupefied.

– Come now, Oriane, broke in the Duc in a slightly sulky tone, as he darted amused glances about the table, you heard the Princess tell you she was highly intelligent.

– But isn't she?

– Highly wide around the waist, certainly.

– Don't listen to him, Madame, he's not being truthful. She's as stupid as a (euh) goose,' interposed Mme de Guermantes in a loud and husky voice (she had far more 'old-world charm' than the Duc himself could sometimes muster when he was not deliberately trying, but her charm was quite different from the deliquescent, lace-jabot style of her husband and far more subtle in fact, with its almost countrified pronunciation and its delightfully rough, earthy tang.) 'But she's the finest woman in the world. And I'm not sure how far one can talk of stupidity in her case. I don't believe I know anyone like her; she's a case for medical treatment, there's something pathological about her, some sort of natural naïvety, or stupidity, or "retarded development", like the sort of thing you come across in melodramas or in *L'Arlésienne*.[62] When she comes here, I'm always wondering whether the moment may not have arrived for her intelligence to show itself at last, which always makes me a little jumpy.' These turns of phrase impressed the Princess wonderfully, but she remained flabbergasted by the Duchesse's verdict. 'She told me your joke about "Teaser Augustus" – Mme d'Épinay mentioned it as well. Quite delightful,' she said by way of response.

M. de Guermantes explained the joke to me. I was wanting to tell him that his brother, who pretended not to know me, was expecting me that very evening at eleven. But I had not enquired of Robert whether I might mention this rendezvous and, given that M. de Charlus had arranged it with me in a way that practically contradicted what he had told the Duchesse, I thought it more tactful not to mention it.

' "Teaser Augustus" isn't bad, said M. de Guermantes, but Mme d'Heudicourt probably didn't tell you about the far better remark Oriane made to her the other day in reply to a luncheon invitation?

– Oh, no! Do tell me!

– Come now, Basin, there's no need for that. In the first place it was a stupid remark, and it will make the Princess think me even worse than my dopey cousin. Though I don't know why I call her my cousin. She's one of Basin's cousins. Still, I suppose she is related to me in a sense.

– Oh!' exclaimed the Princess of Parma as she confronted the idea that she could possibly think of Mme de Guermantes as stupid, protesting desperately that nothing could ever make the Duchesse fall from the place she held in her esteem.

'Besides, we've already deprived her of the qualities of the mind and, since the remark you're referring to tends to deny her certain qualities of the heart, it seems to me quite out of place to repeat it.

– "Deny her!" "Out of place!" How well she expresses herself! said the Duc with a pretence of irony, to win admiration for the Duchesse.

– Come, come, Basin, you mustn't make fun of your wife.

– I should explain to your Royal Highness, the Duc went on, that Oriane's cousin may be superior, kind, on the stout side, anything you care to mention, but she isn't exactly – how shall I put it – open-handed.

– Oh, I know, she's terribly close-fisted, the Princess broke in.

– I should not have ventured to put it like that, but you have hit on exactly the right words. It comes across in the way she keeps house, especially the food she serves. It's excellent, but she does eke it out.

– That can give rise to some fairly amusing goings-on, M. de Bréauté broke in. For instance, my dear Basin, I once went down to Heudicourt on a day when you were expected, Oriane and yourself. The most sumptuous preparations had been made, and then, in the afternoon, a footman brought in a telegram to say you weren't coming.

– That doesn't surprise me at all,' said the Duchesse, who was not only difficult to pin down, but liked people to know it.

'Your cousin read the telegram, was bitterly disappointed, then immediately, quick as a flash, telling herself that there was no point in going to unnecessary expense for unimportant nobility such as myself, she called the footman back: "Tell the cook not to put on the chicken," she shouted. And that evening I heard her asking the butler: "And what about yesterday's left-over beef? Aren't you going to serve it up?"

– All the same, one has to say that the fare one gets there is of the best,' said the Duc, who imagined that the use of this word would show him to be very much of the old school. 'I know of no establishment where one eats better.

– Or less, the Duchesse chipped in.

– The food is quite wholesome and quite adequate for what you would call an old Farmer Grimes like myself, the Duc went on. One doesn't over-indulge.

– Oh, if we are to understand it as taking a cure, then that's another matter; it's clearly more health-inspired than rich and copious. Not that's it's *that* special,' Mme de Guermantes added as someone who was not too keen that the award of 'best table in Paris' should go to any table but her own. 'My cousin follows the same pattern as the constipated writers who present us with a one-act play or a sonnet every fifteen years. The sort of things people call little masterpieces, little jewels of nothing, the sort of thing I really hate in fact. The food at Zénaïde's place isn't bad, but one would find it more humdrum if she was less parsimonious. There are things her cook does well, and others he makes a complete mess of. I've had some dreadful dinners there, as one does in most places, only they've done me less harm than elsewhere because one's stomach is, after all, more sensitive to quantity than to quality.

– Well, to get to the end of the story, the Duc concluded, Zénaïde was adamant that Oriane should go to luncheon with her and, since my wife is not very keen on going out anywhere, she resisted the invitation; she wanted to be sure that she was not being trapped into some great shindig and tried in vain to find out who else would be there to luncheon. "You must come, insisted Zénaïde, as she boasted about all the good things there would be to eat. There'll be a chestnut purée, that's all I need to tell you, and there'll be seven little *bouchées à la reine.* – *Seven*! cried Oriane, then there'll be at least eight of us to lunch!" '

After a few seconds the Princess finally saw the point and let her laughter break forth like a clap of thunder. 'Ah, "there'll be at least eight of us" – it's a delightful one. How very charmingly you edit it!' she said after making a supreme effort to recall the expression she had heard used by Mme d'Épinay and which was more appropriate in this instance.

'Oriane, that was very delightful of the Princess; she said your remark was "well edited".

– But, my dear, there's nothing new in what you're saying. I know how witty the Princess is,' replied Mme de Guermantes, who readily appreciated a remark when it was uttered by a royal personage and flattered her own wit at the same time. 'I am very proud that Madame should appreciate my humble attempts at "editing". Though I don't remember saying such a thing. And if I did, it was to flatter my cousin, for if she had catered for seven "mouthfuls",[63] the mouths to feed, if I can put it like this, would have been a dozen if not more.'

During this time the Comtesse d'Arpajon, who had told me before dinner that her aunt would have been so happy to show me round her Normandy residence, was saying to me, over the Prince d'Agrigente's head, that where she would most like to invite me was to the Côte d'Or, because there, at Pont-le-Duc, she would be in her own home.

'The archives of the château would be of interest to you. There is some absolutely fascinating correspondence between all the most prominent figures in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I spend many very happy hours there, living in the past,' the Comtesse assured me, and I was reminded of M. de Guermantes remarking that she was an extremely cultured woman as far as literature was concerned.

'She owns all M. de Bornier's[64] manuscripts,' the Princess continued, alluding to Mme d'Heudibert, and eager to make the most of any good cause she might have for cultivating the society of such a person.

'She must have dreamed it, I don't believe she ever even knew him, said the Duchesse.

– The really interesting thing about these correspondences is that they are between people of different countries,' the Comtesse d'Arpajon continued, as someone who was allied to the principal ducal and even reigning families of Europe and was always happy to remind people of the fact.

'But surely, Oriane, said M. de Guermantes meaningfully, you can't have forgotten that dinner-party where you had M. de Bornier next to you at table!

– Basin, the Duchesse broke in, if you're trying to tell me that I knew M. de Bornier, why of course I did, he even called on me on several occasions, but I could never bring myself to invite him because it would have meant having the house disinfected with formol after every visit he made. As for the dinner you're referring to, how could I ever forget it? but it was certainly not at Zénaïde's place. She never set eyes on Bornier in her life and would probably think, if you mentioned *La Fille de Roland* to her, that you were talking about a Bonaparte princess who was thought to be engaged to the son of the King of Greece. No, it was at the Austrian Embassy. That dear man Hoyos imagined he was doing me a favour by plonking that evil-smelling Academician right next to me. It was like sitting next to a whole platoon of gendarmes. I was obliged to hold my nose as best I could all through dinner. I didn't dare breathe until they brought on the gruyère!'

M. de Guermantes had obtained his hidden objective and conducted a furtive inspection of his guests' faces to gauge the effect produced by the Duchesse's witticisms.

'And I find there is a peculiar charm in old exchanges of letters,' continued the lady of impressive literary culture who had such fascinating letters in her château, quite undeterred by the intervening head of the Prince d'Agrigente.

'Have you noticed that an author's letters are often superior to the rest of his work? Who was the man who wrote *Salammbô*?'

I should have preferred not to have to reply and to curtail this conversation, but I felt that this would be rather unkind to the Prince d'Agrigente; he was pretending to know perfectly well who *Salammbô* was by and to be leaving it to me to say, whereas he was actually in a painful quandary.

'Flaubert,' I ended up by saying, but the assenting nods performed by the Prince's head smothered the sound of my remark, with the result that the lady I was talking to was not exactly sure whether I had said Paul Bert or Fulbert, names which did not ring quite right in her ears.

'At all events, she went on, how fascinating his correspondence is, and how superior to his books! It explains him, in fact, because one sees from everything he says about the difficulty he has writing a book that he wasn't a true writer, not a talented man.

– Talking of correspondences, I find Gambetta's quite wonderful,' said the Duchesse de Guermantes, to show that she was not afraid to display her interest in a proletarian and a radical. M. de Bréauté, who fully grasped the witty effect of her audaciousness, looked around him with a gaze at once tipsy and affectionate before wiping his monocle.

'By God, it was devilish dull, that *Fille de Roland*,' said M. de Guermantes, with the satisfaction he derived from the sense of his own superiority over a work that had bored him to tears, and perhaps also from the *suave mari magno*[65] sensation one has in the middle of a good dinner when one recalls such terrible evenings at the theatre. 'Still, it had some good lines, and a patriotic spirit.'

I said something that implied my utter lack of enthusiasm for M. de Bornier.

'Ah! you've got something against him?' the Duc asked with curiosity, for he always supposed, when anyone spoke ill of a man, that it must be on account of a private resentment, just as to speak well of a woman indicated an incipient infatuation.

'You clearly bear him some sort of grudge. What did he do to you? Do tell us! Come on, there must be some skeleton in the cupboard or you wouldn't sound so disparaging. It goes on too long, *La Fille de Roland*, but there is a whiff of feeling to it.

– 'Whiff' is exactly the right word for an author with such a smell about him,' broke in an ironic Mme de Guermantes. 'If this poor child has ever been in the man's company one can quite understand that he got up his nose!

– I have to say, though, Madame, the Duc went on, addressing the Princess of Parma, that quite apart from *La Fille de Roland*, I'm terribly old-fashioned in my literary and even in my musical tastes. There's no old junk too rubbishy for my palate. You won't believe this perhaps, but in the evenings when my wife sits down at the piano, I find myself asking for some old tune by Auber or Boieldieu, or even Beethoven! That's what I like. But as for Wagner, it sends me to sleep immediately.

– You're wrong there, said Mme de Guermantes. Even with his insufferable long-windedness, Wagner had elements of genius. *Lohengrin* is a masterpiece. Even in *Tristan* there are occasionally intriguing passages. And the Spinning Chorus in *The Flying Dutchman* is perfect heaven.

– But I'm right, aren't I, Babal?' said M. de Guermantes, turning to M. de Bréauté, 'what we like is:

Les rendezvous de noble compagnie

Se donnent tous en ce charmant séjour.[66]

That's delightful. And *Fra Diavolo*, and *The Magic Flute*, and *Le Chalet*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *Les Diamants de la Couronne* – that's what we call music! It's the same thing in literature. For instance, I love Balzac, *Le Bal de Sceaux, Les Mohicans de Paris*.[67]

– Oh! my dear, if you're off on the subject of Balzac, we'll be here for ever. Save it up for one of Mémé's visits. He's even worse, he knows Balzac by heart.'

Irritated by his wife's interruption, the Duc shot her a momentary look of menacing silence. In the meantime, Mme d'Arpajon had been involved in an exchange with the Princess of Parma about poetry, tragic and otherwise, the words of which did not reach me distinctly until I caught the following remark from the lips of Mme d'Arpajon: 'Oh, Madame is quite right, I admit that he paints us an ugly picture of the world because he can't distinguish between ugliness and beauty, or rather because his insufferable vanity leads him to believe that everything he says is beautiful. I agree with Your Highness that in the piece we're talking about, there are some ludicrous things, quite unintelligible, and some errors of taste, and that it's difficult to understand, as much trouble to read as if it were written in Russian or Chinese, because quite clearly it's simply *not* what we'd call French; but still, when one has taken the trouble, how rewarding a work it is, how truly imaginative!' I had missed the opening sentences of this little lecture. I eventually gathered not only that the poet who was incapable of making the distinction between beauty and ugliness was Victor Hugo, but furthermore that the poetry which was as hard to understand as Russian or Chinese was:

Lorsque l'enfant paraît, le cercle de famille

a piece dating from the poet's earliest period and perhaps even nearer to Mme Deshoulières than the Victor Hugo of *La Légende des siècles*.[68] Far from thinking Mme d'Arpajon ridiculous, I saw her (the first person at this table – such an ordinary, humdrum table – at which I had sat down with such disappointment), I saw her in my mind's eye, beneath that lace cap of hers with the long spiral ringlets falling remorsefully from either side, a cap worn by Mme de Rémusat, Mme de Broglie, Mme de Saint-Aulaire,[69] all those distinguished ladies whose delightful letters quote so learnedly and so aptly from Sophocles, Schiller and the *Imitation of Christ*, but whose reactions to the earliest poetry of the Romantics provoked the alarm and exhaustion which were inseparable, in my grandmother's eyes, from Mallarmé's late poetry.[70]

'Mme d'Arpajon is very fond of poetry,' the Princess of Parma remarked to Mme de Guermantes, impressed by the tone of the former's lecture.

'No, she doesn't understand a thing about it,' returned Mme de Guermantes in an undertone, taking advantage of the fact that Mme d'Arpajon, who was countering an objection raised by the Général de Beautreillis, was too intent on what she was saying to hear what the Duchesse was whispering. 'She's become very bookish since she was abandoned. I don't mind telling Your Highness that I'm the one who has to bear the brunt of it all, because it's to me she comes running whenever Basin hasn't been to see her, which is practically every day. But it really isn't my fault if she bores him, and I can't force him to go and see her, though I'd prefer him to be a little more loyal to her, because it would mean I saw rather less of her myself. But she drives him mad and no wonder. She's not a dreadful person, but, believe me, she's unimaginably boring. She gives me such a headache each day that I'm forever having to take pain-killers. And it's all because Basin took it into his head to go to bed with her behind my back for a year or so. And as if that wasn't enough, I've got a footman who's in love with a little slut and goes about sulking if I don't ask the young lady to quit her street-walking profits for half an hour to come and take tea with me! It's enough to drive one mad!' the Duchesse concluded languidly. The main reason why Mme d'Arpajon was driving M. de Guermantes to distraction was because he had recently become the lover of another woman, the Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, as I discovered.

As it happened, the footman who had been deprived of his day off was at that moment waiting at table. And it struck me that he had not recovered from his disappointment and was doing his job with all this on his mind, for I noticed that, as he was offering the various dishes to M. de Châtellerault, he performed his task so awkwardly that the young Duc's elbow was constantly coming into contact with his own. The young Duc showed no sign of annoyance with the blushing footman, but on the contrary looked up at him with a smile in his clear blue eyes. I saw this good humour as a token of kindness on the guest's part. But the insistent smiling eyes led me to think that he was aware of the servant's disappointed hopes and that what he was in fact feeling was perhaps a malicious amusement.

'But, my dear, you're revealing nothing new, you know, in what you're telling us about Victor Hugo,' the Duchesse went on, turning this time to Mme d'Arpajon, whose worried turn of the head she had just intercepted. You mustn't expect to launch his early work. We all know it is talented. It's the late Victor Hugo that's so dreadful, *La Légende des siècles*, and the other titles I can't remember. But *Les Feuilles d' automne, Les Chants du crépuscule*, are often the work of a poet, a true poet. Even *Les Contemplations* still has some fine things in it,' added the Duchesse, with whom her listeners dared not disagree, and with good reason. 'But I confess that I prefer to venture no further than the *Crépuscule*! It's certainly true that in Victor Hugo's better poems, and they do exist, one frequently stumbles upon an idea, even a profound one.'

And with just the right shade of feeling, bringing out the melancholic thought with the full force of her intonation, projecting it to a world beyond the sound of her voice, and gazing steadily ahead of her in a dreamy, charming manner, the Duchesse said 'Listen to this,' and started to slowly recite:

'La douleur est un fruit, Dieu ne le fait pas croître
Sur la branche trop faible encor pour le porter.[71]

Or this,' she continued:

'Les morts durent bien peu…
Hélas, dans le cercueil ils tombent en poussière,
Moins vite qu'en nos coeurs!'[72]

And, while a smile of disillusionment puckered her sorrowful lips with an elegant twist, the Duchesse rested the dreamy gaze of her lovely clear blue eyes upon Mme d'Arpajon. I was getting to know those eyes, and that voice, with its heavy drawl, its rasping flavour. In this voice and those eyes, I recognized much of the natural world around Combray. It is true that in the affected way the voice sporadically betrayed the earthiness of the soil there were many elements involved: the wholly countrified origins of one branch of the Guermantes family, longer-rooted, sturdier, wilder, more pugnacious than others; and then that automatic reflex characteristic of genuinely refined people and people of intelligence who know that refinement has nothing to do with mincing one's words, the reflex of nobles who fraternize more readily with their farmers than with the middle classes; all of these being particularities which Mme de Guermantes's regal status enabled her to show off more freely, with no holds barred. It appears that some of her sisters shared the same voice; she detested them, and they – less intelligent than herself and married to men somewhat below their station (if one can use such an expression to refer to unions with obscure noblemen, burrowed away in the provinces or in one of the lacklustre circles of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris) – possessed this voice themselves but had curbed it, corrected it, toned it down as far as they were able to do so, just as any one of us seldom has the nerve to be himself as opposed to putting his efforts into aping the most fashionable models of the done thing. But Oriane was far more intelligent, far wealthier and, most importantly, so much more fashionable than her sisters; as the Princesse des Laumes, she had commanded such an impressive dash in the company of the Prince of Wales, that she came to realize that her discordant voice was an attraction, and, with audacious confidence in her own idiosyncrasy, she had used it to create, in the world of society, what in the theatrical world a Réjane or a Jeanne Granier[73] (and of course no comparison is implied here between the respective merits and talents of these two actresses) created with theirs, something admirable and distinctive which certain sisters of Réjane and Granier, utterly unknown to the world, possibly tried to conceal as a defect.

In support of all these reasons for cultivating her native idiosyncrasies, Mme de Guermantes's favourite writers – Mérimée, Meilhac and Halévy – had contributed, together with a respect for 'naturalness', an inclination towards the prosaic through which she attained to poetry and a purely society cast of mind which called up various landscapes before my eyes. Besides, the Duchesse was quite capable, by bringing an artful refinement of her own to these various influences, of having selected for most of her words the pronunciation she thought of as most 'Ile-de-France,' most 'Champenoise', since, if not to the same degree as her sister-in-law Marsantes, she rarely strayed beyond the pure choice of words that might have been used by an old-established French writer. And when one was tired of the composite hotchpotch of modern speech, it was very restful to listen to Mme de Guermantes's talk, even with the knowledge that it could express far fewer things – almost as restful, if one was alone in her company and she restrained and clarified the flow of her speech still further, as listening to an old song. Then, as I looked and listened to Mme de Guermantes, I could see, calmly imprisoned in the unending afternoon of her eyes, an expanse of sky of the Ile-de-France or of Champagne, bluish, slanting, at the same angle of incline as in the eyes of Saint-Loup.

And so, in these various influences, Mme de Guermantes expressed at once the most ancient period of aristocratic France, then, much later, the manner in which the Duchesse de Broglie might have enjoyed and found fault with Victor Hugo under the July Monarchy, and, finally, a keen liking for the literature that sprang from Mérimée and Meilhac. I found the first of these influences more to my taste than the second, and it did more to alleviate the disappointment of my

journey to and arrival at the Faubourg Saint-Germain, so different from what I had imagined it to be; but I found the second preferable to the last. For while Mme de Guermantes was a Guermantes almost to her finger-tips, her à la Pailleron[74] preferences, her taste for the younger Dumas[75] were calculated and deliberate. Since such tastes were the opposite of my own, she fed me with literature when she spoke to me about the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and never seemed so stupidly Faubourg Saint-German as when she talked about literature.

Moved by the last lines recited, Mme d'Arpajon burst forth with: 'Monsieur, you must write that down for me on my fan, she said to M. de Guermantes.

'Ces reliques du coeur ont aussi leur poussière! [76]

– The poor woman, I feel sorry for her! the Princess of Parma remarked to Mme de Guermantes.

– No, please, Madame, spare your feelings. She has only got what was coming to her.

– But – you'll forgive me for saying this – she does really love him, doesn't she?

– Oh, not in the least. She isn't capable of it. She thinks she loves him just as at this very moment she thinks she has been quoting Victor Hugo, when in fact she was reciting a line from Musset. Look, said the Duchesse in a melancholic voice, nobody could be more moved by true feeling than myself. But let me tell you something. Only yesterday she made a terrible scene with Basin. Your Highness is perhaps inclined to think that it was because he's in love with other women, because he no longer loves her. Far from it. It was because he won't put her sons forward for the Jockey! Is that the behaviour of a woman in love, Madame? No! I will go further, Mme de Guermantes added sharply, she is a creature of unusual insensitivity.'

Meanwhile, it was with an eye sparkling with satisfaction that M. de Guermantes had been listening to his wife talking 'point-blank' about Victor Hugo and quoting those few lines. The Duchesse might often be irritating, but at moments such as this he was proud of her. 'Oriane is really extraordinary. She can talk about anything, she's read everything. She couldn't possibly have guessed that the conversation this evening would turn to Victor Hugo. Whatever the subject, she's ready for it. She can hold her own with the most learned people. This young man here must be quite enthralled.'

'But shall we change the subject? Mme de Guermantes continued. She's a very highly-strung woman. You must think me very old-fashioned, she continued, turning to me, I know that nowadays it's seen as a weakness to favour ideas in poetry, poetry with some thought to it.

– It's old-fashioned?' the Princess of Parma asked, slightly a-tremble at the effect upon her of this new wave she had not expected, although she knew that the Duchesse de Guermantes's conversation was always apt to offer a succession of delightful thrills, the breath-taking panic, the healthy fatigue after which her thoughts instinctively turned to the necessity of taking a footbath in a bath cubicle and a brisk walk in order to 'adjust herself' to the experience.

'Personally speaking, Oriane, said Mme de Brissac, I don't have any objection to Victor Hugo having ideas, quite the contrary, but I do object to the way he seeks them in hideous things. It was he, in the end, who accustomed us to ugliness in literature. There's already quite enough ugliness in life as it is. Why can't we just be allowed to forget it while we're reading? A painful sight from which we should turn away in real life, that's what attracts Victor Hugo.

– Victor Hugo is not as realistic as Zola, surely?' enquired the Princess of Parma.

At the name Zola, not a single muscle stirred on the face of M. de Beautreillis. The General's anti-Dreyfusism lay too deep for him to even attempt to give expression to it. And his benign silence when such topics were broached touched the hearts of the uninitiated as the sign of the same delicacy that a priest shows in avoiding any reference to one's religious obligations, a financial adviser in making sure that he does not recommend the companies he himself controls, a strong man in behaving like a lamb and refraining from fisticuffs.

'I know you're related to Admiral Jurien de la Gravière,' Mme de Varambon, the Princess of Parma's lady-in-waiting, said to me with a knowing look. An excellent woman within her limits, she had been procured for the Princess a long time ago by the Duc's mother. She had not so far addressed me, and subsequently I could never rid her, despite the admonitions of the Princess of Parma and my own protestations, of the idea that I was in some way connected with the admiral-Academician, who was a complete stranger to me. The utter refusal of the Princess of Parma's lady-in-waiting to see me as anything other than the nephew of Admiral Jurien de La Gravière was in itself quite a common and laughable phenomenon. But the mistake she made was only an extreme and desiccated instance of the countless mistakes, more trivial, more pointed, unintentional or deliberate, which accompany our names on the particular index card the world allots us. I remember a friend of the Guermantes who had expressed a keen desire to make my acquaintance and alleged as the reason for this that I was a great friend of his cousin, Mme de Chaussegros, 'a charming woman, so very fond of you'. I was punctilious enough to insist – in vain – that there was some mistake, that I was not acquainted with Mme de Chaussegros. 'Then it's her sister you know; it comes down to the same thing. She met you in Scotland.' I have never been to Scotland and, in my honesty, I went to the trouble – a complete waste of time – of pointing this out to the person I was addressing. It was Mme de Chaussegros herself who had said that she knew me (and no doubt she sincerely believed it) as the result of some initial confusion, for from then on she never failed to greet me whenever she caught sight of me. And since, after all, the milieu in which I moved was identical to that of Mme de Chaussegros, there was no rhyme or reason in the way I played the situation down. To say that I was a close friend of the Chaussegros family was, quite literally, a mistake, but from the social point of view it gave some idea of my actual position, if one can speak of social position in regards to the young man I was at the time. It mattered little that this friend of the Guermantes should tell me things about myself which were untrue, and the idea of me he continued to hold neither underestimated nor overestimated me in society terms. After all, for those of us who are not in the acting profession, when another person forms a false idea of us, imagines we are friends with a lady who is unknown to us but we have reputedly met in the course of a delightful journey we have never made, the tedium of constantly inhabiting the same skin becomes dispelled for a moment, as if we were actually going on stage. Mistakes that proliferate harmlessly enough when they are without the unbending rigidity of the one that had been made, and would continue to be made for the rest of her life, in spite of my denials, by Mme de Parme's fool of a lady-in-waiting, stuck for all time in the belief that I was related to that boring man, Admiral Jurien de La Gravière. 'She's got no head for these things, the Duc told me, and she really ought not to overdo the alcohol. I think she's somewhat under the influence of Bacchus at the moment.' As it happened, Mme de Varambon had only been drinking water, but the Duc liked an opportunity to pop up with his favourite expressions.

'But Zola's not a realist, he's a poet, Madame!' said Mme de Guermantes, drawing her inspiration from the critical articles she had read over the last few years and converting them to her individual brilliance. Agreeably jostled up to this point by the experience of bathing in wit, a bath stirred up especially for her, which she was taking this evening and which, in her view, must be particularly beneficial for her health, allowing herself to be borne along by the successive waves of paradox as they broke, the Princess of Parma now gave a sudden start for fear of being knocked to her feet. And it was with a catch in her voice, as though her breath had been taken away, that she gasped out:

'Zola a poet!

– Why, certainly,' answered the Duchesse laughing, delighted by this suffocated reaction. 'Your Highness has surely observed how he elevates everything he touches. I can see you're about to tell me that he only touches the things that bring us… pleasure. But he makes that into something colossal. He's master of the epic dungheap! the Homer of the sewers! He can't write Cambronne's expletive[77] in big enough letters.'

Despite the intense exhaustion she was beginning to feel, the Princess was enchanted; never had she felt in better sorts. She would not have exchanged the highly invigorating salts of these divine dinner-parties at Mme de Guermantes's for an invitation to Schönbrunn,[78] which was the one thing that really flattered her.

'He writes that word with a big *C*, Mme d'Arpajon burst forth.

– Surely with a big *M*, I think, my dear,' replied the Duchesse de Guermantes, but not until she and her husband had looked at each other with a twinkle in their eyes which implied: 'How stupid can you get?' 'And while I think of it…' said Mme de Guermantes, turning to me with a smiling, tender gaze that lingered on my face, because, as an accomplished hostess, she was anxious to display her knowledge of an artist who was of particular interest to me and to provide me with the opportunity to exhibit mine if I wanted, 'while I think of it', she said, gently waving her feather fan, utterly conscious of the fact that she was at that moment exercising the full duties of hospitality, and simultaneously, in order not to be found wanting in any of them, signalling for me to be served again with more asparagus *sauce mousseline*, 'while I think of it, I do believe that Zola has actually written a study on the work of Elstir, the painter whose pictures you were looking at a while ago. The only ones of his that I like, as it happens,' she added. In fact she hated Elstir's painting, but found something special in anything that was in her own house. I asked M. de Guermantes if he knew the name of the gentleman in the top hat who featured in the picture of the crowd and whom I recognized as the same person whose formal portrait was next to this picture in the Guermantes collection, both paintings dating roughly from the same period of Elstir's work when his individuality had not yet fully emerged and he modelled himself slightly on Manet. 'Heavens! he replied, I know it's someone who is neither unknown nor a fool in his line of business, but I have no head for names. It's on the tip of my tongue, Monsieur… Monsieur… oh, well, never mind, I've forgotten. Swann would be able to tell you. He's the one who made Mme de Guermantes buy all that stuff. She's always too good-natured, always afraid of hurting people's feelings if she says no. Between you and me, I think he's landed us with a lot of old doodles. What I *can* tell you is that the gentleman you mean is a sort of Maecenas for M. Elstir. He launched him and has often helped him out of difficulties by commissioning paintings from him. As a token of gratitude to this man – if gratitude is what you call it, it's a matter of taste – Elstir painted him among that crowd. He stands out rather oddly, all dressed up to the nines like that. He may be one of your real pundits, but he's obviously got no idea where and when one wears a top hat. With that thing on his head, among all those hatless girls, he looks like a small-time provincial lawyer out on the spree. But, tell me, you seem really keen on his paintings. Had I known that, I'd have had all the answers ready for you. Not that there's much need to rack one's brains to say all there is to be said about M. Elstir's paintings, as there would be if we were talking about Ingres's *La Source or The Princes in the Tower* by Paul Delaroche.[79] The thing one appreciates in Elstir is the shrewd observation, the humour, the Parisian aspect, and after that one moves on to the next thing. You need no special knowledge to look at that sort of thing. I realize of course they're only sketches, but I don't find that they're worked enough. Swann had the cheek to try and make us buy a painting called *A Bundle of Asparagus*. It was in the house for several days in fact. That was all there was in the picture, a bundle of asparagus just like the ones you're eating now. But I have to say I refused to swallow M. Elstir's asparagus. He was asking three hundred francs for it. Three hundred francs for a bunch of asparagus! A louis is as much as they're worth, even early in the season. I thought it was a bit stiff. And when his things have people in them as well, I find it all rather sordid and depressing, not nice at all. It surprises me that someone with a discriminating mind like yourself, someone with a superior mind, actually likes that sort of thing.

– I really don't know why you say that, Basin,' said the Duchesse, who did not take kindly to any aspersions cast on the contents of her reception rooms. 'I am rather disinclined to dismiss every aspect of Elstir's work as undistinguished. There are things one takes to, others one doesn't. But you can't say there's a consistent lack of talent. And you have to admit that the paintings I purchased are unusually beautiful ones.

– As far as that sort of painting is concerned, Oriane, I infinitely prefer that little sketch by M. Vibert[80] we saw at the water-colour exhibition. There's nothing much in it, if you like, you could hold it in the palm of your hand, but you can see that there's a sense of wit written all over it: that unkempt scarecrow of a missionary standing in front of the snug prelate who is making his little dog do tricks, it's a perfect little poem of shrewdness and even profundity.

– I believe you are acquainted with M. Elstir, the Duchesse said to me. As a man, he's very nice.

– He's intelligent enough, said the Duc. After talking to him, it comes as quite a surprise that his paintings should be so run-of-the-mill.

– He's more than intelligent, he's really quite witty,' said the Duchesse with that look of unequivocal appreciation of someone who knew what she was talking about.

'Didn't he start doing a portrait of you, Oriane? enquired the Princess of Parma.

– Indeed he did. He painted me as red as a beetroot. It's not the sort of thing that's going to set him down for posterity. It's ghastly. Basin wanted to destroy it.'

This last statement was one which Mme de Guermantes was always making. But at other times she chose to judge differently: 'I don't care for his work, but he did once do a good portrait of me.' The first of these judgments was usually addressed to people who asked the Duchesse about her portrait, the second to those who did not mention it and whom she was anxious to apprise of its existence. The first was inspired by concern with her appearance, the second by vanity.

'Make a portrait of you look ghastly! In that case, it wouldn't be a portrait, it would be a travesty. I don't even know how to hold a paintbrush, but I'm sure if I were to paint you by merely setting you down as I see you, I'd produce a masterpiece, said the Princess of Parma ingenuously.

– He probably sees me as I see myself, without the frills.' said Mme de Guermantes with a look that was at once melancholic, modest and winsome, the one that she saw as best calculated to make her appear different from what Elstir had portrayed.

'That portrait cannot be without its appeal for Mme de Gallardon, said the Duc.

– Because she knows nothing about pictures?' asked the Princess of Parma in the knowledge that Mme de Guermantes had unbounded contempt for her cousin. 'But she's a very kind-hearted woman, is she not?' The Duc assumed a look of deep astonishment.

'Why, Basin, can't you see that the Princess is making fun of you? (Nothing was further from the Princess's mind.) She knows as well as you do that Little Miss Gallardon is a venomous serpent,' continued Mme de Guermantes, whose vocabulary was confined by habit to all these antiquated expressions and as richly flavoured as the dishes you can come across in the delicious books of Pampille,[81] but which have become so rare in real life, food in which the jellies, the butter, the juices, the quenelles are all unadulterated, in which even the salt comes specially from the salt-marshes of Brittany: from her accent, her choice of words, one felt that the basis of the Duchesse's conversation came directly from Guermantes. In this respect the Duchesse was very different from her nephew Saint-Loup, who was steeped in countless new ideas and expressions; it is hard, when the mind is murky with Kantian ideas and Baudelairean longings, to write the exquisite French of Henri IV, and so the very purity of the Duchesse's language was a sign of limitations and that, in her, intelligence and sensitivity alike had remained closed to any new departures. Here again, Mme de Guermantes's mind attracted me just because of what it excluded (which was precisely what constituted the substance of my own mind) and everything which, on account of this exclusion, it had been able to preserve, the seductive vigour of supple bodies which no exhausting reflection, no moral anxiety or nervous disorder has distorted. Her mind, shaped so long before my own, was for me the equivalent of what had been offered me by the behaviour of the girls of the little gang along the sea-shore. Mme de Guermantes offered me, tamed and subdued by good manners, by respect for intellectual values, the energy and charm of a cruel little girl from one of the noble families around Combray, who from her childhood had ridden horses, sadistically tormented cats, gouged out the eyes of rabbits, and, while remaining a paragon of virtue, might equally well have been, some years back now, and so much did she share his dashing style, the most glamorous mistress of the Prince de Sagan. The only thing was that she was incapable of understanding what I had sought for in her – the magic surrounding the name Guermantes – and the tiny speck of it I had actually found, a countryfied vestige from Guermantes. Our contact was based on a misunderstanding which could not fail to become apparent the moment my homage, instead of being addressed to the relatively superior being she believed herself to be, was diverted to some other woman of similar mediocrity and exuding the same unconscious charm. A misunderstanding so natural, and one that will always exist between a young dreamer and the society woman he elects, but one that disturbs him profoundly for as long as he remains

ignorant of the nature of his imaginative bent and has not yet resigned himself to the inevitable disappointments he is bound to discover with people, as is the case with the theatre, with travel, with love.

After M. de Guermantes had declared (following upon Elstir's asparagus and the asparagus that had just been served after the *poulet financière*) that green asparagus grown in the open and, as the charming writer who signs herself E. de Clermont-Tonnerre[82] so quaintly puts it, 'without the impressive rigidity of their sisters', ought to be eaten with eggs, M. de Bréauté came out with the reply: 'One man's meat is another man's poison. In the province of Canton, in China, the greatest delicacy that can be offered to someone is a dish of ortolan eggs in a state of advanced putrefaction.' M. de Bréauté, the author of an essay on the Mormons which had appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*,[83] moved only in the most aristocratic circles, but even then only in such as boasted a certain reputation for intellect. The result of this was that his presence, if it was at all regular, in a lady's house indicated that she had a 'salon'. He claimed to loathe society, and assured each one of his duchesses in turn that it was for her wit and beauty that he sought out her society. They all believed him. Whenever he resigned himself, with a heavy heart, to attending an important function at the Princess of Parma's, he collected all his ladies around him to bolster himself up, and thus appeared to be moving only in the midst of a close circle of acquaintances. So that his reputation as an intellectual might not be eclipsed by his society interests, he put into practice certain maxims from the Guermantes repertory, and would set out with fashionable women on long scientific expeditions during the season of society balls, or when some snobbish character, in other words some person who had not yet 'arrived' socially, began to make his presence felt socially, he would become ferociously obstinate in his refusal to make that person's acquaintance, to allow himself to be introduced. His hatred of snobs derived from his own snobbishness, but it led the simple-minded (in other words everyone) to believe that he was untainted by it.

'Babal always knows everything! the Duchesse de Guermantes exclaimed. I find it quite charming that there's such a thing as a country where your dairyman will supply you with really rotten eggs dating back to the year dot. I can just picture myself dipping my fingers of buttered toast into them. And I must say that it's not unknown for such things to happen at Aunt Madeleine's (Mme de Villeparisis), things served up in a state of putrefaction, even eggs.' Then, at signs of protest from Mme d'Arpajon, she added: 'Come, now, Phili, you know it as well as I do. You can see the chicken in the egg. I can't for the life of me think how they're well-behaved enough to stay inside the shell. It's not an omelette she serves, it's a whole chicken-coop, but at least it's not written on the menu. It was as well you didn't come there to dinner the day before yesterday, we had brill poached in carbolic acid! Not exactly a hospitable table – more like a hospital for contagious disease. I must say that Norpois pushes loyalty to the heights of heroics: he had a second helping!

– I think I saw you there the day she said her piece to that man Bloch (M. de Guermantes, in a possible attempt to give a Jewish name a more foreign lilt, did not pronounce the *ch* in Bloch like a *k* but as the *ch* in the German *hoch*) when he described some *pow u*t (poet) or other as sublime. Châtellerault made a brave attempt to break M. Bloch's shins, but the fellow didn't understand and thought that my nephew's kicks were aimed at a young woman sitting right next to him. (At this juncture M. de Guermantes coloured slightly.) He didn't realize that he was irritating our aunt by overdoing all those 'sublimes' of his. Anyway, Aunt Madeleine, who's never short of words, came out with "In that case, Monsieur, what adjective are you going to keep for M. de Bossuet?" (M. de Guermantes was of the opinion that when you mentioned a famous name, the use of "Monsieur" and the nobiliary particle was a must for anyone of the "old school".) It was worth waiting for.

– And what did M. Bloch have to say to that?' asked Mme de Guermantes in an off-hand sort of way, copying her husband's Teutonic pronunciation to compensate for a momentary lapse in her own original contribution to the subject.

'Ah! I can assure you that M. Bloch didn't wait for any more. He's still running.

– And indeed, I have a distinct memory of seeing you there that evening,' Mme de Guermantes said to me with some insistence, as if a recollection of this sort on her part must be something deeply flattering to myself. 'It's always so interesting at my aunt's. At that last evening do, where we met in fact, I meant to ask you whether the old gentleman who was passing us wasn't François Coppée.[84] You must know who everybody is,' she continued, genuinely envious of my contacts with poets and their kind, and also in an attempt to be nice to me and to emphasize the standing, in the eyes of her other guests, of a young man so well versed in literature. I assured the Duchesse that I had not

been aware of any celebrities at Mme de Villeparisis's reception. 'What!' exclaimed Mme de Guermantes unthinkingly, thus betraying the fact that her respect for men of letters and her contempt for society were more superficial than she said, or even thought perhaps, 'what! no famous authors present! You astonish me! I saw quite a number of impossible-looking people!'

I remembered the evening in question perfectly well, on account of an utterly trivial incident. Mme de Villeparisis had introduced Bloch to Mme Alphonse de Rothschild, but my old school-friend had not caught the name and, under the impression that he had been introduced to a slightly mad old English lady, had replied only in monosyllables to the garrulous remarks of this former beauty, until Mme de Villeparisis, introducing her to someone else, had pronounced the words 'Baronne Alphonse de Rothschild', quite clearly this time. At this point, in one fell swoop, so many ideas of millions and glamour, which it would have been wiser to distinguish separately, had suddenly coursed through Bloch's mind, that he had had something like a heart attack and a brainstorm combined, and had burst out in the dear old lady's presence: 'If only I'd known!', an outburst of such stupidity that it had prevented him from sleeping a wink for a whole week. There was nothing particularly interesting in this remark of Bloch's, but I retained it as proof that sometimes in life, in moments of exceptional emotion, people do say what they think.

'I do believe that Mme de Villeparisis is not exactly what one would call a… "moral" person,' said the Princess of Parma, who knew that people did not call on the Duchesse's aunt and, following the remarks just made by the Duchesse herself, thought it permissible to speak her mind quite freely on the subject. But catching a look of disapproval on the Duchesse's face, she immediately added: 'But of course, an intellect of such a high order excuses everything.

– You take the same view of my aunt as the rest of the world, replied the Duchesse. On the whole, it is quite mistaken. It's just what Mémé was saying to me only yesterday.' She blushed, and some memory that was hidden from me clouded her eyes. I formed the conjecture that M. de Charlus had asked her to cancel my engagement with him, given that he had sent Robert to ask me not to go to her dinner. I sensed that the blush – equally incomprehensible to me – I had noticed on the Duc's face when he made some brief reference to his brother was possibly there for the same reason. 'My poor aunt! she will always have a reputation as a lady of the Old School, a woman of sparkling wit and the loosest morals. And yet one couldn't conceive of a more middle-class, more serious-minded and lacklustre person. She will go down as a patroness of the arts, which is tantamount to saying that she was the mistress of a famous painter, though he was never able to make her understand what a painting was. And as for her personal life, far from being a depraved woman, she was so much cast in the mould of marriage, so conjugal from the very start that her lack of success in keeping a husband – and in any case he was a rotter – that she has never had a liaison without taking it as seriously as a regular marriage, with the same upsets, the same rows, the same fidelity. Mind you, such relationships are often the most genuine ones. Generally speaking, there are more inconsolable lovers than there are husbands.

– And yet, Oriane, if you take the case of your brother-in-law Palamède, whom you were speaking of a moment ago, no mistress in the world could ever dream of being grieved for as that poor Mme de Charlus has been.

– Ah! replied the Duchesse, Your Highness must allow me a slight difference of opinion on that matter. People don't all like to be mourned for in the same way. We all have our preferences.

– Still, he has made a regular cult of her since she died. It's true that people sometimes behave towards the dead in a way they would not have done towards the living.

– For a start,' rejoined Mme de Guermantes in a dreamy voice which masked her facetious intent, 'we go to their funerals, which we never do for the living!' M. de Guermantes gave M. de Bréauté a sly glance as though he were trying to incite him to laughter at the Duchesse's wit. 'At the same time, I admit quite frankly, Mme de Guermantes continued, that the manner in which I should like to be mourned for by a man I loved is not the one followed by my brother-in-law.'

A shadow passed over the Duc's face. He did not like to hear his wife pronounce random judgments, particularly about M. de Charlus. 'You're not easy to please. His grief was edifying for everyone,' was his curt rejoinder. But in dealing with her husband the Duchesse had the boldness of an animal-tamer, or of people who live with a madman and have no fear of provoking him:

'Well, if you want to put it like that, I suppose you're right: it is edifying. He goes every day to the cemetery to tell her how many luncheon guests he had, he misses her enormously, but it's as if he's mourning a cousin, a grandmother, a sister. It's not the grief of a husband. It's true that the two of them were real saints, which makes the whole thing rather out of the ordinary.' Incensed by his wife's chatter, M. de Guermantes glared at her with frightening fixity; his look was explosive. 'I'm not trying to say anything against poor Mémé, the Duchesse continued. By the way, he was unable to be here this evening. I know that there's no one as kind as he is. He's delightful, he has delicacy, and a sense of feeling that you don't usually find in men. He's as soft as a woman, is Mémé!

– Don't talk rubbish, M. de Guermantes broke in sharply. There's nothing effeminate about Mémé. I can't think of anyone more manly than he is.

– But I'm not suggesting for a moment that he's the least bit effeminate. Do at least try and follow what I'm saying, the Duchesse continued. He's always like this when he thinks anyone is getting at his brother… she added, turning to the Princess of Parma.

– It's very nice of him, a delight to hear him. There's nothing so fine as two brothers who are fond of each other,' said the Princess of Parma, as many humbler folk might have replied, for it is possible to belong to a princely family by blood and to a very plebeian one by intellect.

'While we're on the subject of your family, Oriane, said the Princess, I saw your nephew Saint-Loup yesterday. I suspect he wants to ask you a favour.' The Duc de Guermantes knitted his Olympian brow. When he was unwilling to do someone a favour, he did not care for his wife to take charge of it, knowing that it would come down to the same thing in the end and that the people to whom she would be obliged to address herself would put it down to the joint account of the household, just as much as if it had been requested by the husband alone.

'Why didn't he ask me himself? said the Duchesse, he spent two hours here yesterday and, good heavens, I can't tell you how tiresome he was. He would be no more stupid than anyone else if he had only had the good sense, like many people of our acquaintance, to remain a fool. It's that intellectual façade of his that gets in the way. He wants to be receptive… but receptive to all the things he doesn't have a clue about. The way he carries on about Morocco, it's dreadful.

– He can't go back there, because of Rachel, said the Prince de Foix.

– But I thought they'd split up, broke in M. de Bréauté.

– I don't know about splitting up, but I came across her two days ago in Robert's bachelor flat and they didn't look like two people who'd quarrelled, believe me,' replied the Prince de Foix, who liked to spread every bit of gossip that might possibly damage Robert's chances of marrying and who might have been misled by the intermittent resumptions of an affair that was to all intents and purposes at an end.

'Your Rachel was speaking to me about you. I run into her occasionally in the morning in the Champs-Élysées. She's rather flighty, as you put it, what you call *loose*, a kind of "Dame aux camélias"[85] figuratively speaking of course.' These words were addressed to me by Prince Von, with that desire of his to appear conversant with French literature and the refinements of Paris.

'But of course, that's what it was! – Morocco… the Princess burst forth, flinging herself into this opening.

– What can he want with Morocco? M. de Guermantes enquired sternly. Oriane can do nothing for him in that department, as he is perfectly well aware.

– He thinks he invented strategy, said Mme de Guermantes, pursuing her theme, and then he uses impossible words for the simplest thing, which doesn't stop him making smudges all over his letters. The other day he told us he'd been served some *sublime* potatoes, and that he'd taken a *sublime* stage box.

– He speaks Latin, said the Duc, going one better.

– What! Latin? queried the Princess.

– On my word of honour, Your Highness can ask Oriane if I'm not telling the truth.

– Why, yes, Madame. The other day, just like that, in a single sentence, he came out with: "I can think of no more moving example of *sic transit gloria mundi*." I can repeat the sentence to Your Highness because, after scores of enquiries and by having recourse to *linguists*, we managed to reconstruct it, but Robert just flung it out without pausing for breath, and we could barely perceive that there was Latin in it. He was like a character out of *Le Malade imaginaire*! And it was all to do with the death of the Empress of Austria![86]

– The poor woman! exclaimed the Princess. What a delightful creature she was!

– Yes, said the Duchesse, a wee bit mad, a tiny bit insane, but a thoroughly good sort, a nice, kindly lunatic. The only thing I could never understand was why she never managed to get herself a set of false teeth that fitted properly. They always came loose before she'd finished a sentence and she had to stop short in case she swallowed them.

– That Rachel was telling me about you. She said that our friend Saint-Loup idolized you, that he was even fonder of you than he was of her,' said Prince Von, addressing me and devouring his food like a red-faced ogre as he spoke, all his teeth exposed by his perpetual grin.

'In which case she must be jealous of me and hate me, I replied.

– Not in the least; she said all sorts of nice things about you. Now the Prince de Foix's mistress would perhaps be jealous if he preferred you to her. You don't know what I mean? Come home with me and I'll explain it all to you.

– I'm afraid that's not possible, I've an appointment with M. de Charlus at eleven.

– Well now, he sent me an invitation yesterday to dine with him this evening, but asked me not to come after a quarter to eleven. But if you really must go and see him, at least come with me as far as the Théâtre-Français, you'll be in the periphery,' said the Prince, who was doubtless under the impression that his last word meant 'neighbourhood' or possibly 'centrally placed'.

But the wide-eyed gaze on his coarse, handsome red face alarmed me and I declined his offer by telling him that a friend was coming to collect me. There was nothing offensive about this response as far as I could see. But the Prince apparently thought differently and did not address another word to me.

'I really must pay a visit to the Queen of Naples – she must be grieving terribly,' said the Princess of Parma, or at least appeared to me to have said as much. For her words had reached me only indistinctly through Prince Von's remarks, closer to my ear yet spoken in an undertone. No doubt he had been afraid, if he spoke any louder, that the Prince de Foix might have heard him.

'Oh, I don't really think that's the case, said the Duchesse, I don't believe she feels any grief at all.

– None at all? You always go to extremes, Oriane,' said M. de Guermantes, reverting to his role as the cliff which, by resisting the wave, forces it to fling its crest of foam even higher.

'Basin knows as well as I do, if not better, that I'm telling the truth, replied the Duchesse, but he feels he has to behave sternly because you're here and is frightened that I might shock you.

– Oh, please, not in the least!' exclaimed the Princess of Parma, fearing that some detail of these delicious evenings at the Duchesse de Guermantes's might get altered on her account and that she would lose this forbidden fruit which even the Queen of Sweden had not yet acquired the right to taste.

'Why, Basin himself had it from her own lips. When he asked her with the usual expression of condolence: "I see the Queen is in mourning. May I ask for whom? Your Majesty must be greatly grieved?", she said: "No, it's not full mourning but rather a light mourning, a very light mourning in fact. It's my sister." The truth is, she's delighted by it, as Basin knows perfectly well. She invited us to a party that very evening and presented me with two pearls. Would that she could lose a sister every day! She's not mourning for her sister's death, she's as pleased as can be about it. She probably says to herself, like Robert, "*sic transit*…" or whatever it is,' she added modestly, perfectly well aware of how to complete the tag.

All this was in fact merely Mme de Guermantes showing off her witty mind, and in the most mendacious manner, for the Queen of Naples, like the Duchesse d'Alençon, also tragically departed, was a warm-hearted woman and mourned her relations with sincerity. Mme de Guermantes knew these noble Bavarian sisters, her cousins, too well not to be aware of this.

'He is anxious not to return to Morocco,' said the Princess of Parma, seizing once more upon the name Robert, which Mme de Guermantes had held out to her, quite unintentionally, like a lifeline. 'I believe you know Général de Monserfeuil.

– Only very slightly,' replied the Duchesse, who was a close friend of the officer in question. The Princess explained what it was that Saint-Loup wanted.

'Heavens, well, yes, if I see him… It's possible I may run into him,' replied the Duchesse, trying to avoid seeming unhelpful – her relations with the Général de Monserfeuil appeared to have grown rapidly more remote the minute there had been any question of her asking him for some favour. This hesitancy was still not good enough for the Duc, who interrupted his wife:

'You know perfectly well you won't be seeing him, Oriane, he said, and besides, you've already asked him to do a couple of things which he hasn't done. My wife is obsessed with pleasing people,' he added, getting increasingly testy in order to force the Princess to withdraw her request without making her doubt his wife's good nature and so that Mme de Parme should put the whole thing down to his own fundamentally curmudgeonly nature. 'Robert could get anything he wanted out of Monserfeuil himself. Only, as he happens not to know what it is he wants, he gets us to do it because he knows there's no better way of making the whole thing fall through, Oriane has already asked too many favours of Monserfeuil. A request from her at this point would be a reason for him to refuse.

– Oh, in that case, it would be better for the Duchesse to do nothing, said Mme de Parme.

– Quite so, came the Duc's final word on the matter.

– That poor General, he's been defeated again at the elections, said the Princess of Parma, to change the subject.

– Oh, it's nothing serious, it's only the seventh time,' said the Duc, who, after being forced to quit politics himself, quite enjoyed hearing about other people's failures at the polls. 'He consoled himself by deciding to give his wife another baby.

– What! Is that poor Mme de Monserfeuil pregnant again? exclaimed the Princess.

– But of course, replied the Duchesse, it's the only sort of *campaign* the poor General has never lost.'

In the time that followed I was continually to be invited, however small the party, to the dinners and luncheons whose guests I had at one time imagined to resemble the Apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle. And in fact they did assemble there like the early Christians, not to partake of merely material nourishment, which was in fact exquisite, but in a sort of social Eucharist; and very soon, in the course of a few dinner-parties, I took in the acquaintance of all the friends of my hosts, friends to whom they introduced me with such a distinct hint of benevolent condescension (as to someone for whom they had always had a sort of parental affection) that there was not a single one of them who would have not felt he was failing the Duc and Duchesse if he had given a ball without including my name on the list, and along with all this, as I savoured one of the Yquems from the recesses of the Guermantes cellars, I enjoyed ortolans prepared in accordance with various recipes tastefully devised and modified by the Duc himself. However, for one who had already sat down more than once at the mystic board, the manducation of the ortolan was not obligatory. Old friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes would come in to see them after dinner, 'at tooth-pick time' as Mme Swann would have said, as casual visitors, and would be offered tilleul in winter in the lighted drawing-room or in summer a glass of orangeade in the darkness of the tiny rectangular garden outside. No one could remember the Guermantes serving anything other than orangeade at these after-dinner evenings in the garden. There was something ritualistic about it. The introduction of other refreshments would have seemed to be perverting the tradition, just as a grand reception in the Faubourg Saint-Germain is no longer such if it includes a play or music. It must be assumed that you have come along simply – even if there were five hundred people present – to pay a call on, let us say, the Princess de Guermantes. Because I managed to procure, in addition to the orangeade, a carafe of stewed cherry- or pear-juice, people marvelled at the weight I carried. It was to do with this that I took a dislike to the Prince d' Agrigente, who, like all people lacking in imagination but not in acquisitiveness, show great surprise at what you happen to be drinking and ask if they may taste a little of it themselves. The result of this was that on all of these occasions M d'Agrigente, by reducing my ration, spoiled my enjoyment. For this fruit-juice is never served in sufficient quantities to quench the thirst. There is nothing so easy to drink as this colour of a fruit, transmuted into a flavour, and the fruit, when stewed in this way, seems to have reverted to the time when it was blossom. With its crimson flush like an orchard in springtime, or else colourless and cool like the breeze beneath the fruit trees, the juice can be sniffed, its every drop admired, and M. d'Agrigente prevented me, regularly, from enjoying it to the full. Despite these fruit-juice concoctions, the time-honoured orangeade persisted, as did the tilleul. In these modest beverages, the social communion service still took place. In this respect no doubt, the friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes were still, as I had originally imagined them, more out of the ordinary than their disappointing appearance might have suggested to me. A great many elderly men came to call and to receive from the Duchesse, together with the invariable drink, a welcome that was often almost frosty. Now, snobbishness could not have accounted for this, since the men in question were of the highest rank; nor could love of luxury: they may well have had a taste for it, but they could have enjoyed glittering luxury in less exalted social surroundings, for on those very same evenings the charming wife of a colossally wealthy financier would have moved heaven and earth to have them join the brilliant two-day shooting-party she was to put on for the King of Spain. They had nevertheless declined her invitation and had called round completely on the off-chance to see whether Mme de Guermantes was at home. They were not even certain of finding absolutely like-minded people at her house or feelings that were particularly cordial; Mme de Guermantes would throw out occasional comments – on the Dreyfus case, on the Republic, on the anti-clerical laws, or even muted innuendoes about themselves, their weaknesses, their boring conversation – which they were obliged to pretend they had not heard. No doubt, if they chose to keep on coming, it was because of their polished training as epicures of refined society and their distinct awareness of the perfect, prime quality of the social platter, the reassuring familiarity and bite of what was to be tasted there, free from hybridity or adulteration, something with an origin and history they recognized as well as she who served it to them, so that they remained more 'noble' in this respect than they themselves realized. Now, among the visitors to whom I was introduced after dinner on this occasion, it turned out that there was the Général de Monserfeuil to whom the Princess of Parma had alluded and whom Mme de Guermantes, whose salon he frequented regularly, had not expected that evening. On hearing my name, he made a bow, as though I had been the President of the Supreme War Council. I had imagined it to be simply through some deep-seated reluctance to oblige, in which the Duc, as in wit if not in love, was his wife's accomplice, that the Duchesse had all but refused to speak to M. de Monserfeuil on her nephew's behalf. And I saw in all this an indifference all the more reprehensible in that I got the impression, from a few words which the Princess of Parma had let slip, that Robert's post was a perilous one and that it would be wise to have him assigned to something else. What really revolted me

was the genuine malice on Mme de Guermantes's part when, after the Princess of Parma had made the timid suggestion that she herself might have a word with the General on her own initiative, the Duchesse did all she could to dissuade Her Highness.

'But Madame, she broke out, Monserfeuil has no standing or influence whatsoever with the new government. It would be an utter waste of effort.

– I think he can hear what we're saying,' murmured the Princess, as a way of inviting the Duchesse to lower her voice.

'Your Highness has nothing to fear, he's a deaf as a post,' said the Duchesse, making no attempt to speak more quietly. The General could hear her every word.

'What I find worrying is that I believe M. de Saint-Loup to be in a rather unsafe place, said the Princess.

– It can't be helped, the Duchesse replied, he's in the same situation as everyone else. The only difference is that he was the one who asked to be sent there. And then, it's not really unsafe, not really. If it was, you know me, I would do something about it. I'd have spoken to Saint-Joseph about it during dinner. He carries far more influence and he gets on with the job! As you can see for yourself, he's already left. And in fact it would be less awkward than speaking to this one, who just happens to have three of his sons in Morocco at present and is unwilling to ask for their transfer; he might well object on those grounds. Since Your Highness insists, I shall talk with Saint-Joseph… if I see him that is, or to Beautreillis. They explained to us the other day where Robert is. I don't think he could be anywhere better.

– What a pretty flower, I've never seen one like that. There's no one like you, Oriane, for finding such marvellous things!' said the Princess of Parma, fearing that the Général de Monserfeuil might have overheard the Duchesse and seeking to change the subject. I recognized the plant as one of those I had watched Elstir painting.

'I'm delighted you like it; these flowers are ravishing, just look at the little mauve velvet collars on them; the unfortunate thing is that – as sometimes happens with people who are very pretty and very nicely dressed – they have an ugly name and a dreadful smell. All the same, I'm very fond of them. But what is rather sad is that they're going to die.

– But they're growing in a pot, they aren't cut flowers, said the Princess.

– No, the Duchesse answered with a smile, but it comes to the same thing, since they're all ladies. It's a species of plant where the ladies and the gentlemen don't grow on the same stalk. I'm like the people who keep a lady dog. I need a husband for my flowers. Otherwise I won't have any young ones!

– How very strange. Are you saying that in nature…?

– Yes, there are some insects who take it upon themselves to bring about the marriage, as with royalty, by proxy, without the partners concerned ever having set eyes on one another. And let me assure you, I always tell the servant to put the plant near the window as often as possible, on the courtyard side and the garden side in turn, in the hope that the right insect will arrive. The odds are almost impossible. Just think, that insect would have had to have just come from one of the same species and the opposite sex, and would then have had to take it into his head to come and leave his card at the house. He hasn't appeared so far; I think my plant still merits the status of virgin, but I must say that a little more loose behaviour would please me better. It's the same thing, you know, with that fine tree of ours in the courtyard, it will die childless because it belongs to a species that's very rare here. In its case, it's the wind that is responsible for bringing about the union, but the wall is rather too high.

– That's true, said M. de Bréauté, you ought to have knocked a few centimetres off the top, that would have done it. You need to know about these things. The vanilla flavouring of that excellent ice-cream you gave us this evening, Duchesse, comes from a plant of the same name. It produces flowers which are both male and female, but there is a kind of tough partition between them which means that they are shut off from each other. So no one could get any fruit from them until a young negro, a native of Réunion called Albius – rather a comic name for a black man, given his name means white – took it into his head to bring the separate organs into contact by using the point of a needle.

– Babal, you're divine, you know everything, cried the Duchesse.

– But you yourself, Oriane, have taught me things I knew nothing about, said the Princess.

– I am bound to explain to Your Highness that it is Swann who has always told me a great deal about botany. Sometimes when we thought it would be too tiresome to go off to some tea-party or an afternoon reception, we used to set off for the country and he would show me extraordinary marriages between flowers, far more amusing than marriages between people – and it all takes place without luncheon-parties and gatherings in the sacristy. We never had time to go very far. Now that there are motor-cars, it would be delightful. Unfortunately since then there has been the business of his own marriage, an even more astonishing affair, which makes everything rather difficult. Ah, Madame, life is a dreadful thing, we spend our entire time doing things that bore us, and then, when we chance to come across someone with whom we could go and look at something really interesting, he has to go and get involved in a marriage like Swann's. Faced with the alternatives of giving up my botanical excursions and having to frequent a person of disrepute, I have chosen the first of these two disasters. But in the end there's no need to go so far afield. It seems that even here, in my tiny piece of garden, more improper activities take place in broad daylight than at night time… in the Bois de Boulogne! It's simply that they attract no attention, because between flowers that sort of thing takes place very unobtrusively – you see a little orange shower, or else a very dusty fly coming to wipe its feet or take a bath before it penetrates a flower. And that's all there is to it!

– That's a splendid chest of drawers too that the plant is standing on; it's Empire, I think,' said the Princess, whose lack of familiarity with the works of Darwin and his flowers made it difficult for her to grasp the Duchesse's jokes.

'It's lovely, isn't it? I'm delighted that Your Highness likes it, replied the Duchesse. It's a very fine piece. I have to tell you that I've always adored Empire style, even when it wasn't in fashion. I remember that at Guermantes I got into terrible trouble with my mother-in-law for asking to have all the splendid furniture Basin had inherited from the Montesqious brought down from the attic, and using it to furnish the wing we lived in.'

M. de Guermantes smiled. Yet he must have remembered that things had happened very differently. But the witticisms of the Princesse des Laumes on the subject of her mother-in-law's bad taste had been traditional during the short period the Prince had been in love with his wife, and his love for the latter had been outlived by a certain amount of contempt for the intellectual inferiority of the former, a contempt which none the less went hand in hand with a great deal of attachment and respect for her.

'The Iénas have the same armchair with Wedgwood medallions. It's a fine chair, but I prefer mine,' said the Duchesse with the same impartial stance she would have had had she owned neither of these two pieces of furniture. 'I do admit, though, that they have some wonderful things which I don't.'

The Princess of Parma said nothing.

'But it's true. Your Highness hasn't seen their collection. Oh, you really ought to accompany me to their place one day. It's one of the most magnificent things in Paris. Like a museum come to life.'

And since this suggestion was one of the most 'Guermantes' of the Duchesse's audacious ploys (the Iénas ranking as mere usurpers in the eyes of the Princess of Parma, their son, like her own, bearing the title of Duc de Guastalla), in launching it thus Mme de Guermantes could not refrain (so much did her love of her own originality still prevail over the deference she owed to the Princess of Parma) from darting amused smiles at her other guests. They too forced themselves to smile in response, at once alarmed, amazed, and above all delighted to think that they were witnessing Oriane's 'latest' and would be able to retail it 'hot from the press'. They were only half-astounded, knowing as they did that the Duchesse was capable of throwing all the Courvoisier prejudices to the winds in favour of some more conspicuous and enjoyable achievement. Had she not, in the course of the last few years, brought together the Princesse Mathilde and the Duc

d'Aumale, who had written that famous letter to the Princesse's own brother: 'In my family all the men are brave and all the women chaste'? Now since princes remain princely even at times when they appear to want to forget the fact, the Duc d'Aumale and the Princesse Mathilde had enjoyed themselves so much at Mme de Guermantes's that they had subsequently exchanged visits, with that same ability to forget the past which was shown by Louis XVIII when he appointed Fouché as minister, the very man who had voted for the death of his brother. Mme de Guermantes was now nursing a similar plan to effect a reconciliation between the Princesse Murat and the Queen of Naples. To return to the circumstances in hand, the Princess of Parma appeared to show the sort of embarrassment that might have been felt by the heirs-apparent to the thrones of the Netherlands and Belgium, the Prince d'Orange and the Duc de Brabant respectively, had anyone offered to present to them M. de Mailly-Nesle, Prince d'Orange, or M. de Charlus, Duc de Brabant. But before anything further could happen, the Duchesse, whom Swann and M. de Charlus between them (although the latter was utterly set on ignoring the Iénas' existence) had finally, and with great difficulty, persuaded to appreciate Empire style, broke forth with this:

'Honestly, Madame, I can't tell you how beautiful you'll find it! I have to admit that Empire style has always exerted a fascination for me. But, believe me, the Iénas' collection is almost hallucinatory. The sort of, what shall I call it?… backwash from the Egyptian Expedition, and then, too, the returning tide of Antiquity into our own times, all those things invading our houses, the Sphinxes couching at the foot of our armchairs, the snakes coiled around candelabras, a huge Muse holding out a little torch for you to play card games under, or who has quietly perched on your mantelpiece and is leaning against the clock; and then all the Pompeiian lamps, the little boat-shaped beds, looking as if they had been found floating on the Nile so that you expect to see Moses climb out of them, the Roman chariots galloping along the bedside tables…

– They're not very comfortable, those Empire chairs, ventured the Princess.

– True, the Duchesse agreed, but, she added with an insistent smile, I love being uncomfortable on those mahogany seats covered with dark red velvet or green silk. I love that discomfort of warriors who have only ever known the curule chair and cross-stack their fasces and pile up their laurels in the middle of the great room. I can assure you that at the Iénas' one doesn't for a moment stop to think about how comfortable one is when one sees that strapping minx of a Victory painted in fresco on the wall. My husband will say that I make a very poor royalist, but I think all the wrong things, you know; I can assure you that in those people's house one comes round to loving all the big *N*s, all those Napoleonic bees. Good lord, we haven't exactly wallowed in monarchist glory for a good many years, and those warriors who brought back so many crowns that they stuck them on the arms of chairs, well, I find it all rather stylish! Your Highness ought to come.

– Good gracious me, if you think so, said the Princess, but I don't think it will be easy.

– But Your Highness will find that it will all go very smoothly. They are kind people, and they're no fools. We took Mme de Chevreuse there, added the Duchesse, fully aware of the force of this example, and she was enchanted. The son is really rather pleasant… I shouldn't really say this, she went on, but he has a bedroom, and more particularly a bed, in which I should love to sleep – alone of course! More improper still is the fact that I went to see him once when he was ill and lying in this bed. At his side, along the bed-frame, there was a carved Siren, stretched out at length, a ravishing creature with a mother-of-pearl tail, holding some sort of lotus flowers. I do assure you,' continued Mme de Guermantes, slowing her pace to bring into even bolder relief the words she seemed to be modelling with her beautiful pouting lips, the tapering of her long expressive hands, and, as she spoke, fastening on to the Princess a gentle, intent, deep gaze, 'that with the palm leaves and the golden crown to one side, it was deeply moving, exactly the same lay-out as Gustave Moreau's *Young man and Death*.[87] Your Highness is of course acquainted with that masterpiece.'

The Princess of Parma, who had never even heard of Moreau, nodded in vigorous assent and smiled warmly in order to demonstrate her admiration for this painting. But the intensity of her charade did not manage to compensate for the light which fails to shine in our eyes when we do not know what it is that people are talking to us about.

'A good-looking boy, I believe? she asked.

– No, he looks just like a tapir. His eyes are rather like those of Queen Hortense[88] painted on a lamp-shade. But he probably decided that it would be rather ridiculous for a man to go on looking like that, and so the look fades into the cheeks, which have been scrubbed until they shine, and this makes him look rather Mameluke. You get the impression that the scrubber must come round every morning. It was Swann,' she continued, reverting to the young Duc's bed, 'who was struck by the resemblance between that Siren and Gustave Moreau's *Death*. But anyway,' she added, in a more rapid yet still serious tone, calculated to provoke a more humorous effect, 'there was nothing really to cause alarm; it was only a head cold, and the young man is now back in fine fettle.

– I'm told he's a snob?' opined M. de Bréauté with a malicious spurt of interest, expecting the same sort of precise reply he would have received from asking: 'I'm told he has only four fingers on his right hand; is that so?'

'G… ood hea… vens, n… no, replied Mme de Guermantes with a sweet smile of indulgence. He *seems* a tiny bit snobbish perhaps, because he's so very young, but I should be surprised to hear that was really the case, because he's intelligent,' she added, as though to her mind there were some utter incompatibility between snobbishness and intelligence. 'He has subtlety, and I've known him to be quite amusing,' she continued, smiling once again as one who had an expert appreciation and appetite for such things, as though judging someone to be amusing required a certain amount of gaiety from the speaker, or as though the Duc de Guastalla's witty thrusts were present in her mind as she spoke. 'Anyway, since he's never received anywhere, he can't have much opportunity for his snobbishness,' she went on to say, oblivious of the fact that none of this was doing very much to encourage the Princess of Parma.

'I cannot help wondering what the Prince de Guermantes will say if he hears I've been to see her. He calls her Mme Iéna.

– What! exclaimed the Duchesse with extraordinary promptitude. Don't you know that we were the ones who let Gilbert have a whole set of games-room furniture in the Empire style! (She now bitterly regretted relinquishing it.) It came to us from Quiou-Quiou. It's a prize collection! We didn't have room for it, though I think it looked better here than it does in his place. It's utterly beautiful, half Etruscan, half Egyptian…

– Egyptian? enquired the Princess, to whom Etruscan conveyed very little.

– Well, you know, a bit of both. It was Swann who told us; he explained it all to me, only you know what a poor ignorant creature I am. And then, Madame, what one has to bear in mind is that the Egypt of Empire style has nothing to do with the real Egypt, any more than its Romans with the real Romans, or its Etruscan…

– I see! said the Princess.

– No, it's like what they used to call a Louis XV costume during the Second Empire, when Anna de Mouchy and our dear Brigode's mother were girls. Basin was talking to you just now about Beethoven. We heard something of his played the other day which was really rather fine, though rather cold, with a Russian theme. It's somewhat pathetic that he thought it to be Russian. It's like those Chinese painters who thought they were copying Bellini. And even in the same country, whenever anyone looks at things in a slightly new way, ninety-nine people out of a hundred are utterly incapable of seeing what is put in front of them. It takes at least forty years before they manage to see it.

– Forty years! cried the Princess, alarmed at the thought.

– Why, yes,' the Duchesse went on, giving more and more weight to her words (practically my own in fact, for I had just come out with a similar idea within her earshot) by pronouncing them in a certain manner, the equivalent of the use of italics on the printed page, 'it's something like the first isolated individual of a

species which does not yet exist but will multiply in time, an individual endowed with some kind of *sense* not available to the human species around him. I can hardly cite myself as an example because I, on the contrary, have always loved any interesting artistic development from the very start, however innovatory. But anyway, the other day I was with the Grand Duchess in the Louvre and we went past Manet's *Olympia*. Nowadays it shocks no one. It looks like something by Ingres! And yet, heaven knows how I had to go to war on behalf of that painting, which I don't altogether like, though it's unquestionably not just any old thing. Perhaps the Louvre isn't quite the place for it.

– The Grand Duchess is well?' inquired the Princess of Parma, to whom the Tsar's aunt was infinitely more familiar than Manet's model.

'Yes, indeed so. We talked about you. After all,' continued the Duchesse, holding to her theme, 'the truth of the matter is, as my brother-in-law Palamède is always telling us, that there is a strange language barrier between oneself and other people. Though I admit there's no one it's truer of than Gilbert. If you'd find it entertaining to go the Iénas', you have too much sense to let your actions be governed by what the poor fellow might think; he's a sweet, innocent creature, but he really does live in another world. I feel closer, more akin to my coachman, even to my horses, than to a man who keeps harking back to what people might have thought in the reign of Philip the Bold or Louis the Fat. Can you imagine, when he goes for a walk in the country, he waves the peasants out of his way with his stick, affably enough, and says things like: "Get along with you, you peasant rogues!" It really does amaze me when I find him addressing me as if he were one of those recumbent figures on an old Gothic tomb. This living gravestone may be my cousin, but he frightens me and the only thing I can think of is to let him stay in his medieval world. Having said that, I do admit that he's never assassinated anyone.

– It just so happens that I've been dining with him at Mme de Villeparisis's,' said the General, but without so much as a smile on his face or any sign that he endorsed the Duchesse's joking banter.

'Was M. de Norpois present?' asked Prince Von, whose mind was still bent on the Academy of Moral Sciences.

'He was, said the General. He was talking about your Emperor as it happens.

– It seems that the Kaiser Wilhelm is highly intelligent, but he doesn't like Elstir's work. I don't say that to disparage him, said the Duchesse, I happen to share his point of view. Although Elstir has done a fine portrait of me. You haven't seen it? It's not a good likeness, but it's intriguing. He's interesting to sit for. He's portrayed me like some old woman. It's modelled on Hals's *The Women Regents of the Old Men's Alms House*. I imagine you know those "sublimities", to borrow one of my nephew's favourite expressions,' she said, turning to me with a delicate flutter of her black feather fan. Rather than sitting erect on her chair, she threw her head nobly backwards, for while she was always the *grande dame*, she was somewhat given to acting the part as well. I told her that I had once been in Amsterdam and The Hague, but that since my time there was limited and I wanted to avoid muddling everything up, I had left out Haarlem.

'Ah, The Hague! What a gallery!' exclaimed M. de Guermantes. I remarked that he had doubtless admired Vermeer's *View of Delft*. But the Duc was less informed than arrogant. And so he made do with a self-complacent reply, as he did every time anyone spoke to him about a picture in a gallery, or in the Salon, of which he had no recollection: 'If it's to be seen, I've seen it!'

'What? You went all the way to Holland and you never visited Haarlem! exclaimed the Duchesse. Why, even if you had only a quarter of an hour in the place, they're an extraordinary thing to have seen, those Hals pictures. I'd go so far as to say that even catching a glimpse of them from the top of a moving tram, supposing they were on view in the street, would be an eye-opener.' I was taken aback by this remark as indicative of a misconception about the way in which artistic impressions are formed in our minds, and because it seemed to imply that our eye in this instance is simply a piece of recording apparatus which takes snapshots.

M. de Guermantes, delighted that she should be talking to me with such competence about things that interested me, stood gazing at the impressive posture his wife was famous for, listening to what she was saying about Frans Hals and thinking: 'She's an ornament of erudition on every subject. Our young guest can boast that he's stood in front of a great lady of the old school in every sense of the word, the like of whom couldn't be found today.' This is how I beheld the two of them, removed from the name Guermantes in which, back in the past, I had imagined them to be leading an unimaginable life, but today just like other men and other women, merely lagging a little behind their contemporaries, but unevenly so, like so many households of the Faubourg Saint-Germain where the wife has been clever enough to stop at the golden age of the past, the husband misfortunate enough to descend to its distasteful aspects, she remaining Louis XV while her husband is pompously Louis-Philippe. That Mme de Guermantes should be like other women had been a disappointment for me at first; I reacted to it now, with the help of so much fine wine, as something almost wondrous. A Don John of Austria, an Isabelle d'Este, catalogued for us in the world of names, have as little connection with the great moments of history as the Méséglise way had with the Guermantes one. Isabella d'Este, in real life, was no doubt a very minor princess, similar to those who under Louis XIV achieved no special rank at court. But because we feel her to be of a unique and thus incomparable essence, we are unable to conceive of her as being any less great than he, so that a supper-party with Louis XIV would appear to us as merely rather interesting, whereas with Isabella d'Este we should find ourselves miraculously transported into the presence of a heroine of romance. But, after studying Isabella d'Este and patiently transplanting her out of that magic world into the world of history, after ascertaining that her life, her thoughts, contained nothing of the mysterious strangeness suggested to us by her name, once we have recovered from our disappointment, we are eternally grateful to that princess for having had a knowledge of Mantegna's paintings almost equal to that of M. de Lafenestre,[89] hitherto despised by us as 'lower than dirt', to use one of Françoise's expressions. After scaling the inaccessible heights of the name Guermantes, as I descended the inner slope of the Duchesse's life and discovered the already familiar names of Victor Hugo, Frans Hals and, regrettably, Vibert, I felt the same astonishment that an explorer does, after he has taken into account, in order to visualize the singularity of the native customs in some wild valley of Central America or North Africa, its geographical remoteness, the strange names of its flora, and then discovers, once he has made his way through a screen of giant aloes or manchineels, inhabitants who (sometimes indeed among the ruins of a Roman theatre and beneath a column dedicated to Venus) are engaged in reading *Mérope* or *Azire*.[90] And in its remoteness and difference from, its superiority to the educated middle-class women I had known, the corresponding culture by which Mme de Guermantes had forced herself, with no ulterior motive, no ambitious aim, to descend to the level of women she would never know, had the praiseworthy merit, almost touching in its uselessness, of a knowledge of Phoenician antiquities in a politician or in a doctor. 'I might have been able to show you a very fine one, Mme de Guermantes said to me amiably, referring still to Hals, the finest one of all, according to some people, which was left to me by a German cousin. Unfortunately, it turned out to be "enfeoffed" in the castle – you don't know the expression? Neither do I,' she added with her fondness for witticisms (which, as she saw it, made her seem modern) about old customs to which she was none the less unconsciously and fiercely attached. 'I'm glad you've seen my Elstirs, but I have to say that I should have been a great deal gladder to have done you the honours of my Hals, my "enfeoffed" painting.

– I've seen that one, said Prince Von, it belongs to the Grand Duke of Hesse.

– Quite so; his brother married my sister, said M. de Guermantes, and it so happens that his mother and Oriane's were first cousins.

– But to return to M. Elstir, the Prince went on, I shall make so bold as to say, without having any opinion of his work, which is unknown to me, that the persistent hatred the Kaiser shows him ought not to be held against him in my view. The Kaiser is a wonderfully intelligent man.

– Yes, I've met him at dinner twice, once at my aunt Sagan's and then at my aunt Radziwill's, and I must say I found him somewhat unusual. I certainly didn't think he was simple! But there's something slightly funny about him, something *forced* (she emphasized the word) like a green carnation, I mean something that surprises me and makes me feel rather uncomfortable, a thing it's surprising that anyone should have been able to create but which would have been just as well left uncreated, it seems to me. I do hope I'm not offending you?

– The Kaiser is man of quite exceptional intelligence, Prince Von proceeded, he is passionately devoted to the arts; his sense of taste in works of art is all but infallible; he never makes an error of judgment; if something is good he recognizes it at once and takes a dislike to it. If he detests something, there can be no doubt about it, the thing is excellent.' Everyone smiled.

'How very reassuring, said the Duchesse.

– I'm rather inclined to compare the Kaiser,' continued the Prince, whose inability to pronounce the word archaeologist (that is, as though it were spelt with a *k*) did nothing to stop him taking every opportunity of using it, 'to an old archaeologist (which the Prince pronounced as 'arsheologist') we have in Berlin. If you set him in front of a genuine piece of Assyrian antiquity, this old arsheologist weeps. But if it is a modern fake, if it is something that is not really old, he fails to weep. And so, when they want to know whether an arsheological piece is really old, they take it to the old arsheologist. If he weeps, they buy the piece for the museum. If there are no tears, they send it back to the dealer and prosecute him for fraud. Well, every time I dine at Potsdam, if the Kaiser says to me of a play: "Prince, you must see it, it's a work of genius," I remind myself not to go to it, and when I hear him railing against an exhibition, I rush to see it at the earliest opportunity.

– Isn't it true that Norpois is in favour of an Anglo-French understanding? said M. de Guermantes.

– What good would that do you?' asked Prince Von, who could not endure the English, in a manner that was at once irritated and wily. 'The English are so *schtubid*. I realize they would not be of use to you as soldiers. But one can none the less judge them on the *schtubidity* of their generals. A friend of mine was talking to Botha the other day, you know, the Boer leader. This leader told him: "It's terrible, an army like that. I'm rather fond of the English, as it happens, but just imagine that I, a mere *peassant*, have thrashed them in every battle. And in the last one, when I was overpowered by a force twenty times the strength of my own, even when I was surrendering because I had to, I still managed to take two thousand prisoners! That was all right because I was only a leader of an army of *peassants*, but if those poor fools ever have to stand up to a real European army, one trembles to think what might happen to them!" Besides, you have only to see how their king, whom you know as well as I do, passes for a great man in England.'

I scarcely listened to those anecdotes, rather like the ones M. de Norpois used to tell my father; they afforded no food for my preferred patterns of thought; and besides, even had they possessed the elements they lacked, they would have needed to be of a highly exciting nature for my inner life to be aroused during those hours spent in society when I lived on the surface, my hair well groomed, my shirt-front starched, that is to say hours in which I could feel nothing of what I personally regarded as pleasure.

'Oh, I don't agree with you there,' said Mme de Guermantes, who felt that the German prince was wanting in tact, 'I find King Edward a charming man, so simple, and much shrewder than people think. And the Queen is, even now, the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

– But, *Matame* la Duchesse, said the Prince, who was losing his temper and unable to see that he was causing offence, the fact remains that if the Prince of Wales had been an ordinary person there isn't a club that wouldn't have blackballed him, and nobody would have been willing to shake hands with him. The Queen is delightful, excessively sweet and of limited intelligence. But still, there's something shocking about a royal couple who are literally kept by their subjects, who get the big Jewish financiers to pay all the bills they ought to pay themselves, and make them Baronets in exchange. It's like the Prince of Bulgaria…

– He's our cousin, said the Duchesse, a man of wit.

– He's mine too, said the Prince, but that is no reason for us to have a high opinion of him. No, it's us you ought to make friends with, it's the Kaiser's dearest wish, but he wants it to come from the heart. He puts it this way: "What I want to see is a hand clasped in my own, not someone touching their hat to me!" With that you would be invincible. It would be a more practical solution than the Anglo-French rapprochement preached by M. de Norpois. – You know him, of course,' said the Duchesse, turning to me so as not to leave me out of the conversation. Remembering that M. de Norpois had had occasion to remark that I had looked as though I had wanted to kiss his hand, thinking that he had almost certainly repeated this story to Mme de Guermantes and could, in any event, only have spoken of me to her with malice, since in spite of his friendship with my father he had had no qualms about making me appear so ridiculous, I did not respond to this as a man of the world would have done. Such a man would have said that he detested M. de Norpois and had made it quite clear to him; he would have said this to give the impression that he was the deliberate cause of the Ambassador's slanders, which would then have been seen as no more than lying, calculated instances of retaliation. But instead I answered that, to my deep regret, I was afraid that M. de Norpois did not like me. 'You're quite wrong, replied Mme de Guermantes, he likes you very much indeed. You can ask Basin. If I have a reputation for telling people only what they want to hear, Basin certainly doesn't. He'll tell you that we've never heard Norpois speak about anyone so kindly as he speaks about you. And only the other day he was talking about creating a fine post for you at the ministry. Since he knew that you weren't in the best of health and would not be able to accept it, he had the delicacy not to mention a word about this kind thought to your father, for whom he has unbounded respect.' M. de Norpois was the very last person I should have expected to do me a service. The truth was that, since his was a mocking and even somewhat malicious nature, those who, like me, had let themselves be taken in by his outward appearance of a Saint Louis dispensing justice under an oak tree, by the glib tones of commiseration that emerged from his slightly too harmonious way of speaking, suspected real treachery when they learned of some slander directed towards them by a man whose words had always seemed so heartfelt. These slanders were a frequent enough occurrence. But they did not prevent him from taking a liking to people, from praising those he liked and taking pleasure in showing willingness to help them.

'Not that I'm at all surprised at his appreciating you, said Mme de Guermantes, he's an intelligent man. And I can quite understand,' she added for the benefit of those present, alluding to a plan of marriage of which I knew nothing, 'that my aunt, who has long ceased to amuse him as an old mistress, may not seem of very much use to him as a new wife. Especially since I understand that even as a mistress she hasn't performed for years now. Her only relations, if I can put it like that, are with the Good Lord above. You can't believe how churchy she is, and Boaz-Norpois could well take Victor Hugo's lines to heart:

> *Voilà longtemps que celle avec qui j'ai dormi,*
> *Ô Seigneur, a quitté ma couche pour la vôtre!*[91]

Really, my poor aunt is like those avant-garde artists who have ranted against the Academy all their lives and end up starting a little academy of their own, or those unfrocked priests who then fabricate a religion of their own. They might as well stick to the cloth or not hang around in a group. But who knows, the Duchesse continued meditatively, it may be in anticipation of widowhood. There's nothing sadder than weeds one's not entitled to wear.

– Ah! If Mme de Villeparisis were to become Mme de Norpois, I think our cousin Gilbert would have a fit, said Général de Saint-Joseph.

– The Prince de Guermantes is a charming man, but he really is a stickler for matters of birth and etiquette, said the Princess of Parma. I went to spend a couple of days with him in the country, when the Princesse had the misfortune to be ill in bed. I went there with Petite. (This was a nickname given to Mme d'Hunolstein because she was an enormous woman.) The Prince came to meet me at the foot of the steps, offered me his arm and pretended not to see Petite. We went up to the reception rooms, and it was only then, as he stepped back to let me pass, that he brought himself to say: "Oh, good day to you, Mme d'Hunolstein" (he always calls her that now, since her separation), pretending that he had only just noticed Petite, in order to indicate that he had had no reason to come down to receive her at the foot of the steps.

– That doesn't surprise me in the least. I don't need to point out,' said the Duc, who regarded himself as extremely up-to-date, more contemptuous than anyone in the world of matters of birth, and even Republican in spirit, 'that I don't have a lot in common with my cousin. As Your Highness can imagine, our opinions on

most subjects are about as distinct as day and night. But I must say that if my aunt were to marry Norpois, for once I should share Gilbert's view of the matter. To be the daughter of Florimont de Guise and to make such a marriage would be enough to send the cat into stitches, as they say, how else can I put it?' This last phrase, which the Duc usually used in the middle of a sentence, was utterly superfluous in the context. But he felt a constant need to utter it, which made him shift it to the end of a sentence if he could not get it in elsewhere. It functioned for him, among other things, as an element of prosody. 'Mind you, he added, the Norpois are excellent folk, they hail from a fine place, from good stock.

– Look here, Basin, it's no good you poking fun at Gilbert if you're going to speak the same language he does,' said Mme de Guermantes, for whom, like the Prince and the Duc de Guermantes, the 'goodness' of a family, no less than that of a wine, consisted precisely in its age. But, less outspoken than her cousin and more subtle than her husband, she made a point of never letting her words play false to the Guermantes spirit, and despised rank in what she said while she was ready to honour it in the way she behaved.

'But isn't there some sort of cousinly connection between you? asked the Général de Saint-Joseph. I have an idea that Norpois married a La Rochefoucauld.

– But not at all in the way you are thinking. She belonged to the branch of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, and my grandmother comes from the Ducs de Doudeauville. She was the actual grandmother of Edouard Coco, the wisest man in the family, replied the Duc, whose conception of wisdom was rather superficial. The two branches of the family haven't intermarried since Louis XIV's time. The connection would be rather remote.

– Really, how interesting. I never knew that, said the General.

– And if I'm right, the Duc went on, his mother was the sister of the Duc de Montmorency and had originally been married to a La Tour d'Auvergne. But since those Montmorencys are barely Montmorencys, and those Tour d' Auvergnes aren't Tour d'Auvergnes at all, I can't see that it gives him any great station. He says – and this is more to the point – that he's descended from Saintrailles, and since we ourselves are in a direct line of descent…'

There was in Combray a rue de Saintrailles to which I had never given a second thought. It led from the rue de la Bretonnerie to the rue de l'Oiseau. And since Saintrailles, the companion of Joan of Arc, had married a Guermantes and brought into that family the county of Combray, his arms were quartered with those of the Guermantes at the base of one of the windows in Saint-Hilaire. I recalled the darkish sandstone steps, while a modulation of sound brought back that name Guermantes in the forgotten tone in which I used once to hear it, so different from the tone in which it merely indicated the genial hosts with whom I was dining that evening. If the name Duchesse de Guermantes was a collective noun to my mind, it was not so merely in history, as the accumulation of all the women who had borne it in turn, but also in the course of my own short early life, which had already seen, in this single Duchesse de Guermantes, so many women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had sufficiently materialized. Words do not change their meaning over the centuries as much as names do for us in the space of a few years. Our memories and our hearts are not large enough to remain faithful. We have not room enough, in our present mental space, to keep the dead alongside the living. We are obliged to build on top of what has gone before and is unearthed only by a chance excavation, like the one just opened up by the name Saintrailles. I felt it would be pointless to explain all this, and a little earlier in the evening I had even implicitly lied by not replying to M. de Guermantes's question: 'You don't know our little patch of the woods?' Perhaps he was quite well aware of the fact that I did know it and had refused to press his question only out of good breeding. Mme de Guermantes drew me out of my day-dream.

'Personally I find all this sort of thing makes me die of boredom. It's really not always as boring as this in this house. I do hope you'll dine with us again soon as a compensation, and with no pedigrees next time,' the Duchesse said to me in an undertone, unable to appreciate the charm I might find in her house and without the humility to be content to let it appeal to me simply as a herbarium filled with outmoded specimens.

What Mme de Guermantes believed to be disappointing my expectations was on the contrary what in the end – for the Duc and the General went on relentlessly with their discussion of pedigree – saved my evening from being a complete disappointment. How could I have felt other than disappointed until now? Each of the dinner guests, cloaking the mysterious name under which I had merely known and imagined them at a distance in a body and mind similar or inferior to those of everyone else I knew, had given me the impression of a commonplace dullness which the initial view of the Danish port of Elsinore would give to any passionate admirer of *Hamlet*. No doubt these geographical regions and the historic past which injected forest glades and Gothic steeples into their names had to a certain extent shaped their faces, their minds and their prejudices, but had survived in them only as does the cause in the effect, that is as something which can be unearthed by the intelligence but in no way perceived by the imagination.

And these prejudices from the historical past instantly restored to the friends of M. and Mme de Guermantes their lost poetry. It is true that the notions possessed by the nobility which make them the scholars, the etymologists of the language not of words but of names (and even then only in comparison with the ignorant majority of the middle classes, for if, on the same level of mediocrity, a devout Catholic would be better able to answer questions on the liturgy than a free-thinker, by contrast, an anti-clerical archaeologist can often teach his parish priest a thing or two about everything connected even with that priest's own church), those notions, if we are to stick to the truth, that is to say to the spirit, had none of the charm for these noblemen that they had for a middle-class person. Possibly they knew better than I did that the Duchesse de Guise was Princess of Cleves, of Orléans, of Porcien, and so forth, but long before they knew all these names, they had known the Duchesse de Guise's face, which was subsequently what this name reflected back to them. I had begun with the fairy, even if she was soon fated to perish; they had begun with the woman herself.

In middle-class families you sometimes see jealousies starting up when the younger sister marries before the elder. Similarly the aristocratic world (the Courvoisiers in particular, but the Guermantes too) reduced its nobiliary greatness to mere levels of domestic superiority out of a childishness I had originally come across in books (the only place I found any charm in it). Does not Tallemant des Réaux[92] seem to be speaking about the Guermantes, as opposed to the Rohans, when he relates with evident satisfaction that M. de Guéménée shouted to his brother: 'You can step inside! This is not the Louvre!' and said of the Chevalier de Rohan himself (because he was the natural son of the Duc de Clermont): 'At least he's a prince!' The only thing that distressed me during the evening's conversation was to discover that the absurd gossip about the charming adopted Grand Duke of Luxembourg found as much credence in this salon as it did among Saint-Loup's friends. It was plainly an epidemic that would last perhaps for no longer than a year or so, but it had infected everyone. People repeated the same false gossip, or created more. I gathered that the Princess of Luxembourg herself, while ostensibly defending her nephew, was supplying weapons to attack him with. 'You are wrong to stand up for him,' M. de Guermantes told me, just as Saint-Loup had done. 'Look, even leaving aside the views of our family, which are unanimous on the subject, you have only to talk to his servants, and they, after all, are the people who know us best. Mme de Luxembourg gave her little negro page to her nephew. The page came back in tears: "Grand Duke beat me, me no bad boy, Grand Duke bad man, real bad." And I have this on good authority, from Oriane's cousin.'

I cannot say, now I come to think about it, how many times I heard the word 'cousin' used in the course of the evening. On the one hand, M. de Guermantes, at almost every name mentioned, would exclaim: 'But he's Oriane's cousin!' with the same delight as a man lost in a forest, who sees a signpost with two arrows pointing in opposite directions, each followed by a very low number of kilometres, reads the words 'Belvédère Casimir-Perier' and 'Croix du Grand-Veneur', and recognizes from them that he is on the right road. On the other hand, the word cousin was being used for a wholly different purpose (an exception to the rule prevailing at this gathering) by the Turkish Ambassadress, who had joined the party after dinner. Devoured by social ambition and endowed with a real gift for assimilating knowledge, she would ingest with equal facility Xenophon's account of the Ten Thousand[93] or the details of sexual perversion among birds. It would have been impossible to fault her on any of the most recent German publications, whether they dealt with political economy, mental illness, the various forms of onanism, or the philosophy of Epicurus. She was a dangerous woman to listen to into the bargain, since she was perpetually getting things wrong and would point out ladies of irreproachable virtue as women of the loosest morals, would put you on your guard against a man of the most honourable intentions, and tell you anecdotes that seemed to come out of a book, not because they were serious, but because they were utterly improbable.

Very few people opened their doors to her at this period. For a few weeks she would frequent socially brilliant women like the Duchesse de Guermantes, but as far as the noblest families were concerned, she had mostly confined herself, of necessity, to obscure branches of the family the Guermantes no longer frequented. She attempted to persuade people of her social standing by quoting the most distinguished names of little-known people who were her friends. The immediate reaction to this on the part of M. de Guermantes, who thought that she was referring to people with whom he frequently dined, was to quiver with delight at finding himself in familiar territory and to utter the rallying-cry: 'But he's Oriane's cousin! I know him like the back of my hand. He lives in the rue Vaneau. His mother was Mlle d'Uzès.'

The Ambassadress was forced to admit that her specimen had been drawn from a smaller stable. She tried to connect her friends with those of M. de Guermantes by means of a detour: 'I know very well who you mean. No, it's not them, it's their cousins.' But these words of partial withdrawal launched by the unfortunate Ambassadress soon lost any momentum they had. For M. de Guermantes, losing interest, answered: 'Oh, then I don't know who you're talking about.' The Ambassadress made no reply, for if she never knew anyone other than 'the cousins' of the people she ought to have known, very often these 'cousins' bore no relation to them at all. Then M. de Guermantes would offer a fresh wave of 'But she's Oriane's cousin,' words which seemed, in his eyes, to have the same practical value in each of his sentences as certain adjectives the Roman poets found convenient because they provided them with dactyls or spondees for their hexameters. At any event, the explosion 'But she's Oriane's cousin!' seemed to me quite natural applied to the Princesse de Guermantes, who was indeed very closely related to the Duchesse. The Ambassadress did not appear to care for the Princesse. She said in an undertone: 'The woman is stupid. And no, she's not *that* beautiful. That reputation is usurped. Anyway, she added with a look that was at once studied, dismissive and conclusive, I find her deeply antipathetic.' But often the question of tenuous relationships extended a great deal further, Mme de Guermantes making it a point of honour to address as 'Aunt' ladies with whom it would have been difficult to find a common ancestress without going back at least to Louis XV, just as, whenever 'hard times' brought it about that a multi-millionairess married a prince whose great-great-grandfather had married, like Oriane's, a daughter of Louvois, one of the joys of the rich American lady, after a first visit to the Hôtel de Guermantes, where she was, incidentally, rather coolly received and more or less gone over with a fine tooth-comb, was to be able to use the term 'Aunt' to Mme de Guermantes, who allowed her to do so with a maternal smile. But I little cared what 'birth' meant for M. de Guermantes and M. de Monserfeuil; in the conversations they held on the subject, the only pleasure I sought was a poetic one. Without being conscious of it themselves, they procured me this pleasure in the same way that farmers or seamen would have done talking about the soil or the tides, realities too ingrained in their lives for them to be able to enjoy the beauty which I myself undertook to extract from them.

Sometimes a name would remind me not so much of a pedigree as of a particular fact or date. As I heard M. de Guermantes recall that M. de Bréauté's mother had been a Choiseul and his grandmother a Lucinge, I would imagine that beneath the ordinary shirt-front with its plain pearl studs I could see bleeding in two crystal globes those august relics: the hearts of Mme de Praslin and of the Duc de Berry.[94] Other associations were more voluptuous: the fine and abundant hair of Mme Tallien or Mme de Sabran.[95]

Occasionally I saw more than a simple relic. Better informed than his wife about the nature of their ancestors, M. de Guermantes had a command of memories which gave his conversation the fine feel of an ancient mansion, lacking in real masterpieces but still full of authentic pictures, of middling interest and imposing, giving an overall impression of grandeur. When the Prince d'Agrigente enquired why Prince Von had referred to the Duc d'Aumale as 'my uncle', M. de Guermantes replied: 'Because his mother's brother, the Duke of Wurttemberg, married one of Louis Philippe's daughters.' I was immediately deep in contemplation of a reliquary, similar to those painted by Carpaccio or Memling, from its first panel, in which the princess was figured, at the wedding festivities of her brother the Duc d'Orléans, wearing a simple garden dress as a sign of her ill-humour at seeing her ambassadors return empty-handed after being sent to sue on her behalf for the hand of the Prince of Syracuse, to the last panel, in which she has just given birth to a son, the Duke of Wurttenberg (the very uncle of the prince with whom I had just dined), in the castle known as Fantaisie, one of those places which are themselves as aristocratic as certain families. For such places too, outlasting a single generation, become associated with more than one historical personage; this one in particular contains alongside one another the memories of the Margravine of Bayreuth, of that other rather unpredictable princess (the sister of the Duc d'Orléans) who was said to have found a certain appeal in the name of her husband's castle, of the King of Bavaria, and finally of Prince Von, who was the present inhabitant and who had just asked the Duc de Guermantes to write to him there, since he had succeeded to it and let it only during the Wagner festival performances to the Prince de Polignac, another delightful 'fantasis'. When M. de Guermantes, to explain how he was connected to Mme d'Arpajon, was obliged to go back, so far and so simply, along the chain of linked hands formed by three or five ancestresses, to Marie-Louise or to Colbert, the same thing happened again: in each of these cases, an important historical event appeared only in passing, masked, distorted, curtailed, in the name of a property, in the first names of a woman, chosen for her because she was the granddaughter of Louis-Philippe and Marie-Amélie, considered no longer as King and Queen of France, but only in their capacity as grandparents for bequeathing a heritage. (For different reasons, in a glossary to the works of Balzac, where the most illustrious names figure only in terms of their connection with *La Comédie humaine*, you can find Napoleon occupying far less space than Rastignac, and occupying it only because he once spoke to the Saint-Cygne ladies.) Thus does the heavy structure of the aristocracy, with its rare windows, admitting a scant amount of daylight, showing the same incapacity to soar, but also the same massive, blind force as Romanesque architecture, enclose all our history within its sullen walls.

Thus did the blank spaces of my memory gradually fill with names which, as they arranged and composed themselves in relation to each other, and as the connections between them became more and more numerous, resembled those perfected works of art in which there is not a single brush-stroke that does not contribute to the whole, and in which every element in turn receives from the rest a justification it confers on them in its turn.

After M. de Luxembourg's name had been brought up again, the Turkish Ambassadress told us how, when the young bride's grandfather (the man who had made a vast amount of money out of flour and pasta) had invited M. de Luxembourg to lunch, the latter had written to decline and addressed the envelope to: 'M. de ***, miller'; the grandfather had written back: 'I am all the more disappointed that you were unable to come, my dear friend, in that I should have been able to enjoy your company in privacy, for we were only a small party and there would have only been the miller, his son, and yourself.' This anecdote was not only utterly distasteful to me, but inconceivable as I knew it to be morally impossible that my dear M. de Nassau should write to his wife's grandfather (and a man whose fortune he was likely to inherit) addressing him as 'miller'; but there was the further point that its stupidity was glaringly apparent from the start, the word 'miller' having been so obviously dragged in only to lead up to the title of the La Fontaine fable.[96] But there is a kind of silliness in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, especially when it is aggravated by malice, which led everyone to applaud the words of this anecdote as 'inspired' and to see the grandfather, whom they all

suddenly confidently declared to be a remarkable man, as a wittier one than his grandson-in-law. The Duc de Châtellerault wanted to take advantage of this story to recount one I had already heard in the café: 'Everyone was made to lie down!' – but no sooner had he begun with an account of M. de Luxembourg's claim that M. de Guermantes ought to stand up in his wife's presence than the Duchesse stopped him and protested: 'No, he's absurd to a degree, but he certainly wouldn't go that far.' My private conviction was that all this gossip at M. de Luxembourg's expense was equally untrue, and that whenever I found myself face to face with one of the participants or onlookers in the story I should hear the same denial. The only thing I wondered about was whether the denial I had just heard from Mme de Guermantes had arisen from a concern with the truth or from pride. In any event pride succumbed to malice, for she went on to say with a laugh: 'Not that I haven't had my little snub too. He invited me to tea to introduce me to the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, which is how he has the good taste to describe his wife when he's writing to his aunt. I wrote back to say I was sorry I couldn't come and I added: "Do tell the 'Grand Duchess of Luxembourg' (in inverted commas) that if she wants to come and see me I'm at home every Thursday after five." I was even snubbed twice. I happened to be in Luxembourg and telephoned to ask to speak to him. His Highness was going to luncheon, had just finished luncheon, two hours went by and there was no reply. So I employed another method: "Would you tell the Comte de Nassau to come to the phone?" Cut to the quick, he was there at once.' Everyone laughed at the Duchesse's story and at further stories in the same vein, that is to say untrue ones (I am convinced of it), for a kinder, more intelligent, more refined, in a word more exquisite man than this Luxembourg-Nassau I had never met. The sequel will show that it was I who was right. Yet I must admit that among the spate of her nasty remarks Mme de Guermantes did have a kind word to say about him.

'He wasn't always like that, she remarked. Before he went off his head, like the man in the story-book who thinks he's become king, he was far from stupid, and indeed, in the early days of his engagement, he used to speak of it in a rather charming way, as an undreamed-of happiness: "It's just like a fairy-tale; I shall have to make my entry into Luxembourg in a fairy coach," he told his uncle d'Ornesson, who said in turn – for you know that Luxembourg is not a very big place: "A fairy coach, eh? I'm afraid you'd never get in with that. I'd suggest a goat-cart myself." Not only did this not annoy Nassau, but he was the first to tell us the story, and to laugh at it.

– Ornesson is full of witticisms, he has every reason to be: his mother was a Montjeu. He's in a bad way these days, is poor Ornesson.'

This name had the merit of interrupting the stale malicious gossip that would otherwise have gone on for ever. For M. Guermantes went on to explain that the M. d'Ornesson's great-grandmother had been the sister of Marie de Castille Montjeu, the wife of Timoléon de Lorraine, and therefore Oriane's aunt. This meant that the conversation reverted to genealogies, and I had the imbecile Turkish Ambassadress murmuring in my ear: 'You appear to be very much in the Duc de Guermantes's good books. Be careful.' And when I asked for an explanation: 'I mean – and I think you'll understand what I mean – that he's a man to whom one could safely entrust one's daughter, but not one's son.' Now if ever, on the contrary, there was a man who was a passionate and exclusive lover of women, that man was the Duc de Guermantes. But error, gullibly credited untruth, were for the Ambassadress like a life-sustaining element without which she could not function. 'His brother Mémé, who, for other reasons, I happen to deeply dislike (the fact was that he refused to acknowledge her), is genuinely distressed at the Duc's morals. So is their aunt Villeparisis. Ah, how I adore that woman. She's a real saint, a perfect example of the way great ladies used to be. She's not only a living image of virtue, but of reserve as well. She still addresses Ambassador Norpois as "Monsieur" even though she sees him every day. And he, by the way, made an excellent impression in Turkey.'

I did not even bother to reply to the Ambassadress because I was anxious to listen to the genealogies. Not all of them were important. It so happened that one of the unexpected alliances about which I learned from M. de Guermantes in the course of the conversation was a misalliance, but not without its charm since it united, under the July Monarchy, the Duc de Guermantes and the Duc de Fezanzac with two beauties, the daughters of a famous navigator, and graced these two duchesses with the unexpected piquancy of a bourgeois exoticism, an element of India à la Louis Philippe. Otherwise, under Louis XIV, there was a Norpois who had married a daughter of the Duc de Mortemart, whose illustrious title, in those far-off times, struck the name Norpois, which to me sounded humdrum and of possibly recent origin, and engraved it deeply with the beauty of an old medal. And again in these cases, it was not solely the less well-known name that benefited by the association: the other, turned into a cliché by its glitter, struck me more forcibly in its novel, less illustrious form, just as among the portraits painted by a brilliant colourist the most striking is sometimes the one that is all in black. The fresh mobility which seemed to me to animate all these names, as they came to join others from which I should have supposed them to be remote, was not due to my ignorance alone; the to-ings and fro-ings they were performing in my mind had been performed no less freely in those periods when a title, always attached to a given territory, would always follow it from one family to another, to the point, for example, where I could successively discern, in the fine feudal structure constituted by the title Duc de Nemours or Duc de Chevreuse, nestling as in the hospitable abode of a hermit-crab, a Guise, a Prince of Savoy, an Orléans, a Luynes. In some instances several remained in competition for a single shell: for the Principality of Orange, the royal house of the Netherlands and MM. de Mailly-Nesle: for the Duchy of Brabant, the Baron de Charlus and the royal house of Belgium; various others for the titles of Prince of Naples, Duke of Parma, Duke of Reggio. In others it was the other way round: the shell had been so long uninhabited by proprietors long since dead that it had never occurred to me that this or that name of a castle could have been, at a period which was after all comparatively recent, the name of a family. And so, when M. de Guermantes replied to a question put to him by M. de Monserfeuil: 'No, my cousin was a fanatical royalist. She was the daughter of the Marquis de Féterne, who had some part in the Chouan uprising,' when I saw this name Féterne, which to me, ever since my stay in Balbec, had been the name of a castle, become something I had never dreamed it could possibly be, the name of a family, I felt the same sense of astonishment I would have done reading a fairy-tale in which turrets and flights of steps come to life and turn into people. In this sense, it could be said that history, even mere family history, restores old stones to life. There have been men in Parisian society who played as considerable a part in it, who were more sought after for their distinction or their wit, who were just as well-born as the Duc de Guermantes or the Duc de La Trémoïlle. Today they have fallen into oblivion because, since they left no descendants, their name, which is no longer heard, echoes with an unfamiliar ring; at the very most, like the name of a thing in which we never expect to discover the name of a person, it survives in some castle, in some remote village. There will soon be a day when the traveller who stops in the heart of Burgundy in the tiny village of Charlus to look at its church, if he is not studious enough or in too much of a hurry to examine its tombstones, will go away ignorant of the fact that the name Charlus was the name of a man who ranked with the greatest. This thought reminded me that it was time for me to leave, and that while I was standing there listening to M. de Guermantes talking genealogy, the time I had promised to call on his brother was fast approaching. Who knows, I went on thinking, whether one day Guermantes itself may survive as anything other than a place name, except to archaeologists who stop briefly in Combray, stand before the window of Gilbert the Bad, and have the patience to hear out the account given them by Théodore's successor or to read the curé's guide? But as long as a great name is not extinct, it keeps the men and women who bore it in the limelight; and no doubt part of the interest which the illustriousness of these families assumed for me lay in the fact that it is possible, starting from the present, to follow them back step by step to well before the fourteenth century, and to find the memoirs and correspondence of all the forebears of M. de Charlus, of the Prince d'Agrigente, of the Princess of Parma, in a past which would shroud the origins of a middle-class family in impenetrable darkness, documents in which we can ascertain, in the luminous backward projection of a name, the origin and persistence of various nervous characteristics, vices and disorders of one or another of the Guermantes. Almost pathologically identical with their namesakes of the present day, from century to century they arouse the startled interest of their correspondents, whether these predate the Princess Palatine and Mme de Motteville, or follow on from the Prince de Ligne.

Yet my historical curiosity paled before my aesthetic pleasure. The names I had heard uttered had a disembodying effect on the Duchesse's guests – in spite of the fact that they might be called the Prince d'Agrigente or the Prince de Cystria – whose masks of flesh and absent or vulgar intelligence had transformed them into rather ordinary specimens, to the point that I ended up feeling that I had landed on the Guermantes door-mat not as upon the supposed threshold but at the terminus of the magic world of names. The Prince d'Agrigente himself, the moment I heard that his mother had been a Damas, a granddaughter of the Duke of

Modena, was set free, as from an unstable chemical alloy, from the face and speech that prevented one from recognizing him, and joined up with Damas and Modena, themselves mere titles, to form an infinitely more seductive combination. Each name displaced by the attraction of another, with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity, left the static position it had occupied in my brain where familiarity had dulled it, and, going off to join the Mortemarts, the Stuarts and the Bourbons, linked up with them to form branches of the most graceful pattern and changing colour. The name Guermantes received from all those fine names, extinct and so all the more glowingly rekindled, with which I learned only now that it was connected, a new and purely poetic sense. At the very most, on the tip of each spray that burgeoned forth from the proud stem, I could see it flower into the face of some wise monarch or illustrious princess, like the father of Henri IV or the Duchesse de Longueville. But since these faces, different in this respect from those of the guests in the room, were in no way overlaid by the residue of physical experience or social mediocrity, they remained, in their handsome outlines and shifting reflections, homogeneous with the names which, at regular intervals, each with its own colouring, detached themselves from the Guermantes genealogical tree, and disturbed with no foreign or opaque matter the translucent, alternating, multi-coloured buds which, like the ancestors of Jesus in windows figuring the tree of Jesse, blossomed on either side of the glass tree.

I had already made several attempts to take my leave for various reasons, but principally because of the insignificance that my presence was imposing on the party, although it was one of those I had long imagined as being so glamorous, as it doubtless would have been had there been no awkward witness present. At least my departure would allow the guests, once the trespasser had disappeared, to form them selves into a closed circle. They would be free to celebrate the mysteries for which they had gathered there, and they had certainly not gathered to discuss Frans Hals or miserliness, and to discuss such matters in the same way as people do in bourgeois society. The talk was trivial, no doubt because I was present, and seeing all these pretty women kept apart, it pained me to think that my presence was preventing them from proceeding, in the most precious of its salons, with the mysterious life of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. But every attempt I made to leave was being foiled by M. and Mme de Guermantes, who carried the spirit of self-sacrifice to the point of constantly detaining me. More curious still, several of the ladies who had come running with delight, in all their finery, glittering with jewels, only to attend a party which, because of me, differed from parties given elsewhere than in the Faubourg Saint-Germain really no more than one feels oneself, in Balbec, to be in a town that differs from what one usually sees – several of these ladies took their leave, not in a state of disappointment, as they had every reason to be, but thanking Mme de Guermantes effusively for the delightful evening they had spent, as though on other days, the days on which I was not present, nothing different happened.

Was it really for dinner-parties like the present one that all these people dressed up and refused middle-class women admittance to their exclusive drawing-rooms? For dinner-parties like this, which would have been no different even in my absence? For a second I suspected as much, but the suspicion was too absurd. Plain common sense enabled me to brush it aside. And had I embraced it, what would have been left of the name Guermantes, already so demoted since the Combray days?

Besides, these flower-maidens were, to a strange extent, easily pleased with another person, or anxious to please that person, for more than one of them, with whom I had exchanged, in the course of the entire evening, no more than a handful of casual remarks the stupidity of which had left me blushing, made a point, before she left the drawing-room, of coming to tell me, as she held me in a fond look from her lovely eyes and straightened as she spoke the spray of orchids that followed the curves of her bosom, what a deep pleasure it had been to make my acquaintance, and to speak to me – a veiled allusion to a dinner invitation – of her desire to 'arrange something' after she had 'fixed a day' with Mme de Guermantes. None of these flower ladies left the room before the Princess of Parma. The presence of the latter – one must never leave before royalty – was one of the two reasons, neither of which I had suspected, why the Duchesse had been so insistent on my remaining. The minute Mme de Parme rose to her feet, there was the feeling that everyone had been set free. Each of the ladies, after making a genuflexion before the Princess, received from her in a kiss, and like a benediction they had begged for on their knees, permission to ask for their cloaks and their attendants. With the result that, at the main door, there was something like a vociferous recital of great names from the history of France. The Princess of Parma had forbidden Mme de Guermantes to accompany her down to the hall for fear of her catching cold, and the Duc had added: 'Come now, Oriane, since Madame gives you leave to stay here, remember what the doctor told you.'

'I think that the Princess of Parma was *very pleased* to dine with you.' I knew the formula. The Duc had come from the other end of the drawing-room to utter it to me, in an obliging, fulsome manner, as though he were awarding me a diploma or offering me a plate of petits fours. The pleasure he appeared to be feeling at that moment, and which brought such a gentle expression to his face for that instant, led me to sense that the order of attentiveness to which his gesture belonged was of the kind that would be with him until the very end of his life, like those honorific sinecures that are retained even by the senile.

Just as I was about to leave, the Princess's lady-in-waiting reappeared in the drawing-room, in search of some flowers she had forgotten, marvellous pinks, from the Guermantes estate, which the Duchesse had offered Mme de Parme. This lady-in-waiting was rather flushed, and one felt that she had just been put roundly in her place, for the Princess, so kind towards everyone else, could not conceal her impatience at the stupidity of her attendant. And so the latter picked up the bunch of pinks and moved off in a hurry, but to preserve some element of unflustered behaviour and wilful independence, she blurted out to me as she passed: 'The Princess tells me I'm keeping her waiting; she is impatient to be gone *and* she wants take the pinks. Heavens! I'm not some little bird, I can't be all over the place at once.'

Alas! the rule about not leaving before royalty was not the only thing that detained me. I was unable to leave immediately for another reason: this was that the lavishness (unknown to the Courvoisiers) for which the Guermantes, whether opulent or practically ruined, were famous when they entertained their friends, was not only lavishness in material terms but also, as I had often experienced with Robert de Saint-Loup, a lavishness of charming words, courteous gestures, a whole gamut of verbal elegance nourished by real intensity of feeling. But as this last, in the idleness of fashionable existence, finds no outlet, it poured forth at times, seeking some channel of expression in a kind of fleeting effusiveness, which was all the more anxiously solicitous, and which might, on the part of Mme de Guermantes, have been mistaken for affection. She did in fact feel it at the moment she let it overflow, for she discovered then, in the company of the friend, man or woman, she was with at the time, a sense of intoxication, in no way sensual, similar to that which music induces in certain people; she would find herself picking a flower from her bodice, or a medallion, and giving it to someone with whom she would have liked to prolong the evening, yet with the melancholy feeling that to prolong it would have led to nothing but idle chatter, which would have absorbed nothing of the nervous pleasure, the fleeting emotion of the experience, and which would have been reminiscent in this respect of the impression of lassitude and regret that follow the first warm days of spring. And as far as the friend was concerned, it was important that he was not too taken in by the promises, more thrilling than any he had ever heard, proffered by these women, who, because they are particularly susceptible to the sweetness of a moment, turn it, with a delicacy, a nobility not granted to ordinary creatures, into a masterpiece of endearment and kindness, and no longer have anything of themselves left to give in the moment that follows. Their affection does not outlive the moment of elation that dictated it; and the subtlety of mind which had led them at that point to intuit all the things that you wished to hear, and to say them to you, will enable them, a few days later, to pinpoint your foibles and use them to entertain another of their guests with whom they will in turn be enjoying one of these *moments musicaux* which are so short-lived.

In the hall, I asked a footman for my snowboots, which I had brought as a precaution against the snow (a few flakes had fallen and already turned to slush), and not realizing how unfashionable they were, I started to feel, because of the contemptuous smiles I was getting, a sense of shame which reached its peak when I realized that Mme de Parme had not in fact left and was watching me put on my American rubbers. The Princess came across to me. 'Oh! what a good idea! she exclaimed, it's so practical! What a very sensible man. Madame, we shall have to buy some of those,' she said to her lady-in-waiting, as the ironic reception of the footmen turned to respect and the other guests crowded around to ask where I had managed to find these wonderful things. 'With those on your feet, you'll have nothing to fear, even if it snows again and you've far to go. You're not at the mercy of the weather, the Princess said to me.

– Oh! as far as the weather's concerned Your Royal Highness can set her mind at rest, broke in the lady-in-waiting knowingly, it won't snow again.

– And how could you possibly know that?' questioned the peerless Princess of Parma in a withering tone provoked by the one thing that could manage to ruffle her, the stupidity of her lady-in-waiting.

'I can assure Your Royal Highness that it can't snow again. It's a physical impossibility.

– But why?

– It can't snow again because they've taken the necessary steps to prevent it. They've put salt on the roads!'

The simple-minded lady did not notice the Princess's anger nor other people's mirth, for instead of remaining silent she said to me with a bland smile, disregarding utterly the denials I had made of any connection with Admiral Jurien de la Gravière: 'Not that it matters, in any case. Monsieur must have strong sea legs. It runs in the family!'

After escorting the Princess of Parma to her carriage, M. de Guermantes picked up my greatcoat with the words: 'Let me help you into your skin.' And he no longer used this expression with an apologetic smile, for given the way the Guermantes affected simplicity, the most low-class expressions, just because they were low-class, had become aristocratic.

An exhilaration which, because it was artificial, tailed off into melancholy was what I also felt, though quite differently from Mme de Guermantes, once I finally left her house in the carriage that was to take me to M. de Charlus. We are free to abandon ourselves to one or other of two forces, one arising in ourselves, emanating from our deepest impressions, the other affecting us from without. The natural accompaniment of the first is a joy, the joy that springs from the life of creative people. The other current, the one which aims to introduce into us the impulses by which people external to ourselves are stirred, is not accompanied by pleasurable feeling; but we can add pleasure to it through a vicarious reaction, adopting an intoxication so artificial that it quickly turns into melancholy, into boredom; whence the gloomy faces of so many society people and their pronounced tendency towards nervous conditions which may even lead to suicide. Now, in the carriage that was taking me to M. de Charlus, I was prey to this second sort of exhilaration, very different from that afforded by a personal impression, like those I had received in other carriages: once in Combray, in Dr Percepied's gig, from which I had seen the Martinville steeples against the setting sun; another day in Balbec, in Mme de Villeparisis's barouche, when I tried hard to work out what it was I was reminded of by an avenue of trees. But in this third carriage, what I had before my mind's eye were those conversations that had seemed so tedious at Mme de Guermantes's dinner-party, for example Prince Von's stories about the Kaiser, General Botha and the British Army. I had just slid these into the inner stereoscope we use, as soon as we are no longer ourselves, as soon as we adopt a society spirit and wish to receive our life only from others, to bring into solid relief what they have said and done. Like a man who has had too much to drink and feels full of kindness and consideration for the waiter who has been serving him, I marvelled at my good fortune – something I had not felt, for sure, at the actual moment – in having dined with someone who knew Wilhelm II so well and had told stories about him that were, upon my word, extremely witty. And as I recalled, together with the Prince's German accent, his story about General Botha, I laughed out loud, as if my laughter, like certain kinds of applause which bolster one's inner admiration, was a necessary corroboration of the story's comic qualities. Through the magnifying lenses, even those of Mme de Guermantes's pronouncements which had struck me as stupid (such as her remarks about seeing Frans Hals paintings from a tram-car) assumed an extraordinary life and depth. And I have to say that, even if this sense of elation was quick to subside, it was not completely nonsensical. Just as there may come a day when we are happy to know the person whom we despise most because he happens to be connected with a girl with whom we are in love, to whom he can introduce us, and thus becomes useful and agreeable, something we would never have dreamed he could be, so there is no conversation, any more than there are personal relations, from which we can be certain that we shall not one day derive some benefit. What Mme de Guermantes had said to me about paintings it would be interesting to see, even from a tram-car, was untrue, but it contained a grain of truth which was valuable to me at a later stage.

Similarly the lines from Victor Hugo she had quoted in my presence were admittedly from an earlier period of his work than the one in which he became something more than a new man, in which he evolved a literary species that was previously unknown, endowed with more complex organs. In these early poems, Victor Hugo is still a thinker, rather than a natural force content with providing food for thought. His 'thoughts' he expressed at this period in the most direct form, almost in the sense in which the Duc understood the word when he found it old-fangled and cumbersome of his guests at big parties at Guermantes to append to their signatures in the visitors' book some philosophic-poetical reflection, and would warn new-comers in a pleading voice: 'Your name, my dear chap, but no "thoughts", I beg you!' Now, it was these 'thoughts' of Victor Hugo (almost as absent from *La Légende des siècles* as 'tunes' and 'melodies' are from Wagner's later manner) that Mme de Guermantes was so fond of in his early work. Nor was she altogether wrong here. They were moving, and already around them, before their form had yet achieved the depth it was to acquire only later on, the flooding tide of words and richly articulated rhymes made them very different from the lines you find in Corneille, for example, in which Romantic feeling, sporadic and restrained, and therefore all the more moving, has nevertheless not managed to penetrate to the physical sources of life, or modified the unconscious and generalizable organism in which the idea is implicit. And so I had been wrong to confine myself up to this point to Hugo's later collections. It is true that Mme de Guermantes had used only a fractional part of the earlier ones to embellish her conversation. But the point is that, by quoting an isolated line in this way, you increase its power of attraction tenfold. The lines that had entered or returned to my mind in the course of this dinner-party acted as magnets in their turn, powerfully called up the poems within which they were normally embedded, so that my magnetized hands were unable to put up more than forty-eight hours' resistance to the force that drew them towards the volume in which *Les Orientales or Les chants du crépuscule* were bound. I cursed Françoise's footman for having made a gift of my copy of the *Feuilles d'automne* to his native village, and lost no time sending him out to buy me another. I reread these volumes from cover to cover and found respite only when I suddenly stumbled, waiting there for me in the light in which she had bathed them, on the lines which Mme de Guermantes had quoted. For all these reasons, talk with the Duchesse was like the discoveries we make in the library of a country house, outdated, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, devoid of almost everything we value, but occasionally offering us some curious piece of information, or even a quotation from a fine passage that was unknown to us and which subsequently we are happy to remember as something we were introduced to because of a stay in a splendid stately home. And because we have discovered Balzac's preface to the *Chartreuse* or some unpublished letters of Joubert, we are then tempted to exaggerate the value of our stay there, the barren frivolity of which we forget in the light of a single evening's happy discovery.

From this point of view, if this social world had been unable to respond initially to what my imagination expected, and was consequently to strike me first of all by what it had in common with every other world rather than the ways it differed from them, it none the less revealed itself to me as something quite distinct. Noblemen are almost the only people who can teach you as much as peasants; their conversation is adorned with everything that concerns the land, dwellings as people used to live in them in the past, old customs, everything about which the moneyed world is profoundly ignorant. Even supposing that an aristocrat of the most moderate aspirations has finally caught up with the times in which he lives, his mother, his uncles, his great-aunts keep him in touch, when he recalls his childhood, with a style of life that is almost unknown today. In the death-chamber of a deceased contemporary, Mme de Guermantes would not have pointed out, but would have been the first to notice all the lapses from traditional practice. It shocked her to see women mingling with the men at a funeral, when there was a special ceremony which ought to be celebrated for the women themselves. As for the pall, which Bloch would have doubtless seen as reserved for funerals, on account of the pall-bearers mentioned in reports of funeral ceremonies, M. de Guermantes could remember the time when, still a child, he had seen it borne at the wedding of M. de Mailly-Nesle. While Saint-Loup had sold his priceless 'genealogical tree', together with old portraits of the Bouillons and letters of Louis XIII, in order to buy Carrière paintings[97] and Art Nouveau furniture, M. and Mme de Guermantes, inspired by a sentiment in which a fervent love of art may have played less part and made them appear more commonplace, had kept their marvellous Boulle[98] furniture, which presented a quite different overall appeal to

an artistic mind. A literary mind would similarly have been enchanted by the conversation, which for him – for a hungry man has no need of another to keep him company – would have been a living dictionary of all those expressions which are passing out of the language by the day (Saint-Joseph neckties, children pledged to wear blue, and so on), and which survive today only among people who have taken it upon themselves to act as the obliging and benevolent custodians of the past. The pleasure that a writer experiences in their company, far more than in that of other writers, is not without its risks, for he is in danger of believing that the things of the past have a charm in themselves, of transporting them raw into his work, which, if he does, becomes still-born and smacks of staleness, for which he consoles himself with the thought: 'It's appealing because it's authentic, that's how people talk.' These aristocratic conversations had the further charm, in Mme de Guermantes's case, of being conducted in excellent French. For this reason, they made it permissible for the Duchesse to react hilariously to the words 'vatic', 'cosmic', 'pythian', 'supereminent' that formed part of Saint-Loup's vocabulary – in the same way as she did to his Bing furniture.[99]

But in the end, the stories I had heard at the Duchesse's house, very different in this respect from the feelings aroused in me by the hawthorns or the taste of a *madeleine*, left me cold. Entering me for a moment and possessing me only physically, it was as though, being of a social, not an individual, nature, they were anxious to escape. I writhed as I sat in the carriage like a prophetess in a trance. I envisaged another dinner-party at which I might myself become a sort of Prince X, or a Mme de Guermantes, and tell the same sort of stories. In the meantime I stammered them out through my trembling lips and tried in vain to restore order to a mind that was carried away by a centrifugal force. And so it was with a feverish impatience not to have to bear the weight of all this any longer on my own in a carriage where I made up for the lack of conversation by talking aloud to myself, that I rang at M. de Charlus's door, and it was in long monologues with myself, in which I rehearsed everything I was going to tell him with scarcely a thought of what he might have to say to me, that I spent the whole of the time awaiting him in a drawing-room into which I had been shown by a footman, and which I was too wound up to take in. I was so anxious for M. de Charlus to listen to the stories I was dying to tell him that I was bitterly disappointed to think that the master of the house had perhaps gone to bed and that I should have to go back home to work off my verbal intoxication. I had just noticed in fact that I had spent twenty-five minutes, that they had perhaps forgotten about me, in this room about which, despite the long wait, the most I could have said was that it was huge, greenish in colour, and contained a handful of portraits. The need to talk prevents one not only from listening, but from noticing anything, and in this case the absence of any description of external surroundings is description enough of an internal state. I was on the point of leaving the room to try to summon someone and, if I found no one, to make my way back to the entrance lobby and have myself let out, when, just as I had risen and taken a few steps across the mosaic parquet, a footman came in and said with a worried expression on his face: 'M. le Baron has been engaged all evening. There are still several people waiting to see him. I shall do my utmost to get him to receive Monsieur. I've already telephoned twice to his secretary.

– No, please don't trouble yourself further. I did have an appointment with M. le Baron, but it's now very late, and if he's busy this evening I can come back another day.

– Oh no, Monsieur, you mustn't leave, exclaimed the footman. M. le Baron might be put out. I'll try again.'

I recalled what I had heard about M. de Charlus's servants and their devotion to their master. It could not quite be said of him, as it could of the Prince de Conti, that he sought to please a valet as much as a minister, but he had been so skilful in presenting the least thing he demanded of them like a sort of favour that at night, when his personal valets were assembled around him at a respectful distance, and after running his eye over them, he would say: 'Coignet, the candlestick!' or 'Ducret, my nightshirt!' it was with an envious grumble that the others withdrew, jealous of the servant who had been singled out by the master. Two of them, in fact, who loathed each other, would each try to snatch the favour from the other by using the flimsiest of pretexts to take some message to the Baron, if he had gone upstairs earlier than usual, in the hope of being entrusted that evening with the duty of candlestick or nightshirt. If he spoke to one or other of them directly about something outside their duties, or even more, if in winter, in the garden, knowing that one of his coachmen had caught cold, he said to him after ten minutes: 'Wrap yourself up properly,' the others would not speak to the man with a cold for a fortnight, out of jealousy for the favour conferred on him.

I waited ten minutes more, then, after requesting me not to stay too long because M. le Baron was tired and had had to send away several most important people who had made appointments with him many days ago, I was ushered into his presence. This theatrical to-ing and fro-ing around M. de Charlus was beginning to strike me as a great deal less impressive than the down-to-earthness of his brother Guermantes, but already the door stood open to reveal a glimpse of the Baron in a Chinese dressing-gown, with his throat bare, stretched out on a sofa. My eye was arrested in the same instant by the mirror-like nap of a top hat, abandoned on a chair with a cape, suggesting that the Baron had only just arrived back home. The footman withdrew. I imagined that M. de Charlus would come over to greet me. Without stirring an inch he fixed me with the harshest of looks. I went over to him and said good evening. He did not hold out his hand, made no reply to my greeting, did not ask me to take a chair. After a moment's pause I asked him, as one would ask an ill-mannered doctor, whether I needed to remain standing. There was nothing nasty about the way I said this, but the cold fury on M. de Charlus's face seemed to intensify. Nor was I aware that at home, in the country, at the Château de Charlus, he was in the habit – so much did he love to play the king – of sprawling in an armchair in the smoking-room, leaving his guests to stand around him. He would ask one of them for a light, offer another a cigar, before saying, after a few moments had elapsed: 'But Argencourt, why don't you sit down? Take a chair, my dear man,' or something of the sort, having made a point of keeping them standing simply to remind them that permission to be seated came from him. 'Sit in the Louis XIV chair,' he answered me imperiously, as though he were forcing me to keep my distance rather than inviting me to sit down. I occupied an armchair that was fairly close. 'Ah! so that is what you call a Louis XIV chair! I can see that you're a well-educated young man,' he broke out in derision. I was so astonished that I stayed in my seat, neither getting up to leave as I ought to have done, nor moving to another chair as he wished me to do. 'Monsieur,' he said, weighing each of his words in turn and prefixing the more insolent of them with a double consonant, 'the interview I have condescended to grant you, at the behest of a person who desires to remain nameless, will put a full stop to our relations. I will make no secret of the fact that I had hoped for better things. I should perhaps be putting too great a strain on the meaning of the words, which one ought not to do, even with people who are ignorant of their value, simply out of respect for oneself, were I to tell you that I had felt a certain liking for you. But I think that the word *benevolence*, in its most effectively tutelary sense, would exceed neither what I felt nor what I was proposing to offer. I had given you to understand, as soon as I returned to Paris, while you were still at Balbec, that you could count upon me.' Remembering the unexpected outburst with which M. de Charlus had parted from me in Balbec, I made a vague gesture of denial. 'What! he burst out angrily (and indeed his white, convulsed face differed so much from his ordinary face as the sea on a stormy morning, when instead of its usual smiling surface you see a seething mass of snake-like spray and foam), are you suggesting that you did not not receive my message – almost a declaration – that you were to remember me? How was the cover of the book I sent you decorated?

– With some very pretty intertwined figures, I told him.

– Ah! came the scornful reply, young Frenchmen know little of the treasures of our land. What would you have to say about a young Berliner who was ignorant of the *Walküre?* In fact you must have eyes that are blind since you yourself told me that you spent two hours in front of that particular treasure. I can see that you know no more about flowers than you do about styles. Don't start protesting about styles, he exploded in a shrill scream of rage, you don't even know what you're sitting on. You present your backside with a Directory fireside chair and tell it it's sitting on a Louis XIV wing chair. One of these days you'll mistake Mme de Villeparisis's lap for the toilet seat, and one begins to wonder what you'd leave in it. It's just like your not even noticing the lintel of myosotis over the Balbec church door on the binding of that book by Bergotte. Could there have been a more obvious way of saying to you: "Forget me not"?'

My eyes were upon M. de Charlus. It was true that his magnificent head, repugnant though it was, far surpassed the heads of all his relatives; he was like an ageing Apollo; but it was as if an olive-greenish, bilious juice was about to seep out of his malevolent mouth. Intellectually, there was no denying that the vast compass of his mind embraced a great many things which would forever remain unknown to the Duc de Guermantes. But however fine the language in which he

cloaked all his hatreds, you had the feeling that, even if his words were motivated by hurt pride or disappointment in love, by rancour, sadism, a need to tease or obsession, this man was capable of murder, and of proving by dint of logic and eloquence that he had been right to commit murder and was still head and shoulders above his brother, his sister-in-law, and all the rest of them.

'As in Velasquez's *Surrender of Breda*,' he continued, 'the victor advances towards the man who is humblest in rank, and as is the duty of every noble soul, since I was everything and you were nothing, it was I who took the first steps towards you. You have responded stupidly to what it is not for me to describe as an act of grandeur. But I refused to be discouraged. Our religion exhorts us to be patient. The patience I have shown towards you will be counted, I hope, to my credit, as will the mere smile brought to my lips by what might be decried as impertinence, were it within your power to be impertinent to one who is head and shoulders above you. But all that, Monsieur, is now neither here nor there. I have submitted you to the test which the one eminent man among us has appositely called the test of too much kindness, which he rightly declares to be the most terrible test of all, the only one that can separate the wheat from the chaff. I can scarcely reproach you for your lack of success in it, for those who emerge triumphant are very few. But, and this is the conclusion I feel myself entitled to draw from these last words we shall exchange on earth, at least I mean to protect myself from your slanderous attempts upon me.'

Thus far, it had never occurred to me that M. de Charlus's rage could have been caused by an unflattering remark that someone had repeated to him; I racked my brains; I had not spoken about him to anyone. Some malicious person had invented the whole thing. I protested to M. de Charlus that I had said absolutely nothing about him. 'I don't think I can have offended you by mentioning to Mme de Guermantes that we were on friendly terms with each other.' He smiled disdainfully, raised his voice to its highest pitch, then, softly attacking the shrillest and most injurious note:

'Oh! Monsieur,' he said, as he reverted extremely slowly to a natural intonation, seeming to revel as he went in the oddities of this descending scale, 'I think you do yourself an injustice to accuse yourself of having said that we were *friends*. I don't expect much verbal accuracy from someone who can barely tell the difference between a piece of Chippendale furniture and a rococo chair, but I really can't believe,' he went on, in a series of vocal caresses that became increasingly sardonic to the point of causing a charming smile to play across his lips, 'I really can't believe that you can ever have said, or thought for that matter, that we were *friends*. Had you boasted of being *presented* to me, of having *talked* to me, of *knowing* me slightly, of having been offered, almost unasked, the possibility of becoming an eventual *protégé* of mine, *that* I would have found, on the contrary, quite natural and intelligent on your part. The extreme difference in age between us makes it possible for me to recognize without absurdity that such a *presentation*, such *talks*, the vague glimmer of any *relationship* between us would have been for you, it is not for me to say an honour, but still, all things considered, an advantage in regard to which, it seems to me, you were silly enough not to divulge it, but to have had no idea how to hold on to it. I will even go as far as to say,' he added, switching abruptly for a second from haughty anger to a gentleness so tinged with regret that I thought he was going to burst into tears, 'that when you failed to reply to the proposal I made to you from Paris, it seemed to me so utterly unlikely on your part, since you had struck me as well brought up and from a good *middle-class* family (it was only on this adjective that his voice gave a slight hiss of impertinence), that I was foolhardy enough to credit all the false excuses people make, letters gone astray, wrong addresses. I realize that it was very gullible of me, but St Bonaventure chose to believe that oxen could fly rather than that his brother monk was capable of lying. But all that is over. The idea didn't appeal to you, and that's that. Only it seems to me that you might have taken the trouble (and here there were genuine tears in his voice), were it only out of consideration for my age, to write to me. I had planned some infinitely attractive possibilities for you, though I had taken good care not to let you know what they were. You chose to refuse before you knew. That was up to you. But, as I say, one can always *write*. In your position, indeed even in my own, I should have done so. That is why I prefer mine to yours – I say this because I believe all our positions are equal, and I am more sympathetically disposed towards an intelligent labourer than I am towards a great many dukes. But I can say that I prefer to be in my position, because in the whole course of my life, which is beginning to be a pretty long one, I know that I have never done what you did. (He had his head turned away from the light, and I could not see if tears were falling from his eyes as his voice led me to suppose.) I said I had come well out of my way to meet you. The effect of that was to make you withdraw twice as far. Now it is my turn to withdraw, and we shall know one another no longer. I shall put your name from my mind but not your behaviour, so that on occasions when I might be tempted to believe that men have feelings, good manners, or merely the intelligence not to let slip an unrivalled opportunity, I can remind myself that that is to ask too much of them. No, that you should have said you knew me when such a thing was true – and from now on it will no longer be the case – I see that as only natural and take it as an act of homage, I mean as something agreeable. Unhappily, in other places and circumstances, you have made remarks of a very different kind.

– Believe me, Monsieur, I have said nothing that could offend you.

– And who says that I'm offended?' he broke out furiously, starting up with a jerk on the sofa on which he had so far been reclining motionless, while, as the pallid, frothing snakes in his face stiffened tensely, his voice became alternately shrill or deep like the deafening uproar unleashed by a storm. (His normally forceful voice, which tended to make people turn in the street, was a hundred times more forceful, as a *forte* is when played by an orchestra rather than on the piano, and changed to a *fortissimo* at the same time. M. de Charlus roared.) 'Do you imagine you have the power to offend me? Have you no idea to whom you are speaking? Do you imagine that the poisonous spittle of five hundred little men of your sort, hoisted on to each other's shoulders, could even drool down on to the tips of my august toes?'

For the last few minutes, my desire to persuade M. de Charlus that I had never spoken or heard anyone speak ill of him had given way to a wild rage, provoked by the words which, to my mind, were dictated to him solely by his colossal pride. And perhaps they stemmed, in part at least, from this pride. Almost everything else was the result of a feeling that was as yet unknown to me, and for which I could not therefore be blamed for underestimating. In the absence of my familiarity with this feeling, I could at least, had I remembered Mme de Guermantes's words, assumed an element of madness in this pride of his. But at the time, the idea of madness did not cross my mind. As I saw it, he was filled merely with pride, I merely with fury. This fury (at the point when M. de Charlus ceased to shout, in reference to his august toes, with an irked majesty, a vomit of disgust at his unnamed blasphemers) was no longer able to contain itself. I was seized with a compulsion to hit something, and, with the little discernment I had left, not wanting to show bodily disrespect to a man so much older than myself nor even, in view of their artistic worth, to the pieces of German porcelain surrounding him, I grabbed hold of the Baron's new top hat, threw it to the ground, trampled on it, and, bent on pulling it to pieces, I ripped out the lining, tore the crown in two, heedless of the continuing vociferations of M. de Charlus, then, crossing the room to make my exit, I opened the door. I was dumbfounded to discover two footmen standing on either side of it, slowly moving away in an attempt to create the impression that they had only been casually passing in the course of their duty. (I subsequently learned their names: one was called Burnier, the other Charmel.) I was not taken in for a moment by the explanation which their leisurely movement seemed to offer. It was utterly unconvincing: three other explanations seemed more likely: one was that the Baron occasionally received guests against whom, if he happened to need assistance (but why?), he found it necessary to have reinforcements to hand; a second was that, drawn by curiosity, they had been listening at the keyhole, not expecting me to come out so quickly; the third, that the whole drama M. de Charlus had performed in front of me had been rehearsed in advance and that he himself had instructed them to listen, out of a love for spectacle combined, perhaps, with a *nunc erudimini*[100] from which each one of them would learn a lesson.

My anger had done nothing to calm the Baron's own and my departure from the room seemed to be causing him sharp distress; he called me back, had his servants call me back, and finally, forgetting that a moment ago, when he had mentioned his 'august toes', he had imagined he was making me a witness to his own deification, he came running after me at top speed, caught up with me in the hall and stood barring the door. 'Come, now, he said, don't be childish, come back for a minute; he that loveth well chasteneth well, and if I have chastened you well it is because I love you well.' My anger had abated. I chose to ignore the

word ‘chasten’ and followed the Baron, who called a footman and, as if nothing had happened, had him remove the remains of the ruined hat, which was replaced by another.

‘If you will be good enough to tell me who it is has treacherously maligned me, I said to M. de Charlus, I will stay here to hear his name and to confute the impostor.

– Who? You mean you don’t know? Do you retain no memory of the things you say? Do you imagine that the people who are good enough to tell me about such things do not swear me to secrecy in the first place? And do you think I am going to break such a promise?

– Monsieur, is it really impossible for you to tell me?’ I asked, unsuccessfully racking my brains in one last effort to discover to whom I could have spoken about M. de Charlus.

‘Have I not made it clear that I have promised my informant to keep his name secret? he said in a categorical tone. I see that your taste for abject remarks is matched only by your taste for futile persistence. You ought at least to have the intelligence to benefit from this last encounter with me, and to use your words to better effect than to talk nonsense.

– Monsieur, I replied, as I made a move to leave, you are insulting me. I am defenceless, because you are far older than me, and we are not equally matched. Moreover, I am unable to convince you. I have already sworn to you that I have said nothing.

– So you’re calling me a liar!’ he shouted in a terrible voice, leaping forward to within a foot or so of me.

‘You have been misinformed.’

At which, in a gentle, affectionate, melancholy tone, as in those symphonies which are performed without any break between the various movements, and in which a graceful scherzo, pleasing and idyllic, follows the thunder-claps of the opening movement, he said, ‘That is very possible. As a rule, a remark repeated at second hand is rarely true. You have only yourself to blame if you have failed to benefit from the opportunities for seeing me I offered you and so not furnished me, through the confidence which frank exchange of daily conversation promotes, with the unique and sovereign antidote against a remark which branded you as a traitor. In any event, true or false, the remark has had its effect. I can never erase the impression it made upon me. I cannot even say that he who loveth well chasteneth well, for I have certainly chastened you but I no longer love you.’ In the course of these remarks he had forced me to sit down once more and had rung the bell. A different footman came into the room. ‘Bring something to drink and order the brougham.’ I said I was not thirsty and that I had my own carriage. ‘They have probably paid the driver and sent him away, he said, you needn’t worry about that. I’m ordering a carriage to take you home… If you’re anxious about the lateness of the hour… I could have given you a room here…’ I told him that my mother would be worried. ‘Ah! of course. Well, true or false, the remark has had its effect. My liking for you was rather premature, and it had flowered too soon. Like those apple trees of which you spoke so poetically in Balbec, it has been unable to resist the first frost’ If M. de Charlus’s liking for me had been destroyed, his behaviour could not have been more at variance with the fact, since, while assuring me that we had fallen out, he was making me stay and drink, offering to put me up for the night, and now arranging for me to be sent home. He looked as if he were dreading the moment he must leave me and find himself on his own again, the same sort of slightly anxious fear his sister-in-law and cousin Guermantes had seemed to me to be feeling an hour ago when she had tried to force me to stay a little longer, with something of the same momentary fondness for me, of the same effort to prolong the minute.

‘Unfortunately, he continued, the gift of making something which has been destroyed re-blossom is not one I have. My affection for you is quite dead. Nothing can revive it. I don’t think it would be unworthy of me to confess that I regret it. I always feel myself to be rather like Victor Hugo’s Boaz: *Je suis veuf je suis seul, et sur moi le soir tombe*.’[101]

I walked back through the big greenish drawing-room with him. I let drop a chance remark about how beautiful I thought it was. ‘Isn’t it?’ he replied. ‘One needs to have something to love. The panelling is by Bagard.[102] The rather charming thing about it, you know, is that it was made to go with the Beauvais chairs and the consoles. Notice that it takes up the same decorative design. There used to be only two places where you could see this, the Louvre and M. d’Hinnisdal’s house. But naturally, as soon as I decided to come and live in this street, an old family house of the Chimays came on the market which no one had ever seen before because it was destined just for *me*. On the whole, it’s really rather good. It might be better, but really it’s not bad. Some pretty things, are there not? Mignard’s portrait of my uncles, the King of Poland and the King of England, for example. But why am I telling you all this? You know it as well as I do, since you were waiting in this room. No? Ah, then they must have shown you into the blue drawing-room,’ he said with what could have been taken for rudeness directed at my lack of curiosity, or personal superiority and lack of interest in where I had been kept waiting. ‘Have you seen what’s in this cabinet? These are all the hats worn by Madame Elisabeth, the Princess de Lamballe and Marie-Antoinette. You’re not interested, are you? You appear not to see them. Perhaps there’s something wrong with your optic nerve. If this sort of beauty appeals to you more, here is a rainbow by Turner beginning to shine out between these two Rembrandts, as a sign of our reconciliation. Can you hear? Beethoven has come to join him.’ And indeed the first chords of the third movement of the Pastoral Symphony, ‘Joy after the Storm’, could be heard, performed somewhere close by, on the first floor perhaps, by a group of musicians. ‘There you are, one never knows. One really never knows. Invisible music. It’s pretty, is it not?’ he said to me in a slightly impudent tone, somehow reminiscent of Swann’s influence and accent. ‘But you don’t care two hoots about it. You want to go home, even if it means showing disrespect for Beethoven and for me. You’re carrying out your own sentence,’ he added with affectionate regret when the moment had come for me to leave. ‘You’ll forgive me for forgetting my good manners and not accompanying you home, he said. Since I have no desire to see you again, there would be very little point in spending five more minutes in your company. But I’m tired, and I have a great deal to do.’ Then, noticing it was a fine night, he changed tack: ‘Ah, well, perhaps I will come in the carriage after all. There’s a superb moon, which I’ll go and inspect in the Bois after I’ve taken you back. I say, you don’t know how to shave! Even on a night you’ve been out to dinner, there are still a few hairs left on your face,’ he said, taking my chin between two fingers, drawn there, it seemed, as if by a magnet, and after a moment’s resistance, running up to my ears like the fingers of a barber. ‘Ah! how pleasant it would be to look at “the blue moonlight” in the Bois with someone like yourself,’ he said with sudden and almost involuntary gentleness, then added sadly: ‘For you’re nice, really. You could be nicer than anyone, he added, laying his hand paternally on my shoulder. I have to say that at first I hardly thought you were worth noticing.’ I ought to have reflected that this was still the case. I had only to remind myself of the rage with which he had spoken to me barely half an hour previously. In spite of this, I had the impression that he was, for the moment, sincere, that his kindness of heart was getting the better of what I regarded as an almost delirious condition of touchiness and pride. The carriage was there waiting for us, and still he prolonged the conversation. ‘Come, he said abruptly, get in. You’ll be home in five minutes, and I shall then bid you a good night that will sever our relations for all time. It is better, since we must part for ever, that we should do so, as in music, on a tonic chord.’ Despite these solemn affirmations that we should never meet again, I could have sworn that M. de Charlus, irked at his loss of temper earlier and afraid that he had hurt my feelings, would not have been averse to seeing me once more. Nor was I mistaken, for a moment later he said: ‘There, now, I’ve actually forgotten the most important thing. In memory of your grandmother, I have had a rare edition of Mme de Sévigné bound for you. Which means that this will not be our last meeting. One must console oneself with the thought that complicated affairs are rarely settled in a day. Just look how long it took to negotiate the Congress of Vienna.

– But I could send someone round for it without disturbing you, I said to oblige him.

– Will you learn to hold your tongue, you little fool, he replied angrily, and not push your grotesque behaviour to the point of assuming that the likelihood of being received by me (I don’t say the certainty, for perhaps one of my servants will hand you the volumes) is some trifling honour.’ He regained control of himself: ‘I do not wish to part from you on these words. No dissonance; before the eternal silence, a chord on the dominant!’ It was for his own nerves that he

seemed to dread a return home immediately after harsh words of discord. 'You would not like to come to the Bois,' he said in a tone that was not interrogative but affirmative, not, it seemed to me, that he did not want to make the offer, but because he was afraid that his pride would be injured by a refusal. 'Well, there we are,' he continued, still marking time, 'it is the hour, as Whistler says, when the bourgeois go to bed (perhaps he wished now to exploit my own sense of pride), the moment to start taking a look at the world. But you don't even know who Whistler is.'[103] I changed the subject and asked him whether the Princess d'Iéna was an intelligent woman. M. de Charlus stopped me and replied, in the most contemptuous tone I had yet heard him adopt:

'Ah! there, Monsieur, you are alluding to an order of nomenclature which means nothing to me. There is perhaps an aristocracy among the Tahitians, but I have to confess I know nothing about it. But strangely enough, the name you have just pronounced did ring in my ears a few days ago. I was asked if I'd be willing for the young Duc de Guastalla to be presented to me. The request astonished me, for the Duc de Guastalla has no need of an introduction to me, for the simple reason that he is my cousin and has known me all his life; he's the son of the Princess of Parma, and, like a dutiful young relative, he never fails to come and pay his respects to me on New Year's Day. But, after informing myself, I discovered that the person in question was not a relative of mine but the son of the person you are interested in. Since there is no princess with that name, I imagined that the person concerned must be some poor creature sleeping under the Pont d'Iéna, who had assumed the picturesque title of Princesse d'Iéna, in the same way that people talk of the Panther of the Batignolles[104] or the Steel King.[105] But no, it was the name of a rich person whose handsome furniture I had admired at an exhibition, and, unlike the owner's title, the furniture had the merit of being genuine. As for this alleged Duc de Guastalla, I thought he must be my secretary's stockbroker, given that you can buy almost anything with money. But no. It was the Emperor, it appears, who amused himself by conferring on these people a title which was simply not his to confer. I don't know whether he did it as a sign of power, out of ignorance or malice, but to me it was a very nasty trick to play on these unwitting usurpers. But I can't really enlighten you much on the matter, I'm competent only to discuss the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and there, if you can manage to secure an introduction, you'll find plenty of old harpies to amuse you, straight out of Balzac. All that is of course a far cry from the prestige of the Princesse de Guermantes, but without me and my "open Sesame" access to her is impossible.

– The Princesse de Guermantes has a very fine house, Monsieur.

– Oh, it's not just very fine. It's the finest thing in the world. After the Princesse herself, that is.

– Is the Princesse de Guermantes superior to the Duchesse de Guermantes?

– Oh, there's no comparison. (It should be observed that, whenever people in society have the least spark of imagination, they will crown or dethrone, as their likings and quarrels dictate, the people whose position seemed most solid and entrenched.) The Duchesse de Guermantes' (by not referring to her as 'Oriane' he was perhaps emphasizing the distance between her and myself) is delightful, far superior to anything you can have imagined. But there is really no comparison between her and her cousin. The Princesse is exactly what people in the market-place might imagine Princess Metternich to have been. But La Metternich was a woman who thought she had launched Wagner because she knew Victor Maurel.[106] The Princesse de Guermantes, or rather her mother, actually *knew* Wagner. That is something prestigious in itself, not to mention the woman's extraordinary beauty. And those Esther gardens!

– Is it possible to visit them?

– No, not unless you are invited, but they never invite *anyone* unless I ask them to.' But having enticed me with the bait of this offer, he immediately withdrew it and held out his hand, for we had arrived at my door. 'My role is over, Monsieur. I will simply add these few words. Another will perhaps offer you his affection one day as I have done. May you learn something from this present instance. Remember it well. Affection is always precious. What we cannot do alone in life, because there are things which we cannot ask, or do, or wish, or learn by ourselves, we can do together, without there needing to be thirteen of us as in the Balzac novel,[107] or four, as in *The Three Musketeers*. I bid you farewell.'

He must have been feeling tired and have abandoned the idea of going to look at the moonlight, for he asked me to tell the coachman to drive home. But then he made a brusque movement as if he was about to change his mind. But I had already given the instruction, and, so as not to lose any more time, I went and rang at my door-bell, oblivious now of the fact that I had been dying to tell M. de Charlus the stories about the Kaiser and General Botha, which had obsessed me a while earlier but which his unexpectedly thunderous reception had chased far from my mind.

When I got in, I saw on my desk a letter which Françoise's young footman had written to one of his friends and had left lying there. Ever since my mother had been away, there was no liberty he shrank from taking; I was even more at fault for taking the liberty of reading the letter lying there without an envelope for all to see and – this was my sole excuse – almost asking to be read.

Dear Friend and Cousin,

I hope this finds you in good health and the same with all the young family particularly my young godson Joseph what I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting but prefer to you all as being my godson, these relics of the heart has also their dust, upon their blest remains let us not lay our hands. Besides dear friend and cousin who is to say that tomorrow you and your dear wife my cousin Marie, will not be both hurled headlong to the bottom of the sea like the sailor clinging to the mast on high, for this life is but a dark valley. Dear friend I must tell you that my principal occupation to your astonishment I feel sure, is now poetry which enraptures me, for we must do something. And so dear friend do not be too surprised that your last letter is unresponded, for lack of pardon let oblivion come. As you know, Madame's mother has passed away amid unspeakable sufferings which fairly exhausted her for she saw as many as three doctors. The day of her funeral was a big day for all Monsieur's relations came in crowds as well as several Ministers. It took them more than two hours to get to the cemetery which will make you all open your eyes wide in your village for they certainly wont do as much for Mère Michu. So all my life will be but one long sob. I am greatly enjoying the motorcycle what I recently learned. What would you say my dear friends if I arrived suddenly like that at full speed at Les Ecorres. But on that score I shall no longer keep silence for I feel that the frenzy of grief sweeps its reason away. I am associating with the Duchesse de Guermantes, people as what you have never even heard in our ignorant part of the world. So it is with pleasure that Im going to send the works of Racine, Victor Hugo, the Selected works of Chenedollé, of Alfred de Musset, for I want to cure the land which give me birth of ignorance which leads inevitably to crime. I cant think of anything more to say to you and send you like the pelican wearied by a long flight my best regards as well as to your wife my godson and your sister Rose. May it not be said of her: And rose she has lived only as roses live, as has been said by Victor Hugo, the sonnet of Arvers, Alfred de Musset all those great geniuses who because of that were sent to die at the stake like Joan of Arc. Am looking forward to your next missive, yours with a brother's love Périgot Joseph.

Any life which represents something mysterious, like some last illusion to be shattered, exerts a pull on us. This said, the mysterious description of the Princesse de Guermantes provided by M. de Charlus, which had led me to conceive of her as an extraordinary being quite different from anyone I knew, was not enough to explain my amazement, shortly followed by my fear of being the target of a bad joke engineered by someone who wanted to see me expelled from a house to which I had not been invited, when, about two months after my dinner with the Duchesse and after her departure to Cannes, I opened an envelope which suggested nothing out of the ordinary to me, and read the following words on a printed card: 'The Princesse de Guermantes, *née* Duchesse en Bavière, At Home, the – th'. No doubt an invitation from the Princesse de Guermantes was really no more difficult to obtain, from a society point of view, than a dinner invitation from the Duchesse, and my smattering of heraldic knowledge told me that the title of Prince is not superior to that of Duc. I also told myself that the intelligence of a society woman could not be so radically dissimilar from that of the rest of her kind as M. de Charlus claimed, nor so radically dissimilar from that of any other woman. But my imagination, like Elstir in the process of creating some effect of perspective independently of the notions of physics he might use in other circumstances, depicted for me not what I knew but what it saw; what it saw, that is to say what the name showed it. Now, even before I knew the Duchesse, the name Guermantes preceded by the title Princesse, like a note or a colour or a quantity sharply modified by the values surrounding it, by the mathematical or aesthetic 'sign' governing it, had always called up something quite different to my mind. With the title Princesse, it is to be found mainly in the memoirs from the periods of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, and in those of the English court, the Queen of Scotland and the Duchesse d'Aumale; and I pictured the house of the Princesse de Guermantes as a place quite regularly frequented by the Duchesse de Logueville and the great Condé, whose presence there made it unlikely that I should ever enter it.

Much of what M. de Charlus had told me had whipped my imagination into vigorous activity and, by causing it to forget how much it had been disappointed by reality at Mme de Guermantes's (people's names and place names are similar in this respect), had steered it towards Oriane's cousin. It was also the case that I

was misled by M. de Charlus about the imaginary value and variety of society people only because he was himself misled. Perhaps this was because he did nothing, did not write, did not paint, did not even read anything in a serious and thorough manner. But, superior as he was by several degrees to society people, when it came to drawing his conversational matter from them and the spectacle they represented, this did not mean that he was understood by them. Speaking as an artist, he could at the most bring out the deceptive charm of society people. But he could do this for artists only, and in relation to them he might be said to have been playing the part of the reindeer among the Eskimos: this prized creature plucks for them from barren rocks lichens and mosses they themselves could neither discover nor put to use, but which, once they have been digested by the reindeer, become a form of food the inhabitants of the far north can assimilate.

To which I may add that M. de Charlus's depiction of society was animated in the most lively way by the blend of his ferocious hatreds and his devoted affections, the hatreds directed mainly towards young men, the adoration aroused principally by various women.

If among these the Princesse de Guermantes had been enthroned in pride of place by M. de Charlus, his mysterious remarks about the 'inaccessible Aladdin's palace' in which his cousin lived did not sufficiently account for my feeling of stupefaction.

Despite the contribution from various subjective points of view in these artificial magnifications – and this is something I shall discuss at a later stage – the fact remains that there is a degree of objective reality in all these people and consequently a difference between them.

And how could it be otherwise? The world of people we associate with, bearing so little resemblance to the way we imagine it, is still the same world we have seen described in the memoirs and letters of eminent people and have felt a desire to know. The completely nondescript old man we meet at a dinner-party is the same man who wrote the proud letter to Prince Friedrich-Karl, which we read with such enthusiasm in a book about the 1870 war. Dinner-parties bore us because our imagination is absent, and reading interests us because it is keeping us company. But the people in question are the same. We should have liked to know Mme de Pompadour, who was so stalwart a patron of the arts, and we should have been as bored in her company as we are among all the modern Egerias [108] at whose houses we cannot bring ourselves to pay a second call, so mediocre is their company. The fact remains that these discrepancies do exist. People are never completely alike, their way of behaving towards us, even, one might say, at the same level of friendship, reveals differences which offset one another in the end. When I knew Mme de Montmorency, she took pleasure in saying disagreeable things to me, but if I asked her a favour, she would oblige me in the most generous way by effectively using all the influence she had to obtain it. Whereas another woman, Mme de Guermantes for instance, would never have wished to hurt my feelings, never said anything about me except what might give me pleasure, lavished upon me all those gestures of friendliness which for the Guermantes constituted the richness of moral life, but, had I asked her for the least thing beyond that, would not have budged an inch to procure it for me, as in those country houses where the guest is provided with a chauffeur and a valet but where it is impossible to obtain a glass of cider for which no provision has been made in the entertainment arrangements. Which was for me the true friend, Mme de Montmorency, so happy to ruffle my feelings and always so willing to oblige, or Mme de Guermantes, distressed at the least offence towards me and incapable of the least effort to be helpful? Again, it was said the Duchesse de Guermantes spoke only about frivolous matters, and her cousin, who was intellectually very drab, invariably about interesting things. Types of mind are so various, so conflicting, not only in literature but in society, that Baudelaire and Mérimée are not the only people with the right to mutual scorn. These distinctive characteristics produce in every person a system of looks, words and actions so coherent, so despotic, that it seems superior to any other when we are in the presence of any given individual. In the presence of Mme de Guermantes, her words, deduced like a theorem from her cast of mind, seemed to me to be both inevitable and appropriate. And at heart I agreed with the Duchesse when she told me that Mme de Montmorency was stupid and kept an open mind towards anything she did not understand, or when she said, after hearing about some malicious remark made by the latter: 'So that's what you call a kind woman. I call her a monster.' But this tyranny of immediate presence, this self-evident lamp-light which makes the already distant dawn pale to the faintness of something barely remembered, disappeared once I was out of Mme de Guermantes's presence and some other lady said to me, putting herself on my level and placing the Duchesse far below either of us: 'Oriane is not really interested in anything or anybody,' or even (something that it would have seemed impossible to believe in Mme de Guermantes's presence, so loudly did she deny it): 'Oriane is a snob.' Since there is no mathematical formula which would enable us to convert Mme d'Arpajon and Mme de Montpensier into uniform quantities, it would have been impossible for me to answer had anyone asked me which of the two seemed superior to the other.

Now, among the characteristics peculiar to the Princesse de Guermantes's salon, the one most usually mentioned was an exclusiveness due in part to the Princesse's royal birth, but more particularly to the almost fossilized rigidity of the Prince's aristocratic prejudices, prejudices which, incidentally, the Duc and Duchesse had not blushed to deride in my presence, and of course such exclusiveness inevitably made me feel it even more unlikely that I should have been invited by this man, who dealt only in royal personages and dukes and who was given to making a scene at every dinner-party because he had not been placed at table as he would have been by right under Louis XIV, an entitlement which, thanks to his immense erudition in matters of history and genealogy, he was the only person to recognize. On this account, in the matter of the differences that distinguished them from their cousins, many people settled in favour of the Duc and the Duchesse. 'The Duc and the Duchesse are far more up-to-date, far more intelligent, *they've* better things to interest them than the number of quarterings a person has, their salon is three hundred years in advance of their cousins',' were the customary remarks, and with these in mind I trembled as I looked at the invitation card, since they made it all the more likely that it had been sent to me as a hoax.

If the Duc and the Duchesse had not still been in Cannes, I could have tried to find out from them whether the invitation I had received was genuine. My state of uncertainty is in fact by no means something that would be unknown to a man of the world, as I flattered myself into believing for a moment, and consequently a writer, even if he belonged to the world of society, ought to reproduce it in order to be thoroughly 'objective' in his portrayal of class distinctions. In fact only a few days ago, in a charming volume of memoirs, I came across an account of uncertainties analogous to those induced in me by the Princesse de Guermantes's invitation. 'Georges and I (or Hély and I – I don't have the book at hand to check) were so itching to be invited to Mme Delessert's salon that when we actually received an invitation from her, we thought it prudent, quite independently, to make sure that we were not the victims of some April fool joke.' Now, the writer is none other than the Comte d'Haussonville (the man who married the Duc de Broglie's daughter), while the other young man who will ascertain 'independently' whether he is being hoaxed or not, is, according to whether he is called Georges or Hély, one or other of the two inseparable friends of M. d'Haussonville, either M.d'Harcourt or the Prince de Chalais.

On the day of the Princesse de Guermantes's reception, I learned that the Duc and Duchesse had returned to Paris the previous day. They would not have come back specially for the Princesse's ball, but one of their cousins was seriously ill, and there was also the fact that the Duc was very anxious to attend a fancy dress event that evening where he was to go as Louis XI and his wife as Isabeau de Bavière. I made up my mind to call on her that morning. But they had gone out early and not yet returned; I kept watch for their carriage at first from a little room which seemed to me to be a good look-out post. As it turned out, I had chosen my observation point very badly, for I could scarcely see into our courtyard, though I caught a glimpse of several others, and this, while of no practical use, diverted me for a time. It is not only in Venice that there are these views on to several houses at once which have drawn painters. The same is true of Paris. The reference to Venice is not random. The poor quarters of that city are what spring to mind when you see the poor quarters of Paris in the morning, with their tall, widening chimneys turned to the most vivid pinks, the brightest reds by the sunlight, a whole garden flowering above the houses, and flowering in such a variety of shades of colour as to suggest the garden of a tulip-fancier in Delft or Haarlem planted above the city. And then the close proximity of the houses, with their windows facing each other across a common courtyard, makes each window into a frame in which a cook stares dreamily down outside, or, further off, a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman whose witchlike face is barely distinguishable in the shadow; and so for the neighbours in the adjoining houses each courtyard, suppressing sound through distance and revealing silent gestures in a rectangle placed under the glass of closed windows, contributes to an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings placed side by side. It is true that from the Hôtel de Guermantes there was not the same sort of view, but there were interesting ones

all the same, particularly from the odd trigonometric point where I had taken up position and from which there was an uninterrupted view, across the relatively featureless and steeply sloping area in between, as far as the distant heights formed by the mansion of the Princesse de Silistrie and the Marquise de Plassac, extremely noble cousins of M. de Guermantes whom I did not know. Between me and this mansion (the home of their father, M. de Bréquigny) nothing but blocks of fairly low buildings, facing in every possible direction, which, without obstructing the view, emphasized the distance with their oblique planes. The red-tiled turret of the outhouse in which the Marquis de Frécourt kept his carriages was in fact topped by a pointed roof which rose higher, but it was so narrow that it did not hide the view, and reminded me of those charming old buildings in Switzerland which rear up in isolation at the foot of a mountain. All these vague and divergent points of focus on which my eyes came to rest made Mme de Plassac's mansion, which was in fact quite near but looked deceptively distant as in an Alpine landscape, seem as though it were separated from us by several streets or by numerous foothills. When its wide square windows, dazzling in the sunlight like flakes of rock crystal, were thrown open while the housework was being done, as the eye followed from one floor to the next the various footmen whom it was impossible to see clearly but who were obviously beating carpets or wielding feather dusters, there was the same sense of pleasure as seeing a landscape by Turner or Elstir with a traveller in a stage-coach, or a guide, at different heights on the Saint-Gothard. But from the vantage-point where I had taken up position I should have run the risk of missing M. or Mme de Guermantes, so that when in the afternoon I found time to resume my watch I simply went and waited on the staircase, from which the opening of the carriage gate could not pass unnoticed, and it was on this staircase that I posted myself, even though the Alpine delights of the Hôtel de Bréquigny and Tresmes, so dazzling to the eye with their footmen made minute by distance as they did the housework, were not on view from where I was. Now this wait on the staircase was to entail such considerable discoveries and to reveal to me so important a landscape, no longer Turneresque but moral, that it is preferable to delay my account of it for a moment and turn first to my visit to the Guermantes once I knew they had returned home. I was received by the Duc alone, in his library. As I was walking towards the door out came a little man with the whitest hair and of shabby appearance, wearing a little black tie like the one worn by the Combray lawyer and by several of my grandfather's friends, but more diffident-looking than they were, and, bowing to me effusively, he utterly refused to pass downstairs until I had walked on in. The Duc shouted after him from the library something I did not catch, while he responded with a further series of bows, addressed this time to the wall, for the Duc could not see him, though the bows were repeated endlessly, like the redundant smiles of people talking to each other on the telephone; he had a falsetto voice, and he bowed to me once more with the humility of a tradesman. And he might indeed have been a tradesman from Combray, so provincial was his manner, the old-fashioned, mild manner of the ordinary people and the modest old folk of that part of the world.

'Oriane will be with us in a while, the Duc said to me when I had joined him in the library. Since Swann is coming round a bit later with the proofs of his study of the coinage of the Order of Malta and, worse still, some huge photograph he has had taken showing both sides of the coins, Oriane thought it better to get dressed first so that she can keep him company until it's time to go out to dinner. We've already got so much clutter around the place we don't know what to do with, and I'm wondering quite where we're going to stick this photograph. But my wife is too good-natured, incapable of saying no to people. She thought it would be nice to ask Swann to provide some means of seeing all those Grand Masters of the Order whose medals he found in Rhodes all together, side by side with each other. I said Malta, but I meant Rhodes, in any case it's the same Order of St John of Jerusalem. In fact she's interested in all that only because Swann is. Our family is very much mixed up in the whole thing; even today, my brother, whom you've met, is one of the highest dignitaries in the Order of Malta. But if I'd mentioned it all to Oriane she wouldn't have listened to me for a moment. Yet it only took the fact that Swann's researches into the Templars (amazing the passion people of one religion have for studying others) led him on to the history of the Knights of Rhodes, who succeeded the Templars, for Oriane to insist on seeing the heads of these knights. They were very small fry compared to the Lusignans, Kings of Cyprus, from whom we descend in a direct line. But so far Swann hasn't shown any interest in them, so Oriane couldn't care less about the Lusignans.' I had no immediate chance to explain to the Duc why I had come. As it happened, several relatives or friends, including Mme de Silistrie and the Duchesse de Montrose, came to call on the Duchesse, who often received people before dinner, and not finding her there, stayed for a time with the Duc. The first of these ladies (the Princesse de Silistrie), unostentatiously dressed, curt but friendly in manner, was holding a walking-stick. I was concerned at first that she had injured herself or was disabled in some way. On the contrary, she was very sprightly. She spoke sadly to the Duc about a first cousin of his – not on the Guermantes side, but more distinguished still, were such a thing possible – whose health, which had been in a very serious condition for some time, had suddenly deteriorated. But it was obvious that the Duc, while he was sympathetic to the state of his cousin's health and kept on repeating 'Poor Mama! He's such a fine chap,' was being optimistic about his case. The truth of the matter was that he was looking forward to the dinner-party he was to attend, was not at all bored by the thought of the big reception at the Princesse de Guermantes's, but above all, he was to go on at one o'clock in the morning with his wife to a grand supper-party and fancy dress ball, he as Louis XI and the Duchesse as Isabeau de Bavière, and the costumes were ready and waiting. So the Duc had a mind not to be disturbed amid all these revelries by the sufferings of his good cousin, Amanien d'Osmond. Then two other ladies carrying walking-sticks, Mme de Plassac and Mme de Tresmes, both daughters of the Comte de Bréquigny, came in to pay Basin a visit, and declared that cousin Mama's state was now beyond hope. The Duc shrugged his shoulders and changed the subject by asking them whether they were going to Marie-Gilbert's that evening. They replied that they were not, in view of the extreme nature of Amanien's condition, and in fact they had excused themselves from the dinner to which the Duc was going, and then proceeded to spell out the guest-list to him: the brother of King Theodosius, the Infanta Maria-Concepción, and so on. Since the Marquis d'Osmond was less closely related to them than he was to Basin, their 'defection' struck the Duc as some kind of indirect reproach for his conduct, and he was barely civil to them. And so, although they had come down from the heights of the Hôtel de Bréquigny to visit the Duchesse (or rather to announce to her the alarming character, incompatible for his relatives with their attendance at society events, of their cousin's illness), they did not stay long, but, armed with their alpenstocks, Walpurge and Dorothée (such were the names of the two sisters) retraced the craggy path to their mountain home. I never thought to ask the Guermantes what was the meaning of these sticks, such a common sight in a certain quarter of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It is possible that, regarding the whole parish as their domain and averse to taking cabs, these ladies were in the habit of walking about a great deal, and that, owing to some old fracture caused by immoderate devotion to hunting and to the falls from the saddle often attendant upon it, or simply rheumatism caused by the dampness of the Left Bank and of old country houses, a stick was necessary. Perhaps they had not set out on any long expedition in the area and had merely come down to their garden (very close to the Duchesse's own) to pick fruit for their compotes, and stopped by on their way home to say good evening to Mme de Guermantes, though without going so far as to bring secateurs or watering-cans into the house. The Duc seemed touched that I should have come to see them the very day of their return home. But his expression darkened when I told him that I had come to ask his wife to find out whether her cousin had really invited me. I had touched upon one of those forms of help which neither M. nor Mme de Guermantes were keen to give. The Duc explained to me that it was too late, that if the Princesse had not sent me an invitation it would make him appear to be asking for one, that his cousins had refused him one on a previous occasion, and that he did not wish now to create the remotest impression that he was interfering with their guest-lists, 'meddling' with their arrangements, finally that he could not be sure that he and his wife, who were dining out that evening, would not come home straight afterwards, in which case their best excuse for not having gone to the Princesse's reception would be to conceal the fact that they were back in Paris, instead of rushing to inform her of the fact, which would be inevitable if they sent her a message or telephoned her about me, and certainly too late to be of any use, since it was more than likely that the Princesse's guest-list would be finally drawn up by now. 'You're not in her bad books, are you?' he asked suspiciously, with that constant anxiety the Guermantes had of not being abreast of the latest society quarrels and of people's possible attempts to patch them up by using them as intermediaries. Then finally, since the Duc was in the habit of assuming responsibility for any decision that might seem unwelcome, he said to me suddenly, as though the idea had just occurred to him: 'Look here, my boy, I'd really prefer to say nothing to Oriane about what you've said. You know how kind-hearted she is, and besides, she's enormously fond of you; she'd want to send word to her cousin, whatever I said to dissuade her, and if she's tired after dinner, there won't be any option, she will be forced to go to the reception. I've made up my mind; I shall say nothing to her about it. Anyhow, you'll be seeing her in a while. Not a word about all this, I beg you. If you decide to accept our cousins'

invitation, I've no need to tell you what pleasure it will give us to spend the evening with you.' Humane motives are too sacred for the person they are used to appeal to not to bow before them, whether he believes them to be sincere or not; I did not wish for a moment to appear to be weighing up the relative importance of my invitation and the possible tiredness of Mme de Guermantes, and I promised to say nothing to her about the object of my visit, acting as though I had been completely taken in by this rigmarole M. de Guermantes had staged for my benefit. I asked him if there was any chance of my meeting Mme de Stermaria at the Princesse's.

'Indeed not, he replied with an air of expert assurance. The name you mention is known to me from club directories – it's not at all the type of person who goes to Gilbert's. You'll meet no one there who is not excessively genteel and extremely boring, duchesses with titles one thought were extinct and have been trotted out for the occasion, all the ambassadors, large numbers of Coburgs and foreign royalties, but don't expect the least hint of a Stermaria. Gilbert would have a fit at the mere thought. Oh, by the way, you like painting, don't you? I must show you a superb picture I bought from my cousin, partly in exchange for the Elstirs, which we didn't really care for in the end. It was sold to me as a Philippe de Champagne, but personally I think it's by someone even more famous. Do you want to know what I think? I think it's a Velázquez, and of his finest period,' said the Duc, looking me straight in the eye, either to gauge my reaction or to accentuate it. A footman came in.

'Madame la Duchesse wishes to know if M. le Duc will be good enough to see M. Swann, since Madame is not quite ready.

– Show M. Swann in,' said the Duc after consulting his watch and seeing that he himself still had a little time left before he need go and dress. 'As ever, my wife, who told him to come, isn't ready. No point in saying anything in front of Swann about Marie-Gilberte's reception, said the Duc. I don't know whether he's been invited. Gilbert is very fond of him, because he thinks that he's the natural grandson of the Duc de Berri, there's a whole story involved there. (Otherwise, you can imagine! – my cousin, who nearly has a stroke if he sees a Jew a mile off.) But now of course the Dreyfus case has made matters worse. Swann of all people ought to have realized that he must drop all connection with those people, instead of which he comes out with the most unfortunate views.'

The Duc called the footman back in to find out whether the man he had sent to cousin d'Osmond's for news had returned. His plan was as follows: since he rightly believed his cousin to be dying, he was anxious to obtain news of him before his actual death, that is before he was obliged to go into mourning. Once he was covered by the official certainty that Amanien was still alive, he would push off to his dinner, to the Prince's reception, to the fancy dress party he was to attend as Louis XI and where he had a most titillating assignation with a new mistress, and put off any further enquiries until the next day, when his pleasure was over. Then he would put on mourning if his cousin had passed away in the course of the evening. 'No, M. le Duc, he is not back yet. – Damn and blast it! nothing is ever done in this house until the last minute,' shouted the Duc, thinking that Amanien might have 'snuffed it' in time to be in the evening paper and to make him miss his party. He sent for *Le Temps*, in which there was nothing.

I had not seen Swann for a very long time, and I wondered for a moment whether he used formerly to clip his moustache or not to wear his hair *en brosse*, for there was something different about him. It was simply that he was very 'different' because he was very ill, and illness alters the face as much as growing a beard or changing one's parting. (Swann's illness was the same one that carried off his mother, who had been struck down by it at exactly the age he now was. In fact heredity makes our lives as full of cabalistic ciphers and horoscopic forecasts as if sorcerers really existed. And just as there is a given life expectancy for humanity in general, so there is one for families in particular, that is, in any one family, for those members of it who resemble each other.) Swann was dressed with an elegance which, like his wife's, connected what he now was with what he had once been. In a very fitted pearl-grey frock-coat which did justice to his tall, slim figure and white gloves with black stitching, he was wearing a grey topper of a flared shape which Delion now made only for him, for the Prince de Sagan, M. de Charlus, the Marquis de Modène, M. Charles Haas and Comte Louis de Turenne. I was surprised at the charming smile and affectionate hand-clasp with which he returned my greeting, for I thought that after so long he would not recognize me so quickly; I gave voice to my astonishment; he responded to this with peals of laughter, a hint of indignation, and a further squeeze of my hand, as if it were to cast doubt on his soundness of mind or the sincerity of his affection to imagine that he did not recognize me. And yet this was in fact the case; as I learned long afterwards, he did not realize who I was until several minutes later when he heard my name mentioned. But no change in expression, in his words, in his conversation with me, betrayed the realization which something M. de Guermantes let drop enabled him to make, so confident a master was he of the social game. In fact he brought to it the same spontaneity of behaviour and the same individual initiative, even in matters of dress, that typified the Guermantes style. And so the greeting the old clubman had given me without recognizing me was not the cold, stiff greeting of a man of the world merely going through the motions, but a greeting full of real friendliness, of genuine charm, similar to those, say, of the Duchesse de Guermantes (who, if she ran into you, even made a point of smiling at you first before you had greeted her), in contrast to the more automatic greetings practised by the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Similarly the hat he placed on the floor beside him, in conformity with a custom that was beginning to disappear, was lined, unconventionally, in green leather because (as he would have us believe) it showed the dirt far less, but in fact because it was extremely chic.

'I say, Charles, you're a great expert, I've got something to show you. And then, my boys, I'm going to ask your permission to leave you together for a moment while I go and dress for dinner. I don't imagine Oriane will be very long now, in any case.' He then showed Swann his 'Velázquez'. 'But this seems familiar,' said Swann with the pained expression of a sick man for whom even speaking is an effort.

'Yes,' said the Duc, in a tone rather flattened by the time the expert was taking to express his admiration. 'You've probably seen it at Gilbert's.

– Yes, of course, I remember.

– What do you think it is?

– Well, if it was at Gilbert's, it's probably one of your *ancestors*,' said Swann with a mixture of irony and deference towards a grandeur he would have felt it impolite and absurd to ignore, but which, for reasons of good taste, he chose to refer to only in a playful manner.

'Of course it is, said the Duc bluffly. It's Boson, the umpteenth member of the Guermantes family. But I don't give a damn about all that. You know I'm not as feudal as my cousin. Rigaud, Mignard, even Velázquez are some of the names I've heard mentioned,' he went on, scrutinizing Swann like an inquisitor or a torturer in a dual attempt to read his thoughts and to influence his response. 'Well now, he concluded (for when he was led to bludgeon someone into delivering the opinion he wanted to hear, it took only a few seconds for him to start believing that it had been spontaneously uttered), come on, none of your flattery. Do you think it's by one of the big names I've just mentioned?

– N… no, Swann replied.

– So what then? I know nothing about these things, it's not for me to judge who painted this old fossil. But you're a lover of these things, a master of the subject, who do you think did it?'

Swann hesitated for a moment in front of this canvas; it was quite clear he thought it dreadful. 'It was done by malicious intent, I should say,' came his amused reply to the Duc, who could not repress a start of rage. This subsided, and he said: 'Be good chaps, both of you, and wait a minute for Oriane. I'll be back as soon as I've put on my tails. I'll send word to my good lady that you're both waiting for her.'

I chatted to Swann briefly about the Dreyfus case and asked him how it was that all the Guermantes were anti-Dreyfusards. 'In the first place because all these people are anti-Semitic at heart,' replied Swann, although his experience made him perfectly well aware that some of them were not, but, like everyone who holds deep convictions, he preferred to explain the fact that other people did not share them by assuming that they had incurable preconceptions and prejudices rather

than reasons that were more open to discussion. Also, as a man who had reached the premature end of his life, like a weary animal that is being tormented, he was loathing these persecutions and turning back to the spiritual fold of his fathers.

'I've certainly been told the Prince de Guermantes is anti-Semitic, I remarked.

– Oh, *him*! He's unmentionable. Do you know that when he was in the army and had an excruciating toothache, he preferred to sit it out in agony rather than go to the only dentist in the area, who happened to be Jewish, and that later on, when a wing of his country house caught fire, he let it burn to the ground rather than send to the neighbouring property – it belongs to the Rothschilds – for hoses?

– Are you going to the reception at his place this evening, by any chance?

– Yes, he replied, although I really don't feel up to it. But he sent me a wire to tell me he has something to say to me. I can feel that I'm soon unlikely to be well enough to go and see him or to receive him myself – I'd find it too stressful – so I'd rather get it over at once.

– Yet the Duc de Guermantes isn't anti-Semitic, is he?

– But you can see for yourself he is, since he's an anti-Dreyfusard,' replied Swann, not realizing that he was begging the question. 'None the less I'm upset I disappointed the fellow – sorry! the Duc – by not admiring his Mignard or whatever he thinks it is.

– 'But at least, I continued, reverting to the Dreyfus case, the Duchesse is a woman with intelligent views.

– Yes, she is charming. But for me she was even more charming when she was still the Princesse des Laumes. Her mind has become more sharp-edged somehow – it was all much softer in her younger days as a *grande dame*. But anyway, what do you expect, younger or older, men or women, these people belong to a different race, they can't help it with a thousand years of feudalism in their blood. And of course, they are under the impression that all that has absolutely no bearing on the views they hold.

– All the same, Robert de Saint-Loup is a Dreyfusard.

– Ah! so much the better, given that his mother is so anti. I'd heard he was, but I wasn't certain. That delights me. Nor does it surprise me, he's highly intelligent. That certainly counts for a lot.'

Swann's Dreyfusism had made him extraordinarily naive and shifted his way of looking at the world towards an impulsiveness, an instability of judgment more pronounced even than the similar effects of his marriage to Odette in the past; this recent class demotion was more like a reassessment of class and something entirely to his credit, since it made him return to the paths trodden by his own people from which he had been led astray by the aristocratic company he kept. But precisely at the moment when his clear-sightedness enabled him, thanks to the principles inherited from his ancestors, to perceive a truth that was still hidden from society people, Swann nevertheless showed a comic capacity to hoodwink himself. He put everything he admired or disdained to the test of a new criterion, Dreyfusism. That the anti-Dreyfusism of Mme Bontemps should make him dismiss her as a fool was no more astonishing than that he should have thought her intelligent at the time of his marriage. Nor was it particularly serious that this new tide of opinion should affect his political judgments and make him forget that he had once branded Clemenceau as a man with mercenary motives, a British spy (an absurdity originating from the Guermantes circles), while he now declared that he had always regarded him as a voice of conscience, a man of steel like Cornély.[109] 'No, I've never expressed a different view to you. You're thinking of someone else.' But the tide washed beyond his political judgments and overturned Swann's literary judgments too, even his way of expressing them. Barrès had lost any talent he once had, and even his early works were on the feeble side and scarcely the sort of thing you would want to reread. 'Just try it, you won't be able to get to the end. How different from Clemenceau! Personally I'm not anti-clerical, but put them side by side, and it's pretty clear that Barrès lacks any backbone. He's a very great man is our Clemenceau. He really knows the language!' Yet the anti-Dreyfusards were in no position themselves to criticize such madness. According to them, one was a Dreyfusard only because one was of Jewish origin. If a practising Catholic like Saniette was also in favour of reviewing the case, it was only because he was cornered into it by Mme Verdurin, who conducted herself like a wild radical. Her foremost grudge was against 'the cloth'. Saniette was more foolish than malicious, and had no idea of the harm the Patronne was doing him. And if you pointed out that Brichot was equally a friend of Mme Verdurin but was also a member of the '*Patrie française*', that was because he was more intelligent.

'You see him occasionally? I asked Swann, in reference to Saint-Loup.

– No, never. He wrote to me the other day asking me to persuade the Duc de Mouchy and various other members to vote for him at the Jockey, where he was accepted for that matter as smoothly as posting a letter.

– In spite of the Affair!

– The question never came up. And let me tell you that since all this business began I never set foot in the place.'

M. de Guermantes rejoined us and was shortly followed by his wife, now attired for the evening, tall and proud in a red satin gown, the skirt bordered with sequins. She wore in her hair a long ostrich feather dyed bright red, and over her shoulders a tulle wrap of the same colour. 'How smart to have one's hat lined in green, said the Duchesse, who missed nothing. But with you, Charles, everything is so tasteful, what you wear, what you say, what you read, and what you do.' Swann meanwhile, without seeming to have caught these remarks, was contemplating the Duchesse as he might have studied the canvas of a master, and then sought her eyes, pulling his face into an expression which conveyed the word 'Gosh!' Mme de Guermantes burst into laughter. 'So you like the way I'm dressed. I'm delighted. To be honest, I can't say I'm very pleased with it myself, she continued with a sullen look. God, what a bore it is to dress up and go out when it would be so much nicer to spend the evening at home!

– What magnificent rubies!

– Ah! my dear Charles, at least it's clear you know what you're talking about, not like that oaf Monserfeuil, who asked me if they were real. I have to admit I've never seen finer ones myself. They were a present from the Grand Duchess. They're a little on the large side for my liking, rather too like claret glasses filled to the brim, but I'm wearing them because we shall see the Grand Duchess this evening at Marie-Gilbert's,' added Mme de Guermantes, in no way suspecting that her last remark nullified what the Duc had previously told me.

'What's taking place at the Princesse's? Swann asked.

– Oh, almost nothing,' the Duc hastened to reply, thinking that this question meant that Swann had not been invited.

'What are you talking about, Basin? The world and his wife have been invited. We'll be crushed to death by tiresome people. What will be lovely though, she added, looking discriminatingly at Swann, if this storm in the air now doesn't break, will be those marvellous gardens. You know them, of course. I was there a month ago when the lilacs were in flower. You can't imagine how lovely they were. And then the fountain – it's really like having Versailles in Paris.

– What sort of person is the Princesse? I asked.

– Why, you know quite well, since you've seen her here, that she's as beautiful as the daylight, and also a touch stupid, but very nice, for all her Germanic haughtiness, full of kindness and blunders.'

Swann was too shrewd not to realize that the Duchesse was trying to show off the 'Guermantes wit', and in a rather cheap manner, since she was merely serving up a rather debased version of a few of her old quips. Nevertheless, to indicate to the Duchesse that he appreciated her intention to be amusing, and as though she really had been, he gave a rather forced smile, a particular form of insincerity which made me feel the same embarrassment I had experienced in the past when I heard my parents discussing the corruption of certain sections of society with M. Vinteuil (when they knew only too well that far greater corruption reigned at

Montjouvain), or Legrandin colouring his speech for the benefit of fools, selecting subtle adjectives when he was perfectly well aware that they would be incomprehensible to his rich or smart yet illiterate audience.

'Come now, Oriane, what are you saying, said M. de Guermantes. Marie stupid? Why, she's read everything, and she's musical to the tips of her fingers.

– But, my poor dear Basin, you're like a babe in arms. As if one couldn't be all that and rather stupid at the same time! Stupid is too strong a word. No, she's fuzzy-minded, she's Hesse-Darmstadt, Holy Roman Empire, wa-wa-wa. Even her pronunciation sets me on edge. But I have to say she has a charming way of being batty. In the first place, the very idea of stepping down from her German throne to go and marry a private individual, as if she were the most middle-class woman alive. It's true that she chose *him*! Ah, but of course,' she added, turning to me, 'you don't know Gilbert. To give you some idea, he's the man who once took to his bed because I left my calling-card at Mme Carnot's[110]… But, my dear Charles,' said the Duchesse, changing the subject, since she could see that the story of the card and Mme Carnot seemed to anger M. de Guermantes, 'you know, you've not sent me the photograph of those Knights of Rhodes you've taught me to love and with whom I'm so keen to become acquainted.'

During all this, the Duc's eyes had not left his wife's face: 'Oriane, you might at least tell the whole story instead of keeping half of it back. I ought to explain, he said in rectification of her omission and addressing himself to Swann, that the British Ambassadress at the time, a very worthy woman, but one who tended to live on the moon and was apt to mismatch her guests, conceived the rather outlandish idea of inviting us with the President and his wife. Even Oriane was rather taken aback by this, especially as the Ambassadress was familiar enough with people of our kind not to invite us to such an incongruous gathering. There was a minister present who's a known swindler… but the less said about that the better – we simply hadn't been warned, we were caught in a trap, though I have to say that all these people behaved very decently. And it would have been better left at that. But Mme de Guermantes, who rarely does me the honour of asking my opinion, thought fit to leave her card at the Élysée the following week. It was perhaps a bit extreme of Gilbert to regard that as a stain upon our name. But one simply has to bear in mind that, politics apart, M. Carnot, who as it happens held his position very respectably, was the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary tribunal which saw eleven members of our family to their deaths in a single day.

In that case, Basin, why did you use to go and dine at Chantilly every week? The Duc d'Aumale too was the grandson of a member of the Revolutionary tribunal, but with this difference: Carnot was a decent man and Philippe-Égalité a dreadful villain.

– I'm sorry to interrupt, but I did send that photograph, said Swann. I can't understand why it hasn't reached you.

– That doesn't altogether surprise me, said the Duchesse. My servants tell me only what they want me to know. They probably have an aversion to the Order of St John.' And she rang the bell.

'I was never very enthusiastic about those dinners at Chantilly, you know, Oriane.

– Not enthusiastic? That's why you took your nightshirt in case the Prince asked you to stay the night, which he rarely did, of course, being a complete lout like all the Orléans family. Do you happen to know who we're dining with at Mme de Saint-Euverte's? Mme de Guermantes asked her husband.

– Apart from the guests already known to you, there'll be the brother of King Theodosius. He was invited at the last moment.'

At this piece of news the Duchesse's features were a picture of contentment, while her speech exuded boredom: 'Oh, God, more princes!

– But this one is agreeable and intelligent, said Swann.

– But not entirely so, however,' replied the Duchesse, who seemed to be seeking for words that would convey her thought with more novelty. 'Have you ever noticed with princes that the nicest of them are never entirely nice? No, I'm not joking. They always have to have an opinion about everything. And since they have no opinions of their own, they spend the first half of their lives asking us ours and the second serving them back up to us. They're not happy unless they can say that this has been well played and that not so well. Even when there's no difference. That little Theodosius Junior now – I forget his name – once asked me what an orchestral motif was called. I told him, said the Duchesse, her eyes sparkling and laughter bursting from her lovely red lips, "an orchestral motif, of course". And oh dear, he was none too pleased with that really. Oh, my dear Charles, Mme de Guermantes continued listlessly, how tiresome these dinners can be. There are evenings when one would sooner die! But of course dying is perhaps just as tiresome, since we don't know what it's like.'

A servant appeared. It was the young fiancé who had come to grief with the concierge until the Duchesse, out of kindness, had restored a semblance of peace between them.

'Am I to enquire after M. le Marquis d'Osmond this evening? he asked.

– Most certainly not, do nothing until tomorrow morning! There's not even any need for you to remain here tonight. His footman, who's a friend of yours, might well come round with news and send you out after us. Go out somewhere, anywhere, go and live it up, sleep out, but I don't want to see your face here before tomorrow morning.'

The young footman's face was overjoyed. At last he would be able to spend long hours with his betrothed, whom it had become practically impossible for him to see since yet another scene with the concierge when the Duchesse had considerately explained to him that, to avoid further conflict, it would be better if he did not go out at all. The thought of finally having a free evening bore him on a tide of happiness which the Duchesse saw and understood. She felt something like a pang and an itching in her whole body as she imagined this happiness being enjoyed behind her back, concealed from her, and it made her irritated and jealous. 'No, Basin, he's to remain here. He's not to stir out of the house.

– But, Oriane, that's absurd. You have all your servants here, and then at midnight there'll be the costumier and the dresser for the fancy dress ball. There's absolutely nothing to keep him here, and since he's the only one who is friendly with Mama's footman, I'd far sooner he was well out of the house.

– Look, Basin, will you just listen to me for a moment. It so happens I shall have a message for him in the course of the evening, I'm not sure at what time. You're not to stir from here for a second,' she said to the despairing footman.

If there were constant quarrels, and if servants did not remain long with the Duchesse, the person responsible for this continual state of warfare was certainly there to stay, but that person was not the concierge. No doubt for the meatier tasks, for the tortures it was more strenuous to inflict, for the quarrels which ended in blows, the Duchesse entrusted the heavy tools to him; and these were roles he played without suspecting that he had been cast for them. Like her servants, he admired the Duchesse's kindness; even the less clear-sighted of her footmen who had left her service and came back to visit Françoise were of the opinion that to be employed by the Duc would have been the best position in Paris if it had not been for the concierge's lodge. The Duchesse made use of the lodge in the same way as people have long made use of clericalism, freemasonry, the Jewish peril and so forth. A footman came into the room.

'Why has the package M. Swann had sent not been brought up? And, since you're here, has Jules come back yet? He went for news of M. le Marquis d'Osmond. (You probably know that Mama is very ill, Charles.)

– He's just arrived back, M. le Duc. They're expecting M. le Marquis to pass away at any moment.

– Ah, he's alive! exclaimed the Duc with a sigh of relief. So they're expecting, are they? To the devil with your expecting! While there's life there's hope, said the Duc cheerfully, turning to us. 'They've already been talking about him as though he were dead and buried. In a week's time he'll be chippier than me.

– It's the doctors who said he wouldn't last the evening. One of them wanted to call again during the night. The head doctor told them it was pointless. M. le Marquis would be dead by then. They've only kept him alive by giving him enemas of camphorated oil.

– Shut up, you stupid fool! shouted the Duc in a furious rage. Who asked for your opinion? You haven't understood a word they told you.

– It wasn't me they told, it was Jules.

– I asked you to shut up! roared the Duc, and he turned towards Swann: How wonderful he's still alive! He's bound to regain his strength in due course. Still alive after such a critical turn – that in itself is really quite something. One can't expect miracles. It can't be too dreadful having a little enema with camphorated oil, he added, rubbing his hands. He's alive. What more could one want? After all he's gone through, that's really quite impressive. To have a constitution like that is even something to be envied. Ah! these invalids, their every need is attended to in a way that ours aren't. At lunch today some blasted chef presented me with a leg of lamb and *béarnaise* sauce – done to a turn, I admit, but for that very reason I ate so much of it that it's still lying on my stomach. But that doesn't mean that people will come enquiring after me as they do after my dear cousin Amanien. There's too much enquiring going on. It's wearying for him. He needs breathing-space. They're killing the poor man with their endless sending round for news.

– Just wait a moment, said the Duchesse to the footman as he was leaving the room, I asked for the package with the photograph M. Swann sent to be brought up.

– It's so large, Mme la Duchesse, that I wasn't sure if it would get through the door. We've left it in the hall. Does Madame wish me to bring it up?

– In that case, no. They should have told me, but if it's so big I shall see it later when I come downstairs.

– I also forgot to tell Madame la Duchesse that Mme la Comtesse Molé left a card this morning for Madame.

– What, this morning?' said the Duchesse disapprovingly, being of the opinion that so young a woman ought not to take the liberty of leaving cards at that time of day.

'About ten o'clock, Madame la Duchesse.

– Bring me the cards.

– In any case, Oriane, when you say that it was a funny idea of Marie's to marry Gilbert, said the Duc, reverting to his earlier topic of conversation, it's you who have a peculiar way of writing history. If anyone was a fool in that marriage, it was Gilbert, for choosing of all people a woman so closely related to the King of the Belgians, who has usurped the name of Brabant from us. In a word, we are of the same blood as the Hesse family, and of the elder branch. It's always stupid to talk about oneself, he said, addressing himself to me, but it is true that whenever we've been to Darmstadt, and not only Darmstadt but even to Cassel and all over electoral Hesse, all the landgraves have invariably been courteous enough to yield us right of precedence as members of the elder branch.

– Oh, I say, Basin, you're not trying to tell me that a person who was honorary commandant of every regiment in her country, who was to be engaged to the King of Sweden…

– Really, Oriane, that's a bit much. Anyone would think you didn't know that the King of Sweden's grandfather was tilling the soil in Pau at a time when we had been holding pride of place all over Europe for nine hundred years.

– Which doesn't alter the fact that if someone were to say in the street: "Look, there's the King of Sweden," everyone would rush as far as the Place de la Concorde to see him, whereas if he said: "There's M. de Guermantes," no one would know who he was talking about.

– What sort of argument is that?

– Nor can I understand how, once the title of Duc de Brabant has passed into the Belgian royal family, you can make any claim to it.'

The footman returned with the Comtesse Molé's card, or rather what she had left to pass for a card. Claiming that she did not have one with her, she had produced from her pocket a letter addressed to herself, removed the contents of the envelope which bore the name: 'La Comtesse Molé,' folded down the corner to present it. Since the envelope was rather large, in accordance with that year's fashion in notepaper, this hand-written 'card' was almost twice the size of an ordinary visiting-card.

'This is an example of what people call Mme Molé's "simple ways", said the Duchesse ironically. She would have us believe she had no cards on her so that she can show off her inventiveness. But we know all about that, don't we, my dear Charles, we're rather too grown-up and inventive ourselves not to see into the mind of this little lady of four years' social experience. She's charming, but, for all that, it doesn't seem to me that she carries enough weight to imagine that she can amaze the world with the tiny effort it takes to leave an envelope instead of a card and to leave it at ten in the morning. Her old mother mouse will show her that she knows a thing or two about those sorts of tricks.'

Swann could not hold back his laughter at the thought that the Duchesse, who happened to be rather jealous of Mme Molé's success, would draw on her stock of 'Guermantes wit' to find some insolent response to her visitor.

'As for the title of Duc de Brabant, I've told you a hundred times, Oriane…' the Duc resumed, but the Duchesse cut him short without listening.

'But, my dear Charles, I'm dying to see your photograph.

– Ah! *Extinctor draconis latrator Anubis*,[111] said Swann.

– Yes, it was so charming what you told me about that in connection with San Giorgio in Venice. But why Anubis? I don't follow.

– What's the one like who was an ancestor of Babal? M. de Guermantes asked.

– You want to see his Babby Babal, do you?' said Mme de Guermantes dryly, to show that she herself despised the wordplay. 'I want to see them all, she added.

– Listen, Charles, let's go downstairs until the carriage comes, said the Duc. You can pay your call on us in the hall, because my wife won't give us a moment's peace until she's seen your photograph. I'm less impatient, if the truth were told, he added complacently. I can bide my time, but she would see us all dead first.

– What an excellent suggestion, Basin, said the Duchesse. Let's go into the hall. At least we'll know why we've come down from your study, though we'll never know how we have come down from the counts of Brabant.

– I've told you a hundred times how the title came into the House of Hesse, said the Duc (as we moved off to see the photograph, and I thought of the ones that Swann used to bring me in Combray), through the marriage of a Brabant in 1241 with the daughter of the last landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse, so that really it's the title of Prince of Hesse that came to the House of Brabant rather than that of Duc de Brabant to the House of Hesse. You'll remember that our battle-cry was that of the Ducs de Brabant: "Limbourg to her conqueror!" until we exchanged the arms of Brabant for those of Guermantes, something we were wrong to do in my opinion, and the example of the Gramonts will do nothing to make me change it.

– But, replied Mme de Guermantes, since it's the King of the Belgians who conquered it… Besides, the Belgian Crown Prince is known as Duc de Brabant.

– But, my dear, what you're saying is unsound, it doesn't hold water. You know as well as I do that there are assumed titles which can perfectly well survive even if the territory is occupied by an usurper. For example, the King of Spain is yet another who describes himself as Duc de Brabant, on the grounds of rights to possession less ancient than ours, but more ancient than those of the King of the Belgians. He also calls himself Duke of Burgundy, King of the West and East Indies, Duke of Milan. Yet he's no more in possession of Burgundy, the Indies or Brabant than I am of Brabant myself, or the Prince of Hesse, if it comes to that. The King of Spain likewise proclaims himself King of Jerusalem, as does the Emperor of Austria, and Jerusalem belongs to neither.'

He broke off for a moment, uneasy that the mention of Jerusalem might have embarrassed Swann, in view of 'current events', only to take up again at a faster pace:

‘What you have just said could be applicable to anyone. In the past we were Ducs d’ Aumale, a duchy that has passed as regularly to the House of France as Joinville and Chevreuse have to the House of Albert. We make no more claim to those titles than to that of Marquis de Noirmoutiers, which was at one time ours and became very regularly monopolized by the House of La Trémoïlle, but because certain transfers of titles are valid, it does not follow that they all are. For instance, he continued, turning to me, my sister-in-law’s son bears the title of Prince d’Agrigente, which comes to us from Joan the Mad, as the title of Prince de Tarente comes to the La Trémoïlles. Now, this title of Tarente was given by Napoleon to a soldier, who may well have done his job excellently, but by doing this Napoleon was giving away something which was not his to give, even less so than Napoleon III when he created a Duc de Montmorency, since Périgord at least had a mother who was a Montmorency, whereas the Tarente of Napoleon I had no more of a Tarente about him than Napoleon’s wish that he should be created one. That didn’t prevent Chaix d’Est-Ange, in some mention of your uncle Condé, from asking the Imperial Attorney if he had fished up the title of Duc de Montmorency from the moat at Vincennes.

– Look, Basin, I’d like nothing better than to follow you to the moat at Vincennes, or even to Taranto. Which reminds me, dear Charles, of something I wanted to say to you when you were telling me about your San Giorgio of Venice. Basin and I were thinking of spending next spring in Italy and Sicily. If you were to accompany us, think what a difference it would make! I’m not thinking only of the pleasure of having you with us, but imagine, after all you’ve so often told me about the remains of the Norman Conquest and of the classical world, just imagine what a trip like that would be like, with you as company! I mean even Basin – what am I saying! I mean Gilbert – would benefit from it, because I feel that even his claims to the throne of Naples and all that sort of thing would begin to interest me if they were explained by you in old Romanesque churches or on little villages perched on hills as they are in primitive paintings. But we’re going to look at your photograph. Unwrap it, said the Duchesse to a footman.

– Please, Oriane, not this evening! You can look at it tomorrow, begged the Duc, who had already been shooting me signs of alarm at the vast size of the photograph.

‘But I need to look at it with Charles,’ said the Duchesse with a smile which was both misleadingly concupiscent and psychologically calculated, for in her desire to please Swann, she spoke of the enjoyment this photograph would give her as of the benefit an invalid feels he would derive from eating an orange, or as though she had simultaneously planned to run off with several lovers and informed a biographer of tastes that were to her credit.

‘In that case, he can make you a special visit, declared the Duc, to whom his wife was obliged to yield. You can spend three hours together in front of it, if that’s what you want, he added ironically. But where are you going to put a toy as big as that?’

– In my bedroom, of course. I want to have it somewhere I can look at it properly.

– Well, just as you please. If it’s in your room, there’s little chance of me ever seeing it,’ said the Duc, heedless of the revelation he was so unthinkingly making about the negative character of his conjugal relations.

‘Just make sure you undo it very carefully, Mme de Guermantes told the servant (she was being liberal with her instructions out of consideration for Swann). And don’t ruin the envelope, either.

– Even the envelope has to be treated with care! the Duc whispered in my ear, raising his hands to the ceiling. I say, Swann, he added, what amazes me, dull unimaginative husband that I am, is how did you manage to find an envelope that size. Where of all places did you dig it up?

– Oh, the photographers are always sending things like that. But the man’s an oaf; I see he’s written on it “La Duchesse de Guermantes” and omitted ‘Madame’.

– I forgive him,’ said the Duchesse with her mind elsewhere; she seemed struck by a sudden idea of an amusing kind, but repressed a faint smile and returned her attention to Swann: ‘Come, now, you haven’t told us whether you’re coming to Italy with us?

– I really don’t think, Madame, that it will be possible.

– Oh, well, Mme de Montmorency is the luckier woman. You went with her to Venice and Vicenza. She told me that with you one saw things one would never see otherwise, things no one has ever mentioned before, that you’d shown her unheard-of marvels, and that even among the familiar things she learned to appreciate details which without you she would have passed by a score of times without ever noticing. She was clearly more privileged than we are to be… She turned to the servant: You will take the huge envelope that contained M. Swann’s photograph, and you will leave it with the corner turned down, as a calling-card from me at Mme la Comtesse Molé’s, at half-past ten this evening.’

Swann burst out laughing.

‘I should like to know all the same, Mme de Guermantes asked him, how you can tell ten months beforehand that it will be impossible to come with us.

– My dear Duchesse, I can tell you if you really want me to, but, first of all, you can see that I’m not at all well.

– True, my dear Charles, I don’t think you look at all well, and it pains me to see you so off-colour, but I’m not asking you to accompany us next week, I’m asking you come with us in ten months’ time. Ten months is surely enough time to get oneself treated?’

At this point a footman came to announce that the carriage was at the door. ‘Come, Oriane, time to saddle up,’ said the Duc, who had been champing at the bit for some time now, just as if he had been one of the horses that stood waiting.

‘Very well, will you tell me in one word why you can’t come to Italy?’ the Duchesse challenged Swann as she rose to take leave of us.

‘But, my dear friend, it’s because I shall have been dead for several months by then. According to the doctors I’ve consulted, by the end of the year my present illness – and as far as that goes it could carry me off at any time – will leave me three or four months to live at the most, and even that is an optimistic estimate,’ replied Swann with a smile, as the footman opened the glass door of the hall for the Duchesse to leave.

‘What on earth are you telling me?’ the Duchesse broke out, stopping short for a second on her way to the carriage and raising her handsome, melancholy blue eyes, her gaze now fraught with uncertainty. Poised for the first time in her life between two duties as far removed from each other as getting into her carriage to go to a dinner-party and showing compassion for a man who was about to die, she could find no appropriate precedent to follow in the code of conventions and, not knowing which duty to honour, she felt she had no choice but to pretend to believe that the second alternative did not need to be raised, thus enabling her to comply with the first, which at that moment required less effort, and thought that the best way of settling the conflict would be to deny that there was one. ‘You must be joking,’ she said to Swann.

‘It would be a joke in charming taste, replied Swann ironically. ‘I don’t know why I’m telling you this. I’ve never mentioned my illness to you before. But since you asked me, and since now I may die at any moment… But please, that last thing I want to do is to hold you up, and you’ve a dinner-party to go to,’ he added, because he knew that for other people their own social obligations mattered more than the death of a friend, and as a man of considerate politeness he put himself in their place. But the Duchesse’s own sense of manners too afforded her a confused glimpse of the fact that for Swann her dinner-party must count for less than his own death. And so, while still moving towards her carriage, she said with a droop of her shoulders: ‘Don’t worry about the dinner-party. It’s of no importance!’ But her words put the Duc in a bad mood and he burst out: ‘Come along, Oriane, don’t just stand there with your chatter, whining away to Swann, when you know very well that Mme de Saint-Euverte makes a point of having her guests sit down to table at eight o’clock sharp. We need you to make up your mind. The horses have been waiting for a good five minutes now. Forgive me, Charles, he said turning to Swann, but it’s ten minutes to eight. Oriane is always late, and it will take us more than five minutes to get to old mother Saint-Euverte.’

Mme de Guermantes made a decisive move towards the carriage and said a last farewell to Swann. 'Look, we'll talk about this some other time. I don't believe a word you've been saying, but we need to discuss it, just the two of us. I'm sure they've given you unnecessary cause for alarm. Come and have lunch, any day you like (for Mme de Guermantes lunch was the answer to all problems), you've only to let me know the day and the time,' and, lifting her skirt, she set her foot on the carriage step. She was about to get in when the Duc caught sight of her foot and thundered out: 'Oriane, you wretched woman, what are you thinking of? You're still wearing your black shoes! With a red dress! Go up quickly and change into your red ones. No, wait, he said, turning to the footman, go and tell Madame's maid to bring down a pair of red shoes at once.

– But, my dear,' said the Duchesse softly, embarrassed to see that Swann, who was leaving the house with me but had stepped back to let the carriage pass out in front of us, had heard this, 'given that we're late… '

– No, no, we have plenty of time. It's only ten to. It won't take us ten minutes to get to the Parc Monceau. And anyway, what does it matter? Even if we arrive at half-past eight they'll still wait for us, but you simply can't go there in a red dress and black shoes. Besides, we shan't be the last to arrive, believe me. The Sassensages are coming. You know that they never turn up before twenty to nine.'

The Duchesse went up to her room.

'Huh! said M. de Guermantes to Swann and myself, people laugh at us poor husbands, but we're not completely useless. If it wasn't for me, Oriane would have gone out to dinner in black shoes.

– They were by no means a disaster, said Swann, I noticed the black shoes and I didn't find them remotely offensive.

– You may be right, replied the Duc, but it looks more elegant to have them matching the dress. Anyway, you can set your mind at rest. No sooner had she got there than she would have noticed, and I would have been the one who had to come back and fetch the others, which means I wouldn't have eaten till nine o'clock. Good-bye, my dear boys, he said, thrusting us gently away, off you go, now, before Oriane comes down. It's not that she doesn't like seeing you both. On the contrary, she's too fond of seeing you. If she finds you still here she'll start talking again. She's already very tired, and she'll be dead by the time she gets to that dinner. And quite frankly, I have to tell you that I'm dying of hunger. I had a miserable lunch this morning when I came from the train. That *sauce béarnaise* was damn good, certainly, but in spite of that I shan't be sorry, no two ways about it, to sit down to dinner. Five to eight! That's women for you! She'll give us both indigestion before the night's out. She's far less robust than people think.'

The Duc had absolutely no qualms in speaking in this way about his wife's petty discomforts and his own to a dying man, for because they were what was uppermost in his mind, they seemed more important to him. And so, after he had gently steered us to the door, it was merely his jocund sense of good manners that led him to boom out after Swann, who was already in the courtyard, in a voice for all to hear:

'Now mind you don't let all this damned doctors' nonsense get to you. They're fools. You're in strapping shape. You'll live to see us all in our graves!'

BOOK IV
Sodom & Gomorrah
PART I

First appearance of the men-women, descendants of those inhabitants of Sodom who were spared by the fire from heaven.

'Woman will have Gomorrah and man will have Sodom.'

Alfred de Vigny

As we know, well before going that day (the day when the Princesse de Guermantes' soirée was taking place) to pay the call on the Duc and Duchesse that I have just recounted, I had been watching out for their return and had, in the course of my vigil, made a discovery, involving M. de Charlus in particular, but so significant in itself that up until now, when I am able to give it the position and dimensions it requires, I have put off reporting it. I had, as I have said, abandoned the splendid vantage point, so comfortably installed at the top of the house, from where you can take in the uneven inclines by which ascent is made to the de Bréquigny *hôtel*, gaily ornamented in the Italian style by the pink campanile of the coachhouse belonging to the Marquis de Frécourt. I had found it more practical, once I thought that the Duc and Duchesse were on the point of returning, to station myself on the staircase. I a little regretted ending my sojourn on high. But at this hour of the day, which was that following lunch, I had less cause for regret, for I would not have seen, as in the morning, the footmen from the de Bréquigny and de Tresmes *hôtel*, reduced by the distance to tiny figures in a painting, making their slow ascent of the abrupt rise, feather duster in hand, between the large sheets of transparent mica that stood out so pleasingly against the red foothills.[2] Lacking the perspective of the geologist, I at least had that of the botanist, and gazed through the shutters on the stairs at the Duchesse's small shrub and the precious plant, exhibited in the courtyard with that insistence with which the marriageable young are thrust forward, and I wondered whether, by some providential chance, the improbable insect would come to visit the tendered and forlorn pistil. Curiosity gradually emboldening me, I descended as far as the ground-floor window, which was also open, and whose shutters were only half closed. I could distinctly hear Jupien getting ready to leave, who could not have detected me behind my blind, where I remained motionless up until the moment when I sprang hurriedly aside for fear of being seen by M. de Charlus, who, on his way to visit Mme de Villeparisis, was slowly crossing the courtyard, pot-bellied, aged by the full daylight, greying. It had taken an indisposition on Mme de Villeparisis's part (a consequence of the illness of the Marquis de Fierbois, with whom he personally was at daggers drawn) for M. de Charlus to pay a visit, for perhaps the first time in his life, at this hour of the day. For with that singularity of the Guermantes who, instead of conforming to the life of society, modified it in accordance with their own habits (unworldly, so they believed, and deserving in consequence that worldliness, that thing of no value, should be humbled before them – thus it was that Mme de Marsantes did not have her 'day' but entertained her women friends every morning, from 10 till 12), the Baron, setting this time aside for reading, or for hunting for old curios and the like, only ever went visiting between 4 and 6 in the evening. At 6 he would go to the Jockey Club or for a drive in the Bois.[3] A moment later, I once again drew back so as not to be seen by Jupien; it would soon be his time for leaving for his office, from where he returned only for dinner, or even not at all for the past week, since his niece had gone off to the country with her apprentices to a customer's to finish a dress. Then, realizing that no one could see me, I resolved not to be disturbed again for fear of missing, were the miracle to occur, the arrival, almost impossible to hope for (across all the obstacles, the distance, the contrary chances, the dangers), of the insect sent from afar as an ambassador to the virgin whose wait had been so long protracted. I knew that this wait was no more passive than with the male flower, whose stamens had spontaneously turned so that the insect might the more easily receive him; similarly, the flower-woman that was here would, should the insect come, arch her 'styles' coquettishly and, in order to be penetrated more fully by him, would imperceptibly, like a hypocritical but ardent young damsel, come to meet him half-way. The laws of the vegetable world are themselves governed by ever higher laws. If the visit of an insect, that is to say, the bringing of the seed from another flower, is necessary as a rule to fertilize a flower, this is because self-fertilization, the fertilization of the flower by itself, like repeated marriages within the same family, would lead to degeneration and sterility, whereas the cross-breeding effected by insects gives to succeeding generations of the same species a vigour unknown among their elders. This new lease of life may be excessive, however, and the species develop disproportionately; then, just as an anti-toxin protects us against disease, or as the thyroid controls our waistline, or as defeat comes to punish pride, or fatigue pleasure, and as sleep in turn reposes us from fatigue, so an exceptional act of self-fertilization comes at the appointed time to give its own turn to the screw, to apply the brake, and bring the flower that had exaggeratedly departed from the norm back within it. My reflections had been following an incline that I shall describe in due course, and I had already drawn from the conspicuous stratagem of the flowers a consequence bearing on a whole unconscious element in the work of literature, when I saw M. de Charlus coming out again from the Marquise's. A few minutes only had elapsed since he had gone in. Perhaps he had learned from his elderly relative herself, or merely through a servant, of the great improvement or rather the complete recovery from what in Mme de Villeparisis's case had been only a passing indisposition. At that moment, when he thought no one to be watching him, his eyelids lowered against the sunlight, M. de Charlus had relaxed the tension in his face and muffled the factitious vitality sustained in him by animated chit-chat and by force of will. Pale as a marble statue, he had a large nose, but his fine features no longer received a different meaning from a wilful gaze that might detract from the beauty of their modelling; nothing more now than a Guermantes, he seemed already sculpted, he, Palamède XV, in the chapel at Combray. Yet these features common to a whole family took on, in M. de Charlus's face, a more spiritualized, above all a gentler, delicacy. I regretted for his sake that he should habitually adulterate, by his many violences, his disagreeable idiosyncrasies, his scandal-mongering, his severity, his touchiness and his arrogance, that he should conceal, beneath a spurious brutality, the amenity and kindness I could see displayed so artlessly on his face at the moment when he emerged from Mme de Villeparisis's. Blinking against the sunlight, he seemed almost to be smiling, and in his face, seen thus in repose and as it were in its natural state, I found something so affectionate, so defenceless, that I could not help reflecting how angry M. de Charlus would have been had he known he was being watched; for what he put me in mind of, this man who was so enamoured of, who so prided himself on, his virility, who found everyone hatefully effeminate, what he suddenly put me in mind of, so unmistakably did he have, fleetingly, the features, the expression, the smile of one, was a woman!

I was about once again to move so that he should not catch sight of me; I had neither the time nor the need. For what did I see! Face to face, in this courtyard where they had certainly never encountered one another before (M. de Charlus coming to the Guermantes *hôtel* only in the afternoons, at times when Jupien was at his office), the Baron, his half-closed eyes all of a sudden opened wide, was gazing with an extraordinary intentness at the former waistcoat-maker on the doorstep of his shop, while the latter, standing suddenly transfixed in front of M. de Charlus, rooted like a plant, was contemplating with an air of wonderment the ageing Baron's embonpoint. But, what was even more astonishing, M. de Charlus's attitude having changed, that of Jupien was at once made to harmonize with it, as if in accordance with the laws of some secret art. The Baron, who was seeking now to disguise the impression he had felt, and who, for all his feigned indifference, seemed to be moving away only with regret, came and went, stared off into space in the manner that he believed best brought out the beauty of his eyes, and had assumed a self-satisfied, casual and ridiculous expression. Jupien meanwhile, at once shedding the humble, kindly expression I had always seen him wear, had – in perfect symmetry with the Baron – drawn back his head, set his torso at an advantageous angle, placed his fist on his hip with a grotesque impertinence and made his behind stick out, striking poses with the coquettishness that the orchid might have had for the providential advent of the bumblebee. I had not know he could look so unsympathetic. But nor had I known that he was capable of playing his part impromptu in this sort of scene between two deaf mutes, which (although he found himself in the presence of M. de Charlus for the first time) seemed to have been long rehearsed; we arrive at such perfection

spontaneously only when meeting with a compatriot abroad, with whom understanding then comes of its own accord, the interpreter being one and the same, without ever having set eyes on one another before.

This scene was not positively comical, however, it was imbued with a strangeness, or if you like a naturalness, the beauty of which continued to grow. For all that M. de Charlus had tried to assume a detached air, distractedly lowering his eyelids, every now and again he would raise them again and give Julien an attentive glance. But (no doubt because he thought that a scene such as this could not be prolonged indefinitely in this place, either for reasons that will be understood in due course, or else out of that sense of the brevity of all things which means that we want every blow to strike home, and makes of any love affair a most affecting spectacle), each time M. de Charlus looked at Jupien, he saw to it that the look was accompanied by a word or two, which made it infinitely unlike the looks normally directed at someone whom we know or do not know; he gazed at Jupien with the peculiar fixity of someone who is about to say to you: 'Forgive my butting in, but you have a long white thread hanging down your back,' or else, 'I can't be mistaken, you must be from Zürich, too, I fancy indeed I've often met you at the antique dealer's.' Thus, every two minutes, the same question seemed to be being posed to Jupien with intensity by M. de Charlus's oglings, like those interrogative phrases in Beethoven, repeated indefinitely at equal intervals, and intended – with an exaggerated luxury of preparation – to bring in a new theme, a change of key, a 're-entry'. But the beauty of M. de Charlus's and Jupien's glances came, on the contrary, from the very fact that, provisionally at least, these glances did not seem to have as their aim to lead to anything. It was the first time I had seen the Baron and Jupien manifest this beauty. In the eyes of both, it was the sky, not of Zürich, but of some Oriental city whose name I had not as yet divined, which had just arisen. Whatever the point that was able to detain M. de Charlus and the waistcoat-maker, agreement seemed to have been reached between them and these useless glances to be no more than the ritual preliminaries, like the entertainments given before a marriage that has been agreed on. Closer still to nature – and the multiplicity of these comparisons is itself all the more natural in that, examined over the course of a few minutes, the same man seems successively to be a man, a man-bird, or a man-insect, and so on – it was like two birds, the male and the female, the male seeking to advance, the female – Jupien – making no sign in response to this manoeuvre, but looking at her new friend without surprise, with an inattentive fixity, adjudged more disturbing no doubt and alone of use, from the moment that the male had made the first moves, and contenting herself with preening her feathers. Finally, Jupien's indifference no longer seemed to be enough for him; from the certainty of having made a conquest to getting himself pursued and desired was but a short step, and, making up his mind to leave for his work, Jupien went out through the *porte-cochère*. It was only after turning his head two or three times, however, that he made his escape into the street, into which the Baron, fearful of losing the scent (whistling with a devil-may-care expression, and not without a loud '*au revoir*' to the concierge, who, half-drunk and entertaining guests in his back kitchen, did not even hear him), dashed hurriedly out in order to catch him up. At the selfsame instant that M. de Charlus passed through the gateway whistling like a fat bumble-bee, another one, a real one this time, entered the courtyard. Who knows whether it was not the one so long awaited by the orchid, that had come to bring her the rare pollen without which she would remain a virgin? But I was distracted from following the insect's frolics, for, a minute or two later, Jupien, making a greater claim on my attention (perhaps in order to collect a package that he later took away with him and which, in the emotion caused in him by the appearance of M. de Charlus, he had forgotten, perhaps quite simply for some more natural reason), Jupien returned, followed by the Baron. The latter, resolved to precipitate matters, asked the waistcoat-maker for a light, but immediately remarked: 'I'm asking you for a light, but I see I've forgotten my cigars.' The laws of hospitality prevailed over the rules of flirtation. 'Come inside, you'll be given everything you want,' said the waistcoat-maker, on whose face disdain gave way to joy. The door of the shop closed on them and I could no longer hear anything. I had lost sight of the bumble-bee, I did not know whether it was the insect that the orchid needed, but I no longer doubted the miraculous possibility of a very rare insect and a captive flower being conjoined, now that M. de Charlus (a simple comparison of the providential chances, whatever they might be, without the least scientific pretension to drawing a parallel between certain botanical laws and what is sometimes quite wrongly called homosexuality), who, for years past, had come into this house only at the times when Jupien was not there, had, through the accident of Mme de Villeparisis's indisposition, encountered the waistcoat-maker and with him, the good fortune reserved for men of the Baron's kind by one of those fellow creatures who may even be, as we shall see, infinitely younger than Jupien and better-looking, the man predestined so that they may receive their share of sensual pleasure on this earth: the man who loves only elderly gentlemen.

What I have just said here is anyway what I was to understand only a few minutes later, however, so closely do these properties of being invisible adhere to reality, until some circumstance removes them. At all events, for the time being I was most annoyed no longer to be able to hear the conversation between the former waistcoat-maker and the Baron. I then noticed that the shop that was to let was divided from Jupien's only by an exceedingly thin partition. To get into it, all I need do was to return upstairs to our apartment, go to the kitchen, descend the servants' staircase as far as the cellars, follow these internally for the whole width of the courtyard and, having reached the point in the basement where, only a few months before, the cabinet-maker had been storing his joinery, and where Jupien was anticipating putting his coal, climb the few steps that gave access to the interior of the shop. Thus my whole route would be under cover, I should be seen by no one. That was the most prudent course. It was not the one that I adopted, but, keeping along the walls, I circled the courtyard in the open, trying not to be seen. If I was not seen, I owe it more to chance, I fancy, than to my good sense. And, supposing there to be one, I can see three possible reasons for the fact that I came to so rash a decision, when the cellar route was so safe. My impatience first of all. Then perhaps an obscure recollection of the scene in Montjouvain, hidden in front of Mlle Vinteuil's window.[4] Indeed, the staging of the things of this sort that I witnessed was always of the rashest and least probable nature, as if such revelations had to be the reward only for an action full of risk, though partly clandestine. Lastly, piece of childishness that it was, I hardly dare confess to the third reason, which was, I do believe, unconsciously determining. Since, in order to follow – and to see contradicted – the military principles of Saint-Loup, I had been following the Boer War in great detail, I had been led to reread old accounts of travel and exploration. These accounts had excited me and I had applied them in my everyday life in order to give myself more courage. When my attacks had forced me to remain for several days and several nights on end, not merely without sleeping, but without lying down, and without drinking or eating, at the moment when my exhaustion and suffering had become such that I thought I would never re-emerge from them, I would think of some traveller cast up on the shore, poisoned by unwholesome plants, shivering with fever in clothes drenched in sea-water, yet who felt better after a day or two and resumed his journey at random, in search of some inhabitants or other, who would perhaps be cannibals. Their example braced me, and gave me back some hope, and I felt ashamed of having momentarily lost heart. Thinking of the Boers who, with English armies facing them, were not afraid to expose themselves at the moment when, before regaining the bush, they needed to cross a stretch of open country: 'A fine thing,' I thought, 'that I should be more pusillanimous when the theatre of operations is merely our own courtyard and when the only steel I, who have just fought several duels without any fear, on account of the Dreyfus Affair, have to fear is that of the neighbours' gaze, who have better things to do than stare into the courtyard.'

But once I was in the shop, avoiding making even the faintest creak of the floorboards, realizing that the slightest sound from Jupien's shop could be heard from mine, I reflected how imprudent Jupien and M. de Charlus had been and the extent to which luck had been with them.

I did not dare move. The Guermantes's groom, taking advantage of their absence no doubt, had in fact transferred a ladder previously stored in the coachhouse into the shop where I now found myself. And had I climbed up on it I could have opened the transom and heard as if I had been in Jupien's shop itself. But I was afraid of making a noise. Moreover, there was no point. I did not even need to regret having taken several minutes to get into my shop. For to judge by what I heard in the early stages from Jupien's, which was simply inarticulate sounds, I assume few words were uttered. It is true that these sounds were so violent that, had they not constantly been taken up an octave higher by a parallel moaning, I might have thought that one person was slitting another's throat close beside me and that the murderer and his resuscitated victim were then taking a bath in order to erase the traces of the crime. From which I later concluded that if there is one thing as noisy as suffering it is pleasure, especially when there is added to it – failing the fear of having children, which could not be the case here, in spite of the far from convincing example in the *Golden Legend*[5] – an immediate concern with cleanliness. Finally, at the end of half an hour or so (during which time I

had surreptitiously hoisted myself up on my ladder so as to see through the transom, which I did not open), a conversation was joined. Jupien was energetically refusing the money that M. de Charlus wanted to give him.

Then M. de Charlus took a step outside the shop. 'Why do you have your chin shaved like that, he said to the Baron affectionately. It's so handsome, a good beard! – Pah, it's disgusting!' replied the Baron. He still lingered in the doorway, however, and asked Jupien for information about the neighbourhood. 'You don't know anything about the chestnut vendor on the corner, not on the left, he's a horror, but on the even-numbered side, a big, strapping fellow, very dark? And the chemist opposite, he's got a very nice cyclist who delivers his medicines.' These questions no doubt ruffled Jupien, for, drawing himself up in pique, like a great coquette betrayed, he replied: 'I can see you're inconstant.' Uttered in a sorrowful, icy and affected tone, this reproach no doubt found a response in M. de Charlus, who, in order to erase the bad impression his inquisitiveness had created, addressed an entreaty to Jupien, too low for me to be able to make out the words, which would no doubt necessitate their prolonging their stay in the shop and which sufficiently affected the waistcoat-maker to erase his suffering, for he stared at the Baron's face, fat and flushed beneath his grey hair, with the supremely happy look of someone whose *amour propre* has just been profoundly flattered, and, making up his mind to grant M. de Charlus what the latter had just requested, Jupien, after one or two remarks lacking in refinement such as 'You've got a fat bum!, said to the Baron, with an expression at once smiling, emotional, superior and grateful: All right, come on, you great baby, you!'

'If I revert to the question of the tram-driver,[6] M. de Charlus went on tenaciously, it's because, aside from anything else, it might provide a bit of interest for the journey home. Like the caliph who used to roam Baghdad mistaken for a simple merchant,[7] I sometimes indeed condescend to follow some curious young person whose silhouette has amused me.' Here I made the same observation as I had made concerning Bergotte. If ever he had to answer before a court of law, he would use, not the phrases apt for persuading the judges, but those Bergotte-like phrases that his peculiar literary temperament prompted in him naturally and from the employment of which he derived pleasure. Similarly, M. de Charlus used the same language with the waistcoat-maker as he would have done with members of society from his own coterie, exaggerating its tics even, whether because the shyness against which he was struggling to fight had impelled him to an excess of pride, or because, by preventing him from being in command of himself (for we are more ill at ease in front of someone who is not from our own circle), it forced him to unveil, to lay bare his true nature, which was indeed arrogant and a little mad, as Mme de Guermantes used to say. 'In order not to lose the scent, he went on, I jump like a little schoolmaster, like a good-looking young doctor, into the same tram as the young person herself, whom we speak of in the feminine only so as to observe the rule (just as we say when speaking of a prince: "Is Son Altesse in good health?").[8] If she changes trams, I take, along perhaps with the microbes of the plague, that unbelievable thing known as a "transfer", a number which, although it is being handed to *me*, isn't always Number i! In this way I change "carriages" as many as three or four times. I am sometimes left stranded at eleven o' clock in the evening at the Gare d'Orléans, and have to come home! If only it wasn't just from the Gare d'Orléans! But one time, for instance, not having been able to get into conversation earlier, I went as far as Orléans itself, in one of those frightful carriages where for a view you have, between the triangles of crochetwork known as "luggage racks", the photographs of the network's chief architectural masterpieces. There was only one seat free, and I had facing me, for a historical monument, a "view" of Orléans cathedral, which is the ugliest in France, and as wearisome to gaze at like that against my will as if I'd been forced to concentrate on its towers in the glass knob on those optical penholders that give you ophthalmia.[9] I got off at Les Aubrais at the same time as my young person where, alas (when I had been assuming every defect in her bar that of having a family), her family was waiting on the platform! For consolation, while waiting for the train that would take me back to Paris, I had only Diane de Poitiers's house.[10] It may well have charmed one of my royal ancestors, I'd have preferred a more living beauty. It's for that reason, as a remedy for the tedium of these solitary return journeys, that I'd rather like to get to know a sleeping-car attendant or the driver of an omnibus. Anyway, don't be shocked, the Baron concluded, it's all a question of class. With young society men, for example, I don't desire any physical possession, but I can't rest until I've touched them, I don't mean bodily, but touched some chord in them. Once, instead of leaving my letters unanswered, a young man never ceases writing to me, is mine to dispose of morally, I am appeased, or I would be at least if I wasn't soon gripped by concern about another one. It's rather curious, isn't it? Talking of young society men, of the ones who come here, you don't know any of them?' 'No, baby boy. Oh yes, one, dark, very tall, with a monocle, who's always laughing and turning round. – I can't tell who you mean.' Jupien completed the portrait, but M. de Charlus could not manage to discover whose portrait it was, for he was unaware that the former waistcoat-maker was one of those people, more numerous than we imagine, who cannot remember the hair-colour of people they know only slightly. For me, however, who knew of this infirmity in Jupien and who replaced dark by fair, the portrait seemed an accurate reference to the Duc de Châtellerault. 'To get back to the young men who are not from the lower orders, resumed the Baron, at this moment my head has been turned by a strange little fellow from the petty bourgeoisie, intelligent, who displays a prodigious incivility towards me. He has absolutely no notion of what a prodigious personage I am and of the microscopic vibrio that he represents. But after all what does it matter, the little donkey can bray all he likes before my august bishop's robe. – Bishop! exclaimed Jupien, who had understood nothing of the last words that M. de Charlus had just uttered, but who was stunned by the word bishop. But that hardly goes with religion, he said. – I have three popes in my family,[11] replied M. de Charlus, and the right to wear red mourning by virtue of a cardinal's title, the niece of the Cardinal, my great-uncle, having brought my grandfather the title of Duke that was substituted for it. I can see you have no ear for metaphors and are indifferent to the history of France. Moreover,' he added, by way less perhaps of a conclusion than of a warning, 'the attraction exerted on me by the young persons who avoid me, out of fear, naturally, for respect alone seals their lips from shouting aloud that they love me, requires of them an eminent position in society. There again, their feigned indifference may produce for all that the directly contrary effect. Foolishly prolonged, it nauseates me. To take an example from a class you will be more familiar with, when my town house was being repaired, so as not to provoke jealousy among all the duchesses vying for the honour of being able to tell me they had given me lodging, I went to spend a few days at a "hotel", as they say. One of the room waiters was known to me, I pointed out to him an intriguing young "*chasseur*", who closed carriage doors and who remained unamenable to my propositions. Exasperated finally, to prove to him that my intentions were pure, I got them to offer him a ridiculously large sum merely to come up and talk to me for five minutes in my room. I waited for him in vain. I then took such a dislike to him that I used to go out by the service entrance so I wouldn't see that wicked young rogue's pretty little face. I learned later that he'd never got any of my letters, which had been intercepted, the first by the room waiter who was envious, the second by the day porter who was virtuous, the third by the night porter who was in love with the young *chasseur* and used to sleep with him at the hour when Diana was rising. But my dislike has persisted all the same, and were they to serve me up the *chasseur* simply as game on a silver dish I wgould reject him and be sick. But there, what a shame, we've been speaking of serious matters and now it's over between us where what I'd been hoping for is concerned. But you could be of great service to me, as a go-between; and then no, that idea in itself puts a bit of spunk back into me and I feel nothing's yet over.'

From the very beginning of this scene, a revolution had been effected in M. de Charlus in my newly opened eyes, as complete and as immediate as if he had been touched by a magic wand. Up until now, because I had not understood, I had not seen. Vice (I put it thus for the sake of linguistic convenience), each person's vice accompanies him in the same fashion as the genie who was invisible to men for as long as they were unaware of his presence. Kindness, double-dealing, reputation, our social relations do not let themselves be discovered, we carry them concealed. Ulysses himself did not at first recognize Athena.[12] But the gods are immediately perceptible to the gods, as like equally soon is to like, and as M. de Charlus had been to Jupien. Up until now I had found myself in the same position when confronted by M. de Charlus as an absent-minded man who, faced by a pregnant woman whose bulging waistline he has not noticed, persists, while she smilingly repeats to him, 'Yes, I'm a little tired at present', in asking her tactlessly: 'What's the trouble then?' But should someone say to him 'She's expecting', he suddenly notices the belly and thereafter sees nothing else. It is reason that opens our eyes; an error dispelled lends us an extra sense.

Those who do not like to go for examples of this law to the Messieurs de Charlus of their acquaintance, whom for a very long time they had not suspected, until that day when, on the smooth surface of an individual no different from the rest, there have appeared, traced in a hitherto invisible ink, the characters

making up that word beloved of the ancient Greeks, need only, in order to convince themselves that the world around them appears at first bare, stripped of the innumerable adornments it offers to those better informed, remember how many times in their lives it has happened that they were on the point of committing a gaffe. Nothing, on this or on that man's face, devoid of characters as it is, could have given them to imagine that he was none other than the brother, or the fiancé, or the lover of a woman of whom they were about to say: 'What a cow!' But then, fortunately, a word whispered to them by a neighbour arrests the fatal expression on their lips. At once the words appear, like a Mene, Takel, Upharsin:[13] he is the fiancé, or he is the brother, or he is the lover of the woman whom it is not right to call a 'cow' in front of him. And this new notion in itself will entail a whole regrouping, the withdrawal or promotion of some fraction of the notions, henceforth complete, we had held concerning the rest of the family. In M. de Charlus, for all that another creature had been coupled with him, which differentiated him from other men, like the horse with the centaur, and that this other creature had formed one with the Baron, I had never noticed it. Now that the abstraction had been materialized, this creature, understood at last, had at once lost its capacity to remain invisible, and the transmutation of M. de Charlus into a new person was so complete that not only the contrasts in his face and his voice, but, in retrospect, even the ups and downs in his relationship with me, all that up until now had appeared incoherent to my mind, became intelligible, showed itself to be self-evident, just as a sentence that had presented no meaning for as long as it remained broken up into letters arranged at random, expresses, if the characters find themselves restored to their rightful order, a thought we will not again be able to forget.

Moreover, I understood now why, a moment ago, when I had seen him coming out from Mme de Villeparisis's, I had been able to think that M. de Charlus had the look of a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings, less contradictory than they appear to be, whose ideal is virile, precisely because their temperament is feminine, and who are in life like other men in appearance only; there where each of us carries, inscribed in the eyes through which we see everything in the universe, a silhouette intaglioed into the facet of the pupil, for them it is not that of a nymph, but of an ephebe. A race on which a malediction weighs and which must live in falsehood and in perjury, because it knows that its desire, which, for every created being, is life's sweetest pleasure, is held to be punishable and shameful, to be inadmissible; which must deny its God, since, even if Christian, when they stand arraigned at the bar of the court, they must, before Christ and in his name, defend themselves, as if from a calumny, from what is their life itself; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie even in the hour when they close her eyes; friends without friendships, notwithstanding all those that their frequently acknowledged charm inspires and which their often kindly hearts would respond to; but can we give the name of friendship to relationships that vegetate only by virtue of a lie and from which the first impulse of trust and sincerity which they might be tempted to show would cause them to be rejected in disgust, unless their dealings are with an impartial, or even a sympathetic spirit, but who then, misled in their regard by a conventional psychology, will ascribe to the vice confessed the one affection that is the most alien to it, just as certain judges presume and excuse murder more readily among inverts and betrayal among Jews for reasons deriving from original sin and the fatality of the race? Finally – at least according to the first theory I had then sketched out, which we shall see being modified in due course, in which this would have angered them more than anything else had the contradiction not been hidden from view by the very illusion that made them see and live – lovers to whom the possibility of that love, the hope of which gives them the strength to bear so many risks and so much loneliness, is all but closed, simply because they are much taken with a man having nothing of the woman about him, with a man who is not an invert and cannot, in consequence, love them; so that their desire would be forever unsatisfiable were money not to deliver up real men to them, and imagination not finally to lead them to mistake the inverts to whom they have prostituted themselves for real men. Their only honour is precarious, their only liberty provisional until the crime be discovered; their only position unstable, as for the poet who was yesterday being fêted in every drawing-room and applauded in every theatre in London, only to be driven on the morrow from every lodging-house, unable to find a pillow on which to lay his head,[14] turning the millstone like Samson and saying, like him: '*Les deux sexes mourront chacun de son côte*',[15] excluded even, save at times of high misfortune when the majority rally around the victim, like the Jews around Dreyfus, from the sympathy – sometimes from the company – of their own kind, who are disgusted to be made to see themselves as they are, depicted in a mirror that no longer flatters them but brings out all the blemishes that they had not wanted to remark in themselves and makes them understand that what they had been calling their love (to which, by playing on the word, they had annexed, out of a social sense, all that poetry, painting, music, chivalry and asceticism have been able to add to love) stems not from an ideal of beauty that they have chosen, but from an incurable malady; like the Jews once again (save those few who wish to associate only with those of their own race, and who have the ritual words and hallowed jokes constantly on their lips), shunning one another, seeking out those who are the most opposed to themselves, who want nothing to do with them, forgiving when rebuffed, elated when indulged; yet also brought together with their own kind by the ostracism that afflicts them, the opprobrium into which they have fallen, having finally acquired, by a persecution similar to that of Israel, the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often ghastly, finding (despite all the ridicule that he who mixes more with, is better assimilated to the opposing race, and is relatively, on the surface, less inverted, heaps on him who has remained more so) relief in the frequentation of their own kind, a support even in their existence, so that, while denying that they are a race (the name of which is the gravest insult), they willingly unmask those who succeed in concealing that they belong to it, less in order to hurt them, to which they have no objection, than to excuse themselves, and going in search, like a doctor of appendicitis, of inversion, even in history, taking pleasure in reminding you that Socrates was one of them, just as the Israelites tell you that Jesus was a Jew, without reflecting that no one was abnormal when homosexuality was the norm, no one anti-Christian before Christ, that opprobrium alone makes the crime, for it has allowed to survive only those who were recalcitrant to all preaching, all example, all punishment, by virtue of an innate disposition so special that it repels other men more (even though it may be accompanied by lofty moral qualities) than certain vices which contradict it such as theft, cruelty, or bad faith, which are better understood and thus more readily excused by the common run of men; forming a freemasonry far more extensive, more effective and less suspected than that of the lodges, for it rests on an identity of tastes, of needs, of habits, of dangers, of apprenticeship, of knowledge, of commerce and of vocabulary, in which even the members who do not wish to know one another at once recognize one another by natural or conventional signs, whether involuntary or deliberate, which indicate to the beggar one of his own kind in the great nobleman whose carriage door he is closing, to the father in his daughter's fiancé, to the man who had wanted to be cured, or to confess, or to be defended, in the doctor or the priest or the advocate of whom he has gone in search; all of them obliged to protect their secret, yet having their share in a secret of others which the rest of humanity does not suspect and which means that for them the most improbable cloak-and-dagger stories seem true; for in this fabulous, anachronistic life, the ambassador is friends with the convict; the prince, with a certain freedom of manner lent him by his aristocratic upbringing, which no fearful petty bourgeois could have, when he comes out from the duchess, goes off to confer with the ruffian; a reprobate portion of the human collectivity, but a significant portion, suspected in places where it is not, flaunted, insolent, unpunished in places where it goes undetected; numbering adherents everywhere, among the common people, in the army, in the temple, in prison, on the throne; living finally, a great number of them at least, in a dangerous, caressing intimacy with the men of the other race, provoking them, playing with them by speaking of their vice as if it were not theirs, a game made easy by the blindness or falseness of the others, a game that may be prolonged for years up until the day of the scandal when these animal-tamers are devoured; obliged until then to keep their lives hidden, to avert their gaze from where they would like to be fixing it, to fix their gaze on what they would like to avert it from, to change the gender of many of the adjectives in their vocabulary, a small social constraint compared with the inner constraint that their vice, or what is improperly so called, imposes on them, in respect no longer of others but of themselves, and in such a way that it does not appear to them to be a vice. But some, more practical, more impatient, who do not have time to go and do their own bargaining or to give up the simplification of their lives and the saving in time that can result from co-operation, have created two societies, the second of which is made up exclusively of people like themselves.

This is striking among those who are poor and have come from the provinces, without connections, with nothing but the ambition of one day becoming a doctor or a celebrated advocate, having a mind as yet empty of opinions, and a body devoid of graces which they expect rapidly to adorn, just as, for their little room in the Latin Quarter, they would buy furniture according to what they have observed and copied among those who have already 'arrived' in the serious and

useful profession in which they hope to enrol and to become famous; with these, their special proclivity, inherited without their knowing, like an aptitude for drawing, for music, or for blindness, is perhaps their one deep-rooted, despotic originality – which on certain evenings forces them to miss some meeting or other useful to their careers with people whose manner of speaking, of thinking, of dressing, of doing their hair they have on the other hand adopted. In their own neighbourhood, where they otherwise associate only with their fellow disciples, their mentors or some compatriot who has arrived and taken them under his wing, they have soon come across other young men drawn to them by the same peculiar proclivity, just as in a small town the fifth-form teacher and the notary become friends, who both love chamber music or medieval ivories; applying to the object of their hobby the same utilitarian instinct, and the same professional spirit that guides them in their careers, they meet with them at occasions to which laymen are not admitted, any more than to those which bring together connoisseurs of old snuff-boxes, Japanese prints or rare flowers, and at which, because of the pleasure of learning something new, the usefulness of the exchanges and the fear of competition, there reigns, as at a stamp market, at once the close understanding of specialists and the fierce rivalry of collectors. No one, moreover, in the café where they have their table knows what the meeting is, whether of an angling club, of sub-editors, or of sons of the Indre,[16] so correct is their costume, so cold and reserved their expression, and so guarded the only glances they dare to give at the fashionable young men, the young 'lions', who, a few yards away, are sounding off about their mistresses, and among whom those who admire them without daring to look up will learn only twenty years later, when some will be on the eve of entering an academy, and others old men in a club, that the most seductive, now a fat and greying Charlus, was in actual fact like themselves, but elsewhere, in another world, beneath other external symbols, with alien signs, the difference of which has led them into error. But these groupings are more or less advanced; and just as the 'Union des Gauches' differs from the 'Fédération socialiste'[17] and this or that Mendelssohn Society from the Schola Cantorum,[18] so on certain evenings, at another table, there are extremists who allow a bracelet to protrude from beneath their cuff, or sometimes a necklace in the opening of their collar, who, by their insistent glances, their giggling, their laughter and their mutual caresses, force a band of schoolboys to take to their heels, and who are served, with a politeness beneath which there broods indignation, by a waiter who, as on the evenings when he serves Dreyfusards, would delight in going off to fetch the police were it not to his advantage to pocket the tips.

It is to these professional organizations that the mind opposes the taste of the solitaries, and without too much artifice in one respect, since in so doing it is only imitating the solitaries themselves, who believe that nothing differs more from organized vice than what appears to them a misunderstood love, yet with some artifice nonetheless, for these different classes correspond, every bit as much as to diverse physiological types, to successive moments in a pathological or merely social evolution. Indeed, it is only very rarely that the solitaries do not, sooner or later, merge into organizations such as these, sometimes out of simple fatigue, or out of convenience (just as those who have been the most opposed to it end up installing the telephone, by receiving the Iénas or by shopping at Potin's).[19] They are generally none too well received there, however, for, in their relatively pure lives, the lack of experience, the saturation by daydreams to which they are reduced, have brought out more strongly in them those signs peculiar to effeminacy that the professionals have sought to erase. And it has to be admitted that with some of these newcomers, the woman is not merely one with the man inwardly, but hideously apparent, agitated as they are in some hysterical spasm by a shrill laugh that convulses their knees and their hands, and no more resembling the common run of men than those monkeys, with their melancholy, dark-ringed eyes and prehensile feet, which put on dinner jackets and wear a black tie; with the result that these new recruits are deemed, and by those less chaste moreover, to be compromising company, and hard of admission; they are accepted, however, and they benefit then from the facilities by which commerce, the great enterprises, have transformed the lives of individuals, have brought within reach commodities hitherto too costly to acquire or even hard to find, but which now submerge them in a plethora of what, on their own, they had been unable to discover in the largest crowds. Yet, even with these innumerable outlets, the social constraint still weighs too heavily on some, who are recruited chiefly from among those in whom no mental constraint has been exercised and who still hold their kind of love to be more uncommon than it is. Let us leave aside for the time being those who, led by the exceptional nature of their inclination to believe themselves superior to women, despise them, who make of homosexuality the privilege of great geniuses and of glorious epochs, and who, when they seek to share their taste with others, do so less with those who seem predisposed to it, as a morphinomane does with morphine, than with those who seem to them worthy of it, out of an apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection, Saint-Simonism,[20] vegetarianism or anarchy. Some, if you come on them unawares in the morning, still in bed, display an admirable woman's head, so general is the expression and symbolic of the sex as a whole; the hair itself declares it; its inflection is so feminine, when loosened, it falls so naturally on the cheek in tresses, that you marvel that the young woman, the girl, Galatea,[21] barely awake as yet in the unconscious of this man's body in which she is imprisoned, should have been able so ingeniously, of her own accord, without having been taught by anyone, to take advantage of the humblest escape route from her prison and find what was necessary to her life. The young man whose delectable head this is doubtless does not say: 'I am a woman.' Even if – for so many possible reasons – he lives with a woman, he may deny to her that he is one, may swear that he has never had relations with a man. Let her look at him as we have just shown him, lying in a bed, in pyjamas, his arms bare, his neck bare beneath his black hair. The pyjamas have become a woman's shift, the head that of a pretty Spanish woman. The mistress is appalled by the confidences entrusted to her gaze, truer than any words could be, or even actions, and which actions moreover, if they have not done so already, will not fail to confirm, for every human being pursues his own pleasure; and if this human being is not too vicious, he seeks it in a sex opposite to his own. But for the invert vice begins, not when he establishes a relationship (for too many reasons may govern that), but when he takes his pleasure with women. The young man whom we have just tried to depict was so obviously a woman, that the women who looked longingly at him were doomed (for lack of a particular proclivity) to the same disappointment as those who, in Shakespeare's comedies, are taken in by a young girl in disguise who passes herself off as an adolescent boy. The deception is the same, the invert knows it even, he can guess at the disillusionment the woman will experience once the travesty is removed, and senses how rich a source of poetic fancy it is, this mistake over gender. Moreover, for all that he may not confess, even to his exigent mistress (unless she is a citizen of Gomorrah), 'I am a woman,' with what stratagems, and what agility, will the unconscious yet visible woman within not seek out the masculine organ, with the obstinacy of a climbing plant! You have only to look at those curly tresses against the white pillow to understand that, in the evenings, if this young man slips from his parents' fingers, in spite of them, in spite of himself, it will not be to go to meet with women. His mistress may castigate him, may turn the key on him, the next day the man-woman will have found the means of attaching himself to a man, just as the convolvulus throws out its tendrils wherever a hoe or a rake is to be found. Why, admiring in this man's face a delicacy that touches us, a grace and a natural affability such as men do not have, should we be distressed to learn that this young man seeks out boxers? These are different aspects of the one reality. And the aspect that repels us is in fact the most touching, more touching than all the delicacy, for it represents an admirable unconscious effort on the part of nature: the recognition of the sex by itself, despite that sex's deceptions, appears as the unavowed attempt to break out towards what an initial error on society's part has set far away from it. Some, those whose childhoods were the most self-conscious no doubt, hardly concern themselves with what sort of physical pleasure they receive, provided they can relate it to a masculine face. Whereas others, whose senses are no doubt more violent, give imperious localization to their physical pleasures. The confessions of these last would perhaps shock the world at large. They live less exclusively beneath the satellite of Saturn perhaps,[22] because for them women are not altogether excluded as they are for the first kind, with regard to whom they would not exist were it not for conversation, flirtation and love in the head. But the second kind seek out the women who love women, who can procure a young man for them and add to the pleasure which they get from finding themselves with him; much more, they can, in the same way, find the same pleasure with them as with a man. Whence it is that, in the case of those who love the first kind, jealousy is excited only by the pleasure they might be finding with a man and which alone seems to them a betrayal, since they have no part in the love of women, have practised it only out of habit and so as to preserve the possibility of marriage, so little picturing to themselves the pleasure it may afford that they cannot bear for the man they love to enjoy it; whereas the second kind often inspire jealousy by their love affairs with women. For in the relationships they have with them, they play the role of another woman for the women who love women, and the woman offers them at the same time more or less what they find in a man, so that the jealous friend suffers from feeling that the man he loves is inseparable from the woman who is for him almost a man, at the same time as he feels

him almost escaping from him, because, for these women, he is something he does not know, a sort of woman. Let us not speak either of those young madmen who, out of a sort of childishness, in order to tease their friends or shock their parents, display a sort of fury in choosing clothes that look like dresses, in reddening their lips and blacking their eyes; let us leave them aside, for it is they whom we shall meet with again, once they have too cruelly paid the penalty for their affectation, spending a whole lifetime trying vainly to make reparation, by their severe, protestant demeanour, for the wrong they did themselves when they were carried away by the same demon that drives young women in the Faubourg Saint-Germain to live in a scandalous fashion, to break with all custom, to flout their families, up until the day when they set out perseveringly but unavailingly to reascend the slope that they had found such amusement in, or rather had been unable to stop themselves from descending. Let us leave until later finally those who have concluded a pact with Gomorrah. We shall speak of them when M. de Charlus comes to know them. Let us leave all those, of one variety or another, who will appear in their turn, and, to bring this first exposé to an end, say a word only about those of whom we began to speak a little earlier, the solitaries. Holding their vice to be more of an exception than it is, they have gone off to live on their own on the day when they discovered it, having long borne it without recognizing it, longer merely than others. For no one knows right away that he is an invert, or a poet, or a snob, or a miscreant. The schoolboy who was learning love poetry or looking at obscene pictures, if he then pressed up against a classmate, merely imagined that he was communing with him in the same desire for a woman. How could he believe that he was not like everyone else, when he recognizes the substance of what he feels in reading Mme de Lafayette, Racine, Baudelaire, Walter Scott, at a time when he is as yet too little able to observe himself to appreciate what he is adding to it of his own making, and that if the sentiment is the same its object is different, that what he desires is Rob Roy and not Diana Vernon?[23] With many of them, out of a prudent defensive instinct that precedes the clearer view of the intelligence, the mirror and walls of their room vanish beneath cheap colour prints of actresses; they write verses such as

Chloë is the one for whom I care,
She is divine, a girl so fair,
Such love for her my heart doth bear.

Must we on this account set at the beginning of these lives a taste not to be met with again in them subsequently, like the blond curls of the children who will later become the darkest? Who knows whether the photographs of women are not a beginning of hypocrisy, and a beginning also of horror for the other inverts? But the solitaries are the very ones for whom hypocrisy is painful. Perhaps even the example of the Jews, of a different colony, is not strong enough to explain how weak a hold upbringing has over them, and with what artistry they succeed in reverting, not perhaps to something as simply atrocious as suicide (to which, whatever precautions we may take, madmen revert, and, having been rescued from the river into which they had thrown themselves, take poison, procure a revolver, and so on), but to a life which not only can the men of the other race not understand or imagine, loathing its necessary pleasures, but whose frequent danger and permanent shame would fill them with horror. In order to depict them, we need perhaps to think, if not of those animals that can not be domesticated, then of lion cubs supposedly tamed yet which are lions still, or at least of blacks, who are driven to despair by the comfortable existence of whites and prefer the risks of the uncivilized life and its incomprehensible joys. The day having come when they discover themselves to be incapable at once of lying to others and of lying to themselves, they go off to live in the country, fleeing their own kind (whom they believe to be few in number) out of horror at the monstrosity or fear of temptation, and the rest of humanity out of shame. Having never achieved genuine maturity, and having lapsed into melancholy, from time to time, on a Sunday when there is no moon, they take a walk along a lane as far as a crossroads where, without a single word having passed between them, one of their childhood friends who lives in a nearby château has come to wait for them. And they take up the games of old once again, on the grass, in the darkness, without exchanging a word. During the week, they meet in one another's houses, chat about this or that, without referring to what has taken place, exactly as if they had not done anything and were never going to do anything again, except, in their dealings, for a hint of coldness, of irony, of irritability, of resentment, and sometimes of hatred. Then the neighbour leaves on an arduous journey on horseback or by mule, scaling mountain peaks and sleeping in the snow; his friend, who identifies his own vice with a weakness of temperament, with his timid, home-loving life, realizes that the vice will not be able to survive in his emancipated friend, at so many thousands of metres above sea-level. And indeed, the other gets married. The abandoned one is not cured, however (in spite of the cases in which we shall see that inversion is curable). He insists on taking in the fresh cream himself in the mornings, in his kitchen, from the hands of the dairy-boy and, on those evenings when he is too troubled by desire, he forgets himself to the extent of setting a drunkard back on his right road or straightening the blind man's blouse. No doubt the life of some inverts seems sometimes to change, and their vice (as we say) no longer shows in their habits; but nothing has been lost: a hidden jewel is recovered; when the quantity of urine decreases in an invalid, it is good that he should perspire more, but the excretion must still take place. One day this homosexual loses a young cousin, and, by his inconsolable grief, you realize that it was into this love, chaste perhaps and which had more to do with preserving esteem than obtaining possession, his desires had passed by a transference, just as, in a budget, certain expenses can be carried over into another financial year without affecting the total. As with those invalids in whom an attack of urticaria causes their habitual ailments to disappear for a time, so, in the invert, a pure love felt for a young relative seems momentarily to have replaced, by metastasis, habits that will sooner or later once again take the place of the vicarious, now cured sickness.

Meanwhile, the solitary's married neighbour has returned; faced with the beauty of the young wife and the affection shown her by her husband, on the day when the friend is obliged to invite them to dinner, he feels shame for the past. Already in an interesting condition, she has to go home early, leaving her husband behind; the latter, when the time comes to go home, asks to be taken some of the way by his friend, who is not at first touched by any suspicion but who then at the crossroads finds himself being thrown down on the grass, without a word, by the mountaineer soon to be a father. And the encounters recommence, up until the day when one of the young wife's male cousins comes and settles not far away, with whom the husband is now always going off. And should the abandoned one call and try to get close to him, the latter pushes him furiously away, indignant that the other should not have had the tact to sense the dislike he will from now on inspire. One time, however, a stranger presents himself, sent by the unfaithful neighbour; but the abandoned one is too busy and can not receive him, and realizes only afterwards with what object the stranger had come.

Then the solitary languishes alone. He has no pleasure other than going to the nearby seaside resort to ask for information from a certain railwayman. But the latter has been given promotion, and been posted to the other end of France; the solitary will no longer be able to go and ask him the times of the trains or the price of a first-class ticket, and before returning home to dream in his tower, like Griselda,[24] he lingers on the beach, like some strange Andromeda whom no Argonaut will come to deliver, like a sterile jellyfish that will perish on the sand, or else he remains idly on the platform, before the departure of the train, casting glances at the crowd of passengers that will seem indifferent, disdainful or distracted to those of another race, but which, like the brilliant luminescence with which certain insects adorn themselves to attract those of the same species, or like the nectar that certain flowers offer to attract the insects that will fertilize them, would not deceive the adept, almost impossible to find, of a pleasure too singular, too difficult to place, that is being offered to him, the confrère with whom our specialist might speak the unusual tongue; at most, some scarecrow on the platform will feign interest, but solely for material gain, like those who, at the Collège de France, in the hall where the professor of Sanskrit is speaking without any hearers, will follow the lecture, but only in order to get warm. Jellyfish! Orchid! When I was following only my own instinct, the jellyfish repelled me at Balbec; but had I known how to look at it, like Michelet,[25] from the point of view of natural history and of aesthetics, I would have seen a delectable girandole of azure. Are they not, with the transparent velvet of their petals, like the mauve orchids of the sea? Like so many creatures of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, like the plant that would produce vanilla, but which, because, in it, the male organ is divided by a septum from the female organ, remains sterile unless humming-birds or certain small bees transport the pollen from one to the other, or unless man fertilizes them artificially, M. de Charlus (and here the word fertilization must be taken in its moral sense, since in the physical sense the union of male with male

is sterile, but it matters that an individual should be able to meet with the one pleasure he is capable of enjoying, and that 'here below every soul' can give someone 'its music, its flame or its fragrance'),[26] M. de Charlus was one of those men who may be called exceptional, because, however numerous they may be, the satisfaction, so simple with others, of their sexual needs depends on the coincidence of too many conditions, too difficult to encounter. For men like M. de Charlus (allowance being made for the accommodations that will gradually appear and of which a hint may already have been given, demanded by the need for pleasure that resigns itself to a half-consent), a mutual love adds to the very great, at times insurmountable, difficulties it encounters among the common run of individuals, ones of its own so particular that what is always very rare for anyone at all becomes in their case almost impossible, and should a truly happy encounter transpire, or one that nature makes to seem so, their happiness, far more even than that of the normal lover, has something extraordinary, something selective, something profoundly necessary about it. The hatred of the Montagus and the Capulets[27] was as nothing compared with the impediments of every kind that have been overcome, the special eliminations to which nature must have subjected the already far from common chances that lead on to love, before a former maker of waistcoats, who had been anticipating setting quietly off for his office, should reel about, bedazzled, in front of a fifty-year-old man with a pot belly. This Romeo and this Juliet have good cause to believe that their love is not a momentary whim, but truly predestined, prepared for by the harmonies of their temperament, and not only by their own temperament but by that of their forebears, of their most remote heredity, so that the fellow-creature now conjoined to them belongs to them from before birth, has attracted them by a force comparable to that which governs the worlds in which we have spent our previous lives. M. de Charlus had distracted me from looking to see whether the bumble-bee had brought the orchid the pollen it had been awaiting for so long, and that it had the good fortune to receive only thanks to a chance so improbable it might be called a sort of miracle. But it was a miracle also which I had just witnessed, of almost the same kind, and no less marvellous. As soon as I had considered the encounter from this point of view, everything about it seemed imbued with beauty. The most extraordinary stratagems that nature has invented to force insects to ensure the fertilization of flowers which could otherwise not be so, for the male flower is too far removed from the female flower, or that which, if it is the wind that must ensure the transporting of the pollen, makes it much easier to detach from the male flower and much simpler for the female flower to trap it as it passes, by suppressing the secretion of the nectar, which is no longer of use since there are no insects to attract, and even the brilliance of the corollas that attract them, and the stratagem which, so that the flower may be reserved for the pollen it requires, which can fructify in it alone, causes it to secrete a liquid that immunizes it against other pollens – seemed to me no more marvellous than the existence of the sub-variety of inverts destined to ensure the pleasures of love to the invert who is growing old: of the men who are attracted, not by all men, but – through a phenomenon of correspondence and of harmony comparable to those that govern the fertilization of such heterostyled, trimorphic flowers as *Lythrum salicaria* – only by men much older than themselves. Jupien had just offered me an example of this sub-variety, though one less striking than others which any human herborist, any moral botanist, will be able to observe, despite their rarity, and which will present them with a frail young man awaiting the advances of a robust, pot-bellied fifty-year-old, and remaining indifferent to the advances of other young men, just as the short-styled hermaphroditic flowers of *Primula veris* remain sterile for as long as they are being fertilized only by other likewise short-styled *Primula veris*, whereas they welcome with delight the pollen from the long-styled *Primula veris*.[28] Where M. de Charlus was concerned, however, I came to realize subsequently that for him there were various kinds of conjunction, certain of which, by their multiplicity, their barely perceptible instantaneity, and especially the absence of contact between the two agents, were even more reminiscent of those flowers which in a garden are fertilized by the pollen from a neighbouring flower that they will never touch. There were indeed certain individuals that he found it enough to have come to him, and to hold them for a few hours under the sway of his tongue, for the desire kindled in him by some encounter to be appeased. Merely with words the conjunction was made, as easily as may happen among the Infusoria. On occasions, as had no doubt transpired in my own case on the evening when I had been summoned by him after the Guermantes dinner-party, assuagement came about thanks to a violent dressing-down cast by the Baron into his visitor's face, just as certain flowers, thanks to a spring-mechanism, spray the unconsciously complicit, disconcerted insect from a distance. M. de Charlus had passed from being the dominated to the dominator, and, feeling himself calmed and purged of his anxiety, dismissed the visitor he had at once ceased to find desirable. Finally, inversion itself arising from the fact that the invert approximates too closely to a woman to be able to have useful relations with her, it is thereby linked to a higher law which means that so many hermaphroditic flowers remain infertile, that is to the sterility of self-fertilization. It is true that inverts in search of a male are often content with an invert as effeminate as themselves. But it is enough that they should not belong to the feminine sex, of which they have inside them an embryo they are unable to make use of, as occurs with so many hermaphroditic flowers and even certain hermaphroditic animals, like the snail, which cannot be fertilized by themselves, but can be so by other hermaphrodites. Hence inverts, who readily link themselves to the ancient East or the golden age of Greece, might go further back still, to those experimental epochs when neither dioecious flowers or unisexual animals existed, to that initial hermaphroditism of which a few rudimentary male organs in the female anatomy and female organs in the male anatomy appear to conserve the trace.[29] I found the mimicry of Jupien and M. de Charlus, incomprehensible to me at the outset, as curious as those gestures of enticement addressed to insects, according to Darwin, by the flowers known as composites, which raise the florets of their capitula so as to be seen from further away, like a certain heterostyled flower which turns its stamens over and arches them in order to clear a path for insects, or which offers them an ablution, or quite simply, like the fragrance of the nectar, the brilliance of its corollas, which were at that very moment attracting insects into the courtyard. From that day forward, M. de Charlus was to alter the time of his visits to Mme de Villeparisis, not that he would have been unable to meet Jupien elsewhere, and more conveniently, but, just as they were for me, the afternoon sunlight and the flowering shrub were no doubt linked to his memory. He did not content himself, moreover, with recommending the Jupiens to Mme de Villeparisis, to the Duchesse de Guermantes and to a whole brilliant clientèle who were all the more attentive to the young embroideress inasmuch as the few ladies who had resisted or merely taken their time were the object of terrible reprisals on the part of the Baron, either so that they might serve as an example, or because they had excited his fury and stood up against his efforts at domination. He made Jupien's position more and more lucrative until finally he took him on as a secretary and set him up in the conditions in which we shall meet him later on. 'Oh, that Jupien's one very lucky man,' said Françoise, who had a tendency to play down or to exaggerate kindnesses according to whether they were shown to her or to others. This time, however, she had no need to exaggerate nor, moreover, did she feel any envy, being genuinely fond of Jupien. 'Oh, the Baron's such a good man, she added, so respectable, so devout, so correct! If I had a daughter to marry off, and came from the world of the rich, I'd give her to the Baron with my eyes shut. – But Françoise,' said my mother gently, she'd have lots of husbands, that daughter. Remember, you already promised her to Jupien. – Oh heavens, so I did, answered Françoise, the fact is he's someone else who'd make a woman very happy. It's all very well there being rich and dirt poor, that doesn't make you what you are. The Baron and Jupien, they're two of a kind right enough.'

Faced by this initial revelation, I had greatly exaggerated the elective nature of so selective a conjunction. True, each of the men of M. de Charlus's kind is an extraordinary creature, since, if he makes no concessions to life's possibilities, he searches essentially for the love of a man of the other race, that is of a man who loves women (and who in consequence will not be able to love him); contrary to what I believed in the courtyard, where I had just seen Jupien circling around M. de Charlus like the orchid making advances to the bumble-bee, these exceptional beings for whom we feel pity are legion, as we shall see in the course of the present work, for a reason that will be disclosed only at the end, and they complain themselves of being too many rather than too few. For the two angels who were posted at the gates of Sodom to learn whether its inhabitants, says Genesis, had done every one of the things report of which had risen as far as the Eternal, had been, and we can but rejoice at the fact, very ill chosen by the Lord God, who ought to have entrusted the task only to a Sodomist. He would not have been led benevolently to lower the flaming sword or temper the sanctions by the excuses, 'Father of six children, I have two mistresses, etc.' He would have answered: 'Yes, and your wife suffers the torments of jealousy. But even if these women were not chosen by you in Gomorrah, you spend your nights with a keeper of flocks from Hebron.' And he would immediately have made him retrace his steps towards the town about to be destroyed by the rain of fire and brimstone. On the contrary, all the shameful Sodomists were allowed to flee, even if, on catching sight of a young boy, they looked away, like Lot's wife, without thereby being

turned as she was into pillars of salt.[30] With the result that they had a numerous posterity, among whom this gesture has remained habitual, like that of those debauched women who, while appearing to stare at a display of shoes in a shop window, look round at a student. These descendants of the Sodomists, so numerous that another verse of Genesis may be applied to them, 'So that if a man be able to number the dust of the earth, so thy seed also shall be numbered,'[31] have established themselves over the whole earth, they have had access to all the professions and gain admission so readily to the most exclusive clubs that, when a sodomist is not admitted, the black balls are in the majority those of the sodomists, but who take care to incriminate sodomy, having inherited the lie that enabled their ancestors to leave the accursed city. It is possible that they will return there one day. Certainly, they form in every country a colony at once Oriental, cultivated, musical and slanderous, which has charming virtues and unbearable defects. A more thorough picture of them will emerge in the course of the ensuing pages, but I have wanted provisionally to forestall the fatal error that would consist, just as a Zionist movement has been encouraged, in creating a sodomist movement and in rebuilding Sodom. But, no sooner arrived there and the sodomists would be leaving the town so as to appear not to belong to it, would take a wife, would keep mistresses in other cities where they would find, moreover, all the appropriate amusements. They would go to Sodom only on days of supreme necessity, when their own town would be empty, at those times when hunger brings the wolf out from the woods, that is to say that everything would proceed in sum as in London, Berlin, Rome, Petrograd[32] or Paris.

At all events, on that particular day, before my visit to the Duchesse, I was not thinking so far ahead and was distressed at having, by attending to the Jupien–Charlus conjunction, perhaps missed the fertilization of the flower by the bumble-bee.

PART II

CHAPTER 1

M. de Charlus in society – A doctor – Characteristic face of Mme de Vaugoubert – Mme d'Arpajon, the Hubert Robert fountain and the merriment of Grand-Duke Vladimir – Mme d'Amoncourt, Mme de Citri, Mme de Saint-Euverte, etc – Curious conversation between Swann and the Prince de Guermantes – Albertine on the telephone – Visits while awaiting my second and last stay in Balbec – Arrival in Balbec – Jealousy with regard to Albertine – The intermittences of the heart.

As I was not in any hurry to arrive at the Guermantes soirée, to which I was not certain of having been invited, I whiled away the time outside; but the summer daylight seemed in no greater haste to move than I was. Although it was after nine o'clock, the daylight it was still which, on the place de la Concorde, had given to the Luxor obelisk an appearance of pink nougat. Then it modified the tint and turned it into a metallic substance, with the result that the obelisk did not merely become more precious, but seemed thinner and almost flexible. You fancied that you might have been able to twist it, that this jewel had already been bent slightly out of true perhaps. The moon was in the sky now like a quarter of orange, delicately peeled but with a small bite out of it. Later it would be made of the most resistant gold. Huddled all alone behind it, a poor little star was about to serve as the solitary moon's one companion, while the latter, even as it shielded its friend, but more daring and going on ahead, would brandish, like an irresistible weapon, like a symbol of the Orient, its marvellous, ample golden cresent.

In front of the Princesse de Guermantes's *hôtel*, I met the Duc de Châtellerault; I no longer remembered that half an hour before I was still haunted by the fear – which was soon indeed to take hold of me again – of coming without having been invited. We feel uneasy, and it is sometimes long after the moment of danger, forgotten thanks to our distraction, that we remember our unease. I said good day to the young Duc and made my way into the house. But here I must first note a trifling circumstance which will enable a fact that will follow shortly to be understood.

On that, as on the preceding evenings, there was someone who had the Duc de Châtellerault very much on his mind, without, however, suspecting who he was: this was Mme de Guermantes's doorman (known in those days as the 'barker'). M. de Châtellerault, very far from being an intimate – as he was of the cousins – of the Princesse, was being received in her drawing-room for the first time. His parents, who had quarrelled with her ten years ago, had made it up two weeks ago, and, obliged to be away from Paris on that evening, had asked their son to stand in for them. Now, a few days before, the Princesse's doorman had met a young man in the Champs-Elysées whom he had thought charming but whose identity he had been unable to establish. Not that the young man had not proved as amiable as he was generous. All the favours that the doorman had imagined having to grant so young a gentleman, he had, on the contrary, received. But M. de Châtellerault was as cowardly as he was imprudent; he was the more determined not to discover his incognito inasmuch as he did not know whom he had to deal with; he would have felt an even greater fear – though ill-founded – had he known. He had merely passed himself off as an Englishman, and to all the doorman's impassioned questions, who was eager to see someone to whom he was indebted for so much pleasure and largesse again, the Duc had merely answered in English, all the way along the Avenue Gabriel, '*I do not speak French*.'

Although in spite of everything – because of his cousin's maternal origins – the Duc de Guermantes affected to find something a trifle Courvoisier-like[1] about the Princesse de Guermantes-Bavière's salon, the general verdict on that lady's spirit of initiative and intellectual superiority was based on an innovation not to be met with anywhere else in those circles. After dinner, and whatever the importance of the rout that was to follow, the seats, at the Princesse de Guermantes's, were arranged in such a manner that you formed small groups, which, if need be, had their backs to one another. The Princesse would then mark her social sense by going and sitting in one of these, as if from preference. She was not afraid, however, of selecting and calling on a member of another group. If, for example, she had remarked to M. Detaille,[2] who had naturally agreed, what a pretty neck Mme de Villemur had, whose position in another group showed her from behind, the Princesse did not hesitate to raise her voice: 'Madame de Villemur, M. Detaille, great painter that he is, is busy admiring your neck.' Mme de Villemur understood this as a direct invitation to join in the conversation; with an agility born of her hours in the saddle, she caused her chair slowly to pivot through an arc of three-quarters of a circle and, without the least disturbance to her neighbours, sit almost facing the Princesse. 'You don't know M. Detaille?' asked her hostess, for whom her guest's skilful but modest about-face was not enough. 'I don't know him, but I know his work,' replied Mme de Villemur, with a winning and respectful expression, and an aptness that many envied, even as she was directing an imperceptible nod at the celebrated painter, her being summoned not having amounted to a formal introduction to him. 'Come, Monsieur Detaille,' said the Princesse, 'I'm going to introduce you to Mme de Villemur.' The latter then showed as much ingenuity in making room for the author of *The Dream*[3] as a little earlier in turning towards him. And the Princesse brought a chair forward for herself; indeed, she had summoned Mme de Villemur only so as to have a pretext for leaving the first group, where she had spent the regulation ten minutes, and granting an equal duration of her presence to a second. Within three-quarters of an hour, all of the groups had received her visit, which seemed every time to result from a sudden inspiration or a predilection, but which had the object above all of throwing into relief how naturally 'a great lady knows how to entertain'. But now the guests at the soirée were starting to arrive and the hostess had taken her seat not far from the entrance – erect and haughty, in her quasi-royal majesty, her eyes ablaze with their own incandescence – between two plain-looking Highnesses and the Spanish Ambassadress.

I lined up behind several guests who had arrived ahead of me. Facing me I had the Princesse, whose beauty, among so many others, is no doubt not the only one to remind me of that particular party. But our hostess's face was so perfect, had been struck like some beautiful medal, that for me it has preserved a commemorative value. The Princesse was in the habit of saying to her guests, when she met them a few days before one of her soirées: 'You will come, won't you?', as if she felt a strong desire to talk with them. But since, on the contrary, she had nothing to say to them, the moment they arrived in front of her, she contented herself, without getting up, with breaking off for a moment from her vacuous conversation with the two Highnesses and the Ambassadress to thank them, by saying, 'It's kind of you to come,' not because she thought that the guest had given proof of kindness by coming, but in order to enhance even further her own; then at once throwing him back into the river, she would add: 'You'll find M. de Guermantes at the door into the gardens,' so that you went off visiting and left her in peace. To some even she said nothing, contenting herself with displaying her admirable onyx eyes, as if you had come merely to an exhibition of precious stones.

The first person to go in ahead of me was the Duc de Châtellerault.

Needing to respond to all the smiles, all the waved greetings that came to him from the drawing-room, he had not noticed the doorman. But the doorman had recognized him from the very first moment. In a moment, he was going to know the identity he had so longed to learn. As he asked his 'Englishman' of two days before what name he should announce, the doorman was not merely moved, he judged himself to be indiscreet, tactless. He seemed to be about to reveal to all the world (who would suspect nothing, however) a secret that he was guilty of having uncovered in this way and of broadcasting publicly. On hearing the guest's reply, 'the Duc de Châtellerault', he felt so overcome by pride that he remained speechless for a moment. The Duc looked at him, recognized him, saw himself ruined, as the manservant meanwhile, who had regained control of himself and knew his armorial well enough to complete for himself an over-modest designation, shouted out with a professional vigour, mellowed by an intimate tenderness: 'His Highness Monseigneur the Duc de Châtellerault – But now it was my turn to be announced. Absorbed in contemplation of our hostess, who had not yet seen me, I had not reflected on the functions, terrible for me – though in another way than for M. de Châtellerault – of this doorman, clad in black like an executioner and surrounded by a troop of footmen in the most cheerful liveries, lusty fellows ready to lay hands on an intruder and show him the door. The doorman asked my name, and I gave it to him as mechanically as a condemned man allowing himself to be attached to the block. He at once raised his head majestically and, before I had been able to beg him to keep his voice down when announcing me so as to spare my *amour propre* if I had not been invited, and that of the Princesse de Guermantes if I had been, he shouted out the disquieting syllables with a force capable of causing the roof of the house to vibrate.

The illustrious Huxley (he whose nephew currently occupies a preponderant place in the English literary world) [4] recounts how one of his patients no longer dared go into society because often, in the very chair that was being politely indicated to her, she could see an elderly gentleman sitting. She was quite sure that either the gesture of invitation, or the presence of the elderly gentleman, was a hallucination, for they would not have been showing her to a chair that was already occupied. When Huxley, in order to cure her, forced her to return to a reception, she experienced a moment of painful hesitation wondering whether the hospitable sign they made to her was the real thing, or whether, in order to obey a non-existent vision, she was about to sit down in public on the knees of a flesh-and-blood gentleman. Her brief uncertainty was cruel. Less so perhaps than my own. From the moment I heard my own name being roared out, like the sound preceding a possible cataclysm, I had, so as at all events to plead my good faith and as if I were not tormented by any doubts, to advance towards the Princesse with a resolute air.

She caught sight of me when I was a few feet away and, what left me no longer in any doubt that I had been the victim of a conspiracy, instead of remaining seated as for the other guests, she got up and came towards me. A second later, I was able to heave the sigh of relief of Huxley's patient when, having made up her mind to sit down on the chair, she found it was unoccupied and realized that it was the elderly gentleman who was a hallucination. The Princesse had just held out her hand to me with a smile. She stayed standing for a few moments, with the kind of graciousness peculiar to the stanza in Malherbe which ends: '*Et pour leur faire honneur les Anges se lever*.'[5]

She apologized for the fact that the Duchesse had not yet arrived, as though without her I must be bored. In order to thus bid me welcome, she performed about me, holding me by the hand, a very graceful pirouette, in whose vortex I felt swept away. I was almost expecting her then to hand me, like the leader of a cotillion, an ivory-knobbed cane or a wristwatch. Truth to tell, she gave me nothing like that but as if, rather than dancing the Boston, she had been listening to a sacrosanct Beethoven quartet, the sublime strains of which she was afraid of disturbing, she halted the conversation there, or rather did not begin it, and, still radiant from having seen me enter, merely informed me of where the Prince was to be found.

I moved away and did not dare approach her again, sensing that she had absolutely nothing to say to me and that in her immense good-will, this marvellously tall and beautiful woman, noble as so many great ladies were who mounted the scaffold with such pride, could only, not daring to offer me some melissa cordial, have repeated what she had already twice told me: 'You'll find the Prince in the garden.' But to go up to the Prince was to feel my doubts revive in a different form.

At all events, someone had to be found to present me. Dominating every conversation could be heard the inexhaustible prattle of M. de Charlus, who was talking with His Excellency the Duc de Sidonia, whose acquaintance he had just made. As profession recognizes profession, so, too, does vice. M. de Charlus and M. de Sidonia had each immediately nosed out that of the other, which was, for both, to be, when in company, monologuists, to the extent of being unable to bear any interruption. Having at once adjudged that the malady was without remedy, as a famous sonnet has it,[6] they had made a resolve, not to stay silent, but each to speak without concerning himself with what the other would say. This had created that jumble of sound which, in Molière's comedies, is produced by several people saying different things at one and the same time. The Baron, with his resonant voice, was certain in any case of having the better of it, of drowning out the feeble voice of M. de Sidonia, without discouraging the latter, however, for, whenever M. de Charlus drew breath for a moment, the interval was filled by the susurration of the Spanish grandee, who had imperturbably continued discoursing. I might well have asked M. de Charlus to present me to the Prince de Guermantes, but I was afraid (with only too good reason) that he might be angry with me. I had behaved towards him in the most ungrateful fashion in not taking him up on his offer for a second time and in not showing him any sign of life since the evening when he had seen me home so affectionately. Yet I had certainly not had as an anticipated excuse the scene that I had just witnessed, that very afternoon, taking place between Jupien and him. I had suspected nothing of the sort. It is true that a little time before, when my parents were reproaching me for my laziness and for not having yet taken the trouble of dropping M. de Charlus a line, I had reproached them furiously for wanting to make me accept dishonourable propositions. But anger alone, and the desire to find the words that would be most disagreeable to them, had dictated this untruthful reply. In actual fact, I had not imagined there to have been anything sensual, or even sentimental, in the Baron's offers. I had said that to my parents out of sheer foolishness. But the future sometimes dwells in us without our knowing it, and the words thought to be untruthful describe an imminent reality.

M. de Charlus would no doubt have forgiven me my lack of gratitude. But what made him furious was that my presence that evening at the Princesse de Guermantes', as for some little time past at her cousin's, seemed to make a mockery of his solemn declaration: 'The only entrée to those salons is through me.' A grave fault, an inexpiable crime perhaps: I had not followed the hierarchical path. M. de Charlus well knew that the thunderbolts that he brandished at those who did not submit to his commands, or to whom he had taken a strong dislike, were beginning to pass, in the eyes of many, and however much fury he put into them, for thunderbolts of cardboard, and no longer had the strength to expel anyone from anywhere. But perhaps he thought that his power, although diminished, was still great and remained intact in the eyes of a novice such as myself. So I did not consider it the wisest course to ask a service of him at a party where my mere presence seemed like an ironic challenge to his pretensions.

At which moment I was stopped by a somewhat vulgar man, Professor E. He had been surprised to see me at the Guermantes'. I was no less so to find him there, for never before, and never again subsequently, had a person of his sort been seen at the Princesse's. He had just cured the Prince, who had already received the last rites, of an infectious pneumonia, and the very particular gratitude that Mme de Guermantes felt towards him for this was the reason why they had broken with custom and invited him. Since he knew absolutely no one in these drawing-rooms and could not prowl about there indefinitely on his own like a minister of death, having recognized me, he had felt that, for the first time in his life, he had infinitely many things to say to me, which enabled him to keep in countenance and was one of the reasons why he had come towards me. There was a second reason. He attached great importance to never being mistaken in a diagnosis. Now so many letters did he receive that he could not always remember clearly, when he had only seen a patient once, whether the illness had indeed followed the course he had assigned to it. It has not been forgotten perhaps that at the time of my grandmother's stroke, I had taken her round to him on the evening when he was having all those decorations sewn on. Some time having elapsed, he no longer remembered the announcement he had been sent at the time. 'Madame your grandmother is indeed dead, is she not?' he said to me, in a voice in which near-certainty had stilled a slight apprehensiveness. 'Ah, indeed! Anyway, from the very first moment I saw her, my prognosis was altogether gloomy, I remember very well.'

Thus it was that Professor E. learned or relearned of my grandmother's death, and I have to say to his credit, which is that of the medical body as a whole, without manifesting, or perhaps feeling, any satisfaction. The mistakes of doctors are innumerable. They err as a rule out of optimism as to the treatment, and pessimism as to the outcome. 'Wine? In moderation it can't do you any harm, it's a tonic when all's said and done… Physical pleasure? It's a function after all. I permit it but not to be overdone, you understand. Excess of any kind is a mistake.' What a temptation all of a sudden for the patient to give up those two resuscitators, water and chastity! If, on the other hand, you have a heart or an albumen problem, or something of the kind, then there is not long to go. Grave, but functional, troubles are readily ascribed to an imaginary cancer. There is no point in keeping on with visits that could never stay an ineluctable disease. Should the patient, left to his own devices, now impose an implacable regimen on himself, and then be cured or at the very least survive, the doctor, greeted by him in the avenue de l' Opéra when he thought him long since in the Père-Lachaise, will see in this tipping of the hat a gesture of sarcastic insolence. An innocent walk taken under his very nose would arouse no greater fury in the Assize Court judge who, two years before, had pronounced sentence of death on the seemingly fearless stroller. Doctors (this does not apply to all of them, naturally, and I do not omit, mentally, some admirable exceptions) are in general more disgruntled, more irritated by the quashing of their verdict than joyful at its execution. Which explains why Professor E., whatever intellectual satisfaction he will have felt no doubt at finding he had not been mistaken, was able to to speak only with sadness of the misfortune that had struck us. He was not keen to cut short the

conversation, which was keeping him in countenance and was a reason for staying. He spoke to me of the heat-wave we had been having in recent days but, although he was literate and could have expressed himself in good French, he said: 'This hyperthermia doesn't upset you?' The fact is that medicine has made some small progress in knowledge since Molière, but none in its vocabulary. My interlocutor added: 'What you need to do is to avoid the sudations weather like this causes, especially in overheated drawing-rooms. You can remedy them, when you return home and want something to drink, by heat' (which means, obviously, hot drinks).

Because of the manner of my grandmother's death, the subject interested me and I had recently read in a book by a great scientist that perspiration harmed the kidneys by causing what should issue elsewhere to pass through the skin. I had deplored the canicular weather during which my grandmother died and had come close to holding it responsible. I made no mention of this to Doctor E. but he said without being prompted: 'The advantage of this very hot weather, when perspiration is very abundant, is that the kidney is correspondingly relieved.' Medicine is not an exact science.

Now that he had hold of me, Professor E. asked only not to leave me. But I had just caught sight, making deep bows to the Princesse de Guermantes to left and to right, having taken a step backwards, of the Marquis de Vaugoubert. M. de Norpois had recently introduced me to him and I hoped that in him I would find someone capable of presenting me to our host. The proportions of the present work do not allow me to explain here the incidents during his youth in consequence of which M. de Vaugoubert was one of the few men (perhaps the only man) in society who found himself in what is known in Sodom as 'confidence' with M. de Charlus.[7] But if our minister to King Theodosius had some of the same faults as the Baron, they ranked as no more than the palest reflections of them. It was only in an infinitely milder, sentimental and simple-minded form that he displayed those alternations between sympathy and loathing through which the desire to charm and then the fear – equally imaginary – of being, if not despised then at least discovered, caused the Baron to pass. M. de Vaugoubert nonetheless displayed these alternations, but rendered absurd by a chastity, a 'platonism' (to which, highly ambitious as he was, he had, ever since the days of the Foreign Office examination, sacrificed all pleasure), above all by his intellectual nullity. But whereas, in M. de Charlus's case, immoderate praises were trumpeted in a veritable sunburst of eloquence, and salted with the subtlest, most mordant raillery, which marked a man for ever, with M. de Vaugoubert, on the contrary, sympathy was expressed with the banality of an utter mediocrity, a man of the fashionable world and a functionary, and his grievances (generally a complete invention, as with the Baron) by a malevolence that was untiring but mindless and all the more shocking in that it was usually in contradiction of remarks the minister had been making six months earlier and would perhaps be making again before very long: a regularity of change that lent an almost astronomical poetry to the various phases of M. de Vaugoubert's life, even though, this aside, no one could have put one less in mind of a heavenly body.

The 'good evening' that he returned had nothing of that which M. de Charlus would have wished me. To this 'good evening', M. de Vaugoubert lent, apart from the high ceremoniousness he thought to be that of society and of diplomacy, a jaunty, brisk, smiling tone, so as to seem, on the one hand, overjoyed by life – whereas inwardly he was brooding over the setbacks to a career lacking in promotion and in danger of ending in a forced retirement – and on the other hand, young, virile and charming, though he could see, and no longer dared even to go and inspect in his mirror, the wrinkles forming on the outlying parts of a face all of whose seductiveness he would have liked to have preserved. It was not that he would have wished for actual conquests, the mere thought of which frightened him on account of hearsay, of scandal and of blackmail. Having gone from an almost infantile debauchery to absolute continence on the day his thoughts turned to the Quai d'Orsay[8] and the desire to make a great career, he wore the look of a caged beast, casting glances in all directions expressive of fear, craving and stupidity. His own was such that he did not pause to consider that the street boys of his adolescence were no longer children and that, when a newspaper seller yelled '*La Presse*!'[9] into his face, he shuddered in terror more even than in desire, believing he had been recognized and tracked down.

But, failing the pleasures sacrificed to an ungrateful Quai d'Orsay, M. de Vaugoubert – and it was on this account that he would have liked still to be found attractive – had sudden impulses of the heart. God knows with how many letters he had pestered the Ministry, what personal stratagems he had deployed, and how many times he had drawn on the credit of Mme de Vaugoubert (who, because of her corpulence, her high birth, her masculine look and especially because of the mediocrity of her husband, was thought to be endowed with superior qualities and fulfilling the true functions of the minister) in order, for no valid reason, to get a young man entirely devoid of merit taken on to the staff of the legation. It is true that, a few months or a few years later, should this insignificant attaché have appeared to show, without the least hint of any evil intent, signs of coldness towards his chief, the latter, believing himself despised or betrayed, devoted the same hysterical ardour to punishing him as once to gratifying him. He moved heaven and earth to get him recalled, and the Director of Political Affairs would receive a letter daily: 'What is keeping you from getting rid of this fellow for me? Give him a bit of a talking-to, for his own good. What he needs is to be given a really hard time of it.' For which reason the post of attaché to the court of King Theodosius was far from pleasant. But in every other respect, thanks to his perfect good sense as a man of the world, M. de Vaugoubert was one of the French government's best representatives abroad. When, later on, a supposedly superior man, a Jacobin,[10] well-informed in every sphere, replaced him, war was not long in breaking out between France and the country ruled over by the King.

Like M. de Charlus, M. de Vaugoubert did not like to be the first to greet one. Both preferred to 'respond', forever fearful of the rumours that the person to whom they would otherwise have held out their hand might have heard on their account since they last saw him. In my own case, M. de Vaugoubert did not have to ask himself the question, for in fact I had gone to greet him first, if only because of the difference in age. He answered me with a wondering and delighted look, his two eyes continuing to jump about as if there were forbidden clover to be grazed on either side. I thought it proper to solicit from him my introduction to Mme de Vaugoubert before that to the Prince, about which I was counting on speaking to him only afterwards. The idea of bringing me into contact with his wife appeared to fill him with joy for himself, as for her, and he led me with resolute steps towards the Marquise. Arriving in front of her, and indicating me with both his hand and his eyes, with every possible mark of consideration, he remained nonetheless without speaking and after a few seconds withdrew, with a fidgety look, so as to leave me alone with his wife. The latter had at once held out her hand to me, but without knowing to whom this mark of affability was being addressed, for I realized that M. de Vaugoubert had forgotten what my name was, had perhaps not recognized me even, and not wanting, out of politeness, to admit it, had made the introduction consist of pure pantomime. So I was no further advanced; how to get myself presented to our host by a woman who did not know my name? Moreover, I found myself forced to talk for a few moments with Mme de Vaugoubert. This annoyed me from two points of view. I had no wish to remain for ever at this party, for I had arranged with Albertine (I had given her a box for *Phèdre*) [11] that she would come and see me a little before midnight. It is true that I was not in love with her; by getting her to come that evening I was obeying a wholly sensual desire, even though we were in that torrid season of the year when a liberated sensuality is more ready to visit the organs of taste and seeks coolness above all. More than for the kiss of a girl, it thirsts for an orangeade or for a bath, or to gaze indeed on that peeled and juicy moon that was quenching the thirst of the sky. But I was counting on ridding myself at Albertine's side – who brought back for me, moreover, the coolness of the waves – of the regrets I could not fail to be left with by so many charming faces (for the soirée the Princesse was giving was for girls as well as ladies). There was nothing attractive, on the other hand, about the morose Bourbon face of the imposing Mme de Vaugoubert.

It was said at the Ministry, without the least hint of malice, that, in this ménage, it was the husband who wore the skirts and the wife the breeches. Now there was more truth in this than they thought. Mme de Vaugoubert was a man. Whether she had always been one, or had become what I now saw her to be, hardly matters, for in either case we are dealing with one of nature's most touching miracles, whereby, in the second case especially, the human kingdom is made to resemble the kingdom of flowers. On the first hypothesis – whether the future Mme de Vaugoubert had always been so heavily mannish – nature, by a stratagem both diabolical and beneficent, gives to the young girl the deceptive aspect of a man. And the adolescent male who does not like women and wishes to be cured lights with joy on this subterfuge, of discovering a fiancée who for him is the embodiment of a market porter. In the contrary case, if the woman does not to start with have masculine characteristics, she gradually acquires them in order to please her husband, unconsciously even, by that sort of mimeticism whereby certain

flowers give themselves the appearance of the insects they seek to attract. The regret she feels at not being loved, at not being a man, virilizes her. Even aside from the case that concerns us, who has not observed how many of the most normal couples end up resembling one another, sometimes even by exchanging their good qualities? A former German Chancellor, the Prince von Bülow, had married an Italian woman.[12] In due course, on the Pincio, it was remarked how much Italian delicacy the German husband had acquired, and how much German coarseness the Italian princess. To move out to a point eccentric to the laws we are tracing, everyone knows of an eminent French diplomat whose origin was recalled only by his name, one of the most illustrious in the East.[13] As he matured, as he aged, the Oriental whom no one had ever suspected was revealed, and on seeing him you regretted the absence of the fez that would have been the crowning touch.

To come back to habits wholly unknown to the ambassador whose ancestrally padded silhouette we have just evoked, Mme de Vaugoubert embodied the type, acquired or predestined, the immortal image of which is the Princesse Palatine, forever in her riding habit and who, having taken more from her husband than his virility, and espousing the defects of the men who do not like women, denounces in her gossipy letters the mutual dealings of all the great noblemen at the court of Louis XIV.[14] One of the factors that further accentuate the masculine appearance of women such as Mme de Vaugoubert is that the neglect they are left in by their husbands, and the shame that they feel, casts a gradual blight on everything womanly in them. In the end they acquire the virtues and defects that the husband does not have. As he grows more frivolous, more effeminate and more indiscreet, they become the charmless effigy as it were of the virtues that the husband ought to be practising.

Traces of opprobrium, annoyance and indignation had clouded Mme de Vaugoubert's regular features. I felt, alas, that she looked on me with interest and curiosity as one of the young men who appealed to M. de Vaugoubert, and whom she would have so much liked to be now that her ageing husband preferred youth. She looked at me with the attentiveness of those provincial women who copy out of a fashion catalogue the tailored dress that looks so well on the pretty young person in the drawing (the same one on every page in point of fact, but illusorily multiplied into different individuals thanks to the difference in the poses and the variety of outfits). The vegetable attraction that drove Mme de Vaugoubert towards me was so strong that she went so far as to seize hold of my arm so that I might take her to drink a glass of orangeade. But I freed myself on the pretext that, on the point of leaving as I was, I had not yet had myself presented to our host.

The distance separating me from the entrance to the gardens where he stood talking to one or two people was not very great. But it made me more afraid than if, in order to cross it, I had had to expose myself to a running fire.

Many women by whom I fancied I might be able to get myself presented were in the garden, where, even as they feigned an impassioned admiration, they hardly knew what to do with themselves. Parties of this kind are generally anticipated. They scarcely become real until the next day, when they occupy the attention of the people who were not invited. If, on reading the article of a critic who has always evinced the greatest admiration for him, a true writer, devoid of the foolish *amour propre* of so many literary people, finds the name of second-rate authors listed but not his own, he does not have time to dwell on what might for him be cause for astonishment: his books reclaim him. But a society woman has nothing to do and, on discovering in the *Figaro*: 'Yesterday the Prince and Princesse de Guermantes gave a grand soirée, etc.,' she exclaims: 'What! I talked, three days ago, for an hour with Marie-Gilbert, without her so much as mentioning it!' and she racks her brains wondering what she might have done to the Guermantes. It has to be said that where the Princesse's parties were concerned, the surprise was sometimes as great among those who were invited as those who were not. For they exploded at the very moment when they were least expected, and sent a summons to people whom Mme de Guermantes had been neglecting for years. And almost all society people are so insignificant that each of their peers judges them only according to their degree of friendliness, cherishes them if invited, detests them if excluded. In the case of these last, if, indeed, the Princesse, even though they were among her friends, did not invite them, this often arose from her fear of displeasing 'Palamède', who had excommunicated them. So I could be certain that she had not spoken about me to M. de Charlus, otherwise I would not have found myself there. He was now leaning, facing the garden, next to the Ggerman Ambassador, on the balustrade of the great staircase which led back into the house, so that, in spite of the three or four female admirers who had congregated around the Baron and were almost screening him, the guests were obliged to come and wish him good evening. He answered by styling people by their names. You heard successively: 'Good evening, Monsieur du Hazay, good evening, Madame de la Tour du Pin-Vercluse, good evening, Madame de la Tour du Pin-Gouvernet, good evening, Philibert, good evening, my dear Ambassadress, and so on.' This made for a continuous yapping, interspersed with well-meaning advice or questions (to the answers to which he paid no heed), which M. de Charlus addressed in a tone at once gentler, artificial, in order to attest to his indifference, and benign: 'Mind the little one doesn't catch cold, gardens are always a bit damp. Good evening, Madame de Brantes. Good evening, Madame de Mecklembourg. Is your young daughter here? Has she put on that ravishing pink dress? Good evening, Saint-Géran.' Certainly, there was arrogance in this attitude. M. de Charlus knew he was a Guermantes occupying a preponderant place at this entertainment. But there was not only arrogance, and the very word entertainment evoked, for a man of aesthetic gifts, the sense of luxury and of curiosity that it may have if the entertainment in question is being given not by society people but in a painting by Carpaccio or Veronese. It is even more likely that the German prince that was M. de Charlus was picturing to himself rather the entertainment that unfolds in *Tannhäuser*, with himself as the Margrave, having a kindly, condescending word for each of the guests at the entrance to the Warburg, as they disperse into the castle or the park, saluted by the long phrase, a hundred times repeated, of the famous March.[15]

I had to come to a decision, however. I was well able to recognize under the trees women with whom I was more or less friendly, but they seemed transformed because they were at the Princesse's and not at her cousin's, and because I saw them sitting not in front of a Saxe plate but beneath the branches of a chestnut tree. The elegance of the setting played no part in it. Had it been infinitely less than at 'Oriane's' the same unease would still have existed inside me. Should the electricity happen to go off in our drawing-room and have to be replaced by oil lamps, everything seems altered. I was rescued from my uncertainty by Mme de Souvré. 'Good evening, she said as she came up to me. Is it long since you saw the Duchesse de Guermantes?' She excelled at lending words of this kind an intonation which proved she was not uttering them out of pure stupidity, like those people who, not knowing what to talk about, are forever accosting you and naming some common acquaintance, often very vague. She, on the contrary, had a fine conductor wire in her eyes, which signified: 'Don't think I didn't recognize you. You're the young man I've seen at the Duchesse de Guermantes's. I remember very well.' Unfortunately, the protection extended over me by these seemingly stupid yet delicately intentioned words was extremely fragile and vanished the moment I sought to make use of it. Mme de Souvré had the art, if it were a matter of backing up a request to someone of influence, of appearing both to be recommending it in the eyes of the petitioner, and not to be recommending this petitioner in the eyes of the exalted personage, in such a way that this double-edged gesture opened a credit balance of gratitude from the former without incurring any debt vis-à-vis the other. Encouraged by this lady's good grace to ask her to present me to M. de Guermantes, she seized on a moment when our host's eyes were not turned in our direction, took me maternally by the shoulders and, smiling at the Prince's face, which was turned away, so that he could not see her, she thrust me towards him with a movement purportedly protective yet deliberately ineffective, which left me stranded almost at my point of departure. Such is the cowardliness of society people.

That of a lady who came up to greet me by calling me by my name was greater still. I tried to recover her name even as I was speaking to her; I remembered very well having dined with her, I remembered things she had said to me. But my attention, straining towards that inner region where these memories of her were, was unable to discover the name. Yet it was there. My mind was engaged on a sort of game with it in order to grasp its contours and the letter it began with, and finally to illuminate it in its entirety. It was so much wasted effort, I could more or less sense its mass, its weight, but as for its forms, comparing these with the mysterious captive huddled in the darkness within, I said to myself, 'That's not it.' My mind might certainly have been able to create the most difficult names. But alas, it had, not to create, but to reproduce. Any action of the mind is easy when it is not subject to reality. Here, I was forced to submit. At last, suddenly, the

name came in its entirety: 'Madame d'Arpajon.' I am wrong to say that it came, for I do not believe it appeared to me under its own propulsion. Nor do I think that my numerous faint memories relating to this lady, whose help I did not cease to solicit (by exhortations such as: 'Come on, this is the woman who's a friend of Mme de Souvré, who has so simple-minded an admiration for Victor Hugo, along with so much terror and repugnance'), I do not believe that all these memories, fluttering about between me and her name, served in the very least to refloat it. In the great game of 'hide-and-seek' played out in the memory when we are trying to recover a name, there is not a series of graduated approximations. We can see nothing, then all of a sudden the exact name appears and quite different from what we thought we could divine. It is not it that has come to us. No, I believe rather that, as we go on through life, we spend our time distancing ourselves from the zone where a name is distinct, and that it was by the exercise of my will and my attention, which enhanced the acuity of my inward gaze, that I had suddenly penetrated the semi-darkness and seen clearly. At all events, if there are transitions between forgetfulness and memory, those transitions are unconscious. For the intermediate names through which we pass, before finding the right name, are themselves false, and bring us no closer to it. They are not even names properly speaking, but often mere consonants not to be found in the rediscovered name. The work of the mind as it passes from nothingness to reality is so mysterious, on the other hand, that it is possible after all that these false consonants are a pole held clumsily out to us in advance, to help us grapple the right name. 'All of which, the reader will say, teaches us nothing about this lady's disobligingness; but since you've been at a standstill for this long, let me, *Monsieur l'auteur*, make you waste one minute more to tell you how regrettable it is that, young as you were (or as your hero was if he is not yourself), you should already have had so little memory as to be unable to recall the name of a lady whom you knew very well.' It is very regrettable, you are right, *Monsieur le lecteur*. And sadder than you think, once it is sensed as heralding the day when names and words will vanish from the illuminated zone of the mind and we shall have to give up for ever naming to ourselves those whom we have known best. It is regrettable indeed that, from our youth on, it should require such labour to recover names we know well. But were this infirmity to occur only with names barely known and quite naturally forgotten, and which we do not want to weary ourselves by recalling, then this infirmity would not be without its advantages. 'And what are they, pray?' Well, Monsieur, the fact is that this malady alone causes us to take notice of and to learn, and enables us to analyse, the mechanisms of which we would otherwise be ignorant. A man who drops into his bed each evening like a dead weight and lives again only at the moment of coming awake and getting up, will that man ever dream of making, if not great discoveries, then at least some minor observations, concerning sleep? He hardly knows whether he sleeps. A spot of insomnia is not without its uses for appreciating sleep, for projecting a certain light into that darkness. An unfailing memory is no very powerful stimulus for studying the phenomena of memory. 'So Mme d'Arpajon finally introduced you to the Prince?' No, but be quiet and let me take up my story again.

Mme d'Arpajon was even more cowardly than Mme de Souvré, but her cowardice had greater excuse. She knew she had always had little influence in society. This influence had been further weakened by the liaison she had had with the Duc de Guermantes; the latter's rejection of her was the final straw. The ill-humour produced in her by my request to be introduced to the Prince resulted in a silence, which she was naïve enough to think was an appearance of not having heard what I said. She did not even realize that anger had caused her to frown. Or perhaps she did realize but was not troubled by the contradiction, using it for the lesson in tact she could give me without being too impolite, I mean a lesson which was wordless but no less eloquent on that account.

Mme d'Arpajon was in any case much put out, the gaze of many having been raised towards a Renaissance balcony at the corner of which, in place of the monumental statues that were so often placed there in those days, there leaned, no less sculptural than they, the magnificent Duchesse de Surgis-le-Duc, she who had just succeeded Mme d'Arpajon in the affections of Basin de Guermantes. Beneath the flimsy white tulle that protected her against the cool night air could be seen the supple body of a winged Victory. My one remaining recourse was to M. de Charlus, who had gone back into a room below, which gave access to the garden. I had ample leisure (since he was pretending to be absorbed in a simulated game of whist, which enabled him not to appear to see people) in which to admire the wilful and artistic simplicity of his dress coat which, thanks to tiny details that a couturier alone might have discerned, looked like a 'Harmony' in black and white by Whistler;[16] or rather black, white and red for M. de Charlus wore, suspended by a broad ribbon against the jabot of his evening-dress, the white, black and red enamel cross of a Knight of the religious Order of Malta. At that moment, the Baron's game was interrupted by Mme de Gallardon, who had her nephew in tow, the Vicomte de Courvoisier, a young man with a pretty face and an impertinent air: 'Cousin, said Mme de Gallardon, allow me to introduce to you my nephew Adalbert. Adalbert, you know, the famous Uncle Palamède you're always hearing about. – Good evening, Mme de Gallardon,' replied M. de Charlus. And he added, without even looking at the young man: 'Good evening, Monsieur', with a surly look and in so violently discourteous a tone that everyone was astounded. Perhaps, knowing that Mme de Gallardon had her suspicions as to his habits and had been unable to resist for once the pleasure of alluding to them, M. de Charlus was anxious to forestall whatever embroidery she might add to a friendly reception of her nephew, at the same time making a resounding profession of his indifference with respect to young men; or perhaps he considered that the aforesaid Adalbert had not replied to his aunt's words with a sufficiently respectful air; or perhaps, eager to press home his attack later on so attractive a cousin, he wanted to give himself the advantages of a previous act of aggression, like those sovereigns who, before engaging in a diplomatic démarche, support it with a military action.

It was not as difficult as I had thought for M. de Charlus to accede to my request for an introduction. For one thing, in the course of the last twenty years, this Don Quixote had tilted against so many windmills (frequently relatives who he claimed had behaved badly towards him), and had forbidden people to be invited with such regularity, 'as someone unfit to be received', by either male or female Guermantes, that the latter were beginning to be afraid of quarrelling with all the people whom they liked, and of being deprived until the day they died of the company of certain newcomers about whom they were curious, in order to espouse the thunderous yet unexplained grudges of a brother-in-law or cousin who would have wanted them to abandon wife, brother and children for his sake. Being more intelligent than the other Guermantes, M. de Charlus had noticed that only one in two of his vetoes was effective and, looking ahead to the future and fearing that one day it might be him of whom they would deprive themselves, he had begun to cut his losses, to lower, as they say, his prices. Moreover, if he was capable of giving an identical life to some hated individual for months, or for years, on end – to whom he would not have tolerated an invitation being extended, but would rather have fought, like a street porter, with a queen, the rank of whatever stood in his way no longer counting for him – his explosions of anger on the other hand were too frequent for them not to be somewhat fragmentary. 'The imbecile, the miserable devil! We're going to return him to where he belongs, sweep him into the gutter where, alas, he won't do much for the salubriousness of the town,' he would shout, even when alone at home, on reading a letter he considered irreverent, or on recalling a remark that had been repeated to him. But a fresh outburst against a second imbecile would dispel the earlier one, and, provided the first imbecile proved deferential, the attack he had occasioned was forgotten, not having lasted long enough to create a foundation of hatred on which to build. So perhaps – in spite of his ill-humour against me – I would have succeeded with him when I asked him to introduce me to the Prince, had I not had the unhappy idea of adding, out of scrupulousness, and so that he should not suppose me tactless enough to have entered on the off chance, relying on him to enable me to stay: 'You know that I know them very well, the Princesse has been very kind to me. – Well, if you know them, what need have you of me to introduce you?' he snapped at me and, turning his back, resumed his make-believe game of cards with the Nuncio, the German Ambassador and a personage whom I did not know.

Then, from the depths of those gardens where once the Duc d'Aiguillon had bred rare animals, there reached me, through the wide-open doors, a sniffing sound, of someone breathing in all this elegance and wanting none of it to go to waste. The sound drew closer, I made in its direction on the off chance, with the result that the words 'good evening' were murmured into my ear by M. de Bréauté, not like the jagged, metallic sound of a knife being ground on the wheel, let alone the cry of the young wild boar that lays waste the crops, but like the voice of a potential saviour. Less influential than Mme de Souvré, but less fundamentally afflicted than her by disobligingness, far more at ease with the Prince than was Mme d'Arpajon, under an illusion perhaps concerning my own place in the Guermantes circle, or perhaps knowing it better than I did, I yet had, in those first seconds, some difficulty in securing his attention for, with nostrils dilated and the papillae of his nose quivering, he was facing in all directions, his monocle-eye wide with curiosity as though he had found himself faced by five hundred masterpieces. But having heard my request, he welcomed it with satisfaction, led me towards the Prince and presented me to him wearing a hungry,

ceremonious and vulgar expression as though he were passing him, along with a recommendation, a plate of petits fours. Just as the Duc de Guermantes's greeting was, when he wanted, friendly, imbued with camaraderie, cordial and familiar, so I found that of the Prince stiff, solemn and haughty. He barely smiled at me, and addressed me gravely as 'Monsieur'. I had often heard the Duc make fun of his cousin's aloofness. But from the first words he spoke to me, which, in their coldness and seriousness, formed the most complete contrast with Basin's way of speaking, I realized at once that the fundamentally disdainful man was the Duc, who spoke to you from your first visit 'as an equal', and that, of the two cousins, the truly simple one was the Prince. In his reserve I found a greater sense, I will not say of equality, for that would have been inconceivable for him, then at least of the consideration one may accord an inferior, as occurs in any strongly hierarchical setting, at the Palais de Justice for example, or in a university faculty, where a public prosecutor or a 'dean', conscious of his high office, perhaps hides more actual simplicity and, once you get to know him better, more kindness, true simplicity and cordiality, beneath a traditional hauteur than someone more up to date in his affectation of a bantering camaraderie. 'Are you expecting to follow Monsieur your father's career?' he said to me with a distant yet interested expression. I replied summarily to his question, realizing he had only asked it in order to be gracious, and moved away to let him welcome the new arrivals.

I caught sight of Swann, and wanted to speak to him, but at that moment I saw that the Prince de Guermantes, instead of receiving Odette's husband's greeting there where he stood, had immediately, with the force of a suction pump, dragged him off to the end of the garden, but, so certain persons informed me, 'so as to show him the door'.

So distracted in society that I learned only two days later, from the newspapers, that a Czech orchestra had been playing throughout the evening and that there had been, minute by minute, a constant succession of Bengal fire, I recovered a certain capacity for attentiveness at the thought of going to see Hubert Robert's celebrated fountain.[17]

It could be seen from afar, set up to one side, in a clearing sequestered by beautiful trees, several of which were as old as it was, slender, immobile, solidified, allowing only the faintest spray falling back from its pale and tremulous plume to be disturbed by the breeze. The eighteenth century had purified the elegance of its lines, but, in determining the jet's style, seemed to have arrested its life; at this distance, you had an impression of art rather than the sensation of the water. The moist cloud that was perpetually gathering at its summit had itself preserved the character of the age, like those which congregate in the sky around the palaces of Versailles. But from close to, you became aware that, even as they respected, like the stones of an ancient palace, the design traced out for them beforehand, the waters were being constantly renewed as they sprang upwards, seeking to obey the ancient orders of the architect, and executing them accurately only by appearing to violate them, their innumerable scattered surges able to give the impression of a single impulse only from a distance. This last was in actual fact as frequently interrupted as the scattering of its fall, whereas, from a distance, it had seemed to me dense, inflexible, of an unbroken continuity. From quite close to, you could see that this continuity, altogether linear in appearance, was ensured at every point in the jet's ascent, wherever it ought to have been broken, by the coming into play, the lateral reprise, of a parallel jet that rose higher than the first and was itself, at a greater, and by now exhausting, height, relieved by a third. From close to, spent drops were falling back from the column of water and meeting their ascending sisters along the way, and now and again, torn and seized by an eddy of the air disturbed by this tireless upsurge, they drifted before capsizing into the basin. By their vacillations, and by travelling in the contrary direction, they frustrated, and with their soft vapour they blurred, the verticality and tension of this shaft, which bore above it an oblong cloud formed of innumerable droplets, yet appearing to have been painted an immutable golden brown, that rose, infrangible, immobile, slender and rapid, to add itself to the clouds in the sky. Unfortunately, a puff of wind was enough to send it obliquely across the ground; at times even, a single disobedient jet would diverge and, had it not remained at a respectful distance, would have soaked the incautious crowd of onlookers to the skin.

One of these minor accidents, which hardly ever occurred except at moments when the breeze got up, was somewhat disagreeable. Mme d'Arpajon had been led to believe that the Duc de Guermantes – in actual fact not yet arrived – was with Mme de Surgis in the galleries of pink marble which were reached through the double colonnade, hollow inside, that rose from the rim of the basin. Now, just as Mme d'Arpajon was about to enter on one of these colonnades, a strong gust from the warm breeze twisted the jet of water and inundated the good lady so thoroughly that, with the water trickling down inside her dress from her décolletage, she was as soaked as if she had been plunged into a bath. Then, not far away, a rhythmical rumbling sounded, loud enough to be audible by an entire army, yet prolonged in periods as if it were addressed not to the whole assembly, but successively, to each section of the troops; it was the Grand-Duke Vladimir[18] laughing for all he was worth at the sight of Mme d'Arpajon's immersion, one of the jolliest things, he liked to say afterwards, he had ever witnessed in all his life. A few charitable souls pointing out to the Muscovite that a word of condolence from him was perhaps in order and would give pleasure to the lady, who, although she would never see forty again, and even as she was mopping herself with her scarf, without asking for anyone's help, had extricated herself despite the water that had made the rim of the basin treacherously wet, the Grand-Duke, a kindly man at heart, thought action was called for and, the last drum-rolls of laughter having hardly been stilled, a fresh rumbling could be heard, still more violent than the earlier one. 'Bravo, old thing!' he cried, clapping his hands as if at the theatre. Mme d'Arpajon did not appreciate having her dexterity praised at the expense of her youth. And when someone said to her, deafened by the sound of the water, which was dominated even so by the thunder of Monseigneur: 'I believe His Imperial Highness said something to you. – No, it was to Mme de Souvré,' she replied.

I crossed the gardens and reascended the steps, where the absence of the Prince, who had vanished off to one side with Swann, had swollen the crowd of guests around M. de Charlus, just as, when Louis XIV was not at Versailles, more people gathered at Monsieur, his brother's. I was stopped as I passed by the Baron, while behind me two ladies and a young man were approaching to greet him.

'It's nice to see you here,' he said, offering me his hand. 'Good evening, Madame de la Tremoïlle, good evening, my dear Herminie.' But no doubt the memory of what he had said to me concerning his role as head of the Guermantes *hôtel* had given him the desire to appear to be feeling, with regard to what displeased him but which he had been unable to prevent, a satisfaction to which his lordly impertinence and his hysterical amusement at once lent a form of excessive irony: 'It's nice, he repeated, but above all it's very comic.' And he began to let out roars of laughter that seemed to testify both to his delight and to the incapacity of human speech to give it expression, as certain people meanwhile, knowing both how hard of access he was and how liable to insolent 'outbursts', approached in curiosity and then, with an almost indecent haste, took to their heels. 'Come, don't be angry, he said, touching me gently on the shoulder, you know I'm very fond of you. Good evening, Antioche, good evening, Louis-René. Have you been to see the fountain?' he asked me in a tone of voice more affirmative than questioning. 'It's very pretty, is it not? It's marvellous. It could be even better, of course, by doing away with certain things, then there'd be nothing to equal it in France. But even as it is, it's among the best things. Bréauté will tell you they were wrong to hang lanterns, to try and make people forget it was he who had that absurd idea. But, when all's said and done, he succeeded in making it only a little bit uglier. It's much harder to disfigure a masterpiece than to create it. We already had a vague suspicion anyway that Bréauté was no Hubert Robert.'

I rejoined the line of visitors who were entering the house. 'Has it been long since you saw my delightful cousin Oriane?' the Princesse asked me, who had shortly before deserted her armchair by the entrance, and with whom I now returned to the drawing-rooms. 'She's due to be here this evening, I saw her during the afternoon, added our hostess. She promised me. I believe in any case that you are dining with the two of us at the Queen of Italy's,[19] in the embassy, on Thursday. Every possible Highness will be there, it'll be most intimidating.' They could in no way have intimidated the Princesse de Guermantes, whose drawing-rooms teemed with them and who used to say 'My little Coburgs', as it might have been 'My little dogs'. And so Mme de Guermantes said 'It'll be most intimidating' out of sheer silliness, which, among society people, even overcomes their vanity. With respect to her own genealogy, she knew less than an *agrégé d'histoire*.[20] Where her connections were concerned, she was keen to show that she knew the nicknames they had been given. Having asked me whether I would be dining the following week at the Marquise de la Pommelière's, often known as 'la Pomme', the Princesse, having obtained a negative reply, was silent for a few

moments. Then, for no reason other than a deliberate display of involuntary erudition, banality and conformity to the prevailing spirit, she added: 'She's quite an agreeable woman, la Pomme!'

It was just as the Princesse was talking with me that the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes made their entry. But I was unable at first to go forward to them, for I was snapped up in passing by the Turkish Ambassadress, who, pointing to our hostess, whom I had just left, exclaimed, seizing hold of me by the arm: 'Oh, what a delightful woman the Princesse is! A being so superior to all others! I fancy that were I a man, she added, with a hint of Oriental obsequiousness and sensuality, I would devote my life to that heavenly creature.' I replied that I indeed found her charming, but that I knew her cousin the Duchesse better. 'But there's no comparison, the Ambassadress said to me, Oriane is a charming woman of the world who gets her wit from Mémé and Babal, whereas Marie-Gilbert is *somebody*.'

I never much like thus being told without possibility of reply what I am to think about people whom I know. And there was no reason why the Turkish Ambassadress's judgment as to the merits of the Duchesse de Guermantes should be any more sure than my own. On the other hand, which also explained my irritation with the Ambassadress, the fact is that the defects of a mere acquaintance, or even of a friend, are for us true poisons, against which we are fortunately 'mithridatized'. But, without making the least show of scientific comparisons and talking of anaphylaxy, let me say that at the heart of our friendly or merely social dealings, there is a hostility, cured temporarily but recurring in fits. Normally, we suffer little from these poisons so long as people are 'natural'. By saying 'Babal' and 'Mémé', to refer to people whom she did not know, the Turkish Ambassadress had suspended the effects of the 'mithridatism' which normally made her bearable. She had irritated me, which was the more unjust inasmuch as she had not spoken in this way in order to make me think she was an intimate of 'Mémé's, but because an over-rapid education had led her to name these noble lords according to what she believed was the local custom. She had completed her schooling in a few months without seeing it through to the end. But on reflection, I discovered another reason for my displeasure at remaining with the Ambassadress. It was not long since, at 'Oriane's', this same diplomatic personage had told me, wearing a serious, considered expression, that the Princesse de Guermantes was frankly antipathetic to her. I saw fit not to dwell on this about-turn: the invitation to this evening's party had brought it about. The Ambassadress was perfectly sincere in telling me that the Princesse de Guermantes was a sublime creature. She had always thought so. But never having up until now been invited to the Princesse's, she thought she must give to this kind of non-invitation the form of a voluntary abstention founded on principle. Now that she had been invited, and very likely would be from now on, her sympathy could express itself freely. There is no need, in order to explain three-quarters of the opinions held about people, to go so far as a love that has been spurned or an exclusion from political power. Our judgment remains unsure: an invitation refused or received determines it. Moreover, the Turkish Ambassadress, in the words of the Duchesse de Guermantes, who was carrying out an inspection of the drawing-rooms with me, 'did well'. She was above all very useful. The true stars of society are weary of appearing there. Anyone who is curious to set eyes on them has often to emigrate into another hemisphere, where they are more or less alone. But women of the Ottoman Ambassadress's kind, newly entered into society, do not fail to shine there, everywhere at once, so to speak. They are useful to performances of the kind known as a soirée or a rout, to which they would have themselves dragged from their death-beds rather than miss them. They are the extras on whom you can always count, zealous in never missing a party. Thus foolish young men, unaware that they are false stars, see them as the queens of fashion, whereas instruction would be needed to explain to them the reasons in virtue of which Mme Standish, not known to them and who paints cushions, far away from society, is at least as great a lady as the Duchesse de Doudeauville.[21]

In the ordinary course of things, the Duchesse de Guermantes's eyes were distracted and a little melancholy; she only made them shine with a flame of wit each time she had to greet some friend, absolutely as if the latter had been some witticism, some delightful shaft, some gourmet delicacy, the sampling of which has brought an expression of joy and refinement to the face of the connoisseur. But with these grand soirées, since she had too many people to acknowledge, she had decided it would be wearisome, after each one of them, to turn off the light each time. A literary gourmet, going to the theatre to see a new play by one of the masters of the stage, attests to his certainty that he will not be spending a bad evening by having already, even as he hands his things to the usherette, adjusted his lips for a judicious smile, and brought a light of sly approval into his eyes; so it was that, from the moment she arrived, the Duchesse would turn on the lights for the whole evening. And as she was handing over her evening cloak, of a magnificent Tiepolo red, to reveal a yoke of real rubies which encircled her neck, after casting the couturière's last rapid, meticulous and complete glance at her dress, which is that of the society woman, Oriane checked on the sparkle in her eyes no less than on her other jewels. In vain did a few 'well-wishers' like M. de Joinville dash up to the Duc to stop him from entering: 'Don't you know then that poor Mama is at the point of death? They've just given her the last rites. – I know, I know,' replied M. de Guermantes, pushing the intruder away in order to enter. The viaticum has worked wonders,' he added with a smile of pleasure at the thought of the costume ball he was determined not to miss after the Prince's soirée. 'We didn't want it known that we had returned home,' the Duchesse said to me. She did not suspect that the Princesse had invalidated these words for me in advance by recounting how she had seen her cousin briefly, who had promised to come. The Duc, after a long stare, with which he crushed his wife for five whole minutes: 'I told Oriane of the doubts you had.' Now that she could see they were unfounded and that she need take no steps to try to dispel them, she declared them to be absurd, and teased me at length. 'Fancy supposing you weren't invited! One is always invited! And then, there was me. Do you think I wouldn't have been able to get you invited to my cousin's?' I have to say that often, subsequently, she did far more difficult things for me; nevertheless, I was careful not to take her words in the sense of my having shown too great a reserve. I was beginning to know the precise value of the spoken or silent language of aristocratic amiability, an amiability happy to pour balm on the sense of inferiority of those in respect of whom it is exercised, but not, however, to the extent of dispelling it, in which event it would no longer have any *raison d'être*. 'But you are our equal, if not better,' the Guermantes seemed, by all their actions, to be saying; and they said it in the nicest way imaginable, so as to be liked and admired, but not so as to be believed; to tease out the fictitious nature of this amiability was to have been what they called well brought up; to believe that amiability to be real was to lack breeding. I received as it happens a short time after this a lesson which finally taught me, with the most perfect exactitude, the extent and limits of certain forms of aristocratic amiability. It was at a matinée given by the Duchesse de Montmorency[22] for the Queen of England; a sort of small cortège had formed to go to the buffet, at the head of which walked the sovereign with, on her arm, the Duc de Guermantes. This was the moment of my own arrival. With his free hand, the Duc made, from a good forty metres away, innumerable gestures of summons and of friendship, which seemed to be saying that I could approach without fear, that I would not be eaten alive in place of the sandwiches. But, I, who was beginning to become word perfect in the language of the courts, instead of moving even a single step closer, gave a deep bow from my forty metres of distance, but without smiling, as I would have done faced by someone I hardly knew, then continued on my way in the opposite direction. I might have written a masterpiece, and the Guermantes would have done me less honour than for this bow. It did not go unobserved by the eyes either of the Duc, even though he had to respond to more than five hundred people that day, or of the Duchesse, who, having met my mother, recounted it to her, and, while being careful not to say that I had been in the wrong, that I should have gone up, told her that her husband had marvelled at my bow, that it would have been impossible to make it any more expressive. They did not cease to discover all the virtues in that bow, without however mentioning that which had seemed the most precious, to wit that it had been discreet, nor did they cease paying me compliments which I realized were less a reward for the past than an indication for the future, on the lines of that tactfully supplied to his pupils by the head of an educational establishment: 'Don't forget, my dear children, that these prizes are less for you than for your parents, so that they will send you back next year.' Thus it was that Mme de Marsantes, when someone from a different world entered her circle, extolled before him those discreet people 'whom one finds when one goes in search of them and who keep themselves to themselves the rest of the time', just as, in a roundabout way, you advise a servant who smells that bathing does wonders for the health.

While, before even she had left the entrance hall, I was talking with Mme de Guermantes, I heard a voice of a kind that, in the future, I was to be able to distinguish beyond possibility of error. It was, in this particular instance, that of M. Vaugoubert talking with M. de Charlus. A clinician has no need even for the patient under observation to lift his shirt nor to listen to his breathing, the voice is sufficient. How many times later on was I not struck in a drawing-room by the

intonation or the laugh of some man who was imitating exactly the language of his profession or the manners of his circle, and affecting a severe refinement or a coarse familiarity, yet the falsity of whose voice acted like a tuning-fork on my practised ear and was enough to tell me 'he's a Charlus'! At that moment, the entire staff of an embassy went by, and bowed to M. de Charlus. Although my discovery of the kind of sickness in question dated only from that same day (when I had caught sight of M. de Charlus and Jupien), I would not have needed, in order to make a diagnosis, to ask any questions or listen to any chests. But M. Vaugoubert, talking with M. de Charlus, seemed unsure. Yet he ought to have known how things stood after the doubts of his adolescence. The invert believes he is the only one of his kind in the entire universe; only later does he imagine – another exaggeration – that the sole exception is the normal man. But, ambitious yet timorous, M. de Vaugoubert had not yielded for a long time past to what for him would have been pleasure. The diplomatic career had had the same effect on his life as if he had taken holy orders. Coupled with his assiduity at the École des Sciences Politiques,[23] it had condemned him since his twenties to the chastity of a Christian. Thus, just as each sense loses some of its strength and acuity, and atrophies once it is no longer exercised, M. de Vaugoubert, like the civilized man who would no longer be capable of the feats of strength or the keenness of hearing of the cave-man, had lost that special perspicacity which was rarely found wanting in M. de Charlus; and at official dinner-tables, whether in Paris or abroad, the Minister Plenipotentiary no longer managed even to recognize those who, under the disguise of their uniforms, were in fact of his own kind. A few names uttered by M. de Charlus, indignant should his own tastes be mentioned but always amused to let those of others be known, came as a delightful surprise to M. de Vaugoubert. Not that, after all these years, he dreamed of taking advantage of any such windfall. But these rapid revelations, similar to those which, in Racine's tragedies, inform Athalie and Abner that Joas is of the race of David, or that Esther, seated in the purple, has kinsfolk who are 'yids',[24] by altering the aspect of the X… Legation or of this or that department of the Foreign Ministry, rendered these palaces retrospectively as mysterious as the Temple of Jerusalem or the throne-room of Suze.[25] For the embassy the young personnel of which came up as one to shake M. de Charlus's hand, M. de Vaugoubert adopted the wondering expression of Elise exclaiming in *Esther*:

> *Ciel! Quel nombreux essaim d'innocentes beautés*
> *S'offre à mes yeux en foule et sort de tous côtés!*
> *Quelle aimable pudeur sur leur visage est peinte!*[26]

Then, anxious to be 'better informed', he smiled and cast a fatuously questioning and concupiscent glance at M. de Charlus: 'Oh come, but of course,' said M. de Charlus, with the learned expression of a scholar talking to an ignoramus. Instantly, M. de Vaugoubert (which greatly annoyed M. de Charlus) could no longer take his eyes off these young secretaries, whom the Ambassador of X… to France, a habitual offender, had not selected at random. M. de Vaugoubert fell silent, I could see only his eyes. But, accustomed since childhood to attribute the language of the classics, even to what is speechless, I made M. de Vaugoubert's eyes speak the lines in which Esther explains to Elise that, out of zeal for his religion, Mordecai has wanted only girls who belonged to it to attend on the Queen.

> *Cependant son amour pour notre nation*
> *A peuplé ce palais de filles de Sion,*
> *Jeunes et tendres fleurs par le sort agitées,*
> *Sous un ciel étranger comme moi transplantées.*
> *Dans un lieu séparé de profanes témoins*
> *Il* (the excellent ambassador) *met à les former son étude et ses soins.*[27]

M. de Vaugoubert finally spoke, other than by his glances. 'Who knows, he said mournfully, whether, in the country where I reside, the same thing does not exist? – It's likely, replied M. de Charlus, starting with King Theodosius, although I don't know anything positive about him. – Oh no, absolutely not! – Then it's not permitted to look like one to that extent. And he has his fancy ways. He's one of the "darling" kind, the kind I detest most. I wouldn't dare show myself with him in the street. Anyway, you must certainly know him for what he is, it's common knowledge. – You're totally mistaken about him. He's charming as it happens. The day when the agreement with France was signed, the King embraced me. I have never been so moved. – That was the moment to tell him what you wanted. – Oh, good God, how horrible, supposing he'd even suspected! But I have no fears on that score.'

Words which I overheard, for I was not far away, and which led me to recite in my head:

> *Le roi jusqu'à ce jour ignore qui je suis,*
> *Et ce secret toujours tient ma langue enchaînée.*[28]

This dialogue, half mute, half spoken, had lasted only a few moments and I had not yet taken more than a few steps into the drawing-rooms with the Duchesse de Guermantes when a small dark-haired woman, extremely pretty, stopped her: 'I'd very much like to call on you. D'Annunzio[29] caught sight of you from a box and wrote a letter to the Princesse de T. in which he says he'd never seen anything so lovely. He'd give his whole life for ten minutes' conversation with you. At all events, even if you can't or won't, the letter is in my possession. You must fix a time for us to meet. There are certain secret things I can't say here. I can see you don't recognize me, she added, addressing herself to me; I met you at the Princesse de Parme's (where I had never been). The Russian Emperor would like your father to be sent to Petersburg. If you were able to come on Tuesday, Isvolsky[30] will in fact be there, he could talk to you about it. I've a present to give you, darling, she added, turning to the Duchesse, which I wouldn't give to anyone except you. The manuscripts of three of Ibsen's plays,[31] which he had his old nurse bring me. I shall keep one and give you the other two.'

The Duc de Guermantes was not enchanted with these offers. Unsure whether Ibsen or d'Annunzio were dead or alive, he could already see writers and dramatists coming to call on his wife and putting her into their works. Society people readily picture books to themselves as a sort of cube, one face of which has been removed, so that the author need waste no time in 'bringing in' the people he meets. This obviously is underhand, and they are people of little worth. Admittedly, it would not be without interest to meet them 'in passing', for thanks to them, when you read a book or an article, you get to know the 'inside story', can 'remove the masks'. But for all that, the wisest course is to stick to authors who are dead. The one author whom M. de Guermantes considered 'perfectly proper' was the gentleman who wrote the death notices in the *Gaulois*.[32] He at least contented himself with citing the name of M. de Guermantes at the head of those persons remarked 'among others' at the funerals where the Duc had signed the list. When the latter preferred that his name should not appear, instead of signing he sent a letter of condolence to the deceased person's family, assuring them of the deep sadness that he felt. Should this family then have inserted in the newspaper: 'Among the letters received, let us cite that from the Duc de Guermantes, etc.', this was not the fault of the gossip writer, but of the son, brother or father of the person deceased, whom the Duc described as *arrivistes* and with whom he was determined to have no further dealings (what he called, being unclear as to the meaning of these locutions, 'having a bone to pick'). The fact is that the names of Ibsen and d'Annunzio, and their uncertain survival, brought a frown from the Duc, not as yet far enough away from us not to have heard the sundry civilities of Mme Timoléon d'Amoncourt. She was a charming woman, of a quickness of mind, like her beauty, so captivating that one of these alone would have been sufficient attraction. But, born outside the circles in which she was now living and, after aspiring to start with only to a literary salon, successively and exclusively the friend – never the lover, her morals were of the purest – of each great writer who gave her all his manuscripts and wrote books for her, chance having introduced her into the Faubourg Saint-Germain, these literary privileges were of service to her there. Her situation was such now that she had no need to dispense any favours other than those bestowed by her presence. But, having got used in the old days to doing services for people, and to handling them tactfully, she had persevered, even though it was no longer necessary. She always had a

state secret to reveal to you, a potentate whom you must meet, a water-colour by a master to offer you. There was an element of falsehood certainly in all these futile attractions, but they made of her life a comedy of scintillating complexity and it was a fact that she had secured the appointment of prefects and generals.

As she walked beside me, the Duchesse de Guermantes allowed the azure light of her eyes to float in front of her, but undirected, so as to avoid the people with whom she was keen not to come into contact, but whom she could sometimes make out in the distance like a menacing reef. We were advancing between a double hedge of guests who, aware that they would never get to know 'Oriane', wanted at least, as a curiosity, to point her out to their wives: 'Ursule, quick, quick, come and see Madame de Guermantes who's talking with that young man.' And you felt it would not have taken much for them to climb up on to chairs so as to have a better view, as at the 14 July parade or the Grand Prix.[33] It was not that the Duchesse de Guermantes had a more aristocratic salon than her cousin. The first was frequented by people whom the second would never have wished to invite, above all because of her husband. She would never have received Mme Alphonse de Rothschild, who, a close friend of Mme de La Trémoïlle and of Mme de Sagan, as was Oriane herself, was often to be seen at the last named's. And the same went for Baron Hirsch,[34] whom the Prince of Wales had brought to her house but not to that of the Princesse, who would not have taken to him, as well as for a number of great Bonapartist or even Republican celebrities, who interested the Duchesse but whom the Prince, a convinced Royalist, would have refused to receive. His anti-Semitism, being also a principle with him, made no concessions to the fashionable, however highly accredited, and if he received Swann, whose friend he had been from a long way back, being moreover the only one of the Guermantes who addressed him as Swann and not as Charles, it was because, knowing that Swann's grandmother, a Protestant married to a Jew, had been the mistress of the Duc de Berri,[35] he tried, from time to time, to believe in the legend which had it that Swann's father was an illegitimate son of the Prince. On this hypothesis, which was, however, false, Swann, the son of a Catholic, who had himself been the son of a Bourbon and a Catholic woman, was Christian through and through.

'What, you don't know these splendours?' the Duchesse said to me, referring to the house we were in. But having sung the praises of her cousin's 'palace', she hastened to add that she infinitely preferred her own 'humble abode'. 'It's admirable for *visiting*, here. But I'd die of sadness if I had to stay and sleep in rooms where so many historical events have taken place. It would have the effect on me of having remained behind after closing time, of having been forgotten, in the château of Blois or Fontainebleau or even at the Louvre, and of having as my one recourse against unhappiness to tell myself that I'm in the room where Monaldeschi was murdered.[36] As camomile tea, that wouldn't do. Hello, there's Mme de Saint-Euverte. We had dinner there just the other day. As it's tomorrow she gives her big annual shindig, I thought she'd have gone off to bed. But she can't miss a party. If this one had been taking place in the country, she'd have climbed into a delivery van rather than not have gone to it.'

In point of fact, Mme de Saint-Euverte had come there, that evening, less for the pleasure of not missing someone else's party than to ensure the success of her own, to recruit the final adherents and as it were review *in extremis* the troops who would the next day be manoeuvring brilliantly at her '*garden-party*'. Because, for quite some years now, the guests at the Saint-Euverte parties had been no longer at all the same as in the old days. The female notabilities of the Guermantes circle, at that time very thin on the ground, had – overwhelmed with courtesies by their hostess – little by little brought their women friends. At the same time, by her progressive hard work in parallel, but in the opposite direction, Mme de Saint-Euverte had, year by year, reduced the numbers of people unknown to the fashionable world. First one, then another, had ceased to be seen there. For a time a system of 'batches' operated, which, thanks to parties over which a veil was cast, enabled the reprobates to be invited to come and be entertained among themselves, which excused her from inviting them together with the people of substance. What cause for complaint could they have? Did they not get (*panem et circenses*) petits fours and a fine programme of music? And so, in some sort of symmetry with the two duchesses in exile who, in the old days, when the Saint-Euverte salon made its bow, were to be seen, like two caryatids, holding up its tottering ridgepiece, in recent years, only two heterogeneous figures were to be made out, mingling with the *beau monde*: old Mme de Cambremer and an architect's wife with a beautiful voice whom they were often obliged to ask to sing. But no longer knowing anyone at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, in mourning for their lost companions, and feeling themselves to be in the way, they looked as though they were ready to die of cold, like two swallows that have not emigrated in time. And so the following year they were not asked; Mme de Franquetot tried to intercede on behalf of her cousin, who was so very fond of music. But since she was unable to obtain any response on her behalf more explicit than the words: 'But it's always possible to come in and listen to the music if it amuses you, there's no crime in that!', Mme de Cambremer did not consider the invitation sufficiently pressing and stayed away.

Such a transmutation having been effected by Mme de Saint-Euverte, from a salon for lepers into a salon for great ladies (the latest form, ultra-chic to all appearances, that it had taken), it might seem surprising that the person who tomorrow would be giving the season's most brilliant party should have needed to come on the eve to address a supreme appeal to her troops. But the fact was that the pre-eminence of the Saint-Euverte salon existed only for those whose social life consists merely in reading the accounts of matinées and soirées in the *Gaulois* or the *Figaro*, without ever having been to any of them. For those socialites who encounter society only by way of the newspaper, the enumeration of the Ambassadresses of England, Austria, etc., and the Duchesses d'Uzès,[37] de La Trémoïlle, etc., etc., was enough for them readily to imagine the Saint-Euverte salon to be the first in Paris, whereas it was one of the last. Not that these accounts were untruthful. The majority of the people named had indeed been present. But every one of them had come as a result of entreaties, politenesses and favours, and with a sense of doing Mme de Saint-Euverte infinite honour. Such salons, less sought-after than shunned, to which you go only in the line of duty as it were, take in only the female readers of the 'Society' column. They slide over a party, a truly fashionable one, to which the hostess, who might have had all the duchesses, who crave being 'among the chosen', has asked only two or three, and has not put the names of her guests in the newspaper. And so these women, either misunderstanding or else scorning the influence that publicity has today acquired, are fashionable for the Queen of Spain, but unrecognized by the crowd, because the first knows and the second do not know who they are.

Mme de Saint-Euverte was not among these women, but had come, like a good honey-bee, to gather all who had been invited for the following day. M. de Charlus was not invited, he had always refused to go to her house. But he had quarrelled with so many people that Mme de Saint-Euverte was able to put this down to his character.

True, if Oriane alone had been there, Mme de Saint-Euverte need not have put herself out, since the invitation had been given verbally, and accepted moreover with that charming and deceitful good grace, the triumphant practitioners of which are the academicians, from whose house the candidate emerges much moved and never doubting that he may count on their vote.[38] But others were there besides. The Prince d'Agrigente, would he be coming? And Mme de Durfort?[39] And so, in order to keep a weather eye open for squalls, Mme de Saint-Euverte had thought it more expedient to transport herself there in person; insinuating with some, imperative with others, to all she gave notice in veiled terms of unimaginable amusements, the like of which would not be seen again, and to each she promised that at her house they would find the person that they longed, or the personage they needed, to meet. And the sort of function with which she was invested on this one occasion in the year – like certain magistracies in the ancient world – of someone who will tomorrow be giving the most notable *garden-party* of the season, conferred on her a momentary authority. Her lists were made up and closed, so that, as she moved slowly through the Princesse's drawing-rooms in order to pour successively into each ear: 'You won't forget me tomorrow,' she experienced the ephemeral triumph of turning away, while continuing to smile, when she caught sight of some ugly duckling who was to be avoided or a country bumpkin admitted to 'Gilbert's' on the strength of having been a school-friend but whose presence would add nothing to the *garden-party*. She preferred not to speak to him so as to be able to say afterwards: 'I gave out my invitations verbally, and unfortunately I didn't bump into you.' So did she, a mere Saint-Euverte, her eyes darting this way and that, 'sort through' the component parts of the Princesse's soirée. And in so doing, she saw herself as a true Duchesse de Guermantes.

It has to be said that neither was the latter as liberal as one might have thought with her greetings and her smiles. On the one hand, when she refused them, it was no doubt deliberately: 'But she gets on my nerves, she would say, am I going to be obliged to talk to her about her reception for a whole hour?'

A very swarthy Duchesse was seen to go past, whose ugliness and stupidity, and certain irregularities of behaviour, had exiled her, not from society but from certain inner circles of the fashionable. 'Oh,' murmured Mme de Guermantes, with the exact, disabused glance of the connoisseur being shown a piece of paste jewellery, 'they entertain that here!' Merely at the sight of this semi-imbecile, whose face was encumbered by too many speckles of black hair, Mme de Guermantes estimated this to be a second-rate soirée. She had been brought up with, but had broken off all relations with this lady; she replied to her greeting with the curtest of nods. 'I don't understand, she said to me, as if to excuse herself, why Marie-Gilbert should invite us with all these dregs. You could say there are people here from every parish. It was far better organized at Mélanie Pourtalès's.[40] She could have the Holy Synod and the Oratorian temple[41] if the fancy took her, but at least she didn't make us go on those days.' But, in many cases, it was out of timidity, of fear of having a scene with her husband, who refused to let her entertain artists and the like (many of whom were Marie-Gilbert's protégés, you had to be careful not to be accosted by some illustrious German soprano), out of a certain fear also in respect of the nationalism which, possessing as she did, like M. de Charlus, the Guermantes spirit, she despised from the social point of view (in order to glorify the general staff, a plebeian general was now accorded precedence ahead of certain dukes), but to which, knowing herself to be adjudged a *mal pensante*, she nevertheless made large concessions, to the point of dreading having to hold out her hand to Swann in this anti-Semitic circle. In this respect she was very soon reassured, having learned that the Prince had not allowed Swann to enter but had had 'a sort of altercation' with him. There was no danger of her having to make conversation in public with 'poor Charles', whom she preferred to cherish in private.

'And who again is that one?' exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, on seeing a rather strange-looking short lady, in a black dress so simple you might have supposed her to have fallen on hard times, make her, along with her husband, a deep curtsy. She did not recognize her and, insolent as she was capable of being, drew herself up as if offended, and looked at her without replying: 'Who or what is that person, Basin?' she asked, with a look of astonishment, while M. de Guermantes, in order to atone for Oriane's rudeness, bowed to the lady and shook her husband's hand. 'But, it's Mme de Chaussepierre, you were very rude. – I know nothing of any Chaussepierre. – The nephew of old mother Chanlivault. – I know nothing of any of them. Who is the woman, why does she curtsy to me? – But you know only too well, it's Mme de Charleval's daughter, Henriette Montmorency. – Oh, but I knew her mother very well, she was charming, very quick-witted. Why did she marry all these people I don't know? You say her name's Mme de Chaussepierre?' she said, spelling out this last word with a questioning air, and as if she were afraid of getting it wrong. The Duc looked severely at her. 'It's not so ridiculous as you appear to think being called Chaussepierre! Old Chaussepierre was the brother of the aforenamed Charleval,[42] of Mme de Sennecour and of the Vicomtesse du Merlerault. They're out of the top drawer. – Oh, stop,' exclaimed the Duchesse, who, like an animal-tamer, never wanted to look as though she were allowing herself to be intimidated by the savage beast's voracious stare. 'Basin, you delight me. I don't know where you've dug those names up from, but I compliment you heartily. I may not have known Chaussepierre but I've read Balzac, you're not the only one, and I've even read Labiche.[43] I appreciate Chanlivault, I don't dislike Charleval, but I confess that du Merlerault is the masterpiece. Let's admit, moreover, that Chaussepierre isn't bad either. You've collected all of them, it's not possible. You who want to write a book, she said to me, you ought to hang on to Charleval and du Merlerault. You won't find any better. – He'll quite simply find himself in court and will go to prison; you're giving him very bad advice, Oriane. – I hope for his sake that he has younger people he can call on if he feels like asking for bad advice, and above all following it. But if the worst thing he means to do is to write a book!' Some little distance from us, a marvellous, proud young woman stood quietly out in a white dress, all diamonds and tulle. Mme de Guermantes looked at her, talking before a whole group magnetized by her grace. 'Your sister is the belle of the ball; she looks charming this evening,' she said, as she was taking a chair, to the Prince de Chimay, who was passing.[44] Colonel de Froberville (he had the general of the same name for an uncle) came and sat down next to us, as did M. de Bréauté, while M. de Vaugoubert (out of an excess of politeness that he maintained even on the tennis court, where, by dint of asking for permission from anyone of importance before striking the ball, he inevitably caused his own side to lose the game) went waddling back to M. de Charlus (up until now almost enveloped by the immense skirt of the Comtesse Molé, whom he professed to admire above all other women), and, by chance, at the very instant when several members of a diplomatic mission new to Paris were greeting the Baron. At the sight of a young, particularly intelligent-looking secretary, M. de Vaugoubert fixed M. de Charlus with an expansive smile that was patently asking a single question. M. de Charlus would gladly have compromised anyone else perhaps, but to feel compromised himself by this smile coming from another and which could have only one meaning, exasperated him. 'I have absolutely no idea, I must ask you to keep your curiosity to yourself. It leaves me more than cold. Moreover, in this particular instance, you are committing a blunder of the first magnitude. I believe that young man to be the exact opposite.' Here, M. de Charlus, annoyed at having been given away by a fool, was not speaking the truth. Had the Baron been speaking truthfully, the secretary would have been the exception in that embassy. It was made up, indeed, of very different personalities, several of them extremely second-rate, so that, had you been searching for what the motive might have been for the choice that had fallen on them, you could have discovered only inversion. By setting at the head of this small diplomatic Sodom an ambassador who, on the contrary, loved women with the comic exaggeration of a music-hall compère putting his battalions of transvestites through their regulation paces, they seemed to have been obeying the law of opposites. Despite the evidence of his own eyes, he did not believe in inversion. He gave instant proof of this by marrying his sister off to a *chargé d'affaires* whom he quite wrongly believed went after tarts. From then on he became something of an embarrassment and was soon replaced by a new Excellency who ensured the homogeneity of the whole. Other embassies sought to compete with this one, but could not dispute the prize (as at the *concours général*,[45] when a particular *lycée* always wins), and more than ten years had to pass before, heterogeneous attachés having been introduced into this very perfect whole, another embassy was finally able to snatch the fateful palm and march at the head.

Reassured as to her fear of having to talk with Swann, Mme de Guermantes now felt only curiosity concerning the conversation he had had with his host. 'Do you know what about? the Duc asked M. de Bréauté. – I did hear, replied the latter, that it was à propos a playlet that the writer Bergotte put on at their house. It was a delight, anyway. But it seems the actor was got up to look like Gilbert, whom the good Sir Bergotte may anyway have wanted in fact to portray. – I say, I'd have been amused to see Gilbert taken off, said the Duchesse, smiling wistfully. – It was about that little performance, M. de Bréauté went on, thrusting forward his rodent's jaw, that Gilbert wanted to have it out with Swann, who merely replied, which everyone thought very witty, "But not at all, it's nothing like you, you're much more ridiculous than that!" It seems, moreover, M. de Bréauté went on, that the little play was a delight. Mme Molé was there, she was vastly amused. – What, Mme Molé goes there? said the Duchesse in astonishment. Oh, it's Mémé who'll have arranged that. It's what always ends up happening in such places. One fine day all the world starts going there, and I, who have deliberately excluded myself on principle, I find myself all alone feeling bored in my little corner.' By now, after the account M. de Bréauté had just given them, the Duchesse de Guermantes had, as can be seen, adopted a fresh point of view (if not on the Swann salon, then at least on the hypothesis of meeting Swann in a few minutes' time). 'The explanation you're giving us, said Colonel de Froberville to M. de Bréauté, is a complete fabrication. I've my own reasons for knowing so. The Prince quite simply gave Swann a good talking-to, and gave him to understand, as our forefathers put it, that he needn't show himself at the house again, given the opinions that he flaunts. And so far as I'm concerned, my uncle Gilbert was right a thousand times over, not simply to tell him off like that, but should have had done with a declared Dreyfusard more than six months ago.'

Poor M. de Vaugoubert, having on this occasion gone from being a too sluggish player to being the inert tennis-ball itself, which is launched without ceremony, found himself being projected towards the Duchesse de Guermantes, to whom he presented his respects. He was none too well received, Oriane existing in the conviction that all the diplomats – or politicians – in her world were halfwits.

M. de Froberville had inevitably benefited from the favourable position in society accorded of late to military men. Unfortunately, if the woman whom he had married was a very genuine relation of the Guermantes, she was also an extremely poor one, and as he himself had lost his money, they had scarcely any connections and were among the people who got left on one side, except on big occasions, when they had the good fortune to lose or to marry off a relation. Then, they truly became part of the communion of high society, like those nominal Catholics who approach the Lord's Table only once a year. Their material situation

would have been wretched even had Mme de Saint-Euverte, loyal to the affection she had had for the late General de Froberville, not helped the household out in every way, providing the two young daughters with outfits and amusements. But the Colonel, good fellow though he was held to be, was not the soul of gratitude. He was envious of the splendours of a benefactress who herself celebrated them tirelessly and unrestrainedly. For him, his wife and his children, the annual *garden-party* was a wonderful pleasure that they would not have wanted to miss for all the gold in the world, but a pleasure poisoned by the thought of the vainglorious delight Mme de Saint-Euverte derived from it. The announcement of this *garden-party* in the newspapers, which then, after a detailed account, added in Machiavellian fashion: 'We shall have more to say about this brilliant entertainment', the complementary details about the costumes, given over several successive days, all this so hurt the Frobervilles that, somewhat starved of pleasures but who knew they could rely on that of the matinée, they got to the point each year of hoping that its success might be spoilt by bad weather, of consulting the barometer and anticipating with joy the first hints of a storm that might cause the party to be a failure.

'I shan't discuss politics with you, Froberville, said M. de Guermantes, but so far as Swann is concerned, I can say frankly that his behaviour towards us has been unspeakable. He was taken up by society in the old days by ourselves and by the Duc de Chartres,[46] and they tell me he's openly Dreyfusard. I'd never have believed it of him, him, a discerning gourmet, a positive mind, a collector, a lover of old books, a member of the Jockey Club, a man highly respected on all sides, a connoisseur of good addresses who used to send us the best port you can drink, a dilettante, a family man. Oh, I've been badly let down. I'm not speaking of myself, it's agreed I'm an old fool whose opinion doesn't count, some sort of down-and-out, but, if only for Oriane's sake, he shouldn't have done that, he should have openly disowned the Jews and the condemned man's supporters.'

'Yes, after the friendship my wife has always displayed towards him,' the Duc went on, who obviously considered that to sentence Dreyfus for high treason, whatever opinion you might hold in your heart of hearts as to his guilt, constituted a form of gratitude for the way one had been received in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, 'he should have broken ranks. For, ask Oriane, she had genuine friendship for him.' The Duchesse, thinking that a calm, ingenuous tone would lend her words a more dramatic and sincere quality, said in the voice of a schoolgirl, as if simply allowing the truth to issue from her mouth, and giving her eyes alone a somewhat melancholy expression: 'But that's true, I've no reason to hide that I felt a sincere affection for Charles – There, you see, I'm not putting words into her mouth. And after that, he takes ingratitude to the point of being a Dreyfusard!'

'Talking of Dreyfusards, I said, it seems that Prince Von is one. – Ah, you do well to bring him up, exclaimed M. de Guermantes, I was about to forget that he's asked me to go and dine on Monday. But whether he's a Dreyfusard or not is all one to me, since he's a foreigner. I don't care two hoots. With a Frenchman, it's another matter. It's true Swann is a Jew. But up until today– forgive me, Froberville – I had been weak-minded enough to believe that a Jew can be a Frenchman, an honourable Jew, I mean, a man of the world. Now Swann was that in the full force of the word. Well, he's forcing me to acknowledge I was mistaken, since he's taking the side of this Dreyfus (who, guilty or not, is in no way part of his circle, and whom he can never have met) against a society that had adopted him, had treated him as one of its own. There's no getting away from it, we'd all have vouched for Swann, I'd have answered for his patriotism as for my own. And this is how he rewards us! I confess I would never have expected it, not from him. I thought better of him. He had a quick wit (in his own way, of course). I'm well aware he'd already committed the insanity of his shameful marriage. By the way, do you know someone who was greatly hurt by Swann's marriage? It was my wife. Oriane often has what I shall call an affectation of insensitivity. But deep down, she feels with an extraordinary intensity.' Mme de Guermantes, overjoyed at this analysis of her character, listened to it wearing a modest expression but did not say a word, not liking to acquiesce in the eulogy, but fearing above all to interrupt it. M. de Guermantes might have spoken for an hour on this subject and she would no more have moved than if they had been making music for her. 'Well, I recall when she heard about Swann's marriage, she felt offended; she decided it was wrong of someone to whom we had displayed so much friendship. She was very fond of Swann; she was greatly upset. Weren't you, Oriane?' Mme de Guermantes thought she must reply to so direct a challenge, on a point of fact that would enable her, without appearing to, to confirm the praises that she sensed were at an end. In a simple, diffident tone, and with an expression all the more studied for seeking to appear 'felt', she said demurely and softly: 'It's true, Basin is not mistaken. – Yet, it still wasn't the same thing. But what do you expect, love is love, although in my view it should stay within certain bounds. I might excuse a young man who's still wet behind the ears, letting himself be carried away by utopias. But Swann, an intelligent man, of a proven refinement, a shrewd connoisseur of paintings, a close friend of the Duc de Chartres, of Gilbert himself!' The tone in which M. de Guermantes had said this was yet perfectly sympathetic, with no hint of the vulgarity he too often showed. He spoke with a faintly indignant sadness, but everything about him breathed that gentle gravity which constitutes the broad and unctuous charm of certain figures in Rembrandt, the burgomaster Six[47] for example. You felt that the question of the immorality of Swann's conduct over the Affair did not even arise for the Duc, so beyond all doubt was it; he had experienced the affliction of a father seeing one of his children, for whose education he has made the greatest sacrifices, wilfully throwing away the magnificent situation he has created for him and, by indiscretions that the family's principles or prejudices can not allow, bringing dishonour on a respected name. It was true that M. de Guermantes had not manifested so profound and sorrowful an astonishment earlier on, when learning that Saint-Loup was a Dreyfusard. But for one thing he looked on his nephew as a young man who had taken the wrong path, and could do nothing that would surprise him until he had mended his ways, whereas Swann was what M. de Guermantes called 'a level-headed man, a man holding a position of the first rank'. Then again, and especially, quite some time had passed during which if, from the historical point of view, events had seemed in part to justify the Dreyfusist case, the anti-Dreyfusard opposition had become twice as violent and, from being purely political at the outset, had become social. It was now a question of militarism, of patriotism, and the waves of anger whipped up in society had had time to acquire the force they never have at the beginning of a storm. 'You see, M. de Guermantes went on, even from the point of view of his beloved Jews, since he insists absolutely on supporting them, Swann has made a blunder of incalculable import. He is proving that they are all secretly united and are somehow obliged to lend their support to someone of their own race, even if they don't know him. That is a public menace. We've obviously been too easy-going, and the gaffe Swann is committing will reverberate all the more inasmuch as he was held in high esteem, received even, and was just about the only Jew whom one knew. People will say to themselves: *Ab uno disce omnes*.'[48] (The satisfaction of having found in his memory, at the appointed moment, so opportune a quotation, alone caused a proud smile to illuminate the melancholy of the great nobleman betrayed.)

I had a strong desire to know what exactly had transpired between the Prince and Swann, and to see the latter, if he had not yet left the soirée. 'I must tell you, the Duchesse replied, to whom I had mentioned this desire, that I am not myself excessively anxious to see him because it seems, judging by what I was told a short while ago at Mme de Saint-Euverte's, that he would like before he dies for me to make the acquaintance of his wife and daughter. Heavens, it grieves me infinitely that he should be ill, but I hope first of all that it's not as serious as all that. And then, that's not after all a reason, because it would really be too simple. A writer devoid of talent would only have to say: "Vote for me at the Academy because my wife is going to die and I want to give her this last pleasure." There wouldn't be salons any more if one was obliged to make the acquaintance of all the dying. My coachman could use it on me: "My daughter's very ill, get me an invitation to the Princesse de Parme's."[49] I adore Charles, and it would upset me greatly to refuse him, which is why I prefer to avoid his asking me. I hope with all my heart that he's not dying, as he says he is, but truly, were that to happen, it would not be the moment for me to make the acquaintance of those two creatures who've deprived me of the most agreeable of my friends these past fifteen years, and whom he would leave on my hands at a time when I wouldn't even be able to take advantage of it to see him, since he'd be dead!'

But M. de Bréauté had not ceased to ponder the contradiction inflicted on him by Colonel de Froberville. 'I don't doubt the accuracy of your account, my dear friend, he said, but I had mine from a good source. It was the Prince de la Tour d'Auvergne who related it to me. – I'm astonished that a knowledgeable man like yourself should still say the Prince de la Tour d'Auvergne, the Duc de Guermantes broke in, you know he's nothing of the kind. There's only one member of that

family left. That's Oriane's uncle, the Duc de Bouillon.[50] – The brother of Mme de Villeparisis?' I asked, recalling that the latter had been a Mlle de Bouillon. 'Exactly so. Oriane, Mme de Lambresac is wishing you good day.'

Indeed, a weak smile could be seen from time to time forming and vanishing like a shooting star, intended by the Duchesse de Lambresac for some person whom she had recognized. But instead of taking on definition as an active affirmation, in a language mute but clear, this smile was almost immediately drowned in a sort of ideal ecstasy that could discern nothing, while the head was inclined in a vacuous gesture of benediction reminiscent of that inclined towards the crowd of communicants by a somewhat doddery prelate. Mme de Lambresac was in no way doddery. But I was already familiar with this particular kind of obsolete refinement. In Combray and in Paris, all my grandmother's women friends were in the habit, at social gatherings, of greeting one another wearing as seraphic an expression as if they had just caught sight of someone of their acquaintance in church, at the moment of the Elevation or during a funeral, and were bidding them a limp good day that ended in a prayer. And some words of M. de Guermantes's were about to complete the comparison I was making. 'But you've seen the Duc de Bouillon, M. de Guermantes said to me. He was leaving my library a little while ago as you were going in, a gentleman short in stature, and white-haired.' He it was whom I had taken for some petty bourgeois from Combray but in whom I could now discern, on reflection, the resemblance to Mme de Villeparisis. The similarity between the evanescent greetings of the Duchesse de Lambresac and those of my grandmother's friends had begun to interest me, by demonstrating that in narrow and enclosed social circles, whether among the petty bourgeoisie or the high nobility, the old ways persist, enabling us to rediscover, like an archaeologist, how people may have been brought up, and the element of soul that it reflects, in the days of the Vicomte d'Arlincourt and Loïsa Puget.[51] Better still, the perfect conformity in appearance between a petty bourgeois of Combray of the same age and the Duc de Bouillon now reminded me (what had already struck me so forcibly when I saw Saint-Loup's maternal grandfather, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, on a daguerreotype where, in dress, expression and manner, he was exactly like my great-uncle) that social, or indeed individual, differences merge over time into the uniformity of an epoch. The truth is that the similarity in dress, and the spirit of the age as it is echoed by the face, occupy so much more significant a place in someone than their caste, which occupies a large place only in the person in question's self-esteem and in the imagination of others, that, to be made aware that a great nobleman of Louis-Philippe's time differs less from a bourgeois of Louis-Philippe's time than from a great nobleman of the time of Louis XV, there is no need to walk the galleries of the Louvre.

At that moment, a long-haired Bavarian musician, a protégé of the Princesse de Guermantes, greeted Oriane. The latter replied by inclining her head, but the Duc, enraged at the sight of his wife saying good evening to someone he did not know, who had so very strange a look about him, and who, so far as M. de Guermantes thought he knew, had a very bad reputation, turned to his wife with a terrible and inquisitorial air, as if to say: 'Who is this Ostrogoth?' Poor Mme de Guermantes's situation was already somewhat complicated, and had the musician felt some pity for that martyred spouse, he would have taken himself off as quickly as possible. But, whether out of a desire not to tolerate the humiliation that had just been inflicted on him in public, in the midst of his oldest friends from the Duc's circle, whose presence may well have been in part the reason for his silent bow, and to show that it was by right, and not without knowing her, that he had greeted Mme de Guermantes, or whether in obedience to the obscure but irresistible inspiration of his gaffe, which – at a moment when he should rather have relied on his wits – urged him on to apply protocol to the letter, the musician approached Mme de Guermantes more closely still and said: 'Madame la Duchesse, I would like to solicit the honour of being presented to the Duc.' Mme de Guermantes was most unhappy. But in the end, for all that she was a deceived wife, she was still the Duchesse de Guermantes and could not appear to have been robbed of her right to introduce people whom she knew to her husband. 'Basin, she said, allow me to present M. d'Herweck.' 'I shan't ask you whether you're going tomorrow to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, said Colonel de Froberville to Mme de Guermantes, in order to dispel the uncomfortable impression produced by M. d'Herweck's untimely request. The whole of Paris will be there.' Meanwhile, turning in a single movement and as if he had no joints towards the tactless musician, the Duc de Guermantes, square on to him, monumental, unspeaking, wrathful, like Jove the Thunderer, remained thus without moving for several seconds, his eyes blazing with anger and astonishment, his frizzy hair seeming to emerge from a crater. Then, as if in the heat of an impulse that had alone enabled him to achieve the civility demanded of him, and after having seemed by his defiant posture to attest to those present that he did not know the Bavarian musician, he crossed his two white-gloved hands behind his back, tipped himself forward and dealt the musician a bow so profound, imbued with so much rage and stupefaction, so abrupt, so violent, that the trembling artist recoiled even as he leaned forward so as not to receive a formidable butt in the stomach. 'But it's just that I shan't be in Paris, replied the Duchesse to Colonel de Froberville. I must tell you (which I shouldn't admit) that I have reached my present age without having seen the stained-glass windows at Montfort-l'Amaury.[52] It's shameful but there you are. So, to make amends for this culpable neglect, I've promised myself to go and see them tomorrow.' M. de Bréauté gave a knowing smile. He understood indeed that, if the Duchesse had been able to go on not knowing the stained-glass windows of Montfort-l'Amaury up until her present age, this artistic visit had not all of a sudden taken on the urgent character of an 'emergency' operation and might, without danger, having been deferred for more than twenty-five years, been put back by twenty-four hours. The plan the Duchesse had formed was simply to decree, in the Guermantes manner, that the Saint-Euverte salon was decidedly not a truly respectable house, but a house to which you were invited so that you could be paraded in the account given in the *Gaulois*, a house that would confer a badge of supreme elegance on those women, or, in any event, on that woman if there were only one of them, who would not be seen there. The tactful amusement of M. de Bréauté, coupled with the poetic pleasure that society people felt when they saw Mme de Guermantes doing things that their own lesser situation did not allow them to imitate, but the mere spectacle of which produced in them the smile of the peasant tied to his glebe, who sees men freer and more fortunate than himself passing above his head, this refined pleasure bore no connection to the disguised but frenetic delight at once experienced by M. de Froberville.

The efforts M. de Froberville was making so that his laughter might not be heard had made him go as red as a rooster, in spite of which he interspersed his words with hiccups of joy as he exclaimed in a compassionate tone: 'Oh, poor aunt Saint-Euverte, what a song and dance she's going to make! No, the unfortunate woman isn't going to get her Duchesse, what a blow! It's enough to make her turn up her toes!' he added, doubled up with laughter. And in his euphoria he could not prevent himself from drumming his heels and rubbing his hands. Smiling out of one eye and only one corner of her mouth at M. de Froberville, whose friendly intentions she appreciated without finding him any less mortally tedious, Mme de Guermantes finally decided to leave him.

'Listen, I'm going to *have* to wish you good evening,' she said, getting to her feet with an air of melancholy resignation, as if this for her were a misfortune. Beneath the incantation of her blue eyes, her softly musical voice put one in mind of the poetic lament of a fairy. 'Basin wants me to go and see Marie for a bit.' In point of fact, she had had enough of listening to Froberville, who had not ceased envying her going to Montfort-l'Amaury, when she knew full well that this was the first he had heard of the stained-glass and, what was more, that he would not have relinquished the Saint-Euverte matinée for anything in the world. 'Goodbye, I've hardly spoken to you, that's how it is in society, we don't meet, we don't say the things we'd like to say to one another; anyway, it's the same everywhere in life. Let's hope it'll be better organized after we're dead. At least we won't always have to wear low-cut dresses. Yet who knows? Perhaps we shall show off our bones and our worms on big occasions. Why not? I say, look at old mother Rampillon, d'you see any great difference between that and a skeleton in an open dress? It's true she has every right, she's at least a hundred years old. She was already one of those sacred monsters I refused to curtsy to when I was starting out in society. I thought she'd died long since; which would as it happens be the one explanation for the spectacle she's offering us. It's impressive and liturgical. Pure "Campo Santo!" '[53] The Duchesse had left Froberville; he came closer: 'I'd like one last word with you.' A little irritated: 'What is it now?' she said haughtily. And he, having feared that she might change her mind about Montfort-l'Amaury at the last minute: 'I didn't dare mention it on account of Mme de Saint-Euverte, so as not to cause her any distress, but since you're not anticipating going, I can tell you I'm glad for your sake, because they've got measles in the house! – Oh, good Lord! said Oriane, who was afraid of diseases. But that doesn't worry me, I've already had it. You can't get it twice. – It's the doctors who say that; I know people who've had it up to four times. Anyway, you've been warned.' As for him, he would need actually to have had this fictitious measles and to be confined to his bed with it to resign himself to missing the Saint-Euverte party, looked forward to these many months. He would have the pleasure of seeing so

many of the fashionable there, the greater pleasure of confirming that certain things had gone wrong, and the pleasure above all of being able to boast for a long time to come of having rubbed shoulders with the first and, by either exaggerating or inventing them, of deploring the second.

I took advantage of the fact that the Duchesse had changed her position to stand up also, so as to make my way to the smoking-room and inquire after Swann. 'Don't believe a word of what Babal's been recounting, she said to me. Never would the little Molé have gone poking her nose in there. They tell us that to lead us on. They receive no one and are invited nowhere. He himself admits it: "The two of us remain on our own by the fire." Because he always says "we", not like the King but on behalf of his wife, I don't insist. But I'm very well informed,' the Duchesse added. She and I passed two young men whose great but dissimilar beauty had its origins in the same woman. These were the two sons of Mme de Surgis, the Duc de Guermantes's new mistress. They were resplendent with their mother's perfections, but each with a different perfection. Into one there had passed, sinuous now in a male body, Mme de Surgis's regal bearing, and the same ardent, reddish, sacred pallor had flowed into the marmoreal cheeks of both the mother and this son; but his brother had received the Greek brow, the perfect nose, the statuesque neck, the boundless gaze; formed thus from the diverse gifts allotted by the goddess, their twofold beauty offered the abstract pleasure of reflecting that the cause of this beauty lay outside them; it was as if their mother's principal attributes had been incarnated in two different bodies; that one of these young men was his mother's stature and her complexion, the other her gaze, like those divine beings who were nothing more than the Strength and the Beauty of Jupiter or Minerva. Full of respect for M. de Guermantes, of whom they used to say: 'He's a great friend of our parents', the older one nevertheless thought it prudent not to come and greet the Duchesse, whom he knew, without perhaps understanding the reason, felt hostility towards his mother, and on seeing us he turned his head slightly away. The younger one, who always imitated his brother because, being stupid and short-sighted into the bargain, he did not dare have an opinion of his own, inclined his head at the same angle, and the two of them glided towards the card-room, one behind the other, like two allegorical figures.

Just as I arrived in this room, I was stopped by the Marquise de Citri, beautiful still though practically foaming at the mouth. Quite noble by birth, she had sought and made a brilliant match by marrying M. de Citri, whose great-grandmother was an Aumale-Lorraine.[54] But this satisfaction no sooner experienced, her negative character had led her to develop a deep dislike of people in high society, which did not absolutely rule out a social life. Not only, at a soirée, would she pour scorn on everyone, but this mockery had something so violent about it that even her laugh was insufficiently acerbic and turned into a guttural hissing: 'Oh! she said to me, pointing to the Duchesse de Guermantes, who had just left me and was already some little way off, what staggers me is that she can lead this sort of life.' Were these the words of an infuriated saint, astonished that the gentiles should not come to the truth of their own accord, or of an anarchist thirsting for bloodshed? At all events, such an apostrophe had no possible justification. In the first place, the 'life' that Mme de Guermantes led differed very little (indignation apart) from Mme de Citri's own life. Mme de Citri was astounded to find the Duchesse capable of this mortal sacrifice: of attending one of Marie-Gilbert's soirées. It has to be said that, in this particular instance, Mme de Citri was very fond of the Princesse, who was indeed very good-natured, and that she knew she was giving her great pleasure by attending her soirée. Thus, in order to come to this party, she had cancelled a ballerina whom she thought had genius and who was due to initiate her into the mysteries of Russian choreography. Another reason that somewhat devalued the concentrated fury felt by Mme de Citri when she saw Oriane greeting one or other guest is that, although at a much less advanced stage, Mme de Guermantes displayed the symptoms of the disease that was ravaging Mme de Citri. We have seen in any case that she had been carrying the germs of it since birth. Being more intelligent than Mme de Citri, Mme de Guermantes would have had better title than her to this nihilism (which was not only social), but it is a fact that certain virtues help us to tolerate our neighbour's failings rather than contributing to the pain that these cause us; a man of great ability will ordinarily pay less attention to other people's foolishness than would a fool. We have described the Duchesse's kind of cleverness at sufficient length to persuade anyone that, if it had nothing in common with high intelligence, it was at least cleverness, a cleverness adroit at employing (like a translator) different forms of syntax. But nothing of the sort seemed to entitle Mme de Citri to despise qualities so similar to her own. She considered everyone to be an idiot, but in her conversation, or in her letters, she showed herself inferior rather to the people whom she treated with such disdain. She had, moreover, so great a need to destroy that, once she had more or less renounced society, the pleasures she then sought after underwent, one after the other, her terrible powers of dissolution. Having abandoned soirées for musical evenings, she started saying: 'Do you like listening to that, to music? Good Lord, it depends on the moment. But it can be so very tedious! I mean, Beethoven, *la barbe*!'[55] With Wagner, then with Franck, and Debussy, she did not even trouble to say '*la barbe*' but was content to pass her hand across her face, like a barber. Soon, what was tedious was everything. 'Beautiful things, they're so tedious! Paintings, they're enough to drive you mad… How right you are, it's so tedious, writing letters!' In the end it was life itself that she declared to us was a bore, without one quite knowing from where she was taking her term of comparison.

I do not know whether it was on account of what the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the first evening when I had dined with her, had said about this room, but the card-room or smoking-room, with its illustrated paving, its tripods, its faces of gods and animals that stared at you, the sphinxes lying along the arms of the seats, and especially the immense marble or enamelled mosaic table, covered with symbolic signs roughly copied from Egyptian or Etruscan art, had the effect on me of a veritable magician's cell. And on a seat drawn up to the sparkling augural table, M. de Charlus, touching none of the cards himself and oblivious to what was going on around him, incapable of noticing that I had just entered, seemed exactly like a magician applying the full force of his will-power and his reasoning to the casting of a horoscope. Not only were his eyes, like those of a Pythoness on her tripod, starting from his head, but, so that nothing might come to distract him from labours that required the cessation of the simplest movements, he had (like a calculator who means to do nothing else until such time as he has resolved his problem) put down beside him the cigar which, a short while before, he had had in his mouth but which he no longer had the necessary freedom of mind to smoke. On remarking the two crouched divinities borne on its arms by the chair set facing him, you might have thought that the Baron was seeking to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, had it not been rather that of a young and living Oedipus, sitting in that selfsame chair, where he had installed himself in order to play. Now the figure to which M. de Charlus was applying, and with such intensity, all his mental powers, and which was not, truth to tell, among those customarily studied *more geometrico*,[56] was that proposed to him by the lineaments of the young Marquis de Surgis's face; it seemed to be, so profound was M. de Charlus's absorption before it, some heraldic motto, some conundrum, some problem in algebra, the riddle or formula of which he was seeking to penetrate or reveal. In front of him, the sybilline signs and figures inscribed on this Table of the Law seemed to be the grimoire that would enable the old wizard to learn the direction in which the young man's destinies were oriented. All of a sudden, he saw that I was looking at him, raised his head as if emerging from a dream and smiled at me, blushing. At that moment, Mme de Surgis's other son came up to the one who was playing, to look at his cards. Once M. de Charlus had learned from me that they were brothers, his face could not disguise the admiration inspired in him by a family capable of creating such splendid yet such different masterpieces. And what would have added to the Baron's enthusiasm would have been to learn that the two sons of Mme Surgis-le-Duc had not only the same mother but the same father. The children of Jupiter are unalike, but that comes from the fact that he married first of all Metis, part of whose destiny it was to bring wise children into the world, then Themis, and next Eurynome, and Mnemosyne, and Leto, and Juno only last of all. But by the one father, Mme de Surgis had given birth to two sons who had each received beauties from her, but different beauties.

At last I had the pleasure of Swann's entry into the room, which was very large, so that he did not notice me straight away. A pleasure mixed with sadness, a sadness that the other guests perhaps did not feel, but which with them consisted in the sort of fascination exerted by the singular and unexpected forms of an imminent death, a death that is already, as the common people would put it, written on the face. And it was with an almost disobliging stupefaction, into which there entered a tactless curiosity, cruelty and an at once calm yet concerned moment of self-awareness (a mixture at once of *suave mari magno* and *memento quia pulvis*,[57] Robert would have said), that every gaze became fixed on that face whose cheeks had been so eroded by disease, like a waning moon, that, except from a certain angle, that no doubt from which Swann looked at himself, they stopped short, like an insubstantial stage-set to which an optical illusion alone can lend an appearance of depth. Whether because of the absence of the cheeks that were no longer there to diminish it, or whether arteriosclerosis, which is also a form of intoxication, had reddened it just as drink would have done, or deformed it, as morphine would have done, Swann's Punchinello nose, for so long reabsorbed into

a pleasing face, now seemed enormous, tumid, crimson, more that of an old Hebrew than an inquisitive Valois.[58] Perhaps in any case, in recent days, the race had caused the physical type characteristic of it to reappear more pronouncedly in him, at the same time as a sense of moral solidarity with the other Jews, a solidarity that Swann seemed to have neglected throughout his life, but which the grafting, one on to the other, of a mortal illness, the Dreyfus Affair and anti-Semitic propaganda, had reawakened. There are certain Israelites, very shrewd and refined men of the world though they be, in whom a boor and a prophet remain in reserve, or in the wings, so as to make their entrance at a given moment in their lives, as in a play. Swann had arrived at the age of the prophet. Certainly, with this face from which, under the effect of his illness, whole segments had disappeared, as from a block of ice that is melting and from which entire slabs have fallen away, he was much changed. But I could not help but be struck by how much more he had changed in relation to myself. I could not manage to understand how I had been able once to inseminate this excellent, cultivated man, whom I was very far from being bored at meeting, with a mystery such that his appearance in the Champs-Elysées caused my heart to pound, to the point where I was ashamed to approach his silk-lined Inverness cape, and that at the door of the apartment where such a being lived, I could not ring without being seized by endless agitation and alarm; all this had vanished, not only from his home but from his person, and the thought of talking with him might or might not have been agreeable to me, but it had no effect whatsoever on my nervous system.

How he had changed, moreover, since that same afternoon, when I had come across him – only a few hours before after all – in the Duc de Guermantes's study! Had he really had an altercation with the Prince, which had shaken him up? The supposition was not necessary. The least effort that is demanded of someone who is very ill quickly becomes for him an excessive strain. Already tired, he need only be exposed to the heat of a soirée for his face to become distorted and to turn blue, as an overripe pear may in less than a day, or milk that is on the turn. Moreover, Swann's hair had thinned in places and, as Mme de Guermantes said, was in need of a furrier, it looked camphorated, and badly camphorated. I was about to cross the smoking-room to talk to Swann when, unfortunately, a hand came down on my shoulder: 'Hello, *mon petit*, I'm in Paris for forty-eight hours. I came round, I was told you were here, so it's to you my aunt owes the honour of my presence at her party.' It was Saint-Loup. I told him how beautiful I found the house. 'Yes, very much the historical monument. But I find it dreary myself. Don't let's get too close to my uncle Palamède, otherwise we'll be snapped up. As Mme Molé (for it's she who rules the roost at present) has just left, he's all at sea. It seems it was a real spectacle, he never strayed from her side, and only left her once he'd had her put into her carriage. I don't hold it against my uncle, only I find it comic that my family council, which has always come down so hard on me, should be made up of those very family members who've lived it up the most, starting with the most dissipated of the lot, my uncle Charlus, who's my surrogate tutor, who's had as many women as Don Juan, and who even at his age doesn't let up. There was a question at one time of my being made a ward of court. I imagine that when all those old lechers got together to consider the matter and sent for me to preach me a sermon and tell me I was causing distress to my mother, they can't have been able to look each other in the eye without laughing. Inspect the make-up of the council, they look to have deliberately picked the ones who've had their hands up the most skirts.' Leaving aside M. de Charlus, on the subject of whom my friend's surprise no longer seemed to me justified, but for other reasons, and ones which were as it happens to be modified later on in my mind, Robert was quite wrong to find it extraordinary that lessons in good behaviour should be given to a young man by family members who have led wild lives, or are still doing so.

Were atavism and family resemblances alone to be involved, it is inevitable that the uncle who issues the reprimand should have more or less the same failings as the nephew he has been charged with berating. This is not the uncle being hypocritical, however, deceived as he is by the capacity men possess for believing that each fresh set of circumstances means that 'things are different', a capacity that enables them to adopt artistic, political etc. errors without noticing that these are the very errors that they took to be truths ten years ago, apropos of another school of painting that they condemned, or another political affair that they thought merited their hatred, but which they have got over, and now espouse without recognizing them in their new disguise. Moreover, even if the uncle's faults are different from those of the nephew, heredity may still to a certain extent be the causal law, for the effect does not always resemble its cause, as a copy its original, and, even if the uncle's faults are worse, he may perfectly well believe them to be less serious.

When M. de Charlus had just been remonstrating indignantly with Robert, who anyway knew nothing of his uncle's true tastes in those days, and even if it had still been in the days when the Baron was denouncing his own tastes, he may perfectly well have been sincere in considering, from the point of view of a man of the world, that Robert was infinitely more blameworthy than himself. Had Robert not got himself all but ostracized from his society at the time when his uncle had been charged with making him see reason? Had he not come close to being blackballed at the Jockey Club? Was he not an object of ridicule for the sums he was lavishing on a woman of the lowest kind, for his friendships with people, authors, actors, Jews, not one of whom was a member of society, for his opinions, which were no different from those of traitors, for the pain he was causing to his whole family? How could this scandalous existence stand comparison with that of M. de Charlus, who had been able, up until now, not only to preserve but even to enhance his position as a Guermantes, being an absolutely privileged individual in society, sought after, adulated in the most select circles, and who, married to a Bourbon princess,[59] an eminent woman, had been able to make her happy, had devoted a cult to her memory that was more fervent and more exact than is customary in society, and had thus been as good a husband as he had been a son?

'But are you sure M. de Charlus has had so many mistresses?' I asked, certainly not with the diabolical intention of revealing to Robert the secret I had chanced upon, but irritated nonetheless by hearing him maintain an error with so much certainty and self-satisfaction. He merely shrugged in response to what he thought to be naïvety on my part. 'In any case, I'm not blaming him for it, I consider he's absolutely right.' And he began outlining a theory to me that would have horrified him at Balbec (where he had not been content merely to denounce seducers, death seeming to him the one punishment proportionate to the crime). But then he had been still in love, and jealous. He went so far as to sing the praises of houses of ill repute. 'It's only there you can find a shoe that fits, what in the regiment we call your own size.' He no longer felt the disgust for places of this sort that had excited him in Balbec when I alluded to them, and hearing him now, I told him that Bloch had introduced me to them, but Robert answered that the one to which Bloch went must have been 'exceedingly run-down, the poor man's paradise.' 'It depends, after all: where was it?' I avoided giving any details, for I remembered that it was there, in fact, that the Rachel with whom Robert had been so much in love used to give herself for one *louis*.[60] 'Anyway, I'll introduce you to far better ones, where some stunning women go.' Hearing me express the desire that he should take me as soon as possible to the ones he knew of, which had indeed to be much superior to the establishment that Bloch had pointed out to me, he evinced genuine regret at not being able to do so on this occasion as he was leaving again the following day. 'The next time I come, he said. You'll see, there are even young girls, he added with an air of mystery. There's a young Mademoiselle de…, d'Orgeville I believe, I'll tell you precisely, who's the daughter of people right out of the top drawer; the mother was born more or less a La Croix-l'Evêque, they're from the cream of society, some sort of relation, if I'm not mistaken, of my aunt Oriane's. Anyway, you've only to set eyes on the child to tell she's the daughter of people of substance (for a moment I was aware of the shadow of the Guermantes genius spreading itself over Robert's voice, which passed like a cloud, but at a great height, and did not pause). She looks to me like a marvellous prospect. The parents are always ill and can't look after her. The child is looking to amuse herself, believe me, and I rely on you to find distractions for her! – Oh, when will you be back? – I don't know; if you're not absolutely set on duchesses (that title being the only one that for the aristocracy denotes a peculiarly brilliant rank, just as among the lower orders they would say the same about princesses), in another line of country there's Mme Putbus's head lady's-maid.'

At that moment, Mme de Surgis entered the card-room to look for her sons. On noticing her, M. de Charlus went up to her with an affability by which the Marquise was all the more agreeably surprised for having expected great coldness from the Baron, he having always posed as Oriane's protector and, alone of the family – all too often indulgent of the Duc's whims because of his inheritance and out of jealousy with regard to the Duchesse – been merciless in keeping his brother's mistresses at arm's length. Thus Mme de Surgis might have well understood the motives of the attitude she feared in the Baron, but was far from

suspecting those of the quite contrary welcome that she received from him. He spoke to her admiringly of the portrait that Jacquet[61] had made of her in the old days. This admiration grew even into an excitement which, if it was partly self-interested, in order to prevent the Marquise from moving away, to 'grapple' her, as Robert used to say of hostile armies whose fighting strength one wants to keep pinned down, may also have been sincere. For if everyone was pleased to admire in her sons Mme de Surgis's own queenly bearing and her eyes, the Baron was able to experience an inverse but equally keen pleasure in discovering these attractions converging once again in the mother, as in a portrait which does not itself kindle desires in us but nourishes those that it awakens with the aesthetic admiration that it inspires. These desires came retrospectively to lend a voluptuous charm to Jacquet's portrait itself, and at that moment the Baron would gladly have acquired it in order to study there the physiological genealogy of the two young Surgis. 'You can see I wasn't exaggerating, Robert said to me. Just look how attentive my uncle's being to Mme de Surgis. Yet even there, it surprises me. If Oriane knew, she'd be furious. Frankly, there are enough women without going and throwing yourself at that particular one,' he added; like all the people who are not in love, he imagined that we choose the person we love after endless deliberation and after taking account of various qualities and kinds of suitability. What was more, while being mistaken about his uncle, whom he thought was addicted to women, Robert, in his resentment, spoke of M. de Charlus too lightly. One is not always someone's nephew with impunity. It is very often by their intermediation that a hereditary habit is sooner or later handed down. A whole portrait gallery might be formed in this way, under the title of the German comedy, *Uncle and Nephew*,[62] in which the uncle would be seen watching to make sure, jealously if unwittingly, that his nephew ends up resembling him. I shall even add that this gallery would be incomplete if it were not made to include the uncles who are not bona fide relations, being only the uncles of the nephew's wife. The M. de Charluses of this world are so convinced indeed of being the only good husbands, the only ones what is more of whom a wife is not jealous, that generally speaking, out of affection for their niece, they make her, too, marry a Charlus. Which ravels the skein of family likenesses. And to affection for the niece is sometimes conjoined an affection for her fiancé, too. Such marriages are not uncommon, and are often what is called happy.

'What were we talking about? Oh, about that tall blonde, Mme Putbus's lady's-maid. She likes women, too, but I fancy you don't mind that; I can tell you honestly, I've never seen so lovely a creature. – I see her as somewhat Giorgione-like?[63] – Pure Giorgione! Oh, if only I had time to spend in Paris, what splendid things there are to do! And then, you move on to the next. Because love, that's just a joke, you know, I'm well and truly over all that.' I soon found, to my surprise, that he was no less over literature, too, whereas it was only with the *littérateurs* that he had seemed to be disenchanted at our last meeting ('They're nearly all of them thoroughly bad lots,' he had told me), which could have been explained by his justified resentment against certain of Rachel's friends. They, indeed, had convinced her that she would never have any talent if she allowed Robert, 'a man of another race', to acquire influence over her, and, along with her, they made fun of him, to his face, at the dinner-parties he gave for them. But in actual fact, Robert's love of Letters had not gone very deep, it did not emanate from his true nature, it was only a by-product of his love for Rachel, and had been erased along with it, at the same time as his abhorrence of voluptuaries and his religious respect for women's virtue.

'What a strange look those two young men have! See, Marquise, that curious passion for cards, Marquise,' said M. de Charlus, pointing her two sons out to Mme de Surgis, as if he had absolutely no idea who they were. 'They must be two Orientals, they have certain characteristic features, perhaps they're Turks,' he added, at once to further establish his feigned innocence and to attest to a vague antipathy which, when next it gave way to affability, would prove that this last was addressed purely to their status as sons of Mme de Surgis, having begun only when the Baron had learned who they were. Perhaps also M. de Charlus, whose insolence was a gift of nature that he took delight in exercising, was taking advantage of the short time during which he was supposed not to know who these young men were to amuse himself at the expense of Mme de Surgis and to indulge in his customary raillery, just as Scapin turns his master's being in disguise to profit by laying vigorously about him with a stick.[64]

'They're my sons,' said Mme de Surgis, going red, as she would not have done had she been subtler without being any more virtuous. She would then have understood that the expression of absolute indifference or raillery that M. de Charlus was exhibiting towards a young man wasn't sincere any more than the wholly superficial admiration that he evinced for a woman expressed the true depths of his nature. The woman to whom he might have gone on indefinitely making the most complimentary remarks might have been jealous of the look which, even as he talked to her, he was casting at a man whom he then pretended not to have remarked. For that particular look was a look different from those which M. de Charlus had for women; a particular look that rose from the depths, and which, even at a soirée, ingenuously, he could not prevent himself casting at young men, like the glances of a couturier, which betray his profession by the way they have of at once fastening on to the clothes.

'Oh, how strange!' replied M. de Charlus, not without insolence, while seeming to make his thoughts travel a long way to bring them back to a reality very different from that which he had pretended to assume. 'But I don't know them,' he added, afraid of having gone a little too far in expressing antipathy and of having thereby paralysed in the Marquise her intention of making them acquainted to him. 'Would you like to allow me to introduce them to you?' asked Mme de Surgis diffidently. – But, good Lord, whatever you think, I'm very willing, I'm not so very entertaining a personage perhaps for such young men,' intoned M. de Charlus, with the air of hesitation and coldness of someone allowing a politeness to be wrested from him. 'Arnulphe, Victurnien, come quickly,' said Mme de Surgis. Victurnien stood up unhesitatingly. Arnulphe, without seeing further than his brother, followed him submissively.

'It's the sons' turn now, then, Robert said to me. What a scream. Right down to the household dog, he strives to please.[65] It's all the more comic in that my uncle detests gigolos. And see how earnestly he's listening to them. If it'd been me who wanted to introduce them to him, he'd have soon sent me packing. Listen, I'm going to have to go and say hello to Oriane. I've so little time to spend in Paris that I want to try to see everyone here that otherwise I'd have to leave cards with.' 'How well brought up they seem, and what pretty manners they have, M. de Charlus was in the midst of saying. – You think so?' replied Mme de Surgis, enraptured.

Swann, having caught sight of me, came up to Saint-Loup and me. With Swann, a Jewish cheerfulness was less discriminating than the pleasantries of the man of the world. 'Good evening, he said to us. Good Lord! All three of us together, they're going to think it's a meeting of the Syndicate. In a minute they'll be looking to see where the cashbox is!' He had not noticed that M. de Beaucerfeuil was behind him and could hear him. The General gave an involuntary frown. We could hear the voice of M. de Charlus close beside us: 'What, your name's Victurnien, like in the *Cabinet des Antiques*?'[66] said the Baron in order to prolong the conversation with the two young men. 'By Balzac, yes,' answered the elder of the Surgis, who had never read a single line of that novelist, but whose form master had pointed out to him, a few days before, the similarity between his first name and that of d'Esgrignon. Mme de Surgis was overjoyed to see her son excelling himself and M. de Charlus in ecstasies at meeting with so much knowledge.

'It seems Loubet[67] is entirely for us, from an altogether reliable source,' Swann said to Saint-Loup, but this time dropping his voice so as not to be overheard by the General, his wife's Republican connections having become more advantageous to him since the Dreyfus Affair had been at the centre of his concerns. 'I'm telling you this because I know you're with us all the way.'

'No, not that far; you're completely mistaken, answered Robert. The whole affair began badly and I very much regret sticking my nose in. It had nothing to do with me. If I could start again, I'd keep well out of the way. I'm a soldier and for the Army above all. If you remain for a minute with M. Swann, I'll find you again in a little while, I'm going over to my aunt.' But I could see that it was with Mlle d'Ambresac that he was going to talk and I was chagrined to think that he had lied to me about their possible engagement. I felt easier in my mind when I learned that he had been introduced to her half an hour before by Mme de Marsantes, who wanted the marriage, the Ambresacs being very wealthy.

‘At last, said M. de Charlus to Mme de Surgis, I find a young man of education, who has read, who knows who Balzac is. And it gives me all the more pleasure to meet him here, where it’s become such a rarity, in the house of one of my peers, one of us,’ he added, laying stress on these words. In vain did the Guermantes make a pretence of finding all men equal, on the great occasions when they found themselves with people who were ‘well-born’, and especially less ‘well-born’, whom they desired and were able to flatter, they did not hesitate to bring out old family memories. ‘In the old days, the Baron went on, aristocrats meant the best, in intelligence, and in feeling. Yet here’s the first one amongst us that I find knows who Victurnien d’Esgrignon is. I’m wrong to say the first. There’s also a Polignac and a Montesquiou,[68] added M. de Charlus, knowing that this double assimilation could but go to the Marquise’s head. Your sons, moreover, have someone to take after, their maternal grandfather had a celebrated eighteenth-century collection. I will show you my own if you’ll do me the pleasure of coming to have lunch one day, he said to the young Victurnien. I’ll show you a curious edition of the *Cabinet des Antiques* with corrections in Balzac’s own hand. I shall be charmed to bring the two Victurniens face to face.’

I could not make up my mind to leave Swann. He had arrived at that degree of fatigue in which the body of a sick man is no more than a retort in which chemical reactions are to be observed. His face was marked with small specks of Prussian blue, which appeared not to belong to the world of the living, and gave off that kind of smell which, at school, after ‘experiments’, makes it so unpleasant to remain in a ‘Science’ classroom. I asked him whether he had not had a long conversation with the Prince de Guermantes and whether he did not want to recount to me what form it had taken. ‘Yes, indeed, he said, but first go for a moment with M. de Charlus and Mme de Surgis, I’ll wait for you here.’

In fact, M. de Charlus having suggested to Mme de Surgis leaving this overheated room and going to sit for a minute with her in another, had not asked her two sons to go with their mother, but me. In this way, he made it seem, having baited his hook, that he did not care about the two young men. He was, moreover, paying me a cheap compliment, Mme de Surgis-le-Duc being somewhat disapproved of.

Unfortunately, scarcely were we seated in a bay without any exit before Mme de Saint-Euverte, the target of the Baron’s jibes, chanced to come by. She, in order perhaps to dissemble, or to disregard openly the hostile feelings she inspired in M. de Charlus, but above all to show she was on intimate terms with a lady who was talking so familiarly with him, wished the celebrated beauty a disdainfully amicable good day, who replied to it, while glancing at M. de Charlus out of the corner of her eye, with a mocking smile. But so constricted was the bay that when Mme de Saint-Euverte wanted, behind us, to continue flushing out her next day’s guests, she found herself trapped and unable easily to disengage herself, a precious moment which M. de Charlus, anxious to show off his insolent verve to the watching mother of the two young men, took good care not to waste. An inane question that I put to him, without malice, furnished him with the opportunity for a triumphal diatribe of which the wretched Saint-Euverte, almost immobilized behind us, could hardly have lost a single word. ‘Would you believe that this impertinent young man, he said, indicating me to Mme de Surgis, has just asked me, with none of the care one ought to take to hide these sorts of needs, whether I was going to Mme de Saint-Euverte’s, that is, I fancy, whether I had the colic.[69] I should attempt in any case to relieve myself in some more comfortable spot than at the house of someone who, if memory serves, was celebrating her centenary when I was making my entry into society, i.e. not *chez elle*. Yet who would be more interesting to listen to than her? So many historical memories, seen or lived through, from the days of the First Empire and the Restoration,[70] so many intimate stories, too, with nothing “Saint-ly” about them for sure but that must have been very “*vertes*”,[71] to judge by how she still frisks about on those venerable hams! What would stop me from interrogating her about those exciting times is the sensitivity of my olfactory apparatus. Mere proximity to the lady is enough. I suddenly say to myself: “Oh, good God, someone’s burst my cesspit,” but it’s simply that the Marquise, with the aim of getting some invitation, has just opened her mouth. And you’ll understand that were I to have the misfortune to go to her, the cesspit would be multiplied into a fearsome barrelful of sewage. Yet she bears a mystical name that always makes me think jubilantly, though she has long since passed the date of her own jubilee, of that stupid line of so-called “deliquescent” poetry: “*Ah! Verte, combien verte était mon âme ce jour-là…*”[72] But I need more wholesome greenery. I’m told that this indefatigable old street-walker gives “*garden-parties*”, myself, I’d call them “invitations to a stroll in the sewers”. Are you going to filthy yourself there?’ he asked Mme de Surgis, who this time found herself in difficulties. For, wishing to pretend to the Baron that she wasn’t going yet knowing that she would give days of her life rather than miss the Saint-Euverte matinée, she got out of it by a compromise, by uncertainty that is. This uncertainty took so stupidly dilettantish, and so miserably wardrobe-minded a form, that M. de Charlus, unafraid of giving offence to Mme de Surgis, whom he was on the other hand anxious to please, started to laugh to show her that ‘it didn’t wash’ with him.

‘I always admire the people who make plans, she said; I often cancel at the last minute. There’s the question of a summer gown that may alter things. I shall act on the inspiration of the moment.’

For my own part, I was indignant at the abominable short speech that M. de Charlus had just delivered. I would have liked to shower the giver of *garden-parties* with good things. In society, alas, as in the world of politics, the victims are so cowardly that you can not hold it against their executioners for long. Mme de Saint-Euverte, who had managed to extricate herself from the bay the entrance to which we had been obstructing, brushed unintentionally against the Baron in passing and, in a reflex of snobbery that annihilated all the anger in her, perhaps even in hopes of an overture of a kind at which this cannot have been her first attempt, exclaimed: ‘Oh, forgive me, Monsieur de Charlus, I hope I didn’t hurt you,’ as if she were kneeling before her lord and master. The latter did not deign to reply other than by a bold, ironic laugh and granted her only a ‘good evening’ which, as if he had only become aware of the Marquise’s presence once she had been the first to greet him, was one insult the more. At last, with a supreme obsequiousness which made me bleed for her, Mme de Saint-Euverte came up to me, and, after taking me aside, said into my ear: ‘But how have I offended M. de Charlus? They claim he doesn’t consider me smart enough for him,’ she said, laughing uproariously. I remained serious. For one thing, I found it stupid that she should appear to think or to want it thought that no one was in actual fact as smart as she was. And for another thing, people who laugh so loudly at what they say, when it is not funny, thereby excuse us from joining in by taking all the hilarity on themselves.

‘Others assure me that he’s put out I don’t invite him. But he doesn’t give me much encouragement. He looks to be avoiding me (the expression struck me as feeble). Try to find out and come and tell me tomorrow. And if he feels remorse and wants to come with you, bring him. Mercy for all sinners. It would even quite please me, on account of Mme de Surgis, whom it’d annoy. I give you carte blanche. You’ve got the most discerning flair for all that sort of thing and I don’t want to seem to be angling for guests. At all events, on you, I count absolutely.’

I reflected that Swann must be getting tired of waiting for me. I did not want, moreover, to be too late returning home because of Albertine, and taking leave of Mme de Surgis and M. de Charlus, I went to find my invalid again in the card-room. I asked him whether what he had said to the Prince during their conversation in the garden was indeed what M. de Bréauté (whom I did not name) had retailed to us and which had to do with a playlet by Bergotte. He burst out laughing: ‘There’s not a word of truth in it, not one, it’s a complete invention and would have been totally stupid. Really, it’s unbelievable, this spontaneous generation of error. I shan’t ask you who told you that, but it would be really intriguing, in a setting as confined as this, to go back step by step and find out how it took shape. Moreover, how can what the Prince said to me be of any interest to anyone? People are very inquisitive. I’ve never been inquisitive myself, except when I’ve been in love and when I was jealous. And for all that that taught me! Are you jealous?’ I told Swann that I had never felt jealousy, that I did not even know what it was. ‘Well, I congratulate you! When you’re a little bit jealous, it’s not altogether unpleasant, from two points of view. For one thing, because it enables people who are not inquisitive to interest themselves in the lives of other people, or at least of one other person. And then, because it gives you quite a good sense of the sweetness of possession, of getting into a carriage with a woman, of not letting her go off alone. But that’s only in the very early stages of the disease or when the cure is almost complete. In between, it’s the most frightful of tortures. Moreover, I have to say that I’ve seldom experienced even the two forms of sweetness I’m referring to; the first by the fault of my nature, which is incapable of any very prolonged reflection; the second because of circumstances, by the fault of the

woman, I mean of the women, of whom I've been jealous. But that doesn't matter. Even when you no longer care about things, it still means something that you did so once, because it was always for reasons that escaped other people. We feel that the memory of those feelings is only in us; it's into ourselves we must return in order to look at it. Don't make too much fun of the idealist jargon, but what I mean is that I've loved life and have loved the arts. Well, now that I'm a bit too tired to live with other people, these old feelings that I've had, so personal to myself, seem very precious to me, which is the obsession of every collector. I open up my heart to myself like a sort of showcase, and I look one by one at so many loves that other people won't have known. And, about this collection, to which I'm now even more attached than to other people, I tell myself, a little like Mazarin with his books,[73] but without any anguish as it happens, that it will be very tiresome to leave it all behind. But let's get on to my conversation with the Prince, I'm only going to tell one person about it, and that person shall be you.' My hearing him was made harder by the conversation that, right beside us, M. de Charlus, who had returned to the card-room, was prolonging indefinitely. 'And do you read, too? What do you do?' he asked the Comte Arnulphe, who did not know even the name of Balzac. But his short-sightedness, because he saw everything very small, made him appear to be seeing from a long way off, so that, a rare touch of poetry in a statuesque Greek god, remote and mysterious stars were as if inscribed in his pupils.

'Suppose we take a short turn in the garden, Monsieur,' I said to Swann, while the Comte Arnulphe, in a lisping voice that seemed to indicate that his mental development at least was incomplete, answered M. de Charlus with an artless and obliging precision: 'Oh, with me it's more golf, tennis, football, running, polo especially.' Just so, having subdivided herself, did Minerva, in a certain city, cease from being the goddess of Wisdom and incarnate one part of herself in a purely sporting, hippic divinity, 'Athena Hippia'. He also went to Saint-Moritz to ski, for Pallas Tritogeneia frequents the high peaks and outruns horsemen.[74] 'Ah!' replied M. de Charlus, with the transcendent smile of the intellectual who does not even take the trouble to hide that he is making fun, but who anyway feels so superior to other people, and so despises the intelligence of those who are the least stupid, that he hardly differentiates between them and those who are the most stupid, as soon as they can be agreeable to him in some other fashion. By the mere act of talking to Arnulphe, M. de Charlus considered that he was conferring on him a superiority that the whole world must envy and acknowledge. 'No, Swann replied, I'm too tired to walk, let's rather sit down in some corner, I can't stand any longer.' This was true, yet starting to talk had already given him back a certain animation. The fact is that, even in the most genuine fatigue, especially among the nervous, there is an element that depends on our awareness and is preserved only by the memory. We are suddenly weary the moment that we fear being so, and to overcome our fatigue it is enough to forget it. True, Swann was not quite one of those exhausted indefatigables who, having arrived drained, wilting, ready to drop, revive in conversation like a flower in water and can, for hours on end, draw, from their own words, a strength that they cannot, alas, transmit to those who are listening to them, who appear more and more dejected the more wide awake the speaker feels. But Swann belonged to that strong Jewish race, in whose vital energy and resistance to death its individuals themselves seem to share. Struck down by their particular illness, as it itself has been by persecution, they each struggle indefinitely in a terrible death agony that may be prolonged beyond any probable term, when all that can now be seen is a prophet's beard crowned by an immense nose, dilated in order to draw the final breaths, before the time comes for the ritual prayers and the punctual file-past to begin, of distant relatives, moving mechanically forward, as on an Assyrian frieze.

We went to sit down, but before moving away from the group formed by M. de Charlus, the two young Surgis and their mother, Swann could not help fixing the latter's corsage with the lengthy, dilated, lustful glances of a connoisseur. He put in his monocle so as to have a better view and, even as he was talking to me, he would now and again cast a glance in that lady's direction. 'Here, word for word, is my conversation with the Prince, he said to me once we were seated, and if you recall what I told you just now, you'll see why I have chosen you as a confidant. And then for another reason, too, as you'll find out one day. "My dear Swann, the Prince de Guermantes said to me, you'll forgive me if I've seemed to be avoiding you for some little time. (I'd noticed nothing of the kind, being ill and myself avoiding company.) In the first place, I'd heard, and could indeed foresee, that you held, in this unfortunate affair that is dividing the country, opinions wholly opposed to my own. Now it would have been pained me exceedingly had you professed them in my presence. So great was my nervousness that, the Princesse having heard her brother-in-law, the Grand-Duke of Hesse,[75] say two years ago that Dreyfus was innocent, she didn't simply pick up on the remark very promptly, she didn't repeat it so as not to annoy me. At almost the same time, the Swedish Crown Prince[76] had come to Paris and, having probably heard that the Empress Eugénie was a Dreyfusiste,[77] got her confused with the Princesse (an odd confusion, you'll admit, between a woman of my wife's rank and a Spaniard, far less well born than they say and married to a mere Bonaparte) and said to her: "Princesse, I'm doubly glad to meet you, because I know you have the same ideas as I do about the Dreyfus Affair, which doesn't surprise me since your Highness is from Bavaria." Which earned the Prince this reply: "Monseigneur, I'm nothing more than a French princess, and I think as all my compatriots do." Now, my dear Swann, about a year and a half ago, a conversation I had with General de Beaucerfeuil gave me to suspect that, not an error, but grave illegalities had been committed in the conduct of the trial." '

We were interrupted (Swann was anxious that his account should not be overheard) by the voice of M. de Charlus, who (without concerning himself with us) was on his way past, escorting Mme de Surgis out, and stopped in order to try and detain her further, either on account of her sons, or from that desire which the Guermantes had not to see the present moment brought to an end, which plunged them into a sort of anxious inertia. In which connection, Swann told me something a little later on that removed from the name of Surgis-le-Duc all the poetry I had been finding in it. The Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc had a far higher place in society, and far better connections by marriage, than her cousin, the Comte de Surgis, who was poor and lived on his estates. But the word that ended the title, 'le Duc', was far from having the origin I had been lending to it, which had led me to compare it, in my imagination, to Bourg l'Abbé, Bois-le-Roi and the like.[78] Quite simply, during the Restoration, a Comte de Surgis had married the daughter of an extremely wealthy industrialist, M. Leduc, or Le Duc, himself the son of a manufacturer of chemical products, the wealthiest man of his day, and who was a peer of France.[79] For the male issue of this marriage, King Charles X had created the marquisate of Surgis-le-Duc, the marquisate of Surgis existing already in the family. The addition of the bourgeois name had not prevented this branch, on account of its enormous fortune, from marrying into the first families of the realm. And the present Marquise de Surgis-le-Duc, with her high birth, might have had a position of the first rank. A demon of perversity had driven her, despising a ready-made position, to flee the conjugal home, and to live in the most scandalous fashion. Then, the world she had despised as a twenty-year-old, when it was at her feet, failed her cruelly at thirty, when, for the last ten years, no one, bar a few faithful woman friends, any longer acknowledged her, and she had undertaken painstakingly to reconquer, bit by bit, what she had possessed at her birth (a not uncommon return journey).

As for the great noblemen, her kinsfolk, disowned of old by her and who had disowned her in their turn, she excused herself for the delight she would take in getting them back by the childhood memories she would be able to evoke with them. In saying which, in order to disguise her snobbery, she was perhaps being less untruthful than she thought. 'Basin, it's my whole youth!' she said on the day when he returned to her. And indeed, there was some truth in this. But she had miscalculated in choosing him for a lover. For all the Duchesse de Guermantes's woman friends would be taking her side, and Mme de Surgis would thus descend for a second time the slope she had had so much difficulty in reascending. 'Well,' M. de Charlus was in the midst of saying to her, anxious to keep the conversation going, 'you must lay my tribute at the feet of the beautiful portrait. How is it? What's become of it? – But you know, I no longer have it, replied Mme de Surgis, my husband wasn't happy with it. – Not happy! With one of the masterpieces of the age, the equal of Nattier's Duchesse de Châteauroux[80] and which aspired, moreover, to capture a goddess no less murderous and majestic! Oh, that little blue collar! That's to say, never did Vermeer paint a fabric with greater mastery, let's not say that too loudly so Swann doesn't attack us with the intention of avenging his favourite painter, the master of Delft.' The Marquise, turning round, addressed a smile and held out her hand to Swann, who had risen to greet her. But, almost without disguising it, the advancing years having perhaps deprived him, either of the moral will, out of an indifference to public opinion, or else of the physical capability, out of a heightening of desire and a weakening of the mechanisms that help to conceal it, the moment Swann had, as he shook the Marquise's hand, seen her bosom from close to and from above, he plunged an attentive, serious, absorbed, almost anxious, gaze into the depths of her corsage, and his nostrils, intoxicated by the woman's perfume, quivered like a butterfly ready to go and settle on the half-glimpsed flower. Abruptly, he tore himself free from the vertigo that had gripped him, and, so contagious at times is desire, Mme de Surgis herself, though embarrassed, suppressed a deep sigh. 'The painter was put out, she said to M. de Charlus, and took it back. People have said it's now at Diane de Saint-Euverte's. – I shall never believe, answered the Baron, that a masterpiece could have such poor taste.'

'He's talking to her about her portrait. *I* could talk to her about that portrait as well as Charlus, Swann said, affecting a drawling, louche tone and following the retreating couple with his eyes. And it would surely give me more pleasure than Charlus,' he added. I asked him whether what was said about M. de Charlus was true, in which I lied twice over, for if I did not know whether anything had ever been said, I knew very well on the other hand, from a little earlier, that what I had meant was true. Swann shrugged, as if I had proffered an absurdity. 'That's to say he's a delightful friend. But do I need to add that it's purely Platonic. He's more sentimental than others, that's all; on the other hand, because he never goes very far with women, that's given a sort of credibility to the nonsensical rumours you want to talk about. Charlus is very fond of his friends perhaps, but take my word for it, that has never happened anywhere except in his head and in his heart. Anyway, we're perhaps going to get a couple of seconds' peace and quiet. So, the Prince de Guermantes went on: "I'll admit to you that this notion, of a possible illegality in the conduct of the trial, was extremely painful to me because, as you know, of the reverence I have for the Army; I raised it again with the General, and I no longer had any doubts on that score, alas! I shall tell you frankly that the idea that in all this an innocent man might have suffered the most ignominious of punishments had never even crossed my mind. But, tormented by this idea of illegality, I set to studying what I had refused to read, and that was when I became haunted by doubts, not just about the illegality this time but about his innocence. I didn't think I should mention it to the Princesse. God knows she's become as French as I am. After all, I'd made such a point, from the day I married her, of showing her our France in all her beauty, and what for me is the most splendid thing about her, her Army, that it was too cruel for me to let her into my suspicions, which only affected, it's true, a few officers. But I'm from a family of soldiers, I refused to believe that officers could be wrong. I raised it yet again with Beaucerfeuil, he confessed to me that guilty machinations had been set on foot, that the bordereau wasn't perhaps by Dreyfus, but that there existed glaring proof of his guilt. This was the Henry document.[81] And a few days later, we learnt it was a forgery. From then on, on the sly from the Princesse, I started reading *Le Siècle* and *L'Aurore*[82] every day; soon I was no longer in any doubt, I could no longer sleep. I unburdened myself of my moral sufferings to our friend, the Abbé Poiré, whom I was astonished to find had the same conviction, and I had Masses said by him for Dreyfus, for his unfortunate wife and his children. At which juncture, one morning when I went in to the Princesse, I saw her lady's-maid hiding something she'd had in her hand. I laughed and asked her what it was, she went red and wouldn't tell me. I had the utmost confidence in my wife, but this incident greatly disturbed me (the Princesse, too, no doubt, her lady's-maid must have told her about it), because my dear Marie hardly spoke to me during the lunch that followed. That was the day when I asked the Abbé Poiré if he could say my Mass for Dreyfus the next day." Oh no!' exclaimed Swann in a low voice, breaking off. I looked up and saw the Duc de Guermantes coming towards us. 'Forgive my disturbing you, *mes enfants*. Young fellow, he said, addressing himself to me, I am delegated to speak to you by Oriane. Marie and Gilbert have asked her to stay and have supper at their table with five or six people only: the Princesse de Hesse, Mme de Ligne, Mme de Tarente, Mme de Chevreuse and the Duchesse d'Arenberg.[83] Unfortunately, we can't stay, because we're going to a small costume ball of sorts.' I was listening, but whenever we have something to do at an appointed moment, we depute a certain personage inside us accustomed to this sort of task to keep an eye on the clock and give us due warning. This internal servant reminded me, as I had asked him to a few hours earlier, that Albertine, at that moment very far from my thoughts, was to come round straight after the theatre. So I turned down the supper. It was not that I was not enjoying myself at the Princesse de Guermantes's. Men may thus have several sorts of pleasures. The true pleasure is that for which they give up another. But this last, if it is apparent, or is alone apparent even, may act as a decoy for the first one, may reassure the jealous or throw them off the scent, may lead the world astray. And yet, a little happiness or a little suffering is all it takes for us to sacrifice it to the other pleasure. Sometimes a third order of pleasures, more serious but more essential, does not yet exist for us, whose virtuality betrays itself only by arousing regrets or discouragement. It is to these pleasures, however, that we shall give ourselves later on. To give an altogether minor example, a soldier in time of peace will sacrifice his social life to love, but once war is declared (and without there being any need even to introduce the notion of a patriotic duty), love to the passion, stronger than love, for fighting. For all that Swann had said he was glad to be recounting his history to me, I felt strongly that, because of the lateness of the hour, and because he was too unwell, his conversation with me was one of those exertions for which those who know that they are killing themselves by late nights, and by excess, feel an exasperated regret on returning home, like that felt by prodigals at the huge sums they have once again spent, yet who will be unable to prevent themselves on the morrow from tossing money out of the window. Once past a certain degree of weakness, whether it be caused by age or by sickness, any pleasure indulged at the expense of sleep, outside our habits, any disruption, becomes a worry. The talker continues to talk out of politeness, or of excitement, but he knows that the hour when he might still have been able to get to sleep has already

passed, and knows, too, the reproaches he will be directing at himself during the insomnia and tiredness that will ensue. Already, moreover, even the momentary pleasure has come to an end, mind and body are too drained of their energies to welcome with pleasure what to your interlocutor seems like a distraction. They resemble an apartment on a day of departure or removal, when the visits we receive sitting on trunks, our eyes glued to the clock, are such drudgery. 'Alone at last, he said to me; I no longer know where I'd got to. I told you, didn't I, that the Prince had asked the Abbé Poiré if he could have his Mass said for Dreyfus. "No," was the Abbé's reply to me (I say *me*, Swann said, because it's the Prince talking to me, you understand?), "because I've another Mass I've been instructed to say for him also this morning." – What, I said to him, there's another Catholic besides myself who's convinced of his innocence? – So it would seem. – But this other supporter's conviction must be more recent than my own. – But this supporter was already making me say Masses when you still thought Dreyfus to be guilty. – Oh, I can tell it's not someone from our circle. – On the contrary! – Really, there are Dreyfusistes among us? You intrigue me; I'd like to unburden myself to this *rara avis*, if I know them. – You do know them. – Their name? – The Princesse de Guermantes." While I had been afraid of upsetting nationalist opinions, the French faith of my dear wife had been afraid on the other hand of alarming my religious opinions, my patriotic sentiments. But on her side, she'd been thinking as I had, though for longer than me. And what her maid had been hiding on entering her room, what she went out to buy her every day, was *L'Aurore*. There and then, my dear Swann, I thought of the pleasure I'd give you by telling you how closely akin my ideas on the matter were to your own; forgive me for not having done so sooner. If you go back to the silence I had maintained vis-à-vis the Princesse, you won't be surprised that being of the same mind as you should then have kept me away from you even more than thinking differently from you. For I found the subject infinitely painful to broach. The more I believe that an error, that crimes even have been committed, the more I bleed in my love for the Army. I'd have thought that opinions similar to mine were far from filling you with the same sadness, when I was told the other day that you had strongly condemned the insults to the Army and that the Dreyfusistes should have agreed to ally themselves with the insulters. That decided me, I'll admit I found it cruel to confess to you what I think of certain officers, few in number happily, but it's a relief for me not to have to keep my distance from you any longer and especially that you should feel that, if my feelings may have been other, it was because I was in no doubt at all as to the soundness of the verdict. As soon as I felt any doubt, I could wish for only one thing, for the error to be put right." I confess to you that these words of the Prince de Guermantes moved me profoundly. If you knew him as I do, if you knew from where he had had to return to get to this point, you would feel admiration for him, and he deserves it. Not that his opinion surprises me, he's so upright a character!' Swann was forgetting that, that same afternoon, he had said to me on the contrary that opinions in the Dreyfus Affair were governed by atavism. At most, he had made an exception for intelligence, since in Saint-Loup's case it had succeeded in getting the better of atavism and making him into a Dreyfusard. But he had just found that this victory was of short duration and that Saint-Loup had gone over to the enemy. So the role devolved a little earlier on to intelligence was now given to uprightness of heart. In point of fact, we always discover after the event that our adversaries had a reason for taking the side they do take, and one that does not depend on the degree to which that side is in the right, and that those who think as we do have been constrained to do so by, if their moral nature is too contemptible to be invoked, intelligence, and if they have no great acumen, uprightness.

Swann now found those who were of his opinion to be uniformly intelligent, his old friend the Prince de Guermantes and my school-fellow Bloch, whom he had hitherto kept at arm's length but whom he invited to lunch. Swann interested Bloch greatly by telling him that the Prince de Guermantes was a Dreyfusard. 'We must ask him to sign our lists for Picquart;[84] with a name like his, that would have a tremendous effect.' But Swann, tempering the burning conviction of the Israelite with the diplomatic moderation of the man about town, whose habits he had imbibed too deeply to be able this belatedly to shed them, refused to sanction Bloch's sending the Prince a round-robin to sign, even a seemingly spontaneous one. 'He can't do that, one mustn't ask for the impossible, repeated Swann. Here we have a charming man who has travelled thousands of miles to get to where we are. He can be very useful to us. Were he to sign your list, he would simply be compromising himself with his own people, would be castigated on our account, would perhaps repent of his confidences and not give us any more.' What was more, Swann withheld his own name. He thought it too Hebraic not to have the wrong effect. And besides, although he approved of everything where the review was concerned, he wanted no part in the anti-militarist campaign. He was wearing, which he had never done up until now, the decoration he had won as a very young militiaman in '70,[85] and he added a codicil to his will asking that, contrary to his previous dispositions, he should be granted the military honours due to his rank as a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur.[86] This assembled around the church at Combray a whole squadron of those troopers for whose future Françoise used to weep when she contemplated the prospect of a war. In short, Swann refused to sign Bloch's round-robin, so that, though he passed in the eyes of many for a fanatical Dreyfusard, my school-fellow considered him lukewarm, infected with nationalism, and a jingo. Swann left me without shaking me by the hand so as not to be obliged to make his farewells in a room where he had too many friends, but he said to me: 'You ought to come and see your friend Gilberte. She has really grown up and changed, you wouldn't recognize her. She'd be so happy!' I no longer loved Gilberte. She was for me like a dead person whom one has long mourned, but then oblivion has set in, and, were she to be resurrected, she would no longer be able to insert herself into a life no longer made for her. I had no desire to see her any more, nor the desire even to show her that I was not keen to see her which every day, when I loved her, I promised myself I would display once I no longer loved her.

And so, seeking now only to make it look, where Gilberte was concerned, as if I had wished with all my heart to see her again, but had been prevented from doing so by so-called circumstances 'outside my control', which in fact occur, in any coherent way at least, only once our will does not go against them, very far from giving a cautious welcome to Swann's invitation, I did not leave him until he had promised me to explain in detail to his daughter the untoward events that had deprived me, and would deprive me still, from going to visit her. 'Anyway, I shall write to her in a minute when I get home, I added. But do tell her it will be a letter of threats, for in a month or two, I shall be completely free, and then let her tremble, for I shall be round as often as in the old days even.'

Before leaving Swann, I had a word with him about his health. 'No, it's not as bad as all that, he replied. At all events, as I told you, I'm rather tired and I'm resigned in advance to accepting what may happen. Only, I confess it would be very irritating to die before the end of the Dreyfus Affair. Those scum have more than one trick up their sleeves. I don't doubt they'll be beaten in the end, but they're very influential, they've got support everywhere. Just when it's going best, everything gives way. I'd like to live long enough to see Dreyfus rehabilitated[87] and Picquart a colonel.'

Once Swann had left, I returned into the large drawing-room where the Princesse de Guermantes was, with whom I did not then know I was one day to be such good friends. The passion that she felt for M. de Charlus did not at first reveal itself to me. I merely observed that the Baron, from a certain time on, and without breaking out into any of that hostility towards the Princesse de Guermantes that with him was never a surprise, while continuing to have as much, or perhaps even more affection for her, seemed irritated and displeased whenever anyone mentioned her to him. He no longer ever put her name down on the list of people with whom he wished to dine.

It is true that before this, I had heard a very malicious member of society say that the Princesse was altogether changed, that she was in love with M. de Charlus, but this slander had seemed to me absurd and made me indignant. I had certainly been surprised to observe that, when I was recounting something concerning myself, should M. de Charlus be introduced into the middle of it, the Princesse's attention was at once drawn a notch tighter, to become that of an invalid who, listening to us talking about ourselves, and consequently in a casual and distracted fashion, suddenly recognizes a name to be that of the illness he is suffering from, which both interests and delights him. Thus, were I to say to her: 'M. de Charlus was in fact telling me…', the Princesse would gather up the slackened reins of her attention. On one occasion, having said in her presence that at that moment M. de Charlus was quite drawn to a certain person, I was astonished to see insert itself into the Princesse's eyes the different, momentary line that traces something like the wake of a fissure in the pupils and which originates in a thought that our words have, without our knowing, stirred up in the person to whom we are speaking, a secret thought that will not betray itself by

words but will rise up from the depths we have disturbed to the momentarily impaired surface of the eyes. But if my words had affected the Princesse, I did not suspect in what way.

A little time later, she began anyway talking to me about M. de Charlus, and almost openly. If she made allusion to the rumours that a few people were circulating concerning the Baron, it was only as though to absurd and infamous inventions. On the other hand, she said: 'I consider that any woman who lost her heart to a man of Palamède's immense worth should have a sufficiently high outlook, and sufficient devotion, to accept and understand him as a whole, just as he is, to respect his freedom, his fancies, to seek only to smooth out his difficulties and console him for his sorrows.' By which remarks, vague though they were, the Princesse de Guermantes revealed what she was seeking to magnify, in just the same way as M. de Charlus himself sometimes did. Have I not heard the latter say on more than one occasion to people who up until then had been unsure whether he was being traduced or not: 'I, who have had many ups and many downs in my life, who have known all sorts of people, thieves as well as kings, and even, I have to say, with a slight preference for the thieves, who have pursued beauty in all its forms, etc.', and by these words, which he thought clever, and by denying rumours that they did not suspect had been circulating (or to make an allowance for the truth, out of an inclination, or a sense of proportion, or a concern for verisimilitude, that he alone adjudged to be minimal), he removed the last doubts concerning him of some, and inspired the first doubts in those who had not as yet felt any. For the most dangerous of all forms of concealment is that of the fault itself in the mind of the guilty person. His own permanent awareness of it prevents him from imagining how general ignorance of it is, how readily a complete falsehood would be believed and, in return, from appreciating at what degree of truthfulness confession begins for others, in words that he believes to be innocent. Moreover, he would in any case have been quite wrong to seek to suppress it, for there are no vices that in high society cannot find complaisant support, and the domestic arrangements of a château have been known to be turned upside down so that a sister may sleep next to her sister, the moment it was known that she did not have a merely sisterly love for her. But what suddenly revealed the Princesse's love to me was a particular fact that I shall not dwell on here, for it forms part of the quite different story in which M. de Charlus allowed a queen to die rather than miss the hairdresser who was to use the curling tongs on him for the sake of a bus conductor by whom he found himself prodigiously intimidated.[88] However, in order to have done with the Princesse's love, let me say what the trifle was that opened my eyes. On the day in question, I was alone with her in her carriage. Just as we were going past a postbox, she made it stop. She had not brought a footman with her. She half drew a letter out from her muff and made as if to descend in order to put it in the box. I tried to stop her, she put up a slight struggle, and we both of us now realized that our first movement had been, hers compromising for seeming to be protecting a secret, mine tactless for opposing itself to that protection. She was quickest regaining possession of herself. Suddenly going very red, she gave me the letter, I no longer dared not take it, but, as I put it into the box I saw, without wanting to, that it was addressed to M. de Charlus.

To go back in time and to that first soirée at the Princesse de Guermantes's, I went to take my leave of her, for her cousins were driving me home and were in a great hurry. M. de Guermantes wanted, however, to say good-bye to his brother. Mme de Surgis having had the time, in a doorway, to tell the Duc that M. de Charlus had been charming to both her and her sons, this great kindness on his brother's part, the first in this connection that the latter had shown, touched Basin deeply and reawoke in him family feelings that were never dormant for long. Just as we were taking our leave of the Princesse, he insisted, without declaring his gratitude to M. de Charlus in so many words, on expressing his fondness for him, whether because he in fact found it hard to contain, or else so that the Baron might remember that the kind of action he had performed that evening had not gone unobserved by the eyes of a brother, just as, with the object of creating salutary associations of memories for the future, we give a lump of sugar to a dog that has sat up and begged. 'Well, well, young brother, said the Duc, stopping M. de Charlus and taking him affectionately under his arm, so that's how we walk past our older brother without so much as a small hello. I never see you any more, Mémé, and you don't know how much I miss you. Looking for some old letters I in fact found some from poor Mama that were all so full of affection for you. – Thank you, Basin,' replied M. de Charlus in a strained voice, for he could never speak of their mother without emotion. 'You ought to make up your mind to let me fix up a cottage for you at Guermantes,' the Duc went on. 'It's nice to see the two brothers so affectionate with one another, said the Princesse to Oriane. – Oh, indeed, I don't think you can find many brothers like that. I shall invite you with him, she promised me. You're not in his bad books?… But what can they have to say to each other?' she added, in an anxious tone, for she could hear their words only imperfectly. She had always felt a certain jealousy at the pleasure M. de Guermantes experienced in talking with his brother about a past which he rather kept from his wife. She sensed that, when they were glad to be in one another's company like this and when she, no longer able to restrain her impatient curiosity, came to join them, her arrival did not please them. But this evening, a second jealousy was added to this habitual one. For if Mme de Surgis had recounted to M. de Guermantes the kindnesses his brother had shown, so that he might thank him, devoted woman friends of the Guermantes couple had at the same time thought they should warn the Duchesse that her husband's mistress had been seen deep in conversation with his brother. And Mme de Guermantes agonized over that. 'Remember how happy we were in the old days at Guermantes, the Duc went on, addressing himself to M. de Charlus. If you were sometimes to come there in the summer, we could resume our good life. Do you remember old father Courveau: "Why is Pascal *troublant*? Because he is *trou*… trou…" – "*blê*",' pronounced M. de Charlus, as if he were still answering his teacher. ' "And why is Pascal *troublé*? Because he is *trou*… because he is *trou*…" – *blanc*[89] – "Very good, you will pass, you will certainly get a distinction, and Mme la Duchesse will present you with a Chinese dictionary." – Because you remember, Basin, at that time, Basin, I had a thing about Chinese. – Do I not remember, my dear Mémé! And that old porcelain vase that Hervey de Saint-Denis[90] brought you back, I can see it now. You'd been threatening us you'd go and spend the whole of your life in China, so smitten were you by the country; you already loved going off on long jaunts. Oh, you were someone out of the ordinary, for it can be said that in nothing did you have the same tastes as everyone else…' But hardly had he spoken these words before the Duc went red as a beetroot, as they say, for he knew, if not of his brother's habits, then at least of his reputation. As he never spoke about it to him, he was all the more embarrassed at having said something that might seem to refer to it, and even more so at having appeared embarrassed. After a second's silence: 'Who knows, he said, in order to erase his last words, perhaps you were in love with a Chinese girl before loving so many white ones and finding favour with them, if I'm to judge by a certain lady to whom you have certainly given pleasure this evening by talking to her. She found you enchanting.' The Duc had promised himself not to talk about Mme de Surgis but, in the midst of the disarray into which the gaffe he had made had just thrown his thoughts, he had snatched at the nearest one, which was the very one that ought not to have appeared in the conversation, even if it had led to it. But M. de Charlus had noticed his brother go red in the face. And, like a guilty man not wishing to appear embarrassed by having the crime he is supposed not to have committed discussed in front of him, and who thinks that he should prolong a perilous conversation: 'I'm charmed, he replied, but I insist on returning to what you said before that, which strikes me as profoundly true. You said that I have never had the same ideas as other people, you didn't say ideas, you said tastes. How right that is! I've never had the same tastes as other people in anything, how right that is! You said I had particular tastes. – No, no,' protested M. de Guermantes, who in fact had not used those words and perhaps did not believe in the reality they denoted in his brother's case. Did he think he had the right, moreover, to harass him on account of singularities which had in any case remained sufficiently doubtful or sufficiently secret as in no way to harm the Baron's immense position? What was more, sensing that this position of his brother's was going to be of service to his mistresses, the Duc told himself that this was well worth a few kindnesses in return; had he had knowledge at that time of any 'special' liaison of his brother's, M. de Guermantes, in the hope of the support the latter would lend him, a hope allied to the pious memory of days gone by, would have overlooked it, closing his eyes to it, and if need be lending a hand. 'Come, Basin; good evening, Palamède,' said the Duchesse, who, gnawed at by rage and curiosity, could stand no more, 'if you've decided to spend the night here, we'd do better to stay to supper. You've been keeping Marie and me standing here for the last half-hour.' The Duc left his brother after a meaningful embrace and we all three descended the immense staircase of the Princesse's *hôtel*.

On either side, on the topmost steps, couples were spread out waiting for their carriages to be brought up. Erect, isolated, having at her side her husband and myself, the Duchesse stood on the left of the staircase, already wrapped in her Tiepolo cloak, the collar fastened by the clasp of rubies, being devoured by the eyes of women and of men, seeking to chance upon the secret of her elegance and her beauty. Waiting for her carriage on the same stair as Mme de Guermantes,

but at the opposite end, Mme de Gallardon, who had long since lost all hope of receiving her cousin's visit, had turned her back so as not to appear to have seen her, and above all so as not to present proof that the latter had not acknowledged her. Mme de Gallardon was in a very spiteful mood because some gentlemen who were with her had thought they should bring up the subject of Oriane: 'I'm not in the least anxious to see her, she had replied, I caught sight of her just now, in any case, she's beginning to age; it seems she can't come to terms with it. Basin himself says so. And I can well understand that, because, since she's not intelligent, is a thoroughly nasty piece of work, and has a bad way with her, she certainly feels that, once she's no longer beautiful, she'll have nothing left at all.'

I had put on my overcoat, for which M. de Guermantes, who was afraid of catching a chill, reproved me as he went down with me, because of how warm it was. And the generation of noblemen who have more or less passed through the hands of Monseigneur Dupanloup[91] speak such bad French (the Castellanes[92] excepted), that the Duc expressed his thought thus: 'It's better not to be covered up before going outside, at least *as a general thesis*.' I can still see that whole departure, still see, if I am not mistaken in placing him on that staircase, a portrait removed from its frame, the Prince de Sagan,[93] whose last society soirée this was to be, uncovering himself in order to pay his respects to the Duchesse, with so sweeping a revolution of his top-hat in his white-gloved hand, which matched the gardenia in his buttonhole, that you were surprised it was not a felt hat with a feather from the Ancien Régime, several ancestral faces from which were reproduced exactly in that of the great nobleman. He remained beside her for only a short time, but his attitudes, however momentary, sufficed to compose a whole *tableau vivant*, a scene from history as it were. Moreover, as he has since died, and as I hardly did more than catch sight of him in his lifetime, he has become for me so much a character out of history, of the history of society at least, that I sometimes feel astonishment when I reflect that a woman and a man whom I know are his sister and his nephew.

As we were going down the stairs, there came up them, with an air of lassitude that suited her, a woman who looked to be about forty though she was more than that. This was the Princesse d'Orvillers, a natural daughter, it was said, of the Duc de Parme, whose soft voice was marked by a vague Austrian accent. She advanced, tall, stooped, in a dress of flowered white silk, allowing her delectable bosom to beat, palpitating and exhausted, through a harness of diamonds and sapphires. Tossing her head like a royal mare encumbered by its halter of pearls, of inestimable value but an uncomfortable weight, she rested her gentle, charming gaze first here, then there, of a blue which, as it began to weaken, became more caressing still, and gave a friendly nod of the head to the majority of the departing guests. 'A fine time to be arriving, Paulette! said the Duchesse. – Oh, I'm so very sorry! But truly, there wasn't the physical possibility,' answered the Princesse d'Orvillers, who had got this sort of expression from the Duchesse de Guermantes, but who brought to it her natural gentleness and the air of sincerity lent by the vigour of a remotely Teutonic accent in so affectionate a voice. She seemed to be alluding to complications in her life too lengthy to be spoken of, and not to common or garden soirées, though she was at that moment returning from several. But it was not these that had forced her to arrive so late. Since the Prince de Guermantes had for long years prevented his wife from receiving Mme d'Orvillers, the latter, once the ban was lifted, contented herself with replying to the invitations, so as not to appear to be craving them, simply by leaving a card. After two or three years of this method, she came in person, but very late, as if after the theatre. In this way, she made it seem as if she cared nothing about the soirée, or about being seen there, but was simply coming to pay a visit to the Prince and the Princesse, for their sake alone, out of sympathy, at the time when, three-quarters of the guests having left, she would 'enjoy them more'. 'Oriane has really sunk as low as you can go, grumbled Mme de Gallardon. I don't understand Basin letting her talk to Mme d'Orvillers. M. de Gallardon wasn't the man to have let me do that.' For my part, I had recognized in Mme d'Orvillers the woman who, near the Guermantes *hôtel*, had cast long, languorous looks at me, had turned round and had stopped in front of shop windows. Mme de Guermantes introduced me, Mme d'Orvillers was charming, neither too friendly nor prickly. She looked at me as at everyone else, out of her gentle eyes… But never again was I to receive from her, when I met her, a single one of those overtures in which she had seemed to be offering herself. There are particular looks which appear to recognize you, that a young man only ever receives from certain women – or certain men – up until the day when they get to know you and learn that you are the friend of people with whom they, too, are connected.

They announced that the carriage had been brought up. Mme de Guermantes gathered up her red skirt as if to go downstairs and get into the carriage, but, seized perhaps by remorse, or by the desire to give pleasure and above all to take advantage of the brevity that the physical impediment to prolonging it imposed on so tiresome an action, she looked at Mme de Gallardon; then, as if she had only just noticed her, taken with an inspiration, she retraversed the whole length of the stair, before descending, and, having reached her delighted cousin, held out her hand to her. 'How long it has been!' the Duchesse said, and then, so as not to have to expand on all that this formula purported to contain by way of regrets and legitimate excuses, she turned with an expression of alarm towards the Duc, who had, in fact, gone down with me to the carriage, and was furious on finding that his wife had set off towards Mme de Gallardon and was holding up the movement of the other carriages. 'Oriane is still very beautiful all the same! said Mme de Gallardon. People amuse me when they say there's no love lost between us; we may, for reasons we have no need to divulge to others, go for years without seeing one another, we have too many memories in common to be able ever to be separated, and, deep down, she knows very well that she loves me more than so many of the people she sees every day and who are not of her blood.' Mme de Gallardon indeed was like those spurned lovers who want at all costs to make you believe that they are better loved than those whom their fair one dotes on. And (by the praises with which, untroubled by any contradiction with what she had been saying just before, she was so lavish when speaking of the Duchesse de Guermantes) she proved indirectly that the latter had a thorough command of the maxims that should guide a woman of high fashion in her career, who, at the very moment when the most wonderful of her outfits is exciting, as well as admiration, envy, knows how to cross a whole staircase in order to disarm it. 'At least take care not to get your shoes wet' (there had been a brief downpour), said the Duc, who was still furious at having waited.

On the way back, so exiguous was the coupé, the red shoes necessarily found themselves in close proximity to my own, and Mme de Guermantes, afraid they might even have touched them, said to the Duc: 'This young man is going to be obliged to say to me, like in some cartoon or other: "Madame, tell me here and now that you love me, but don't tread on my feet like that."[94] My thoughts as it happens were at some remove from Mme de Guermantes. Ever since Saint-Loup had spoken to me of a high-born girl who went into a brothel and of the Baronne Putbus's lady's maid, it was in these two individuals that, formed into a single whole, were now subsumed the longings inspired in me daily by so many beauties of two classes, the vulgar and magnificent on the one hand, the majestic lady's-maids from great houses, puffed up with pride, who say "we" when speaking of duchesses, and on the other hand, the girls whose names it was enough at times that I should have read in the account of a ball, without even having seen them go past in a carriage or on foot, for me to fall in love with them, and having searched painstakingly through the *Annuaire des châteaux*[95] for where they were spending the summer (allowing myself very often to be led astray by a similarity in the names), I would dream of going by turns to inhabit the plains of the West, the sand dunes of the North or the pine woods of the Midi. But for all that I had fused together all the most exquisite carnal substance so as to constitute, following the ideal traced out for me by Saint-Loup, the dissolute young girl and Mme Putbus's lady's-maid, my two possessible beauties lacked what I could not know until I had once set eyes on them: an individual character. I was to tire myself out seeking vainly to imagine, during the months when my desire turned rather to young girls, what the one whom Saint-Loup had talked to me about was like in her person, or who she was, and during the months when I would have preferred a lady's-maid, that of Mme Puthbus. But how restful, after being perpetually troubled by my anxious longings for so many fugitive creatures whose names even I often did not know, who were in any case so hard to find, even more so to get to know and impossible perhaps to conquer, to have selected from out of all this scattered, fugitive and anonymous beauty, two choice specimens complete with their descriptions, whom I was at least sure of procuring for myself when I wanted! I deferred the moment of starting on this twofold pleasure, as I did that of working, but the certainty of enjoying it whenever I wanted excused me almost from taking it, like the sleeping pills that it is enough to have within reach of our hand for us no longer to need them but to fall asleep. I now desired only two women in the world, whose faces, it is true, I could not manage to picture to myself, but whose names Saint-Loup had given me and whose compliance he had guaranteed. So that, if by his words of a little earlier he had imposed an arduous task on my imagination, he had, in return, procured a considerable relaxation and a lasting respite for my will.

'Well, the Duchesse said to me, apart from balls, can I not be of any use to you? Have you found a salon where you'd like me to introduce you?' I replied that I was afraid that the only one which tempted me might be too unfashionable for her. 'Who is it?' she asked in a husky, threatening tone, almost without opening her mouth. 'The Baronne Putbus.' This time she feigned genuine anger. 'Oh, no, not her, I think you're having me on. I don't even know by what mischance I know the name of that cow. She's the dregs of society. It's like asking me to introduce you to my haberdasher. Or then again, no, because my haberdasher is charming. You're a little mad, my poor boy. In any case, I ask you as a favour to be polite to the people I've introduced you to, to leave cards with them, to go and call on them and not to mention the Baronne Putbus, who is not known to them.' I asked whether Mme d'Orvillers was not a little loose. 'Oh, not at all, you're muddling her up, she's prudish if anything. Isn't she, Basin?' – Yes, at any event I don't think she's ever given rise to any talk,' said the Duc.

'You won't come with us to the costume ball? he asked me. I'd lend you a Venetian cloak, and I know someone it'd damn well give pleasure to, to Oriane for one, but that's not worth saying, no, the Princesse de Parme. She's forever singing your praises, she swears only by you. You're lucky – since she's on the mature side – that her morals are impeccable. Otherwise she'd have certainly taken you for her sigisbeo, as they used to say in my youth, a sort of *cavaliere servente*.'

It was not the costume ball I wanted, but my rendez-vous with Albertine. Thus I refused. The carriage had stopped, the footman asked for the *porte cochère*, the horses pawed the ground until it had been opened to its full width and the carriage entered into the courtyard. 'Toodle-oo, the Duc said to me. – I've sometimes regretted living so near Marie, the Duchesse said to me, for I may be very fond of her, but I'm less fond of seeing her. But I've never regretted the proximity so much as this evening, because it means my remaining so short a time with you. – Come on, Oriane, no speeches.' The Duchesse would have liked me to go in with them briefly. She gave a loud laugh, as did the Duc, when I said I could not because in fact a girl was due to come and call on me. 'You receive your calls at a very strange hour, she said. – Come on, *mon petit*, let's get a move on, said M. de Guermantes to his wife. It's a quarter to midnight and time to get our costumes on…' In front of his door he came up against its stern guardians, the two ladies with sticks who had not been afraid to come down from their mountain-top by night in order to avert a scandal. 'Basin, we were anxious to warn you, in case you were to be seen at that costume ball: poor Amanien has just died, an hour ago.' The Duc felt a momentary alarm. He could see the famous costume ball foundering for him from the moment when, via these accursed mountain-dwellers, he had been warned of M. d'Osmond's death. But he very soon recovered himself and into the remark that he hurled at the two cousins, he put, along with the determination not to renounce a pleasure, his inability to assimilate accurately the locutions of the French language: 'He's died! No, no, they're exaggerating, they're exaggerating!'[96] And paying no further attention to his two kinswomen, who, alpenstocks at the ready, were about to make their ascent into the night, he hurried off to learn the latest by questioning his valet: 'Has my helmet come? – Yes, Monsieur le Duc. – Is there a little hole to breathe through? I don't want to be asphyxiated, damn it all! – Yes, Monsieur le Duc. – Oh, hell's teeth, I'm having a bad evening. Oriane, I forgot to ask Babal whether the poulaine slippers were for you! – But the wardrobe master from the Opéra-Comique is here, he'll tell us, dearest. I don't myself think they can go with your spurs. – Let's go and find the wardrobe master, said the Duc. Goodbye, my boy, I'd certainly say come in with us while we're trying them on, you'd be amused. But we'd talk, it's coming up to midnight and we mustn't arrive late if the party's to be complete.'

I, too, was in a hurry to leave M. and Mme de Guermantes as soon as I could. *Phèdre* had finished around half-past eleven. Having had time to come, Albertine must have arrived. I went straight to Françoise: 'Is Mlle Albertine here? – No one has come.' Good God, did that mean that no one would be coming? I was in torment, Albertine's visit now seeming all the more desirable for being less certain. Françoise, too, was annoyed, but for quite another reason. She had just sat her daughter down at the table for a succulent meal. But hearing me arrive, and finding there was no time to remove the dishes and lay out needles and thread, as if it were a matter of needlework and not of supper: 'She's just had a spoonful of soup, Françoise said to me, and I forced her to suck on a bit of the carcass,' so as thus to reduce her daughter's supper to nothing, as though it would have been wrong for it to be plentiful. Even at lunch or at dinner, if I made the mistake of going into the kitchen, Françoise would make as if they had finished and even apologize by saying: 'I just wanted a *bite of something*', or 'a *mouthful*'. But you were soon reassured on seeing the multitude of dishes littering the table, which Françoise, taken by surprise by my sudden entry, like the malefactor that she was not, had not had time to make disappear. Then she added: 'Come on, off to bed, you've done enough work as it is today (for she wanted her daughter to appear not only not to be costing us anything, to live by going without, but also to be working herself to death on our behalf). You're only cluttering up the kitchen and above all getting in Monsieur's way, who's expecting a visit. Come on, upstairs,' she went on, as if she were obliged to exert her authority to send her daughter to bed, who, the moment her supper had misfired, was there purely for effect and who, had I remained five minutes longer, would have decamped of her own accord. And turning to me, in that beautiful, uneducated yet slightly individual French of hers: 'Monsieur can't see she's got sleep written all over her face.' I remained, overjoyed at not having to talk to Françoise's daughter.

She came, as I have said, from a small village which was right next door to that of her mother, yet different by the nature of the soil, the cultivation, the patois and certain peculiarities of the inhabitants above all. Thus 'the butcher's wife' and Françoise's niece got on very badly, but had this much in common, that, when going off on an errand, they would linger for hours 'at the sister's' or 'at the cousin's, being incapable of ending a conversation of their own accord, a conversation in the course of which the reason that had led them to go out vanished, to the point where, if you said to them on their return: 'Well, will M. le Marquis de Norpois be at home at a quarter to six?', they wouldn't even slap their foreheads and say 'Oh, I've forgotten,' but 'Oh, I didn't realize Monsieur had asked that, I thought I was only to wish him good day.' But although they might 'go haywire' in this way concerning something said one hour earlier, it was impossible in return to rid their heads of what they had once heard the sister or the cousin say. Thus, if the butcher's wife had heard it said that the English had made war on us in '70 at the same time as the Prussians (and it was no good my explaining that this was not the case), every three weeks the butcher's wife would repeat to me in the course of a conversation: 'It's 'cos of that war the English made on us in '70 at the same time as the Prussians. – But I've told you a hundred times you're mistaken.' She would reply, which implied that her conviction was in no way shaken: 'That's no reason to hold a grudge against them in any case. A lot of water's flowed under the bridge since '70,' and so on. On another occasion, advocating a war with England, of which I disapproved, she said: 'Of course, no war's always better; but since we must, better to get on with it right away. As the sister explained just now, since that war the English made on us in '70, the trade agreements have been ruining us. After we've beaten them, they won't let a single Englishman enter France without paying three hundred francs for admission, like us now to go to England.'

Such, apart from a great deal of honesty and, when they spoke, a stubborn determination not to let themselves be interrupted, to take up again twenty times over at the point where they had been interrupted, which ended by lending to their remarks the unshakable solidity of a Bach fugue, was the character of the inhabitants of this small locality, who numbered barely five hundred and which was bounded by its chestnut trees, its willows, and its fields of potatoes and beetroot.

Françoise's daughter, on the other hand, looking on herself as a modern woman who had abandoned the well-worn paths, spoke the argot of Paris and avoided none of the jokes that went with it. Françoise having told her that I had just come from a princess's: 'Ah, a bargain-basement princess no doubt.' Seeing that I was expecting a visit, she pretended to believe that my name was Charles. I replied innocently that it was not, which enabled her to get in: 'Oh, I thought it was! And I'd been saying to myself Charlatan (*Charles attend*)'. It was not in very good taste. But I was less indifferent when, as consolation for Albertine's lateness, she said to me: 'I fancy you can wait for her till you're blue in the face. She won't come. Oh, our good-time girls today!'

Thus her way of talking differed from that of her mother; but what is more intriguing is that her mother's way of talking differed from that of her grandmother, a native of Bailleau-le-Pin,[97] which was so close to Françoise's village. Yet the patois differed slightly, like the two landscapes. Françoise's mother's village, on a slope and descending into a ravine, was frequented by willow trees. And a long way from there, on the other hand, there was in France a small region where they spoke almost exactly the same patois as in Méséglise. I made this discovery simultaneously with experiencing the nuisance of it. In fact, I once found Françoise

deep in conversation with one of the housemaids, who came from that area and spoke its patois. They almost understood one another, I understood them not at all, they knew this but did not for that reason desist, being excused, so they thought, by the joy of being fellow-countrywomen though born so far away from one another, to go on speaking this alien tongue in my presence, as when we do not want to be understood. These colourful studies in linguistic geography and its attendant camaraderie were pursued each week in the kitchen, without my deriving any pleasure from them.

As, each time the *porte cochère* was opened, the concierge pressed an electric button which lit the staircase, and as none of the tenants had not now returned, I at once left the kitchen and went back to sit in the ante-room, to keep watch, at the point where the curtain, slightly too narrow to cover completely the glazed door to our apartment, let through the dark vertical strip made by the semi-blackness on the stairs. Should this strip suddenly turn pale gold, it would mean that Albertine had just come in down below and would be with me in a couple of minutes; no one else could any longer be arriving at that hour. And there I stayed, unable to take my eyes off the strip, which persisted in remaining dark; I leaned right over so as to be sure of seeing properly; but my looking was in vain, the vertical black line, for all my passionate longing, did not yield me the intoxicating happiness I would have felt had I seen it change, by some sudden, meaningful magic, into a luminous bar of gold. All this anxiety for that same Albertine to whom I had not given three minutes' thought during the Guermantes soirée! But, by reawakening the feelings of expectancy I had felt of old in connection with other girls, with Gilberte above all, when she was late in arriving, the possible deprivation of a simple physical pleasure caused me cruel moral suffering.

I had to go back into my room. Françoise came in after me. Since I had returned from my soirée, she considered it pointless that I should keep the rose I had in my buttonhole, and came over to remove it. By reminding me that Albertine might no longer be coming, and by obliging me also to admit that I wanted to look smart for her, her action produced an irritation in me which was renewed by the fact that, in tearing myself violently free, I crumpled the flower and that Françoise said to me: 'It'd have been better to let me take it away rather than spoil it like that.' Her every least word exasperated me, moreover. When we are waiting, so much do we suffer by the absence of what we desire that we cannot tolerate another presence.

Françoise having left the room, I reflected that, if now it had come down to my fussing over my appearance with regard to Albertine, it was very unfortunate that I had so many times appeared before her ill-shaven, with several days' growth of beard, on the evenings when I had let her come to renew our caresses. I felt that, neglectful of me, she had been leaving me alone. To improve my room a little, were Albertine still to arrive, and because it was one of the prettiest things I possessed, I put back, for the first time in years, on the table that stood beside my bed, the turquoise-studded slip-cover Gilberte had had made for me to hold Bergotte's little volume, and which I had for a long time wanted to keep with me while I slept, next to the agate marble. At any event, as much perhaps as Albertine, who had still not come, her presence at that moment in an 'elsewhere' that she had evidently found more agreeable, and that I did not know, produced in me a painful feeling which, despite what I had said, scarcely an hour before, to Swann, as to my inability to feel jealousy, might perhaps, had I seen my loved one at less distant intervals, have turned into an anxious need to learn where, and with whom, she was spending her time. I did not dare send round to Albertine's, it was too late, but in the hope that, having supper perhaps with friends, in a café, she might take it into her head to telephone me, I turned the selector switch and, by restoring the connection to my room, cut it off between the post office and the concierge's lodge, to which it was ordinarily linked at that hour. To have had a receiver in the narrow corridor on to which Françoise's room opened would have been simpler and less of a disturbance, but useless. The progress of civilization enables each one of us to manifest unsuspected virtues or new vices, which make us either dearer or more unbearable to our friends. Thus it was that Edison's discovery[98] had enabled Françoise to acquire one more defect, which was to refuse, whatever its utility, however urgent it might be, to make use of the telephone. Whenever you tried to teach her, she found a means of escape, as others do on the point of being vaccinated. And so the telephone had been placed in my room and, so that it should not inconvenience my parents, the bell had been replaced by a simple rotary sound. For fear of not hearing it, I did not move. So unmoving was I indeed that, for the first time in months, I noticed the ticking of the clock. Françoise came in to put things away. She talked with me, but I detested the conversation, beneath the uniformly trite continuity of which my feelings were changing minute by minute, passing from fear to anxiety, and from anxiety to total disappointment. Unlike the vaguely contented words I felt obliged to address to her, I sensed my face to look so unhappy that I pretended I was suffering from a rheumatism in order to account for the disparity between my feigned indifference and this pained expression; and then I was afraid that the words uttered by Françoise, albeit in a low voice (not on account of Albertine, for she considered the hour of her possible arrival to have long passed), risked preventing me from hearing the saving call that would not now be coming. Finally, Françoise went off to bed; I dismissed her roughly but quietly, so that the noise she made going off should not drown that of the telephone. And I began once again to listen, and to suffer; when we are waiting, the double trajectory, from the ear that gathers in the sounds to the mind which processes and analyses them, and from the mind to the heart to which it transmits its results, is so rapid that we are unable even to perceive its duration, and we seem to be listening directly with our hearts.

I was tortured by the ceaseless recurrence of my longing, ever more anxious but never fulfilled, for the sound of a call; having arrived at the culminating point of a harrowing ascent within the spirals of my solitary anguish, from the depths of a populous, nocturnal Paris, brought suddenly close to me, next to my bookcase, I all of a sudden heard, mechanical and sublime, like the brandished scarf or the shepherd's pipe in *Tristan*,[99] the spinning-top sound of the telephone. I dashed to it, it was Albertine. 'I'm not disturbing you ringing at this hour? – No, no…' I said, containing my delight, for what she had said about the untoward hour was no doubt her apology for being on the point of arriving, this late, not because she was not going to come. 'Are you coming? I asked, in an indifferent voice. – Well… no, if you don't absolutely need me.'

One part of me, which the other part was seeking to rejoin, was in Albertine. She had to come, but I did not tell her so at first; since we had made contact, I told myself I could always force her, at the last minute, either to come to me, or to let me hurry round to her. 'Yes, I'm close to home, she said, and quite a way from where you are; I didn't read your note properly. I've just found it again and I was afraid you might be expecting me.' I sensed that she was lying, and it was now, in my fury, more from a need to inconvenience her than to see her, that I wanted to force her to come. But first I was anxious to refuse what I would try to obtain in a minute or two. But where was she? Other sounds were mixed in with her words: a cyclist's horn, the voice of a woman singing, a brass band in the distance, sounded as distinctly as the cherished voice, as if to prove that it was indeed Albertine in her present surroundings who was close to me at that moment, like a clod of earth with which you have carried off all the grasses round about it. The same sounds that I could hear were striking her ear also and hindering her from attending: truthful details, unconnected with the subject, futile in themselves, but all the more necessary to reveal to us the evidence of the miracle; prosaic, charming features, descriptive of some Parisian street, yet cruel, sharp-pointed features also of an unknown evening which, on leaving after *Phèdre*, had prevented Albertine from coming to see me. 'I must start by warning you that it's not so that you'll come, because at this hour you'll inconvenience me greatly…, I said to her, I can't keep my eyes open. Besides, well, a whole host of complications. I have to tell you that there was no possible misunderstanding in my letter. You answered that it was agreed. So then, if you didn't understand, what did you mean by that? – I said it was agreed, only I couldn't really remember what was agreed. But I can tell you're cross, and that bothers me. I regret having gone to *Phèdre*. If I'd known it was going to lead to such a fuss…,' she added, like all those people who, in the wrong over one thing, make a pretence of believing it is for another that they are being criticized. '*Phèdre* has nothing to do with my displeasure, since it was I who asked you to go to it. – Then, you're annoyed with me, it's a nuisance it's so late this evening, otherwise I'd have come round, but I'll come tomorrow or the day after to make my excuses. – Oh, no, Albertine, please, having made me waste an evening, at least leave me in peace on the days following. I shan't be free before a fortnight or three weeks. Listen, if it bothers you that we should be left with an impression of anger, and perhaps basically you're right, then I'd much prefer, it can't make me any more tired, since I've waited until this hour for you and you're still out, if you came right away, I'll have some coffee to wake me up. – Wouldn't it be possible to put it off till tomorrow, because the difficulty…' Hearing these words of excuse, uttered as if she were not going to come, I felt that a very different element was attempting painfully to unite itself with the desire to set eyes once again on that velvet face which already, at Balbec, had directed all my days towards the moment when, in front of the mauve September sea, I would be beside that pink flower. I had learned to

recognize this terrible need for another human being in Combray, in connection with my mother, to the point of wanting to die if she got Françoise to tell me she could not come upstairs. This effort of the old feeling to combine and form but a single element with the other, more recent one, whose voluptuous object was nothing more than the coloured surface, the carnation pink of a flower of the sea-shore, such an effort often eventuates only in the formation (in the chemical sense) of a new body, which may endure for a few moments only. On that evening, at least, and for a long time to come, the two elements remained dissociated. But already, from the last words heard on the telephone, I had begun to realize that Albertine's life was located (not physically, of course) at so great a distance from me that it would still have required wearisome investigations to lay my hand on it, organized, furthermore, like battlefield fortifications and, for greater surety, of the kind we later acquired the habit of referring to as 'camouflaged'. Albertine was part, moreover, at a more elevated level of society, of that class of persons to whom the concierge promises your messenger she will give the letter when she returns – up until the day when you realize that it is none other than her, the person met with outside and to whom you have taken the liberty of writing, who is the concierge, so that she does indeed live – if only in the porter's lodge – at the house she had indicated (which is, on the other hand, a small brothel, of which the concierge is the madam), or else who gives as her address a building where she is known by accomplices who will not betray her secret, from which your letters will be forwarded to her, but where she does not live, where she has at most only left some of her belongings. Existences disposed across five or six lines of retreat, so that when you try to visit, or find out about, this woman, you strike too far to the right, or too far to the left, or too far in front or too far behind, and you may, for months or years on end, learn nothing. With Albertine, I felt that I would never learn anything, would never succeed in unravelling this tangled multiplicity of authentic details and untruthful facts. And that it would always be thus, unless I were to put her in prison (but people escape) up until the end. On the evening in question, this conviction caused no more than a misgiving to pass through me, though in it I could sense that there quivered something like an anticipation of drawn-out suffering.

'No, no, I replied, I've already told you I wouldn't be free before three weeks, tomorrow any more than any other day. – All right, then… I'll run round… It's a nuisance, because I'm at a girl friend's who…' I sensed that she hadn't thought I would accept her suggestion that she should come, which was not genuine therefore, and I wanted to make things difficult for her. 'Your friend's no concern of mine. Come or don't come, that's your affair, it's not I who am asking you to come, it was you who suggested it. – Don't get angry, I'll jump into a cab and be with you in ten minutes.' And so, out of that Paris from whose nocturnal depths there had already emanated, all the way into my room, measuring the radius of action of a distant being, the invisible message, what was about suddenly to materialize and to appear, following this first annunciation, was the Albertine I had known of old beneath the skies of Balbec, when the waiters at the Grand-Hôtel, as they laid the tables, were blinded by the light of the setting sun, when, the windows having been drawn all the way back, the imperceptible evening breezes were free to enter from the beach, where the last strollers still lingered, into the vast dining-room, where the first diners were not yet seated, and when, in the mirror set behind the bar, the red reflection of the hull went past, and there long lingered the grey reflection of the smoke, of the last boat for Rivebelle. I no longer asked myself what might have caused Albertine to be late, and when Françoise entered my room to tell me: 'Mademoiselle Albertine is here', if I answered without even moving my head, this was only in order to dissemble: 'What's Mademoiselle Albertine doing coming this late?' But then, looking up at Françoise, as if out of curiosity to get her response, which would corroborate the apparent sincerity of my question, I saw, with admiration and with fury, that, capable of rivalling Berma herself in the art of getting inanimate garments and the features of her face to speak, Françoise had been able to teach their lines to her blouse, to her hair, the whitest of which had been brought to the surface and put on display like a birth certificate, and to her neck, bowed by tiredness and by obedience. They pitied her for having been dragged from her sleep and the fug of her bed, in the middle of the night, at her age, and forced to get dressed at high speed, at the risk of catching pneumonia. And so, afraid of having appeared to be apologizing for Albertine's tardy arrival: 'Anyway, I'm very glad she's come, it's all for the best,' and I let my profound joy burst forth. It did not go long unalloyed, once I had heard Françoise's reply. She, without proffering any complaint, looking even as if she were doing her best to suppress an irresistible cough, and merely drawing her shawl about her as if she were cold, began by retailing all that she had said to Albertine, not having failed to ask her for news of her aunt. 'That's just what I was saying, Monsieur must've been afraid Mademoiselle's no longer coming, because this is no hour to arrive, it'll soon be morning. But she must've been in places where she was having a good time because she didn't even say she was upset at having kept Monsieur waiting, she answered me as if she didn't give a fig for anyone: "Better late than never!" ' Then Françoise added the words that cut me to the quick: 'She gave herself away, talking like that. She might well have wanted to hide perhaps, but…'

I had no call to be greatly surprised. I have just said that, on the errands she was sent on, Françoise rarely gave any account, if not of what she had said, on which she gladly expounded, then at least of the expected answer. But if, exceptionally, she did repeat what our friends had said, however short it might be, she usually contrived, thanks if need be to the expression or tone by which, she assured us, they had been accompanied, to make them seem somehow hurtful. At a pinch, she would accept having suffered a snub, probably imaginary as it happens, from a tradesman to whom we had sent her, provided that, having been addressed to her as our representative, she having spoken in our name, this snub hit us on the rebound. You needed only to reply that she had misunderstood, that she was suffering from a persecution mania and that the tradespeople were not all in league against her. Their feelings mattered little to me in any case. The same did not go for those of Albertine. And by repeating those ironic words, 'Better late than never!' Françoise at once evoked for me the friends in whose company Albertine had ended her evening, finding more pleasure there than in my own. 'She's comical, she's got a little flat hat, with her big eyes, it gives her a funny look, especially with her coat that she'd have done well to send to the invisible amender's because it's all mangy. She amuses me,' added, as though making fun of Albertine, Françoise, who rarely shared my impressions but felt a need to let her own be known. I did not even want to appear as if I understood that this laugh denoted disdain and mockery, but, in order to return blow for blow, I answered Françoise, though I did not know the little hat she had been referring to: 'What you call a "little flat hat" is something quite simply ravishing… – Like nothing at all, you mean,' said Françoise, expressing, openly this time, her genuine contempt. Then (in a quiet, more deliberate tone, so that my untruthful reply might seem to be expressing not my anger but the truth, but wasting no time on the other hand, so as not to keep Albertine waiting), I addressed these cruel words to Françoise: 'You're an excellent person, I said smarmily, you're kind, you've a thousand good qualities, but you're no further on than the day you arrived in Paris, either in knowing about women's clothes or in how to pronounce words properly and not commit howlers.' This was a particularly stupid criticism, because the French words we are so proud of pronouncing accurately are themselves only 'howlers' made by Gallic mouths in mispronouncing Latin or Saxon, our language being simply the defective pronunciation of a few others. The genius of the language in its living state, and the future and past of French, that is what should have interested me in Françoise's mistakes. Was her 'amender' for 'mender' not equally as curious as those animals surviving from remote epochs, such as the whale or the giraffe, which demonstrate to us the stages through which animal life has passed? 'And, I added, seeing that in all these years you haven't managed to learn, you'll never learn. But you can take consolation, that doesn't stop you from being a good soul, or making a wonderful *boeuf à la gelée* and countless other things besides. The hat you think is simple was copied from one of the Princesse de Guermantes's hats which cost five hundred francs. Moreover, I expect very soon to offer Mlle Albertine an even better one.' I knew that what was best able to annoy Françoise was that I should spend money on people she did not like. She answered me by a few words rendered almost unintelligible by a sudden breathlessness. When I later learned that she had a heart condition, how remorseful I felt at never having denied myself the ferocious and barren pleasure of answering her back in this way! Françoise loathed Albertine, in any case, because Albertine, being poor, could not add anything to what Françoise saw as my advantages. She smiled benevolently each time I got an invitation from Mme de Villeparisis. She was indignant in return that Albertine did not practise reciprocity. I had reached the point of being forced to invent purported presents I had received from her, in whose existence Françoise placed not the faintest credence. This lack of reciprocity shocked her above all in the matter of food. That Albertine should accept dinners from Mama, if we had not been invited to Mme Bontemps's (who was not, however, in Paris for half the time, her husband accepting 'posts', as in the old days when he had had enough of the Ministry), seemed to her indelicate on the part of my loved one, whom she condemned indirectly by reciting the saying current in Combray:

Let's eat my bread.

– All right, come on.
– Let's eat yours instead.
– My hunger's gone.

I made a pretence of being busy writing. 'Who were you writing to? Albertine said on entering – To a pretty friend of mine, to Gilberte Swann. Do you know her? – No.' I forbore to put any questions to Albertine about her evening, I felt I would be reproaching her and, given the hour, that we would no longer have time to be sufficiently reconciled to move on to kisses and fondlings. So it was with these that I wanted to begin, from the very first moment. Moreover, if I had calmed down somewhat, I did not feel happy. The loss of one's bearings, of all sense of direction, that characterizes waiting, persists even after the arrival of the person awaited, and, having taken the place in us of the calm by virtue of which we had been picturing that arrival to ourselves as so great a pleasure, prevents us from deriving any pleasure from it at all. Albertine was here: my ravaged nerves, their agitation continuing, were still waiting for her. 'Can I have a nice one, Albertine? – As many as you like,' she said, all kindness. Never had I seen her looking so pretty. 'Another one? You know what great, great pleasure it gives me. – And me ever so many times greater, she replied. Oh, what a pretty slip-case you've got there – Take it, I give it to you as a memento. – You're so kind…' We should be forever cured of our romanticism were we willing, in order to think of the one we love, to try to be the person we shall be once we no longer love them. The slip-case, Gilberte's agate marble, all that had once derived its importance from a purely internal state, since now, for me, they were just any old slip-case, any old marble.

I asked Albertine whether she wanted a drink. 'I fancy I see some oranges and some water over there, she said. That would be just the thing.' I was thus able to enjoy, along with her kisses, the coolness that had seemed to me superior to them at the Princesse de Guermantes's. And squeezed now into the water, the orange seemed, as I drank, to yield up the secret life of its ripening, of its fortunate action against certain states of that human body which belongs to a very different kingdom, which it is powerless to make live, but which in return it was able to favour by its irrigatory effects, innumerable mysteries disclosed by the fruit to my senses, not at all to my intellect.

Albertine having left, I recalled that I had promised Swann to write to Gilberte and I thought it kinder to do so right away. It was without emotion and as if adding the final line to some tedious piece of classwork, that I traced on the envelope the name of Gilberte Swann, with which in the old days I had covered my exercise-books so as to give myself the illusion of corresponding with her. The fact is that if, once, it had been I who wrote that name, the task had now been devolved by habit on to one of the numerous secretaries on whom it can call. The latter was able to write Gilberte's name all the more calmly because, found a place with me recently by habit, having recently entered my employ, he had not known Gilberte and knew only, without putting any reality underneath the words, because he had heard me speak of her, that she was a girl with whom I had been in love.

I could not accuse her of being unfeeling. The person that I was now with regard to her was the 'witness' best qualified to understand what she herself had been. The slip-case and the agate marble had simply become for me, with regard to Albertine, what they had been for Gilberte, what they would have been for anyone who had not allowed the glow from an inner flame to play on them. But now there was a new agitation inside me which had impaired in its turn the true power of words and things. And as Albertine was saying, to thank me once again: 'I do so love turquoises!', I replied: 'Don't let these ones die,' thus entrusting to them, as if to precious stones, the future of our friendship, which, however, was no more capable of inspiring a sentiment in Albertine than it had been of preserving that which had once united me to Gilberte.

At this time there occurred a phenomenon which deserves mention only because it is to be found in all significant periods of history. At the very moment when I was writing to Gilberte, M. de Guermantes, only just returned from the costume ball and still crowned by his helmet, was reflecting that the following day he would certainly be obliged to go into official mourning, and decided to bring forward by a week the cure that he was due to take. When he returned from it three weeks later (to anticipate, since I have only just finished my letter to Gilberte), the Duc's friends, who had watched him, originally so indifferent, become a fanatical anti-Dreyfusard, were left speechless with surprise when they heard him reply (as if the cure had acted on more than just his bladder): 'Well, the proceedings will be reviewed and he'll be acquitted; you can't condemn a man against whom there's nothing. Have you ever seen anyone as gaga as Froberville? An officer preparing Frenchmen for the slaughter (for war, that is) ! Strange times!' Now, in the interim, the Duc de Guermantes had got to know three charming ladies at the spa (an Italian princess and her two sisters-in-law). On hearing them comment briefly on the books they were reading and on a play being performed at the Casino, the Duc had at once realized that he was dealing with women of superior intellect, and with whom, as he put it, he could not keep up. He had been all the happier to be invited to play bridge by the princess. But hard on his arrival there, as he was saying, with all the fervour of his unqualified anti-Dreyfusism, 'Well, there's no more talk of the famous Dreyfus getting his review,' great had been his stupefaction to hear the princess and her sister-in-law say: 'We've never been so close to it. You can't keep someone in the penal colony who hasn't done anything. – Oh, ah, what?' the Duc had stammered to begin with, as if on discovering some bizarre nickname employed in this household in order to make someone he had hitherto thought intelligent appear ridiculous. But after a few days, just as, out of cowardice and a spirit of imitation, we cry 'Hallo there, Jojotte',[100] without knowing why, to a great artist we have heard being called that, in this house, as yet much embarrassed by the new custom, the Duc was nevertheless saying: 'Indeed, if there's nothing against him!' The three charming ladies considered he was not moving fast enough and were quite hard on him: 'But basically, no one of intelligence can have believed there was anything.' Each time a 'crushing' fact was produced against Dreyfus and the Duc, believing that this was going to convert the three charming ladies, came to announce it, they laughed uproariously and had no difficulty in demonstrating to him, with great dialectical subtlety, that the argument was without value and altogether ridiculous. The Duc had returned to Paris a rabid Dreyfusard. And indeed we shall not pretend that the three charming ladies were not, in this instance, the harbingers of the truth. But it should be remarked that every ten years, when you have left a man filled with a real conviction, it happens that an intelligent couple, or simply one charming lady, enter his society and that after a few months he has been led to hold opposite opinions. And in this regard, there are many countries which behave like the man of sincerity, many countries that have been left filled with hatred for a people and which, six months later, have changed their views and reversed their alliances.

I did not see Albertine again for some time, but continued, failing Mme de Guermantes, who no longer spoke to my imagination, to see other fairies and their dwellings, no more separable from them than the mother-of-pearl or enamel valve, or the crenellated turret of its shell, from the mollusc that manufactured it and finds shelter there. I would not have known how to classify these ladies, the difficulty of the problem being that, as well as lacking all significance, it was impossible not only to resolve but to pose. Before the lady herself the fairy *hôtel* had to be approached. Now, one of them, 'at home' always after lunch during the summer months, even before arriving there, you had to have had the hood of the cab lowered, so fiercely was the sun beating down, the memory of which, without my being aware of it, would form part of the total impression. I thought I was simply going to the cours-la-Reine;[101] in reality, before arriving at the gathering, which a practical man would perhaps have made fun of, I had, as though on a journey across Italy, known both bedazzlement and extreme pleasure, from which the house would never again be separated in my memory. Moreover, because of the warmth of the season and of the time of day, the lady had hermetically closed the shutters in the vast rectangular drawing-rooms on the ground floor in which she entertained. I had difficulty at first in recognizing my hostess and her visitors, even the Duchesse de Guermantes, who, in her husky voice, asked me to go and sit beside her, in a Beauvais armchair figuring the *Rape of Europa*.[102] Then I made out on the walls the vast eighteenth-century tapestries representing ships with flowering hollyhocks for masts, beneath which I found myself in a palace not of the Seine but of Neptune, beside the river Oceanus, where the Duchesse de Guermantes had become like a divinity of the waters. I should never finish were I to enumerate all the salons different from this one. This example will suffice to demonstrate that into my judgments of society I

introduced poetic impressions, of which I never took any account when drawing up the total, with the result that, when I assessed a salon's merits, my addition was never correct.

Admittedly, these sources of error were far from being the only ones, but I no longer have time, before my departure for Balbec (where, to my misfortune, I am going to stay for a second, which will also be the last, time), to start on depictions of society that will find their place much further on. Let me simply say that to this first false reason (my relatively frivolous life, which gave people to assume that I was a lover of society) for my letter to Gilberte and the return to the Swanns that it seemed to indicate, Odette might have added, just as inaccurately, a second. Up until now I have been imagining the different aspects that society may take for the same person only by assuming that society does not change: if the same lady who used not to know anyone is now received everywhere, and another, who had a dominant position, has been abandoned, we are tempted to see in this the purely personal ups and downs that now and again lead, in the one society, consequent on speculation on the Bourse, to a resounding bankruptcy or an unhoped-for enrichment. But they are not only that. To a certain extent, social manifestations (greatly inferior to artistic movements, to political crises and to the evolution that carries public taste towards the theatre of ideas, then towards Impressionist painting, then towards complicated German music, then towards simple Russian music, or towards social ideas, ideas of justice, religious reaction, an outburst of patriotism) are nevertheless the distant, broken, uncertain, cloudy, shifting reflection of them. So that even the salons cannot be portrayed in the static immobility that may have been suitable hitherto for the study of characters, which must also be as it were swept along in a quasi-historical movement. The taste for novelty which leads those men of the world more or less genuinely desirous of keeping abreast of intellectual developments to frequent the circles where they can follow them, will normally cause them to prefer some hostess, previously unheard-of, who represents the still fresh hopes of a superior quality of mind, so withered and faded among the women who have long held sway over society, whose strengths and weaknesses they know and who no longer speak to their imagination. Thus each age finds itself personified in new women, in a new group of women, who, closely identified with the very latest objects of curiosity, seem, by their dress, to appear only now, at this moment, like an unknown species born of the last flood, the irresistible beauties of each new Consulate, each new Directory.[103] But very often the new hostesses are quite simply, like certain statesmen whose first ministry it is but who had been knocking at all the doors for the last forty years without seeing them open, women who were not known to society but who had nevertheless, for a long time past and *faute de mieux*, been receiving a 'few close friends'. Admittedly, this is not always the case, and when, with the prodigious efflorescence of the Ballets Russes, revealing of, one after the other, Bakst, Nijinsky, Benois, and the genius of Stravinsky, the Princess Yourbeletieff,[104] the young godmother to all these new great men, appeared wearing on her head an immense, quivering aigrette unfamiliar to the women of Paris and which they all sought to copy, one might have thought that this marvellous creature had been brought with them, in their innumerable baggage and as their most precious treasure, by the Russian dancers; but when, beside her, in her stage-box, we shall see installed, at every performance of the 'Russes', like a veritable fairy, unknown before today to the aristocracy, Mme Verdurin, we will be able to answer to those members of society who easily suppose Mme Verdurin to be newly disembarked with Diaghilev's troupe, that this lady had already existed in different times, and passed through various avatars, from which this one differed only in being the first finally to bring her the success, henceforth assured and progressing ever more rapidly, for which the Patronne had waited for so long, and in vain. In the case of Mme Swann, it is true, the novelty that she represented did not have the same collective character. Her salon had crystallized around a man, a dying man, who had passed almost overnight, at a time when his talent was running dry, from obscurity to great fame. The infatuation with the works of Bergotte was immense. He spent the whole day, on display, at Mme Swann's, who would whisper to a man of influence: 'I'll speak to him, he'll write you an article.' He was, indeed, in a position to write one, and even a short playlet for Mme Swann. Closer now to death, his health was a little better than in the days when he came to ask after my grandmother. The fact was that severe physical pain had imposed a regimen on him. Illness is the best heeded of doctors: to kindness or to knowledge, we only make promises; suffering we obey.

Certainly, the Verdurins' little clan was currently an altogether livelier source of interest than the mildly nationalist, even more literary and above all Bergottian salon of Mme Swann. The little clan was the active centre indeed of a long political crisis that had reached its maximum intensity: Dreyfusism. But society people were for the most part so anti-revisionist, that a Dreyfusian salon seemed something as impossible as, in another age, a Communard salon.[105] The Princesse de Caprarola, who had made the acquaintance of Mme Verdurin in connection with a large exhibition she had been organizing, had indeed paid the latter a lengthy visit, in hopes of debauching a few interesting elements of the little clan and adding them to her own salon, a visit in the course of which the Princesse (playing a cut-price version of the Duchesse de Guermantes) had argued against received opinions and declared those in her own world to be idiots, which Mme Verdurin had thought showed great courage. But this courage was not to extend so far later on as to dare, with the gaze of nationalist ladies trained on her, to acknowledge Mme Verdurin at the Balbec races. In the case of Mme Swann, on the other hand, the anti-Dreyfusards were grateful to her for being a '*bien-pensante*', which, married as she was to a Jew, was doubly meritorious. Nonetheless, those who had never been there imagined she entertained only a few obscure Israelites and pupils of Bergotte. So it is that women far better qualified than Mme Swann are ranked at the very bottom of the social scale, either on account of their origins, or because they do not like dining out or the soirées at which they are never seen, which is wrongly supposed to be due to their not having been invited, or because they never talk about their friendships in society but only about literature or art, or because people keep quiet about having visited them, or they, so as not to show impoliteness to others, keep quiet about having entertained them, in short for a thousand reasons which end by making one or other of them, in the eyes of some, the woman one does not receive. So it was with Odette. Mme d'Epinoy, looking at the time for a contribution to the 'Patrie française',[106] having had to go and call on her, as if she were going into her haberdasher's, convinced moreover she would find only faces not despised even but unknown, remained as if transfixed when the door opened, not on the drawing-room she had imagined, but on a magic chamber in which, as if thanks to a change of lighting in a fairy-play, she recognized in the dazzling female extras, half reclining on divans or sitting on armchairs, addressing their hostess by her first name, the Highnesses and duchesses that she, the Princesse d'Epinoy, had the greatest difficulty in luring to her own house, and to whom, at that moment, beneath the benevolent gaze of Odette, the Marquis du Lau, the Comte Louis de Turenne, the Prince Borghese and the Duc d'Estrées[107] were acting as pantlers and as cup-bearers, carrying the orangeade and the petits-fours. Since, without her being aware of it, the Princesse d'Epinoy saw people's place in society as internal to them, she was obliged to disincarnate Mme Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman. Ignorance of the life actually led by women who do not exhibit it in the newspapers thus casts a veil of mystery over the social standing of some (thereby helping to diversify the salons). In Odette's case, at the outset, a few men of the very best society, curious to meet Bergotte, had been to dine at her house privately. She had had the tact, recently acquired, not to advertise the fact; there they had found – a memory perhaps of the little nucleus whose traditions Odette had preserved since the schism – the table laid, and so forth. Odette had taken them, together with Bergotte, the death of whom this in fact finally proved to be, to the interesting 'first nights'. They spoke of her to a few women of their own world capable of taking an interest in all this novelty. They were convinced that Odette, an intimate of Bergotte's, had more or less collaborated in his works, and thought her a thousand times more intelligent than the most remarkable women of the Faubourg, for the same reason as they had placed all their political hopes in certain staunch Republicans such as M. Doumer and M. Deschanel,[108] whereas they would have seen France as headed for the abyss had it been entrusted to the monarchist personnel whom they entertained to dinner, to the Charettes, the Doudeauvilles, etc.[109] This change in Odette's standing had been achieved on her part with a discretion that made it surer and more rapid, but allowed no inkling of it to reach a public inclined to depend on the columns of *Le Gaulois* for the advance or decline of a salon, with the result that one day, at the dress rehearsal of a play by Bergotte, given in one of the most fashionable auditoria in aid of charity, it was a veritable *coup de théâtre* when they saw, in the front box, which was that of the author, coming to sit next to Mme Swann, Mme de Marsantes and the woman who, thanks to the progressive effacement of the Duchesse de Guermantes (sated with honours, and annihilating herself by putting up no resistance), was on the way to becoming the 'lioness', the queen of the hour, the Comtesse Molé. 'We hadn't even suspected she'd started to climb,' it was said of Odette just as the Comtesse Molé was seen entering her box, 'and now she's reached the top rung.' With the result that Mme Swann was able to believe I was making it up with her daughter out of

snobbery. Despite her brilliant woman friends, Odette nevertheless listened to the play with an extreme attentiveness, as though she were there purely in order to hear it, just as in the old days she had crossed the Bois for her health's sake and to get some exercise. Men who, in the old days, had paid her less attention came to the balcony, disturbing all and sundry, so as to hang on her hand and come close to the imposing circle by whom she was surrounded. She, with a smile still more friendly than ironic, replied patiently to their questions, affecting a greater calm than one would have credited and which was perhaps genuine, this exhibition being only the belated exhibition of a habitual and discreetly concealed intimacy. Behind the three ladies attracting all the stares was Bergotte, surrounded by the Prince d'Agrigente, the Comte Louis de Turenne and the Marquis de Bréauté. And it is easy to understand that, for men who were received everywhere and could no longer expect further elevation save by seeking out originality, this demonstration of their worth that they thought to be giving, by allowing themselves to be lured by a hostess known for her high intellectuality, in whose company they expected to meet all the playwrights and novelists who were in vogue, was livelier and more exciting than the soirées at the Princesse de Guermantes's, which, lacking any programme or fresh attraction, had succeeded one another these many years past, more or less similar to that which we have described at such length. In this exalted world of the Guermantes, from which curiosity had somewhat turned away, the new intellectual fashions were not embodied in amusements in their own image, as in the skits written for Mme Swann by Bergotte, or those veritable meetings of the Committee of Public Safety[110] (had society been able to take an interest in the Dreyfus Affair) when there gathered at Mme Verdurin's, Picquart, Clemenceau, Zola, Reinach and Labori.[111]

Gilberte, too, was of service to her mother's position, for an uncle of Swann's had just left the girl nearly eighty million francs, which meant that the Faubourg Saint-Germain was beginning to take notice of her. The obverse of which medal was that Swann, who was anyway dying, held Dreyfusist views, but even this did his wife no harm and was even of service to her. It did her no harm because they said: 'He's senile, an idiot, no one pays him any attention, only his wife counts and she's charming.' But even Swann's Dreyfusism was useful to Odette. Left to her own devices, she would perhaps have gone and made overtures to smart women that would have destroyed her. Whereas, on the evenings when she dragged her husband out to dine in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Swann, remaining unsociably in his corner, did not hesitate, should he see Odette getting herself introduced to some nationalist lady, to say in a loud voice: 'Come, Odette, you're mad. Calm down, I beg you. It would be ignominious on your part to get yourself introduced to anti-Semites. I forbid it.' The society people after whom everyone runs are unaccustomed either to so much pride or to such lack of breeding. For the first time they had found someone who thought himself 'more' than them. These grumbles of Swann's were retailed and Odette was showered with turned-down visiting cards. When she called on Mme d'Arpajon, there was a keen and sympathetic stir of curiosity. 'It didn't annoy you my introducing her to you, said Mme d'Arpajon. She's very nice. I got to know her through Marie de Marsantes. – No, no, on the contrary, it seems she's as intelligent as could be, she's charming. On the contrary, I longed to meet her; tell me where she lives.' Mme d'Arpajon told Mme Swann that she had enjoyed herself greatly at her house two days before and had been delighted to give up Mme de Saint-Euverte for her sake. Which was true, for to prefer Mme Swann was to prove that you were intelligent, like going to the concert rather than a tea-party. But when Mme de Saint-Euverte came to Mme d'Arpajon's at the same time as Odette, since Mme de Saint-Euverte was a great snob and Mme d'Arpajon, even though she rather looked down on her, was keen on her receptions, Mme d'Arpajon did not introduce Odette so that Mme de Saint-Euverte should not know who it was. The Marquise imagined that it must be some princess or other who very seldom went out for her never to have seen her, and prolonged her visit, replying indirectly to what Odette said, but Mme d'Arpajon was unyielding. And when the defeated Mme de Saint-Euverte was leaving: 'I didn't introduce you, her hostess said to Odette, because people don't much like going to her and she invites on the grand scale; you wouldn't have been able to extricate yourself. – Oh, that doesn't matter,' said Odette, with some regret. But she retained the idea that people did not like going to Mme de Saint-Euverte's, which was to a certain extent true, and concluded from that that her own standing was much superior to that of Mme de Saint-Euverte, even though the latter had a very grand standing and Odette as yet none at all.

She was unaware of this, and although all Mme de Guermantes's woman friends were friendly also with Mme d'Arpajon, when the latter invited Mme Swann, Odette would say, with a scrupulous air: 'I'm going to Mme d'Arpajon's, but you're going to think me very *vieux jeu*, it shocks me, on account of Mme de Guermantes' (whom she did not as it happens know). Men of distinction thought that the fact that Mme Swann knew few people in high society was because she must be a superior woman, probably a great musician, and that to go there would be a sort of extra-social qualification, as for a duke to be a Doctor of Science. Women who were complete nobodies were drawn to Odette for a contrary reason; learning that she went to the Colonne concerts[112] and declared herself to be a Wagnerian, they concluded that she must be a 'practical joker' and were much excited by the thought of getting to know her. But, being themselves none too secure socially, they were afraid of compromising themselves in public by seeming to be friendly with Odette, and, should they catch sight of Mme Swann at a charity concert, they looked the other way, deeming it out of the question, under the gaze of Mme de Rochechouart, to acknowledge a woman who was quite capable of having been to Bayreuth – which meant of committing all manner of excess.

Everyone, when they visited someone else, became different. To say nothing of the miraculous metamorphoses achieved in this way among the fairies, in Mme Swann's drawing-room, M. de Bréauté, lent a sudden prominence by the absence of the people who customarily surrounded him, by the air of satisfaction he wore at finding himself as much at ease there as if, instead of going to a party, he had donned his spectacles in order to shut himself away and read the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*,[113] and by the mysterious ritual he appeared to be fulfilling by coming to see Odette, M. de Bréauté himself seemed like a new man. I would have given a lot to see how much the Duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg might have changed for the worse in this new setting. But she was one of those people to whom Odette could never be introduced. Mme de Montmorency, who was much more kindly disposed towards Oriane than the latter was towards her, had greatly astonished me by saying to me, apropos of Mme de Guermantes: 'She knows clever people, everyone likes her, I think that if she'd stuck at it more, she'd have managed to create a salon. The truth is she wasn't keen on it, she's quite right, she's happy as she is, sought after by all.' If Mme de Guermantes did not have a 'salon', what then was a 'salon'?

The stupefaction into which these words threw me was no greater than that which I caused Mme de Guermantes by telling her I much liked going to Mme de Montmorency's. Oriane thought her an old cretin. 'Me, yes, she said, I'm forced to, she's my aunt; but you! She doesn't even know how to attract agreeable people.' Mme de Guermantes did not realize that the agreeable people left me cold, that when she said 'the Arpajon salon' I saw a yellow butterfly, and 'the Swann salon' (Mme Swann was 'at home' in the winter from 6 till 7) a black butterfly, its wings felted with snow. Although inaccessible to her, she adjudged this latter salon, which was not one, to be excusable in my own case, because of the 'clever people'. But Mme de Luxembourg! Had I already 'produced' something that had been noticed, she would have concluded that talent may co-exist with an element of snobbery. And to crown her disappointment, I admitted to her that I did not go to Mme de Montmorency's (as she thought) to 'take notes' or 'make a study'. Mme de Guermantes was no more mistaken, however, than those society novelists who analyse the actions of a snob, or a purported such, cruelly from the outside, but never place themselves inside him, at the time when a whole social springtime is coming into flower in his imagination. When I tried to find what the great pleasure was that I felt on going to Mme de Montmorency's, I was myself somewhat disappointed. She lived in an old place in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, filled with detached houses divided by small gardens. Under the archway, a statuette, said to be by Falconet,[114] represented a spring, from which, indeed, there welled a perpetual moisture. A little further on, the concierge, her eyes permanently red, whether from grief, or neurasthenia, or a migraine, or a cold, never answered you, but gestured vaguely to indicate that the Duchesse was in and allowed a few drops to fall from her eyelids over a bowl filled with 'forget-me-nots'. The pleasure I got from seeing the statuette, putting me in mind as it did of a small plaster gardener that had stood in a garden in Combray, was as nothing compared with that produced in me by the great, damp, resonant staircase, full of echoes, like that in certain bathing establishments of old, from the vases filled with cinerarias – blue against blue – in the anteroom, and above all from the tinkling of the bell, which exactly matched that in Eulalie's room. This tinkling raised my enthusiasm to new heights, but seemed too humble for me to be able to explain it to Mme de Montmorency, so that that lady always saw me in a state of euphoria whose source she never divined.

THE INTERMITTENCES OF THE HEART [115]

My second arrival in Balbec was very different from the first. The manager had come in person to wait for me at Pont-Couleuvre, repeating how much he valued his titled clientèle, which made me fear that he had ennobled me until I realized that in the darkness of his grammatical memory, *titré*, or 'titled', meant simply *attitré*, or 'regular'. For the rest, as he proceeded to learn new languages, he grew worse at the old ones. He announced that he had put me right at the top of the hotel. 'I hope, he said, that you won't see that as a lack of discourtesy, I was worried about giving you a room you're unworthy of, but I did it with regard to the noise, because that way you won't have anyone overhead assailing your eardrops (for "eardrums"). Rest assured, I'll have the windows closed so they don't bang. I'm intolerable where that's concerned,' (these words expressing not his own thought, which was that he would always be found inexorable on that subject, but very possibly that of his *garçons d'étage*). The rooms were in any case those of my first stay. They were no lower down but I had risen in the manager's esteem. I could have a fire lit if I liked (for on doctors' orders I had left straight after Easter), but he was afraid there might be 'crocks' (for 'cracks') in the ceiling. 'Above all, always wait when lighting a blaze until the one before's been consummated (for "consumed"). For the important thing's to avoid not setting fire to the fireplace, all the more because, to brighten things up a bit, I've had a big old Chinese porcelain postiche placed above it, which might get ruined.'

He informed me with much sadness of the death of the *bâtonnier*[116] from Cherbourg: 'He was a woolly one,' he said (probably for 'wily'), and gave me to understand that his end had been hastened by a life of 'débâcles', which meant 'debauchery'. 'I'd been noticing for some time how after dinner he used to have a sneeze (no doubt for a "snooze") in the lounge. Just lately, he was so much altered that if you hadn't known it was him, to look at he was barely recognisant' (for 'recognizable', no doubt).

In happy compensation, the First President[117] from Caen had just received the 'ensign' of a Commander in the Légion d'Honneur. 'He has abilities, that's for sure, but it seems he was given it above all on account of his great impotence.' Much had been made of this award moreover in the previous day's *Écho de Paris*,[118] of which the manager had as yet read only the first 'paraph' (for 'paragraph'). M. Caillaux's[119] policies had been given a good going-over there. 'I think they're right, what's more, he said. He's putting us too much under the thimble (instead of the "thumb") [120] of Germany.' Since this sort of topic as treated by a hotelier struck me as tedious, I stopped listening. I thought of the mental images that had decided me to return to Balbec. They were very different from those of the other time, the vision that I had come in search of was as brilliant as the earlier one had been hazy; they were to be no less of a disappointment. The images chosen by memory are as arbitrary, as confined and as elusive as those which imagination had formed and that reality had destroyed. There is no reason why, outside of us, a real place should possess the pictures painted by memory rather than those of our dreams. Besides, a new reality will perhaps make us forget, or even detest, the desires on whose account we had come away.

Those which had made me come away to Balbec stemmed in part from the fact that the Verdurins (of whose invitations I had never taken advantage, and who would certainly be glad to entertain me, were I to go to the country to apologize for never having been able to visit them in Paris), knowing that several of the faithful would be spending their holidays along this coast, and having for that reason rented for the whole season one of M. de Cambremer's châteaux (La Raspelière), had invited Mme Putbus. On the evening when I had learned of this (in Paris), I sent, like a veritable madman, our young footman to inquire whether that lady would be taking her lady's-maid to Balbec. It was eleven o'clock at night. The concierge was a long time opening up and by some miracle did not send my messenger packing, nor summon the police, but was content merely to give him a rough reception, while supplying him with the desired information. He said that the head lady's-maid would indeed be accompanying her mistress, first of all to take the waters in Germany, then to Biarritz, and lastly, to Mme Verdurin's. From that moment on, I had felt calm and glad to have this prospect in store. I had been able to dispense with those pursuits in the street, when I was not armed with the letter of introduction to the beauties I encountered that my having dined that same evening, at the Verdurins, with her mistress, would represent to the 'Giorgione'. Moreover, she would perhaps think even better of me on learning that I knew not only the bourgeois tenants of La Raspelière, but its owners, and especially Saint-Loup, who, unable to recommend me to the lady's-maid from a distance (she not knowing Robert's name), had written an enthusiastic letter to the Cambremers on my behalf. He thought that, aside from the great usefulness they might have for me, I would find Mme de Cambremer, the daughter-in-law, *née* Legrandin, interesting to talk to. 'She's an intelligent woman, he had assured me. Within limits, of course. She won't say anything definitive ("definitive" things had taken the place of "sublime" ones with Robert, who, every five or six years, would modify some of his pet expressions, while preserving the main ones), but she's got character, she has a personality, intuition, she comes out with just what needs saying. She can get on your nerves now and again, she throws out silly remarks so as to seem "upper crust", which is all the more ridiculous since no one could be less fashionable than the Cambremers, she isn't always "up to the minute" but, all in all, she's still one of the people it's most bearable to associate with.'

As soon as Robert's recommendation had reached them, the Cambremers, whether snobbery, which led them to want to make themselves indirectly agreeable to Saint-Loup, or gratitude for what he had done for one of their nephews in Doncières, or more probably mainly out of kindness and a tradition of hospitality, had written long letters demanding that I should stay with them, or, if I preferred to be more independent, offering to look for lodgings. When Saint-Loup had pointed out that I would be staying at the Grand-Hôtel in Balbec, they replied that they would at least expect a visit from me straight after I arrived and, if it were too long delayed, would not fail to come and badger me with invitations to their *garden-parties*.

Nothing of course connected Mme Putbus's lady's-maid in any essential way to the neighbourhood of Balbec; she would not be for me there like the peasant girl whom, alone on the Méséglise road, I had so often summoned up in vain, with all the strength of my longing.

But I had long since ceased trying to extract from a woman the square root of her unknown as it were, which did not often survive a simple introduction. At least in Balbec, where I had not been for a long time, I should have the advantage, for want of the necessary connection that did not exist between the neighbourhood and the woman, that my sense of reality would not be suppressed for me by habit as it was in Paris where, whether in my own house, or in some familiar bedroom, pleasure with a woman was unable to give me for a single moment the illusion, in the midst of everyday objects, that it was opening the way for me to a new life. (For if habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing the first, of which it has neither the cruelties nor the enchantments.) But I would perhaps have this illusion in a new landscape, where, before a ray of sunlight, the sensibility is reborn, and where the lady's-maid whom I desired would indeed finally inflame me; but we shall see circumstances so decree not only that this woman should not come to Balbec, but that I dreaded nothing so much as that she might come, with the result that this principal object of my journey was neither attained nor even pursued. True, Mme Putbus was not due to go to the Verdurins so early in the season; but the pleasures that we have chosen can be a long way off if their advent is certain and if, while we await them, we can give ourselves over in the meantime to an idle seeking to attract and to an incapacity for love. For the rest, I was not going to Balbec in as impractical a spirit as the first time; there is always less egotism in the pure imagination than in the memory; and I knew that I was going to find myself as it happens in one of those places teeming with beautiful women whom I did not know; a seaside resort displays no fewer of them than a ball, and I thought in advance of those strolls in front of the hotel, along the esplanade, with the same sort of pleasure that Mme de Guermantes would have procured for me if, instead of getting me invited to brilliant dinner-parties, she had more often given my name, for their lists of male partners, to the hostesses where there was dancing. To make female acquaintances in Balbec would be as easy as it had been awkward for me in the old days, for I now had as many connections and supports there as I had been devoid of them on my first trip.

I was aroused from my reverie by the voice of the manager, to whose political dissertation I had not been listening. Changing the subject, he told me of the delight of the First President on learning of my arrival and that he would be coming to call on me in my room, that very evening. The prospect of this visit so alarmed me, for I was starting to feel tired, that I begged him to obstruct it (which he promised to do) and, for added security, for this first evening, to get his staff

to mount guard on my floor. He did not seem overfond of them. 'I'm obliged all the time to run after them because they lack too much inertia. If I wasn't there, they wouldn't budge. I'll put the liftboy on sentry-go at your door.' I asked whether he was at last 'head *chasseur*'. 'He's not yet senior enough in the house, he replied. He's got workmates older than him, there'd be an outcry. There need to be granulations in everything. I allow he has a good aptitude (for "attitude") there in front of his lift. But he's still a bit young for such positions. It would show up against others, who are too old. He's a bit lacking in responsibility, which is the primitive quality (no doubt the "primordial", the most important, quality). He needs to have his brains (my interlocutor meant "head") screwed on a bit more. Anyway, he need only trust me. I know the ropes. Before winning my stripes as manager of the Grand-Hôtel, I first saw action under M. Paillard.'[121] This comparison impressed me and I thanked the manager for having come himself all the way to Pont-à-Couleuvre. 'Oh, don't mention it! It made me waste only an infinite (for "infinitesimal") amount of time.' We had in any event arrived.

A convulsion of my entire being. On the very first night, as I was suffering from an attack of cardiac fatigue, trying to overcome the pain, I bent down slowly and cautiously to remove my boots. But hardly had I touched the first button of my bottine, before my chest swelled, filled with an unknown, divine presence, I was shaken by sobs, tears streamed from my eyes. The person who had come to my assistance, who was rescuing me from my aridity of soul, was the one who, several years before, at an identical moment of distress and loneliness, a moment when I no longer had anything of myself, had entered, and who had restored me to myself, for it was both me and more than me (the container which is more than the content, and had brought it to me). I had just glimpsed, in my memory, bent over my fatigue, the tender, concerned, disappointed face of my grandmother, such as she had been on that first evening of our arrival; the face of my grandmother, not that of the one whom I had been surprised and self-reproachful at having missed so little, who had nothing of her but her name, but of my true grandmother, the living reality of whom, for the first time since the Champs-Elysées, where she had suffered her stroke, I had rediscovered in a complete and involuntary memory. This reality does not exist for us until such time as it has been recreated in our minds (otherwise the men who have been involved in some titanic battle would all be great epic poets); thus, in a wild desire to hurl myself into her arms, it was only at this instant – more than a year after her funeral, on account of the anachronism which so often prevents the calendar of facts from coinciding with that of our feelings – that I had just learned she was dead. I had spoken of her often since that time and thought of her also, but beneath the words and thoughts of an ungrateful, selfish and cruel young man there had never been anything that might resemble my grandmother, for, in my frivolity, my love of pleasure, and accustomed as I was to seeing her as an invalid, I contained within me the memory of what she had been only in a virtual state. At whatever moment we may consider it, our total soul has an almost fictitious value only, for all its great wealth of assets, for now some, and now others of these are unavailable, whether indeed they be real assets, as well as those of the imagination, and in my own case, for example, fully as much as that of the ancient name of Guermantes, those, so very much more solemn, of the true memory of my grandmother. For to the disturbances of memory are linked the intermittences of the heart. It is no doubt the existence of our body, similar for us to a vase in which our spirituality is enclosed, which induces us to suppose that all our inner goods, our past joys, all our sorrows, are perpetually in our possession. Perhaps this is as inaccurate as to believe that they escape or return. At all events, if they do remain inside us, it is for most of the time in an unknown domain where they are of no service to us, and where even the most ordinary of them are repressed by memories of a different order, which exclude all simultaneity with them in our consciousness. But if the framework of sensations in which they are preserved be recaptured, they have in their turn the same capacity to expel all that is incompatible with them, to install in us, on its own, the self that experienced them. Now, since the self that I had suddenly re-become had not existed since that far-off evening when my grandmother had undressed me on my arrival in Balbec, it was quite naturally, not after the day we were living, of which that self knew nothing, but – as if there were, in time, different and parallel series – without any break in continuity, immediately after that first evening in the past, that I adhered to the moment when my grandmother had leaned towards me. The self that I was then and which had vanished all that time ago, was once again so close to me that I seemed to hear still the words that had come immediately before, yet which were no more than a dream, just as a man not properly awake thinks he can perceive close beside him the sounds of his receding dream. I was nothing more than the being who had sought refuge in his grandmother's arms, to erase the traces of her sorrows by giving her kisses, the being I would have had as great difficulty in imagining to myself, when I was one or other of those who had been succeeding one another inside me for some time past, as the efforts it would now have required, sterile in any case, to re-experience the desires and joys of one of those beings that, for a time at least, I no longer was. I recalled how, an hour before the moment when my grandmother had thus leaned over, in her dressing-gown, towards my boots, wandering in the stiflingly hot street, in front of the *pâtissier*, I had thought I could never, such was the need I had to embrace her, wait for the hour I had still to spend without her. And now that this same need was reborn, I knew that I could wait for hour upon hour, that never again would she be beside me, I had made the discovery only now because I had just, on being aware of her for the first time, alive, real, swelling my heart to bursting, on meeting her again that is, realized that I had lost her for ever. Lost for ever; I could not understand and I applied myself to suffering the pain of this contradiction: on the one hand, an existence, a tenderness, surviving in me such as I had known them, that is to say created for me, a love in which everything so much found in me its complement, its object, its constant direction, that the genius of great men, all the geniuses who may have existed since the world began, would have counted for less with my grandmother than a single one of my faults; and on the other hand, as soon as I had relived, as though present, that felicity, to feel it traversed by the certainty, springing up like a repeated physical pain, of a nothingness that had erased my image of that tenderness, which had destroyed that existence, abolished retrospectively our mutual predestination, made of my grandmother, at the moment when I had found her again as if in a mirror, a mere stranger whom chance had led to spend a few years with me, as it might have been with anyone at all, but for whom, before and after, I was nothing, would be nothing.

Instead of the pleasures I had been enjoying for some time past, the only pleasure it would have been possible for me to enjoy at this moment would have been, by retouching the past, to lessen the sorrows my grandmother had once experienced. I did not remember her only in that dressing-gown, a garment appropriate, to the extent of becoming almost symbolic of them, to the pains, unhealthy no doubt yet comforting also, she took on my behalf; little by little, I now remembered all the opportunities I had seized, by letting her see my sufferings, by, if need be, exaggerating them, of causing her a grief that I then imagined being expunged by my kisses, as if my affection were as capable as was my happiness of making hers; and what was worse, I, who could conceive of no other happiness now than of being able to find it once again extended in my memory across the planes of that face, moulded and bowed by tenderness, I had once shown a senseless fury in trying to extirpate from it even the smallest pleasures, as on the day when Saint-Loup had taken my grandmother's photograph and when, finding it hard to conceal from her the almost ridiculously childish coquettishness she was putting into posing, with her broad-brimmed hat, in a fetching half-light, I had allowed myself to murmur a few impatient and hurtful words, which, I had sensed from the way her face contracted, had struck home, had wounded her; it was me whom they were lacerating now that the consolation of a thousand kisses was forever impossible.

But never again would I be able to erase that contraction from her face, or that suffering from her heart, or rather from my own; for since the dead exist only in us, it is ourselves that we strike unrelentingly when we persist in remembering the blows we have dealt them. I clung to these sorrows, however cruel they might be, with all my strength, for I felt indeed that they were the effect of my memory of my grandmother, the proof that this memory which I had was indeed present in me. I felt that I truly remembered her only through sorrow, and would have wished the nails to be driven yet more firmly home that had riveted her memory inside me. I had not sought to make the suffering any easier, to embellish it, to pretend that my grandmother was only absent and momentarily invisible, by addressing words and entreaties to her photograph (the one that Saint-Loup had taken and which I had with me) as though to a being separated from us but who, having remained an individual, knows us and remains joined to us by an indissoluble harmony. I never did this, for I was anxious not to suffer only, but to respect the originality of my suffering such as I had suddenly endured it against my will, and I wanted to continue to endure it, in accordance with its own laws, each time this strange contradiction between survival and oblivion, intersecting within me, returned. I knew, not, certainly, whether I might one day isolate some element of truth in this painful and at present incomprehensible impression, but that, if I were ever able to extract that element of truth, it could only be from this same impression, so particular, so spontaneous, which had been neither traced by my intellect, nor inflected or attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself,

the abrupt revelation of death, had hollowed out in me, like a thunderbolt, in accordance with some inhuman, supernatural diagram, like a double and mysterious furrow. (As for the forgetfulness of my grandmother in which I had been living up until now, I could not even think of attaching myself to that so as to draw some truth from it; for in itself it was nothing more than a negation, an enfeeblement of the mind, incapable of re-creating an actual moment of life and obliged to substitute for it conventional and indifferent mental images.) Perhaps, however, now that the instinct for self-preservation, or the intellect's ingenuity in shielding us against sorrow, was beginning to build on the still smoking ruins, to lay the first foundations of its useful but ill-starred building-work, I had been finding too much comfort in recalling one or other of the beloved being's judgments, in recalling them as if she were still able to pass them, as if she existed, as if I continued to exist for her. But as soon as I came to fall asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes were closed to the things without, the world of sleep (on the threshold of which, my intellect and my will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer contend with the cruelty of my genuine impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness, in the organic depths, now become translucid, of the mysteriously illuminated viscera. World of sleep, where our inner knowledge, held in subjection by the disturbances in our organs, quickens the rhythm of our heart or of our breathing, for the same dosage of alarm, of sadness, of remorse, is a hundred times more potent when thus injected into our veins; as soon as, in order to travel along the arteries of the subterranean city, we have embarked on the dark waves of our own blood, as if on the sixfold meanders of some internal Lethe,[122] tall, solemn forms appear to us, accost us and then go from us, leaving us in tears. I searched in vain for that of my grandmother the moment I touched land beneath the gloomy porticos; yet I knew she existed still, but with a diminished life, as pale as that of memory; the darkness was increasing, and the wind; my father did not come, who was to conduct me to her. Suddenly my breath failed, I felt my heart as if hardened, I had just remembered that for long weeks I had forgotten to write to my grandmother. What must she be thinking of me? 'Dear God, I said to myself, how unhappy she must be in that small room that they've rented for her, as small as for some former maidservant, where she's all alone with the nurse they've sent in to look after her, and where she can't stir, for she's still partly paralysed and hasn't once wanted to get up! She must think I've forgotten her since she died, how alone and abandoned she must feel! Oh! I must run and see her, this very minute, I can't wait for my father to come, but where is it? How can I have forgotten the address? If only she still recognizes me! How can I have forgotten her all these months?' It's dark, I shan't find her, the wind is stopping me advancing; but here is my father walking in front of me; I cry out to him: 'Where's grandmother? Tell me the address. Is she all right? Is it quite certain she's got all she needs? – No, no, my father says to me, you can rest assured. Her nurse is an orderly person. We send a very small sum from time to time so they can buy her the little she has need of. She sometimes asks what's become of you. She's even been told you were going to write a book. She seemed pleased. She wiped away a tear.' Then I thought I remembered that shortly after she died, my grandmother had said to me, sobbing, with a humble expression, like an old servant who has been dismissed, like a stranger: 'You'll allow me to see you sometimes all the same, don't let me go too many years without visiting me. Remember that you were my grandson and that grandmothers don't forget.' And seeing once again the face, so submissive, so unhappy, so gentle, that she wore, I wanted to run immediately and say what I ought then to have replied to her: 'But grandmother, you'll see me as much as you want, I have only you in the world, I shall never leave you again.' How my silence must have made her sob during all these months when I haven't been to where she's in bed! What may she have said to herself? And it was sobbing that I, too, said to my father: 'Quick, quick, her address, take me.' But he: 'The fact is… I don't know if you'll be able to see her. Besides, she's very weak, you know, very weak, she's not herself any more, I think you'd find it rather upsetting. And I don't recall the exact number in the avenue. – But tell me, you who know, it's not true that the dead are no longer alive. It just can't be true, despite what they say, since grandmother still exists.' My father gave a sad smile: 'Oh, very little, you know, very little. I think you'd do better not to go. She lacks for nothing. They come and keep everything tidy. – But she's often alone? – Yes, but that's better for her. It's better that she shouldn't think, that could only cause her pain. Thinking often causes people pain. Anyway, you know, she's very low. I'll leave you exact directions so that you can go there; I can't see what you'd be able to do and I don't think the nurse would let you see her. – You know very well though that I shall always live near her, stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork.'[123] But already I had recrossed the river with its gloomy meanders, I had come back to the surface, where the world of the living opens out; so if I was still repeating 'Francis Jammes, stags, stags', this sequence of words no longer held the limpid, logical meaning they had expressed so naturally for me only a moment before and which I could no longer recall. I could no longer understand even why the word Aias,[124] spoken to me just now by my father, had at once signified 'Take care not to catch cold,' beyond any possible doubt. I had forgotten to close the shutters and the broad daylight had no doubt woken me up. But I could not bear to look out on those waves that my grandmother had once been able to contemplate for hours on end; the new image of their indifferent beauty was at once completed by the idea that she could not see them; I would have liked to block my ears against their sound, for now the luminous plenitude of the beach was hollowing out a void in my heart; everything seemed to be saying to me, like the paths and the lawns in the public gardens where I had once lost her, when I was very young: 'We haven't seen her,' and beneath the roundness of the pale, heavenly sky I felt oppressed, as if beneath an immense blue bell-jar, shutting off a horizon where my grandmother was not. So as no longer to see, I turned towards the wall, but alas, against me was the partition that had served of old between us as a morning messenger, that partition which, docile as a violin in rendering all the nuances of a feeling, spoke so exactly to my grandmother of my fear both of waking her up, or, if she was already awake, of not being heard by her and of her not daring to move, then at once, like a second instrument taking it up, announcing her coming and exhorting me to stay calm. I no more dared to approach that partition than a piano on which my grandmother had been playing and that was vibrating still from her touch. I knew that now I could knock, more loudly even, that nothing could again wake her, that I would not hear any response, that my grandmother would never again come. And I asked nothing more of God, if there is a Paradise, than to be able to give there the three little taps on that partition that my grandmother would recognize anywhere, and to which she would respond with those other taps that meant: 'Don't fret yourself, little mouse, I realize you're impatient, but I'm just coming', and that he should let me remain with her for all eternity, which would not be too long for the two of us.

The manager came to ask me whether I did not want to go down. Just in case, he had taken care of my 'placement' in the dining-room. Not having seen me, he had been afraid that I might have had a recurrence of my breathless attacks from the old days. He hoped that it would be only some minor 'throat troubles' and assured me that he had heard they could be eased with the aid of what he called 'calyptus'.

He handed me a brief note from Albertine. She had not been due to come to Balbec this year but, having changed her plans, had been for the last three days, not in Balbec itself, but ten minutes away by tram, at a neighbouring resort. Afraid that I might be tired from the journey, she had stayed away on the first evening, but was now sending to know when I might be able to see her. I inquired whether she had come in person, not so as to see her, but so as to arrange not to see her. 'She did indeed, the manager replied. But she'd like it to be as soon as possible, unless you have absolutely necessitous reasons. You can see, he concluded, that, when all's done and said, everyone here wants you.' I, however, did not want to see anyone.

Yet the day before, when I arrived, I had felt captured once more by the indolent charm of life in a seaside resort. The same silent 'lift', out of respect this time, not disdain, and flushed with pleasure, had set the lift in motion. And as I rose along the ascending column, I traversed once more what had once been for me the mystery of an unfamiliar hotel, where, when you arrive, a tourist without either protection or prestige, every habitué returning to his room, every young girl going down to dinner, every maid passing down the strangely configured corridors, and the girl come from America with her chaperon going down to dinner, give you a look in which you can read nothing of what you would have wished for. This time, on the contrary, I had experienced the too restful pleasure of making the ascent of a hotel known to me, where I felt at home, where I had once more accomplished that operation having always to be begun afresh, longer and more difficult than the turning inside-out of an eyelid, which consists of imposing on objects the soul that is familiar to us in place of their own soul, which had alarmed us. Would I now, I had said to myself, unsuspecting of the abrupt change that lay in wait for my soul, have to go into yet other hotels, where I would dine for the first time, where habit would not yet have slain, on each floor, before each door, the terrifying dragon that had seemed to stand watch over an enchanted existence, where I would have to go up to those unknown women that grand hotels, casinos and beach resorts serve merely to bring together and cause to live in common, like so many vast polyparies?

I had derived pleasure even from the fact that the tiresome First President should have been in such a hurry to call on me; I had seen, for the first day, waves, the azure mountain ranges of the sea, its glaciers and its waterfalls, its elevation and its careless majesty – merely by smelling, for the first time in so long, as I washed my hands, the distinctive odour of the too highly scented Grand-Hôtel soap – which, seeming to belong simultaneously to the present moment and to my past stay, floated between them like the real charm of a particular way of life in which you return home only to change your tie. The sheets on the bed, too fine, too light, too vast, impossible to tuck in, to hold in place, and which remained puffed up around the blankets in shifting scrolls, would once have saddened me. On the unwieldy, billowing roundness of their sails, they merely cradled the glorious, hope-filled sunshine of early morning. But the sun did not have time to appear. During that same night, the dreadful, divine presence had been resurrected. I begged the manager to go, to ask that no one should come in. I told him I should be staying in bed and rejected his offer of sending to the chemist's for his excellent preparation. He was overjoyed by my refusal for he was afraid that the guests might be incommoded by the smell of 'calyptus'. Which earned me this compliment: 'You're in the swim' (he meant to say 'in the right'), and this piece of advice: 'Mind you don't dirty yourself on the door, for, relating to the locks, I've had it "coasted" with oil; if one of the staff were to dare knock at your room, he'd get a "threshing". And that can be taken as read, for I don't like "recitations" (which evidently meant: "I don't like having to recite things twice"). Only, for a pick-me-up wouldn't you like a drop of the old wine I've got a bust of downstairs (no doubt for "butt"?). I shan't bring it to you on a silver dish like the head of Jonathan,[125] and I must warn you it's not Château-Lafite, but it's more or less equivocal (for "equivalent"). And because it's light, they could fry you a small sole.' I refused everything, but was surprised to hear the name of the fish (*sole*) pronounced like the word for a willow tree (*saule*), by a man who must have ordered so many of them in his lifetime.

Despite the manager's promises, a little later on I was brought the turned-down visiting-card of the Marquise de Cambremer. Having come to see me, the old lady had sent to ask whether I was there, and when she learned that my arrival dated only from the previous day, and that I was indisposed, she had not insisted, but (doubtless not without stopping off at the chemist's or the haberdasher's, where the footman had jumped from his seat to go in and pay some account or lay in supplies) the Marquise had left again for Féterne, in her ancient eight-spring calash and pair. Quite often indeed, its rumble was to be heard, and its pomp admired, in the streets of Balbec and of several other small localities along the coast, situated between Balbec and Féterne. Not that these stops at suppliers' were the object of these outings. This, on the contrary, would be a tea-party, or *garden-party*, at the house of some squireen or bourgeois quite unworthy of the Marquise. But the latter, although, by her birth and fortune, she lorded it over the minor nobility of the district, was so afraid, in her perfect kindness and simplicity, of letting someone down who had invited her that she went to the most insignificant social gatherings in the neighbourhood. Admittedly, rather than travel such a long way to come and hear, in the heat of some stifling small drawing-room, a soprano generally devoid of talent and to whom, in her capacity as great lady of the district and a musician of repute, she would then have to offer her exaggerated congratulations, Mme de Cambremer would have preferred to go for a drive or to remain in her wonderful gardens at Féterne, at the foot of which the drowsy waves of a small bay come to expire amidst the flowers. But she knew that her probable coming had been announced by the host, whether he were a nobleman or a freeman of Maineville-la-Teinturière or Chattoncourt-l'Orgeuilleux. Now, if Mme de Cambremer had left home that day without putting in an appearance at the festivity, one or other of the guests coming from one of the small resorts along the sea could have heard and seen the Marquise's calash, which would have robbed her of the excuse of having been unable to leave Féterne. On the other hand, for all that these hosts had often seen Mme de Cambremer going to concerts given in the houses of people where they considered it was not her place to be, the slight lowering that, as they saw it, this fact inflicted on the standing of the too good-natured Marquise, vanished as soon as it was they who were entertaining, and it was feverishly that they asked themselves whether they would or would not be getting her at their small tea-party. What relief, for anxieties felt for several days past, if, after the first piece sung by the hosts' daughter or by some amateur holidaying locally, a guest announced (an infallible sign that the Marquise would be coming to the matinée) that they had seen the horses of the famous calash halted in front of the watchmaker or the druggist! Then Mme de Cambremer (who indeed would not be long in making her entry, followed by her daughter-in-law and by guests she currently had residing with her, and whom she had asked permission, granted with what delight, to bring with her) would recover all her lustre in the eyes of the hosts, for whom the reward of her hoped-for coming had perhaps been the determining but unacknowledged reason for the decision they had taken a month earlier: to inflict on themselves the bother and expense of giving a matinée. Seeing the Marquise present at their tea-party, they no longer remembered her willingness to attend those of ill-qualified neighbours, but the antiquity of her family, the luxury of her château, and the rudeness of her daughter-in-law, *née* Legrandin, who, by her arrogance, threw into relief the somewhat mawkish good nature of the mother-in-law. They already fancied they could read, on the society page of the *Gaulois*, the paragraph that they would themselves concoct *en famille*, behind locked doors, about 'the little corner of Brittany where they know how to enjoy themselves, the ultra-select matinée from which no one tore themselves away without having made their hosts promise to repeat it without delay.' Each day they would await the newspaper, concerned at not yet having seen any mention of their matinée, and fearing that they had got Mme de Cambremer for their guests alone and not for the multitude of readers. At last the blessed day arrived: 'The season is exceptionally brilliant this year in Balbec. The fashion is for small afternoon concerts, etc.' Lord be praised, Mme de Cambremer's name had been spelt correctly and 'cited at random', but in first place. All that remained was to appear annoyed by this indiscretion on the part of the newspapers, which might lead to a falling-out with the people one had been unable to invite, and to ask hypocritically, in front of Mme de Cambremer, who could have been so perfidious as to send in this item of gossip, of which the Marquise, ever the benevolent *grande dame*, said: 'I can understand it annoying you but for my own part I'm only too happy for it to be known that I came to you.'

On the card I was handed, Mme de Cambremer had scribbled that she was giving a matinée in two days' time. And certainly, only two days before, however tired of socializing I might have been, it would have been a real pleasure to sample it transplanted into those gardens where, thanks to Féterne's exposure, fig trees, palms and rose bushes grew out in the open, all the way down to a sea often of a Mediterranean calm and blue, across which the owners' small yacht would go, before the party began, to fetch the more important guests from the resorts on the far side of the bay, and serve, its awnings spread against the sun, once everyone had arrived, as a dining-room for the tea, and set off again in the evening to take back those whom it had brought. A charming luxury, but so costly that it was partly in order to offset the expense it entailed that Mme de Cambremer had sought to increase her income in various ways, and notably by letting, for the first time, one of her properties, very different from Féterne: La Raspelière. Yes, two days ago, what a change such a matinée, populated by unfamiliar minor nobility, in a new setting, would have made from the 'high life' of Paris! But now pleasures no longer had any meaning for me. I wrote therefore to Mme de Cambremer to make my excuses, just as an hour earlier I had sent Albertine away: sorrow had abolished the possibility of desire in me as completely as a high fever takes away the appetite. My mother was to arrive the following day. It seemed to me that I was less unworthy of living beside her, that I would understand her better, now that a whole alien and degrading existence had made way for the resurgence of heart-rending memories that had garlanded and ennobled my soul, like hers, with their crown of thorns. Or so I believed; in reality there is every difference between genuine grief like that of Mama – which literally takes away your life for long periods, sometimes for ever, the moment you have lost the person that you love – and that other grief, ephemeral in spite of everything, as mine was to be, which goes away quickly just as it is late in coming, which we experience only long after the event because in order to feel it we needed to 'understand' that event; grief such as so many people experience and from which the grief that was now torturing me differed only in its modality, of involuntary memory.

As for a grief as deep as that of my mother, I was to know that one day, as will be seen in due course in this narrative, but it was not now, nor thus that I pictured it to myself. Nevertheless, just as a narrator, who ought to know his lines and have taken up his place long before, but has arrived only at the last second and having read what he is to say only once, is able to disguise the fact skilfully enough when the time comes to respond to his cue, so that no one is made aware of his late arrival, my new-found grief enabled me, when my mother arrived, to talk to her as if it had always been the same. She merely thought that the sight of the places where I had been with my grandmother (though this was not in fact it) had reawoken it. Then for the first time, and because I felt a sorrow that was nothing in comparison with her own, but which had opened my eyes, I realised with terror what she might be suffering. I understood for the first time that the

fixed, tearless gaze (which meant that Françoise felt little pity for her) which she had had since my grandmother's death, had been dwelling on this incomprehensible contradiction between memory and nothingness. Moreover, though still in her black veils, but more dressed-up in this new place, I was the more struck by the transformation that had taken place in her. It is not enough to say that she had lost all her gaiety; having melted and become congealed into a sort of imploring image, she seemed to be afraid, by too abrupt a movement, too loud a tone of voice, of giving offence to the sorrowful presence that never left her. But above all, the moment I saw her enter in her crêpe coat, I realized – what had eluded me in Paris – that it was no longer my mother I saw in front of me, but my grandmother. Just as, in royal or ducal families, when the head of the family dies the son takes his title, and, from having been the Duc d'Orléans, Prince de Tarente or Prince des Laumes, becomes King of France, Duc de la Trémoïlle, or Duc de Guermantes,[126] so, frequently, by an accession of a different order, and of a more profound origin, the dead man seizes hold of the living one, who becomes his successor in his own likeness, the perpetuator of his interrupted life. Perhaps all that the great grief does which, in a daughter such as Mama was, ensues on the death of her mother, is to break open the chrysalid a little sooner, to hasten the metamorphosis and the appearance of a being that we bear within us and which, but for this crisis, which misses out the intermediate stages and covers long periods at a single bound, would only have supervened more slowly. Perhaps, in the regret for the one who is no more, there is a sort of suggestion which in the end produces on our own features similarities that were already latent in us, and that above all arrests our more particularly individual activities (in my mother's case, her common sense, and the mocking high spirits she had got from her father), which, for as long as the person greatly loved was alive, we were not afraid to exercise, be it at their expense, and which counter-balanced the character that we had got exclusively from them. Once she is dead, we would feel qualms about being other, we now admire only what she was, what we already were, but mixed in with something else, and what henceforth we shall be alone. It is in this sense (and not in that very vague, very false sense in which it is generally understood) that we can say that death is not without its use, that the dead person continues to exercise an influence on us. They influence us more even than the living because, the true reality being set free only by the mind, being the object of a mental process, we truly know only what we are obliged to re-create by thought, what everyday life keeps hidden from us… Finally, in this cult of regret for our dead, we make idols of that which they loved. Not only could my mother not be parted from my grandmother's bag, more precious for her now than if it had been of sapphires and diamonds, from her muff, from all the garments that brought out still more strongly how alike the two of them were in appearance, but even from the volumes of Mme de Sévigné[127] that my grandmother was never without, copies that my mother would not have exchanged for the manuscript of the *Letters* itself. She had teased my grandmother in the old days, who never once wrote to her without quoting a sentence from Mme de Sévigné or Mme de Beausergent.[128] In each of the three letters I received from Mama before her arrival in Balbec, she quoted Mme de Sévigné at me, as if these three letters had been, not addressed by her to me, but addressed by my grandmother to her. She wanted to go down on to the esplanade to see the beach that my grandmother spoke of every day when writing to her. Holding her mother's *en-tout-cas* in her hand, I saw her from the window, advancing all in black, with timid, pious steps, across the sand that cherished feet had trodden before her, and she seemed to be going in search of a dead body that the waves were to bring back to her. So as not to let her dine alone, I had to go downstairs with her. The First President and the widow of the *bâtonnier* had themselves introduced to her. And she was so sensitive to everything connected with my grandmother that she was infinitely touched, and preserved ever afterwards the memory and her gratitude for what the First President said to her, just as she felt hurt and indignant at the fact that, on the other hand, the *bâtonnier*'s wife spoke not one word in remembrance of the dead woman. In point of fact, the First President felt no more concern for her than did the *bâtonnier*'s wife. The emotional words of the one and the silence of the other were only, although my mother set so great a distance between them, different ways of expressing the indifference that the dead inspire in us. But I believe that my mother took comfort above all from the words into which, against my will, I allowed a little of my pain to pass. It could but make Mama happy (despite all the affection she had for me), like everything that ensured my grandmother's survival in our hearts. On each of the days following, my mother went down to sit on the beach, to do exactly as her mother had done, and read her two favourite books, the *Memoirs* of Mme de Beausergent and the *Letters* of Mme de Sévigné. She, or any of us, could not bear the last-named being referred to as the 'witty Marquise', any more than La Fontaine as '*le Bonhomme*' or 'good old La Fontaine'.[129] But when in the letters she read the words 'my daughter', she thought she heard her mother speaking to her.

She had the ill luck, on one of these pilgrimages when she did not want to be disturbed, to meet on the beach a lady from Combray, followed by her daughters. I believe her name was Mme Poussin. But among ourselves we only ever used to call her 'We'll see how you like that', for it was by this phrase, constantly repeated, that she warned her daughters of the evils they were storing up for themselves, saying to the one who was rubbing her eyes, for example: 'Once you've got a nice ophthalmia, we'll see how you like that.' She addressed long, tearful greetings to my mother from a distance, not as a sign of condolence, but because such had been her upbringing. Even had we not lost my grandmother and had reason only to be happy, she would have done the same. Living a somewhat withdrawn life in Combray, in an immense garden, she considered that nothing was ever soft enough and subjected the words and even the names of the French language to a softening process. She considered it too harsh to call the item of silverware that poured out her syrups a *cuiller* and would say in consequence, *cueiller*;[130] she would have been afraid of giving offence to the gentle songster of *Télémaque* by calling him, crudely, Fénelon[131] – as I did myself, with good reason, having for my dearest friend the best, most intelligent, and bravest of human beings, unforgettable for all who knew him, Bertrand de Fénelon – and only ever said 'Fénélon', considering that the acute accent added a certain mellowness. The not so soft son-in-law of this Mme Poussin, whose name I have forgotten, when he was a notary in Combray, ran off with the cash-box and caused my uncle, notably, to lose quite a considerable sum. But most of the people of Combray were so well disposed towards the other members of the family that no coldness resulted and all they did was to feel sorry for Mme Poussin. She did not entertain, but every time you passed in front of her railings you stopped to admire the admirable shade under the trees, without being able to make out anything more. She hardly troubled us in Balbec, where I met her only once, at a moment when she was saying to her daughter, busy gnawing at her fingernails: 'When you've got a nice whitlow, we'll see how you like that.'

While Mama was reading on the beach I remained in my room on my own. I recalled the last days of my grandmother's life and everything connected with them, the staircase door that had been kept open when we went out for her last walk. In contrast to all of which, the rest of the world seemed scarcely real and my suffering poisoned it in its entirety. Finally, my mother demanded that I go out. But at each step, some forgotten aspect of the casino, of the street in which, as I waited for her, that first evening, I had gone as far as the statue of Duguay-Trouin,[132] prevented me, like a wind against which you can not battle, from going any further; I looked down so as not to see. And having recovered some of my strength, I went back towards the hotel, towards the hotel where I knew it was henceforth impossible that, however, long I might wait, I should find my grandmother again, my grandmother whom I had once found, on the first evening of our arrival. Since this was the first time I had gone out, many of the servants that I had not yet seen looked at me curiously. On the actual doorstep of the hotel a young *chasseur* took off his cap to salute me and promptly put it back on again. I imagined that Aimé had, to use his own expression, 'passed on the order' that I was to be shown respect. But I saw in that same instant that, for someone else who was coming back in, he removed it again. The truth was that all this young man knew in life was how to take off and replace his cap, and this he did to perfection. Having realized that he was incapable of anything else but excelled at this, he performed it the greatest number of times he could each day, which earned for him a discreet but general sympathy on the part of the clientele, great sympathy, too, on the part of the porter, to whom fell the task of engaging the *chasseurs* and who, up until this *rara avis*, had been unable to find one who did not get himself dismissed within the week, to the great astonishment of Aimé, who used to say: 'Yet in that trade little more's asked of them than to be polite, that shouldn't be so hard.' The manager insisted also that they should look 'present' as he put it, meaning that they should remain there, or rather having failed to retain the word 'presentable'. The appearance of the lawn that stretched behind the hotel had been modified by the creation of a few flowerbeds and the removal, not only of an exotic shrub, but of the *chasseur* who, the first year, had adorned the entrance externally with the supple stem of his body and the curious colour of his hair. He had followed a Polish countess who had taken him on as a secretary, imitating in this his two elder brothers and his typist sister, snatched from the hotel by personalities of various countries and gender, who had been smitten by their charms. The youngest alone remained, whom no one wanted because he had a

squint. He was very happy when the Polish countess and the patrons of the other two came to spend some time at the hotel in Balbec. For, although he envied his brothers, he loved them and was thus able for a few weeks to cultivate family feelings. Was the Abbess of Fontevrault not in the habit, for which she used to abandon her nuns, of going to share in the hospitality offered by Louis XIV to the other Mortemart, his mistress, Mme de Montespan?[133] As for him, this was the first year he had been in Balbec; he did not yet know me, but having heard his longer-serving fellows follow the word Monsieur when they were speaking to me by my name, he imitated them from the very first occasion with an air of satisfaction, either at displaying his training in relation to a personality he adjudged to be well known, or else at conforming to a usage of which he had been unaware five minutes previously but from which it seemed to him indispensable not to depart. I understood very well the attraction this grand hotel might have for certain people. It was arranged like a theatre, and a numerous cast of extras gave life to it all the way up into the flies. Although the guest was only a sort of spectator, he was constantly involved in the spectacle, not even as in those theatres where the actors perform one scene in the auditorium, but as if the spectator's own life were unfolding amidst the sumptuousness of a stage-set. The tennis player might re-enter in a white flannel jacket, but the porter would have put on a blue dress-coat with silver braid to hand him his letters. If this tennis player did not want to walk up, he was no less involved with the actors for having at his side, to take the lift up, the equally richly costumed 'lift'. The upstairs corridors secreted an escape of chambermaids and guests' maids, as lovely against the sea as the frieze of the Panathenaea,[134] all the way to the little bedrooms to which the connoisseurs of ancillary female beauty would come by knowing detours. Downstairs, it was the masculine element that dominated and turned this hotel, thanks to the extreme and indolent youthfulness of its servants, into a sort of Judeo-Christian tragedy that had become flesh and was in continuous performance. Thus I could not help repeating to myself, on seeing them, not, for sure, the lines of Racine that had come into my head at the Princesse de Guermantes's as M. de Vaugoubert was watching the young secretaries from the embassy greeting M. de Charlus, but some other lines from Racine, no longer from *Esther* this time, but from *Athalie*: for, starting in the hallway, what in the seventeenth century was known as the portico, there stood '*un peuple florissant*'[135] of young *chasseurs*, especially at tea-time, like the young Israelites of Racine's choruses. But I do not believe a single one of them would have been able to supply even the vague answer that Joas finds for Athalie when the latter asks the child prince: '*Quel est donc votre emploi?*',[136] for they had none. At the very most, had any one of their number been asked, like the old queen: '*Mais tout ce peuple enfermé dans ce lieu,/A quoi s'occupe-t-il?*',[137] he might have been able to say: ' "*Je vois l' ordre pompeux de ces cérémonies*",[138] and have my part in them.' From time to time, one of these young extras would move towards some more important character, then the young beauty would rejoin the chorus, and, unless it were a moment of contemplative respite, all would interweave in their futile, respectful, decorative, everyday manoeuvres. For except on their day off, '*loin du monde élevés*',[139] and never going beyond the parvis, they led the same ecclesiastical existence as the Levites in *Athalie*, and, faced by this '*troupe jeune et fidèle*',[140] playing at the foot of stairs covered in magnificent carpets, I was able to wonder whether I was making my way into the Grand-Hôtel in Balbec or the Temple of Solomon.

I went directly up to my room. My thoughts had become habitually fixed on the last days of my grandmother's illness, on the sufferings that I was reliving, while increasing them by the element, even harder to endure than the actual suffering of others, added to them by the cruelty of our compassion; when we believe we are merely re-creating the pain of a beloved being, our compassion exaggerates it; yet perhaps it is the compassion that is right, rather than the awareness which those who are suffering have of their pain, from whom the sadness of their life is hidden, whereas compassion sees it, and despairs. Even so, my compassion would have gained fresh impetus and exceeded my grandmother's sufferings had I known then what I was long unaware of, that, on the eve of her death, in a conscious moment and after making sure that I was not there, she had taken Mama's hand and, after pressing her fevered lips to it, had said to her: 'Good-bye, daughter, good-bye for ever.' And it was perhaps this memory also that my mother never again ceased to gaze at so fixedly. Then the sweet memories came back to me. She was my grandmother and I was her grandson. The expressions of her face seemed written in a language that was for me alone; she was everything in my life, others existed only in relation to her, to the judgment she would pass on them; but no, our relations were too fleeting not to have been accidental. She no longer knows me, I shall never see her again. We had not been created solely for one another, she was a stranger. I was busy looking at Saint-Loup's photograph of that stranger. Mama, who had met Albertine, had insisted that I see her because of the kind things she had said to her about grandmother and about myself. I had arranged to meet her therefore. I warned the manager so that he would make her wait in the lounge. He told me he had known her from a long way back, she and her friends, well before they had attained 'the age of purity', but that he resented things they had said about the hotel. 'They can't be so very "illustrated" to talk like that. Unless they've been slandered.' I understood easily enough that he had said 'purity' for 'puberty'. While waiting for it to be time to go and find Albertine, I kept my eyes fixed, as if on a drawing that in the end you are unable to see by dint of having stared at it, on the photograph Saint-Loup had taken, when all of a sudden I again thought: 'It's grandmother, I am her grandson,' just as an amnesiac rediscovers his name, or as an invalid changes personality. Françoise entered, to tell me that Albertine was there and, on seeing the photograph: 'Poor Madame, it's her all over, right down to the beauty spot on her cheek; the day the Marquis photographed her, she'd been very ill, she'd had two bad turns. "Above all, Françoise, she says to me, my grandson mustn't know." And she hid it so well, she was always cheerful in company. Alone, mark you, I thought she seemed at times as if her spirits were a bit monotonous. But it soon passed. And then she'd say to me right out: "If anything were ever to happen to me, he'd need to have a portrait of me. I've never had a single one done." Then she sent me to say to Monsieur the Marquis, advising him not to tell Monsieur it was her who'd asked him, whether he couldn't take her photograph. But when I came back to tell her yes, she wouldn't any more because she thought she looked so poorly. "It'd be even worse, she says to me, than no photograph at all." But as she wasn't stupid, she finally arranged things very well by putting on a big turned-down hat so it no longer showed when she wasn't in the full daylight. She was very pleased with her photograph, because at that moment she didn't think she'd be returning from Balbec. It was no good my saying: "You mustn't talk that way, Madame, I don't like hearing Madame talking that way", she'd got it into her head. And, good Lord, there were several days when she wasn't able to eat. That's why she urged Monsieur to go and dine a long way off with Monsieur le Marquis. Then instead of going to the table she pretended to read and as soon as the Marquis's carriage had gone, she went up to bed. Some days she wanted to warn Madame to come so she'd see her again. And then she was afraid it would surprise her, as she hadn't said anything to her. "It's better she stays with her husband, you know, Françoise." ' Françoise, her eyes on me, asked all of a sudden if I felt 'indisposed'. I told her no; and she: 'And then you keep me tied up here talking to you. Perhaps your visit's arrived already. I must go down. She's not a person for here. And always on the move as she is, she may have left again. She doesn't like to wait. Oh, now, Mademoiselle Albertine, she's quite a one. – You're wrong, Françoise, she's quite respectable, too respectable for here. But go and warn her I shan't be able to see her today.'

What pitying declamations I should have aroused in Françoise had she seen me crying! I carefully hid it from her. Otherwise I should have had her sympathy. But I gave her mine. We do not put ourselves sufficiently often into the hearts of these poor servants who cannot see us cry, as if crying were harmful to us; or perhaps harmful to them, Françoise having said to me when I was small: 'Don't cry like that, I don't like seeing you cry like that.' We do not like high-flown phrases or attestations, and we are wrong, we thereby close our hearts to the pathos of the countryside, to the legend which the poor serving-woman, having been dismissed, perhaps unjustly, for stealing, white-faced, become suddenly humbler as if to be accused were a crime, unfolds in invoking her father's honesty, her mother's principles, her grandmother's good advice. Admittedly, these same servants who can not endure our tears, will not hesitate to make us catch pneumonia because the housemaid downstairs likes draughts and it would not be polite to prevent them. For the very ones who are right, like Françoise, have also to be wrong, so that Justice becomes an impossibility. Even the humble pleasures of women servants provoke either a refusal or the mockery of their employers. For it is always some trifle, foolishly sentimental and unhygienic. Thus they may say: 'What, it's the one thing I ask for all year, and I'm not granted it.' Yet the employers would grant far more, were it not stupid or dangerous for them – or for themselves. True, there is no withstanding the humility of the poor housemaid, trembling, ready to confess to what she has not committed, saying 'I'll go this evening if I have to.' But we must be able also not to remain insensitive, for all the solemn, threatening banality of the things she says, to her maternal heritage and the dignity of the 'close', faced by an old cook draped in an honourable life and

ancestry, clutching her broom like a sceptre, playing her role for tragedy, interspersing it with tears, drawing herself majestically up. On the day in question I recalled or imagined such scenes, and I linked them to our old servant, after which, despite all the harm she was able to do Albertine, I loved Françoise with an affection, intermittent it is true, but of the strongest kind, that which is founded on compassion.

Certainly, I suffered all that day by remaining in front of my grandmother's photograph. It tormented me. Less, however, than did the manager's evening visit. As I was talking to him of my grandmother and he was renewing his condolences, I heard him say (for he loved using the words he mispronounced): 'It's like the day when Madame your grandmother had that suncopy, I wanted to warn you, because on account of the clientele, you know? It might have been bad for the establishment. It would've been better for her to leave that same evening. But she begged me not to say anything and promised me she wouldn't have any more suncopies or that she'd leave at the first one. The *chef de l'étage* reported to me, however, that she'd had another one. But, good Lord, you were old patrons we were trying to please, and given that no one had complained…' So my grandmother had had syncopes and had kept them from me. Perhaps at the very time when I was being least nice to her, and when she was obliged, unwell though she was, to be careful to remain good-humoured so as not to annoy me and to appear to be healthy so as not to be shown the door of the hotel. 'Suncopy' is a word that, so pronounced, I would never have imagined, which would perhaps, applied to others, have struck me as absurd, but which, by the strange novelty of its sound, similar to that of an original dissonance, long remained what was capable of evoking the most painful sensations in me.

The next day I went at Mama's request to stretch out on the sand for a while, or rather in the dunes, at a point where you are hidden by their folds, and where I knew that Albertine and her friends would not be able to find me. My lowered eyelids let through only one, pink, light, that of the internal walls of my eyes. Then they closed altogether. And now my grandmother appeared to me sitting in an armchair. She was so weak she seemed less alive than other people. Yet I could hear her breathing; now and again, a sign showed that she had understood what we were saying, my father and I. But it was in vain that I embraced her, I could not succeed in arousing a look of affection in her eyes or a spot of colour in her cheeks. Absent from herself, she appeared not to love me, not to know me, perhaps not to see me. I could not guess the secret of her indifference, her dejection, her silent displeasure. I drew my father aside. 'You can tell all the same, I said, there's no denying it, she's taken everything in perfectly. It's a complete illusion of life. If only we could get your cousin to come who claims that the dead aren't alive! It's more than a year now since she died yet all in all she's still alive. But why won't she embrace me? – Look, her poor head is falling back. – But she'd like to go to the Champs-Elysées in a little while. – That's madness! – Really, you think it could do her any harm, that she could die any more? It's not possible she no longer loves me. It'll be no good my embracing her, will she never smile at me again? – What do you expect, the dead are the dead.'

A few days later I found comfort in looking at the photograph Saint-Loup had taken; it did not reawaken the memory of what Françoise had told me because that had not left me again and I had become used to it. But in contrast to the idea I had formed of how serious and painful her condition was that day, the photograph, profiting still from the stratagems my grandmother had employed, which succeeded in deceiving me even now that they had been uncovered, showed her looking so elegant, so carefree, beneath the hat that partly hid her face, that I saw her as less unhappy and in better health than I had imagined. And yet, her cheeks having, without her knowing it, an expression of their own, something leaden and haggard, like the look of an animal that feels itself already chosen and marked down, my grandmother wore the air of someone under a death sentence, an involuntarily sombre, unconsciously tragic air that had eluded me but which stopped Mama from ever looking at this photograph, a photograph that seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of the latter's illness, of an insult delivered by that illness to Grandmother's brutally abused face.

Then one day I made up my mind to let Albertine know that I would receive her shortly. The fact was that, one morning of great and premature heat, the innumerable shouts of the children playing, of the bathers as they joked, of the newspaper sellers, had described to me, in lines of fire, in a latticework of sparks, the scorching hot beach, which the ripples were coming one by one to sprinkle with their coolness; then the symphony concert had begun, mixed in with the lapping of the water, in which the violins vibrated like a swarm of bees strayed over the sea. I had at once longed to hear Albertine's laugh once more, to see her friends again, the young girls, outlined against the waves, who had remained in my memory as the inseparable charm, the characteristic flora of Balbec; and I had resolved to send word to Albertine by Françoise, for the following week, as, gently rising, at each unfurling of a wave, the crystalline flux of the sea completely drowned the melody, whose phrases seemed separated one from the next, like those angels with their lutes who, on the roof-ridge of the Italian cathedral, rise up between the crests of blue porphyry and foaming jasper. But on the day when Albertine came, the weather had deteriorated again and grown cooler, and I had no opportunity in any case of hearing her laugh; she was in a very bad mood. 'Balbec's a bore this year, she said. I shall try not to stay long. You know I've been here since Easter, that's more than a month. There's no one. If you think that's a lot of fun.' Despite the recent rain and the sky that was changing from minute to minute, after going with Albertine as far as Epreville, since Albertine, to use her own term, was 'ferrying' between the small resort where Mme Bontemps's villa was, and Incarville, where she had been taken in '*en pension*' by Rosemonde's parents, I left to take a walk on my own towards the main road that Mme de Villeparisis's carriage had taken when we went out with my grandmother; puddles of water that the bright sunshine had not dried out had turned the ground into a real quagmire, and I thought of my grandmother who, in the old days, could not go two steps without getting mud on her. But the moment I reached the road, what bedazzlement. There where, in August, with my grandmother, I had seen only the leaves and as it were the emplacement of the apple trees, they were in full flower for as far as the eye could see, unimaginably luxuriant, their feet in the mud but wearing their ball-gowns, not taking any precautions so as not to spoil the most marvellous pink satin that you ever set eyes on, made to shine by the sunlight; the far-off horizon of the sea provided the apple trees with what was in effect a background from a Japanese print; if I raised my head to look at the sky between the flowers, which made its blue appear the more cloudless, almost violent, they seemed to draw aside so as to display the depth of that paradise. Beneath this azure a slight but fresh breeze was causing the reddening bouquets to shiver slightly. Blue tits were coming to settle on the branches and were leaping about among the indulgent flowers, as if it were some lover of exoticism and of colours who had artificially created this living beauty. But it moved one almost to tears because, however excessive these effects of a refined artifice, you felt that it was natural, that these apple trees were there, in the heart of the countryside, like peasants, on one of the highways of France. Then to the rays of sunlight there suddenly succeeded those of the rain; they striped the entire horizon, drawing their grey mesh tight round the line of apple trees. But these continued to raise aloft their pink, flowering beauty, in a wind now become icy beneath the shower of rain that was falling: it was a day in spring.

CHAPTER 2

The mysteries of Albertine. – The girls she sees in the mirror. – The unknown lady. – The liftboy. – Madame de Cambremer. – The pleasures of M. Nissim Bernard. – First outline of Morel's strange character. – M. de Charlus dines at the Verdurins'.

In my fear that the pleasure found in this solitary walk might weaken the memory of my grandmother in me, I sought to revive it by thinking of some great moral suffering that she had experienced; at my summons, this suffering tried to erect itself in my heart, throwing up its immense pillars there; but my heart was doubtless too small for it, I did not have the strength to bear so great a sorrow, my attention slipped away just as it was reforming into a whole, and its arches crumbled before they had come together, just as waves break before they have completed their vault.

Meanwhile, if only from my dreams when I was asleep, I might have learned that my grief at my grandmother's death was diminishing, for she appeared there less oppressed by the idea I had been forming of her non-existence. I saw her as an invalid still, but on the way to recovering; I thought she looked better. And if she alluded to what she had suffered, I stopped her mouth with my kisses and assured her that now she was cured for ever. I would have liked to make the sceptics acknowledge that death is in truth an illness from which we recover. Only I did not find in my grandmother the rich spontaneity of old. Her words were only an enfeebled, docile response, a mere echo almost, of my own words; she was no longer anything more than the reflection of my own thoughts.

Incapable though I was as yet of again experiencing physical desire, Albertine was beginning meanwhile to fill me with something like a desire for happiness. Certain dreams of a shared tenderness, forever floating inside us, readily unite themselves by a sort of affinity to the memory (provided this has already become a little shadowy) of a woman with whom we have experienced pleasure. This feeling recalled for me aspects of Albertine's face, softer, less cheerful, rather different from those which physical desire would have evoked in me; and since it was also less pressing than this last, I would willingly have adjourned its realization to the following winter, without seeking to see Albertine again in Balbec before her departure. Yet even in the midst of a still keen grief, physical desire revives. From my bed, where I was made to stay resting for long periods each day, I wished that Albertine might come back and resume our old games. Are married couples not soon to be found once again intertwined, in the very bedroom where they have lost a child, in order to give the dead little one a brother? I tried to find distraction from this desire by going to the window to look at that day's sea. As in that first year, the seas were rarely the same from one day to the next. But they scarcely resembled those of that first year, on the other hand, either because now it was spring, with its storms, or because, even if I had come on the same date as the first occasion, the different, more changeable weather might not have recommended this coast to certain indolent, vaporous and fragile seas that I had seen on days of burning heat sleeping on the beach, lifting their blue bosom imperceptibly with a soft palpitation, or above all because my eyes, educated by Elstir to retain precisely those elements that I had once wilfully discarded, dwelt at length on what that first year they had not known how to see. The opposition that had so struck me then, between the rustic excursions I took with Mme de Villeparisis and this fluid, inaccessible, mythological vicinity of the everlasting Ocean, no longer existed for me. On certain days, the sea itself now seemed to me, on the contrary, almost rural. On the quite rare days of truly fine weather, the heat had traced on the water, as if across the countryside, a white and dusty road, behind which there protruded, like a village steeple, the delicate tip of a fishing-boat. A tugboat, of which only the funnel was visible, would be smoking in the distance like a secluded factory, while, alone on the horizon, a bellying white square, painted no doubt by a sail but which appeared compact and as if made of chalk, put you in mind of the sunlit corner of some isolated building, a hospital or a school. And the clouds and the wind, on the days when they were added to the sunshine, completed, if not the error of judgment, at least the illusion of a first glance, the suggestion it awakens in the imagination. For, on stormy days, the alternation between sharply defined areas of colour, like those resulting in the countryside from the contiguity of different crops, the harsh, yellow, as if muddy irregularities of the sea's surface, the embankments and slopes that hid from view a boat on which a crew of agile sailors seemed to be harvesting, all this made of the ocean something as varied, as consistent, as uneven, as populous, as civilized, as the land that was navigable, where I would before long be driving again. On one occasion, unable any longer to withstand my desire, instead of going back to bed, I got dressed and went off to find Albertine in Incarville. I would ask her to go with me as far as Douville, where I would pay Mme de Cambremer a visit at Féterne, and at La Raspelière, a visit to Mme Verdurin. During which time, Albertine would be waiting for me on the beach and we would come back together in the dark. I went to catch the little branch-line train, all of whose local nicknames I had once learned from Albertine and her friends, it being known variously as the *Slowcoach*, on account of its innumerable detours, the *Rattletrap*, because of its slow progress, the *Ocean Liner*, on account of a fearsome siren it possessed to make passers-by get out of the way, the *Decauville*[1] and the *Funi*, even though it was nothing like a funicular, but because it climbed up the cliff, nor even, properly speaking, a Decauville, but because it had a 60-centimetre track, the *B.A.G.* because it went from Balbec to Grattevast via Angerville, the *tram* and the *T.S.N.* because it formed part of the line of the Tramways du Sud de la Normandie. I installed myself in a carriage where I was alone, it was gloriously sunny, and stifling; I lowered the blue blind, which let only a strip of sunlight through. But I at once saw my grandmother, as she had been when sitting in the train on our departure from Paris for Balbec, and when, pained at seeing me drinking beer, she had preferred not to look, to close her eyes and pretend to be asleep. I, who had been unable to endure her sufferings in the old days when my grandfather took cognac, I had inflicted this pain on her, not simply even of seeing me take, at someone else's invitation, a drink she believed disastrous for me, but I had forced her to leave me free to swill it down as I pleased; worse still, by my rages and my breathless attacks, I had forced her to help me, to recommend it, in a supreme act of resignation whose wordless, despairing image I had before my memory, her eyes closed so as not to see. Such a memory, like a wave from a magic wand, had once again given back to me the soul I had been in the act of losing for some time past; what could I have done with Rosemonde[2] when across the whole of my lips there was passing only a desperate desire to kiss a dead woman? What could I have said to the Cambremers and the Verdurins when my heart was pounding because the sorrow that my grandmother had endured was constantly re-forming there? I could not remain in that carriage. As soon as the train stopped in Maineville-la-Teinturière, abandoning my plans, I got out. Maineville had for some time past been acquiring a considerable importance and a particular reputation, because a director of numerous casinos, a purveyor of well-being, had had built, not far from there, with an opulence of bad taste capable of competing with that of a grand hotel, an establishment to which we shall be returning, and which was, to make no bones about it, the first brothel for the smart set that anyone had thought to build on the coasts of France. It was the only one. Every port has its brothel, of course, but good only for sailors and for lovers of local colour, who get amusement from seeing, right next door to the immemorial church, the madam, herself almost as old, venerable and moss-covered, standing in front of her door of ill repute waiting for the fishing boats to return.

Avoiding the dazzling house of 'pleasure', insolently erected there despite the family protests addressed in vain to the mayor, I rejoined the cliff and followed its winding paths in the direction of Balbec. I heard the summons of the hawthorns, without responding. As its less affluent neighbours, they found the apple blossom very heavy, while acknowledging the fresh complexions worn by the daughters, with their pink petals, of the great cider-makers. They knew that, though less richly dowried, they were yet more sought after, and that a rumpled whiteness was all they required by way of attraction.

When I got back, the hotel porter handed me a letter announcing a bereavement on the part of the Marquis and Marquise de Gonneville, the Vicomte and Vicomtesse d'Amfreville, the Comte and Comtesse de Berneville, the Marquis and Marquise de Graincourt, the Comte d'Amenoncourt, the Comtesse de Maineville, the Comte and Comtesse de Franquetot, the Comtesse de Chaverny *née* d'Aigleville, and which I finally understood why it had been sent to me when I recognized the names of the Marquise de Cambremer *née* du Mesnil La Guichard, and of the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer, and when I saw that the dead woman, a cousin of the Cambremers, had been called Eléonore-Euphrasie-Humbertine de Cambremer, Comtesse de Criquetot. Nowhere in this extensive provincial family, the enumeration of which filled lines of fine, close-set writing, was there a single bourgeois, nor a single familiar title for that matter, but the whole *ban* and *arrière-ban* of the regional nobility, whose names – those of all the interesting places in the region – they made to sing with their joyful endings in

ville, or *court*, or sometimes more dully (in *tot*). Clad in the tiles of their château or the roughcast of their church, their nodding heads barely protruding above the vaulting or the *corps de logis*, and then only in order to be crowned by the Norman lantern or the half-timbering of the pepperpot roof, they seemed to have sounded the rallying-cry for all the pretty villages arranged in echelon or scattered for fifty leagues roundabout and to have set them out in close formation, without one gap, or one intruder, on the compact, rectangular chessboard of this aristocratic, black-edged letter.

My mother had gone back up to her room, meditating on this sentence from Mme de Sévigné – 'I see none of those who seek to distract me; in veiled words, the fact is they want to stop me from thinking of you and that offends me' – because the First President had told her she should find some amusement. To me he whispered: 'It's the Princesse de Parme.' My fear was dispelled on seeing that the woman the magistrate was pointing to had no connection with Her Royal Highness. But since she had reserved a room in order to spend the night on returning from Mme de Luxembourg's, the news had the effect on many of making them assume that every newly arrived lady was the Princesse de Parme – and on me, of making me go up and shut myself away in my garret. I would not have wanted to remain there alone. It was barely four o'clock. I asked Françoise to go and find Albertine so that she might come and spend the end of the afternoon with me.

I think I would be lying if I said that the painful and perpetual mistrust that Albertine was to inspire in me had already begun, let alone the particular, above all Gomorran, character which that mistrust was to assume. True, from that day forward – thought it was not the first – my expectations were a little fraught. Françoise, once gone, stayed away so long that I began to lose hope. I had not lit any lamps. It was barely daylight any longer. The wind was making the flag on the casino flap. And more sickly still, in the silence of the shore, where the sea was coming in, and like a voice as it were translating and enhancing the enervating uncertainty of that false, anxious hour of the day, a small barrel-organ had stopped in front of the hotel and was playing Viennese waltzes. At last Françoise arrived, but alone. 'I've been as quick as I could but she wouldn't come because she didn't think her hair was good enough. If she didn't stay a whole hour by the clock pomading herself, she didn't stay five minutes. It'll be a real scent-shop here. She's coming, she stayed behind to fix herself up in front of the mirror. I thought I'd find her here.' It was still a long time before Albertine arrived. But her cheerfulness and kindness on this occasion dispelled my unhappiness. She announced (contrary to what she had said the other day) that she would be staying for the whole season and asked whether we could not, as the first year, see each other every day. I told her that at the moment I was too unhappy and that instead I would send for her from time to time, at the last minute, as in Paris. 'If ever you feel sad or if your heart tells you to, don't hesitate, she said, send for me, I'll come running, and if you're not afraid it might cause a scandal in the hotel, I'll stay as long as you like.' On bringing her back, Françoise had worn a happy expression, as on every occasion when she had put herself out on my behalf and succeeded in pleasing me. But Albertine herself counted for nothing in this delight and the very next day Françoise was to speak these profound words to me: 'Monsieur shouldn't see that young lady. I can easily tell the sort of character she has, she'll cause you unhappiness.' Showing Albertine out, I caught sight through the lit dining-room of the Princesse de Parme. I merely looked at her while contriving not to be seen. But I will admit that I found a certain grandeur in the regal courtesy that had caused me to smile at the Guermantes's. It is a principle that sovereign princes are at home anywhere, and protocol translates this into dead and worthless customs such as that which has it that the host should keep his hat in his hand, in his own house, in order to show that he is no longer at home but at the prince's. Now the Princesse de Parme had not perhaps formulated this idea to herself, but so imbued with it was she that all her actions, invented on the spur of the moment to meet the circumstances, betrayed it. When she got up from the table she handed Aimé a large tip, as if he had been there solely on her account or as if, on leaving a château, she were rewarding a *maître d'hôtel* who had been detailed to attend on her. She did not content herself with the tip, moreover, but, with a gracious smile, addressed a few friendly and flattering words to him, with which her mother had supplied her. A minute more and she would be telling him that, just as the hotel was so very well maintained, so Normandy was prospering, and that of all the countries in the world she preferred France. Another coin slipped out of the Princesse's hand, for the *sommelier*, whom she had sent for and to whom she insisted on expressing her satisfaction, like a general who has just reviewed his troops. The 'lift' had come up at that same moment to give her a reply; he, too, received a word, a smile and a tip, all combined with some humble and encouraging words intended to prove that she was nothing more than one of them. Since Aimé, the *sommelier*, the 'lift' and the others thought it would be impolite not to wear the broadest of smiles for someone who was smiling at them, she was soon surrounded by a group of servants with whom she chatted benevolently; such manners being unusual in grand hotels, the people going past along the beach, not knowing her name, thought they were seeing an habituée of Balbec, who, on account of her unimpressive origins or out of professional self-interest (she was perhaps the wife of a champagne representative), was less different from the domestic staff than the genuinely smart patrons. For my part, I thought of the palace in Parma, and of the advice, part religious and part political, given to the Princesse, who behaved towards the populace as though she must win them over in order to reign one day; or rather, as though she were reigning already.

I went back up into my room, but I was not alone there. I could hear the mellow sound of someone playing Schumann. People, even those that we love the most, may, it is true, become saturated by the sadness or irritation that emanates from us. There is one thing, however, capable of a power of exasperation to which no human being will ever attain: a piano.

Albertine had made me take note of the dates on which she was due to be away, to go to her girl-friends' for a few days, and had made me write down their addresses also in case I had need of her on one of these evenings, since none of them lived too far away. This meant that, in order to find her, a chain of flowers, linking one girl to another, formed quite naturally around her. I dare to confess that many of her friends – I did not yet love her – afforded me moments of pleasure on one beach or another. These benevolent young companions did not seem many in number. But lately my mind has gone back to them, and their names have returned. I reckoned that in that one season, twelve granted me their fragile favours. One name came back to me later, which made thirteen. I then felt a childish fear of remaining on that number. I reflected, alas, that I had overlooked the first of them, Albertine, who was no more and who made the fourteenth.

To take up the thread of my story again, I had written down the names and addresses of the girls at whose houses I would find her on such and such a day when she would not be in Incarville, but I thought I would take advantage of those days rather to go to Mme Verdurin's. Our desires for different women are in any case not all equally strong. On a particular evening we cannot do without the woman who, afterwards, will hardly trouble us for the next month or two. And besides, apart from the reasons for alternating, for the study of which this is not the place, after the great exertions of the flesh, the woman whose image haunts our momentary senility is a woman whom we would hardly even kiss on the brow. As for Albertine, I saw her rarely, and only on those widely spaced-out evenings when I could not be without her. Should such a desire take hold of me when she was too far from Balbec for Françoise to be able to go there, I would send the 'lift' to Epreville, La Sogne or Saint-Frichoux, by asking him to stop work a little early. He would come into my room but left the door open, for, although he did his 'job' most conscientiously, which was arduous, consisting of much cleaning, starting at five o'clock in the morning, he could never find the strength to close a door, and if you pointed out to him that it was open, he would go back and, by succeeding in making a supreme effort, give it a gentle push. With the democratic vanity characteristic of him, but to which, in their careers, members of the fairly numerous professions, lawyers, doctors, men of letters, never attain, referring to another lawyer, man of letters or doctor simply as 'my colleague', he, making use, quite rightly, of a term reserved for exclusive bodies such as academies, for example, would say to me, when speaking of a *chasseur* who worked the lift one day in two, 'I'm going to see my *associate* takes my place'. This vanity did not prevent him, with the aim of improving what he called his 'salary', from accepting remuneration for his errands, which had led Françoise to develop a strong dislike of him: 'Yes, the first time you see him he looks as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but there are days when he's about as polite as a prison gate. They're all just money-grubbers.' A category in which she had so often placed Eulalie, and in which, alas, for all the misfortunes to which it was one day to lead me, she had already classed Albertine, because she often saw me asking Mama, on behalf of my far from wealthy loved one, for small objects, trinkets, which Françoise thought inexcusable, because Mme Bontemps had only the one maid of all work. Very soon, the 'lift', having taken off what I would have called his

uniform and what he termed his tunic, would appear in a straw hat, with a cane, attentive to his gait and holding himself erect, for his mother had advised him never to adopt the style of a 'workman' or '*chasseur*'. Just as, thanks to books, knowledge is knowledge to a workman who is no longer a workman once his labours are over, so, thanks to the boater and to the pair of gloves, elegance had been brought within reach of the 'lift' who, having stopped taking guests up for the evening, believed, like a young surgeon who has removed his smock, or Sergeant Saint-Loup his uniform, he had turned into a perfect man of the world. He did not in any case lack ambition, any more than a talent for handling his cage and not causing you to stop between floors. But his language was defective. I believed in his ambition because, in speaking of the hall-porter, whose dependant he was, he would say: 'my hall-porter', in the same tone of voice as a man who, owning in Paris what the *chasseur* would have called 'a private mansion', would have spoken of his doorman. As for the liftboy's language, it is odd that someone who heard the guests calling out '*ascenseur*' fifty times a day, should himself only ever have said '*accenseur*'.[3] Certain things about this liftboy were extremely irritating: whatever I might have said to him, he would break in with a phrase, 'I'll say!' or 'Imagine!', which seemed to signify either that my remark was so self-evident that anyone at all might have thought of it, or else to transfer its merits on to himself as if it were he who had drawn my attention to it. 'I'll say!' and 'Imagine!', exclaimed with the utmost vigour, came to his lips every two minutes, for things that would never have entered his head, which so irritated me that I at once began saying the opposite, to show him he understood not the first thing. But to my second assertion, incompatible though it was with the first, he would still answer: 'I'll say!' or 'Imagine!', as if these words were inevitable. I found it hard to forgive him also for employing certain terms of his trade, which would for that reason have been perfectly suitable if used literally, only in a figurative sense, which lent them a somewhat puerile pretension to wit, the verb 'to pedal' for example. He never used it when he had run an errand by bicycle. But if, on foot, he had had to hurry so as to be on time, to signify that he had walked quickly, he would say: 'You can imagine how I pedalled!' The liftboy was on the small side, of poor physique and somewhat ugly. Which did not stop him, whenever you mentioned a young man who was tall, slim and fine-featured, from saying: 'Oh, yes, I know, one who's just my height.' One day, when I was waiting for an answer from him, as someone had been coming up the stairs, at the sound of footsteps I had in my impatience opened the door of my room, to see a *chasseur* as handsome as Endymion, with features of an unbelievable perfection, who had come for a lady whom I did not know. Once the liftboy had returned, on telling him with what impatience I had been awaiting his answer, I told how I had thought it was him coming upstairs but that it was a *chasseur* from the Hôtel de Normandie. 'Oh, yes, I know the one, he said, there's only one, a boy my own size. To look at, too, he's so like me we could be mistaken for one another, you'd say he was my twin.' Finally, he liked appearing to have understood everything right from the start, which meant that, as soon as you were advising him of something, he would say: 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand perfectly', with a decisiveness and an air of intelligence that took me in for a time; but, as we get to know them, people are like a metal plunged into some corrosive mixture, and can be seen gradually losing their good qualities (as sometimes their defects). Before giving him my instructions, I saw that he had left the door open; I pointed this out, I was afraid we might be overheard; he condescended to my wishes and returned, having reduced the opening. 'That's so as to please you. But there's no one on this floor any more but the two of us.' I immediately heard one, then two, then three people go past. This annoyed me because of the possible indiscretion, but above all because I could see that it in no way surprised him but was simply the normal traffic. 'Yes, it's the chambermaid from next door going to fetch her things. Yes, it's not of any importance, it's the *sommelier* bringing up his keys. No, no, it's nothing, you can speak, it's my associate who's going on duty.' And since the reasons that all these people had for going past did not lessen my annoyance that they might overhear me, at my formal order, he went, not to close the door, which was beyond the capacities of this cyclist who longed for a 'motorbike', but to push it a little further to. 'There, now we'll be nice and quiet.' We were so much so that an American woman entered and withdrew, apologizing for having mistaken the room. 'You're to bring the girl back here to me,' I said to him, after myself slamming the door with all my strength (which brought another *chasseur* to make sure no windows were open). 'I'm sure you can remember: Mlle Albertine Simonet. It's on the envelope in any case. All you need do is tell her it's from me. She'll come very willingly, I added, to encourage him not to humiliate me too much. – I'll say! – No, on the contrary, it's by no means a matter of course that she'll come willingly. It's very inconvenient to come here from Berneville. – I understand! – You'll tell her to come with you. – Yes, yes, yes, yes, I understand perfectly,' he replied in that precise, quick tone of voice that had long since ceased to create a 'good impression' on me because I knew it was more or less automatic and concealed beneath its seeming decisiveness much vagueness and stupidity. 'What time will you be back? – It'll not take me very long,' said the 'lift', who, taking to an extreme the rule, laid down by Bélise, of avoiding the recidivism of adding a *pas* to a *ne*, always contented himself with a single negative.[4] 'I can very easily go there. In fact, time off was cancelled this afternoon because there was a private party of twenty for lunch. And it was my turn to be off this afternoon. It's only fair if I'm out for a bit this evening. I'll take my bike with me. That way I'll be quick.' And an hour later he arrived, saying: 'Monsieur's had to wait indeed, but the young lady's come with me. She's downstairs. – Ah, thank you, the hall-porter won't be angry with me? – Monsieur Paul? Doesn't know where I been even. Even the door head had nothing to say.' But once when I had said to him: 'You absolutely must bring her back here,' he said to me with a smile: 'You know I couldn't find her. She's not there. And I couldn't stay longer; I was afraid of being like my associate who was moved from the hotel' (for the 'lift', who talked of rejoining a profession when one is joining it for the first time: 'I'd be very happy to rejoin the post office', by way of compensation, either so as to soften the blow if it was he who was involved, or else to insinuate it in a more mealy-mouthed and perfidious way if it involved someone else, suppressed the 're-' and said 'I know he was moved.'). It was not out of malice that he smiled, but on account of his shyness. He thought he could lessen the significance of his lapse by treating it as a joke. Similarly, while he had said '*You know* I couldn't find her,' it was not because he in fact believed I knew that already. On the contrary, he was in no doubt that I did not know and was above all alarmed. Thus he said 'you know' so as to spare himself the agonies he would go through in uttering the words intended to inform me of it. We should never lose our tempers with those who, when we catch them out, start sniggering. They do so, not because they are making fun, but are fearful that we may be displeased. Let us evince great compassion, show great gentleness to those who laugh. Like a veritable stroke, the 'lift's' agitation had produced not only an apoplectic redness but a deterioration in his vocabulary, become suddenly familiar. He ended by explaining that Albertine was not in Epreville, that she would be back only at nine o'clock and that if sometimes, which meant by any chance, she were to return sooner, she would be given the message, and she would at all events be with me before one a.m.

It was not even on that evening, however, that my cruel mistrust began to take shape. No, to have out with it and although the episode took place only several weeks later, it was born of a remark of Cottard's. Albertine and her friends had wanted on that particular day to drag me along to the casino in Incarville and, as luck would have it, I would not have joined them there (wishing to go and pay a call on Mme Verdurin, who had invited me a number of times), had I not been held up in Incarville itself by the tram breaking down, which was going to take some time to put right. Walking up and down while waiting for them to finish, I suddenly found myself face to face with Doctor Cottard, who had come to Incarville for a consultation. I hesitated almost to wish him good day as he had not replied to any of my letters. But friendliness does not manifest itself in the same fashion in everyone. Not having been constrained by his upbringing to the same fixed rules of savoir-vivre as members of society, Cottard was full of good intentions of which we were unaware, which we denied, up until the day when he had the opportunity to display them. He apologized, had indeed received my letters, had signalled my presence to the Verdurins, who had a strong desire to see me and to whom he advised me to go. He even wanted to take me there that same evening, since he would be catching the little branch-line train again to go and dine there. As I was wavering and as he still had a little time before his train, the breakdown going to be quite prolonged, I made him enter the little casino, one of those that I had found so sad on the evening of my first arrival, full now of the tumult of young girls who, for want of male partners, were dancing together. Andrée came glissading up to me, I was anticipating leaving again in a moment with Cottard to go to the Verdurins', when I refused his offer once and for all, overcome by too keen a desire to remain with Albertine. For the fact was I had just heard her laughing. And that laugh at once summoned up the pink carnations, the perfumed walls against which it seemed to have just brushed and from which, pungent, sensual and revealing as the scent of geraniums, it seemed to be transporting with it a few almost ponderable, irritant and secret particles.

One of the girls whom I did not know sat down at the piano, and Andrée asked Albertine to waltz with her. Happy, in this little casino, to reflect that I was going to remain with these girls, I pointed out to Cottard how well they danced. But he, from the specialized perspective of a doctor, and with his faulty upbringing, which took no account of the fact that I knew these girls, whom he must, however, have seen me greeting, replied: 'Yes, but the parents are very unwise who let their daughters pick up such habits. I certainly wouldn't allow my own to come here. Are they pretty anyway? I can't make out their features. There, look,' he added, pointing to Albertine and Andrée, who were waltzing slowly, pressed one against the other, 'I've forgotten my eyeglass and I can't see properly, but they're certainly at the height of arousal. It's not sufficiently well known that it's chiefly through the breasts that women experience it. And look, theirs are touching, completely.' Indeed, those of Andrée and of Albertine had not ceased to be in contact. I do not know whether they heard or guessed at Cottard's observation, but they drew slightly apart while continuing to waltz. At that moment, Andrée said something to Albertine and the latter laughed, with that same deep, penetrating laugh I had heard just before. But the disturbance it brought me this time was more than simply cruel; Albertine seemed to be demonstrating, to be making Andrée acknowledge, some secret and voluptuous tremor. It had the ring of the first or last chords of some unknown celebration. I left again with Cottard, my thoughts elsewhere as I talked with him, reflecting only at intervals on the scene I had just witnessed. Not that Cottard's conversation was interesting. At that particular moment it had turned sour even because we had just caught sight of Doctor du Boulbon, who did not see us. He had come to spend time on the far side of the bay of Balbec, where he was in great demand. Now, although Cottard was in the habit of declaring that he did not practise medicine when on holiday, he had hoped to create for himself a select practice along this coast, to which du Boulbon found himself forming an obstacle. True, the Balbec doctor could not trouble Cottard. He was simply a very conscientious doctor who knew everything and to whom you could not mention the least itch without his immediately prescribing, in some complex formula, the appropriate pomade, liniment or lotion. As Marie Gineste put it in her pretty way of talking, he knew how to 'charm away' injuries and sores. But he lacked distinction. He had in fact caused Cottard some small annoyance. The latter, since he had been seeking to exchange his professorial chair for one in therapeutics, had made a special study of toxicants. Toxicants, a perilous innovation in medicine, serving to rewrite the labels of the pharmacists, all of whose products are declared to be, contrary to similar drugs, absolutely non-toxic, or detoxicant even. This is the fashionable claim; the guarantee that the product has been carefully antisepticized survives, if only just, at the bottom, in illegible letters, like the faint vestige of a previous fashion. Toxicants serve also to reassure the patient, who learns to his delight that his paralysis is only some passing toxic malaise. Now a Grand-Duke having come to spend a few days in Balbec, and having a badly swollen eye, he had sent for Cottard, who, in exchange for a few hundred-franc notes (the Professor would not put himself out for less), had ascribed the inflammation to a toxic condition and prescribed a detoxifying treatment. The swelling did not go down, and the Grand-Duke fell back on the usual Balbec doctor, who within five minutes had extracted a speck of dust. The next day all sign of it had gone. A more dangerous rival, however, was a celebrated specialist in nervous diseases. He was a red-faced, jovial man, both because his close acquaintance with nervous collapse did not stop him enjoying the rudest of health but also in order to reassure his patients by the loud laugh of his 'good morning' and his 'good-bye', even if his athlete's arms might later help to slip the straitjacket on them. All the same, the moment you spoke with him in company, whether about politics or about literature, he would listen to you with a benign attentiveness, as if to say: 'What's the problem?', without pronouncing right away, as though this were a consultation. But he after all, whatever his gifts, was a specialist. And so the whole of Cottard's fury had been transferred on to du Boulbon. For the rest, I soon left the Professor, the friend of the Verdurins, in order to return home, promising him I would go and visit them.

The hurt that his remarks concerning Albertine and Andrée had caused me was profound, but the worst of the pain was not felt by me straight away, as happens in those cases of poisoning which take effect only after a certain interval of time.

On the evening when the 'lift' had gone to fetch her, Albertine did not come, despite his assurances. It is true that a person's attractions are a less frequent cause of love than some such phrase as: 'No, this evening I shan't be free.' We pay little heed to those words if we are with friends; we remain cheerful throughout the evening, we are not preoccupied by a certain mental picture; during such time it is immersed in the requisite mixture; on coming home we find the photograph, developed and perfectly clear. We realize that life is no longer the life we would have given up for a trifle the day before, for, though we may continue not to fear death, we no longer dare to contemplate separation.

At all events, after, not one o' clock in the morning (the hour the liftboy had fixed), but three o' clock, I no longer suffered as in the old days from feeling the chances of her appearing to be diminishing. The certainty that she would not now be coming produced a complete calm in me, a freshness; the night was quite simply a night like so many others on which I had not seen her, that was the idea from which I began. And from that moment on, the thought that I would see her the next day or on other days, standing out against the nothingness that I had accepted, became sweet to me. Sometimes, on these evenings of waiting, our anguish is due to some medicament that we have taken. Wrongly construed by whoever is suffering, he believes he is anxious on account of she who does not come. Love is born in such a case, like certain nervous diseases, from the inaccurate explanation of a painful malaise. An explanation which there is no point in rectifying, at least where love is concerned, a sentiment which (whatever its cause) is always erroneous.

The next day, when Albertine wrote that she had only just got back to Epreville, so had not received my note in time, and would come, with my permission, to see me that evening, behind the words of her letter, as behind those she had spoken to me once on the telephone, I thought I sensed the presence of pleasures, of persons, whom she had preferred to me. Once again, my whole being was agitated by a painful curiosity to know what she might have been doing, by the latent love we bear always within us; I was able to believe for a moment that it was about to attach me to Albertine, but all that it did was to quiver, there where it was, and its last murmurs died away without its having started moving.

During my first stay in Balbec, I misunderstood – and perhaps indeed Andrée had done as I had – Albertine's character. I had believed that it was innocent frivolity on her part if all our entreaties did not succeed in detaining her and causing her to miss a *garden-party*, a donkey-ride or a picnic. During my second stay in Balbec, I suspected that that frivolity was only an appearance, and the *garden-party* only a screen, if not an invention. Under various forms, the following episode occurred (I mean the episode as observed by me, from my side of the glass, which was by no means transparent, and without my being able to tell what truth there might be on the other side). Albertine would make me the most passionate protestations of her affection. She would look at the time because she was due to go and call on a lady who was 'at home', it seemed, every day at five o'clock in Infreville. Tortured by a suspicion and feeling anyway unwell, I asked Albertine, I begged her, to stay. It was impossible (in fact, she could only stay for another five minutes) because it would annoy the lady in question, who was touchy and not very welcoming and, said Albertine, a bore. 'But one can easily miss a visit. – No, my aunt has taught me politeness has to come first. – But I've seen you be impolite often enough. – That's not the same thing, this lady would hold it against me and make trouble for me with my aunt. I'm already in her bad books rather. She insists I should have been to see her once at least. – But since she's "at home" every day.' Here, Albertine, feeling she had been 'cut off', modified the reason. 'Of course she's "at home" every day. But today I've arranged to meet some friends at her house. That way, we shan't be so bored. – In that case, Albertine, you're preferring this lady and your friends to me, since, in order not to risk paying a tedious visit, you prefer to leave me on my own, ill and most unhappy? – I wouldn't in the least mind the visit being tedious. But it's out of devotion to them. I shall bring them back in my trap. Otherwise, they'd no longer have any means of transport.' I pointed out to Albertine that there were trains up until ten o'clock in the evening, from Infreville. 'That's true, but, you know, it's possible we shall be asked to stay to dinner. She's very hospitable. – Well, you could refuse. – I'd be annoying my aunt again. – Anyway, you can have dinner and catch the ten o'clock train. – That's cutting it fine. – Then I can never go out to dinner and come back by train. But listen, Albertine, we're going to do something very simple: I feel that the fresh air will do me good; since you can't give this lady up, I'm going to go with you as far as Infreville. Never fear, I shan't go as far as the Tour Elisabeth (the lady's villa), I shan't see the lady, nor your friends.' Albertine looked as if she had received a terrible blow. She broke off from speaking. She said that sea bathing had not benefited her. 'If my going with you annoys you? – But how can you say that, you know my greatest pleasure is going out with you.' There had been an abrupt change of tack. 'Since we're going to go somewhere together, she said, why shouldn't we go the other side of Balbec, we could

have dinner together. It would be so nice. Basically, the coastline there's much prettier. I'm beginning to get fed up with Infreville and all these little places the colour of spinach. – But your aunt's friend will be angry if you don't go and see her. – Well, she'll get unangry again. – No, we shouldn't make people angry. – But she won't even notice, she's "at home" every day; whether I go there tomorrow, or the day after, in a week's time, a fortnight's time, that'll meet the bill. – And your friends? – Oh, they've left me in the lurch enough times. It's certainly my turn. – But in the direction you're proposing, there's no train after nine o'clock. – Well, what of it? Nine is ideal. Besides, we should never let the problem of getting back stand in our way. We can always find a cart, or a bike, failing which we've got our legs. – Always find, Albertine, you're getting carried away! The Infreville direction, where the little wooden stations are so close to one other, yes. But the opposite direction, it's not the same. – Even that way. I promise I'll get you back safe and sound.' I sensed that Albertine was giving up on my account something she had arranged that she did not want to tell me about, and that there was someone who would be as unhappy as I had been. Finding that what she had wanted was not possible, since I wanted to go with her, she gave it up unhesitatingly. She knew it was not irremediable. For, like all the women who have several things in their lives, she could rely for support on what never weakens: doubt and jealousy. Admittedly, she was not trying to excite them, on the contrary. But those in love are so suspicious that they instantly sniff out a falsehood. So that Albertine, being no better than anyone else, knew from experience (without guessing in the very least that she owed it to jealousy) that she would always be sure to see again the people she had left in the lurch one evening. The person unknown whom she had given up for my sake would suffer, would love her the more (Albertine did not know this was the reason), and so as not to go on suffering would return to her of his own accord, as I would have done. But I wanted neither to cause pain, nor to tire myself out, nor to enter on to the terrible path of inquiry, of a multiform, innumerable surveillance. 'No, Albertine, I don't want to spoil your pleasure, go to your lady in Infreville, or at any rate to the person she's a pseudonym for, it's all the same to me. The real reason why I'm not going with you, is that you don't want it, that the excursion you'd be making with me isn't the one you wanted to make, the proof of which is that you've contradicted yourself more than five times without noticing.' Poor Albertine was afraid that her contradictions, which she had not noticed, might have been more serious, not knowing exactly what lies she had told: 'It's very possible I contradicted myself. The sea air takes away all my powers of reason. I'm forever saying one name instead of another.' And (which proved to me that she would not now have needed many sweet affirmations for me to believe her) I experienced the pain of a wound, on hearing this admission of what I had only feebly assumed. 'All right, it's agreed, I'm going,' she said in a tragic voice, not without looking at the time so as to see whether she was late or not for the other person, now that I had furnished her with the pretext for not spending the evening with me. 'You're so unkind. I change everything so as to spend a nice evening with you and it's you who don't want it, and you accuse me of lying. I've never seen you so cruel before. The sea will be my grave. I shall never see you again. (My heart beat faster at these words although I was certain she would be back the next day, which is what happened). I shall drown myself, I shall throw myself into the water. – Like Sappho.[5] – Yet another insult; you don't only have doubts about what I say but about what I do. – But little one, I had no such intention, I swear, you know that Sappho hurled herself into the sea. – Yes you did, you don't have any confidence in me.' She saw from the clock that it was twenty to; she was afraid of missing what it was she had to do, and selecting the briefest of farewells (which she apologized for as it happens by coming to see me the following day; on that particular following day the other person probably was not free), she made her escape at a run, crying 'Farewell for ever,' wearing a heartbroken expression. And perhaps she was heartbroken. For knowing what she was doing at that moment better than I did, at once more severe and more indulgent towards herself than I was to her, perhaps all the same she felt a doubt that I might not make her welcome after the way she had left me. I think that she cared for me, to the point where the other person was more jealous than me.

A few days later, in Balbec, when we were in the ballroom of the casino, Bloch's sister and cousin came in, both of whom were by now very pretty, but whom I no longer acknowledged because of my friends, for the younger of the two, the cousin, was living quite openly with the actress whose acquaintance she had made during my first stay. Andrée, allusion having been made to this under her breath, said to me: 'Oh, I'm like Albertine about that, there's nothing the two of us find more disgusting.' As for Albertine, starting to talk with me on the sofa where we were sitting, she had turned her back on the two disreputable girls. Yet I had observed that prior to this movement, just as Mlle Bloch and her cousin had made their appearance, there had come into my loved one's eyes that sudden and profound attentiveness that sometimes lent this mischievous girl's face a serious, even solemn expression, and left her looking sad afterwards. But Albertine had at once turned her gaze, still oddly immobile and thoughtful, back on to me. Mlle Bloch and her cousin having finally gone off, after giving a very loud laugh and uttering unseemly shouts, I asked Albertine whether the small, fair-haired one (she who was the girl-friend of the actress) was not the same girl who had the day before won the prize in the floral carriage race. 'Oh, I don't know, said Albertine, has one of them got fair hair? I have to tell you, they don't greatly interest me, I've never looked at them. Has one of them got fair hair?' she asked her three friends, with a detached, questioning look. Applied as it was to people whom Albertine met every day on the esplanade, this ignorance struck me as too extreme not to have been put on. 'They don't appear to be looking at us much, either,' I said to Albertine, perhaps on the hypothesis, though I did not as yet consciously entertain it, that Albertine liked women, so as to remove any regret on her part by demonstrating to her that she had not attracted the attention of these women, and that, generally speaking, even the most depraved of them do not usually concern themselves with young girls whom they do not know. 'They didn't look at us? replied Albertine unthinkingly, they did nothing else the whole time. – But you can't know that, I said, you had your back to them. – Well, what about that?' she replied, indicating, set into the wall facing us, a large mirror that I had failed to notice, and on which I now realized that, even while she was speaking to me, my loved one had not ceased to fix her beautiful, much preoccupied eyes.

From the day when Cottard had gone with me into the little Incarville casino, without sharing the opinion he had given voice to, I no longer saw Albertine in the same light; the sight of her produced anger in me. I had myself changed so much that she seemed other. I had ceased to look kindly on her; in her presence, or out of her presence if it might get repeated to her, I spoke of her in the most wounding fashion. There were truces, however. One day I learnt that Albertine and Andrée had both of them accepted an invitation to Elstir's. Not doubting that this was with a view to being able to amuse themselves on the way back like schoolgirls, by taking off girls of the disreputable sort, and derive in doing so an unconfessed, virginal pleasure that would wring my heart, without any announcement, in order to inconvenience them and to deprive Albertine of the pleasure on which she was counting, I arrived at Elstir's unexpectedly. But I found only Andrée there. Albertine had chosen another day, when her aunt was due to go there. So I told myself that Cottard must have been mistaken; the favourable impression produced in me by Andrée's being present without her friend did not go away and fostered in me a gentler disposition in regard to Albertine. But this lasted no longer than the fragile good health of those delicate individuals liable to temporary improvements, but in whom the merest nothing suffices to bring about a relapse. Albertine had incited Andrée to games that, without going very far, were not perhaps altogether innocent; finding this suspicion painful, in the end I discarded it. Hardly was I cured before it was reborn in another form. I had just seen Andrée, in one of those graceful movements that were peculiar to her, lay her head coaxingly on Albertine's shoulder and kiss her on the neck, half closing her eyes; or else they had exchanged a quick glance; a comment had escaped someone who had seen them alone together on the way to bathe, trivial incidents such as habitually float in the ambient atmosphere, where the majority of people absorb them all day long without their health suffering or their mood changing for the worse, but which are morbid and generative of fresh pain for someone so predisposed. Sometimes even, without my having seen Albertine again, and without anyone having spoken of her to me, I rediscovered in my memory an attitude of Albertine's in the company of Gisèle which I had thought innocent at the time; it was enough now to destroy the state of calm I had been able to recover, I no longer needed to go out of doors to breathe in dangerous germs, I had, as Cottard would have said, intoxicated myself. I thought then about all that I had learned of Swann's love for Odette, and of the way in which Swann had been made a fool of all his life. Fundamentally, if I try to think about it, the hypothesis which led me little by little to construct Albertine's whole character, and to interpret painfully each moment of a life I was unable to control in its entirety, was the memory, the *idée fixe*, of the character of Mme Swann, such as I had been told that it was like. These accounts helped to ensure that in future my imagination played the game of supposing that, instead of being a good girl, Albertine might have the same immorality, the same capacity for deception, as a former whore, and I thought of all the suffering that would have awaited me in that event had I ever had to love her.

One day, in front of the Grand-Hôtel, where we had gathered on the esplanade, I had just directed the harshest and most humiliating words at Albertine, and Rosemonde said: 'Oh, how you've changed towards her, at one time she was all that mattered, it was she who called the tune, now she's only good to be fed to the dogs.' In order to make my attitude towards Albertine even more conspicuous, I was in the midst of saying all manner of friendly things to Andrée, who, though she might be afflicted with the same vice, seemed more excusable because she was unwell and neurasthenic, when we saw emerge, at a gentle trot, into the street perpendicular to the esplanade on the corner of which we were standing, Mme de Cambremer's calash and pair. The First President, who was at that moment advancing towards us, leaped out of the way when he recognized the carriage, so as not to be seen in our company; then, when he thought that the Marquise's glances might be about to meet his own, he bowed and gave an immense sweep of his hat. But the carriage, instead of continuing, as had seemed likely, along the rue de la Mer, vanished behind the entrance to the hotel. It was a good ten minutes after this that the 'lift' arrived, all out of breath, to warn me: 'It's the Marquise de Camembert who's come just to see Monsieur. I went up to the room, I looked in the reading-room, I couldn't find Monsieur. Luckily, I had the idea of looking on the beach.' Hardly had he concluded his narration before, followed by her daughter-in-law and by a very ceremonious gentleman, the Marquise advanced towards me, coming probably from a matinée or tea-party in the vicinity, and bowed down under the weight, not so much of the years as of the host of luxurious articles in which she thought it more friendly and more befitting to her rank to be covered so as to appear as 'dressed-up' as possible to those she had come to see. It was, in short, at the hotel, that 'disembarkation' of the Cambremers which my grandmother had once so much dreaded when she wanted Legrandin not to be aware that we would perhaps be going to Balbec. Then Mama would laugh at the fears inspired by an event she considered impossible. And yet now at last it had come about, but by another route and without Legrandin having had any part in it. 'Can I stay if I don't disturb you? Albertine asked me (in whose eyes there remained, put there by the cruel things I had just been saying to her, a few tears that I observed without appearing to see them, and not without rejoicing), I might have something to say to you.' A hat with feathers, itself surmounted by a sapphire pin, had been set down anyhow on Mme de Cambremer's wig, like an insignia the display of which is necessary but sufficient, its placing of no importance, its elegance conventional, its immobility useless. Despite the heat, the good lady had put on a jet-black mantlet resembling a dalmatic, on top of which there hung an ermine stole, the wearing of which seemed to relate not to the temperature or the season, but to the nature of the ceremony. And on Mme de Cambremer's bosom there hung a baron's coronet linked to a short chain in the manner of a pectoral cross. The gentleman was a celebrated barrister from Paris, of a nobiliary family, who had come to spend three days with the Cambremers. He was one of those men of a professional experience so complete as to cause them somewhat to look down on their profession and who say, for example: 'I know I argue well in court, so I no longer get any amusement from arguing', or: 'Operating no longer interests me; I know I operate well.' As intelligent men, and as *artists*, they see, resplendent about a maturity handsomely endowed by success, the 'intelligence' and the 'artistic' nature that their colleagues acknowledge and which confers on them a rough approximation to taste and discernment. They develop a passion for the paintings not of a great artist, but of an artist of great distinction nonetheless, to purchasing whose works they devote the large income that their career procures for them. Le Sidaner[6] was the artist selected by the friend of the Cambremers, who was in fact very agreeable. He talked well about books, the books not of the true masters, however, but of those who have mastered themselves. The one troublesome defect that this *amateur* displayed was that he consistently employed certain ready-made expressions, such as 'for the most part', which lent something both important and incomplete to what he wished to talk about. Mme de Cambremer had taken advantage, she told me, of a matinée that some friends of hers had been giving that day near Balbec to come and see me, as she had promised Robert de Saint-Loup. 'You know he's due shortly to come and spend a few days locally. His uncle Charlus is staying in the country at his sister-in-law's, the Duchesse de Luxembourg, and M. de Saint-Loup will take the opportunity both to go and greet his aunt and to revisit his old regiment, where he is greatly loved, greatly esteemed. We often entertain officers, who all praise him to the skies. It would be so nice if you were to do us the pleasure of coming both of you to Féterne.' I introduced Albertine and her friends to her. Mme de Cambremer named us to her daughter-in-law. The latter, so glacial towards the petty nobility with whom the neighbourhood of Féterne forced her to associate, so full of reserve for fear of being compromised, held out her hand to me on the contrary with a radiant smile, in a place of safety and delighted as she was, faced by a friend of Robert de Saint-Loup's, and one whom the latter, preserving a greater social finesse than he liked people to see, had told her was a close friend of the Guermantes. Thus, in contrast to her mother-in-law, Mme de Cambremer had two infinitely different forms of politeness. It was at the very most the first form, distant and intolerable, that she would have accorded me had I met her through her brother Legrandin. But for a friend of the Guermantes she was all smiles. The most comfortable room in the hotel in which to receive people was the reading-room, in the old days a very terrible place into which I now entered ten times a day, re-emerging freely, as my own master, like those lunatics, little affected and so long resident in the asylum that the doctor has entrusted them with the key. Thus I offered to take Mme de Cambremer there. And because this saloon no longer filled me with shyness nor held any attraction for me, since the faces of things change for us just as those of people do, it was without feeling flustered that I made the suggestion. But she refused, preferring to remain out of doors, and we sat down in the open air, on the hotel terrace. There I found and rescued a volume of Mme de Sévigné that Mama had not had time to take with her in her precipitate flight, when she heard that I had visitors. She dreaded these invasions by strangers as much as my grandmother had and, for fear of no longer being able to escape if she let herself be hemmed around, she made her escape with a rapidity that always led my father and me to make fun of her. In her hand, Mme de Cambremer held, together with the handle of a sunshade, several embroidered bags, a tidy, a gold purse from which hung ropes of garnets, and a lace handkerchief. It struck me that it would have been more convenient for her to put them down on a chair; but I sensed it would be improper and pointless to ask her to abandon the regalia of her pastoral rounds and her worldly ministry. We gazed at the calm sea, where stray gulls floated like white petals. Because of the level of simple 'medium' to which worldly conversation reduces us, and also our desire to please with the help, not of qualities of which we are ourselves unaware, but of what we believe must be prized by those we are with, I began instinctively to talk to Mme de Cambremer, *née* Legrandin, in the manner in which her brother might have done. 'They have, I said, referring to the gulls, the whiteness and stillness of water-lilies.' And indeed, they appeared to be offering an inert target to the little waves that were rocking them, to the point where these, by contrast, seemed, in their pursuit, animated by some purpose, to have taken on life. The dowager Marquise did not weary of hymning the superb view of the sea that we got in Balbec, and envied me it, she who, at La Raspelière (where it so happens she was not living that year), could see the waves only from a long way off. She had two peculiar habits that derived at once from her exalted love of the arts (of music above all) and from her dental inadequacy. Whenever she talked aesthetics, her salivary glands, like those of certain animals in the rutting season, entered on a phase of hypersecretion such that the old lady's toothless mouth allowed a few droplets whose rightful place this was not to come from the corners of her faintly moustachioed lips. She would at once swallow them down again with a deep sigh, like someone recovering their breath. And then, were the beauty of the music too much for her, in her enthusiasm she would raise her arms and proffer a few summary judgments, energetically masticated and coming, if need be, from the nose. Now, it had never occurred to me that the commonplace beach of Balbec might indeed offer a 'sea-view', and Mme de Cambremer's simple words changed my ideas where that was concerned. In return, as I now told her, I had always heard people extolling the unique panorama from La Raspelière, situated at the top of the hill, and where, in a large drawing-room with two fireplaces, one whole row of windows looks out, at the foot of the gardens, between the foliage, on to the sea as far as Balbec and beyond, and the other row on to the valley. 'How kind of you and how well you put it: the sea between the foliage. It's ravishing, it's like… a fan.' And I sensed, from a deep breath intended to catch the saliva and dry the moustache, that the compliment was genuine. But the Marquise *née* Legrandin remained unmoved in order to show her disdain not for my words but for those of her mother-in-law. She did not merely despise the latter's intelligence, moreover, she deplored her affability, forever afraid that people might not have a sufficiently high regard for the Cambremers. 'And what a pretty name, I said. One would love to know the origin of all these names. – In the case of that one, I can tell you, the old lady answered quietly. It's a family home, of my grandmother Arrachepel, it's not an illustrious family, but a very good and very ancient provincial family. – What, not illustrious? her daughter-in-law broke in curtly. A whole stained-glass window in Bayeux Cathedral is filled with its arms, and the principal church of Avranches contains their funerary monuments. If these old names amuse you, you've come one year too late. We had appointed to the living at Criquetot, despite all the difficulties there are in changing dioceses, the dean of a place where I myself have estates, a long way from here, in Combray, where the good priest felt he was becoming neurasthenic. Unfortunately, the

sea air didn't succeed at his great age; his neurasthenia increased and he went back to Combray. But while he was our neighbour, he amused himself by going to consult all the old charters, and he wrote a rather intriguing little booklet on the local place-names. That gave him a taste for it, moreover, for it seems he's occupying his closing years writing a large book on Combray and its surroundings. I shall send you his booklet on the region around Féterne. It's a labour of love. You'll read the most interesting things in it about our old Raspelière, about which my mother-in-law speaks much too modestly. – At all events, this year, replied the dowager Mme de Cambremer, La Raspelière is no longer ours and doesn't belong to me. But I sense you're a painter at heart; you ought to draw, and I would so like to show you Féterne, which is much better than La Raspelière.' For now that the Cambremers had let this last-named house to the Verdurins, its commanding position had abruptly ceased to appear what it had been for them during all these years, that is to say as offering the advantage, unique in the region, of having a view both out to sea and over the valley, and had suddenly – and after the event – presented them in return with the inconvenience that you had always to climb and descend in order to get there and then come away again. In short, you might have thought that if Mme de Cambremer had rented it out, this was less in order to increase her revenues than to rest her horses. And she declared herself overjoyed at finally being able all the time to possess the sea from so close to, at Féterne, she who, for so long, ignoring the two months she used to spend there, had only seen it from high up and as if in a panorama. 'I am discovering it at my age, she said, and how I enjoy it! It does me a world of good! I'd let La Raspelière for nothing so as to be constrained to live at Féterne.'

'To get back on to more interesting matters, resumed Legrandin's sister, who addressed the old Marquise as "Mother" but had adopted an insolent manner towards her over the years, you were talking of water-lilies: I imagine you know those that Claude Monet has painted. What genius! It interests me all the more because close to Combray, the place where I told you I owned land…' But she preferred not to speak too much about Combray. 'Oh, that's surely the series we heard about from Elstir, the greatest of contemporary painters, exclaimed Albertine, who had said nothing hitherto. – Oh, one can tell Mademoiselle loves the arts,' exclaimed Mme de Cambremer, sucking back a jet of saliva as she drew a deep breath. 'You will permit me to prefer Le Sidaner, Mademoiselle,' said the lawyer, smiling with the air of a connoisseur. And, as he had once appreciated, or seen appreciated, certain of Elstir's 'audacities', he added: 'Elstir was gifted, he was almost part of the avant-garde even, but for some reason or other he didn't keep up, he has wasted his life.' Mme de Cambremer came down in favour of the lawyer so far as Elstir was concerned, but, much to her guest's chagrin, ranked Monet with Le Sidaner. It cannot be said that she was stupid; she overflowed with an intelligence that I sensed was of not the slightest use to me. The sun just then getting lower, the seagulls were now yellow, like the water-lilies in another canvas of that same series by Monet. I said that I knew it and (continuing to imitate the language of the brother whose name I had not as yet dared to cite) I added that it was a pity that she had not thought rather of coming the day before, for, at that same hour, she would have been able to admire a light out of Poussin. Confronted by some Normandy squireen, not known to the Guermantes, telling her that she should have come the day before, Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin would no doubt have stiffened with offence. But I could well have been more familiar still and she would have been all fond, melting sweetness; in the warmth of that lovely late afternoon I could gather honey as I liked in the great honeycomb that Mme de Cambremer so seldom was and which took the place of the petits-fours I had not thought to hand round. But the name of Poussin, without taking away from the amenableness of the society woman, aroused the protests of the dilettante. On hearing that name, Mme de Cambremer gave vent six times, with scarcely any interval in between, to that brief clicking of the tongue against the lips which serves to signify to a child who is in the midst of doing something silly, that he is both at fault for having started and forbidden to continue. 'In heaven's name, after a painter like Monet, who's quite simply a genius, don't go and name an untalented old hack like Poussin. I tell you straight out that I consider him the most crashing of bores. There you are, but I can't call that painting. Monet, Degas, Manet, yes, they're painters! It's very odd,' she added, fixing a rapt and searching gaze on some vague point in space where she could perceive her own thought, 'it's very odd, at one time I preferred Manet. Nowadays, I still admire Manet, naturally, but I think I perhaps prefer Monet even more. Oh, the cathedrals!' She put as much scrupulousness as self-satisfaction into informing me of the direction in which her taste had evolved. And you had the sense that the phases through which that taste had passed were no less important, as she saw it, than the different manners of Monet himself. I had, moreover, no cause to feel flattered that she should have been confiding her admirations to me, for, even when faced by the most narrow-minded of provincial ladies, she could not go five minutes without feeling the need to confess them. When a noble lady from Avranches, who would have been incapable of telling Mozart from Wagner, said in front of Mme de Cambremer: 'There was nothing new on of any interest during our stay in Paris, we did go once to the Opéra Comique, they were doing *Pelléas et Mélisande*, it's ghastly,' Mme de Cambremer not only seethed with anger but felt the need to exclaim: 'On the contrary, it's a small masterpiece' and to 'argue the matter'. This perhaps was a habit from Combray, picked up from the sisters of my grandmother, who called it 'fighting the good fight', and who loved dinner-parties where they knew, week after week, that they would have to defend their gods against the Philistines. Thus, Mme de Cambremer liked to 'get the blood coursing' by 'squabbling' about art, as others about politics. She took the side of Debussy as she would have done that of one of her women friends whose conduct had come under fire. Yet she must certainly have realized that when she said: 'Not at all, it's a small masterpiece', she could never improvise, in whoever she was putting in their place, that whole progression in artistic culture at whose conclusion they might have reached agreement without any need to argue. 'I shall have to ask Le Sidaner what he thinks of Poussin, the lawyer said to me. He's a quiet one, keeps himself to himself, but I shall know how to draw him out.'

'Anyway, Mme de Cambremer went on, I have a horror of sunsets, so very romantic, so very operatic. That's the reason why I detest my mother-in-law's house, with its plants from the Midi. You'll see, it looks like a park in Monte-Carlo. That's the reason why I like your shore better. It's sadder, more genuine; there's a little lane from where you can't see the sea. On rainy days, there's nothing but mud, it's a world of its own. It's like in Venice, I detest the Grand Canal and I know of nothing more affecting than the little alley-ways. It's a question of ambiance anyway. – But,' I said to her, sensing that the one way of rehabilitating Poussin in Mme de Cambremer's eyes was to let her know that he was back in fashion, 'M. Degas assures us that he knows of nothing more beautiful than the Poussins at Chantilly.[7] – Oh yes? I don't know the ones at Chantilly, said Mme de Cambremer, who did not want to be of a different opinion to Degas, but I can talk about those in the Louvre, which are horrors. – Those, too, he admires enormously. – I shall have to look at them again. It's all a bit old in my head,' she replied after a moment's silence and as if the favourable judgment she would certainly soon be delivering on Poussin must depend, not on the news I had just conveyed to her, but on the supplementary and this time definitive examination to which she was relying on subjecting the Poussins in the Louvre so as to facilitate the reversing of her verdict. Contenting myself with what was the beginning of a retraction since, if she did not yet admire the Poussins, she had adjourned for further deliberation, and so as not to leave her any longer on the rack, I told her mother-in-law what a lot I had heard about the admirable flowers at Féterne. Modestly, she spoke of the small mixed garden she had at the back into which, by pushing open a door, she went in the mornings in her dressing-gown to feed her peacocks, to look for new-laid eggs, and to pick zinnias or roses, which, by providing an edging of flowers along her table runner for the *oeufs à la crème* or the fried fish, reminded her of her garden paths. 'It's true we have lots of roses, she said, our rose garden is almost too close to our living quarters, there are days when it gives me a headache. It's more agreeable from the terrace at La Raspelière, where the wind brings you the smell of the roses, but not so heady.' I turned to the daughter-in-law: 'It's straight out of *Pelléas*, I said, to satisfy her liking for modernism, the smell of the roses coming all the way up to the terraces. It's so strong in the score that, because I get both hay-fever and rose-fever, it made me sneeze each time I heard that scene. – What a masterpiece *Pelléas* is! exclaimed Mme de Cambremer, I simply adore it'; and drawing closer, with the gestures of a female savage seeking to have her way with me, and making use of her fingers to pick out imaginary notes, she began humming something that I supposed for her represented Pelléas's farewell, keeping on with a vehement insistence as though it were of importance that Mme de Cambremer should remind me of that scene at this moment, or rather perhaps demonstrate that she remembered it. 'I think it's even more beautiful than *Parsifal*, she added, because in *Parsifal* the most beautiful things have had a certain halo of melodic phrases added to them, obsolete therefore because melodic. – I know you are a great musician, Madame, I said to the dowager. I'd very much like to hear you.' Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin looked at the sea in order not to take part in the conversation. Considering that what her mother-in-law liked was not music, she considered the gift she was recognized as possessing, purported according to her, but most remarkable in point of fact, as a virtuosity of no interest. It is true that Chopin's one surviving

pupil had declared, rightly, that the Master's way of playing, his 'feeling', had been handed down, through her, only to Mme de Cambremer, but to play like Chopin was far from being a commendation for the sister of Legrandin, who despised nobody so much as the Polish musician. 'Oh, they're flying away!' exclaimed Albertine, pointing to the seagulls which, ridding themselves for a moment of their floral incognito, were rising as one towards the sun. '*Leurs ailes de géants les empêchent de marcher*,'[8] said Mme de Cambremer, confusing the seagulls with albatrosses. 'I'm very fond of them, I saw some in Amsterdam, said Albertine. They can smell the sea, they come and sniff it even through the paving in the streets. – Oh, you've been in Holland, do you know the Ver Meers?' Mme de Cambremer asked imperiously, in the tone of voice in which she might have said 'Do you know the Guermantes?', for snobbery does not change its accent in changing its object. Albertine answered no; she thought they were living people. But it did not show. 'I'd be very happy to play something for you, Mme de Cambremer said to me. But you know, I only play things that no longer interest your generation. I was brought up to worship Chopin,' she said in a low voice, for she was fearful of her daughter-in-law and knew that the latter regarded Chopin as not being music, so that to play him well or to play him badly were expressions devoid of sense. She acknowledged that her mother-in-law had good technique, and performed the virtuoso passages to perfection. 'They'll never get me to say she's a musician,' ended Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin. Because she saw herself as 'advanced' and (in art only) 'never far enough to the left', as she put it, she imagined that music not only progresses, but does so along a single line, and that Debussy was some sort of super-Wagner, a little more advanced even than Wagner. She had not realized that, if Debussy was not as independent of Wagner as she herself was to believe in a few years' time, for we use the weapons won in battle after all finally to liberate ourselves from him whom we have momentarily vanquished, he was nevertheless seeking, people beginning to have had their fill of works that were too complete, in which everything is expressed, to satisfy a contrary need. This reaction had been bolstered momentarily, of course, by theories, similar to those which, in politics, come to the support of laws against the Congregations, or wars in the East (teaching against nature, Yellow Peril, etc.).[9] An age of haste called, it was said, for rapidity in art, absolutely as they might have said that a future war could not last more than a fortnight, or that the out-of-the-way spots beloved of the stage-coaches would be forsaken by the railways but restored to honour by the motor-car. It was recommended not to tire the listener's attention, as though we did not have at our command different degrees of attention, the highest of which it is in fact up to the artist to awaken. For those who yawn with fatigue after ten lines of some second-rate article have been making the journey to Bayreuth year after year to hear the *Tetralogy*.[10] The day was coming, moreover, when, for a time, Debussy would be declared to be as fragile as Massenet[11] and the joltings of *Mélisande* demoted to the rank of those of *Manon*. For theories and schools, like microbes and globules, devour one another and, by their struggles, ensure life's continuance. But that time had not yet come.

As on the Bourse, when an upward movement occurs and a whole section of the market profits by it, a certain number of disdained authors had benefited from the reaction, either because they had not deserved such disdain, or simply – which enabled one to break new ground by extolling them – because they had brought it on themselves. And people even went looking, in an isolated past, for a few independent talents whose reputation the current movement should not, seemingly, have affected, but whose name one of the new masters was thought to have cited favourably. Often it was because a master, whoever he might be, and however exclusive his school may be, is original in his judgments and does justice to talent wherever it is to be found, and to less than talent even, to a pleasing inspiration he has enjoyed in the past, linked to some cherished moment of his adolescence. At other times, because certain artists of another epoch have, in a single piece, achieved something that resembles what the master has gradually realized he has been seeking to do himself. He then sees this elder as something like a precursor; he likes in him, in another form, an effort that is momentarily, and in part, fraternal. There are bits of Turner in the work of Poussin, a phrase of Flaubert's in Montesquieu. But sometimes, too, the rumour of a master's predilection had resulted from an error, born who knows where and hawked about among his school. But the name cited then benefited from the imprint under whose protection it had come just in time, for if there is a certain freedom, genuine taste, in the choice of the master, schools for their part take their lead only from the theory. Thus it was that, following its customary course, which advances by digressions, veering off one time in this direction and the next in the contrary direction, the spirit of the age had brought back into the spotlight a certain number of works, to which the need for justice, or for renewal, or the taste of Debussy, or some caprice of his, or some remark he had not perhaps made, had added those of Chopin. Extolled by judges in whom people had every confidence, and benefiting from the admiration aroused by *Pelléas*, they had rediscovered a new *éclat*, and even those who had not heard them again were so anxious to like them that they did so despite themselves, though with an illusion of freedom. But Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin remained for part of the year in the provinces. Even in Paris, as an invalid, she lived largely in her bedroom. It is true that this handicap managed to draw attention to itself mainly in the choice of expressions that Mme de Cambremer thought were fashionable, which would have been better suited to the written language, a nuance she had not discerned, for she derived them more from reading than from conversation. This last is necessary for an accurate knowledge less of people's opinions than of the new expressions. However, the rejuvenation of the *Nocturnes* had yet to be announced by the critics. News of it had been passed on only in casual conversation by 'the young'. It remained unknown to Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin. I took pleasure in informing her, though by addressing her mother-in-law for this purpose, as when, in billiards, you play off the cushion in order to strike a ball, that, very far from being old-fashioned, Chopin was Debussy's favourite musician. 'Well I never, how amusing,' the daughter-in-law said with a smile, as though this were merely a paradox tossed off by the author of *Pelléas*. Nevertheless, it was quite certain now that she would only ever listen to Chopin with respect or even with pleasure. And so my words, which had just sounded the hour of her deliverance for the dowager, brought an expression of gratitude to me, and above all of joy, to her face. Her eyes shone like those of Latude in the play entitled *Latude or 35 years of Captivity*;[12] and her breast inhaled the sea-air with that dilatation that Beethoven has emphasized so well in *Fidelio*, when his prisoners finally breathe in 'the air that gives life'.[13] I thought she was going to put her moustachioed lips to my cheek. 'What, you like Chopin? He likes Chopin, he likes Chopin,' she exclaimed with an impassioned nasal twang, as she might have said: 'What, you know Mme de Francquetot, too?', with the difference that my connection with Mme de Francquetot would have been a matter of profound indifference to her, whereas my knowledge of Chopin threw her into a sort of artistic delirium. Salivary hypersecretion was no longer enough. Without even having tried to understand Debussy's role in the reinvention of Chopin, she simply felt that my verdict was favourable. She was seized by musical enthusiasm. 'Elodie! Elodie! He likes Chopin.' Her bosom swelled and she beat the air with her arms. 'Ah, I'd sensed indeed you were a musician, she exclaimed. I can understand, aaartist that you are, that you should like it. It's so beautiful!' And her voice was as flinty as if, in order to express her ardour for Chopin, she had, in imitation of Demosthenes, filled her mouth with all the pebbles from the beach. Finally there came the reflux, reaching as far as her veil, which she had not had time to remove to safety and was drenched, and finally the Marquise took her embroidered handkerchief to the dribble of foam with which the memory of Chopin had just soaked her moustaches.

'Heavens, Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin said to me, I think my mother-in-law's overstaying her welcome rather, she's forgetting we've got my uncle de Ch'nouville coming to dinner. And besides, Cancan doesn't like to wait.' Cancan remained beyond me, I thought perhaps it referred to a dog. But where the de Ch'nouville cousins were concerned, it was as follows. With age, the pleasure the young Marquise had taken in pronouncing their name in this fashion had died down. And yet, in the old days, it had been in order to enjoy it that she resolved on her marriage. In other social groups, when the name of de Chenouville came up (every time at least that the *particule*[14] was preceded by a noun ending in a vowel, for in the contrary case one was indeed obliged to lay stress on the *de*, the tongue refusing to pronounce Madam' d'Ch'nonceaux), it was customary for the mute *e* of the *particule* to be sacrificed. They said: 'Monsieur d'Chenouville'. Among the Cambremers, the tradition was the reverse, but equally imperious. In every case it was the mute *e* in Chenouville that was suppressed. Whether the name were preceded by '*mon cousin*' or '*ma cousine*', it was always de 'Ch'nouville' and never 'Chenouville'. (Where the father of these Chenouvilles was concerned, they said '*notre oncle*', for they were not upper-crust enough at Féterne to pronounce it '*notre onk*', as the Guermantes would have done, whose required jargon, suppressing consonants and nationalizing foreign names, was as hard to understand as old French or the modern patois.) Every person entering the Cambremer family at once received a warning, in this matter of the Ch'nouvilles, of which Mlle Legrandin had had no need. Visiting one day, and hearing a

girl say '*ma tante d'Uzai', 'mon onk de Rouan'*, she had not recognized straight away the illustrious names she was in the habit of pronouncing 'Uzès' or 'Rohan'; hers had been the surprise, the embarrassment and the shame of someone who finds a newly invented utensil before them on the dinner table of whose use they are ignorant and with which they do not dare to start eating. But the night following and the next day, she had repeated, enraptured: '*ma tante d'Uzai*', with that suppression of the final *s*, a suppression that had astounded her the day before but which she now found it so vulgar not to be aware of, one of her women friends having referred to a bust of the Duchesse d'Uzès, Mlle Legrandin had answered her ill-humouredly and in a haughty tone: 'You might at least pronounce it correctly: "*Mame d'Uzai*".' From that moment on, she had realized that, by virtue of the transmutation of solid matter into ever more subtle elements, the considerable and very honourably acquired fortune that she owed to her father, the thorough education that she had received, her assiduity at the Sorbonne, at Caro's lectures along with those of Brunetière',[15] and at the Lamoureux concerts,[16] all this was to be volatilized, to find its final sublimation in the pleasure of one day saying: '*ma tante d'Uzai*'. This did not exclude from her mind that she would continue to associate, at least in the early days following her marriage, not with certain woman friends whom she liked but was resigned to giving up, but with certain others whom she did not like but to whom she wished to be able to say (since this was her reason for marrying): 'I shall introduce you to my aunt d'Uzai', or when she saw that this alliance was too difficult: 'I shall introduce you to my aunt de Ch'nouville' or 'I'll have you to dinner with the Uzais.' Her marriage to M. de Cambremer had provided Mme de Cambremer with the opportunity of saying the first of these sentences but not the second, the society in which her parents-in-law moved not being that which she had imagined and of which she continued to dream. And so, after having said to me about Saint-Loup (adopting for the purpose an expression of Robert's own, for if, in order to talk to her, I had spoken like Legrandin, she, by an opposite suggestion, had answered me in Robert's dialect, borrowed unbeknownst to her from Rachel), bringing her thumb and forefinger together and half closing her eyes, as though she were gazing at something infinitely delicate that she had succeeding in capturing: 'He has a pretty quality of mind'; so wholehearted was she in her praise of him that you might have thought she was in love with him (it was claimed, as it happens, that in the old days, when he was at Doncières, Robert had been her lover), but in reality merely so that I might repeat it to him, and to lead up to: 'You're very friendly with the Duchesse de Guermantes. I'm ailing, I hardly get out, and I know she remains confined within a circle of select friends, which I fully approve of, so I know her only slightly, but I do know she's an absolutely superior woman.' Knowing that Mme de Cambremer scarcely knew her, and to make myself as small as she was, I slid over this topic and said, in answer to the Marquise, that I had above all known her brother, M. Legrandin. At this name, she adopted the same evasive expression as I had worn in the case of Mme de Guermantes, but combining with it a look of displeasure, for she thought I had said this in order to humble, not myself, but her. Was she eaten away with despair at having been born Legrandin? That at least was what her husband's sisters and sisters-in-law claimed, provincial noblewomen who knew nobody and nothing, and were jealous of Mme de Cambremer's intelligence, her education, her wealth, and the physical attractions she had possessed before she fell ill. 'She thinks of nothing else, it's that that's killing her,' these spiteful women would say the moment they were talking about Mme de Cambremer to anyone at all, but preferably to a commoner, either, if he was conceited and stupid, so as to enhance the value, by this assertion of the shame attaching to the commoner's condition, of the affability they were showing him, or else, if he was shy and discerning, and had applied the remark to himself, so as to have the pleasure, even as they received him courteously, of indirectly behaving insolently towards him. But if these ladies believed they spoke true where their sister-in-law was concerned, they were mistaken. The latter suffered all the less from having been born Legrandin for having lost all memory of the fact. She was put out that I should have reminded her of it and fell silent as if she had not understood, not regarding it as necessary to supply any details, nor even to confirm mine.

'Our relations are not the main reason for cutting short our visit,' the dowager Mme de Cambremer said to me, who was probably more blasé than her daughter-in-law where the pleasure to be had from saying 'Ch'nouville' was concerned. 'But so as not to tire you out with too many people, Monsieur, she said, indicating the lawyer, did not dare bring his wife and son all the way here. They're walking on the beach while they wait for us and must be starting to get bored.' I had them carefully pointed out to me and hurried off to find them. The wife had a round face like certain flowers of the Ranunculus family, and quite a large plant-like mark at the corner of her eye. And since the generations of men preserve their features like a family of plants, just as on the faded face of the mother, so the same mark, which might have helped to classify a variety, swelled beneath the eye of the son. The lawyer was touched by my attentiveness towards his wife and son. He showed interest in the subject of my stay in Balbec. 'You must feel a bit out of place, for they're foreigners here for the most part.' And he looked at me as he spoke, for, not liking foreigners, though many were his clients, he wanted to be sure that I was not hostile to his xenophobia, in which case he would have beaten a retreat, by saying: 'Of course Mme X may be a charming woman. It's a question of principle.' Since at that time I had no opinion concerning foreigners, I evinced no disapproval, and he felt himself on safe ground. He went so far as to ask me to call on him one day in Paris, to see his collection of Le Sidaners, and to bring the Cambremers along, with whom he obviously thought I was intimate. 'I shall invite you with Le Sidaner, he said, convinced I would be living only in anticipation of that blessed day. You'll see what a delightful man he is. And his pictures will enchant you. Of course, I can't compete with the big collectors, but I believe it's I who own the greatest number of his favourite canvases. It'll interest you all the more, coming from Balbec, because they're seascapes, in the majority at least.' The wife and son, of a vegetable disposition, listened composedly. You sensed that their house in Paris was a sort of temple to Le Sidaner. These sorts of temples are not without their uses. When the god has doubts about himself, he can easily stop up the fissures in his own opinion with the irrefutable testimony of individuals who have devoted their lives to his work.

At a signal from her daughter-in-law, Mme de Cambremer made to stand up and said to me: 'Since you don't want to install yourself at Féterne, won't you at least come and have lunch, one weekday, tomorrow for example?' And in her benevolence, in order to decide me, she added: 'You'll find the Comte de Crisenoy there,' whom I certainly had not lost, for the good reason that I did not know him. She was starting to hold out still other shining temptations to me, but stopped short. The First President, who, on returning, had learned that she was in the hotel, had been searching everywhere for her on the sly, had then waited for her and, pretending to be meeting her by chance, came up to present his respects. I realized that Mme de Cambremer was not keen to extend to him the luncheon invitation she had just addressed to me. He, however, had known her for much longer than I had, having for years past been one of those regulars at the Féterne matinées whom I had so much envied during my first stay in Balbec. But seniority cannot do everything among society people. They reserve their lunches more readily for those new connections who can still prick their curiosity, especially when their arrival is preceded by a cordial and prestigious recommendation such as that of Saint-Loup. Mme de Cambremer calculated that the First President had not heard what she said to me, but in order to still the remorse that she felt, she addressed him in the most friendly manner. In the sunlight in which, on the horizon, the golden shoreline of Rivebelle, normally invisible, was bathed, we could make out, barely separate from the luminous azure, emerging from the water, pink, silvery, imperceptible, the little bells of the angelus ringing out in the vicinity of Féterne. 'Again, it's rather like *Pelléas*, I remarked to Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin. You know the scene I mean. – I think I do, yes.' But 'I've no idea' was what her voice and her face proclaimed, uninformed by any memory, and her unsupported smile off into the air. The dowager could not get over the fact that the bells had carried all this way and stood up, thinking of the time: 'In fact, I said, from Balbec, you can't normally see that shoreline, nor hear it either. The weather must have changed and made the horizon twice as wide. Unless they've come to fetch you, for I can see they're making you leave; for you they are the dinner-bell.' The First President, none too responsive to the bells, was gazing furtively at the esplanade, which he was distressed to see so depopulated this evening. 'You're a true poet, Mme de Cambremer said to me. I can tell how fine-strung you are, how artistic; come and I will play you some Chopin,' she added, raising her arms with an ecstatic air and pronouncing the words in a hoarse voice that seemed as if it were shifting pebbles. Then came the deglutition of the saliva, and the old lady instinctively wiped her so-called 'American' toothbrush moustache with her handkerchief. The First President rendered me a very great service in spite of himself by seizing the Marquise by the arm in order to conduct her to her carriage, a certain admixture of vulgarity, boldness and a liking for ostentation having dictated a course of behaviour that others would hesitate before adopting, but which is found far from displeasing in society. It had, in any case, been much more of a habit with him these many years past than with me. I may have blessed him but I did not dare to imitate him, and walked beside Mme de

Cambremer-Legrandin, who wanted to see the book I had in my hand. The name of Mme de Sévigné caused her to screw up her face; and employing a word she had read in certain newspapers, but which, when spoken and put into the feminine, and applied to a writer of the seventeenth century, created a bizarre effect, she asked me: 'Do you find her genuinely *talentueuse*?'[17] The Marquise gave the footman the address of a pâtis-serie she needed to go to before taking again to the road, pink from the dust of evening, in which the stepped rumps of the cliffs had turned blue. She asked her old coachman whether one of her horses that felt the cold had been warm enough, whether another's shoe might not be hurting. 'I shall write to you about what we have to arrange, she said to me in a low voice. I saw you were talking literature with my daughter-in-law, she's adorable,' she added, although she did not believe this but had got into the habit – maintained out of goodness of heart – of saying so, so that her son should not seem to have married for money. 'Besides, she added, in a last enthusiastic mumble, she's so aaartissstic!' Then she climbed into her carriage, swaying her head and raising the handle of her sunshade, and went off again through the streets of Balbec, weighed down by the vestments of her ministry, like an old bishop on his confirmation rounds.

'She has invited you to lunch,' the First President said to me sternly once the carriage had moved off and I came back with the girls. 'We're not on good terms. She thinks I neglect her. But there, I'm easy enough to get on with. Should anyone have need of me, I'm always there to answer "present". But they tried to throw the grappling-irons over me. Ah, well, that!' he added, with a canny expression and raising his finger like someone splitting hairs: 'That I don't allow. That's an attack on my liberty when on holiday. I was obliged to say: "Stop there!" You seem to be very well in with her. When you get to be my age, you'll find that society is nothing really, and you'll regret having attached so much importance to these trifles. Right, I'm going to take a turn before dinner. *Adieu les enfants*,' he cried to the world at large, as if he were already fifty metres away.

Once I had said goodbye to Rosemonde and Gisèle, they saw with astonishment that Albertine had stopped, without following them. 'Albertine, what are you doing, you know the time? – You go home, she replied authoritatively, I have to talk with him,' she added, indicating me with a submissive expression. Rosemonde and Gisèle looked at me, imbued so far as I was concerned with a new respect. I enjoyed feeling that, for the moment at least, and in the eyes even of Rosemonde and Gisèle, I counted for more with Albertine than the time of her return home, or than her friends, and might even share solemn secrets with her into which it was impossible that they be admitted. 'Shan't we be seeing you this evening? – I don't know, that'll depend on him here. – Till tomorrow anyway. – Let's go up to my room,' I said to her, once her friends had gone off. We took the lift; she held her tongue in front of the 'lift'. The habit of being obliged to rely on personal observation and on deduction in order to know the petty concerns of their masters, those strange people who talk among themselves but do not speak to them, develops a greater power of divination among 'employees' (as the 'lift' called the servants) than among the 'employers'. Our organs atrophy or become stronger or more subtle according as the need for them increases or diminishes. Since the existence of railways, the necessity of not missing the train has taught us to reckon the minutes, whereas among the ancient Romans, whose astronomy was not only more perfunctory but whose lives were less hurried, the notion, not of minutes but even of fixed hours of the day, scarcely existed. So the 'lift' had understood, and was counting on retailing to his fellows, that we were preoccupied, Albertine and I. But he talked to us without stopping because he was without tact. I could see depicted on his face, however, substituted for the usual impression of friendship and delight at taking me up in his lift, a look of extraordinary dejection and anxiety. Since I was ignorant of its cause, in an attempt to distract him, and although more preoccupied with Albertine, I told him that the name of the lady who had just left was the Marquise de Cambremer and not de Camembert. On the floor that we were just then passing, I caught sight of, carrying a bolster, a frightful-looking chambermaid who curtseyed to me respectfully, hoping for a tip on my departure. I would like to have known whether it was the one I had so much desired on the evening of my first arrival in Balbec, but I was never able to be certain. The 'lift' swore to me, with the sincerity of most false witnesses, though without abandoning his despairing expression, that it was certainly under the name of Camembert that the Marquise had asked him to announce her. And truth to tell it was quite natural that he should have heard a name he knew already. Besides, having, where the nobility and the nature of the names out of which titles are made are concerned, the very vague notions which are those of many people who are not liftboys, the name of Camembert had struck him as all the more probable in that, this cheese being universally known, there was no call to be surprised that a Marquisate of such glorious renown should have been derived from it, unless it were that of the Marquisate which had lent its celebrity to the cheese. All the same, as he could see that I did not wish to appear to have made a mistake, for he knew that the masters like to see their most futile whims being obeyed and their most blatant falsehoods accepted, he promised me, like a good servant, to say Cambremer from then on. It is true that no shopkeeper in the town, nor countryman from roundabout, where the name and the persons of the Cambremers were thoroughly familiar, would ever have been able to make the 'lift's' mistake. But the staff at the Grand-Hôtel de Balbec were not in any sense locals. They had come in a straight line, with all their equipment, from Biarritz, Nice and Monte-Carlo, one part having been directed to Deauville, another to Dinard and the third been kept for Balbec.

But the 'lift's' sorrowful anxiety only grew. For him thus to have neglected to evince his devotion to me by his customary smiles, some misfortune had to have befallen him. Perhaps he had been 'moved'. I promised myself in that event to try to get him kept on, the manager having promised he would ratify whatever I might decide where his staff were concerned. 'You can always do what you want, I rectify it in advance.' Suddenly, just after leaving the lift, I fathomed the 'lift's' distress, his downcast expression. Because of the presence of Albertine I had not given him the hundred sous I was in the habit of handing him as we ascended. And instead of realizing that I did not want to make a show of tipping in front of a third party, the imbecile had begun to tremble, assuming that it was over once and for all, that never again would I give him anything. He had been imagining that I had 'come a cropper' (as the Duc de Guermantes would have said), and that supposition had filled him, not with any compassion for me but with a terrible, selfish disappointment. I told myself I was less unreasonable than my mother had thought one day when I had not dared not to give the exaggerated but feverishly anticipated sum that I had given the day before. But also, the significance I had hitherto been lending, without the slightest doubt, to the customary expression of delight, which I had not hesitated to see as a sign of attachment, appeared less certain in meaning. Seeing the liftboy ready, in his despair, to throw himself down five storeys, I wondered whether, had our respective positions in society been reversed, as the result of a revolution for example, instead of operating the lift for me so politely, the 'lift', now a bourgeois, might not have thrown me from it, and whether there is not, among certain classes of the people, more duplicity than in society, where, no doubt, the disobliging remarks are reserved for when we are absent, but where the attitude towards us would not be insulting were we to fall on hard times.

It cannot be said, however, that at the Balbec hotel the 'lift' was the most self-interested. So far as that went, the staff could be divided into two categories: on the one hand, those who made a distinction between the guests, being more responsive to the reasonable gratuity from an old nobleman (in a position of course to get him excused his twenty-eight days by putting in a word with General de Beautreillis) than to the reckless largesse of some foreign money-bags, who thereby betrayed a lack of breeding that was referred to as generosity only to his face. And on the other hand, those for whom nobility, intelligence, celebrity, position, manners, were non-existent, being masked by a figure. For these there was only one hierarchy, the money that you have, or rather that you give. Aimé himself, although he aspired, on account of the large number of hotels in which he had served, to a wide knowledge of the world, perhaps belonged to this category. At most, he would give a social twist, as knowing the families, to this kind of appreciation, by saying of the Princess of Luxembourg for example: 'Is there plenty of money there?' (the question-mark being in order to gain information, or to check one last time on information already acquired, before procuring for a guest a 'chef' for Paris, or guaranteeing him a table on the left, as you go in, with a view of the sea, at Balbec). Despite which, without being devoid of self-interest, he would not have exhibited it with the same foolish despair as the 'lift'. On the other hand, the latter's artlessness perhaps simplified matters. The convenience of a grand hotel, or an establishment such as Rachel's once was, is that, without intermediaries, the sight of a hundred-franc note, and even more of a thousand-franc note, even when being given on this occasion to someone else, causes the hitherto frozen face of an employee or of a woman to smile and show willing. In politics on the other hand, or the relationship of a lover and a mistress, too many things are interposed between the money and the docility. So many things that even those in whom money finally kindles a smile are often incapable of following the inner process that links them, and believe themselves to be, indeed are, more

delicate. Besides, this clarifies polite conversation of all that 'I know what remains for me to do, tomorrow they'll find me in the morgue.' Thus one meets in polite society with few novelists, or poets or all those sublime creatures who talk about the very things that should not be said.

As soon as we were alone and had started down the corridor, Albertine said to me: 'What have you got against me?' Had my severity towards her not been more painful to myself? Was it only an unconscious stratagem on my part, with a view to inducing in my loved one, vis-à-vis myself, that attitude of fear and entreaty which would enable me to question her and learn perhaps which of the two hypotheses I had long since formed about her was the right one? The fact is that when I heard her question, I felt suddenly happy, like someone close to attaining a long-desired objective. Before answering her, I led her all the way to my door. As it opened, the latter caused the pink light that was filling the room to flow back and turned the white muslin of the curtains hanging against the evening into saffron lampas. I went as far as the window; the gulls had settled again on the waves; but now they were pink. I remarked on this to Albertine: 'Don't change the subject, she said, be open like me.' I lied. I declared that she would have to listen to a preliminary confession, of a great passion that I had been feeling for some time past for Andrée, and I made it to her with a simplicity and candour worthy of the stage, but which we hardly ever have in life save in the case of a love that we do not feel. Repeating the falsehood I had used with Gilberte before my first stay in Balbec, but varying it, I went so far, the better to make her believe me when I now told her that I did not love her, as to let slip that in the old days I had been on the point of falling in love with her, but that too much time had elapsed, that she was no more to me than a good companion, and that, even had I wanted, it would no longer have been possible for me again to have more ardent feelings towards her. Moreover, by thus dwelling in Albertine's presence on the protestations of my indifference towards her, all that I was doing – because of a particular circumstance and with a particular end in view – was to make more apparent, to mark with greater force, the binary rhythm that love assumes in all who are too unsure of themselves to believe that a woman can ever love them, and also that they can truly love her. They have sufficient self-knowledge to know that, with the most dissimilar women, they have felt the same hopes and the same anxieties, have invented the same fictions and uttered the same words, to have thus been made aware that their sentiments and their actions bear no close or necessary relation to the beloved, but pass to one side of her, splashing her, circumventing her like the tide that dashes itself along the rocks, and the sense of their own instability even increases their mistrust as to whether this woman, by whom they would like so much to be loved, loves them. Why would chance so order it, when she is nothing more than a simple accident set down before the outpouring of our desires, that we should be the object of those that she feels? And so, even while needing to pour out all these feelings towards her, so very different from the merely human feelings inspired in us by our neighbours, the very special feelings which are those of love, having taken a step forward, confessing to the one we love our affection for her and our hopes, instantly fearful of displeasing her, embarrassed, too, at sensing that the language we have used was not created expressly for her, that it has served, will serve us, for others, that if she does not love us she cannot understand us, that we have spoken with the lack of good taste, the immodesty of the pedant addressing subtle phrases not designed for them to dunces, this fear, this shame, lead to a counter-rhythm, a reflux, a need, be it by first of all drawing back, quickly to retract our previously confessed sympathy, to resume the offensive and recover our esteem, our dominance; this double rhythm is to be perceived in the various stages of a single love affair, in all the corresponding periods of similar love affairs, and in all those individuals who are better at analysing than at valuing themselves. If, however, it was accentuated rather more forcefully than is customary in the speech I was in the midst of making to Albertine, this was simply to enable me to move more rapidly and energetically into the contrary rhythm, punctuated by my affection.

As though Albertine must be having difficulty believing what I had told her of the impossibility of my loving her again, because of the too long interval, I backed up what I had called a quirk of my character with examples taken from people with whom I had, either by their fault or my own, allowed the moment of loving them to pass, without being able, however much I might desire it, to rediscover it afterwards. I thus appeared to be both apologizing to her, as if for an impoliteness, for this inability to start loving her again, and to be trying to make her understand the psychological reasons as if they had been peculiar to myself. But in explaining myself in this fashion, in elaborating on the case of Gilberte, in respect of whom what had become so untrue when applied to Albertine had been strictly true, I was simply making my assertions as plausible as I had pretended to believe that they were implausible. Sensing that Albertine had appreciated what she believed was my 'frank talking', and had recognized in my deductions the clarity of the self-evident, I apologized for the former, telling her that I knew quite well that one always gave offence by speaking the truth and that she must anyway have found it incomprehensible. She thanked me on the contrary for my sincerity and added into the bargain that she understood perfectly a state of mind so common and so natural.

So as to appear wholly sincere and not to be exaggerating, I assured Albertine in passing, as if making a point of being polite, that this confession of an imaginary feeling for Andrée, and of indifference towards herself, was not to be taken too literally, and I was finally able, without fearing that Albertine might suspect love in it, to speak to her with a gentleness that I had for so long denied myself and which I found delectable. I was almost caressing my confidante; as I spoke to her of her friend whom I loved, tears came into my eyes. But coming to the point, I finally told her that she knew what love was like, its susceptibilities and its sufferings, and that perhaps, as a friend already of long standing, she would have her heart set on putting an end to the great unhappiness she had been causing me, not directly, since it was not her that I loved, if I might venture to repeat that without offending her, but indirectly, by injuring me in my love for Andrée. I broke off to look and to indicate to Albertine a large solitary, hurrying bird which, far ahead of us, was lashing the air with the regular beat of its wings and, travelling at great speed above the beach, stained here and there by reflections like small pieces of torn red paper, covered its entire length, without slackening its speed, without its attention being diverted, without deviating from its course, like an emissary carrying far off some urgent, critical message. 'It at least goes straight to the mark! said Albertine with a reproachful look. – You say that because you don't know what I'd have liked to say to you. But it's so difficult that I'd rather give up; I'm certain I'd make you angry; and then all it would lead to is this: I'd be in no way happier with the one I've given my heart to but I'd have lost a good companion. – But since I swear I shan't be angry.' She looked so sweet, so sadly docile, to be waiting for her happiness to come from me, that I had difficulty restraining myself and not kissing – kissing with the kind of pleasure almost that I would have got from kissing my mother – that new face, which no longer had the alert, blushing appearance of a perverse and mischievous kitten, with its little pink, upturned nose, but seemed, in the fullness of its overwhelming sadness, to have melted, in broad, flattened, descending rivulets, into kindness. Leaving my love out of account, as though it were a chronic foolishness unconnected with her, and putting myself in her place, I felt pity faced by this good girl, accustomed to being treated fairly and kindly, yet against whom the good companion she may have thought I was for her had been conducting for weeks past a persecution that had finally reached a climax. It was because I had taken up a simply human vantage-point, external to the two of us, from where my jealous love had vanished, that I felt this profound pity for Albertine, which would have been less so if I had not loved her. Moreover, in this rhythmic oscillation, which goes from the declaration to the quarrel (the surest, most dangerously effective means of forming, by contrary and successive movements, a knot that will not come untied but which attaches us firmly to a person), and at the heart of the movement of withdrawal which constitutes one of the two elements in this rhythm, what use is it still to distinguish these refluxes of human pity which, opposed to love yet perhaps having unconsciously the same cause, lead in any case to the same effects? When afterwards we recall the sum-total of all that we have done for a woman, we are often made aware that the actions inspired by the desire to demonstrate that we love her, to make ourselves loved, to win favours, occupy little more space than those attributable to the human need to set right the wrongs we have done to the one we love, out of a simple moral duty, as though we did not love them. 'So, then, what have I managed to do?' Albertine asked me. There was a knock; it was the 'lift'; Albertine's aunt, who had been passing the hotel in her carriage, had stopped on the off chance to see whether she might not be there and to take her back. Albertine sent answer that she could not come down, that they should eat without waiting for her, that she did not know what time she would be home. 'But your aunt will be angry? – Don't you believe it! She'll understand perfectly.' And so – at this moment at least, such as would not perhaps recur – a conversation with me was, as Albertine saw it, the circumstances being what they were, a matter so self-evidently important that it must come before everything else, to which, referring herself no doubt instinctively to a familial jurisprudence, and enumerating the situations in which, when M. Bontemps's career had been at stake, a journey was not a consideration, my loved one was in no doubt that her aunt would think it perfectly natural to find the dinner hour being sacrificed. Having slid this remote hour that she spent without me, at her family's,

all the way to me, Albertine gave it to me; I could use it as I saw fit. In the end I ventured to tell her what had been reported to me as to her mode of life, and that, despite the profound disgust aroused in me by women afflicted with that same vice, I had not felt any concern until they named her accomplice to me, and that she could well understand, loving Andrée to the extent that I did, the grief that I had experienced. It would have been cleverer perhaps to say that other women, too, had been named, but ones who meant nothing to me. But Cottard's abrupt and terrible revelation had entered into me and lacerated me just as it was, in its entirety, with nothing to be added. And just as, before, I could never on my own have imagined that Albertine loved Andrée, or might at least play caressing games with her, had Cottard not drawn my attention to their attitude as they waltzed, so I had been unable to move on from that idea to the, for me, so very different one that Albertine might have relationships with women other than Andrée which not even affection could excuse. Even before swearing to me that it was not true, Albertine, like anyone who has just been told they have been talked about in this way, displayed anger, unhappiness and, where the unknown slanderer was concerned, a raging curiosity to learn who it was and a desire to come face to face with them so as to be able to confound them. But she assured me that at least she did not hold it against me. 'If it'd been true, I'd have confessed it. But Andrée and I are both as horrified as each other by that sort of thing. We haven't reached the age we are without seeing women with short hair, who have mannish ways and are of the kind you say, and nothing revolts us as much.' Albertine merely gave me her word, a peremptory word and unsupported by any proof. But that was the very thing best able to set my mind at rest, jealousy belonging to that family of unhealthy doubts far more easily removed by the vigour of an affirmation than by its plausibility. A peculiarity of love, moreover, is that it makes us at once more mistrustful and more credulous, makes us quicker to suspect the one we love than we would have another woman, and to be readier to lend credence to her denials. We must be in love to feel concern that there are not only honest women, or in other words to be made aware of it, and in love, also, if we are to hope, that is to say to be sure, that there are some. It is human to seek out sorrow and at once to be delivered from it. The propositions capable of succeeding in this easily strike us as true, we do not quibble for long over a sedative that works. And besides, however multiple the person that we love may be, they may in any case present two essential personalities to us, according to whether they appear as ours or as turning their desires elsewhere than towards us. The first of these personalities possesses the peculiar power which prevents us from believing in the reality of the second, the specific secret for allaying the suffering that the latter has caused. The loved one is by turns the sickness and the remedy that suspends and aggravates the sickness. No doubt I had long been prepared, by virtue of the sway exercised over my imagination and my ability to be moved by the example of Swann, to believe that what I feared was true instead of what I would have wished for. Thus the comfort brought by Albertine's affirmations was all but compromised for a moment because I recalled the story of Odette. But I told myself that if it was right to make allowances for the worst, not only when, in order to understand Swann's sufferings, I had tried to put myself in his place, but now that it involved myself, by seeking the truth as though it involved someone else, it must not, however, out of cruelty towards myself, a soldier choosing the post, not where he may be of the greatest use but where he is the most exposed, eventuate in the error of holding one supposition to be truer than the others solely because it was the most painful. Was there not an abyss between Albertine, a girl from quite a good bourgeois family, and Odette, a cocotte sold by her mother from an early age? The word of the one was not to be set alongside that of the other. Moreover, Albertine had none of the same interest in lying to me as Odette had to Swann. Besides, Odette had confessed to the latter what Albertine had just denied. I should therefore have committed an error of reasoning as serious – though opposite – as that which would have inclined me towards a hypothesis on the grounds that it would have caused me less suffering than the others, by not taking into account these real differences between their situations and reconstructing the actual life of my loved one solely in terms of what I had learned of Odette's. I had before me a new Albertine, already glimpsed on several occasions, it was true, towards the end of my first stay in Balbec, open, good-natured, an Albertine who, out of affection for me, had just forgiven me my suspicions and attempted to dispel them. She made me sit down beside her on my bed. I thanked her for what she had said, I assured her that our reconciliation was complete and that never again would I be hard on her. I told Albertine that she should, all the same, go back home for dinner. She asked me whether I was not comfortable as we were. And drawing down my head for a caress she had never as yet given me, and which I owed perhaps to the ending of our quarrel, she passed her tongue lightly over my lips, and tried to part them. To start with, I kept them tightly shut. 'You're being such a naughty boy!' she said.

I should have left that evening without ever seeing her again. I had a presentiment from then on that in a love that is not shared – or in other words, in love, for there are people for whom there is no shared love – all we can taste of happiness is that simulacrum which had been granted me at one of those unique moments when a woman's kindness, or her caprice, or chance, applies to our desires, in a perfect coincidence, the same words and the same actions as if we had truly been loved. The wise thing would have been to contemplate with curiosity, to possess with delight, this small particle of happiness, lacking which I would have died without having suspected what it can be like for hearts less difficult or more favoured; to suppose that it formed part of a vast and enduring happiness that had appeared to me at this point alone; and, so that the following day might not give the lie to this pretence, not to try to demand a further favour following that which had been due only to the artifice of an exceptional moment. I should have left Balbec, have shut myself away in solitude, have remained there in harmony with the dying vibrations of the voice I had been able to turn for a moment into that of love, and of which I would have demanded nothing more than never to address me further; for fear that by some fresh utterance, which from now on could only be different, it might wound by a dissonance the silence of the senses in which, as though thanks to some pedal, the tonality of happiness might have long survived within me.

Calmed by my discussion with Albertine, I began to live more in the company of my mother once again. She liked talking quietly to me about the days when my grandmother had been younger. Afraid that I might be reproaching myself for the sadnesses with which I may have darkened the end of that life, she went gladly back to the years when my early studies had given my grandmother satisfactions that hitherto had always been concealed from me. We spoke again of Combray. My mother told me that there at least I used to read and that in Balbec I should certainly be doing the same, if I was not working. I replied that in order indeed to surround myself with memories of Combray and the pretty painted plates, I would like to reread *The Arabian Nights*. As in the old days at Combray, when she gave me books for my name day, so as to make it a surprise, my mother sent secretly for both Galland's *Arabian Nights* and Mardrus's *Arabian Nights*.[18] But having cast an eye over the two translations, my mother would certainly have wanted me to stick to that by Galland, while being afraid to influence me on account of the respect she had for intellectual freedom, of a fear of intervening clumsily in the life of my mind, and of the feeling that, as a woman, on the one hand she lacked, as she thought, the necessary literary competence, and on the other should not be judging a young man's reading-matter according to what she found shocking. Lighting upon certain of the tales, she had been revolted by the immorality of the subject-matter and the coarseness of the expression. But above all, having conserved as precious relics, not only the brooch, the *en-tout-cas*,[19] the cloak and the volume of Mme de Sévigné, but also her mother's habits of thought and of language, and searching at every opportunity for the opinion the latter might have expressed, my mother was in no doubt that my grandmother would have pronounced sentence on Mardrus's book. She recalled that at Combray, when, before setting off on the Méséglise walk, I had been reading Augustin Thierry,[20] my grandmother, happy with my reading, and with my walks, was indignant all the same to find the man whose name had remained attached to the hemistich 'Then Mérovée reigned' being referred to as Merowig, and refused to say Carolingians for the Carlovingians to whom she had remained faithful. In the end I had told her what my grandmother had thought about the Greek names that Bloch, following Leconte de Lisle,[21] had given to the Homeric gods, even going so far, in the case of the simplest things, to take it as a religious duty, in which he thought literary talent consisted, to adopt the Greek spelling. Having to say for example in a letter that the wine they drank at home was true nectar, he wrote true nektar, with a *k*, which enabled him to snigger at the name Lamartine.[22] Now, if an *Odyssey* from which the names of Ulysses and Minerva were missing was for her no longer the *Odyssey*, what would she have said on seeing the title of her *Arabian Nights* deformed on the cover itself, and on no longer finding, exactly transcribed as she had always been accustomed to saying them, the immortally familiar names of Scheherezade or Dinarzarde, or where the charming Caliph and the influential Djinns were barely recognizable, having been debaptized, if I dare apply that term in the case of Muslim tales, as, in the one instance, the 'Kalifat' and, in the other, the 'Gennis'? Meanwhile, my mother handed me the two books and I told her I would read them on those days when I was too tired to go out for a walk.

Those days were not very frequent as it happens. We went to have tea as a 'gang' as in the old days, Albertine, her girl-friends and I, on the cliffs or at the Marie-Antoinette farm. But there were times when Albertine gave me this great pleasure. She would say: 'Today I want to be alone with you for a bit, it would be nicer if just the two of us met.' Then she would say she had things to do, that in any case she did not have to account to anyone, and so that the others, if they went off for a walk and for tea without us, would not be able to find us, we used to go off like two lovers all on our own to Bagatelle or La Croix d'Heulan, while the gang, who would never have thought of looking for us there and never went there, remained indefinitely, in the hope of seeing us arrive, at Marie-Antoinette. I remember the warm weather we were then having, when a drop of sweat would fall vertically, regularly, intermittently, from the brow of the farmboys working in the sun, like the drip from a cistern, alternating with the fall of the ripe fruit coming away from the tree in the neighbouring 'close'; they have remained, still today, together with this mystery of a woman concealed, the most constant element in any love that is offered to me. I will break all my week's engagements to get to know a woman I have been told about but to whom I would not give a moment's thought, if it is a week when the weather is of this kind, and if I am to meet her at some isolated farmhouse. For all my knowing that weather and an assignation of this sort are not from her, they are the bait, familiar to me though it is, that I allow myself to take and which is enough to hook me. I know that in cold weather, in a town, I might have desired this woman, but without the accompaniment of any romantic feelings, without falling in love; the love is no less strong once, the circumstances being what they are, it has enslaved me, it is simply more melancholy, as our feelings for people become in life the more we perceive the increasingly small part they are playing and that the new love, which we would wish to be so enduring, and to be cut short at the same time as our life itself, will be the last.

There were few people in Balbec as yet, few girls. Sometimes I would see one or other of them stopped on the beach, without attractions yet whom many coincidences seemed to certify was the same one as I had been in despair at not being able to go up to just as she was coming out with her friends from the riding-school or the gymnastics class. If it was the same one (and I was careful not to mention her to Albertine), the girl I had thought intoxicating did not exist. But I was unable to attain any certainty for the faces of these girls did not occupy a fixed magnitude on the beach, did not present any permanent form, contracted, dilated, transformed as they were by my own expectations, by my anxious longing, or a feeling of well-being that was sufficient unto itself, by the different outfits that they wore, by the pace they were walking at or by their immobility. From close to, however, I found two or three of them adorable. Each time I saw one of these, I longed to take her down the avenue des Tamaris, or into the dunes, or better still along the cliffs. But although into desire, as opposed to indifference, there already enters the boldness that is after all a first step, if a unilateral one, towards realization, between my desire and the action that would be my asking to kiss her, there lay the whole indefinite 'blank' of hesitation and timidity. So then I would go into the *pâtissier-limonadier* and drink seven or eight glasses of port one after the other. Instantly, in place of that unbridgeable gap between my desire and the action, the effect of the alcohol drew a line that conjoined both. No further room for hesitation or fear. I fancied that the girl would come flying to me. I went up to her, and these words came from my lips of their own accord: 'I would like to go for a walk with you. Wouldn't you like us to go along the cliffs, you're not disturbed by anyone behind the little wood which shields the portable house that's currently unlived-in from the wind?' All life's difficulties had been smoothed away, there was no longer anything to impede the intertwining of our two bodies. No more impediments where I was concerned at least. For they had not evaporated for the girl, who had not been drinking port. Had she done so, and had the universe lost a certain reality in her eyes, the long-cherished dream that might then have suddenly appeared realizable to her would by no means perhaps have been that of falling into my arms.

Not only were the girls few in number but at that time of year, which was not yet the 'season', they stayed only briefly. I remember one with the russet complexion of a Coleus flower, with green eyes and two russet cheeks, whose thin, reversible face resembled the winged seeds of certain trees. I do not know what breeze brought her to Balbec, nor what other breeze bore her away again. So abrupt was it that for several days I felt an unhappiness which I ventured to confess to Albertine, once I realized that she had gone for ever.

It has to be said that several of them were either girls I did not know at all, or ones whom I had not seen in years. Often, before meeting them, I would write to them. What joy if their reply led me to believe in a possible love affair! At the outset of a friendship with a woman, even if it is not subsequently to be realized, we cannot be parted from the first letters we have received. We want to have them always beside us, like so many beautiful flowers we have been sent, still fresh, and which we break off from gazing at only in order to breathe them in from closer to. The phrase that we know by heart is pleasant to reread, and, with those that we have learned less literally, we want to verify the degree of affection in a certain expression. Did she write: 'Your dear letter'? A small disappointment in the sweetness we are breathing in, to be attributed either to our having read too fast or to our correspondent's illegible handwriting; she has not put 'and your dear letter', but 'on seeing your letter'. But the rest is so affectionate. May more such flowers come tomorrow! Then that is no longer enough, her looks, her voice, must be set next to the written words. We arrange a rendezvous and – without her having changed perhaps – where we had thought, from the given description or our own personal memory, we would be meeting the fairy Viviane we find Puss in Boots.[23] We fix a rendezvous for the next day nevertheless, for it is after all *her*, and what we desired was her. But these desires for a woman of whom we have dreamed do not make the beauty of any precise feature absolutely necessary. These desires are simply the desire for some being or other; vague as fragrances,[24] as Styrax was the desire of Prothyraia, saffron the ethereal desire, spices the desire of Hera, myrrh the fragrance of the clouds, manna the desire of Nike, incense the fragrance of the sea. But the fragrances of which the Orphic Hymns sing are far fewer in number than the divinities that they cherish. Myrrh is the fragrance of the clouds but also of Protogonos, of Neptune, of Nereus and of Leto; incense is the fragrance of the sea, but also of the beautiful Dike, of Themis, of Circe, of the Nine Muses, of Eos, of Mnemosyne, of the Day, of Dikaiosyne. As for styrax, manna and spices, there could be no telling all the divinities whom they inspire, so numerous are they. Amphietes has all the fragrances save incense, and Gaia rejects solely beans and spices. So also with the desires I felt for girls. Fewer in number than they were, they turned into disappointments and unhappinesses one of which was much like another. Myrrh I have never wanted. I reserved that for Jupien and for the Princesse de Guermantes, since it is the desire of Protogonos 'of the two sexes, having the bellow of the bull, of the countless, memorable, indescribable orgies, descending, joyfully, to the sacrifices of the Orgiophants'.

But soon the season was in full swing; every day saw new arrivals and for the suddenly increasing frequency of my walks, replacing the delightful reading of the *Arabian Nights*, there was a reason devoid of pleasure, which poisoned every one of them. The beach was now populated by girls, and the idea put into my head by Cottard having, not furnished me with fresh suspicions, but made me sensitive and vulnerable on that score and careful not to allow any to form within me, as soon as a young woman arrived in Balbec, I felt uneasy and proposed the most distant excursions to Albertine, so that she might not make the acquaintance of or even, if it were possible, set eyes on, the new arrival. I was naturally more fearful still of those whose dubious ways had been observed or whose bad reputation was known; I attempted to persuade my loved one that this bad reputation was without foundation, was a slander, perhaps, without admitting it to myself, out of an as yet unconscious fear that she might try to strike up a friendship with the depraved woman in question, or regret not being able to seek her out on my account, or think, given the number of examples, that so widespread a vice was not to be condemned. By denying it in each instance of guilt, I came close to claiming that sapphism does not exist. Albertine adopted my own incredulity in respect of this or that woman's vice: 'No, I think it's just a manner she's trying to put on, it's to give herself style.' But then I would almost regret having pleaded their innocence, for it displeased me that Albertine, formerly so severe, might think that this 'manner' was something sufficiently flattering, and sufficiently advantageous, for a woman exempt from such tastes to have sought to make it appear that she had them. I would have wished for no more women to come to Balbec; I trembled at the thought that since this was more or less the time when Mme Putbus was due to arrive at the Verdurins', her lady's-maid, whose preferences Saint-Loup had not concealed from me, might make an excursion as far as the beach, and, if it was on a day when I was not at Albertine's side, might try to corrupt her. I found myself wondering, since Cottard had made no secret of the fact that the Verdurins were very attached to me, and while not wishing, as he put it, to appear to be pursuing me, would have given much to receive a visit, whether I

might not, by dint of promising to bring to them in Paris every known Guermantes, persuade Mme Verdurin, on some pretext or other, to warn Mme Putbus that it was impossible that they should keep her in the house and make her leave again as quickly as possible.

In spite of these thoughts, and since it was above all the presence of Andrée that had been worrying me, the assuagement procured by Albertine's words persisted for some little while longer. I knew, moreover, that soon I would have less need of it, Andrée being due to leave with Rosemonde and Gisèle at almost the same time as everyone would be arriving, having only a few weeks more in the company of Albertine. During which weeks, moreover, Albertine seemed to plan everything she did and everything she said with a view to destroying my suspicions, should any remain, or stopping them from reviving. She saw to it that she was never left alone with Andrée and insisted, when we returned home, that I should go with her all the way to her door, so that I might come and fetch her from there when we were due to go out. Andrée meanwhile, for her part, took equal pains and seemed to avoid seeing Albertine. And this apparent pact between them was not the only indication that Albertine must have informed her friend of our conversation and asked her to be good enough to lay my absurd suspicions to rest.

Around this time, there occurred a scandal at the Grand-Hôtel de Balbec which was not calculated to alter the course of my torments. Bloch's sister had for some little time had a secret relationship with a former actress that soon was no longer enough for them. To be seen seemed to them to add perversity to their pleasure, and they wanted to expose their perilous frolickings to the public gaze. It began with caresses, that might after all be put down to an intimate friendship, in the cardroom, around the baccarat table. Then they grew bolder. Finally, one evening, in a not even unlit corner of the great ballroom, on a sofa, they no more stood on ceremony than if they had been in their bed. Two officers who were close by with their wives complained to the manager. It was thought for a moment or two that their protest might have some effect. But against them was the fact that, having come to Balbec for the evening from Netteholme, where they were staying, they could be of no possible usefulness to the manager. Whereas, without her even knowing it, and whatever observations the manager may have made to her, there hovered over Mlle Bloch the protection of M. Nissim Bernard. I need to say why. M. Nissim Bernard practised the family virtues in the very highest degree. Each year he rented in Balbec a magnificent villa for his nephew, and no invitation could have deflected him from going back to dine at his, which was in reality their, house. He never ate lunch at home, however. Each day, at noon, he was at the Grand-Hôtel. For the fact was that, just as other men keep a young dancer, he kept a 'commis', rather like the *chasseurs* mentioned earlier, who put one in mind of the young Israelites in *Esther* and *Athalie*. Truth to tell, the forty years that separated M. Nissim Bernard from the young commis ought to have preserved the latter from a disagreeable contact. But as Racine puts it so very sagaciously in those same choruses:[25]

Mon Dieu, qu 'une vertu naissante
Parmi tant de périls marche à pas incertains!
Qu 'une âme qui te cherche et veut être innocente
Trouve d'obstacle à ses desseins![26]

For all that the young commis had been 'raised far from the world', in the Temple Palace of Balbec, he had not followed the advice of Joad:

Sur la richesse et l'or ne mets point ton appui.[27]

He had resigned himself perhaps by saying: 'The sinners cover the earth.' Whatever the truth of the matter, and although M. Nissim Bernard could not have been hoping for so brief a delay, from the very first day,

Et soit frayeur encor ou pour le caresser,
De ses bras innocents il se sentit presser.[28]

From the second day, M. Nissim Bernard was taking the commis out, and 'the contagion of this contact had marred his innocence'. From then on, the young boy's life had changed. For all that he carried the bread and the salt, as ordered by his *chef de rang*, his whole face sang out:

De fleurs en fleurs, de plaisirs en plaisirs
Promenons nos désirs.
De nos ans passagers le nombre est incertain.
Hâtons-nous aujourd'hui de jouir de la vie!
L'honneur et les emplois
Sont le prix d'une aveugle et douce obéissance,
Pour la triste innocence
Qui viendrait élever la voix.[29]

From that day forward, M. Nissim Bernard had never failed to come and occupy his seat at lunch (as someone who is keeping a ballet dancer would have done his seat in the stalls, a ballet dancer in this case of a strongly characterized kind that still awaits its Degas).[30] It was M. Nissim Bernard's pleasure to follow, in the dining-room and off into the distant vistas where the cashier sat enthroned beneath her palm tree, the manoeuvrings of this adolescent, assiduous in his attendance on one and all, though less so with M. Nissim Bernard since the latter had been keeping him, either because the young choirboy did not think it necessary to evince the same friendliness towards someone by whom he thought himself sufficiently loved, or because this love irritated him, or because he was afraid that, once discovered, it might make him miss other opportunities. But this coldness in fact pleased M. Nissim Bernard by all that it concealed. Whether out of an atavistic Hebraism, or a profanation of Christian sentiment, he took a singular pleasure in the Racinian ceremonial, whether Jewish or Catholic. Had it been a real performance of *Esther* or *Athalie*, M. Bernard would have regretted that the difference of centuries would not have allowed him to get to know the author, Jean Racine, in order to obtain a more prominent role for his protégé. But the ceremony of lunch not emanating from any writer, he contented himself with being on good terms with the manager and with Aimé, so that the 'young Israelite' might be promoted to the hoped-for role of either second-in-command or even *chef de rang*. He had been offered that of *sommelier*. But M. Bernard forced him to refuse for he would no longer have been able to come every day and see him running around the green dining-room and be served by him like a stranger. And so strong was this pleasure that M. Bernard came back to Balbec year after year and ate his lunch away from home, habits in which M. Bloch saw, in the first, a poetic liking for the beautiful light, the sunsets along this coast that he preferred to any other; and in the second, the inveterate idiosyncrasy of an old bachelor.

Truth to tell, this error on the part of M. Nissim Bernard's relations, who did not suspect the real reason for his annual return to Balbec, and for what the pedantic Mme Bloch called his 'culinary nights away', this error was a deeper truth, to the second degree. For M. Nissim Bernard was himself unaware of the extent to which his love of the beach at Balbec, and of the view you got over the sea from the restaurant, and his obsessive habits entered into his liking for keeping, like a ballet dancer of another sort as yet lacking its Degas, one of the male servants who were still as yet girls. And so M. Nissim Bernard maintained excellent relations with the manager of the theatre that was the Balbec hotel, and with Aimé, its director and stage manager – whose role in this whole affair was not of the most pellucid. One day they would scheme to obtain a leading role, a position as *maître d'hôtel* perhaps. Meanwhile, M. Nissim Bernard's pleasure, however poetical and calmly contemplative it might be, had something of the character of those ladies' men – Swann in the old days, for example – who always know that by going into society they will meet with their mistress. Hardly would M. Nissim Bernard be seated before he saw the object of his desires advancing on to the stage bearing in his hand fruit or cigars on a tray. And so each morning, having kissed his niece, fretted over my friend Bloch's labours and fed lumps of

sugar to his horses from his outstretched palm, he made feverish haste to arrive at the Grand-Hôtel in time for lunch. Had the house caught fire, or had his niece had a stroke, he would no doubt have left just the same. Thus he feared like the plague a cold that might keep him in bed – for he was a hypochondriac – and necessitate having Aimé asked to send his young friend round to him before tea-time.

Moreover, he loved that whole labyrinth of corridors, secret offices, saloons, cloakrooms, larders and galleries that was the Balbec hotel. He had the atavistic love of an Oriental for harems, and when he left in the evenings, he was to be seen furtively exploring its byways.

Whereas, venturing all the way down into the basements, and trying in spite of everything not to be seen and to avoid scandal, M. Nissim Bernard put you in mind, in his quest for young Levites, of these lines from *La Juive*:[31]

> *O Dieu de nos pères,*
> *Parmi nous descends,*
> *Cache nos mystères*
> *A l'oeil des méchants!*[32]

I, on the contrary, was going up to the room of two sisters who had accompanied an old foreign lady to Balbec, as ladies'-maids. They were two what in hotel parlance are known as *courrières*, or guests' servants, and in that of Françoise, who imagined that a *courrier* or *courrière* is there to run *courses* or errands, two *coursières* or 'coursers'. Hotels, for their part, have remained, more nobly, in the days when they used to sing: '*C'est un courrier de cabinet*.'[33]

In spite of the difficulty there was for a guest to go into the *courrières*' rooms, and vice versa, I had very soon struck up a very lively though very pure friendship with these two young people, Mlle Marie Gineste and Mme Céleste Albaret.[34] Born at the foot of the high mountains in the centre of France, on the banks of streams and torrents (the water even passed underneath their family home, where a mill-wheel turned, and which had several times been devastated by flooding), they seemed to have preserved their character. Marie Gineste was more uniformly quick and staccato, Céleste Albaret softer and more languid, slack like the waters of a lake, but with recurring fits of a terrible turbulence when her fury recalled the dangers of those spates and whirlpools that carry everything away and lay everywhere waste. They often used to come and visit me in the mornings, when I was still in bed. I have never known people so wilfully ignorant, who had learned absolutely nothing at school, yet whose language had something so literary about it that, had it not been for the almost primitive nature of their accent, you would have thought their words affected. With a familiarity on which I am not embroidering, and despite the praises (which are here in order to celebrate, not myself but the strange genius of Céleste) and the criticisms, both equally false, but perfectly sincere, which such remarks appear to imply in my regard, as I was dipping croissants in my milk, Céleste would say to me: 'Oh, little black devil with hair like a jay, oh what deep mischief! I don't know what your mother was thinking of when she made you, because you're just like a bird. Look, Marie, wouldn't you say he's smoothing down his feathers, and turning his neck so supply? He looks so light, you'd think he was busy learning to fly. Oh, you're lucky that the ones who created you had you born into the ranks of the rich; what'd have become of you, wasteful as you are? Look, he's throwing away his croissant because it touched the bed. Oh no, look how he's spilling his milk, wait till I put a napkin on you because you wouldn't know how to go about it, I've never seen anyone so silly and so clumsy as you.' And then you heard the more regular torrent-sound of Marie Gineste, who was furious and took her sister to task: 'Come, Céleste, will you be quiet? Are you crazy talking to Monsieur in that way?' All Céleste did was to smile; and since I hated having a napkin tied on: 'No, I'm not, Marie, look at him, whoosh! he's sitting straight up now like a snake. A real snake, I tell you.' She did not stint, indeed, on these zoological comparisons, for according to her one never knew when I was asleep, I fluttered about all night long like a moth, and during the day I was as quick as the squirrels, 'you know, Marie, like you see at home, so agile you can't follow them even with your eyes. – But, Céleste, you know he doesn't like having a napkin on when he's eating. – It's not that he doesn't like it, it's to tell you there's no changing what he's made up his mind to. He's a lord and master and wants to show he's a lord and master. You can change the sheets ten times a day if you have to, but he won't have given in. Yesterday's lasted the course, but today they've only just been put on and already they'll have to be changed. Oh, I was right to say he wasn't made to be born amongst the poor. Look, his hair's standing up, it's puffing up with anger like the feathers on a bird. Poor little dickybird!' At this Marie was not alone in protesting, I did so, too, for I did not at all feel myself to be a lord and master. But Céleste never believed that my modesty was genuine and, cutting me short: 'Oh, bag of tricks, oh, sweet, yes, and treacherous, of all the cunning, lowdown…! Oh Molière!' (This was the only writer's name that she knew, but she applied it to me, meaning by it someone who would be capable simultaneously of composing plays and performing in them.) 'Céleste!' cried Marie imperiously who, not knowing the name of Molière, was afraid it might be some further insult. Céleste went back to smiling: 'Haven't you seen the photograph in his drawer then of when he was a child? He wanted to make us believe they always dressed him very simply. And there, with his little cane, he's nothing but fur and lace, like no prince ever had. But that's nothing compared with his immense majesty and his even more profound goodness. – So now you're rummaging in his drawers,' scolded Marie the mountain torrent. To allay Marie's fears, I asked her what she thought about what M. Nissim Bernard had been doing. 'Oh, Monsieur, those are things I couldn't have believed they existed; I needed to come here', and, for once outdoing Céleste with a more profound observation: 'But there you are, Monsieur, you can never know what there may be in a life.' To change the subject, I talked to her about my father's life, who used to work day and night. 'Oh, Monsieur, those are lives where people keep nothing for themselves, not a single minute, not a single pleasure; everything, everything entirely is a sacrifice for others, those are *given* lives… Look, Céleste, just to put his hand on the coverlet to pick up his croissant, such refinement! He can do the most insignificant things, you'd think the whole nobility of France, all the way to the Pyrenees, was changing its position in every one of his movements.'

Crushed by this far from truthful portrait, I was silent; Céleste saw this as one more stratagem: 'Oh, brow that looks so pure yet hides so many things, cool and friendly cheeks like the inside of an almond, little satin hands all plush, nails like claws, and so on. I say, Marie, look at him drinking his milk so composedly it makes me want to say my prayers. How serious he looks! Now's when they should make his portrait right enough. He's the complete child. Is it drinking milk like them that's kept you their clear complexion? Oh, youth, oh, what pretty skin! You'll never grow old. You're lucky, you'll never have to raise your hand against anyone because you've got eyes that know how to impose their will. And look there, now he's angry. He's standing up, straight as what there's no denying.'

Françoise did not at all like the women she called the two wheedlers coming to engage me in conversation like this. The manager, whose staff he made keep watch on everything that was going on, even pointed solemnly out to me that it was undignified for a guest to talk to the *courrières*. But I, who found the 'wheedlers' superior to all the female guests in the hotel, merely laughed in his face, convinced that he would not understand my explanations. And the two sisters returned. 'Look, Marie, at those delicate features. Oh perfect miniature, finer than the most precious miniature you'd see in a glass case, for he's got the movements, and words to make you listen to him for days and nights on end.'

It was a wonder that a foreign lady had been able to bring them, for, without knowing any history or geography, they confidently detested the English, the Germans, the Russians, the Italians, those foreign 'vermin', and liked, with some exceptions, only the French. Their faces had preserved the moisture of the malleable clay of their rivers to such an extent that, as soon as mention was made of a foreigner staying in the hotel, in order to repeat what he had said, Céleste and Marie applied his face to their faces, their mouths became his mouth, their eyes his eyes, and you would have wanted to preserve these admirable stage masks. Céleste even, while pretending merely to be repeating what the manager had said, or one or other of my friends, would, without appearing to, insert fictitious remarks into her brief narrative, in which were mischievously depicted all the defects of Bloch, or the First President, and the like. In the form of an account of a simple errand that she had obligingly carried out, you got an inimitable portrait. They never read anything, not even a newspaper. One day, however, they found a book on my bed. It was some admirable but obscure poems by Saint-Léger Léger.[35] Céleste read a few pages and said to me: 'But are you quite sure they're poetry, aren't they more like riddles?' Obviously, for someone who had learned only one poem in her childhood, '*Ici-bas tous les lilas meurent*',[36] there was

a lack of transition. I think that their obstinate refusal to learn had something to do with their unhealthy native region. Yet they were as well endowed as a poet, with more modesty than these generally possess. For if Céleste had said something remarkable and, unable to remember it properly, I asked her to remind me of it, she assured me she had forgotten. They will never read books, but nor will they ever write any.

Françoise was quite impressed on learning that the two brothers of these very simple women had married, one of them the niece of the Archbishop of Tours, the other a relation of the Bishop of Rodez. To the manager, this would have conveyed nothing. Céleste sometimes reproached her husband for not understanding her, and I was astonished for my part that he was able to put up with her. For there were certain moments when, quivering, furious, all-destroying, she was hateful. They claim that the saline liquid which is our blood is only what survives within us of our original element, the sea. In the same way, I believe that Céleste, not only in her rages but also in her moments of depression, had preserved the rhythm of her native streams. When she was exhausted, it was after their fashion; she had truly run dry. Nothing then could have brought her back to life. Then all of a sudden the circulation would resume in her tall, slight, magnificent body. The water flowed in the opaline transparency of her blueish skin. It smiled in the sunlight and became bluer still. At such moments she was truly celestial.

For all that Bloch's family had never suspected the reason why his uncle never lunched at home, but had accepted it from the outset as an old bachelor's idiosyncrasy, required of him perhaps by a liaison with some actress, everything that concerned M. Nissim Bernard was 'taboo' for the manager of the Balbec hotel. And this was why, without even having referred the matter to the uncle, he had not dared in the end to find fault with the niece, while advising her to a certain circumspection. So the girl and her friend, who for several days had imagined that they would be banned from the casino and the Grand-Hôtel, finding that everything had been arranged, were happy to demonstrate to the paterfamiliases who had shunned them that they could do whatever they liked with impunity. Not that they went so far of course as to repeat the public exhibition that had revolted everyone. But gradually and imperceptibly they resumed their old ways. And one evening as I was leaving the casino more dead than alive with Albertine, and Bloch, whom we had met, they came past, intertwined, kissing without stopping, and, having drawn level with us, gave vent to giggles, laughter and indecent shouts. Bloch looked down so as to appear not to have recognized his sister, while I was in torments at the thought that this private and atrocious language was perhaps directed at Albertine.

Another incident fixed my preoccupations even more firmly in the direction of Gomorrah. On the beach I had seen a beautiful young woman, slender and pale, whose eyes disposed, around their centres, rays so geometrically luminous that, faced by her gaze, you thought of a constellation. I reflected on how much more beautiful this girl was than Albertine and how it would be more sensible to give the other up. At the very most, this beautiful young woman's face had been subjected to an invisible planing by a life of great degradation, of the constant acceptance of coarse expedients, so that her eyes, though nobler than the rest of her face, had to radiate only appetite and lust. But the next day, this young woman being sat some distance from us in the casino, I could see that she never stopped letting the alternating and revolving light from her glances rest on Albertine. You would have said she was signalling to her, as if with the aid of a lighthouse. I was suffering lest my loved one saw that she was the object of so much attention, and afraid that these endlessly kindled glances might carry the conventional meaning of a lovers' assignation for the following day. Who knows? that assignation might not perhaps be the first. The young woman with the radiant eyes might have come to Balbec another year. It was perhaps because Albertine had already yielded to her desires or to those of a friend that the latter felt free to address these dazzling signals to her. They were doing more then than demand something for the present, their authority for that had come from good times in the past.

In that case, the assignation would not be the first but a continuation of games played together in other years. And indeed, the glances were not saying 'Will you?' The moment the young woman had caught sight of Albertine, she had turned her head all the way round and shone glances at her laden with memories, as though she were afraid and astounded that my loved one should not remember. Albertine, who could see her very clearly, remained phlegmatically without moving, with the result that the other, with the same sort of tact as a man who sees his former mistress with another lover, stopped looking at her or taking any more notice of her than if she had not existed.

But a few days later I received proof of this young woman's proclivities and also of the probability that she had known Albertine in the old days. Often, when, in the hall of the casino, two girls felt desire for one another, there was produced something like a phenomenon of light, a sort of trail of phosphorescence leading from one to the other. Let me say in passing that it is with the aid of such materializations, imponderable though they be, by these astral signs setting fire to a whole portion of the atmosphere, that, in every town and every village, that Gomorrah, having been scattered, tends to reunite its separated members, to reconstitute the biblical city, while everywhere the same efforts are being pursued, if only with a view to an intermittent rebuilding, by the nostalgic, the hypocritical and sometimes by the courageous exiles from Sodom.

On one occasion I saw the unknown woman whom Albertine had appeared not to recognize, just as Bloch's cousin was passing. Stars came into the young woman's eyes, but it was easy to tell that she did not know the young Israelite damsel. She was seeing her for the first time, had felt desire, little doubt about that, but not at all the same certainty as in respect of Albertine, Albertine on whose camaraderie she must have so much been counting that, faced by her indifference, she had experienced the surprise of a stranger familiar with Paris but who does not live there and who, having returned to spend a few weeks, finds that a bank has gone up on the site of the little theatre where he had been in the habit of spending happy evenings.

Bloch's cousin went and sat at a table, where she looked at a magazine. Soon the young woman came and sat down beside her wearing an absent air. But beneath the table you would soon have been able to see their feet becoming agitated and then their legs and hands, which were merged. Words followed, a conversation got under way, and the young woman's innocent husband, who had been looking for her everywhere, was astonished to find her making plans for that same evening with a girl he did not know. His wife introduced Bloch's cousin to him as a childhood friend, under some unintelligible name, for she had forgotten to ask her what her name was. But the presence of the husband advanced their intimacy by a step, for they addressed one another as *tu*, having met at the convent, an incident at which they laughed heartily later on, as well as at the deluded husband, with a merriment that was an opportunity for further intimacies.

As for Albertine, I cannot say that anywhere, in the casino or on the beach, her manner towards another girl was too free. I found it in fact excessively distant and insignificant, seeming more like a stratagem intended to deflect suspicion than the effect of a good upbringing. She had a quick, icy, proper way of answering this girl or that in a very loud voice: 'Yes, I'll be going to play tennis around five. I shall have my bathe tomorrow morning around eight,' and at once leaving the person to whom she had just said this, which looked horribly like an attempt to mislead, and either to be arranging a rendezvous, or rather, having arranged one sotto voce, to be saying these, in effect insignificant, words loudly so as not to 'draw attention to herself'. And when next I saw her fetch her bicycle and ride off at top speed, I could not help thinking that she was on her way to join the girl to whom she had barely spoken.

At most, whenever some beautiful young woman got out of a motor-car at the corner of the beach, Albertine could not help looking round. And she would immediately justify herself: 'I was looking at the new flag they've put up in front of the baths. They might have spent a bit more. The other one was pretty moth-eaten. But I really think this one's even shabbier.'

On one occasion, Albertine was not content to remain indifferent, and I was all the more unhappy. She knew it bothered me that she might sometimes meet a friend of her aunt's, who 'had a certain reputation' and sometimes came to spend two or three days with Mme Bontemps. Albertine had been kind enough to tell me she would not acknowledge her. And when this woman came to Incarville, Albertine said: 'By the way, you know she's here. Did anyone tell you?' as if to demonstrate she was not seeing her on the sly. One day as she was saying this, she added: 'Yes, I met her on the beach and on purpose, out of rudeness, I practically brushed against her as I passed, I jostled her.' As Albertine said this there came back into my head some words of Mme Bontemps to which I had never given a second thought, when she had said to Mme Swann in my presence how impudent her niece Albertine was, as if this were a virtue, and how she had told some functionary or other's wife that the latter's father had been a kitchen boy. But a remark made by the woman we love does not preserve its purity for long; it spoils, it goes off. One or two evenings later, Albertine's words came back to me and what they seemed to signify was no longer the bad upbringing that

was a source of pride to her – and which could but make me smile – but something else, and that Albertine, perhaps even without any precise object, in order to excite the woman's senses or to remind her mischievously of earlier propositions, accepted perhaps in the old days, had brushed quickly against her, had thought that I had perhaps found out about it, since it had been done in public, and had wanted to forestall an unfavourable interpretation.

But the jealousy caused in me by the women whom Albertine had perhaps loved was in any case about abruptly to cease.

We were, Albertine and I, in front of the Balbec station on the little local railway. We had had ourselves driven there by the hotel omnibus, on account of the weather. Not far away from us was M. Nissim Bernard, who had a black eye. He had recently been unfaithful to the choirboy from *Athalie* with the boy from quite a thriving farm in the vicinity, 'Aux Cerisiers'. This red-faced boy, with his blunt features, seemed absolutely to have a tomato for a head. An exactly similar tomato served his twin brother for a head. For the disinterested onlooker, what is rather beautiful about these perfect resemblances between two twins is that nature, as if it had been momentarily industrialized, seems to be turning out similar products. M. Nissim Bernard, alas, saw things from a different point of view, and the resemblance was purely external. Tomato No. 2 found frenetic enjoyment in giving delight exclusively to the ladies, tomato No. i was nothing loth to condescend to the tastes of certain gentlemen. Now each time M. Bernard, shaken, as if by a reflex, by the memory of good times spent with tomato No. 1, presented himself at 'Aux Cerisiers', the short-sighted (and short-sightedness was not essential in order to get them confused) old Israelite, unwittingly playing the role of Amphitryon,[37] would address the twin brother and say to him: 'Will you meet me this evening?' He at once received a good 'hiding'. This might even be repeated in the course of the same meal, when he pursued with the one topics started on with the other. Eventually, by an association of ideas, he grew so to dislike tomatoes, even the edible kind, that every time he heard a traveller ordering them next to him at the Grand-Hôtel, he would whisper: 'Forgive me for addressing you without having been introduced, Monsieur. But I heard you ordering tomatoes. They're off today. I tell you this for your own good as it's all one to me, I never eat them.' The stranger would thank this disinterested and philanthropic neighbour effusively, call the waiter back and pretend to be changing his mind: 'No, definitely, no tomatoes.' Aimé, for whom this was a familiar scene, would laugh to himself and think: 'He's a sly old fox, M. Bernard, he's found a way of getting the order changed again.' M. Bernard, as he waited for the tram, which was late, was not keen to greet Albertine and me, on account of his black eye. We were even less keen to speak to him. It would have been almost inevitable, however, if, at that moment, a bicycle had not borne down on us at high speed; from it jumped the 'lift', out of breath. Mme Verdurin had telephoned shortly after our departure to get me to go to dinner in two days' time; it will soon be seen why. Then, having given me the details of this telephone-call, the 'lift' left us and, like those democratic 'employees' who affect independence vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, and re-establish the principle of authority among themselves, meaning that the hall-porter and the coachman might be displeased were he to be late, he added: 'I'm off on account of my chiefs.'

Albertine's friends had gone off for some time. I wanted to amuse her. Even supposing that she might have derived some happiness from spending the afternoons alone with me, in Balbec, I knew that it never allows itself to be possessed totally and that Albertine, still at that age (which some never pass beyond) when we have yet to discover that this imperfection depends on the one who is experiencing the happiness, not on the one who is giving it, might have been tempted to trace the cause of her disappointment back to me. I preferred that she should impute it to circumstances which, having been arranged by me, would leave no opportunity for our being alone together, while preventing her from remaining in the casino or on the esplanade without me. And so on the day in question I had asked her to go with me to Doncières, where I would be going to visit Saint-Loup. In this same intention of keeping her occupied, I advised painting, which she had learned in the old days. While working, she would not be asking herself whether she was happy or unhappy. I would gladly also have taken her to dine now and again at the Verdurins' or the Cambremers', who would certainly, both of them, have gladly entertained a friend introduced by me, but I first had to be sure that Mme Putbus was not yet at La Raspelière. It was really only on the spot that I could find out, and I knew in advance that in two days' time Albertine would be obliged to go off round about with her aunt, I had taken advantage of this to send a telegram to Mme Verdurin asking whether she could receive me on Wednesday. If Mme Putbus was there, I would contrive to meet her lady's-maid, ascertain whether there was a risk of her coming to Balbec, and in that case find out when, so as to take Albertine well away on the day in question. The little local railway, making a loop that had not existed when I took it with my grandmother, now went through Doncières-la-Goupil, a large station from which important trains left, notably the express by which I had come to visit Saint-Loup from Paris, and had then returned by. Because of the bad weather, the omnibus from the Grand-Hôtel took us, Albertine and me, to the station for the little tram, Balbec-Plage.

The little train was not yet there, but you could see the slow, lazy plume of smoke that it had left behind along the way, and which now, reduced to its own resources as a not very mobile cloud, was slowly climbing the green slopes of the Criquetot cliffs. At last, the little tram, which it had preceded only to then take a vertical direction, arrived in its turn, slowly. The passengers who would be catching it stood aside to give it room, but unhurriedly, knowing that they had to deal with a debonair, almost human stroller which, guided, like the bicycle of a learner, by the indulgent signals of the station-master, and under the powerful tutelage of the engine-driver, was in no danger of running anyone down and would have stopped wherever you wanted.

My telegram explained the Verdurins' telephone-call and it was all the more timely in that Wednesday (the next day but one happened to be a Wednesday) was the day on which Mme Verdurin, at La Raspelière as in Paris, gave a big dinner party, which I had not known. Mme Verdurin did not give 'dinners', but she had 'Wednesdays'. Her Wednesdays were a work of art. While knowing that there was nothing to equal them elsewhere, Mme Verdurin introduced fine distinctions between them. 'This last Wednesday wasn't up to the one before, she would say. But I think the next'll be one of the most successful I've ever given.' She sometimes went so far as to confess: 'This Wednesday wasn't worthy of the others. In return, I've got a big surprise for you for the one after that.' In the final weeks of the season in Paris, before leaving for the country, the Patronne would announce that the Wednesdays were ending. It was an opportunity to spur on the faithful: 'There are only three Wednesdays left, there are only two more, she would say, in the same tone of voice as if the world were about to end. You're not going to let me down next Wednesday for the closure.' But this closure was a sham, for she would warn them: 'Now, officially, there are no more Wednesdays. That was the last for this year. But I shall be here all the same on Wednesdays. We'll have Wednesday amongst ourselves; who knows? these little intimate Wednesdays will perhaps be the pleasantest.' At La Raspelière, the Wednesdays were necessarily restricted, and since, according as some friend had been met with when passing through, and had been invited for one evening or another, almost every day was a Wednesday. 'I don't recall exactly the names of the guests, but I know Mme the Marquise de Camembert is one of them,' the 'lift' had said to me; the memory of our discussions relating to the Cambremers had not succeeded in finally supplanting that of the old word, whose familiar syllables, so full of meaning, had come to the aid of the young employee when he was having trouble with this difficult name, and had been instantly preferred and readopted by him, not out of laziness or as an old, ineradicable usage, but because of the need for logic and clarity that they satisfied.

We made haste to find an empty carriage where I would be able to kiss Albertine all through the journey. Not having found one, we got into a compartment where was already installed a lady with an enormous, ugly, old face, and a mannish expression, very overdressed, who was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. For all her vulgarity, she was pretentious in her gestures, and I amused myself by wondering to which social category she might belong; I at once concluded that she must be the manageress of some large brothel, a madam on her travels. Her face and mannerisms proclaimed it. I had simply been unaware up until now that such ladies might read the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Albertine drew my attention to her, not without winking as she smiled at me. The lady wore an extremely dignified air; and as, on my side, I carried within me the knowledge that I had been invited for the next day, at the terminus of the little railway, to the celebrated Mme Verdurin's, that at an intermediate station Robert de Saint-Loup was waiting for me, and that a little further on I would have given Mme de Cambremer great pleasure by going to stay at Féterne, my eyes sparkled with irony as I contemplated this self-important lady, who seemed to think that, what with her studied attire, the feathers in her hat, and her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, she was a more considerable personage than myself. I was hoping that this lady would not remain

much longer than had M. Nissim Bernard, and that she would at least be getting out at Toutainville, but no. The train stopped at Epreville, she remained sitting. Similarly at Montmartin-sur-Mer, at Parville-la-Bingard, at Incarville, so that in despair, once the train had left Saint-Frichoux, which was the last station before Doncières, I began to twine myself around Albertine without concerning myself with this lady. At Doncières, Saint-Loup had come to wait for me at the station, with the greatest difficulty, he told me, for living as he was at his aunt's, my telegram had only just now reached him and, not having been able to organize his time in advance, he could only devote an hour to me. That hour appeared much too long for me, alas, for no sooner had she alighted from the carriage than Albertine's attention was all for Saint-Loup. She would not talk with me, scarcely answered if I addressed her, pushed me away when I approached. With Robert on the other hand, she laughed her temptress's laugh, talked volubly, played with the dog he had brought, and, in teasing the animal, brushed deliberately against its master. I recalled that on the day when Albertine had let herself be kissed by me for the first time, I had had a smile of gratitude for the unknown seducer who had produced so profound a modification in her and so greatly simplified my task. I thought of him now with horror. Robert must have realized that I was not indifferent to Albertine, for he did not respond to her flirting, which put her in a bad mood with me; then he spoke to me as if I were alone, which, once she had noticed it, made me rise again in her esteem. Robert asked me whether I would not like to try and find, among the friends with whom he had made me dine each evening in Doncières when I was staying there, those who were still there. And since he was inclined himself to the kind of irritating pretentiousness that he disapproved of: 'What was the point of "turning on the charm" for them so persistently if you don't want to meet them again?' I turned down his proposal because I did not want to risk being parted from Albertine, but also because I was now detached from them. From them, that is to say, from myself. We desire passionately that there should be another life in which we would be similar to what we are here below. But we do not reflect that, even without waiting for that other life, but in this one, after a few years, we are unfaithful to what we have been, to what we had wanted to remain immortally. Even without supposing that death might modify us more than the changes that occur in the course of a lifetime, if in that other life we were to meet the self that we have been, we would turn away from ourselves as from those people to whom we have been close but whom we have not seen for a long time – those friends of Saint-Loup's, for example, that I was so pleased to find again every evening at the Faisan Doré but whose conversation I would now find simply out of place and an embarrassment. In this respect, and because I preferred not to go and rediscover what had pleased me there, a walk through Doncières might have seemed to me to prefigure my arrival in paradise. We dream a great deal of paradise, or rather of numerous successive paradises, but they are all, long before we die, paradises lost, in which we would feel lost.

He left us at the station. 'But you may have nearly an hour to wait, he said. If you spend it here you'll no doubt meet my uncle Charlus, who's taking the train to Paris again this afternoon, ten minutes before yours. I've already said my goodbyes to him because I'm obliged to be back before the time of his train. I wasn't able to talk to him about you because I hadn't yet had your telegram.' To the reproaches I directed at Albertine once Saint-Loup had left us, she replied that she had wanted, by her coldness towards me, to erase any ideas he might have chanced to get if, just as the train was stopping, he had seen me leaning against her with my arm around her waist. He had indeed remarked this position (I had not noticed him, otherwise I would have been sitting more correctly at Albertine's side) and had had time to say into my ear: 'So, are these the very stuck-up girls you talked about, who wouldn't associate with Mlle de Stermaria because they didn't like the look of her?' I had indeed told Robert, and in all sincerity, when I went from Paris to visit him in Doncières, and as we were talking again about Balbec, that there was nothing to be done with Albertine, that she was virtue itself. And now that I had long since learned for myself that this was not so, I wanted even more for Robert to believe it was true. It would have been enough for me to tell Robert that I loved Albertine. He was one of those people who are able to deny themselves a pleasure in order to spare their friend sufferings they would experience as if they were their own. 'Yes, she's very childish. But you don't know anything about her? I added anxiously. – Nothing, except that I saw you sat there like two lovers.'

'Your attitude erased nothing at all,' I said to Albertine once Saint-Loup had left us. 'It's true, she said, I was clumsy, I've made you suffer, I'm much more unhappy about that than you. You'll see, I'll never be like that again; forgive me,' she said, holding out her hand to me with a sad expression. At that moment, from the back of the waiting-room in which we were sitting, I saw, followed a little way behind by a porter carrying his bags, M. de Charlus go slowly past.

In Paris, where I encountered him only at soirées, motionless, tightly buttoned into his evening dress, maintained in the vertical position by a haughty straightening of his back, the impulse to attract and the rocket flight of his conversation, I had not realized to what extent he had aged. Now, in a light-coloured travelling suit that made him look fatter, waddling as he walked, swinging a belly that was becoming a paunch and an almost symbolic behind, the cruelty of the broad daylight had broken down, into rouge on his lips, into rice powder fixed by cold cream on the tip of his nose, into black on the dyed moustaches whose ebony colour contrasted with his greying hair, everything that in an artificial light would have seemed to be enlivening the complexion of someone still young.

Even as I talked with him, only briefly, because of his train, I was looking at Albertine's carriage so as to signal to her that I was coming. When I turned back towards M. de Charlus, he asked me to be good enough to call over a soldier, a relation of his, who was on the other side of the line exactly as if he were going to get into our train, but in the opposite direction, that leading away from Balbec. 'He's in the regimental band, M. de Charlus said. Since you have the good fortune to be young enough, and I the nuisance of being old enough, for you to be able to spare me crossing all the way over there…' I made it my duty to go towards the soldier indicated and could see, indeed, from the lyres sewn on to his collar, that he was a bandsman. But how great was my surprise, and I may say my pleasure, when, just as I was about to discharge my commission, I recognized Morel, the son of my uncle's valet, who brought back so many memories! I forgot to carry out M. de Charlus's commission. 'What, are you in Doncières? – Yes, and I've been incorporated in the band, in the percussion.' But he answered me in a curt, haughty tone. He had become a real 'poseur' and the sight of me, reminding him as it did of his father's profession, was obviously disagreeable to him. I suddenly saw M. de Charlus bearing down on us. The delay had evidently made him impatient. 'I'd like to hear a bit of music this evening, he said to Morel, without any preamble, I'll give 500 francs for the evening, that might be of some interest to one of your friends, if you have any in the band.' For all that I was familiar with M. de Charlus' insolence, I was amazed that he should not even have greeted his young friend. The Baron left me no time for reflection, in any case. Holding out his hand affectionately: '*Au revoir*, dear boy,' he said, to signify that all that remained was to go. I had in any case left my dear Albertine on her own for quite long enough. 'You know, I said to her, as we got back into the carriage, the life of a resort and the life of travel make me realize that the theatre of the world has fewer sets at its disposal than actors and fewer actors than "situations". – For what reason do you say that? – Because M. de Charlus has just asked me to send one of his friends to him who, at this very instant, on the platform of the station here, I've just recognized as a friend of mine, too.' But even as I said this, I was trying to think how the Baron might have met Morel. The social disproportion, which I had not at first considered, was too vast. My first idea was that it had been through Jupien, whose daughter, it will be remembered, had seemed very taken with the violinist. What had amazed me, however, was that, having to leave for Paris in five minutes, the Baron should have asked to hear some music in Doncières. But seeing Jupien's daughter again in my memory, I was beginning to think that 'recognitions', a lame expedient in works of artifice, might on the contrary express an important element in real life, were we able to attain to the true romance of it, when I had a sudden flash of inspiration and realized I had been very naïve. M. de Charlus had never in his life met Morel, nor Morel M. de Charlus, who, dazzled but also intimidated by a soldier, even by one wearing only lyres, had, in his agitation, commandeered me to bring him someone he had not suspected that I knew. At all events, the offer of five hundred francs must have made up in Morel's case for the absence of any previous connection, for I could see them continuing to talk without reflecting that they were next to our tramcar. And recalling the manner in which M. de Charlus had come towards Morel and me, I seized on the resemblance to certain of his kinsmen when they picked up women in the street. The intended target had simply changed sex. After a certain age, and even if our inner development varies, the more we become ourselves, the more are family characteristics accentuated. For, while maintaining the harmonious design of its tapestry, Nature breaks up the monotony of the composition by the variety in the faces that it inserts. Moreover, the hauteur with which M. de Charlus had looked the violinist up and down is relative, according to the vantage point we adopt. It would have been recognized by three out of four society people, who bowed to him, but not by the chief of police, who, a few years later, was to put him under surveillance.

'The Paris train is signalled, Monsieur,' said the porter who was carrying the bags. 'But I'm not catching the train, put all that in the cloakroom, confound it!' said M. de Charlus, giving the porter twenty francs, who was stupefied by this volte-face but enchanted by the tip. Such generosity at once attracted a flower-seller. 'Buy my carnations, see, this beautiful rose, *mon bon Monsieur*, it'll bring you good luck.' M. de Charlus, growing impatient, handed her forty sous, in exchange for which the woman offered him her blessing and once again her flowers. 'God, if only she'd leave us alone,' said M. de Charlus, addressing himself in an ironic, complaining tone, like a man all on edge, to Morel, in appealing to whom for support he found a certain comfort. 'What we have to say is rather complicated as it is.' Perhaps, the railwayman not yet being too far away, M. de Charlus was not keen to have a large audience, or perhaps these parenthetical words allowed his haughty timidity not to broach the request for a rendezvous too directly. The musician, turning with a frank, imperative and resolute air towards the flower-seller, raised a palm towards her which thrust her away and signified that they did not want any of her flowers and that she should remove herself forthwith. M. de Charlus was in ecstasies at the sight of this virile, authoritative gesture, executed by the graceful hand for which it should as yet have been too heavy, too massively brutal, with a precocious firmness and suppleness that lent this as yet beardless adolescent the air of a young David capable of engaging Goliath in combat. Mixed involuntarily in with the Baron's admiration was the smile that we experience on seeing an expression on the face of a child that is too solemn for its years. 'Here's someone I'd like to be accompanied by on my travels and helped by in my business affairs. How he would simplify my life!' M. de Charlus said to himself.

The Paris train (which the Baron did not take) left. Then Albertine and I got into ours, without my knowing what had become of M. de Charlus and Morel. 'We mustn't ever be angry any more, I ask you to forgive me once again, Albertine repeated, referring to the Saint-Loup incident. We must always both be kind, she said fondly. As for your friend Saint-Loup, if you think he interests me in the very slightest, you're quite wrong. The one thing that attracts me about him is that he seems to be so fond of you. – He's a very good fellow,' I said, carefully avoiding lending Robert any imaginary superior qualities, as I should not have failed to do, out of friendship for him, had I been with anyone other than Albertine. 'He's an excellent person, open, devoted, loyal, whom you can rely on for everything.' In saying this, restrained by my jealousy, I was confining myself to speaking the truth about Saint-Loup, but it was certainly the truth that I spoke. But it had been expressed in exactly the same terms as Mme de Villeparisis had employed in talking to me of him, when I did not as yet know him, imagined him to be very different, very haughty, and used to tell myself: 'People think him kind because he's a great nobleman.' Similarly, when she had said to me, 'He'd be so pleased', I imagined, having caught sight of him in front of the hotel, ready to drive off, that his aunt's words were a mere social commonplace, intended to flatter me. But I had then realized that she had spoken sincerely, thinking of what interested me, of my reading, and because she knew that that was what Saint-Loup liked, just as I was to have occasion to say sincerely to someone who was writing a history of his ancestor, La Rochefoucauld, the author of the *Maxims*,[38] and who would have liked to approach Robert for his advice, 'He'll be so pleased.' The fact was that I had learned to know him. But on meeting him that first time, I had not believed that an intelligence akin to my own could be swathed in so much outward elegance of dress and attitude. From his plumage, I had adjudged him to be from another species. It was Albertine now who, partly perhaps because Saint-Loup, out of kindness for me, had been so distant with her, said what I had once thought: 'Oh, he's as devoted as that! I notice people always discover all the virtues in the people who come from the Faubourg Saint-Germain.' Now, that Saint-Loup was from the Faubourg Saint-Germain was something that had not once crossed my mind during those years when, divesting himself of his prestige, he had displayed his virtues to me. A change of perspective from which to regard people, already more striking in friendship than in any mere social connection, but how much more so still in love, when desire sets the first signs of indifference on so vast a scale, magnifies them to such proportions, that it had taken a lot less than that shown at the outset by Saint-Loup to make me believe myself scorned at first by Albertine, to imagine her girl-friends to be wonderfully inhuman creatures, and to put Elstir's verdict down, when he said of the little gang, altogether in the same spirit as Mme de Villeparisis of Saint-Loup, 'They're good girls', simply to the indulgence we feel towards beauty and a certain elegance. And was this not the verdict I would gladly have delivered when I heard Albertine say: 'Anyway, devoted or no, I hope very much not to meet him again, because he led to us quarrelling. We mustn't ever be angry again, the two of us. It's not nice'? Because she had seemed to feel desire for Saint-Loup, I felt more or less cured for some time of the idea that she loved women, which I imagined to be

incompatible. And confronted by Albertine's rubber waterproof, in which she seemed to have become another person, the indefatigable wanderer of rainy days, and which, close-fitting, malleable and grey at that moment, seemed less to be to protect her clothes against the water than to have been soaked by her and to have been attached to my loved one's body in order to take an impression of her forms for a sculptor, I snatched at this tunic that was jealously moulding a longed-for bosom, and drawing Albertine to me:

Mais toi, ne veux-tu pas, voyageuse indolente,

Rêver sur mon épaule en y posant ton front?[39]

I said, taking her head in my hands and pointing to the great silent, flooded meadows, stretching all the way in the gathering dusk to a horizon closed off by the parallel ranges of distant, blue-coloured foothills.

Two days later, on the famous Wednesday, on the same little railway I had just taken in Balbec, to go and dine at La Raspelière, I was very anxious not to miss Cottard in Graincourt-Saint-Vast, where a fresh telephone-call from Mme Verdurin had told me I should find him. He was to get on to my train and indicate where we needed to get off in order to find the carriages that were sent from La Raspelière to the station. And so, the little train stopping only for a moment at Graincourt, the first station after Doncières, I had stationed myself at the door ahead of time, so afraid was I of not seeing Cottard or of not being seen by him. Fears that proved quite baseless! I had not appreciated the extent to which, the little clan having shaped all the 'regulars' to the same pattern, they, wearing full evening dress for good measure, were instantly recognizable as they waited on the platform by a certain air of self-assurance, elegance and familiarity, and by glances that passed, as though over an empty space where there is nothing to stay the attention, over the serried ranks of the common herd, watching for the arrival of some regular who had caught the train at a preceding station, and were already bubbling with the conversation to come. This sign of election, with which the habit of dining together had stamped the members of the little group, did not mark them out only when numbers of them were massed there in force, forming a more brilliant patch of colour in the midst of the flock of travellers – what Brichot called the '*pecus*'[40] – on whose lacklustre faces there could not be read any notion relating to the Verdurins, any hope of ever dining at La Raspelière. Moreover, these common travellers would have been less interested than I was, had – despite the notoriety some had acquired – they heard spoken the names of those faithful whom I was surprised to find continuing to dine out, when several had already been doing so, according to the accounts I had heard, before I was born, in an epoch both sufficiently distant and sufficiently vague for me to be tempted to exaggerate its remoteness. The contrast between their continuing, not merely to exist but to be in the fullness of their vigour, and the annihilation of so many friends whom I had already seen depart at one time or another, produced in me the same feeling that we experience when, in the 'Late News' column of the newspapers, we read the very report we had least expected, that of a premature death, for example, which seems fortuitous because the causes of which it is the outcome were not known to us. The sense we get is that death does not come to all men uniformly, but that a more advanced wave from its tragic tide, as it rises, carries off an existence situated at the same level as others that will yet long be spared by the waves that follow. We shall see, moreover, later on, the diversity of the deaths which circulate invisibly to be the source of that particular unexpectedness represented, in newspapers, by the obituaries. Then I saw that, with time, not only do real gifts, which may co-exist with the worst vulgarities in conversation, reveal and impose themselves, but also that second-rate individuals attain to those high positions that belong in our childhood imaginings to a few celebrated old men, without reflecting that a certain number of years later their disciples would be celebrated also, having become masters, and inspire the same respect and fear which they had felt in the old days. But if the names of the faithful were not known to them, their appearance attracted the stares of the '*pecus*'. Even in the train (once the accident of what one or other of them had had to do during the day had brought them all together there), having only one more isolated member to pick up at the next station, the carriage in which they found themselves gathered, indicated by the elbow of Ski, the sculptor, and bedecked with Cottard's copy of *Le Temps*, blossomed in the distance like a de luxe carriage and, at the station appointed, rallied their laggard comrade. The only one whom these promissory signs may have eluded, half blind as he was, was Brichot. But one of the regulars had gladly taken on the duties of lookout on behalf of the blind man and the moment they caught sight of his straw-hat, his green umbrella and his blue spectacles, they steered him gently but hurriedly towards the compartment of election. So that it was unheard-of for one of the faithful, short of exciting the gravest suspicions of being on the razzle, or even of not having come 'by the train', not to meet up with the others along the way. On occasions, the opposite occurred: one of the faithful had had to go some distance during the afternoon and had in consequence to effect part of the journey on his own before being joined by the group; but even in isolation like this, alone of his kind, he did not fail most often to produce an effect. The Future for which he was making singled him out to the person sitting on the seat opposite, who said to himself, 'He must be somebody', and with the obscure perspicacity of the travellers to Emmaus[41] could discern, whether around Cottard's soft hat or Ski the sculptor, a vague halo, and was only half surprised when, at the next station, a fashionable crowd, if it was their final stop, welcomed this member of the faithful at the carriage-door and went off with him towards one of the carriages that were waiting, all bowed very low to by the Douville porter, or else, if it were an intermediate station, invaded the compartment. Which is what, precipitately, for several had arrived late, just as the train, already in the station, was about to leave again, the troop did that Cottard led at the double towards the carriage at whose window he had seen my signals. Brichot, who was among the faithful in question, had become more so in the course of the same years that had seen the assiduity of others diminish. His progressively failing eyesight had obliged him, even in Paris, to do less and less work in the evenings. Moreover, he had little sympathy with the New Sorbonne, where German-style notions of scientific accuracy were beginning to prevail over humanism.[42] He confined himself exclusively now to his lectures and to examination juries; thus he had far more time to give to his social life, that is to soirées at the Verdurins', or those given now and again for the Verdurins by one or other of the faithful, quaking with emotion. It is true that on two occasions love had nearly achieved what his work could not: detach Brichot from the little clan. But Mme Verdurin, who 'kept a weather eye open for squalls' and, what was more, having acquired the habit for the sake of her salon, had finally come to find a disinterested pleasure in these kinds of drama and executions, had turned him irremediably against the dangerous person, knowing, as she put it, how to 'keep everything shipshape' and to 'apply the cauterizing iron to the wound'. This had been all the simpler for her in the case of one of these dangerous persons as it was only Brichot's washerwoman, and Mme Verdurin, who had free access to the Professor's fifth-floor rooms, he blushing scarlet with pride whenever she deigned to undertake the climb, had merely had to show this worthless woman the door. 'What, the Patronne had said to Brichot, a woman like me does you the honour of coming up here, and you entertain a creature like that?' Brichot had never forgotten the service Mme Verdurin had rendered him by preventing his old age from sinking into the mire, and had become increasingly attached to her, whereas, in contrast to this renewal of affection and perhaps on account of it, the Patronne had begun to feel dislike for one of the faithful who was far too docile and of whose obedience she could be certain in advance. But from his intimacy with the Verdurins Brichot derived a prestige that marked him out among all his colleagues at the Sorbonne. They were dazzled by the accounts he gave them of dinner-parties to which they would never be invited, by the mention made of him, in reviews, or by the portrait exhibited at the Salon, by one or other renowned writer or painter, whose talents were held in high esteem by the holders of the other chairs in the Faculty of Letters but whose attention they had no chance of attracting, and finally by the very elegance of dress of the worldly philosopher, an elegance that they had mistaken at first for casualness until such time as their colleague kindly explained to them that the top hat gladly allows itself to be put down on the floor in the course of a visit, and is not worn for dinners in the country, however smart, where it must be replaced by a soft hat, which looks very well with a dinner-jacket. During the first moments of the little group's being engulfed by the carriage, I was not even able to speak to Cottard, for he was choking, less from having run so as not to miss the train, as from amazement at having cut it so fine. More than joy at a triumph, he was experiencing the hilarity almost of a merry prank. 'Oh, that was a good one! he said, once he had recovered himself. Another few seconds, upon my word, that's what they call arriving on the dot!' he added with a wink, not in order to ask whether the expression was correct, for these days he oozed self-assurance, but out of self-satisfaction. Finally he was able to name me to the other members of the little clan. I was annoyed to see that they were almost all of them dressed in what in Paris is called a *smoking*. I had forgotten that the Verdurins had begun timidly to evolve

in the direction of society, an evolution slowed by the Dreyfus Affair, but accelerated by the 'new' music, if one which they themselves denied, and would continue to deny until it had come to fruition, like those military objectives which a general announces only once he has attained them, in such a way as not to appear to have suffered a defeat if he fails. For its part, moreover, the world was quite prepared to move towards them. As yet, it looked on them as people to whom no one from society went, but who did not thereby feel any regret. The Verdurin salon passed for a temple of music. It was there, you were assured, that Vinteuil had found inspiration and encouragement. Now, if Vinteuil's sonata remained wholly misunderstood and more or less unknown, his name, spoken as that of the greatest of contemporary musicians, exerted an extraordinary prestige. Indeed, certain young men from the Faubourg having made up their minds to be as well-informed as the bourgeoisie, three of their number had learned music and among these Vinteuil's sonata enjoyed a huge reputation. Having returned home, they spoke of it to the intelligent mother who had urged them on to cultivate themselves. And having taken an interest in their sons' studies, at concerts the mothers would gaze with a certain respect at Mme Verdurin, who was following the score from her front box. Up until now, this latent society-mindedness on the Verdurins' part had betrayed itself by two actions only. On the one hand, Mme Verdurin had said of the Princesse de Caprarola,[43] 'Ah, she's intelligent, that one, she's an agreeable woman. What I can't stand are the imbeciles, the people who bore me, they drive me crazy.' Which would have given anyone in the least discerning to think that the Princesse de Caprarola, a woman of the very highest society, had paid a call on Mme Verdurin. She had even uttered her name in the course of a visit of condolences she had made to Mme Swann after the death of the latter's husband, and had asked her whether she knew them. 'How did you say? Odette had replied, suddenly looking sad. – Verdurin. – Oh, then I know! she went on, desolately, I don't know them, or rather I know of them without having met them, they're people I saw once at some friends' a long time ago, they're agreeable.' The Princesse de Caprarola having left, Odette would very much have liked simply to have told the truth. But her instant falsehood was not the product of calculation, but the revelation of her fears and of her desires. She had denied not what it would have been astute to deny, but what she would have wished was not the case, even if her interlocutor was to learn within the hour that it was indeed the case. Not long afterwards she had regained her self-confidence and had even pre-empted questions by saying, so as not to appear to fear them: 'Mme Verdurin, why, I knew her terrifically well,' with an affectation of humility, like a great lady recounting how she has taken the tram. 'The Verdurins have been much spoken of just lately,' said Mme de Souvré. Odette, with the disdainful smile of a duchess, replied: 'Oh yes, indeed, I fancy they're much spoken of. From time to time you get new people like that who arrive in society,' without reflecting that she herself was one of the newest. 'The Princesse de Caprarola has dined there, Mme de Souvré went on. – Ah! replied Odette, accentuating her smile, that doesn't surprise me. It's always through the Princesse de Caprarola that these things start, then another one comes along, the Comtesse Molé, for example.' In saying this, Odette appeared to have a profound disdain for the two great ladies who were in the habit of being the earliest occupants of the newly opened salons. You sensed by her tone that this meant that they would never manage to get her, Odette, like Mme de Souvré, aboard any such ship of fools as that.

Following Mme Verdurin's admission as to the Princesse de Caprarola's intelligence, the second sign that the Verdurins were conscious of their future destiny was that they hoped very much that (without having requested it formally, of course) people should now wear evening dress when coming to dinner; M. Verdurin might now have been greeted without shame by his nephew, the one who was 'in queer street'.

Among those who got into my carriage at Graincourt was Saniette, who had been driven out from the Verdurins' in the old days by his cousin Forcheville, but had returned. His defects, where his social life was concerned, had once been – for all his superior qualities – somewhat of the same kind as those of Cottard, shyness, a desire to please, and fruitless attempts to manage to do so. But if life had led Cottard to wear, if not at the Verdurins', where he had, thanks to the influence that past times exert over us when we find ourselves in an accustomed setting, remained much the same, then at least among his patients, when on duty at the hospital or at the Academy of Medicine, an exterior of coldness, disdain and solemnity that was accentuated while he was coming out with his puns in front of his indulgent pupils, and had dug a veritable chasm between the present Cottard and the old one, the same defects had on the contrary become exaggerated in Saniette, even as he sought to correct them. Sensing that he was often boring, that he was not listened to, instead of then slowing down as Cottard would have done, and compelling their attention by an air of authority, not only did he attempt, by a playful tone, to apologize for the too serious turn of his conversation, but he hurried his delivery, ignored all but the gist, used abbreviations so as to seem less long-winded and more familiar with the things he was talking about and, by rendering these unintelligible, merely succeeded in seeming interminable. His self-assurance was not like that of Cottard, which caused his patients to freeze, who, to the people who acclaimed his amenableness in company, would answer: 'He's not the same man any more when he receives you in his consulting-room, you in the light, he with his back to it, with those piercing eyes.' It did not impose itself, you felt it was masking too much self-consciousness, that the least thing would be enough to put it to flight. Saniette, whose friends had always told him he had too little belief in himself, and who indeed saw people whom he rightly regarded as very inferior obtaining with ease the successes that were denied to him, could no longer start on a story without smiling at its drollery, for fear that a serious expression might sell his wares short. At times, lending credence to the humour he himself appeared to find in what he was about to say, they granted him the favour of a general silence. But the story would fall flat. A kind-hearted guest would sometimes slip Saniette the private, almost secret encouragement of a smile of approval, conveying it to him furtively, without attracting attention, as someone slips you a note. But no one went so far as to assume the responsibility, to risk the public adherence, of laughing out loud. Long after the story had finished, and fallen flat, the dejected Saniette alone remained smiling to himself, as if enjoying, alone, the delectation in it that he pretended to find sufficient and which the others had not felt. As for the sculptor Ski, so called because of the difficulty they found in pronouncing his Polish name, and because he himself, since he had been living in a certain society, had affected not to wish to be confused with relations who were very well placed but somewhat boring and very numerous, he, aged forty-five and extremely ugly, had a sort of impishness, of dreamy whimsicality, that he had preserved from having been, up until the age often, the most ravishing child prodigy in the world, the apple of every lady's eye. Mme Verdurin claimed he was more artistic than Elstir. Any resemblance he bore to the latter was purely external, however. It was sufficient for Elstir, who had met Ski on one occasion, to feel for him that profound repulsion that is inspired in us, even more than by those people who are our complete opposites, by those who resemble us only on our worst side, in whom are displayed what is least good about us, the faults which we have cured, unfortunate reminders to us of how we may have appeared to some before we became what we are. But Mme Verdurin believed that Ski had more temperament than Elstir because there was no art for which he did not have an aptitude, and she was convinced that he might have developed that aptitude into a talent had he had less laziness. This last even seemed to the Patronne to be one more gift, being the opposite of hard work, which she thought was the lot of those without genius. Ski would paint anything you wished, on cuff links or on the tops of doors. He sang with the voice of a composer, and played from memory, giving an imitation of an orchestra at the piano, less by his virtuosity than by the false bass notes that signified his fingers' inability to indicate that at this point there was a cornet, which he imitated in any case with his mouth. Searching for words as he spoke, to make people believe in an interesting impression, in the same way as he would hold back a chord and then strike it, saying 'ping', to make the brass section sound, he passed for being wonderfully intelligent, but in point of fact his ideas amounted to two or three, very limited ones. Annoyed by his reputation as a fantasist, he had taken it into his head to demonstrate that he was a practical, positive person, whence a triumphant affectation in him of false precision and false good sense, made worse by the fact that he had no memory and that his information was always inaccurate. The movements of his head, his neck and his legs might have been graceful had he still been nine years old, with blond curls, a big lace collar and little red leather boots. Having arrived ahead of time with Cottard and Brichot at the station in Graincourt, they had left Brichot in the waiting-room and gone to take a stroll. When Cottard had wanted to go back, Ski had replied: 'But there's no rush. It's not the local train today, but the departmental train.' Overjoyed at observing the effect that this pedantic nuance produced in Cottard, he added, speaking of himself: 'Yes, because Ski loves the arts, because he models in clay, people think he isn't practical. Nobody knows this line better than I.' Nevertheless, they were on their way back to the station, when suddenly, catching sight of the smoke of the little train as it arrived, Cottard let out a cry and shouted: 'We'll have to run like the very devil.' They had in fact arrived just in time, the distinction between the local and the departmental trains having ever existed only in Ski's head. 'But isn't the Princesse on the train?' asked Brichot in a quavering voice, whose enormous

spectacles, resplendent like the reflectors that laryngologists attach to their foreheads to shine down their patients' throats, seemed to have borrowed their vitality from the professor's eyes and, perhaps because of the effort he was making to adjust his vision to them, seemed, even at the most insignificant moments, to be themselves gazing with a sustained attention and an extraordinary fixity. Moreover, by gradually depriving Brichot of his sight, his illness had revealed to him the beauties of this sense, just as we often need to have decided to part with an object, by making a present of it for example, to look at it, to miss it and to admire it. 'No, no, the Princesse has gone to take some of Mme Verdurin's guests back to Maineville, who were catching the Paris train. It's not impossible even that Mme Verdurin, who had things to do in Saint-Mars, went with her! In that case she'd be travelling with us and we'd all be doing the journey together, it'd be delightful. The thing is to keep an eye open at Maineville, and the right one! Ah well, never mind, we very nearly missed the boat and no mistake. When I saw the train, I was thunderstruck. That's what they call arriving at the psychological moment. If we'd missed the train, you know, if Mme Verdurin saw the carriages coming back without us, picture the scene! added the doctor, who was not yet recovered from his agitation. That was no ordinary escapade. I say, Brichot, what d'you think of our little adventure? asked the Doctor with a certain pride. – My word, replied Brichot, yes indeed, if you hadn't found the train still there, as the late Villemain[44] would have said, that would have put the lid on things!' But I, distracted from the very start by these people whom I did not know, I recalled all of a sudden what Cottard had said to me in the ballroom of the little casino, and as if an invisible chain had managed to connect an organ to the pictures in my memory, that of Albertine leaning her breasts against those of Andrée gave me a terrible pain in my heart. The pain did not last; the idea of Albertine's possible relations with women no longer seemed possible since two days earlier, when the advances my friend had made to Saint-Loup had excited a new jealousy in me which had caused me to forget the earlier one. I had the innocence of those people who believe that one taste necessarily excludes another. At Arembouville, as the tram was crowded, a farmer in a blue smock, who had only a third-class ticket, got into our compartment. The Doctor, adjudging that the Princesse could not be allowed to travel with him, summoned a porter, displayed his card as doctor to one of the great railway companies, and forced the station-master to make the farmer get out. This scene so pained the kind heart and alarmed the timidity of Saniette that the moment he saw it start, fearful already, because of the number of country people there were on the platform, that it might take on the dimensions of a peasants' revolt, he feigned a stomach-ache and, in order not to be accused of having some share in the Doctor's violence, he slipped into the corridor on the pretence of looking for what Cottard called the 'W C'. Not finding one, he gazed at the countryside from the other end of the 'slowcoach'. 'If this is your first time at Mme Verdurin's, Monsieur, Brichot said to me, anxious to show off his talents to a "newcomer", you'll find there's no circle where you get a stronger sense of "*douceur de vivre*", in the words of the inventors of dilettantism, of couldn't-care-less-ism, of a lot of words in "ism" fashionable among our jumped-up shop-girls, I refer to M. le Prince de Talleyrand.'[45] For when he spoke of these great noblemen from the past, he thought it was witty and lent 'period colour' to put Monsieur in front of their title, and would say Monsieur le Duc de La Rochefoucauld, or Monsieur le Cardinal de Retz, whom he also called from time to time 'That "*struggle-for-lifer*" de Gondi, that "*boulangiste*" de Marcillac.'[46] And he never failed to call Montesquieu, with a smile, 'Monsieur le Président Secondat de Montesquieu.' A clever man of the world would have been irritated by this pedantry, which smelt of the schools. But there is pedantry, too, in the perfect manners of the man of the world, revealing of another caste, that in which, when speaking of a prince, they put 'the Emperor' in front of the name of William,[47] and talk to a Royal Highness in the third person. 'Ah, to him we must take off our hats, Brichot went on, alluding to "Monsieur le Prince de Talleyrand". He's an ancestor. – It's a delightful circle, Cottard said to me, you'll find a bit of everything, for Mme Verdurin is not exclusive: illustrious scholars like Brichot, the high nobility like, for example, the Princesse Sherbatoff, a great Russian lady, a friend of the Grand-Duchesse Eudoxie, who even visits her alone, at the times when no one is admitted.' The Grand-Duchesse Eudoxie indeed, not caring that the Princesse Sherbatoff, who had not been received by anyone for a long time past, should come to her when she might have people there, only let her come very early in the day, when Her Highness had none of the friends with her for whom it would have been as disagreeable to encounter the Princesse as it would have been embarrassing for the latter. As, for the last three years, immediately after leaving, like a manicurist, the Grand-Duchesse, Mme Sherbatoff had gone off to Mme Verdurin's, who had only just woken up, and did not leave her again, it could be said that the Princesse's loyalty infinitely exceeded that of Brichot even, assiduous though he was at the Wednesdays, where he had the pleasure of believing himself, in Paris, to be a sort of Chateaubriand at l'Abbaye-aux-Bois[48] and where, in the country, he got the impression of having become the equivalent of what the man whom he always called (with the mischievous satisfaction of the literary man) 'M. de Voltaire' may have been for Mme de Châtelet.[49]

The absence of connections had enabled the Princesse Sherbatoff to display a fidelity to the Verdurins in recent years that made her more than an ordinary member of the 'faithful', but the very type, the ideal that Mme Verdurin had long believed was inaccessible and which, having reached the change of life, she had at last found made flesh in this new female recruit. However much the Patronne might be racked by jealousy, it was unprecedented for even the most assiduous of the faithful not to have 'defaulted' once. The most stay-at-home had let themselves be tempted by a journey; the most continent had had an amorous adventure; the most robust may have caught 'flu, the idlest been trapped by their twenty-eight days, the most indifferent gone to close the eyes of their dying mother. And it was in vain that Mme Verdurin would then say to them, like the Roman empress,[50] that she was the one general whom her legion must obey, like Christ or the Kaiser,[51] that whoever loved his father and mother as much as her but was not prepared to leave them in order to follow her, was unworthy of her, that instead of growing weak in bed or letting themselves be made a fool of by a whore, they would do better to remain close to her, she, their one remedy and their one delight. But destiny, which is sometimes pleased to embellish the conclusion of lives that are long-drawn-out, had caused Mme Verdurin to meet the Princesse Sherbatoff. Having quarrelled with her family, an exile from her homeland, no longer knowing anyone except the Baronne Putbus and the Grande-Duchesse Eudoxie, to whom, because she had no wish to meet the women friends of the first, and because the second had no wish for her women friends to meet the Princesse, she went only at those morning hours when Mme Verdurin was still asleep, not recalling having kept to her room on a single occasion since the age of twelve, when she had had measles, and having replied on the 31st of December to Mme Verdurin who, concerned at being on her own, had asked her without warning whether she could not stay overnight, despite New Year's Day: 'But what would be able to stop me, no matter what day it is? Moreover, that's a day when we remain *en famille* and you are my family', living in a *pension* and swapping whenever the Verdurins moved house, following them on their holidays in the country, the Princesse was, for Mme Verdurin, so much the embodiment of Vigny's line:

> *Toi seule me parus ce qu 'on cherche toujours*[52]

that the lady president of the little club, desirous of securing one of the 'faithful' even unto death, had asked her that whichever of them was the last to die should have herself buried next to the other. Before strangers – among whom must always be counted that stranger to whom we lie the most because it is by them that it would be most painful to be despised: ourselves – the Princesse Sherbatoff took care to represent her only three friendships – with the Grande-Duchesse, with the Verdurins and with Mme Putbus – as the only ones, not that cataclysms independent of her will had allowed to emerge amidst the destruction of all the rest, but which a free choice had caused her to elect in preference to any other, and to which a certain liking for solitude and simplicity had led her to confine herself. 'I see *no one* else,' she would say, stressing the inflexible character of what had the appearance more of a self-imposed rule than a necessity to be endured. She would add: 'I frequent only three houses', like those authors who, afraid of being unable to stretch to a fourth, announce that their play will have only three performances. Whether or not M. and Mme Verdurin lent credence to this figment, they had helped the Princesse to instil it into the minds of the faithful. And the latter were persuaded both that the Princesse, out of the thousands of connections available to her, had chosen the Verdurins alone, and that the Verdurins, solicited in vain by the whole of the upper aristocracy, had consented to make only one exception, in favour of the Princesse.

As they saw it, the Princesse, too superior to her original milieu not to be bored there, and out of all the people with whom she might have associated, had found the Verdurins alone to be agreeable, and the latter in return, deaf to the overtures of the whole aristocracy that had been offering itself to them, had

consented to make only one exception, in favour of a great lady more intelligent than her peers, the Princesse Sherbatoff.

The Princesse was very rich; at every first night she had a large ground-floor box, to which, authorized by Mme Verdurin, she took the faithful and never anyone else. People would point out this pale, enigmatic figure who had aged without turning white, but rather had gone red, like certain long-lasting, shrivelled fruit in the hedgerows. They admired both her influence and her humility, for though always having with her an Academician, Brichot, a celebrated scholar, Cottard, the leading pianist of the day, and later on M. de Charlus, she still did her best to book the gloomiest *baignoire*, and remained at the back, paying no attention to the auditorium but living exclusively for the little group, who, a little before the end of the performance, would withdraw, in the train of this strange sovereign, who was not without possessing a shy, fascinating, worn-out beauty. But, if Mme Sherbatoff did not look at the auditorium, and remained in the shadows, it was in order to try to forget that there existed a living world that she desired passionately, but was unable to get to know; the 'coterie' in a *baignoire* was for her what their almost corpse-like stillness is for certain animals in the presence of danger. Nonetheless, the taste for novelty and for curiosity which exercises society people meant that they perhaps lent greater attention to this mysterious stranger than to the celebrities in the front boxes on whom everyone came calling. They imagined her to be other than the people whom they knew, that a wonderful intelligence, allied to a clairvoyant goodness, had retained this small circle of the eminent around her. Were someone's name to be mentioned, or someone introduced to her, the Princesse was forced to feign a great indifference so as to keep up the fiction of her horror of society. Nonetheless, with the support of Cottard or of Mme Verdurin, a few newcomers succeeded in meeting her, and her euphoria at meeting one of them was such that she forgot the fable of her voluntary isolation and lavished attention on this new arrival. If he were a nonentity, everyone was astonished. 'What a peculiar thing, that the Princesse, who refuses to meet anybody, should go and make an exception for someone so out of keeping!' But these fertilizing acquaintances were rare, and the Princesse lived strictly confined in the midst of the faithful.

Cottard was far more inclined to say, 'I'll see him on Wednesday at the Verdurins,' than 'I'll see him on Tuesday at the Academy.' He spoke also of the Wednesdays as of an occupation just as important and just as ineluctable. Cottard, moreover, was one of these little-sought-after people who make it an imperious duty to accept an invitation as though it constituted an order, like a military or judicial summons. He needed to be called out on a truly important visit for him to 'default' from the Verdurins on a Wednesday, its importance having more to do, moreover, with the status of the sick person than the seriousness of their condition. For Cottard, kindly man though he was, would renounce the comforts of a Wednesday, not for a workman who had had a stroke, but for the head-cold of a minister. Even in this last instance he would say to his wife: 'Make my sincere apologies to Mme Verdurin. Warn her I'll be late getting there. His Excellency might well have picked another day to catch cold.' One Wednesday, their elderly cook having cut the vein in her arm, Cottard, already in a dinner-jacket in order to go to the Verdurins, had given a shrug when his wife timidly asked him whether he could not dress the wound: 'But I can't, Léontine, he had exclaimed with a groan, you can see I've got my white waistcoat on.' So as not to provoke her husband, Mme Cottard had sent post-haste for the *chef de clinique*. The latter, in order to save time, had taken a cab, with the result that, his carriage entering the courtyard at the same moment as that of Cottard was about to leave to take him to the Verdurins, they had wasted five minutes advancing and retreating. Mme Cottard was embarrassed that the *chef de clinique* should have seen her lord and master in his evening clothes. Cottard had cursed at the delay, perhaps out of remorse, and left in an execrable temper that it required all the pleasures of a Wednesday finally to dispel.

Were a patient to ask Cottard: 'Do you sometimes come across the Guermantes?' it was in the best of good faith that the Professor would reply: 'Perhaps not the Guermantes exactly, I don't know. But I meet all those sorts of people at some friends of mine. You've certainly heard speak of the Verdurins. They know everybody. And they at least aren't smart folk who've gone down in the world. There's money there all right. Mme Verdurin's generally reckoned to have thirty-five million. I mean, that's a tidy sum, thirty-five million. So she doesn't do things by halves. You mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes. I'm going to tell you the difference. Mme Verdurin is a great lady, the Duchesse de Guermantes is probably on her uppers. You get the distinction, don't you? In any event, whether the Guermantes go to Mme Verdurin's or not, she entertains, which is better, the d'Sherbatoffs, the d'Forchevilles, *e tutti quanti*, people out of the very top drawer, all the nobility of France and Navarre, who you'd see me talking to as equals. What's more, those sorts of individuals are happy to seek out the princes of science,' he added, with a beatifically self-regarding smile, produced on his lips by the presumptuous satisfaction, not so much that an expression once reserved for such as Potain and Charcot[53] should now be applied to him, but that he was finally able to make suitable use of all those expressions authorized by custom of which, after much burning of the midnight oil, he now had a thorough command. And so, after citing the Princesse Sherbatoff to me among the people received by Mme Verdurin, Cottard added, with a wink: 'You can tell the type of establishment it is, you understand what I mean?' He meant the most chic imaginable. Now, to entertain a Russian lady who knew only the Grande-Duchesse Eudoxie meant little. But the Princesse Sherbatoff might even not have known her without lessening the opinion Cottard held as to the supreme elegance of the Verdurin salon or his delight at being received there. The splendour in which the people with whom we associate appear clothed is no more intrinsic than that of those characters on the stage to dress whom it is quite pointless for a director to spend hundreds of thousands of francs on buying authentic costumes and real jewelry that will have no effect, when a great designer will create an impression of luxury a thousand times more sumptuous by directing a beam of artificial light at a doublet of coarse cloth strewn with glass bottle-tops and a cloak made of paper. A man may have spent his life amidst the great ones of the earth, who to him were either tedious relatives or tiresome acquaintances, because in his eyes a habit contracted from the cradle had stripped them of all glamour. But in return, this same glamour needed only, by some accident, to be added to the most obscure individuals for Cottards without number to live bedazzled by titled women whose salons they imagined to be the centre of aristocratic elegance, and who were not even what Mme de Villeparisis and her friends were (great ladies fallen from favour with whom the aristocracy that had been brought up with them no longer associated); no, were the many people who took pride in their friendship with such ladies to publish their memoirs, citing their names and those of the women whom they received, no one, Mme de Cambremer any more than Mme de Guermantes, would be able to identify them. But what matter! In this way, a Cottard has his Baronne or his Marquise, who for him is 'the Baronne' or 'the Marquise', just as in Marivaux, where the Baronne's name is never spoken and we have no idea even that she ever had one.[54] Cottard believes all the more strongly that he has here found the very essence of the aristocracy – which has no knowledge of this lady – because the more doubtful the titles the more space the coronets occupy on the glasses, the silver, the notepaper and the luggage. Numerous Cottards, who thought they were spending their lives in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, have had their imaginations more bewitched perhaps by feudal dreams than those who have lived among princes in actuality, just as, for the small shopkeeper who, on Sundays, goes now and again to visit 'olde world' buildings, it is sometimes from those buildings all of whose stones are of our own world, and whose ceilings have been painted blue and strewn with gold stars by pupils of Viollet-le-Duc,[55] that they get the strongest sense of the Middle Ages. 'The Princesse will be at Maineville. She will travel with us. But I shan't introduce you straight away. It'd be better were Mme Verdurin to do that. Unless I find some neat way in. You can rely on me then, I shall jump at it. – What were you talking about? said Saniette, who made as if he had been out getting a breath of air. – I was quoting to Monsieur, said Brichot, a remark you know well, of the man who in my opinion is first among all the "*fins de siècle*" (of the eighteenth *siècle*, be it understood), first name Charles-Maurice, *abbé* of Périgord.[56] He had begun by promising to be a very good journalist. But he went to the bad, I mean he became a minister! These falls from grace happen in life. A none too scrupulous politician what's more, with all the disdain of a thoroughbred nobleman, but who found no difficulty in working in his time for nothing, let's not hide the fact, and died an incorrigible member of the centre-left.'

At Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs there got in a splendid girl who, alas, was not part of the little group. I could not take my eyes off her magnolia flesh, her black eyes, the high and admirable construction of her breasts. After a moment, she wanted to open a window because it was rather hot in the compartment, and not wanting to ask everyone for permission, since I alone had no overcoat, she said to me, in a quick, fresh, laughing tone: 'You don't find it disagreeable, Monsieur, the fresh air?' I would have liked to say to her: 'Come with us to the Verdurins,' or 'Tell me your name and address.' I replied: 'No, the fresh air doesn't worry me, Mademoiselle.' And afterwards, without moving from her seat: 'The smoke won't worry your friends?', and she lit a cigarette. At the third station she jumped out.

The next day, I asked Albertine who it could have been. For, foolishly, believing that we can love only one thing, and jealous of Albertine's attitude in respect of Robert, I felt reassured where women were concerned. Albertine told me, perfectly sincerely I believe, that she did not know. 'I'd so much like to meet her again! I exclaimed. – Don't worry, we always do meet again,' answered Albertine. In this particular instance, she was wrong; I have never again met nor identified the beautiful girl with the cigarette. We shall see, moreover, why for a long time I had to leave off searching for her. But I have not forgotten her. It often happens that when I am thinking of her I am seized by a wild longing. But these recurrences of desire force us to reflect that, if we wanted to meet these girls again with the same pleasure, we should have also to go back to the year in question, which has since been followed by ten others, in the course of which the girl has faded. We can sometimes find a person again, but not abolish time. All this up until that unforeseen day, sad as a winter's night, when we are no longer seeking that particular girl, nor any other, and when to find one would alarm us even. For we no longer feel we have sufficient attractions to please, nor the strength to love. Not, of course, that we are, in the true sense of the word, impotent. So far as love is concerned, we would love more than ever. But we feel that it is too great an undertaking for the little strength that we preserve. Our eternal rest has already introduced intervals, in which we cannot go out, cannot speak. To place a foot on the step that is needed is a triumph, like not missing a somersault. To be seen in this state by a girl whom we love, even if we have kept the face and the fair hair we had as a young man! We can no longer assume the fatigue of falling into step with youth. So much the worse if the desires of the flesh are redoubled instead of being deadened! On their account, we send for a woman whom we shall make no effort to please, who will share our couch for one evening only and whom we shall never see again.

'We must still be without news of the violinist,' said Cottard. The event of the day amongst the little clan had indeed been the defection of Mme Verdurin's favoured violinist. He, who was doing his military service near Doncières, came three times a week to dine at La Raspelière since he had leave up until midnight. But two days before, for the first time, the faithful had not managed to discover him on the tram. It was assumed he had missed it. But for all that Mme Verdurin had sent to the tram following, and finally to the last one, the carriage had come back empty. 'He's been put on jankers for sure, there's no other explanation for his flight. In the soldiering trade, you know, with those strapping young fellows, it only takes a grumpy N C O. – It'll be all the more mortifying for Mme Verdurin, said Brichot, if he lets her down again this evening, because our charming hostess is entertaining to dinner for the very first time the neighbours who have let La Raspelière to her, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer. – This evening, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer! exclaimed Cottard. But I had absolutely no idea. Of course, I knew as you all did that they were due to come one day, but I didn't know it'd be so soon. *Sapristi*, he said, turning to me, what did I tell you? The Princesse Sherbatoff, the Marquis and Marquise de Cambremer.' And having repeated these names, savouring their melodiousness: 'You can see that we do well for ourselves, he said. Never mind, for your first time, you've scored a bull's-eye. It's going to be an exceptionally brilliant roomful.' And, turning to Brichot, he added: 'The Patronne must be furious. It was high time we arrived to lend her a hand.' Since Mme Verdurin had been at La Raspelière, she had indeed affected in front of the faithful to be under an obligation and in despair at having to invite the owners. In this way she would get better terms for the following year, she said, and was doing it only out of self-interest. But she claimed to feel such terror, to fuss so about nothing more than a dinner with people not from the little group, that she was always putting it off. It did frighten her a little as it happens, for the reasons that she proclaimed, even though she exaggerated them, if from another point of view it charmed her, for snobbish reasons about which she preferred to remain silent. She was thus half sincere, she thought the little clan something so unique in the world, one of those bodies such that it would take centuries to constitute its like, that she trembled at the thought of seeing introduced into it these provincials, unfamiliar with the *Tetralogy* and the *Meistersinger*, who would not know how to sustain their part in the concert of the general conversation and were capable, by coming to Mme Verdurin's, of ruining one of the famous Wednesdays, those fragile and incomparable masterpieces, like the Venetian glass that one false note is enough to shatter. 'What's more, they're bound to be as *anti* as can be, and all top brass, M. Verdurin had said. – Oh *that*, that's all one to me, that particular story's been being talked about for quite some time,' Mme Verdurin had replied, who was genuinely pro-Dreyfus but would still have liked to earn some worldly reward from the preponderant Dreyfusism of her salon. But Dreyfusism had triumphed politically, not socially. For society people, Labori, Reinach, Picquart and Zola remained traitors of a kind that could only alienate them from the little nucleus. And so, after this incursion into politics, Mme Verdurin was anxious to get back into art. Were d'Indy and Debussy not anyway 'in the wrong' over the Affair?[57] 'So far as the Affair is concerned, we'd only need to sit them next to Brichot, she said (the university man being the only one of the faithful who had taken the side of the General Staff, which had lowered him greatly in Mme Verdurin's esteem). We're not obliged to go on everlastingly about the Dreyfus Affair. No, the truth is that the Cambremers get on my nerves.' As for the faithful, as much excited by the unconfessed desire they felt to meet the Cambremers as taken in by the annoyance Mme Verdurin affected to feel at entertaining them, they daily took up again when talking with her the unworthy arguments she had herself used in favour of the invitation and attempted to make them irresistible. 'Make up your mind to it once and for all, repeated Cottard, and they'll knock something off the rent, they'll pay the gardener, you'll have the use of the field. All that's well worth an evening of boredom. I mention it only for your sake,' he added, although his heart had beaten faster one time when, in Mme Verdurin's carriage, he had met that of the old Mme de Cambremer along the road, and above all had been made to feel small in front of the porters when, at the station, he found himself next to the Marquis. For their part, the Cambremers, who lived much too far outside the social swim to be able even to suspect that certain fashionable women might speak of Mme Verdurin with a certain consideration, imagined the latter to be someone who could know only bohemians, was not even lawfully married perhaps, and, so far as people 'of birth' were concerned, would only ever meet themselves. They had resigned themselves to dining there only in order to keep in with a tenant who they hoped would return for many more seasons, especially since they had learned, the previous month, that she had just inherited all those millions. It was in silence and without any tasteless jokes that they prepared themselves for the fateful day. The faithful no longer expected it ever to arrive, so many times had Mme Verdurin already fixed in their presence a date that was forever shifting. These false resolutions had as their aim, not only to make display of the nuisance this dinner-party was causing her, but to keep in suspense those members of the little group who lived in the vicinity and were inclined at times to default. Not that the Patronne had guessed that the 'great day' was as agreeable for them as for her, but because, having persuaded them that for her this dinner-party was the most terrible drudgery, she could appeal to their devotion. 'You're not going to leave me on my own, hobnobbing with that lot! On the contrary, we need to be there in numbers to put up with the boredom. Of course we shan't be able to talk about anything that interests us. As a Wednesday it'll be a failure, but there you are!'

'In fact,' replied Brichot, addressing himself to me, 'I don't believe Mme Verdurin, who is highly intelligent and very fastidious in working out her Wednesdays, was very keen to entertain these squireens *of* high pedigree but no brains. She couldn't bring herself to invite the dowager Marquise but has resigned herself to the son and daughter-in-law. – Ah, we shall be seeing the Marquise de Cambremer?' said Cottard, with a smile that he thought he should make both suggestive and bantering, although he did not know whether Mme de Cambremer was pretty or not. But the title of Marquise had evoked dashing and glamorous images in him. 'Oh, I know her,' said Ski, who had met her once when out driving with Mme Verdurin. 'You don't know her in the biblical sense?' said the Doctor, one of whose favourite jokes this was, sliding a louche glance beneath his eye-glass. 'She's intelligent, Ski said to me. Of course,' he went on, noticing that I had said nothing and smilingly laying weight on every word: 'she's intelligent yet she isn't, she lacks education, she's frivolous, but she has an instinct for pretty things. She'll fall silent but she'll never say anything stupid. Besides, her colouring is pretty. Hers is a portrait it'd be amusing to paint,' he added, half closing his eyes, as if he were gazing at her posing in front of him. Since I thought the complete opposite of what Ski had expressed with so many qualifications, I contented myself with saying that she was the sister of a very distinguished engineer, M. Legrandin. 'Well, you see, you'll be introduced to a pretty woman, Brichot said to me, and one never knows what that may lead to. Cleopatra wasn't even a great lady, she was the little woman, the thoughtless and terrible little woman of our Meilhac,[58] and think of the consequences, not only for that simpleton of an Antony but for the Ancient World. – I've already been introduced to Mme de Cambremer, I answered. – Ah, so you're going to find yourself in familiar country. – I'll be all the more glad to see her, I replied, because she promised me a book by the former *curé* of Combray about the local place names, and I'll be able to remind her of her promise. I'm interested in the priest and in etymologies also. – Don't put too much

trust in those he gives, replied Brichot. The book, which is at La Raspelière and which I've amused myself by looking through, tells me nothing of any value; it's littered with errors. I'll give you an example. The word *bricq* enters into the formation of a number of place-names hereabouts. The good cleric has had the somewhat cranky notion that it comes from *briga*, a height or fortified place. He finds it already in the Celtic tribes, Latobriges, Nemetobriges and so on, and traces it even in names like Briand, Brion, etc. To come back to the region we have the pleasure of traversing with you at this moment, Bricquebosc would signify the wood of the height, Bricqueville the habitation of the height, Bricquebec, where we shall be stopping in a moment before getting to Maineville, the height near the stream. Yet that's not it at all, for the good reason that *bricq* is the old Norse word signifying quite simply a bridge. Just as *fleur*, which Mme de Cambremer's protégé takes infinite pains to link at one point to the Scandinavian words *floi* and *flo*, and at others to the Irish words *ae* and *aer*, is, on the contrary, and beyond any doubt, the *fiord* of the Danes, and signifies a harbour. Similarly, the excellent priest thinks that the station of Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, which is next door to La Raspelière, signifies Saint-Martin-le-Vieux (*vetus*). It's a fact that the word *vieux* has played a major role in the toponymy of the region. *Vieux* generally comes from *vadum* and signifies a ford, as in the place known as Les Vieux, or as in the English Oxford and Hereford. But in this particular instance, *vieux* comes not from *vetus* but from *vastatus*, a bare, de-vastated place. Near here you have Sottevast, the vast of Setold, Brillevast, the vast of Berold. I'm all the more certain that the *curé* is in error because Saint-Martin-le-Vieux was at one time called Saint-Martin-du-Gast or even Saint-Martin-de-Terregate. Now the *v* and the *g* in those words are the same letter. We say *dévaster* but also *gâcher*. *Jachères* and *gâtines*[59] (from the High German *wastinna*) have the same sense. Terregate, therefore, is *terra vasta*. As for Saint-Mars, in the old days (*honni soit qui mal y pense*!) Saint-Merd,[60] that is Saint-Medardus, which is sometimes Saint-Médard, Saint-Mard, Saint-Marc, Cinq-Mars, all the way to Dammas. It mustn't be forgotten, moreover, that very near here, places bearing this same name of Mars are evidence merely of a pagan origin (the god Mars) that's still very much alive in the region, but which the man of God refuses to acknowledge. The heights dedicated to the gods in particular are very numerous, like the mountain of Jupiter (Jeumont). Your *curé* is having none of it but, on the other hand, wherever Christianity has left traces, they elude him. He extended his travels as far as Loctudy, a barbarian name, he says, whereas it's *Locus sancti Tudeni*, nor, in Sammarcoles, has he divined *Sanctus Martialis*. Your *curé*, Brichot went on, noticing that he was interesting me, makes the words *hon, home* and *holm* come from the word *holl* (*hullus*), a hill, whereas it comes from the Norse *holm*, an island, which you're certainly familiar with in Stockholm, and which is so widespread throughout the region: La Houlme, Engohomme, Tahoume, Robehomme, Néhomme, Quettehou, and so on.' These names brought to mind the day when Albertine had wanted to go to Amfreville-la-Bigot (from the name of two of its successive lords, Brichot told me), and when she had then suggested we should eat together in Robehomme. As for Montmartin, we would be passing it in a minute. 'Is Néhomme, I asked, not near Carquethuit and Clitourps? – Exactly, Néhomme is the *holm*, the island or peninsula of the famous Vicomte Nigel, whose name has survived also in Néville. For Mme de Cambremer's protégé, Carquethuit and Clitourps, which you spoke of, are an opportunity for other errors. He can see easily enough of course that *carque* is a church, the Germans' *Kirche*. You're familiar with Querqueville and Carquebut, not to mention Dunkerque. For we'd do better then to pause at this famous word *dun*, which for the Celts signified an elevation. That you'll find throughout France. Your *abbé* has been hypnotized faced by Duneville. But in the Eure-et-Loir he'd have found Châteaudun; Dun-le-Roi in the Cher; Duneau in the Sarthe; Dun in the Ariège; Dune-les-Places in the Nièvre, and so on and so forth. This *dun* leads him to commit a curious error in connection with Douville, where we shall be getting out and where the comfortable carriages of Mme Verdurin await us. Douville, in Latin *donvilla*, so he says. Indeed, Douville is at the foot of the big heights. Your *curè*, who knows everything, senses all the same he has blundered. He has in fact read *Domvilla* in an old terrier. Then he retracts; Douville, according to him, is a fief of the *abbé, domino abbati*, of Mont Saint-Michel. That delights him, which is rather bizarre when one reflects on the scandalous life that, since the capitulary of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, they led at Mont Saint-Michel, and which would be no more extraordinary than finding the King of Denmark as suzerain of this whole coast, where he celebrated the worship of Odin far more than that of Christ. On the other hand, the suppositions that the *n* got changed into a *u* doesn't shock me and requires less of a deformation than the very correct Lyon, which also comes from *dun* (*Lugdunum*). But the *abbé* has in fact got it wrong. Douville was never Donville, but Doville, *Eudonis Villa*, the village of Eudes. Douville was once called Escalecliff, where you scaled the rise. Around 1233, Eudes the Cupbearer, lord of Escalecliff, left for the Holy Land; at the moment of departure, he handed over the church to the Abbey of Blanchelande. An exchange of courtesies: the village took his name, whence present-day Douville. But I will add that toponymy, where I'm anyway quite ignorant, is not an exact science; did we not have this historical evidence, Douville might very well come from d'Ouville, i.e. les Eaux, the waters. Forms in *ai* (Aigues-Mortes), from *aqua*, very often turn into *eu*, or *ou*. And there were renowned waters very close to Douville. As you can imagine, the *curé* was only too happy to find some Christian vestige there, even if the region seems to have been hard enough to evangelize since it took successive attempts by Saint Ursal, Saint Gofroi, Saint Barsanore and Saint Laurent de Brèvedent, who finally made way for the monks of Beaubec. But where *tuit* is concerned, the author is mistaken, he sees it as a form of *toft*, a hovel, as in Criquetot, Ectot, Yvetot, whereas it's the *thveit*, or assart, land freshly cleared, as in Braquetuit, Le Thuit, Regnetuit, and so on. Similarly, if, in Clitourps, he recognizes the Norman *thorp*, which means village, he wants the first part of the name to derive from *clivus*, an incline, whereas it comes from *cliff* a rockface. But his grossest blunders stem less from ignorance than from his prejudices. However good a Frenchman you may be, do you have to deny what is self-evident and take Saint-Laurent-en-Bray to be the well-known Roman priest, whereas the saint in question is Saint Lawrence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin? But more than his patriotic sentiments, it's your friend's religious *parti pris* that leads him to commit crude errors. Thus, not far from the house of our hosts at La Raspelière, you have two Montmartins, Montmartin-sur-Mer and Montmartin-en-Graignes. With Graignes, the worthy *curé* has not made any mistake, he's seen clearly that Graignes, *grania* in Latin, *krene* in Greek, signifies ponds, marshland; how many Cresmays, Croens, Grennevilles, Lengronnes, could one not cite? But with Montmartin your purported linguist insists it's a question of parishes dedicated to St Martin. His authority for this is the fact that that saint is their patron, but he's unaware that he was only adopted as such after the event; or rather he's blinded by his hatred of paganism; he won't see that people would have said Mont-Saint-Martin as they say Mont-Saint-Michel, had it been a question of St Martin, whereas the name of Montmartin applies in a far more pagan fashion to temples consecrated to the god Mars, temples of which, it's true, we possess no other vestiges, but which would be made extremely likely by the undeniable presence in the vicinity of vast Roman camps, even without the name of Montmartin, which settles any doubts. So you can see, the little book that you'll find at La Raspelière is not so very well done.' I protested that in Combray the *curé* had often taught us interesting etymologies. 'He was probably better on his home ground, the journey to Normandy will have disoriented him. – And not cured him, I added, because he arrived with neurasthenia and left with the rheumatics. – Ah, that's the fault of the neurasthenia. He fell from neurasthenia into philology, as my good master Poquelin[61] would have said. I say, Cottard, does it seem to you that neurasthenia can have a harmful influence on philology, and philology a calming influence on neurasthenia, and that the cure for neurasthenia can lead to rheumatism? – Absolutely, rheumatism and neurasthenia are two vicarious forms of neuro-arthritis. You can pass from one to the other by metastasis. – The eminent professor, said Brichot, expresses himself, may God forgive me, in a French mixed in with as much Latin and Greek as M. Purgon himself might have done, of Molièrish memory! Help, Uncle, I mean Sarcey,[62] our national…' But he was unable to finish his sentence. The Professor had just given a start and let out a shout: 'Damn it all, what the…, he cried, finally moving on to articulated speech, 'we've passed Maineville (hey, what!) and even Renneville.' He had just noticed that the train had stopped at Saint-Mars-le-Vieux, where almost all the passengers alighted. 'They can't have gone through it without stopping, though. We can't have been paying attention, talking about the Cambremers. – Listen, Ski, wait, I'm going to tell you "a good thing" ', said Cottard, who had developed a fondness for this expression, common in certain medical circles. 'The Princesse must be on the train, she won't have seen us but has got into another compartment. Let's go and look for her. Just so long as all this isn't going to create ructions!' And he led all of us off in search of the Princesse Sherbatoff. He found her in the corner of an empty carriage, busy reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Over long years, she had, from a fear of rejection, got into the habit of staying put, of remaining in her corner, and of waiting until someone wished her good day before giving her hand. She continued to read when the faithful entered her carriage. I recognized her instantly; this woman who might have come down in the world but was nevertheless of noble birth, who was in any case the pearl of a salon like that of the Verdurins, was the lady who, in this same train, two days earlier, I had thought might be

the madam of a brothel. Her very uncertain social personality became clear to me the moment I learned her name, as when, having toiled over a riddle, we finally learn the solution, which makes clear everything that had remained obscure, and which in the case of people is their name. To learn two days later who the person was next to whom one had travelled on the train without managing to decide on their social standing is a far more amusing surprise than reading in the latest issue of a review the solution to the conundrum posed in the previous issue. Great restaurants, casinos, 'slowcoaches', these are the family museums of such social conundrums. 'Princesse, we must have missed you in Maineville! Will you allow us to come and sit in your compartment? – Why of course,' said the Princesse, who raised her eyes from her review only when she heard Cottard address her, eyes which, like those of M. de Charlus, although gentler, saw very clearly the people whose presence she had pretended not to have noticed. Cottard, reflecting on the fact that being invited with the Cambremers was for me a sufficient recommendation, took, after a moment, the decision to introduce me to the Princesse, who bowed with great courtesy, but gave the impression of hearing my name for the first time. 'Dammit, exclaimed the Doctor, my wife's forgotten to change the buttons on my white waistcoat. Oh, women, they never think. Don't ever get married, d'you hear,' he said to me. And as this was one of the pleasantries he thought appropriate when there was nothing to be said, he glanced out of the corner of his eye at the Princesse and at the other faithful, who, because he was a professor and an Academician, smiled in admiration of his good humour and lack of presumption. The Princesse informed us that the young violinist had been found. He had kept to his bed the previous day on account of a migraine, but would be coming this evening and bringing an old friend of his father's whom he had met again in Doncières. She had learned this through Mme Verdurin, with whom 'she had had lunch that morning,' she told us quickly, in a voice in which the rolled *r*s of her Russian accent were quietly mumbled at the back of her throat, as if they were not *r*s but *l*s. 'Ah, you had lunch with her this morning,' said Cottard to the Princesse; but looking at me, for the words were intended to demonstrate to me how intimate the Princesse was with the Patronne. 'You're truly one of the faithful! – Yes, I like the little gloup, intelligent, agleeable, without malice, velly simple, not snobbish and where they've blains all the way down to their fingertips. – Damnation, I must have lost my ticket, I can't find it,' exclaimed Cottard, without being unduly concerned, however. He knew that at Douville, where two landaus would be awaiting us, the porter would allow him through without a ticket and would simply doff his cap all the lower in order, by this salute, to give the explanation of his indulgence, to wit that he had indeed recognized Cottard to be a Verdurin regular. 'They won't be putting me in the police room for that, the Doctor concluded. – You were saying, Monsieur, I asked Brichot, that there were some renowned waters near here; how do you know? – The name of the next station confirms it, together with much other evidence. It's called Fervaches. – I don't complehend what he means,' grumbled the Princesse, in the tone of voice in which she might have said to me, out of kindness: 'He's getting on our nerves, isn't he?' 'But, Princesse, Fervaches means warm waters, *fervidae aquae*… But… apropos of the young violinist, Brichot went on, I was forgetting, Cottard, to speak to you about the big news. Did you know that our poor friend Dechambre, formerly Mme Verdurin's favourite pianist, has just died? It's frightening. – He was still young, replied Cottard, but he must have got something amiss with his liver, he must have had something nasty there, he'd looked rotten for some time. – But he wasn't that young, said Brichot, in the days when Elstir and Swann used to come to Mme Verdurin's, Dechambre already had a reputation in Paris and, what is admirable, without having received his baptism of success abroad. *He* was no adept of the Gospel according to St Barnum.[63] – You're getting him confused, he couldn't have been going to Mme Verdurin's at that time, he was still in swadddling-clothes. – But unless my old memory's playing me false, I fancy Dechambre was playing the Vinteuil sonata for Swann when that clubman, who'd broken with the aristocracy, hardly suspected he would one day become the *embourgeoisé* prince consort of our national Odette. – That's impossible, Vinteuil's sonata was played at Mme Verdurin's long after Swann was no longer going there,' said the Doctor, who, like those people who work a great deal and think they should retain many things that they imagine may be useful, forget many others, which enables them to go into ecstasies at the memory of people who have nothing to do. 'You're doing your knowledge an injustice, your mind isn't going, however,' smiled the Doctor. Brichot conceded his mistake. The train stopped. It was La Sogne. The name intrigued me. 'I'd love to know what all these names mean, I said to Cottard. – But ask M. Brichot, he'll know perhaps. – But La Sogne, is La Cicogne, *Siconia*, the stork,' replied Brichot, whom I was longing to question about many other names.

Forgetting how keen she was on her 'corner', Mme Sherbatoff kindly offered to change places with me so that I would be better able to talk with Brichot, whom I wanted to ask for other etymologies that interested me, and she assured me that it was a matter of indifference to her whether she travelled forwards, backwards, standing up, or any other way. She remained on the defensive for as long as she did not know the intentions of the new arrivals, but once she had recognized that these were friendly, she tried in every way possible to please each one of them. Finally, the train stopped in the station of Douville-Féterne, which, being more or less equidistant from the village of Féterne and that of Douville, bore on account of this peculiarity both their names. 'Zounds,' exclaimed Doctor Cottard, once we were in front of the barrier where the tickets were collected, and pretending only now to have noticed, 'I can't find my ticket, I must have lost it.' But the porter, removing his cap, assured him it was of no account and smiled respectfully. The Princesse (giving an explanation to the coachman, as a sort of lady-in-waiting to Mme Verdurin might have done, who, on account of the Cambremers, had not been able to come to the station, which she did only rarely in any case) took me, together with Brichot, with her in one of the carriages. Into the other there got the Doctor, Saniette and Ski.

The coachman, though very young, was the Verdurins' head coachman, the only one actually to bear the title; during the day, he took them on all their outings, for he knew all the roads, and in the evenings went to fetch and later take back the faithful. He was accompanied by auxiliaries (chosen by him) in case of need. He was an excellent lad, sober and skilful, but with one of those melancholy faces whose too fixed gaze signifies someone who is soon worked up, or even gets dark thoughts, over nothing at all. But at that moment he was very happy for he had managed to get his brother, another excellent sort, taken on by the Verdurins. We went first through Douville. Here, grassy hillocks ran right down to the sea, in ample grazing made lush, velvety and exceptionally vivid in colour from its saturation by the damp and the salt. The islets and indentations of Rivebelle, much closer together here than in Balbec, lent this part of the sea the appearance, new to me, of a relief map. We passed small chalets, almost all of them rented by painters; we took a track on which some loose cows, just as alarmed as our horses, barred our way for ten minutes, then we entered on the road along the corniche. 'But by the immortal gods, asked Brichot all of a sudden, to revert to poor Dechambre; do you think Mme Verdurin *knows*? has she been *told*?' Like almost all society people, Mme Verdurin, precisely because she had need of the company of others, never gave them another thought after the day they died, and were no longer able to come to her Wednesdays, or her Saturdays, or eat in a dressing-gown. And it could not have been said of the little clan, the image in this of all the salons, that it was made up more of the dead than the living, seeing that the moment you were dead it was as if you had never existed. But in order to avoid the nuisance of having to speak of the deceased, or even to suspend the dinners, something quite out of the question for the Patronne, as a sign of mourning, M. Verdurin would pretend that the death of the faithful so affected his wife that, in the interests of her health, it was not to be mentioned. Moreover, and perhaps indeed just because the death of others struck him as so common and final an accident, the thought of his own death filled him with horror and he avoided any reflection that might bear on it. As for Brichot, since he was a very decent man and completely taken in by what M. Verdurin had said about his wife, he dreaded on his friend's account the emotions of such an upset. 'Yes, she's *known everything* since this morning, said the Princesse, we couldn't *keep it from her*. – Oh, great thundering Zeus, exclaimed Brichot, oh, that must have been a terrible blow, a friend of twenty-five years' standing! And who was one of us! – How right, how right, but there you are, said Cottard. These are always painful circumstances; but Mme Verdurin is a strong woman, she's a cerebral even more than an emotive. – I'm not altogether of the Doctor's opinion,' said the Princesse, whose rapid way of speaking and muttered accent gave her an expression decidedly at once sullen and mischievous. 'Beneath a cold exterior, Mme Verdurin conceals treasures of sensitivity. M. Verdurin told me he had great difficulty stopping her from going to Paris for the ceremony; he was obliged to give her to believe it would all take place in the country. – Ah, good heavens, she wanted to go to Paris. But I know very well she's a woman of heart, too much heart perhaps. Poor Dechambre! As Mme Verdurin was saying not two months since, "Compared with him, Planté, Paderewski, Risler even,[64] none of them count". Ah, he had better reason than that show-off Nero, who has found a way of hoodwinking German learning itself, to say *Qualis artifex pereo*![65] But Dechambre at least must have died in the fulfilment of his ministry, in the odour of Beethovenian devotion; and bravely, I don't doubt; by rights, that officiant of German music

would have deserved to pass away while celebrating the Mass in D.[66] For all that, he was a man to welcome the Grim Reaper with a trill, for that performer of genius sometimes rediscovered in his ancestry, Parisianized man of Champagne that he was, the swank and elegance of a *garde-française*.[67]

From the height at which we already were, the sea no longer looked, as it did from Balbec, like the undulations of upraised mountains, but on the contrary, the way a blue-coloured glacier, or a dazzling plain, situated at a lower altitude, appears from a peak, or from a road that hugs the mountainside. The jagged swirls seemed to have become immobilized and to have traced their concentric circles once and for all; the very enamel of the sea, which changed colour imperceptibly, took on, towards the end of the bay, where an estuary had been scooped out, the blueish whiteness of milk, in which small black ferryboats seemed trapped like flies, unable to advance. I fancied that from nowhere else could you have discovered so vast a tableau. But at each bend in the road, a new portion was added to it and when we reached the tollhouse of Douville, the spur of cliff that had hitherto hidden one half of the bay from us, drew back, and I suddenly saw to my left a gulf as deep as that which hitherto I had had in front of me, but whose proportions it altered while doubling its beauty. In this very elevated spot, the air had become of a keenness and purity that intoxicated me. I loved the Verdurins; that they should have sent a carriage for us seemed so kind as to be touching. I would have liked to kiss the Princesse. I told her I had never seen anything so beautiful. She, too, professed to love this country more than any other. But I had a strong sense that for her, as for the Verdurins, the important thing was not to gaze on it like tourists, but to eat well there, to entertain company that they enjoyed, to write letters, to read, in short to live in it, allowing its beauty to wash passively over them rather than making it the object of their concerns.

From the toll-house, the carriage having stopped for a moment at such a height above the sea that, as from a mountain-top, the view of the blue gulf almost gave you vertigo, I opened the window; the softness and clarity of the sound of each wave as it broke, distinct to the ear, had something sublime about it. Was it not like an index of measurement which, overturning our customary impressions, proves that vertical distances can be assimilated to horizontal distances, contrary to the representation our minds usually make of them; and that, bringing the sky closer to us as they do, they are not great; that they are less great even for a sound that covers them, as that of the little waves was doing, because the medium that it has to traverse is purer? Indeed, if you drew no more than two metres back from the tollhouse, you could no longer make out the sound of the waves, which two hundred metres of cliff had not robbed of its delicate, meticulous, gentle precision. I told myself that my grandmother would have felt for it the admiration inspired in her by all those manifestations of nature or of art into whose simplicity grandeur may be read. My exaltation was at its height, and raised up all that surrounded me. I was touched that the Verdurins should have sent to fetch us from the station. I said as much to the Princesse, who seemed to think I was making far too much of a quite simple courtesy. I know that she later confessed to Cottard that she found me very enthusiastic; he replied that I was too emotional, that I would have needed sedatives and to take up knitting. I remarked to the Princesse on each tree, each little house crumbling beneath its roses, I made her admire everything, I would like to have pressed her to my heart. She told me she could see I had a gift for painting, that I should draw, that she was surprised I had not been told that before. And she admitted that the country here was indeed picturesque. We went through, perched on its height, the little village of Englesqueville (*Engleberti Villa*, Brichot told us). 'But are you quite sure that this evening's dinner is taking place, despite Dechambre's death, Princesse? he added, without reflecting that the fact that the carriages in which we were had come to the station was in itself an answer. – Yes, said the Princesse, M. Veldulin was insistent it shouldn't be put off, plecisely in order to stop his wife 'thinking'. Besides, after all these years when she has never failed to entertain on a Wednesday, the change in her habits might have left its mark on her. She is tellibly nervous these days. M. Verdurin was especially pleased you were coming to dinner this evening because he knew it would be a great distraction for Mme Verdurin,' said the Princesse, forgetting her pretence of not having heard of me. 'I think you'd do well not to say *anything* in front of Mme Verdurin, added the Princesse. – Ah, you do well to tell me, replied Brichot artlessly. I'll pass that recommendation on to Cottard.' The carriage stopped for a moment. It started off again, but the noise the wheels had been making in the village ceased. We had entered on the grand driveway of La Raspelière, where M. Verdurin was waiting for us on the steps. 'I did right putting on a dinner-jacket, he said, ascertaining with pleasure that the faithful were in theirs, since I have such smart men.' And as I apologized for my own jacket: 'Oh come, that's ideal. Here we dine among friends. I'd gladly offer to lend you one of my dinner-jackets, but it wouldn't fit you.' The very feeling handshake which, as he entered the hallway of La Raspelière, and by way of condolences for the death of the pianist, Brichot gave the Patron, provoked no comment from the latter. I told him of my admiration for the region. 'Ah, so much the better, yet you've seen nothing, we'll show it to you. Why don't you come and stay here for a few weeks? The air is excellent.' Brichot feared that his handshake might not have been understood. 'Well, well, poor Dechambre!' he said, but in a low voice, for fear that Mme Verdurin might not be far away. 'It's frightful, replied M. Verdurin cheerfully. – So young,' Brichot went on. Annoyed at being detained by these futilities, M. Verdurin replied hurriedly and with a shrill groan, not of grief but of irritated impatience: 'Well, yes, but there you are, there's nothing we can do about it, our words aren't going to bring him back to life, are they?' And gentleness returning along with his joviality: 'Come on, my good Brichot, put your things down quickly. We've got a bouillabaisse which won't wait. Above all, in the name of goodness, don't go mentioning Dechambre to Mme Verdurin! You know she hides a lot of what she feels, but she's so sensitive it's like a genuine sickness. I swear to you, when she heard that Dechambre was dead, she almost wept,' said M. Verdurin in a profoundly ironic tone. Hearing him, you would have said that it required a sort of dementia to mourn for a friend of thirty years' standing, while gathering on the other hand that the perpetual union of M. Verdurin and his wife did not preclude the former from constantly passing judgment on her and the latter from frequently irritating him. 'If you mention it to her she'll go and get ill again. It's lamentable, three weeks after her bronchitis. And in these cases, it's me who's the sick-nurse. You can understand I've only just been through it. Grieve all you want for the fate of Dechambre in your heart. Think about it, but don't speak of it. I loved Dechambre dearly, but you can't begrudge me loving my wife even more dearly. Here, there's Cottard, you'll be able to ask him.' And indeed, he knew that there are many small services a family doctor is able to render, such, for example, as prescribing that we must not feel grief.

Cottard had said, docilely, to the Patronne: 'Upset yourself like that and tomorrow you'll be giving *me* a temperature of 39,' as he might have said to the cook: 'Tomorrow you can give me a *ris de veau*.' For want of curing us, medicine busies itself altering the meanings of verbs and pronouns.

M. Verdurin was happy to confirm that, despite the rebuffs he had suffered two days earlier, Saniette had not deserted the little nucleus. In their idleness, Mme Verdurin and her husband had in fact developed cruel instincts, for which the great occasions were too infrequent any longer to suffice. They had been able indeed to turn Odette against Swann, and Brichot against his mistress. And they would repeat it with others, that was understood. But the opportunity did not present itself every day. Whereas, thanks to his quivering sensitivity, and his fearful, quickly panic-stricken shyness, Saniette offered them an everyday whipping-boy. And so, for fear of his defaulting, they took care to invite him with friendly and persuasive words such as those who have been held back a year at the *lycée*, or old sweats in the army, use to a tyro whom they want to butter up so as to be able to grab hold of him, with the one aim of then tickling or bullying him once he can no longer escape. 'Above all, Cottard, who had not heard M. Verdurin, reminded Brichot, not a word in front of Mme Verdurin. – Fear not, O Cottard, you see before you a sage, as Theocritus has it.[68] M. Verdurin is right, moreover, what use are our lamentations?' he added, for, capable of assimilating forms of words and the ideas to which they gave rise in him, but being without finesse, he found M. Verdurin's words admirable for their very courageous stoicism. 'All the same, it's a great talent who has left us. – What, are you still talking about Dechambre?' said M. Verdurin, who had gone ahead of us but, noticing that we were not following, had turned back. 'Listen, he said to Brichot, there's never any need to exaggerate. Because he's dead isn't a reason to make him into the genius he wasn't. He played well, agreed, above all he had the right setting here; transplanted, he no longer existed. My wife became besotted with him and made his reputation. You know how she is. I shall say moreover that, for that same reputation's sake, he died at just the right moment, *à point*, just as the *demoiselles de Caen* are about to be, I hope, grilled in accordance with the incomparable recipes of Pampille[69] (unless you're going to keep on for ever with your jeremiads here in this Casbah open to all the winds). You surely can't want to kill all of us off just because Dechambre is dead, when for the last year he'd been obliged to play scales before giving a concert, so as to get his suppleness back temporarily, very temporarily. In any case, this evening you're going to hear, or at least encounter, for after dinner the young monkey too often abandons art for cards, someone who's far more of an artist than Dechambre, a youngster my wife discovered (just as

she discovered Dechambre, and Paderewski and the others): Morel. The confounded fellow hasn't arrived yet. I'm going to be obliged to send a carriage to the last train. He's coming with an old friend of his family's who he's met again and who bores him to death, but who otherwise, so as not to have his father complaining, he'd have been obliged to remain with in Doncières, to keep him company: the Baron de Charlus.' The faithful went in. M. Verdurin, who had stayed behind with me while I took off my things, took me jokingly by the arm, like a host at a dinner party who has no lady guest to give you to take in. 'Did you have a good journey? – Yes, M. Brichot taught me things that interested me greatly,' I said, thinking of the etymologies and because I had heard that the Verdurins greatly admired Brichot. 'I'd have been surprised if he hadn't taught you something, said M. Verdurin, he's such a self-effacing man, who talks so seldom about the things he knows.' This compliment did not strike me as very accurate. 'He has a charming way with him, I said. – Exquisite, delightful, not at all pedantic, whimsical, light-hearted, my wife adores him, I do, too!' replied M. Verdurin, in a tone of exaggeration and as if reciting a lesson. Only then did I realize that what he had said about Brichot was ironic. And I wondered whether M. Verdurin, since those distant days of which I had heard speak, had not shaken off his wife's tutelage.

The sculptor was much surprised to learn that the Verdurins had consented to receive M. de Charlus. Whereas in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where M. de Charlus was so well known, his habits were never referred to (not known to the great majority, an object of uncertainty for others, whose idea was more of intense but platonic friendships and indiscretions, and carefully concealed by those alone in the know, who would shrug their shoulders when some ill-natured Gallardon ventured an insinuation), these same habits, scarcely known about save to a few intimates, were on the contrary denounced daily far away from the circle in which he lived, like the gunfire that is heard only after the interference of a zone of silence. Moreover, in those bourgeois and artistic circles where he was looked on as the very embodiment of inversion, his high standing in society and his exalted origins were wholly unknown, through a phenomenon analogous to that whereby, among the people of Romania, the name of Ronsard is known for that of a great nobleman, whereas his poetic oeuvre is unknown there.[70] On top of which, Ronsard's nobility rests on an error in Romania. Similarly, if in the world of painters and actors, M. de Charlus had such a bad reputation, this stemmed from the fact that he had been confused with a certain Comte Leblois de Charlus, who was not even faintly, or only very distantly related to him, and who had been arrested, perhaps in error, during a police raid that was still talked about. In short, all the stories recounted of M. de Charlus applied to the false one. Many professionals swore that they had had dealings with M. de Charlus, and in good faith, believing the false Charlus to be the true one, and the false one perhaps encouraging, half as parading his noble birth, half as concealing his vice, a confusion which was for a long time prejudicial to the real Charlus (the Baron whom we have met), but which then, once he was on the slippery slope, became a convenience, since it enabled him also to say 'It wasn't me.' At present, indeed, the talk was not of him. What added to the falsehood of the comments about a true fact (the Baron's tastes) was that he had been the close and perfectly innocent friend of an author who, in the world of the theatre, had, no one knew why, the same reputation without in any way deserving it. When they were seen together at a first night, people said 'You know,' just as it was believed that the Duchesse de Guermantes had an immoral relationship with the Princesse de Parme; an indestructible legend, for it would have evaporated only at a proximity to these two great ladies to which the people who retailed it would most likely never attain, save when turning their lorgnettes on to them at the theatre and slandering them to the occupant of the next stall. The sculptor was all the less hesitant about concluding from M. de Charlus's habits that the Baron's standing in society also must be bad because he possessed no information of any kind about the family to which M. de Charlus belonged, neither his title, nor his name. Just as Cottard thought that everyone knows that the title of Doctor of Medicine means nothing, and that of house surgeon something, so society people are mistaken in imagining that everyone holds the same ideas as themselves and those of their circle concerning the social significance of their names.

The Prince d'Agrigente passed for a foreign vulgarian in the eyes of a club *chasseur* to whom he owed twenty-five *louis*, and resumed his importance only in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where he had three sisters who were duchesses, for the great nobleman has some effect, not on people of modest means, in the eyes of whom he counts for little, but on the brilliant ones, well informed as to his status. For the rest, M. de Charlus was to be able to realize that same evening that the Patron had only very superficial notions concerning the most illustrious ducal families. Convinced that it would be a *faux pas* on the Verdurins' part to allow a tainted individual to be introduced into their very 'select' salon, the sculptor thought he should take the Patronne aside. 'You're entirely mistaken, anyway I never believe that sort of thing, and besides, even if it were true, I can tell you it wouldn't exactly be compromising me!' replied Mme Verdurin, furious, for Morel being the principal ingredient of her Wednesdays, she was anxious before all else not to upset him. As for Cottard, he could not give an opinion for he had asked to go upstairs for a moment 'on a brief errand' in the *buen retiro*,[71] and then to write a very urgent letter on behalf of a patient in M. Verdurin's bedroom.

An important publisher from Paris, there on a visit and who had thought he would be asked to stay, went abruptly off, without delay, understanding that he was not fashionable enough for the little clan. He was a tall, powerful man, very dark, studious, with something sharp-edged about him. He looked like an ebony paper knife.[72]

Mme Verdurin who, in order to receive us in her immense drawing-room, where trophies of ornamental grasses, poppies and wildflowers, picked that same day, alternated with the same motif painted in camaieu, two centuries earlier, by an artist of exquisite taste, had got up for a moment from a game of cards she was having with an old friend, and asked for two minutes' grace in order to finish it while going on talking to us. What I told her of my impressions was only half agreeable to her, however. For one thing, I was shocked to find that she and her husband came back in every day long before it was time for the sunsets that were held to be so beautiful, seen from these cliffs, and even more so from the terrace at La Raspelière, for the sake of which I would have travelled great distances. 'Yes, they're incomparable, said Mme Verdurin off-handedly, with a glance at the immense casements that formed a French window. For all that we see them all the time, we never grow tired of them', and her eyes went back to the cards. But my very enthusiasm had made me demanding. I complained of not being able to see from the drawing-room the rocks at Darnetal that Elstir had told me were adorable at this hour of the day, when they refracted so many colours. 'Oh, you can't see them from here, you'd need to go to the end of the garden, to the "Bay-view". From the seat there you can take in the whole panorama. But you can't go there on your own, you'd get lost. I'll take you there, if you like, she added, lamely. – No you don't, come on, weren't the pains you had the other day enough, d'you want to get more of them? He can come back, he'll see the view of the bay another time.' I did not insist, and I realized that for the Verdurins it was enough to know that the setting sun was here in their drawing-room or their dining-room, like a magnificent painting, or a precious Japanese enamel, justifying the high price at which they were renting La Raspelière fully furnished, but to which they seldom raised their eyes; their main business here was to live agreeably, to go on excursions, to eat well, to talk, to entertain agreeable friends whom they made play amusing games of billiards, have good meals and cheerful tea-parties. I found later on, however, how intelligently they had learned to know the locality, taking their guests on excursions as 'original' as the music to which they made them listen. The part that the flowers at La Raspelière, the roads along by the sea, the old houses and the unknown churches played in M. Verdurin's life was so great that those who saw him only in Paris, and who had themselves replaced the life of the seaside and the country with the luxuries of the city, could scarcely comprehend the idea he had formed of his own life, and the importance that his pleasures lent it in his own eyes. This importance had been further increased by the fact that the Verdurins were convinced that La Raspelière, which they were counting on buying, was a property unique in the world. As they saw it, the superiority that their *amour propre* had led them to ascribe to La Raspelière justified my enthusiasm, which would otherwise have somewhat irritated them, including as it did the disappointments (like those I had once suffered on first hearing Berma) of which I had made sincere confession to them.

'I hear the carriage returning. Let's hope it found them,' the Patronne suddenly murmured. Let it be said in a word that Mme Verdurin, aside even from the changes made inevitable by age, no longer resembled what she had been in the days when Swann and Odette were listening to the little phrase in her house. Even when it was being played, she was no longer obliged to wear that look of exhausted admiration she had adopted in the old days, for it had become her face. Under the impact of countless attacks of neuralgia, brought on by the music of Bach, Wagner, Vinteuil and Debussy, Mme Verdurin's forehead had assumed vast proportions, like limbs finally deformed by rheumatism. Her temples, like two beautiful burning spheres, pain-filled and milky white, in which Harmony rolls undyingly round, had pushed back her silvery tresses on either side and proclaimed, on the Patronne's behalf, without the latter having any need to speak, 'I know what awaits me this evening.' Her features no longer took the trouble to formulate the succession of too strong aesthetic impressions, for they were themselves their permanent expression as it were, in a face both ravaged and majestic. This attitude of resignation to the ever-imminent sufferings inflicted on her by the Beautiful, and of the courage that it took to put on a gown when one was scarcely recovered from the last sonata, meant that, even when listening to the cruellest music, Mme Verdurin kept a disdainfully impassive face and even hid herself in order to swallow her two spoonfuls of aspirin.

'Ah yes, here they are!' exclaimed a relieved M. Verdurin, seeing the door open on Morel, followed by M. de Charlus. The latter, for whom to dine *chez* Verdurin was certainly not to go into society, but into some place of ill-repute, was as self-conscious as a schoolboy entering for the first time into a brothel and overdoing his respects to the madam. Thus M. de Charlus's customary wish to appear virile and unmoved was overcome (when he appeared in the open doorway) by those notions of a traditional politeness which reawaken the moment self-consciousness destroys an artificial attitude and summons up the resources of the unconscious. When this sense of an instinctive, atavistic politeness towards strangers takes effect in a Charlus, whether he be a nobleman or a bourgeois for that matter, it is always the soul of a relative of the female sex, auxiliary like a goddess or incarnate like a double, who undertakes to introduce him into a new drawing-room and to shape his attitude until such time as he arrives in front of his hostess. Thus will a young painter, brought up by a saintly Protestant cousin, enter, his head on one side and tremulous, looking up at the sky, his hands clutching an invisible muff, the evoked shape of which, together with the real tutelary presence, will assist the self-conscious artist to cross, without any agoraphobia, the chasm-filled space leading from the ante-room into the small drawing-room. Thus it was that the pious relative, the memory of whom is guiding him today, had entered many years ago, with so mournful an expression that they wondered what misfortune she had come to announce, when, from her opening words, they realized, as now with the painter, that she had come to pay a digestive call. By virtue of the same law which holds that, in the interests of an action as yet unperformed, life should exploit, utilize, denature, by a perpetual prostitution, the most respectable, at times the most sacred, and sometimes only the most innocent legacies from the past, and although it might then engender a different aspect, that one of Mme Cottard's nephews who had caused distress to his family by his effeminate ways and the company that he kept, always made his entry joyfully, as if he had come to give you a surprise or announce an inheritance, radiating a happiness of which it would have been pointless to inquire the cause, but which derived from his unconscious heredity and his misplaced sex. He would walk on tiptoe, was himself astonished no doubt not to be holding in his hand a book of visiting-cards, held out his hand while opening his mouth into a heart-shape, as he had seen his aunt doing, and his one worried glance was at the mirror, where he seemed to want to make sure, bare-headed though he was, whether, as Mme Cottard had asked Swann one day, his hat was not on crooked. As for M. de Charlus, whom the society in which he had lived had provided, at this critical juncture, with different examples, other arabesques of affability, and the maxim that we must be able, in certain cases, even for members of the petty bourgeoisie, to show off and exploit our rarest charms, normally held in reserve, it was fluttering affectedly, and with the same ampleness to his waddlings as though they were hobbled and made broader by his being in a skirt, that he made for Mme Verdurin, wearing so flattered and honoured an expression that you might have thought that to be introduced to her was for him a supreme favour. His half-bowed face, on which self-satisfaction did battle with propriety, was creased by small lines of affability. You might have thought you saw Mme de Marsantes coming forward, so conspicuous at that moment was the woman that nature's error had introduced into M. de Charlus's body. It is true that the Baron had laboured hard to conceal that error, and to acquire a masculine appearance. But hardly had he succeeded before, having during this same time preserved the same tastes, the habit of feeling as a woman lent him a new feminine appearance, engendered this time not by his heredity but by his individual way of life. And since he had gradually come to think, even about social matters, in the feminine, and this without even noticing, for it is not only by dint of lying to others, but also of lying to ourselves, that we cease to notice that we are lying, although he had demanded of his body that it manifest (at the moment of entering the Verdurins' house) all the courtesy of a great nobleman, that body, which had clearly grasped what M. de Charlus had ceased to understand, deployed all the seductiveness of a *grande dame*, to the point where the Baron might have merited the epithet of 'lady-like'. Can we in any case entirely separate M. de Charlus's appearance from the fact that, sons not always taking after their fathers, even if they are not inverts and go in pursuit of women, they may consummate the profanation of their mothers in their faces? But let us here leave what would merit a chapter on its own: the profanation of mothers.

Although other reasons may have presided over this transformation in M. de Charlus, and purely physical ferments have caused matter to 'work' in him and his body gradually to pass over into the category of women's bodies, the change we are here registering was spiritual in origin. By dint of believing ourselves to be ill, we become so, we lose weight, we no longer have the strength to get up, we suffer from nervous enteritis. By dint of having tender thoughts about men, we

become a woman and a false skirt impedes our steps. In such cases, the *idée fixe* can modify (as in other cases our health) our gender. Morel, who was behind him, came to greet me. From that moment on, because of a twofold change that had occurred in him, he created (I was unable to take account of it soon enough, alas!) a bad impression on me. Here is why. I have said that Morel, having escaped from servitude under his father, generally indulged in a very disdainful familiarity. On the day when he had brought me the photographs, he had spoken without even once calling me 'Monsieur', treating me condescendingly. How surprised I was then, at Mme Verdurin's, to find him bowing very low to me, and to me alone, and to hear, even before any other utterance, words of respect, most respectful – the words I had thought it impossible to bring beneath his pen or onto his lips – being addressed to me! I at once got the impression he had something to ask of me. Leading me aside a minute or two later: 'Monsieur would be doing me a very great service, he said, going so far this time as to address me in the third person, by concealing altogether from Mme Verdurin and her guests the kind of profession that my father exercised at his uncle's. It would be better to say that, in your family, he was the steward of estates so vast that it made him the equal practically of your parents.' Morel's request annoyed me very greatly, not because it forced me to exaggerate his father's situation, which was all one to me, but my own father's at least apparent wealth, which I thought ridiculous. But so unhappy and so urgent was his expression that I did not refuse. 'No, before dinner, he said in a tone of entreaty, Monsieur has countless pretexts for taking Mme Verdurin aside.' Which was what in fact I did, attempting as best I could to enhance the distinction of Morel's father, without exaggerating overmuch the 'standard of living' or the 'worldly wealth' of my family. This was accepted without a murmur, despite the astonishment of Mme Verdurin, who had known my grandfather slightly. But as she lacked tact, and detested families (that solvent of the little nucleus), after telling me that she had once caught sight of my great-grandfather, and speaking of him as of some semi-imbecile who would not have understood the first thing about the little group and who, as she put it, 'was not one of us', she said: 'Families are such a nuisance in any case, one aspires only to escape from them'; and she at once recounted one of my grandfather's traits of which I was unaware, although at home I had had suspicions (I never knew him, but he was much talked about) as to his uncommon avariciousness (as opposed to the rather too ostentatious generosity of my great-uncle, the friend of the lady in pink and Morel's father's employer): 'The very fact that your grandparents had such a smart steward proves that there are people of every stripe in a family. Your grandfather's father was so miserly that, almost gaga by the end of his life – between ourselves, he was never very bright, you make up for all of them – he couldn't bring himself to spend three *sous* on an omnibus. So that they were obliged to have someone go after him, to pay the conductor separately, and give the old skinflint to believe that his friend, M. de Persigny,[73] a minister of state, had arranged for him to travel on the buses gratis. Anyway, I'm very glad that *our* Morel's father should have been so respectable. I'd understood he taught at a *lycée*, but never mind, I'd misunderstood. But it hardly matters, for I must tell you that here we appreciate only people's inner worth, the personal contribution, what I call participation. Provided you are of the guild, provided in short you are of the brotherhood, the rest matters little.' Morel's way of being of it – so far as I could make out – was to be sufficiently fond of both men and women to give pleasure to either sex with the help of the experiments he had conducted on the other; as will be seen in due course. But what it is essential to say here is that, the moment I had given him my word to approach Mme Verdurin, the moment I had done so above all, when there was no going back, Morel's 'respect' for me took wing as if by magic, the respectful formulae vanished, and for a time he avoided me even, contriving to make it look as though he despised me, so that if Mme Verdurin wanted me to say something to him, to ask him for a particular piece of music, he went on talking to one of the faithful, then moved on to another, and changed his position if I went up to him. They were obliged to tell him up to three or four times that I had addressed him, after which he would answer me, briefly, with an air of constraint, unless we were alone. In which case, he was expansive and amicable, for he had charming sides to his character. I concluded nonetheless from that first evening that he must be low by nature, that he would not shrink when need be from any obsequiousness and knew nothing of gratitude. In which he resembled the common run of mankind. But as I had something of my grandmother in me, and took pleasure in men's diversity without expecting anything from them or holding anything against them, I overlooked his servility, took pleasure in his gaiety when it showed itself, and even in what I took to have been genuine friendship on his part when, having reviewed the full range of his false knowledge of human nature, he realized (in fits and starts, for he had strange regressions to his blind and primitive savagery) that my kindness towards him was disinterested, that my indulgence stemmed not from a lack of clear-sightedness but from what he called goodness of heart, and above all I was enchanted by his artistry, which was hardly anything more than an admirable virtuosity but which caused me (without his being in the intellectual sense of the word a true musician) to hear again, or to get to know, so much beautiful music. Moreover, a manager, M. de Charlus, of whose talents in this direction I had been unaware (although Mme de Guermantes, who had known a very different Charlus in their young days, claimed that he had written her a sonata, had painted a fan for her, and so on), modest where his own superior abilities, first-rate though they were, were concerned, had been able to harness this virtuosity to a manifold artistic sense, which magnified it tenfold. You are to imagine some merely skilful performer from the Ballets Russes, trained, taught and brought on in every sense by M. de Diaghilev.

I had just passed on to Mme Verdurin the message I had been entrusted with by Morel and was talking to M. de Charlus about Saint-Loup, when Cottard entered the drawing-room to announce, as if there were a fire, that the Cambremers were arriving. So as not to appear, in front of newcomers like M. de Charlus (whom Cottard had not seen) and myself, to attach too great an importance to the arrival of the Cambremers, Mme Verdurin did not stir, made no response to the announcement of this news, but contented herself with saying to the Doctor, fanning herself gracefully and in the same artificial tone of voice as a marquise at the Théâtre-Français: 'The Baron was just saying…' This was too much for Cottard! Less animatedly than would once have been the case, for his practice and his high positions had slowed down his delivery, but with the emotion all the same that he recovered at the Verdurins': 'A Baron! Where, where's a Baron? Where's a Baron?' he exclaimed, looking around for him with an astonishment bordering on incredulity. Mme Verdurin, with the affected indifference of a hostess one of whose servants has just smashed a precious glass in front of her guests, and with the artificial, over-shrill intonation of a first prizewinner at the Conservatoire playing in Dumas *fils*,[74] replied, indicating Morel's patron with her fan: 'But the Baron de Charlus, to whom I am about to introduce you… Monsieur le Professeur Cottard.' Mme Verdurin was not displeased as it happens to have an opportunity to play the lady. M. de Charlus held out two fingers, which the Professor shook with the benevolent smile of a 'prince of science'. But he stopped dead on seeing the Cambremers enter, while M. de Charlus drew me into a corner to say a word to me, not without feeling my muscles, which is a German custom. M. de Cambremer bore little resemblance to the old Marquise. He was, as she used affectionately to put it, 'altogether on his father's side'. For anyone who had only heard speak of him, or even of letters from him, of a lively and apt turn of phrase, his physical appearance was a surprise. No doubt you would grow accustomed to it. But his nose, in order to come and take up its crooked position above his mouth, had chosen perhaps the one oblique line, out of so many, that you would never have thought of tracing on that face, one which denoted a common stupidity, made even worse by the proximity of an apple-red Norman complexion. It is possible that M. de Cambremer's eyes had preserved in their lids something of that Le Cotentin sky, so soft on those beautiful sunny days when the stroller is amused to see, halted beside the road, and to count in their hundreds, the shadows of the poplar trees, but those heavy, rheumy, badly drooping eyelids would have prevented intelligence itself from passing through. And so, disconcerted by the thinness of that blue gaze, you turned back to the big, crooked nose. By a transposition of the senses, M. de Cambremer looked at you with his nose. This nose of M. de Cambremer's was not ugly, but rather a little too beautiful, too strong, too vain of its own importance. Hooked, polished, shiny, spanking new, it was quite prepared to make up for the spiritual insufficiency of his gaze; unfortunately, if the eyes are sometimes the organ in which intelligence is revealed, the nose (whatever their intimate solidarity and the unsuspected repercussions of one feature on the others), the nose is generally the organ in which stupidity exhibits itself the most readily.

For all that the decorousness of the sombre clothing that M. de Cambremer always wore, even in the mornings, reassured those dazzled and exasperated by the insolent brilliance of the beach costumes of the people whom they did not know, you could not understand why the wife of the First President should declare, with an air of expertise and of authority, as someone having had greater experience of Alençon's high society than yourself, that with M. de Cambremer you at once felt yourself, even before knowing who he was, in the presence of a man of great refinement, a man of perfect breeding, who made a change after the

Balbec kind, a man in short in whose company you could breathe freely. On her, asphyxiated as she was by so many Balbec tourists, who knew nothing of her world, he had the effect of a flask of smelling-salts. He struck me, on the contrary, as one of those people whom my grandmother would have at once found to be 'quite unpresentable', and since she did not understand snobbery, she would no doubt have been amazed that he had managed to be married to Mlle Legrandin, who must have been very hard to satisfy when it came to refinement, she whose brother was so very 'presentable'. At best, it might have been said of M. de Cambremer's common ugliness that it rather belonged to the locality, possessing something of its ancient past; faced by his defective features, which one would have liked to rectify, you thought of the names of those small Normandy towns about whose etymology my *curé* had been mistaken, because the country people, articulating badly or having understood amiss the Norman or Latin word that designated them, had finally perpetuated a misconception and a corrupt pronunciation in a barbarism that was already to be found in the cartularies, as Brichot would have said. Life in these small old towns can anyway be spent agreeably, and M. de Cambremer must have had his good qualities, for if it was only natural that, as a mother, the old Marquise should have preferred her son to her daughter-in-law, she often declared in return, she who had several children, two or three of whom were not without talents, that the Marquis was in her opinion the best one of the family. During the short time he had spent in the army, his comrades, finding Cambremer too much of a mouthful, had given him the nickname of Cancan,[75] which he had as it happens in no way deserved. He knew how to adorn a dinner party to which he had been invited by saying on the arrival of the fish course (even were the fish to be high) or the entrée: 'I say though, what a fine beast we seem to have here.' And his wife, having, on entering the family, adopted all that she thought formed part of this society's style of living, put herself on to the same level as her husband's friends, and sought perhaps to please him like a mistress, as if in the old days she had been involved in his life as a bachelor, by saying with a detached air when talking about him to officers: 'You'll be seeing Cancan. Cancan has gone to Balbec, but he'll be back this evening.' She was furious to be jeopardizing her reputation this evening at the Verdurins' and had done so only at the entreaties of her mother-in-law and husband, for the sake of the tenancy. But being less well brought up than they, she made no secret of the motive and for the past fortnight had been having a good laugh with her woman friends about this dinner. 'You know we're having dinner with our tenants. That'll be well worth a rise. Basically, I'm rather curious to find out what they may have done to our poor old La Raspelière (as though she had been born there, and found it full of mementos of her family). Our old keeper told me only yesterday the whole place has become unrecognizable. I don't dare to think about all that must be going on in there. I think we'd do well to have it all fumigated before we move back in.' She arrived haughty and morose, with the air of a great lady whose château, on account of a war, has been occupied by the enemy, but who feels at home nonetheless and is keen to show the victors that they are intruders. Mme de Cambremer could not see me to start with, for I was in a bay to one side with M. de Charlus, who was telling me he had learned from Morel that his father had been a 'steward' in my family, and that he, Charlus, was relying sufficiently on my intelligence and my magnanimity (a term common to both him and Swann) to deny myself the mean and unworthy pleasure that common young imbeciles (I had been warned) would not fail to take in my position by revealing to our hosts details that the latter might think demeaning. 'The mere fact that I take an interest in him and extend my protection over him has something supereminent about it and abolishes the past,' concluded the Baron. Even as I was listening to him, and pledging him the silence which I would have kept even without the hope of being thought in exchange intelligent and magnanimous, I was looking at Mme de Cambremer. And I had difficulty recognizing the melting, toothsome article whose company I had enjoyed the other day at teatime, on the terrace in Balbec, in the Normandy *galette* I saw now, hard as a pebble, into which the faithful would have tried to sink their teeth in vain. Irritated in advance by the easy-going side that her husband had got from his mother, and which meant that he would assume an honoured expression when the faithful were being introduced to him, but anxious all the same to fulfil her functions as a woman of the world, once Brichot had been presented to her she wanted him to make the acquaintance of her husband, as she had seen the more elegant of her woman friends doing, but fury or pride prevailing over the flaunting of her savoir-vivre, she said, not as she should have done, 'Allow me to introduce my husband,' but 'Meet my husband,' so keeping the flag of the Cambremers flying high, in spite of themselves, for the Marquis bowed as low in front of Brichot as she had anticipated. But Mme de Cambremer's whole mood changed suddenly when she noticed M. de Charlus, whom she knew by sight. Never had she succeeded in getting herself introduced to him, even in the days of the liaison she had had with Swann. For M. de Charlus, who always took the woman's side, of his sister-in-law against M. de Guermantes's mistresses, of Odette, at that time not yet married, but an old liaison of Swann's, against the new ones, was a stern defender of morality and a loyal protector of married couples, and had given Odette – and kept – his word that he would not allow himself to be presented to Mme de Cambremer. The latter had certainly never suspected that it was at the Verdurins' that she would finally meet this unapproachable man. M. de Cambremer knew that it was so great a delight to her that he was himself affected, and he looked at his wife with an expression that signified: 'You're glad you decided to come, aren't you?' He spoke as it happens very little, knowing that he had married a superior woman. 'Me, unworthy,' he was forever saying, readily quoting a fable of La Fontaine's and another by Florian[76] which he saw as applying to his own ignorance, and as enabling him, on the other hand, under the guise of a disdainful flattery, to demonstrate to the men of learning who were not members of the Jockey Club that one could both be a sportsman and have read fables. The unfortunate thing was that he only really knew two. Thus these recurred frequently. Mme de Cambremer was not stupid but she had various very irritating habits. In her case, the deformation of people's names had absolutely nothing of aristocratic disdain about it. She would not have said, unlike the Duchesse de Guermantes (whose birth should have shielded her, more so than Mme de Cambremer, against such an absurdity), so as to appear not to know the far from fashionable name (whereas it is now that of one of the least approachable of women) of Julien de Monchâteau: 'a little Madame… Pico de la Mirandola'.[77] No, when Mme de Cambremer got a name wrong it was out of kindness, so as to appear not to know something, and when, out of sincerity, she all the same admitted it, she thought she could hide it by removing the name-tag. If she was defending a woman, for example, she would seek to disguise the fact, while wanting not to lie to someone who was begging her to tell the truth, that Madame Such-and-Such was currently the mistress of M. Sylvain Lévy, and would say: 'No… I know nothing whatsoever about her, I believe she's been criticized for having kindled a passion in some gentleman whose name I don't know, something like Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn; anyway, I believe that this gentleman has long since died and that there was never anything between them.' The procedure is similar – though the reverse of theirs – to that of those liars who, by editing their activities when recounting them to a mistress or simply to a friend, imagine that neither one nor the other will at once see that the sentence spoken (as in the case of Cahn, Kohn, Kuhn) is an interpolation, is of another species from those making up the conversation, that it has a false bottom.

Mme Verdurin asked in her husband's ear: 'Do I give my arm to the Baron de Charlus? Since you'll have Mme de Cambremer on your right, we could have swapped courtesies. – No, said M. Verdurin, as the other is higher in rank (meaning that M. de Cambremer was a Marquis), M. de Charlus is in fact his inferior. – Very well, I'll put him next to the Princesse.' And Mme Verdurin introduced Mme Sherbatoff to M. de Charlus; the pair of them bowed silently, as much as to say they knew all about one another but promised to keep a mutual secret. M. Verdurin introduced me to M. de Cambremer. Even before he had spoken, in his loud voice with its slight stammer, his tall stature and high colour had displayed in their oscillation the martial hesitation of a superior officer who tries to put you at your ease and says: 'They've had a word with me, we'll sort things out; I'll get your punishment lifted; we're not man-eaters; it'll all be all right.' Then, shaking my hand: 'I believe you know my mother,' he said. The verb 'believe' he thought appropriate to the wariness of a first introduction but in no way to express doubt, for he went on: 'Anyway, I have a letter from her for you.' M. de Cambremer was artlessly happy to revisit the place where he had lived for so long. 'I am rediscovering myself,' he said to Mme Verdurin, as his wondering gaze recognized the painted flowers on the trumeaux above the doors, and the marble busts on their tall pedestals. He may, however, have felt disoriented, for Mme Verdurin had brought in any amount of fine old things that she owned. From which point of view, Mme Verdurin, though regarded by the Cambremers as having turned everything upside down, was not a revolutionary but intelligently conservative, in a sense which they could not understand. Thus they accused her, wrongly, of hating the old house and of dishonouring it with simple fabrics in place of their own opulent plush, like an ignorant *curé* criticizing the diocesan architect for reinstating the old wooden carvings that had been stored away, for which the cleric had seen fit to substitute ornaments bought in the place Saint-Sulpice.[78] What was more, in front of the château, a small mixed garden had started to replace the

flower-beds that had been the pride and joy not only of the Cambremers but of their gardener. The latter, who looked on the Cambremers as his sole masters, and groaned beneath the yoke of the Verdurins, as if the land had been temporarily occupied by an invader and a troop of marauding soldiery, went off secretly bearing his grievances to the dispossessed owner, waxed indignant at the contempt in which his araucarias, his begonias, his sempervivums and his double dahlias were held, and that anyone should dare, in so opulent a residence, to grow such commonplace flowers as anthemis or maidenhair fern. Mme Verdurin had sensed this stubborn resistance and had decided, should she take a long lease or even buy La Raspelière, to set as a condition the dismissal of the gardener, to whom the old owner was, on the contrary, exceedingly attached. He had served her for nothing in times of hardship, and adored her; but thanks to the bizarre compartmentalization of opinion among the common people, where the profoundest moral contempt may be enclosed within the most heartfelt esteem, the which in its turn overlaps with old, unended grudges, he often used to say about Mme de Cambremer, who, in '70, in a château she owned in the east, surprised by the invasion, had had, for a whole month, to endure the contact of the Germans: 'What Madame la Marquise's been much criticized for is, during the war, to have taken the Prussian side and even put them up in her house. At any other time, I'd have understood; but in time of war, she shouldn't have done. It's not right.' So that he was undyingly loyal to her, revered her for her kindness, yet credited that she had been guilty of treason. Mme Verdurin was piqued that M. de Cambremer should claim to recognize La Raspelière so easily. 'You must find a few changes all the same, she replied. First of all, there were those terrible great Barbedienne bronzes[79] and some nasty little plush chairs that I wasted no time packing off to the attic, which is still too good for them.' After which acerbic rejoinder directed at M. de Cambremer, she offered him her arm to go to the table. He hesitated for a moment, saying to himself: 'All the same, I can't go in ahead of M. de Charlus.' But imagining that the latter was an old friend of the household, seeing that he did not have the place of honour, he decided to take the arm he was being offered and told Mme Verdurin how proud he was to have been admitted into the *cénacle* (which is how he referred to the little nucleus, not without a short laugh of satisfaction at knowing the term). Cottard, who was sitting next to M. de Charlus, looked at him underneath his eyeglass so as to make his acquaintance and break the ice, with winks that were far more insistent than they would once have been, and not diluted by any shyness. His winning glances, magnified by their smile, were no longer contained by the eyepiece but overflowed it on every side. The Baron, who was quick to find men of his own kind wherever he was, did not doubt that Cottard was one such and was giving him the eye. He at once displayed to the Professor the severity of the invert, as contemptuous of those who feel attracted by him as he is all ardour and attentiveness towards those for whom he feels an attraction. Although everyone talks, untruthfully, of the comforts, forever denied to us by fate, of being loved, it is no doubt a general law, whose writ is very far from running to the Charluses alone, that we should find the person whom we do not love but who loves us unbearable. To such a person, to the woman of whom we will say not that she loves us but that she has her hooks into us, we prefer the company of any other woman at all, who has neither her charm, nor her attractions, nor her brains. She will only get these back so far as we are concerned once she has ceased loving us. In which sense, we might see, in the irritation produced in an invert by a man he finds unattractive but who seeks him out, simply the transposition, in a comical form, of this universal rule. With him, however, it is far more powerful. Thus, whereas the common run of men try to conceal it even as they experience it, the invert is implacable in letting the man who has provoked it know, as he would certainly not let a woman know, M. de Charlus, for example, with the Princesse de Guermantes, whose passion annoyed yet flattered him. But when they find another man displaying a particular proclivity towards them, then, whether it be incomprehension that it should be the same as their own, or an unfortunate reminder that this proclivity, found beautiful by them for as long as it is they who are experiencing it, is looked on as a vice, or a desire to rehabilitate themselves by an outburst in circumstances where it will not cost them anything, or out of a fear of detection which they suddenly rediscover when desire is no longer leading them on, blindfold, from one rash act to the next, or in fury at suffering, by virtue of someone else's equivocal attitude, the injury they would not have shrunk from causing that other person by their own attitude had they found him attractive, the men who are not embarrassed to follow a young man for miles on end, or never to take their eyes off him at the theatre even if he is with friends, thereby risking causing a rift between them, they can be heard to say, the minute someone for whom they feel no attraction looks at them: 'Who do you take me for, Monsieur? (simply because they are being taken for what they are), I don't understand you, no, no good insisting, you're making a mistake', going as far as a slap in the face if necessary, and, in front of someone who knows the rash individual in question, becoming indignant: 'What, you know this horror? The way it has of looking at one! Such manners!' M. de Charlus did not go as far as this, but he assumed the frosty, offended expression that women who are not loose have when people appear to think that they are, and even more the women who are so. Moreover, the invert brought face to face with an invert sees not simply a displeasing image of himself which, purely inanimate, could injure only his self-esteem, but another himself, alive, active in the same direction, and capable therefore of injuring him in his amours. Thus he is following his instinct for self-preservation when he runs this potential rival down, either to the people who are capable of doing the latter harm (without Invert No i concerning himself about being taken for a liar when thus condemning Invert No 2 in the eyes of people who may be well informed about his own case), or to the young man whom he has 'started', who is going perhaps to be taken away from him and who needs to be convinced that the same things that he would find every advantage in doing with him would be the greatest of misfortunes were he to allow himself to do them with the other. For M. de Charlus, mindful perhaps of the (quite imaginary) dangers that the presence of this Cottard, whose smile he had misinterpreted, would incur for Morel, an invert who did not attract him was not merely a caricature of himself, he was also a rival designate. If, when setting foot in the provincial town where he has come to settle permanently, a tradesman in an unusual line of business sees directly facing him, in the same square, the same business being carried on by a competitor, he is not any more discomfited than a Charlus who, having gone off to conduct his love-life privately in some tranquil spot, catches sight, on the day of his arrival, of the local squire, or the barber, whose appearance and mannerisms leave him in no doubt. The tradesman will often develop a hatred for his competitor; this hatred sometimes degenerates into melancholy, and if his heredity be even slightly tainted, the tradesman in small towns has been known to show the first signs of insanity, which can be cured only by persuading him to sell his 'good-will' and expatriate himself. The fury of the invert is more obsessional still. He has realized from the very first instant that the squire and the barber have desired his young companion. It is no good his repeating to the latter a hundred times a day that the barber and the squire are ruffians any contact with whom would dishonour him, he is obliged, like Harpagon,[80] to watch over his treasure and gets up during the night to see whether it is being stolen from him. Which is what no doubt, more even than desire or the convenience of a common habit, and almost as much as that experience of ourselves which is alone true, makes one invert able to sniff out another with an almost infallible rapidity and certainty. He may be momentarily mistaken, but is quickly able to redivine the truth. Thus M. de Charlus's error was short-lived. A godlike discernment showed him a moment later that Cottard was not of his own kind and that he had no need to fear his advances, either for himself, which would merely have exasperated him, or for Morel, which would have seemed to him more serious. He recovered his composure, and since he was still under the influence of the transit of Venus Androgyne, he smiled feebly now and again at the Verdurins without taking the trouble to open his mouth, but simply uncreasing one corner of his lips, and for a second allowed his eyes to light up affectionately, he who was so besotted with virility, just as his sister-in-law the Duchesse de Guermantes would have done. 'Do you do much hunting, Monsieur? Mme Verdurin said contemptuously to M. de Cambremer. – Has Ski told you about our great adventure? Cottard asked the Patronne. – I hunt mainly in the forest of Chantepie, answered M. de Cambremer. – No, I haven't told her anything, said Ski. – Does it deserve its name?'[81] Brichot asked M. de Cambremer, having glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, for he had promised to talk etymologies, while asking me to keep from the Cambremers the contempt with which those of the *curé* had filled him. 'It's no doubt because I'm incapable of understanding, but I don't follow your question, said M. de Cambremer. – I mean, do many magpies sing there?' answered Brichot. Cottard meanwhile was suffering from the fact that Mme Verdurin was not aware that they had all but missed the train. 'Come on now, said Mme Cottard to her husband, in order to encourage him, recount your odyssey. – Yes indeed, it's quite out of the ordinary, said the Doctor, who recommenced his narrative. When I saw that the train was in the station I was thunderstruck. And all by the fault of Ski. You're somewhat quaint with your information, *mon cher*! And with Brichot waiting for us at the station – I thought, said the university man, casting what remained of his gaze around him and smiling with his thin lips, that if you had been delayed at Graincourt, it was because you had encountered some lady of the peripatetic school. – Hold your tongue, will you? Supposing my

wife were to hear you! said the Professor. The little woman, he jealous. – Oh, that Brichot,' exclaimed Ski, whose traditional gaiety had been aroused by Brichot's risqué joke, 'ever the same,' although he did not know truth to tell whether the university man had ever been dirty-minded. And in order to add the ritual gesture to these hallowed words, he made as if he were unable to resist the urge to pinch his leg. 'Quite a lad, he never changes,' Ski went on, and, not reflecting on how sad and how comic the academic's semi-blindness made the words seem, he added: 'Ever one eye on the ladies. – There, you see, said M. de Cambremer, that's what it's like when you encounter a scholar. I've been hunting in the forest of Chantepie these past fifteen years and not once did I ask myself what the name might mean.' Mme de Cambremer cast a stern glance at her husband; she would not have wanted him to humble himself like this in front of Brichot. She was even more displeased when, each time Cancan employed a 'ready-made' expression, Cottard, who knew both their strengths and their weaknesses, having learned them so laboriously, demonstrated to the Marquis, who had owned to being stupid, that they did not mean anything: 'Why "dull as ditchwater"? Do you think ditchwater is duller than anything else? You say "forty winks". Why forty particularly? Why "sleep like a log"? Why "go west"? Why "paint the town red"?' But then Brichot undertook to defend M. de Cambremer, by explaining the origins of each expression. But Mme de Cambremer was chiefly occupied in examining the changes the Verdurins had brought about at La Raspelière, so as to be able to criticize some of these and to import others, or the same ones perhaps, into Féterne. 'I ask myself what that chandelier is that's all askew. I have difficulty recognizing my old Raspelière,' she added, with a familiarly aristocratic air, as though she had been speaking of a retainer, and claiming less to be denoting his age than saying that he had seen her born. And as she was somewhat bookish in her language: 'All the same, she added, in an undertone, I fancy that, were I to live in someone else's house, I'd be rather ashamed to alter everything like this. – It's unfortunate you didn't come with them,' said Mme Verdurin to M. de Charlus and Morel, hoping that M. de Charlus would 'be back' and would yield to the rule of all arriving by the same train. 'You're sure Chantepie means the magpie that sings, Chochotte?' she added, to demonstrate that, great hostess that she was, she took part in all the conversations at once. 'Tell me a little bit about this violinist, Mme de Cambremer said to me, he interests me; I adore music, and I fancy I've heard speak of him, you must educate me.' She had found out that Morel had come with M. de Charlus and wanted, by getting the first to come, to try and make a friend of the second. She added, however, so that I might not guess this reason: 'M. Brichot, too, interests me.' For though she was highly cultivated, just as certain people predisposed to obesity eat hardly anything and walk all day long without ceasing visibly to put on weight, so, for all that Mme de Cambremer had delved more deeply, at Féterne especially, into an increasingly esoteric philosophy and an increasingly learned kind of music, she emerged from these studies only to contrive schemes that might enable her to 'drop' the bourgeois friendships of her young days and form relationships that she had thought at first were part of her in-laws' society but which she had then realized were situated much higher up and much further off. A philosopher who was not sufficiently modern for her, Leibnitz, has said that the journey from the intellect to the heart is a long one. Mme de Cambremer had proved no more up to making it than her brother. Stopping from reading Stuart Mill only to start reading Lachelier,[82] the less she came to believe in the reality of the external world, the greater the zeal with which she tried to create a position for herself in it before she died. Besotted as she was with realism in art, no object seemed to her humble enough to serve as the painter or the writer's model. A society picture or novel she would have found nauseating; Tolstoy's muzhiks, or Millet's peasants,[83] were the absolute limit, socially speaking, which she would not allow the artist to go beyond. Yet to overstep that which limited her own social dealings, to ascend to associating with duchesses, was the aim of all her endeavours, so ineffective was the spiritual discipline to which she subjected herself through the study of masterpieces against the morbid and congenital snobbery that had grown up in her. This last had in the end cured certain tendencies towards avarice and adultery to which she had been liable when young, in which it resembled those singular and permanent pathological states that appear to immunize those afflicted by them against other diseases. Listening to her, I could not for the rest help but acknowledge, without deriving any pleasure from it, the refinement of her expressions. They were those common, in any given period, to everyone of the same intellectual calibre, so that the refined expression at once supplies an arc of the circle as it were, the means of describing and limiting the whole circumference. Thus these expressions mean that the people who employ them at once annoy me, as being already familiar, yet also pass for being superior, and were often held out to me as delightful and unappreciated neighbours. 'You are not unaware, Madame, that many forest regions derive their names from the animals that populate them. Next to the forest of Chantepie, you have the woods of Chantereine. – I don't know who the queen in question is,[84] but you're not being very gallant to her, said M. de Cambremer. – Take that! Chochotte, said Mme Verdurin. Apart from which, did you have a good journey? – We encountered only vague specimens of humanity, who filled the train. But I must answer M. de Cambremer's question; the *reine* here isn't a queen, the wife of a king, but a frog. It's the name it kept for a long time in these parts, witness the station of Renneville, which ought to be written as Reineville. – You seem to have a fine beast there,' said M. de Cambremer to Mme Verdurin, pointing to a fish. This was one of the compliments with the help of which he thought he could pay his way at a dinner-party, and already return the courtesy. ('There's no point in inviting them, he would often say to his wife, referring to one or other lot of friends. They were delighted to have us. It was they who thanked me.') 'Anyway, I have to tell you that I've been going just about every day to Renneville for many years, and I've not seen any more frogs there than elsewhere. Mme de Cambremer brought the *curé* of a parish where she owns a lot of property here, who's of the same way of thinking as yourself, I fancy. He's written a book. – He has indeed, I read it with the utmost interest,' answered Brichot, hypocritically. The satisfaction that his vanity received indirectly from this answer brought a long laugh from M. de Cambremer. 'Ah, well, the author of, how shall I put it, this geography, this glossary, holds forth at length on the name of a small locality of which we were once, if I may say so, the lords, by the name of Pont-à-Couleuvre. Now I'm obviously just a common ignoramus compared with that fount of learning, but I've been to Pont-à-Couleuvre scores of times to his once, and I'll be damned if I've ever seen ever one of those nasty serpents,[85] I say nasty, despite the praise the good La Fontaine bestows on them ('The Man and the Snake' was one of his two fables.) – You've not seen any, and it's you who has seen aright, replied Brichot. True, the writer you speak of knows his subject backwards, he's written a remarkable book. – Indeed! burst out Mme Verdurin, that book, it's right to say, is a true labour of love. – No doubt he consulted a few terriers (meaning by that the lists of benefices and cures for each parish), which may have supplied him with the names of the lay patrons and ecclesiastical collators. But there are other sources. One of my most learned friends has drawn on them. He found that the same place was given the name of Pont-à-Quileuvre. This bizarre name inspired him to go further back still, to a Latin text where the bridge that your friend believes to be infested with snakes is given as *Pons cui aperit*. A closed bridge opened only on payment of a fair toll. – You talk of frogs. Finding myself in the midst of such learned people, I have the impression of being the frog before the Areopagus' (this was the second fable),[86] said Cancan, who made this joke frequently, laughing loudly, thinking by means of it, in his humility and very aptly, at once to profess his ignorance and make a display of his learning. As for Cottard, blocked by the silence of M. de Charlus and searching for air in other directions, he turned to me and put one of those questions which impressed his patients if he had guessed right and thus shown that he was, so to speak, inside their bodies; and if, on the contrary, he had guessed wrong, enabled him to rectify certain theories and broaden his former points of view. 'When you come to these relatively elevated situations, such as that where we find ourselves in at this moment, have you noticed whether it increases your tendency to breathless attacks?' he asked me, certain either of making me admire him, or else of completing his education. M. de Cambremer heard the question and smiled. 'I can't tell you how much it amuses me to hear you have breathless attacks,' he threw at me across the table. By which he did not mean that it cheered him up, although that was in fact the case. For this excellent man could not hear speak of another's misfortune without a sense of well-being and a spasm of hilarity which quickly made way for the compassion of a kind heart. But his words had another meaning, made clear by those that followed: 'It amuses me, he said, because in fact my sister does, too.' In short, it amused him as if he had heard me naming as one of my friends someone who had been a frequent visitor to their house. 'What a small world,' was the reflection that he formulated to himself and which I saw written on his smiling face when Cottard mentioned my breathless attacks. And, starting with that dinner-party, these became like a sort of common link, for news of which M. de Cambremer never failed to ask me, if only in order to pass it on to his sister.

Even as I replied to the questions his wife put to me concerning Morel, I was thinking about a conversation I had had with my mother during the afternoon. As, while not advising me against going to the Verdurins' if it might amuse me, she was reminding me that it was a milieu that would not have appealed to my

grandfather but would have made him shout 'Turn out the guard!', my mother had added: 'Listen, President Toureuil and his wife told me they had had lunch with Mme Bontemps. I wasn't asked anything. But I thought I gathered that a marriage between you and Albertine would be her aunt's dearest wish. I think the real reason is they all find you very sympathetic. At the same time, I fancy the luxury they think you would be able to give her, the connections they more or less know we have, all that's not unconnected with it, I fancy, though secondary. I wouldn't have mentioned it to you, because I'm not keen on it, but as I imagine people will bring it up, I preferred to forestall them. – But you, what do you think of her? I had asked my mother. – Me? *I* shan't be marrying her. You could certainly do a thousand times better where marriage is concerned. But I don't think your grandmother would have liked you to be influenced. At present, I can't tell you what I think of Albertine, I don't think of her. I shall say to you, like Mme de Sévigné, "She has good qualities, or so I believe. But at the start, I am able to praise her only with negatives. She is not this, she does not have a Rennes accent. In time I shall perhaps say, she is that."[87] And I shall always think well of her if she is to make you happy.' But by these same words, which put the decision concerning my happiness back into my own hands, my mother had plunged me into that state of doubt in which I had been already when, my father having given me permission to go to *Phèdre*, and above all to become a man of letters, I had suddenly felt too heavy a responsibility, the fear of upsetting him, and the melancholy that comes when we cease to obey orders which, day by day, hide the future from us, and realize that we have at last begun to live life in earnest, as a grown-up person, to live the one life of which each of us is free to dispose.

It would be best perhaps to wait a little, to begin by seeing Albertine as in the past, so as to try and find out whether I truly loved her. I could amuse her by bringing her to the Verdurins', and that reminded me that I had come there myself this evening only in order to discover whether Mme Putbus was staying there, or would be coming. She was not dining at all events. 'Apropos of your friend Saint-Loup,' Mme de Cambremer said to me, thus making use of an expression that indicated a greater logic in her thoughts than her words might have given one to suppose, for though she had been talking to me about music, her mind had been on the Guermantes, 'you know everyone's talking about his marriage with the Princesse de Guermantes's niece. I must tell you that for my own part, I don't give *a fig* for all this social tittle-tattle.' I was seized by a fear of having spoken unsympathetically in front of Robert about a girl whose originality was false and whose mind was as second-rate as her character was violent. There is almost no piece of news that we learn which does not cause us to regret some remark of ours. I replied to Mme de Cambremer, what was in any case the truth, that I knew nothing about it, and that anyway his fiancée had struck me as still very young. 'That's perhaps the reason why it's not yet official; it's on everyone's lips, at all events. – I prefer to warn you,' said Mme Verdurin curtly to Mme de Cambremer, having heard that the latter had been talking to me about Morel and thought, when she dropped her voice to talk about Saint-Loup's engagement, that she was still talking about him. 'What we make here isn't light music. It's frightening how progressive they are, you know, in matters of art, my Wednesday faithful, my children as I call them, she added, with a look of vainglorious terror. I sometimes say to them: "My dear good people, you're marching faster than your Patronne, not that audacity was ever thought to frighten her." Every year, they go a bit further; I can see the day coming when they'll no longer march for Wagner or for d'Indy. – But it's very good being progressive, we're never progressive enough,' said Mme de Cambremer, while inspecting every corner of the dining-room, seeking to identify the things her mother-in-law had left behind, and those that Mme Verdurin had brought in, and to catch the latter red-handed in her lack of good taste. Meanwhile, she was trying to talk to me on the subject that interested her most, M. de Charlus. She found it touching that he should have a violinist for a protégé. 'He looks to be intelligent. – Extremely full of life even, for a man who's already getting on, I said. – Getting on? But he doesn't look as though he's getting on, see, his hair's still yellow.' (For the last three or four years, the normal word for 'hair', *les cheveux*, had been used in the singular, *le cheveu*, by one of those unknown launchers of literary fashions, and everyone on the same radius as Mme de Cambremer said *le cheveu*, not without an affected smile. At the present moment, people are still saying *le cheveu*, but out of a surfeit of the singular, the plural will be reborn.) 'What mainly interests me in M. de Charlus, she added, is that you can sense the gift in him. I must tell you that I lay little store by knowledge. What is learned doesn't interest me.' These words are not at variance with the particular virtue of Mme de Cambremer, which was indeed imitative, and acquired. But one of the things that you needed to know at that particular moment was that knowledge is nothing, is not worth a straw compared with originality. Mme de Cambremer had learned, like everyone else, that one must never learn anything. 'That's the reason why Brichot, she said to me, who has his intriguing side, for I don't turn up my nose at a certain appetizing erudition, interests me much less.' But Brichot, at that moment, had only one preoccupation: hearing that they were talking music, he was fearful lest the subject remind Mme Verdurin of the death of Dechambre. He wanted to say something that would dismiss that fateful memory. M. de Cambremer gave him the opportunity with this question: 'Wooded places are always named after animals, then? – Not so,' replied Brichot, happy to deploy his knowledge in front of so many newcomers, among whom, as I had told him, he was sure to interest at least one. 'You only need to see how, in the names of people themselves, a tree is preserved, like a fern in a lump of coal. One of our conscript fathers[88] is called M. de Saulces de Freycinet, which, if I'm not mistaken, signifies a place planted with willows and ash, *salix et fraxinetum*; his nephew, M. de Selves, unites even more trees, since his name is de Selves, *sylva*.'[89] Saniette was delighted to find the conversation taking so animated a turn. He was able, since Brichot was talking the whole time, to observe a silence that would avoid his becoming the target of M. and Mme Verdurin's gibes. And having become more susceptible still in his joy at being rescued, he had been touched to hear M. Verdurin, for all the solemnity of such a dinner-party, telling the *maître d'hôtel* to set a jug of water beside M. Saniette, who drank nothing else. (The generals who get the most soldiers killed insist that they be well fed.) And then at one moment Mme Verdurin had smiled at Saniette. No question about it, they were good people. He would never again be tortured. At that moment the meal was interrupted by a guest whom I have forgotten to mention, an illustrious Norwegian philosopher who spoke French very well but very slowly, for the twofold reason, first that having only recently learned it and wishing not to make mistakes (he made a few all the same), he referred for each word to a sort of internal dictionary; and then because, as a metaphysician, he was always thinking about what he meant as he was saying it, which, even in a Frenchman, is a cause of slowness. He was for the rest a delightful creature, though similar in appearance to many others, except in one respect. This man who was so slow of speech (there was a silence between each word) became vertiginously quick to make his escape the moment he had said his farewells. His precipitateness gave you to suppose, the first time, that he had a stomach-ache or some even more pressing need.

'My dear… associate,' he said to Brichot, having deliberated to himself whether 'associate' was the appropriate term, 'I have a sort of… desire to know whether there are other trees in the… nomenclature of your beautiful… French… Latin… Norman… language. Madame (he meant Mme Verdurin although he did not dare look at her) has told me that you know everything. Is this not the precise moment? – No, it's the moment to eat,' broke in Mme Verdurin, who could see the dinner never being over. 'Ah, very well!' replied the Scandinavian, lowering his head to his plate, with a sad smile of resignation. 'But I must point out to Madame that if I ventured on this questionnaire… I'm sorry, this questation… it's because tomorrow I must return to Paris to dine at the Tour d'Argent or at the Hôtel Meurice.[90] My French… colleague… M. Boutroux,[91] is to talk to us there about the spiritualist séances… I'm sorry, the spirituous evocations… that he has supervised. – It's not as good as they make out, the Tour d'Argent, said Mme Verdurin in irritation. I've even had some detestable dinners there. – But am I mistaken, or is the food that one eats at Madame's not the very finest French cuisine? – Good heavens, it's not positively bad, said Mme Verdurin, mollified. And if you come next Wednesday, it'll be better. – But I leave on Monday for Algiers, and from there I am going to the Cape. And once I'm at the Cape of Good Hope, I shan't be able to meet my illustrious associate any more… Forgive me, I shan't be able to meet my colleague any more.' And having supplied these retrospective excuses, he began obediently to eat at breakneck speed. But Brichot was only too happy to be able to provide further vegetable etymologies and he replied, so interesting the Norwegian that the latter stopped eating once again, but indicating that they could take away his full plate and move on to the next course: 'One of the Forty,[92] said Brichot, has the name Houssaye, or a place planted with *houx* or holly; in the name of a subtle diplomatist, d'Ormesson, you find *orme*, or elm, the *ulmus* beloved of Virgil and which gave its name to the town of Ulm; in that of his colleagues, M. de la Boulaye, the *bouleau* or birch; M. d'Aunay, the *aulne* or alder; M. de Bussière, the *buis* or box; M. Albaret, the *albier* or alburnum (I promised myself I would tell Céleste that); M. de Cholet, the *chou* or cabbage; and the *pommier* or apple tree in the name of M. de la Pommeraye, whom we heard lecture, Saniette, d'you remember, in the days when the good Porel had been sent off to the other end of the earth, as proconsul in Odéonia?'[93] Hearing Brichot pronounce the name of Saniette, M. Verdurin cast an

ironic glance at his wife and at Cottard which unnerved that self-conscious man. 'You were saying that Cholet comes from *chou*, I said to Brichot. Does a station that I went through before getting to Doncières, Saint-Frichoux, also come from *chou*? – No, Saint-Frichoux is *Sanctus Fructuosus*, just as *Sanctus Ferreolus* gave Saint-Fargeau, but it's not Norman at all. – He knows evelything there is to be known, he's borling us,' gurgled the Princesse quietly. – There are so many other names that interest me, but I can't ask you everything at once.' And turning to Cottard: 'Is Mme Putbus here? I asked him. – No, thank God, replied Mme Verdurin, who had overheard my question. I tried hard to divert her holidays to Venice, we're rid of her for this year. – I shall myself have a right to two trees, said M. de Charlus, for I've more or less taken a small house between Saint-Martin-du-Chêne and Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs.[94] – But that's very near here, I hope you'll come over often, together with Charlie Morel. You'll only need to make arrangements concerning the trains with our little group, you're no distance from Doncières,' said Mme Verdurin, who hated people not coming by the same train and at the times when she had sent carriages. She knew how severe the climb was up to La Raspelière, even going round by the network of small roads behind Féterne, which delayed you by half an hour, and she was afraid that those looking to be independent might not find carriages to bring them, or might even, having in actual fact remained at home, seize on the pretext of not having found one at Douville-Féterne and not having felt up to making such an ascent on foot. In response to this invitation, M. de Charlus contented himself with a mute nod of the head. 'He can't always be so accommodating, he looks so stiff,' whispered the Doctor to Ski, having remained very simple despite the superficial coating of vanity, and who did not try to hide the fact that Charlus had snubbed him. 'He's no doubt unaware that in all the watering-places and even in Paris in the clinics, the doctors, for whom I am of course 'number one', make it a point of honour to introduce me to all the noblemen who are there and are afraid of hearing the worst. That even makes staying in a resort rather agreeable for me, he added off-handedly. Even in Doncières the major of the regiment, who is the doctor in attendance on the colonel, invited me to have lunch with him, telling me I was in a position to dine with the general. And this general is a Monsieur *de* something. I don't know whether his titles of nobility are more or less ancient than those of the Baron here. – Don't get all excited, it's not much of a coronet,' replied Ski in an undertone, and he added something indistinct with a verb, of which I could make out the final syllables '*arder*',[95] preoccupied as I was with listening to what Brichot was saying to M. de Charlus. 'No, I regret to tell you, it's probable you have only one tree, for if Saint-Martin-du-Chêne is obviously *Sanctus Martinus juxta quercum*, the word *if* conversely may simply be the root, *ave, eve*, which means damp, as in Aveyron, Lodève, Yvette, and which you see surviving in our *éviers*, or kitchen-sinks. It's the "*eau*", the water, which in Breton is *Ster, Stermaria, Sterlaer, Sterbouest, Ster-en-Dreuchen*.' I did not hear the conclusion, for whatever pleasure I might have taken in hearing the name of *Stermaria* once again, I could not help hearing Cottard, near to whom I was sitting, saying in a low voice to Ski: 'Ah, but I didn't know! He's a gentleman who knows how to manage things, then. What, he's one of the brotherhood! Yet he hasn't got those puffy eyelids. I shall need to watch out for my feet underneath the table, he'd only have to squeeze one so far as I'm concerned. Anyway, it only half surprises me. I see several noblemen in the shower, in the altogether, they're degenerates more or less. I don't speak to them because after all I'm a public servant and it might do me harm. But they know perfectly well who I am.' Saniette, who had been alarmed by Brichot's interpellation, was beginning to breathe freely again, like someone who is afraid of storms but finds that the flash of lightning has not been followed by any sound of thunder, when he heard M. Verdurin question him while fixing him with a stare that did not leave hold of the poor wretch all the time he was speaking, in such a way as instantly to intimidate him and not allow him to gather his wits. 'But you've always kept it from us, Saniette, that you used to frequent matinées at the Odéon?' Trembling like a recruit in front of a bullying sergeant, Saniette answered, making his words occupy the smallest possible space so as to have a better chance of avoiding the blows: 'Once, to *La Chercheuse*.[96] – What's that he says?' shouted M. Verdurin, looking both disgusted and furious, and knitting his brows, as though his full attention would not be enough if he was to understand something unintelligible. 'For a start, we don't understand what you're saying, what have you got in your mouth?' demanded M. Verdurin with increasing violence, and alluding to Saniette's faulty pronunciation. 'Poor Saniette, I won't have you making him unhappy,' said Mme Verdurin in a falsely pitying tone and so as to leave no one in any doubt as to her husband's insolent intentions. 'I went to *La Che… – Che, che, che*, do try to speak clearly, said M. Verdurin, I can't even hear you.' Hardly one of the faithful could forbear from guffawing, and they looked like a band of cannibals whose taste for blood has been reawakened by a wound inflicted on a white man. For the instinct for imitation and lack of courage govern societies as they do crowds. And everyone laughs at someone who is seen being made fun of, while being quite prepared to venerate him ten years later in a circle where he is admired. It is in this same fashion that the common people drive out or acclaim a king. 'Come, it's not his fault, said Mme Verdurin. – It's not mine either, you don't dine out if you can no longer articulate. – I was at Favart's *La Chercheuse d'esprit*. – What, it's La Chercheuse d'esprit that you call *La Chercheuse*? Oh, that's magnificent, I could have gone on looking for a hundred years and not found that,' exclaimed M. Verdurin, who would, however, have decided straight off that someone was not well read or an artist, 'was not one of us', if he had heard him give certain works their full title. You had, for example, to say *Le Malade, Le Bourgeois*; and anyone adding '*imaginaire*' or '*gentilhomme*' would have made it clear they were not 'of the club', just as in a salon someone proves that he is not a member of society by saying M. de Montesquiou-Fezensac instead of M. de Montesquiou. 'But it's not so extraordinary,' said Saniette, breathless with emotion yet smiling, though he may not have wanted to. Mme Verdurin burst out: 'Oh yes it is! she sniggered. You can be sure that no one in the world could have guessed you meant *La Chercheuse d'esprit*.' M. Verdurin resumed more quietly, and addressing both Brichot and Saniette: 'It's a jolly play as it happens, *La Chercheuse d'esprit*.' Uttered in a serious tone, these simple words, in which no trace of malice was to be detected, did Saniette as much good and evoked as much gratitude in him as a kindness. He was unable to proffer a single word but maintained a contented silence. Brichot was more talkative. 'That's true, he replied to M. Verdurin, and were it to be passed off as the work of some Sarmatian or Scandinavian author, *La Chercheuse d'esprit* might be proposed as a candidate for the situation vacant of masterpiece. But let it be said without disrespect to the shade of the gentle Favart, his temperament was not that of an Ibsen. (He at once blushed up to the ears remembering the Norwegian philosopher, who wore an unhappy look because he had been trying in vain to identify what vegetable substance the *buis* might be that Brichot had mentioned just now in connection with Bussière.) Anyway, Porel's satrapy now being occupied by a functionary who is a Tolstoyan of the strict observance, maybe we shall be seeing *Anna Karenina* or *Resurrection* beneath the Odéonian architrave.[97] – I know the portrait of Favart you mean, said M. de Charlus. I saw a very good proof engraving of it at the Comtesse Molé's.' The name of the Comtesse Molé had a powerful effect on Mme Verdurin. 'Ah, so you go to Mme de Molé's,' she exclaimed. She thought that you said 'the Comtesse Molé' or 'Madame Molé' simply as an abbreviation, as she had heard people say 'the Rohans', or out of disdain, as she herself said 'Madame La Tremoïlle'. She was in no doubt that the Comtesse Molé, knowing as she did the Queen of Greece and the Princesse de Caprarola, had as good a right to the *particule* as anybody, and she had decided for once to grant it to this very brilliant person who had shown herself so well-disposed towards her. And so, to make quite clear that she had spoken as she had deliberately, and did not begrudge the Comtesse the *de*, she went on: 'But I had no idea you knew Madame de Molé!' as if it had been doubly extraordinary both that M. de Charlus should have known that lady and that Mme Verdurin should not have known that he knew her. Now society, or at least what M. de Charlus called by that name, forms a relatively homogeneous and closed whole. Just as it is understandable that in the disparate vastness of the bourgeoisie a barrister should say to someone who knows one of his schoolfriends, 'But how the devil did you come to meet so-and-so?', to be surprised on the other hand that a Frenchman should know the meaning of the word *temple* or *forêt* would be hardly any more extraordinary than to wonder by what accident M. de Charlus had been brought together with the Comtesse Molé. Moreover, even had such an acquaintance not followed naturally from the laws of society, if it had been fortuitous, how could it have been strange that Mme Verdurin should not know of it when she was meeting M. de Charlus for the first time, and his connection with Mme Molé was far from the only thing she did not know in relation to a man of whom, in truth, she knew nothing? 'Who was in that *Chercheuse d'esprit*, my dear Saniette?' asked M. Verdurin. Although feeling that the storm had passed, the former archivist hesitated before answering: 'There now, said Mme Verdurin, you're intimidating him, you make fun of everything he says and then you want him to respond. Come on, say who was in it, and we'll give you some galantine to take home,' said Mme Verdurin, making unkind allusion to the ruination Saniette had brought down on himself in trying to save a married couple with whom he was friends. 'I only remember that it was Mme Samary who played La Zerbine, said Saniette. – La Zerbine? What on earth's that? cried M. Verdurin, as though the house were on fire. – It's a stock role in the old repertoire, see *Le Capitaine*

Fracasse,[98] as you might say the Braggart or the Pedant. – Ah, it's you who's the pedant. La Zerbine! No, but he's off his head,' exclaimed M. Verdurin. Mme Verdurin looked at her guests and laughed, as if to excuse Saniette. 'La Zerbine, he imagines everyone knows instantly what that means. You're like M. de Longepierre, the stupidest man I know, who said to us familiarly the other day "the Banat". Nobody knew what he was talking about. Finally we found out it was a province in Serbia.' To put an end to Saniette's ordeal, which was causing me more pain than it was him, I asked Brichot if he knew what Balbec meant. 'Balbec is probably a corruption of Dalbec, he told me. One would need to be able to consult the charters of the Kings of England, the suzerains of Normandy, because Balbec was a dependency of the barony of Dover, on which account it was often known as Balbec d'Outremer or Balbec-en-Terre. But the barony of Dover itself came under the bishopric of Bayeux, and despite the rights held momentarily over the Abbey by the Templars, starting with Louis d'Harcourt, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Bishop of Bayeux, it was the bishops of that diocese who were collators of the benefice of Balbec. That's how the Dean of Doville explained it to me, a bald, eloquent, fanciful man and a gourmet, who lives in the obedience of Brillat-Savarin and expounded some dubious pedagogy to me in ever so slightly sybilline terms while making me eat some admirable *pommes frites*.'[99] While Brichot was smiling, to show how witty it was to associate such disparate matters and to employ an ironically elevated language on down-to-earth matters, Saniette was looking to introduce some shaft of wit that might set him back on his feet after his collapse of a moment before. The shaft of wit was what used to be known as an *à-peu-près*,[100] or pun, but which had changed its form because plays on words evolve as do literary genres, or epidemics, which vanish only to be replaced by others, and so on. In the old days, the form the *à-peu-prés* took was that of 'the last word'. But this was out of date, no one any longer used it, it was only Cottard now who might sometimes say in the middle of a game of piquet: 'Do you know the last word in absent-mindedness? Believing that the Édit de Nantes was an Englishwoman.'[101] Last words had been replaced by nicknames. Basically, it was still the old *à-peu-prés*, but because the nickname was in vogue people failed to notice. Unfortunately for Saniette, when these *à-peu-près* were not his own, and generally unfamiliar to the little nucleus, he came out with them so self-consciously that, despite the laugh by which he followed them in order to signal their humorous nature, no one understood them. But if, conversely, the *bon mot* was his own, since he had generally hit upon it when talking with one of the faithful, the latter had repeated it on taking possession of it and the witticism was then known, but not as coming from Saniette. Thus, when he slipped one of these in it was recognized, but because he was its author, he was accused of plagiarism. 'Now then, Brichot went on, *bec* in Norman is stream; there is the Abbey of Bec; Mobec, the stream of the marshland (*mor* or *mer* meant marsh, as in Morville, or in Bricquemar, Alvimare, Cambremer); Briquebec, the stream of the height, coming from *briga*, a fortified place, as in Bricqueville, Bricquebosc, Le Bric, Briand, or else from *brice*, a bridge, which is the same as *Bruck* in German (Innsbruck) and in English *bridge*, which ends so many place-names (Cambridge, etc.) You have a lot of other *becs* in Normandy: Caudebec, Bolbec, Le Robec, Le Bec-Hellouin, Becquerel. It's the Norman form of the Germanic *Bach*, Offenbach, Anspach. Varaguebec, from the old word *varaigne*, the equivalent of *garenne*, a private wood or pond. As for *dal*, Brichot went on, that's a form of *Thal*, a valley: Darnetal, Rosendal, and even, near Louviers, Becdal. The river that lent its name to Balbec is charming as it happens. Seen from a *falaise* or cliff (*Fels* in German, you even have, not far from here, on a height, the pretty town of Falaise), it adjoins the spires of the church, though in reality situated a long way off, and appears to be reflecting them. – I can believe that, I said, it's an effect Elstir is very fond of. I've seen several sketches of it in his house. – Elstir! You know Tiche? exclaimed Mme Verdurin. But you must know that he and I were once really close. Thank heaven, I no longer see him. No, but ask Cottard, or Brichot, he used to have his place laid at my table, he came every day. And he's one of whom it can be said it did him no good leaving our little nucleus. In a moment I'll show you some flowers he painted for me; you'll see the difference from what he's doing nowadays, which I don't like at all, not at all! Why, I got him to paint Cottard's portrait, not counting everything that he did from me. – And he gave the Professor mauve hair,' said Mme Cottard, forgetting that at that stage her husband was not even an *agrégé*.[102] 'I don't know whether you find that my husband has mauve hair, Monsieur. – That's of no account,' said Mme Verdurin, lifting her chin with an expression of disdain for Mme Cottard and admiration for the man of whom she had been speaking, 'that was the work of a famous colourist and a fine painter. Whereas, she added, addressing herself once again to me, I don't know whether you call that painting, all those terrible great compositions, those great contraptions he's been exhibiting since he's no longer been coming to me. I call them daubs, they're so trite, and then they lack any relief, any personality. There's a bit of everybody in them. – He is bringing back the grace of the eighteenth century, but in a modern form, said Saniette precipitately, invigorated and restored to the saddle by my friendliness. But I prefer Helleu.[103] – There's no connection with Helleu, said Mme Verdurin. – But there is, it's eighteenth-century febrile. He's a *Watteau à vapeur*,[104] and he started to laugh. – Oh, heard it, heard it a hundred times, I've been having that served up to me for years, said M. Verdurin, who had indeed once been told it by Ski, though as his own creation. You're out of luck when the one time you pronounce something intelligibly, it isn't your own. – It pains me, Mme Verdurin went on, for he was someone of ability, he's thrown away a fine artistic temperament. Oh, if only he'd stayed here! He'd have become the leading landscapist of the day. And it's a woman who's dragged him down so! Not that that surprises me, for he was an attractive man, if vulgar. Basically, a second-rater. I can tell you, I sensed that straight off. All in all, he never interested me. I was very fond of him, that's all. For one thing, he was so dirty! Do you much care for that, people who never wash? – What's this thing we're eating, of such a pretty shade? asked Ski. – It's called a strawberry mousse, said Mme Verdurin. – But it's ra-vish-ing. We ought to be opening bottles of Château-Margaux, Château-Lafite, port. – I can't tell you how amusing I find him, he only drinks water,' said Mme Verdurin, in order to disguise, beneath the charm she found in this flight of fancy, the alarm occasioned in her by such prodigality. 'But not so as to drink them, Ski went on, you will fill all our glasses with them, they'll bring in wonderful peaches, huge nectarines, there facing the setting sun; it'll have the luxuriance of a beautiful Veronese. – And cost almost as much, muttered M. Verdurin. – But take away these cheeses of such a villainous shade,' he said, trying to remove the Patron's plate, who defended his Gruyère with all his might. 'You can understand why I don't miss Elstir, Mme Verdurin said to me, this one has twice the talent. Elstir is hard work, the man who's incapable of letting go of his picture when he wants to. He's the good student, examination fodder. Ski on the other hand follows his fancy. You'll see him lighting his cigarette in the middle of dinner. – By the way, I don't know why you've refused to have his wife, said Cottard, it would be like the old days then. – Watch what you're saying, will you! No prize tart enters my house, Monsieur le Professeur.' said Mme Verdurin, who had, on the contrary, done her very best to get Elstir to return, even with his wife, but before they got married she had tried to come between them, she had told Elstir that the woman he loved was stupid, dirty, immoral and had stolen. For once, she had not succeeded in bringing about a split. Instead, Elstir had broken with the Verdurin salon; and he had congratulated himself on having done so, just as converts bless the illness or the setback that has impelled their withdrawal and set them on the road to salvation. 'He's splendid is the Professor, she said. Why not say that my drawing-room is a house of assignation. Anyone'd think you don't know what Mme Elstir is like. I'd rather entertain the lowest of street-girls! No, no, I'd rather starve. I tell you in any case, I'd have been all the more stupid to overlook the wife when the husband no longer interests me, it's out of date, it's not even drawn any more. – That's extraordinary for a man of such intelligence, said Cottard. – Oh no, replied Mme Verdurin, even in the days when he had talent, for he had that, the wretch, and to spare, what was tiresome about him was that he wasn't the least bit intelligent.' Mme Verdurin had not waited for their quarrel, and no longer to like his painting, to pass this verdict on Elstir. The fact was that, even in the days when he formed part of the little group, Elstir would sometimes spend entire days with some woman or other whom Mme Verdurin thought, rightly or wrongly, was 'bird-brained', which in her view was not the behaviour of an intelligent man. 'No, she said, with an air of being even-handed, I think his wife and he are just right for each other. God knows, I know of no more boring creature anywhere on earth and I'd go out of my mind if I had to pass two hours with her. But they say he finds her very intelligent. You simply have to admit the fact, our *Tiche* was above all *excessively stupid*! I've seen him bowled over by women you can't imagine, by honest-to-God idiots we'd never have wanted in our little clan. Well, he used to write to them, to argue with them! Him, Elstir! Not that that stops him having his charming side, oh charming, charming and delightfully absurd, of course.' For Mme Verdurin was convinced that truly remarkable men commit countless follies. A false idea, yet with some truth in it. Certainly, people's 'follies' are unbearable. But a lack of balance that we discover only with time is a consequence of the entry into a human brain of susceptibilities to which it is not customarily suited. With the result that the oddities of people that are charming exasperate us, but there are few if any charming people who are not, in some way, odd. 'Here, I'm going to be able to show you his flowers right away,' she said to me, seeing her

husband signalling to her that we could get up from the table. And she took M. de Cambremer's arm once again. As soon as he had left Mme de Cambremer, M. Verdurin sought to make his apologies to M. de Charlus, and give his reasons, mainly for the pleasure of discussing these social nuances with a man of title, and momentarily the inferior of those who had assigned him the place to which they adjudged he had a right. But first of all he was anxious to demonstrate to M. de Charlus that he held too high an opinion of him intellectually to suppose that he paid any heed to such bagatelles: 'Forgive me for mentioning these trifles, he began, for I can well imagine the scant importance you attach to them. Bourgeois minds may heed them, but the others, the artists, the ones truly of our own kind, don't give a damn. And I realized you were one of us from the very first words we exchanged!' M. de Charlus, who had placed a very different interpretation on this expression, gave a sudden start. Following the Doctor's oglings, the Patron's insulting frankness made him choke. 'Don't protest, *cher* Monsieur, you are one of us, it's as clear as day, M. Verdurin went on. Note that I do not know whether you practise one or other art, but that isn't necessary, nor is it always sufficient. Dechambre, who has just died, played perfectly, with the most robust technique, but he wasn't one, you sensed straight away he wasn't. Brichot isn't one. Morel is, my wife is, I sense that you are. – What were you going to say to me?' M. de Charlus broke in, who was beginning to feel reassured as to M. Verdurin's meaning, but would rather he did not shout these ambiguous words from the rooftops. 'We put you only on the left,' M. Verdurin replied. M. de Charlus, with a good-natured, understanding, insolent smile, replied: 'Oh come! That's of no account at all, *here*!' And he gave a little laugh that was peculiar to him, a laugh that had probably come down to him from some Bavarian or Lorraine grandmother, who had herself got the identical laugh from one of her forebears, so that it had been ringing out like this, unchanged, for a good few centuries in the lesser courts of old Europe, and its precious quality been being enjoyed, like that of certain old musical instruments now grown very uncommon. There are times when, in order to depict someone in their entirety, a phonetic imitation would need to be added to the description, and that of the character which M. de Charlus was playing risks incompleteness for want of this little laugh, so delicate and so light, just as certain of Bach's suites are never rendered accurately because the orchestras lack the 'little trumpets', with their particular tone, for which the composer wrote one or other part. 'But, explained M. Verdurin, wounded, it was on purpose. I attach no importance at all to titles of nobility,' he added with that disdainful smile that I have seen so many people I have known, unlike my grandmother and my mother, have for all the things they do not possess, in front of people who will then, so they believe, be unable to use these to establish their superiority over them. 'But then, since M. de Cambremer was in fact there and he's a Marquis, and you're only a Baron… – Permit me, replied M. de Charlus with a haughty expression, to the astonished M. Verdurin, I am also Duc de Brabant, Damoiseau de Montargis, and Prince d'Oléron, de Carency, de Viareggio and des Dunes. It's of absolutely no importance, however. Do not torment yourself,' he went on, resuming his delicate smile, which grew broader at these final words: 'I could tell straight away that you weren't in the habit of it.'

Mme Verdurin came up to show me Elstir's flowers. If the act, long since become a matter of such indifference to me, of dining out had, on the contrary, in a form that had entirely revived it, of a journey along the coast, followed by an ascent by carriage up to two hundred metres above sea-level, produced a sort of intoxication, this last had not been dispelled at La Raspelière. 'Here, just look at that, the Patronne said to me, pointing to some large and magnificent roses by Elstir, but whose unctuous scarlet and frothy whiteness had boiled over with rather too creamy a relief against the jardinière on which they had been placed. D'you think he'd still have the touch to capture that? Is that not pretty good? Besides, the subject matter's so beautiful, it would be amusing to finger them. I can't tell you how amusing it was watching him painting them. You felt it interested him, searching for that effect.' And the Patronne's gaze paused dreamily on this present from the artist, in which was encapsulated, not only his great talent, but their long friendship, which survived only in these mementoes of it that he had left to her; behind the flowers once picked for her by him, she thought she could once again see the beautiful hand which had painted them, in a single morning, in their freshness, so that the ones on the table, and the other leaning against a chair in the dining-room, had been able to represent, for the Patronne's lunch-party, a tête-à-tête between the still living roses and the semi-likeness of their portrait. A semi-likeness only, Elstir being able to see a flower only by first transplanting it into that interior garden in which we are obliged always to remain. In this watercolour he had shown the roses as they had first appeared to him and which, but for him, we should never have known; so that they could be said to be a new variety with which the painter, like an ingenious horticulturist, had enriched the rose family. 'From the day he left the little nucleus, the man was finished. It seems that my dinner parties made him waste time, that I was harming the development of his *genius*, she said, in an ironic tone. As if associating with a woman such as myself could be anything but salutary for an artist!' she exclaimed in an impulse of vanity. Right beside us, M. de Cambremer, who had already sat down, and seeing M. de Charlus standing, made as if to get up and offer him his chair. This offer corresponded in the Marquis's mind perhaps simply to a vague intention of being polite. M. de Charlus preferred to attach to it the significance of a duty that a mere gentleman knew he must render to a prince, and thought that there was no better way of establishing his right to such precedence than by declining it. And so he exclaimed: 'What's this? I beg you! The idea!' There was already something very 'Guermantes' about the astutely vehement tone of this protestation, which was more strongly marked still in the imperious, useless and familiar gesture with which M. de Charlus pressed down with both hands, as if forcing him to be seated again, on the shoulders of M. de Cambremer, who had not got up: 'Oh, come now, my dear fellow, the Baron insisted, that'd be all we need! There's no reason! In our day we reserve that for princes of the blood.' The Cambremers were no more moved than Mme Verdurin by my enthusiasm for their house. For I was unresponsive to the beauties they pointed out to me but excited by my confused reminiscences; now and again I even confessed to my disappointment on finding that something did not conform to what its name had given me to imagine. I made Mme Verdurin indignant by telling her that I had thought it would be more countryfied. Conversely, I paused in ecstasy to sniff the fragrance of the air coming through the doorway. 'I see you like draughts,' they said. My praise of the piece of green lustre stopping up a broken window-pane was no more successful: 'But it's horrible!' exclaimed the Marquise. The last straw was when I said: 'My greatest joy was when I arrived. When I heard my footsteps echoing along the gallery, I thought I'd entered the offices of some village *mairie* or other, where there's a map of the canton.' This time, a determined Mme de Cambremer turned her back on me. 'You didn't find it all too badly arranged? her husband asked her, with the same pitying solicitude as if he were inquiring how well his wife had withstood some unhappy ceremony. There are some good things.' But since, when the fixed rules of a sure taste do not impose inevitable limits on it, malevolence finds fault with everything about the person or the house of the people who have supplanted you: 'Yes, but they're not in the right place. Indeed, are they all that good? – You'll have noticed, said M. de Cambremer, with a sadness restrained by a certain firmness, some of the Jouy cretonne is showing through, things worn completely out in this drawing-room! – And that piece of material with its big roses like a peasant woman's bedspread,' said Mme de Cambremer, whose quite spurious culture applied exclusively to idealist philosophy, Impressionist painting and the music of Debussy. And so as not to make her case solely in the name of luxury but also of good taste: 'And they've put up draught curtains! What a lack of style! But what d'you expect, such people don't know, where could they have learned? They must be retired wholesalers. They've not done so badly considering. – I thought the chandeliers were good,' said the Marquis, without anyone knowing why he should make an exception of the chandeliers, just as, inevitably, each time a church was mentioned, whether it be Chartres cathedral, or Rheims, or Amiens, or the church in Balbec, what he always hastened to cite as admirable was 'the organ-case, the pulpit and the workmanship on the misericords'. 'As for the garden, the less said the better,' said Mme de Cambremer. It's been massacred. 'The paths have gone all skew-whiff!'

I took advantage of the fact that Mme Verdurin was serving the coffee to go and take a look at the letter that M. de Cambremer had handed me, in which his mother had invited me to dinner. In these few lines of ink, the handwriting betrayed an individuality recognizable for me from now on among all others, without there being any need to resort to the hypothesis of special pens any more than rare pigments of mysterious manufacture are necessary to the painter to express his original vision. Even a paralytic, suffering from agraphia after a stroke, and reduced to seeing the characters as a pattern without being able to read them, would have realized that Mme de Cambremer belonged to an old family in which the enthusiastic cultivation of literature and the arts had let some air into its aristocratic traditions. He would also have guessed around what age the Marquise had learned simultaneously to write and to play Chopin. It was the epoch when people of breeding observed the rule of being agreeable and the so-called rule of the three adjectives. Mme de Cambremer combined the two. One laudatory adjective was not enough for her, she would follow it (after a dash) by a second, then (after a second dash) by a third. But what was peculiar to her is that,

contrary to the social and literary objective she had set herself, in Mme de Cambremer's letters the sequence of the three epithets wore the aspect, not of a progression, but of a diminuendo. Mme de Cambremer told me in this first letter that she had met Saint-Loup and had appreciated more than ever his 'unique – rare – real' qualities, and that he was due to return with one of his friends (the one indeed who was in love with the daughter-in-law), and that if I cared to come, with or without them, to dinner at Féterne, she would be 'overjoyed – happy – pleased'. Perhaps it was because the desire to be agreeable was not matched in her by any fertility of imagination or richness of vocabulary that, keen to utter three exclamations, this lady had the resources to provide in the second and third only an enfeebled echo of the first. There need only have been a fourth adjective for nothing to have remained of her initial affability. Finally, out of a certain refined simplicity that can but have created a considerable impression amongst her family and even the circle of their connections, Mme de Cambremer had acquired the habit of substituting for the word '*sincère*', which might end by appearing untruthful, the word '*vrai*', or true. And to make quite clear that something sincere was indeed involved, she broke the conventional alliance that would have put *vrai* in front of the substantive and set it bravely down behind. Her letters would end with: '*Croyez à mon amitié vraie*.' '*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie*.'[105] Unfortunately, so much had this become a formula that the affectation of candour gave a stronger impression of a mendacious politeness than those ancient formulas to whose meaning we no longer give a thought. My reading was not helped in any case by the confused sound of conversations, dominated by the raised voice of M. de Charlus, not having let the topic drop and saying to M. de Cambremer: 'By wanting me to take your place, you reminded me of a gentleman who sent me a letter this morning addressed "To His Highness the Baron de Charlus" and which began "Monseigneur" – Indeed, your correspondent was exaggerating somewhat,' replied M. de Cambremer, giving way to a discreet merriment. M. de Charlus had provoked it; he did not share in it. 'But in actual fact, my dear fellow, he said, you'll observe that, heraldically speaking, it's he who is in the right; I'm not turning it into a personal matter, as you can imagine. I speak of it as though it concerned someone else. But what will you, history is history, there's nothing we can do about it and it's not up to us to rewrite it. I shan't cite the case of the Emperor William, who in Kiel has never stopped Monseigneuring me. I've heard it said that he called all French dukes that, which is improper, but is perhaps simply a thoughtful gesture aimed above our heads, at France. – Thoughtful and more or less sincere, said M. de Cambremer. – Oh, I'm not of your opinion. Personally speaking, you'll observe that a nobleman of the lowest rank such as this Hohenzollern, a Protestant what's more, and who dispossessed my cousin the King of Hanover,[106] is unlikely to appeal to me,' added M. de Charlus, who seemed to take Hanover more closely to heart than Alsace-Lorraine. 'But I believe that the inclination the Emperor bears towards us is deeply sincere. The imbeciles will tell you that he's a stage emperor. On the contrary, he's wonderfully intelligent. He knows nothing about painting, and he forced M. Tschudi[107] to withdraw the Elstirs from the national collections. But then Louis XIV didn't like the Dutch masters, also had a liking for ostentation, yet, when all's said and done, was a great sovereign. And then William II has armed his country from the military and naval points of view, as Louis XIV did not, and I trust that his reign will never experience the reverses that darkened the end of the reign of the man tritely referred to as the Sun-King. The Republic committed a grave error in my view in spurning the Hohenzollern's civilities, or in returning them in driblets. He himself is very conscious of this and says, with that gift for expression that he has: "What I am looking for is a handshake, not a sweep of the hat." As a man, he is despicable; he has abandoned, betrayed, reneged on his best friends in circumstances in which his silence was as wretched as theirs was magnificent,' continued M. de Charlus, who, borne off down the slope, was slithering towards the Eulenburg Affair,[108] and recalled the remark made to him by one of the highest placed of those inculpated: "What confidence the Emperor must have in our tact to have dared to permit such a trial! But then he was not wrong to have put his trust in our discretion. We'd have kept our mouths shut even on the scaffold." Anyway, all this has nothing to do with what I meant to say, namely that, in Germany, as mediatized princes we are *Durchlaucht*,[109] and that in France our rank of Highness was publicly recognized. Saint-Simon claims we acquired it improperly, in which he is completely mistaken. The reason he gives, namely that Louis XIV had us forbidden to call him the Most Christian King, and ordered us to call him the King and nothing more, merely proves that we were answerable to him and not at all that we did not have the rank of Prince. Otherwise, he would have had to deny it to the Duc de Lorraine and a great many others! As it happens, several of our titles come from the House of Lorraine through Thérèse d'Espinoy, my great-grandmother, who was the daughter of the Damoiseau de Commercy.' Having noticed that Morel was listening to him, M. de Charlus went into the reasons for his pretension more fully. 'I have pointed out to my brother that the entry on our family ought to be found, not in the third section of the *Gotha* but in the second, not to say in the first,' he said, not realizing that Morel did not know what the *Gotha* was. 'But that's his affair, he's my *chef d'armes* and so long as he finds it right the way it is and lets the matter rest, I have only to close my eyes. – M. Brichot interested me greatly,' I said to Mme Verdurin, who had come up to me, as I was putting Mme de Cambremer's letter into my pocket. 'A good man and with a cultivated mind, she answered coldly. He obviously lacks originality and taste, and has a terrible memory. It used to be said of the "forefathers" of the people we have here this evening, the *émigrés*,[110] that they had forgotten nothing. But at least they had the excuse, she said, taking over a *bon mot* of Swann's, of never having learned anything. Whereas Brichot knows everything and hurls piles of dictionaries at our heads during dinner. I imagine you now know everything there is to be known about what the name of this or that town or village means.' As Mme Verdurin was speaking, I was thinking that I had promised myself to ask her something, but I could not remember what it was. 'I'm sure you're talking about Brichot, said Ski. Chantepie, Freycinet, eh what, he spared you nothing. I had my eye on you, *ma petite* Patronne. – I saw you indeed, I nearly exploded.' I would not be able to say today how Mme Verdurin was dressed on that particular evening. I had no better idea at the time perhaps, for I am not observant by nature. But sensing that her toilette was not without its pretensions, I said something friendly or even admiring to her. She was like almost all women, who imagine that the compliment they receive is a strict expression of the truth, that it is a judgment passed impartially, irresistibly, as though it applied to an art object unconnected with a particular individual. And so it was with a seriousness which made me blush at my own hypocrisy that she put the vain and artless question customary in such circumstances: 'You like it? – You're talking about Chantepie, I'm sure,' said M. Verdurin coming up to us. I had been alone, with my mind on my green lustrine and a smell of wood, in not noticing that, as he enumerated his etymologies, Brichot was being laughed at. And since the impressions that for me gave things their value were of the kind that other people either do not experience or else suppress unthinkingly as insignificant, so that in consequence, had I been able to communicate them, they would have remained misunderstood or would have been scorned, they were quite unserviceable and had the additional drawback of making me appear stupid in the eyes of Mme Verdurin, who could see that I had 'swallowed' Brichot, as I had already seemed stupid to Mme de Guermantes because I had enjoyed myself at Mme d'Arpajon's. However, where Brichot was concerned, there was another reason. I was not one of the little clan. And in every clan, be it social, political or literary, they develop a perverse capacity for discovering in a conversation, an official speech, an item of news, a sonnet, all that the straightforward reader would never have dreamed of finding there. How many times has it not happened that, reading with a certain emotion a tale artfully spun by a wordy and somewhat antiquated Academician, I have been on the point of saying to Bloch, or to Mme de Guermantes, 'It's very jolly!', when, before I had opened my mouth, they would exclaim, each in a different language: 'If you want to have a moment's enjoyment, read a short story by so-and-so. Human stupidity has never gone so far.' Bloch's contempt derived above all from the fact that certain, as it happens agreeable, effects of style were somewhat jejune; that of Mme de Guermantes from the fact that the story seemed to prove the exact reverse of what the author had intended, for factual reasons that she was ingenious enough to deduce but of which I would never have thought. I was as surprised to find the irony that lay concealed behind the apparent amiability of the Verdurins towards Brichot as to hear, a few days later at Féterne, the Cambremers say to me, faced by the enthusiastic praises I was bestowing on La Raspelière: 'You can't possibly mean it, after what they've done there.' It is true they admitted that the dinner service was good. I had not noticed it, any more than the scandalous draught-curtains. 'So now, when you go back to Balbec, you'll know what Balbec signifies,' said M. Verdurin, ironically. It was indeed the things that Brichot had taught me which interested me. As for what they called his wit, it was exactly the same as that which had once been so much enjoyed among the little clan. He spoke with the same irritating facility, but his words no longer carried, had to overcome a hostile silence or disagreeable echoes; what had changed was, not what he trotted out, but the acoustics of the drawing-room and the attitude of mind of the audience. 'Careful!' said Mme Verdurin in an undertone, pointing to Brichot. The latter, having kept his hearing, more acute than his eyesight, cast at the Patronne a myopic philosopher's glance, soon averted. If his eyes were not so good, those of his mind in return took a broader view of things.

He had seen how little was to be expected from human affection, and had resigned himself to the fact. Admittedly, it pained him. It happens that even the man who, on the same evening, in a circle where he is accustomed to please, guesses that he has been found too frivolous, or too pedantic, or too clumsy, or too cavalier, and so on, returns home unhappy. Often it is over a matter of opinion, or a system, that he has appeared absurd to others or passé. Often he knows perfectly well that these others are his inferiors. He would have no difficulty dissecting the sophisms with the aid of which they have tacitly condemned him, he wants to go and visit someone, or to write a letter; wiser to do nothing, but wait for the following week's invitation. Sometimes also, instead of ending in a single evening, these falls from favour last for months. They further increase the instability of social judgments to which they are attributable. For the man who knows that Mme X despises him, feeling himself to be appreciated at Mme Y's, declares her to be much superior and emigrates to her salon. This, however, is not the place to depict the men who are above the life of society but have not been able to realize themselves outside of it, glad to be received, embittered by being misunderstood, and discovering year by year the flaws in the hostess they had been idolizing, and the genius of the one whose true worth they had not appreciated, only to return to their first love once they have endured the disadvantages that the second love had also, and once those of the first have been somewhat forgotten. From these brief falls from favour you can judge of the unhappiness produced in Brichot by one that he knew was final. He was not unaware that Mme Verdurin sometimes made fun of him in public, of his infirmities even, and although knowing how little was to be expected of human affection, having accepted that, he still looked on the Patronne as his best friend. But from the flush that covered the university man's face, Mme Verdurin realized that he had heard her and promised herself she would be kind to him in the course of the evening. I could not help saying to her that she had not been at all so to Saniette. 'What, not nice! But he adores us, you don't know how much we mean to him! My husband is a little irritated at times by his stupidity, and you have to admit, with good reason, but why at such times doesn't he bridle up more, instead of wearing that hangdog expression? It's not being open. I don't like that. That's not to say I don't always try to calm my husband down, because, if he went too far, Saniette would only have not to come back; and I wouldn't want that because I can tell you he's penniless, he needs his dinners. But then, after all, if he takes offence, if he doesn't come back, that's no concern of mine, when you have need of other people you try not to be so idiotic. – The dukedom of Aumale was in our family for a long time before entering the House of France, M. de Charlus was explaining to M. de Cambremer, in front of an open-mouthed Morel, for whom this whole discourse was, if not addressed to him, intended. We took precedence over all the foreign princes; I could cite you a hundred examples. When, at the burial of Monsieur,[111] the Princesse de Croy attempted to kneel after my great-great-grandmother, the latter pointed out to her in no uncertain terms that she had no right to the cushion, had it removed by the officer on duty and took the matter to the King, who ordered Mme de Croy to go to Mme de Guermantes's and make her apologies. The Duc de Bourgogne having come to us with the ushers, with their rods of office raised, we obtained the King's consent to have them lowered. I know it's bad form to speak of the virtues of one's own kinsfolk. But it's well known that ours were always to the fore in times of danger. Our battle cry, once we had given up that of the Ducs de Brabant, was "*Passavant*".[112] So that all in all it was quite legitimate that the right everywhere to be first to which we had laid claim during all those centuries in war we should then have obtained at Court. And it's always been recognized there, I can assure you. For further proof, I shall cite the Princesse de Baden. She having so far forgotten herself as to try to dispute her rank with that same Duchesse de Guermantes of whom I spoke just now, and having sought to go in ahead of her to the King by taking advantage of a momentary hesitation on my kinswoman's part (although there was no need for one), the King quickly called out, "Enter, cousin, enter, Madame de Baden knows all too well what is due to you." And it was as Duchesse de Guermantes that she held that rank, even though she was well enough born in her own right, since through her mother she was niece to the Queen of Poland, the Queen of Hungary, the Elector Palatine, the Prince de Savoie-Carignan and the Prince of Hanover, later King of England.[113] – *Maecenas atavis edite regibus*![114] said Brichot, addressing M. de Charlus, who responded to this compliment with a slight nod of the head. – What were you saying? Mme Verdurin asked Brichot, with whom she would have liked to try and make amends for her words of a little earlier. – I was referring, may God forgive me, to a dandy who was the ornament of the upper crust (Mme Verdurin gave a frown) in roughly speaking the century of Augustus (Mme Verdurin, reassured by the remoteness of this 'upper crust', adopted a more serene expression), to a friend of Virgil and Horace, who carried their toadying to the point of acclaiming his more than aristocratic, his royal, ascendancy to his face, in short I was referring to Maecenas, to a bookworm who was the friend of Horace, of Virgil and of Augustus. I'm sure M. de Charlus knows very well, in every respect, who Maecenas was.' Looking graciously at Mme Verdurin out of the corner of his eye, because he had heard her arranging a rendezvous with Morel in two days' time, and was afraid of not being invited: 'I fancy, said M. de Charlus, that Maecenas was something like the Verdurin of the Ancient World.' Mme Verdurin could only half suppress a smile of satisfaction. She went up to Morel. 'He's agreeable, your parents' friend, she said. You can tell he's an educated man, well bred. He'll do well in our little nucleus. Where does he live in Paris?' Morel maintained a haughty silence and simply asked to play a game of cards. Mme Verdurin first demanded something on the violin. To general astonishment, M. de Charlus, who never spoke of the great gifts he possessed, accompanied, in the purest style, the last part (uneasy, tormented, Schumannesque, though in fact earlier than the Franck sonata) of Fauré's sonata for piano and violin.[115] I felt that he would give Morel, wonderfully gifted where tone and virtuosity were concerned, precisely what he lacked, culture and style. But I reflected with curiosity on what unites a physical taint and a spiritual gift within the same man. M. de Charlus was not very different from his brother, the Duc de Guermantes. He had even, a moment or two earlier (which was rare with him), spoken in equally bad French. Berating me (no doubt so that I might speak warmly about Morel to Mme Verdurin) for never going to see him, and I having pleaded discretion, he had replied: 'But since it's I who am asking you, it's only I who *might've taken umbrage*.' It could have been the Duc de Guermantes speaking. M. de Charlus was in sum only a Guermantes. But it was enough that nature should have thrown his nervous system out of balance sufficiently for him to prefer, instead of a woman, as his brother the Duc would have done, one of Virgil's shepherds or Plato's pupils, and qualities foreign to the Duc de Guermantes but often linked with this imbalance, had turned M. de Charlus into a delightful pianist, an amateur painter who did not lack taste and an eloquent talker. Who could have divined that the quick, anxious, charming style in which M. de Charlus had played the Schumannesque passage from Fauré's sonata had its correlation in – I do not dare say, was caused by – the purely physical elements of M. de Charlus, in the defectiveness of his nerves? We shall explain the term 'defectiveness of his nerves' later on, and the reasons why a Greek from the time of Socrates, or a Roman from the time of Augustus, could be what we know they were while remaining absolutely normal men, and not men-women such as we see today. In addition to a real aptitude for the arts, never brought to fruition, M. de Charlus had, far more than the Duc, loved their mother, and loved his wife, and even years later, when people spoke of them, tears would come, but superficial tears, like the perspiration of an overweight man, whose brow is beaded with sweat at the least exertion. With the difference that to the latter people say, 'You're overheated!' whereas they pretend not to notice other people's tears. They, that is to say, society; for the common people are concerned by seeing someone cry, as if a sob were more serious than a haemorrhage. His sadness following the death of his wife did not, thanks to his habit of lying, debar M. de Charlus from a way of life that was out of keeping. Later on, he stooped so low as to let it be understood that, during the funeral ceremony, he had found a means of asking the altar-boy for his name and address. And this may have been true.

The piece having finished, I took the liberty of demanding some Franck, which seemed to cause Mme de Cambremer so much pain that I did not insist. 'You can't like that,' she said. She asked instead for Debussy's *Fêtes*,[116] which brought cries of 'Oh, it's sublime!' from the very first note. But Morel realized that he knew only the opening bars and out of a sense of mischief, without any intention of mystifying, he began a march by Meyerbeer. Unfortunately, as he left few transitions and made no announcement, everyone thought it was still Debussy, and they went on calling out 'Sublime!' By revealing that the composer was that not of *Pelléas* but of *Robert le Diable*,[117] Morel cast a certain chill. Mme de Cambremer scarcely had time to experience it for her own part, as she had just come upon a book of Scarlatti[118] and had flung herself on it with the impulsiveness of a hysteric. 'Oh, play this, look, this, it's divine,' she cried. And yet what, in her fever of impatience, she had selected from that long-despised composer, recently promoted to the highest honours, was one of those accursed pieces that have so often stopped you from sleeping and which a merciless learner begins over and over again on the floor adjoining yours. But Morel was done with music and, since he insisted on playing cards, M. de Charlus, in order to take part, wanted whist. 'He told the Patron just now he was a Prince, Ski said to Mme Verdurin, but

that's not true, his family's bourgeois merely, of minor architects. – I want to know what you were saying about Maecenas. It amuses me, so there!' Mme Verdurin repeated to Brichot, out of an amiability that went to the latter's head. To shine in the eyes of the Patronne, therefore, and perhaps in my own: 'Well truth to tell, Madame, Maecenas interests me mainly because he was the first apostle of note of that Chinese god who numbers more sectaries today in France than Brahma, than Christ himself, the almighty god Je-Men-Fou.'[119] Mme Verdurin was no longer content in such cases to sink her face into her hands. She descended with the abruptness of the insects known as mayflies on the Princesse Sherbatoff; if the latter was within range, the Patronne would clutch at the Princesse's armpit, digging in her nails, and hide her head there for a moment or two like a child playing hide-and-seek. Masked by this protective screen, she was presumed to be laughing until the tears came but was as likely to be thinking of nothing at all as those people who, while reciting a somewhat lengthy prayer, take the sensible precaution of burying their face in their hands. Mme Verdurin imitated them when listening to Beethoven quartets, at once to show that she regarded these as a prayer and not to let it be seen that she was asleep. 'I speak in all seriousness, Madame, said Brichot. Too many in number I think are the people today who spend their time contemplating their navel as if it were the centre of the universe. As sound doctrine, I raise no objection to some nirvana or other that tends to dissolve us into the Great All (which, like Munich and Oxford, is much closer to Paris than Asnières or Bois-Colombes),[120] but it is not the mark of a good Frenchman, or even of a good European, when the Japanese are perhaps at the gates of our Byzantium, that collectivized anti-militarists should be solemnly debating the cardinal virtues of free verse.' Mme Verdurin thought she could now let go of the Princesse's bruised shoulder and she allowed her face to reappear, not without pretending to wipe her eyes and to catch her breath two or three times. But Brichot wanted that I should share in the feast, and having remembered, from the *soutenances de thèses*[121] over which he presided so incomparably, that there is no better way of flattering the young than by taking them to task, by granting them some importance and getting them to treat you as a reactionary: 'I wouldn't want to blaspheme against the Gods of Youth, he said, casting at me one of those furtive glances which an orator accords on the sly to someone present in the audience whom he has mentioned by name. I wouldn't want to be damned as a heretic or a backslider in the Mallarméan chapel, in which our new friend, like all those of his age, will have served at the esoteric Mass, as an altar-boy at least, and proved himself a deliquescent or a Rosicrucian.[122] But really, we've seen too many of these intellectuals worshipping Art with a capital A and who, when taking to the bottle with Zola is no longer enough, inject Verlaine into their veins. Having become etheromanes in their devotion to Baudelaire, they'd no longer be capable of the manly effort their homeland may some day demand from them, anaesthetized as they are by the great literary neurosis in the hot, enervating atmosphere, heavy with the unwholesome effluvia from an opium-den symbolism.' Unable to feign even the faintest admiration for Brichot's motley and inept declamation, I turned away towards Ski and assured him that he was entirely mistaken as to the family to which M. de Charlus belonged; he replied that he was sure of his facts and added that I had even told him that his real name was Gandin, Le Gandin. 'I told you, I replied, that Mme de Cambremer was the sister of an engineer, M. Legrandin. I've never mentioned M. de Charlus. He and Mme de Cambremer are about as closely connected by birth as the Great Condé[123] and Racine. – Oh, I thought they were,' said Ski offhandedly, no more apologizing for his mistake than a few hours earlier for that which had almost caused us to miss the train. 'Are you planning to stay long on the coast?' Mme Verdurin asked M. de Charlus, whom she could foresee being one of the faithful and was fearful of seeing him return too soon to Paris. 'Good Lord, one never knows, replied M. de Charlus in a nasal drawl. I should like to stay until the end of September. – You're right, said Mme Verdurin, that's when we get the good storms. – To be perfectly truthful, that's not what would decide me. For some time I've been too neglectful of the archangel St Michael, my patron, and I would like to make amends by remaining until his feast-day, the 29th of September, at the Abbaye du Mont.[124] – Does that sort of thing much interest you?' asked Mme Verdurin, who might perhaps have managed to suppress the injury to her anti-clericalism had she not been afraid that so lengthy an excursion might lead to the violinist and the Baron 'defaulting' for forty-eight hours. 'You are perhaps afflicted by an intermittent deafness, replied M. de Charlus insolently. I have told you that St Michael was one of my glorious patrons.' Then, smiling in a benevolent ecstasy, his eyes fixed on the distance, and his voice swelling with an exaltation that seemed to me more than aesthetic, but religious: 'It's so fine at the Offertory, when Michael stands beside the altar, in a white robe, swinging a gold censer and with such a mass of perfumes that the fragrance of them rises all the way up to God! – We might go as a group, suggested Mme Verdurin, for all her horror of the cassock. – At that moment, from the Offertory,' M. de Charlus went on, who, for different reasons but in the same manner as the good orators in the Chamber, never responded to an interruption but pretended not to have heard it, 'it would be gorgeous to see our young friend Palestrina-ing or even performing an aria by Bach. He would be wild with joy, the good Abbé also, and it's the greatest homage, the greatest public homage at any rate, that I can render to my patron. So very edifying for the faithful! We will discuss it in a little while with the young musical Angelico, a soldier, like St Michael.'

Called on to be dummy, Saniette declared that he did not know how to play whist. And Cottard, noticing that there was not now long to go before the time of the train, at once started on a game of *écarté* with Morel. M. Verdurin, furious, marched on Saniette wearing a terrible expression: 'You don't know how to play anything then!' he shouted, furious at having lost an opportunity for a game of whist, but overjoyed at finding one for insulting the former archivist. The latter, terror-stricken, adopted a humorous expression: 'Yes I do, I know how to play the piano,' he said. Cottard and Morel had sat down facing one another. 'Your honour, said Cottard. – Suppose we move a bit closer to the table, M. de Charlus said to M. de Cambremer, worried at seeing the violinist with Cottard. It's as interesting as those questions of etiquette which, in our own day, no longer much signify. The only kings left to us, in France at any rate, are the ones in a pack of playing-cards, and I fancy there are kings galore in our young virtuoso's hand,' he soon added, out of an admiration for Morel that even extended to the way he played cards, to flatter him also, and indeed to justify the movement he was making, of leaning over the violinist's shoulder. 'Me terrump you,' said Cottard, putting on his vulgar rich foreigner's voice, whose children used to burst out laughing, as did his students and the *chef de clinique*, when, even at the bedside of a seriously ill patient, the Master, wearing the expressionless mask of an epileptic, came out with one of his customary jests. 'I don't quite know what I ought to play, said Morel, consulting M. de Cambremer. – As you like, you'll be beaten either way, this one or that one, it matters not, *c'est égal*. – Égal… Galli-Marié?[125] said the Doctor, sliding a kindly and insinuating glance in the direction of M. de Cambremer. She was what we call a true diva, a dream, a Carmen such as we shan't see again. The role was made for her. I liked hearing Ingalli-Marié[126] in it, too.' The Marquis stood up with the contemptuous vulgarity of the well-born, who do not realize that they are insulting their host by appearing not to be sure whether their guests are be associated with, and who take the English custom as their excuse for employing a disdainful expression: 'Who is that gentleman playing cards? What's his occupation in life? What does he *sell*? I rather like to know who I find myself with, so as not to become intimate with just anyone at all. But I didn't catch his name when you did me the honour of introducing me to him.' If M. Verdurin had, on the strength of these last words, indeed introduced him to his guests, M. de Cambremer would have thought it very wrong. But knowing that it was the opposite that had taken place, he thought it gracious and to be running no risks to assume a modest, good-natured expression. The pride that M. Verdurin took in his intimacy with Cottard had only grown since the Doctor had become an illustrious Professor. But it no longer expressed itself in the naïve form of old. Then, when Cottard was scarcely known, should anyone speak to M. Verdurin of his wife's facial neuralgia: 'There's nothing you can do,' he would say, with the naïve smugness of the people who suppose that those whom they know are famous and that everyone has heard the name of their daughter's singing teacher. 'If her doctor were in the second rank, we might be looking for a different treatment, but when your doctor's name is Cottard (a name he pronounced as though it had been Bouchard or Charcot),[127] there's no point in looking elsewhere.' Employing a contrary procedure, and knowing that M. de Cambremer had certainly heard speak of the famous Professor Cottard, M. Verdurin assumed a simple-minded expression. 'He's our family doctor, a dear good soul whom we adore and who'd go through fire and water for us; he's not a doctor, he's a friend; 'I don't suppose you know him or that his name means anything to you; at all events, for us it's the name of a thoroughly good man, of a very dear friend, Cottard.' This name, murmured wearing a modest expression, deceived M. de Cambremer, who had thought someone else had been meant. 'Cottard? You're not speaking of Professor Cottard?' At which exact moment the voice of the said Professor was to be heard who, the play having gone against him, said as he held up his cards: 'And then it was prepare to meet thy doom.' – Oh yes, the very

same, he's a professor, said M. Verdurin. – What, Professor Cottard! You're not mistaken! You're quite sure it's the same one, the one who lives in the rue de Bac! – Yes, he lives in the rue de Bac, No 43. You know him? – But everyone knows Professor Cottard. He's a top man! It's as though you were asking me whether I know Bouffe de Saint-Blaise or Courtois-Suffit.[128] I could tell by listening to him right enough that he was no ordinary man, that's why I took the liberty of asking you. – Let's see now, what do I need to put down, a trump?' asked Cottard. Then abruptly, with a vulgarity that would have been irritating even in heroic circumstances, where a soldier tries to give a familiar expression to his contempt for death, but which became doubly foolish in the safe pastime of cards, Cottard, making up his mind to play a trump, assumed a grim, 'fire-eater' air and, in an allusion to those who risk their skins, staked his card as though it were his life, exclaiming 'After all, I don't give a damn!' It was not what he should have played, but he found a consolation. In the middle of the drawing-room, in a wide armchair, Mme Cottard, yielding to the effects, irresistible in her case, of after-dinner, had, after a losing struggle, succumbed to the vast if light sleep that had taken possession of her. For all that she straightened up now and again, to smile, either in self-mockery or else out of a fear of leaving some friendly word that might have been addressed to her unanswered, she would then fall helplessly back, in the grip of an implacable but delightful sickness. Rather than the noise, what had thus aroused her, for a second only, was the glance (which, in her fondness, she could see even with her eyes closed, could foresee, for the same scene took place every evening and haunted her sleep, like the hour when we shall have to get up), the glance by which the Professor indicated his spouse's slumbers to those present. He was content at the start to look at her and smile, for if, as a doctor, he was critical of this after-dinner sleep (he at any rate gave this scientific reason so as to become angry towards the end, but it is not certain that it was determinant, so various were the views he held on the matter), as an all-powerful husband and a tease, he was delighted to make fun of his wife, to only half wake her at first, so that she might go back to sleep and he have the pleasure of waking her again.

Mme Cottard was now fast asleep. 'Here, I say, Léontine, you're napping! the Professor called out to her. – I'm listening to what Mme Swann is saying, *mon ami*, Mme Cottard replied, weakly, and sank back into her lethargy. – It's nonsensical, exclaimed Cottard, in a minute she'll be declaring she hasn't been asleep. It's like the patients who come to a consultation and claim that they never sleep. – They imagine it perhaps,' laughed M. de Cambremer. But the Doctor was as fond of contradicting as he was of teasing, and above all could not allow a layman to dare to talk medicine to him. 'We can't imagine that we don't sleep, he proclaimed in a dogmatic tone. – Ah, replied the Marquis, bowing respectfully, as Cottard would once have done. – One can easily tell, Cottard went on, that you've haven't, as I have, administered up to two grammes of trional without managing to induce somnolescence. – Indeed, indeed, laughed the Marquis with a superior air, I've never taken trional, or any of the drugs that soon cease to have any effect but which do things to your stomach. When you've been shooting all night as I have in the forest of Chantepie, I can assure you you don't need trional in order to get to sleep. – It's the ignoramuses who say that, replied the Professor. Trional can sometimes raise nerve-tone in a remarkable way. You talk about trional, do you even know what it is? – But… I've heard that it's a medicine for sleeping. – You're not answering my question,' replied the Professor pompously, who, three times a week, in the Faculty, acted as an 'examiner'. 'I'm not asking you whether it makes one sleep or not, but what it is. Can you tell me what proportion it contains of amyl and ethyl? – No, replied M. de Cambremer, in embarrassment. I prefer a good glass of brandy or even 345 port.[129] – Which are ten times more toxic, broke in the Professor. – As for trional, ventured M. de Cambremer, my wife subscribes to all that sort of thing, you'd do better to talk with her about it. – Who must know just about as much as you do. Anyway, if your wife takes trional to make her sleep, you can see that my wife has no need of it. Come, Léontine, move yourself, you'll get stiff, do I go to sleep after dinner? What'll you be like when you're sixty if you drop off like an old woman now? You'll start to get stout, you're stopping the circulation… She can't even hear me any more. – These little naps after dinner are bad for the health, are they not, Doctor? said M. de Cambremer, in order to rehabilitate himself with Cottard. After a good meal one should take some exercise. – An old wives' tale! replied the Doctor. They've taken equal quantities of food from the stomach of a dog that hadn't moved, and from the stomach of a dog that had been running and digestion was more advanced in the first. – So it's sleep that shortens digestion? – That depends on whether we're talking about oesophageal, stomachal or intestinal digestion; no point in giving you explanations you wouldn't understand since you've never studied medicine. Come on, Léontine, by the front… quick march! It's time we went.' This was not true, for the Doctor was merely about to go on with his game of cards, but he was hoping by this more abrupt means to interfere with the sleep of this speechless woman to whom he had been addressing the most scientific exhortations without receiving any further response. Either because the will to keep sleep at bay persisted in Mme Cottard, even in the somnolent state, or because the armchair lent it no support, her head was being jerked mechanically about in space, from left to right and up and down, like some lifeless object, and Mme Cottard, well-balanced where her head was concerned, appeared now to be listening to music and now to have entered on the final phase of her death agony. But where the increasingly vehement remonstrations of her husband had failed, a sense of her own foolishness succeeded: 'My bath is just the right temperature, she murmured, but the feathers of the dictionary… she exclaimed, coming upright. Oh good heavens, I'm so silly! What am I saying? I was thinking about my hat, I must have said something foolish, I was just about to doze off, it's that wretched fire.' Everyone started to laugh, for there was no fire.

'You're making fun of me, said Mme Cottard, laughing herself, as she wiped the last traces of sleep from her brow with her hand, with the light touch of a mesmerist and the neatness of a woman rearranging her hair. I would like to present my humble apologies to dear Madame Verdurin and to learn the truth from her.' But her smile quickly turned unhappy, because the Professor, who knew that his wife was seeking to please him, and was fearful of not having succeeded, had just called out to her: 'Look at yourself in the mirror, you're as red as if you'd come out in acne, you look like an old peasant woman. – He's charming, you know, said Mme Verdurin, he's got a lovely bantering, good-natured side to him. Besides, he brought my husband back from the edge of the grave when the whole Faculty had given him up. He spent three nights beside him, without going to bed. So for me, you know, she added, in a solemn, almost menacing tone, raising her hand to the twin spheres of her musical temples with their white tresses, and as if we had wanted to lay hands on the Doctor, Cottard is sacred! He could ask for whatever he wanted. Moreover, I don't call him Doctor Cottard, I call him Doctor God! And even when I say that I'm slandering him, for this God does everything in his power to put right some of the evils the other one is responsible for. – Play a trump, M. de Charlus told Morel, with a happy expression. A trump, so as to see, said the violinist. You should have declared your king first, said M. de Charlus, you're distracted, but how well you play! – I've got the king, said Morel. – He's a fine-looking man, replied the Professor. – What's that affair up there with the pickets? asked Mme Verdurin, indicating to M. de Cambremer a superb carved escutcheon above the fireplace. Are they your *arms*? she added, with ironic disdain. – No, they're not ours, replied M. de Cambremer. We bear Or with three bars embattled, counter-embattled Gules of five pieces each charged with a trefoil of the field. No, those are the arms of the Arrachepels, who weren't of our stock, but from whom we inherited the house, and those of our line have never wanted to change it. The Arrachepels (Pelvilains in the old days, so it's said) bore Or with five piles couped Gules. When they intermarried with the Féternes their coat of arms changed but remained cantoned with twenty crosses crosslet with pile pery fitchy Or with dexter a vol ermine. – So much for you, said Mme de Cambremer under her breath. – My great grandmother was a d'Arrachepel or de Rachepel, as you wish, because both names are found in the old charters, M. de Cambremer went on, suddenly blushing, for only now did the thought occur to him that his wife had put him in dread of and he was afraid that Mme Verdurin might have applied to herself words that were in no way aimed at her. History has it that in the eleventh century, the first Arrachepel, Macé, known as Pelvilain, showed himself particularly skilled during a siege at uprooting stakes. Whence the nickname of Arrachepel[130] under which he was ennobled, and the stakes you see persisting through the centuries in their arms. The stakes in question are those which, to make the fortifications harder to approach, they planted, they bedded, if you'll allow the expression, in the ground in front of them, and then joined them together. It's they that you quite rightly called pickets and which had no connection with the floating sticks of our good La Fontaine.[131] For they were held to make a place impregnable. That brings a smile obviously, what with modern artillery. But you must remember we're talking about the eleventh century. – It lacks topicality, said Mme Verdurin, but the little campanile has character. – You have, said Cottard, the luck of a… cuckoo-clock, a word he happily repeated in order to avoid Molière's word.[132] – Do you know why the king of diamonds failed his Army medical? – I wish I'd been in his shoes,' said Morel, who was bored by his military service. – Oh, he's no patriot, exclaimed M. de Charlus, who could not restrain himself from pinching the violinist's ear. –

No, you don't know why the king of diamonds failed his medical? Cottard went on, who insisted on his jokes, it's because he's only got one eye. – You've got a hard game on your hands, Doctor, said M. de Cambremer, to show Cottard that he knew who he was. – This young man is astonishing, M. de Charlus broke in artlessly, pointing to Morel. He plays like a god.' This observation did not much appeal to the Doctor, who replied: 'Time will show. He may be too cunning by half. – Queen, ace,' announced Morel triumphantly, the luck having been with him. The Doctor bowed his head as if unable to deny this good fortune and admitted, fascinated: 'That's good.' – We're so glad to have dined with M. de Charlus, said Mme de Cambremer to Mme Verdurin. – You didn't know him? He's quite agreeable, he's unusual, he's from *another era*' (she would have found it hard to say which), replied Mme Verdurin, with the self-satisfied smile of a dilettante, a judge and a hostess. Mme de Cambremer asked me whether I would be coming to Féterne with Saint-Loup. I could not contain a cry of admiration on seeing the moon suspended like an orange-coloured lantern from the vault of oak trees that led away from the château. 'It's nothing as yet; in a minute, when the moon is higher and the valley is lit up, it'll be a thousand times more beautiful. That's something you don't have at Féterne!' she said scornfully to Mme de Cambremer, who did not know how to reply, not wishing to run her own property down, especially in front of her tenants. 'Will you be staying some time yet in these parts, Madame? M. de Cambremer asked Mme Cottard, which might have passed for a vague intention to invite her but which excused him for the present from any more precise arrangement. – Oh certainly, Monsieur, I insist on this annual exodus for the children's sake. No matter what people say, they need the fresh air. I'm perhaps very primitive in these matters, but I find that there's no treatment for children like good air, even though the contrary were to be proved to me by A plus B. Their dear little faces are quite altered already. The Faculty wanted to send me to Vichy; but it's too airless and I'll start worrying about my stomach once these great big lads have grown a bit more. Besides, the Professor, with the examinations he puts them through, always has his nose to the grindstone and the heat tires him out. I consider that you need frankly to relax when you've been hard at it like him all year long. We shall be here for a good month yet, whatever happens. – Ah, then we shall be seeing one another again. – I'm all the more obliged to remain in any case because my husband has to do a tour of Savoie and it'll be another fortnight before he's stationed here permanently. – I like the valley side even more than the sea side, Mme Verdurin went on. You're going to have splendid weather for your return. – We'll even have to see whether the carriages are harnessed up, in the event of your absolutely insisting on going back to Balbec this evening, M. Verdurin said to me, because I don't see the necessity for it myself. We could have you driven back tomorrow morning by carriage. It'll certainly be fine. The roads are admirable.' I said that it was out of the question. 'It's not time, in any case,' objected the Patronne. 'Let them be, they've plenty of time. Much good it'll do them arriving at the station an hour ahead of time. They're better off here. And you, my young Mozart, she said to Morel, not daring to address herself directly to M. de Charlus, will you not stay? We have some lovely bedrooms overlooking the sea. – But he can't, replied M. de Charlus, on behalf of the attentive card-player, who had not heard. He has leave only up to midnight. He must go back there to sleep, like a very good, very obedient little boy,' he added, in a voice at once self-satisfied, affected and insistent, as though he were deriving a sadistic and voluptuous pleasure from employing this chaste comparison, as well as letting his voice dwell in passing on what concerned Morel, from touching him, for want of a hand, with words that seemed to be palpating him.

From the sermon that Brichot had directed at me, M. de Cambremer had concluded that I was a Dreyfusard. Since he was as anti-Dreyfusard as it was possible to be, out of courtesy towards an enemy, he began to eulogize a Jewish colonel to me who had always treated a cousin of the Chevregnys with great fairness and had got him the promotion he deserved. 'And my cousin's ideas were absolutely opposed to his,' said M. de Cambremer, sliding over what these ideas were, but which I sensed to be as ancient and ill-formed as his own face, ideas that a few families in certain small towns must have held for a long time past. 'Well, you know, I find that very fine!' M. de Cambremer ended. It is true that he was hardly using the word 'fine' in the aesthetic sense, where, in the case of his mother or his wife, it might have described different works, but works of art. M. de Cambremer preferred to make use of this qualifier when, for example, congratulating someone delicate on having put on a little weight. 'What, you've put back three kilos in two months? You know, that's fine!' Refreshments were being served from a table. Mme Verdurin invited the gentlemen to go themselves to choose the drink that suited them. M. de Charlus went and drank his glass and came quickly back, to sit beside the card-table, and did not stir again. Mme Verdurin asked him: 'Did you have some of my orangeade?' Then M. de Charlus, with a gracious smile and in a crystalline tone that was rare with him, and with endless pursings of the lips and wigglings of his torso, replied: 'No, I preferred its neighbour, the *fraisette*[133] I fancy, it's delicious.' It is strange that a certain category of secret actions should have as their external consequence a manner of speaking or of gesticulating which betrays them. If a gentleman believes, or not, in the Immaculate Conception, or in Dreyfus's innocence, or in the plurality of worlds, but wishes to keep it to himself, you will find nothing in his voice, or in his bearing, that enables you to see his thoughts. But on hearing M. de Charlus say, in that high-pitched voice, and with that smile and those movements of the arm, 'No, I preferred its neighbour, the *fraisette*', you could have said: 'Aha, he likes the strong sex', with the same certainty as that which enables a judge to condemn a criminal who has not confessed, or a doctor a general paralytic who perhaps does not know himself what is wrong with him but who has made certain mistakes in pronunciation from which it can be deduced that he will be dead within three years. Perhaps the people who infer from the way of saying 'No, I preferred its neighbour, the *fraisette*' to a so-called anti-physical love, have no need of so much science. But that is because in this case there is a more direct relationship between the tell-tale sign and the secret. Without quite putting it into words, we sense that it is a gentle, smiling lady who is answering and who appears affected because she is passing herself off as a man and because we are not accustomed to seeing men put on so many airs and graces. And it is more gracious perhaps to imagine that for a long time now a certain number of angelic women have been included by mistake in the male sex, where, as exiles, even as they vainly beat their wings at the men whom they fill with a physical repulsion, they know how to arrange a drawing-room or create an 'interior'. M. de Charlus was unconcerned that Mme Verdurin should be standing up, and remained installed in his armchair so as to be closer to Morel. 'Do you not think it a crime, said Mme Verdurin to the Baron, that that person there, who might be enthralling us with his violin, should be at the *écarté* table. When you can play the violin like he does! – He plays cards well, he does everything well, he's so intelligent,' said M. de Charlus, keeping an eye on the cards in order to advise Morel. This was not as it happens his only reason for not getting up from his chair for Mme Verdurin. With the peculiar amalgam that he had created out of his social conceptions, as at once a great nobleman and an *amateur* of the arts, instead of being polite in the same way as another man from his world would have been, he had created for himself *tableaux vivants* of a sort based on Saint-Simon; at this moment, he was amusing himself playing the Maréchal d'Huxelles, other aspects also of whom were of interest to him, whose vanity was such, so it was said, that he refused to rise from his seat, seemingly out of laziness, for the most distinguished members of the Court. 'I say, Charlus, said Mme Verdurin, who was beginning to grow familiar, you wouldn't have in your Faubourg some broken-down old nobleman who might come and be my porter? – But of course… of course, replied M. de Charlus, smiling jovially, but I don't advise it. – Why? – I'd be afraid for your sake that fashionable visitors might not get any further than the lodge.' This was the first of the skirmishes between them. Mme Verdurin hardly heeded it. There were, alas, to be others in Paris. M. de Charlus continued not to leave his chair. He could not, however, help smiling imperceptibly when he saw, in the submission so readily obtained from Mme Verdurin, confirmation of his favourite maxims as to the prestige of the aristocracy and the cravenness of the bourgeoisie. The Patronne appeared in no way surprised by the Baron's posture and if she left him, it was only because she had been concerned to see me being badgered by M. de Cambremer. Before that, however, she wanted to elucidate the question of M. de Charlus's relations with the Comtesse Molé. 'You told me you knew Mme de Molé. Do you go there?' she asked, giving to the words 'go there' the sense of being received by her, of having being authorized to call on her. M. de Charlus replied with an inflection of disdain and an affectation of precision, and in a sing-song tone: 'But yes, now and again.' This 'now and again' sowed doubts in Mme Verdurin, who asked: 'Have you met the Duc de Guermantes there? – Well, I don't recall. – Ah, you don't know the Duc de Guermantes? – But how could I not know him?' replied M. de Charlus, a smile causing his mouth to undulate. This smile was ironic; but as the Baron was afraid of allowing a gold tooth to show, he suppressed it beneath a reflux of his lips, so that the resulting sinuosity was that of a smile of benevolence: 'Why do you say, "How could I not know him?" – But when he's my brother,' said M. de Charlus off-handedly, leaving Mme Verdurin plunged in stupefaction and uncertainty as to whether her guest was making fun of her, or was a natural child or the son of another marriage. The idea that the

Duc de Guermantes's brother might be called the Baron de Charlus never entered her head. She made her way over to me: 'I heard M. de Cambremer inviting you to dinner just now. That's all right with me, you understand. But in your own best interest, I very much hope you won't go. For one thing, it's infested with bores. Oh, if you enjoy dining with provincial counts and marquises that no one knows, you'll have your fill of them. – I think I shall be obliged to go there once or twice. I'm not so free as it happens, for I have a young cousin whom I can't leave on her own (I had found that this purported kinship simplified things where going out with Albertine was concerned). But where the Cambremers are concerned, since I've already introduced her to them… – You must do as you wish. I can tell you this: it's excessively unhealthy; and what good is it going to do you to pick up an inflammation of the chest, or a nice little family rheumatism? – But is it not a very pretty spot? – Mmmyesss… if you like. But I confess to you frankly that I like the view over the valley a hundred times better from here. For one thing, even if they'd paid us, I wouldn't have taken the other house, because the sea air is fatal for M. Verdurin. Your cousin only needs to be a bit high-strung… But then you're high-strung, I fancy… you have breathless attacks. Well, you'll see! Go there once and you won't sleep for a week. No, it's not the place for you.' And without thinking how contradictory her next words would be of the earlier ones: 'If it'd amuse you to see the house, which isn't bad, pretty would be overstating it, but amusing after all, with the old moat, the old drawbridge, as I shall have to go through with it and dine there one time, well, come here that day, I'll try to bring all my little circle, then it'll be nice. The day after tomorrow we're going to Arembouville by carriage. The road is magnificent, they have delicious cider. Come with us. You, Brichot, you must come, too. And you too, Ski. It'll make an outing that my husband must have planned in advance in any case. I'm none too sure who he's invited. Monsieur de Charlus, are you one of them?' The Baron, who heard only these final words and did not know they had been talking about an excursion to Arembouville, gave a start: 'Strange question,' he murmured in a sardonic tone, by which Mme Verdurin felt piqued. 'Anyway, she said to me, while we wait for the Cambremer dinner-party, why shouldn't you bring your cousin here? Does she like conversation, intelligent people? Is she agreeable? Yes, well then, very good! Come with her. The Cambremers aren't the only people in the world. I can understand them being glad to invite her, they can't manage to get anyone. Here she'll have good air, and always men who are intelligent. At all events, I'm counting on you not letting me down next Wednesday. I've heard you were having a tea-party in Rivebelle with your cousin, M. de Charlus and I don't know who else. You ought to plan to transport the whole lot here, it'd be nice, a small consignment en masse. Communications couldn't be simpler, the roads are ravishing; if need be, I'll have you fetched. I don't know for that matter what you can find attractive in Rivebelle, it's infested with mosquitoes. Perhaps you're thinking of the reputation of its *galettes*. The ones my cook makes are in a different class. 'I'll make you eat Normandy *galettes*, the real thing, and the local shortbread, I say no more. Oh, if you insist on the filth they serve in Rivebelle, I want none of it, I don't murder my guests, Monsieur, and even if I wanted, my cook would refuse to make those unspeakable objects and would change establishments. You don't know what they're made from, the *galettes* from there. I know a poor girl who got peritonitis from them, which carried her off in three days. She was only seventeen. It's sad for her poor mother, added Mme Verdurin, with a melancholy expression, beneath the spheres of her temples, weighed down by sorrow and experience. But there, go and have tea in Rivebelle if it amuses you to be fleeced and to throw money out of the window. Only, I beg you, I'm entrusting you with a confidential mission: on the stroke of six o'clock, bring all your people here, don't let them disband and all go off home one by one. You can bring whom you please. I wouldn't say that to everyone. But I'm sure your friends are nice, I can see here and now that we understand one another. Apart from the little nucleus, some very agreeable people are coming on Wednesday in fact. You don't know little Mme de Longpont? She's a delight and so quick, not in the least bit snobbish, you'll see, you'll really take to her. She's also due to bring a whole group of friends, added Mme Verdurin, to show that this was quite the thing and to encourage me by example. We'll see who has the most influence and brings the most people, out of Barbe de Longpont and you. Besides, I believe they're due to bring Bergotte, too, she added with a vague expression, the collaboration of that celebrity having been rendered all too improbable by a notice that had appeared in the papers that morning, to the effect that the great writer's health was giving rise to the gravest anxiety. Anyway, you'll see, it'll be one of my most successful Wednesdays, I don't want any women who are tiresome. Don't judge by this evening's, in any case, that was a total failure. Don't protest, you can't have been any more bored than I was, I found it tedious myself. It won't always be like this evening, you know! I'm not talking about the Cambremers, moreover, who are impossible, but I've known society people who passed for being agreeable, well, compared to my little nucleus, they didn't exist. I heard you say you thought Swann intelligent. My opinion first of all is that that was much exaggerated, but not even to speak of the man's character, which I always found fundamentally unsympathetic, sly, underhand, I often had him to dinner on Wednesdays. Well, you can ask the others, even compared with Brichot, who's certainly no genius, but a good fifth-form teacher whom I got into the Institute just the same, Swann was nothing any more. He was so dreary!' And as I was emitting a contrary opinion: 'That's the way it was. I don't want to say a word against him, since he was your friend; he was very fond of you for that matter, he spoke about you in a delightful way, but ask these people whether he ever said anything interesting at our dinners. That's the acid test after all. Well, I don't know why, but Swann when he came to me never produced, never gave us anything. And yet the little that he was worth, he acquired it here.' I assured her that he was very intelligent. 'No, you only thought that because you hadn't known him for as long as I had. Basically, you very soon got the measure of him. He bored *me*. (Translation: he went to the La Trémoilles and the Guermantes and knew that I didn't.) And I can stand anything, except boredom. That, no, never!' Her horror of being bored was now the reason on which Mme Verdurin relied to explain the make-up of her little circle. She had not yet entertained duchesses because she was unable to be bored, as she was to go on a cruise on account of sea-sickness. I told myself that what Mme Verdurin had been saying was not wholly false and, whereas the Guermantes might have declared Brichot to be the stupidest man they had ever met, I remained unsure whether he was not at bottom superior, if not to Swann himself, then at least to those people having the Guermantes sense of humour, who would have had the good taste to avoid and the decency to blush at his pedant's facetiousness, or so I asked myself, as if a measure of light might be thrown on the nature of intelligence by the answer I gave, with the seriousness of a Christian, influenced by Port-Royal, posing the problem of Grace to himself.[134] 'You'll see, Mme Verdurin continued, when you have society people together with truly intelligent people, people from our circle, that's where you need to see them, the cleverest man of the world in the kingdom of the blind is no more than a one-eyed man here. He freezes the others, moreover, who no longer feel any confidence. To the point where I ask myself whether, instead of trying out the combinations that ruin everything, I shan't have series for the bores alone, so as to enjoy my little nucleus properly. We must end: you shall come with your cousin. That's agreed. Good. At least, here, the two of you'll get to eat. At Féterne, it's hunger and thirst. Oh, I mean, if you like rats, go there this instant, you'll be offered your fill of them. And they'll keep you there as long as you like. I mean, you'll die of hunger. Anyway, when I go, I shall dine before setting out. And to make it jollier, you must come and fetch me. We'll have a hearty tea and supper when we get back. Do you like *tarte aux pommes*? Yes, well, our chef's better at them than anybody. You can see, I was right to say you were meant to live here. So come and stay. You know the house is far roomier than it looks. I don't tell people so as not to attract bores. You could bring your cousin here permanently. She'd get quite different air here from Balbec. With the air here, I claim I can cure the incurable. Take my word for it, I've cured some, and not just recently. Because I lived quite near here in the old days, something I'd unearthed, that I got for a crust of bread and which had far more character than their Raspelière. I'll show you it if we take a drive. But I acknowledge that even here, the air is really bracing. But then I don't want to talk about it too much, the Parisians would only have to start liking my little hideaway. That's always been my luck. Anyway, tell your cousin. We'll give you two pretty rooms overlooking the valley, you'll see it in the mornings, the sun in the mist! And who's this Robert de Saint-Loup you were talking about? she said anxiously, for she had heard that I was due to go and visit him in Doncières and was afraid he might cause me to default. You could bring him here instead if he's not a bore. I've heard about him through Morel, I fancy he's one of his great friends,' said Mme Verdurin, telling a complete lie, because Saint-Loup and Morel did not even know of one another's existence. But having heard that Saint-Loup knew M. de Charlus, she thought that this was through the violinist and wanted to appear to be in the swim of things. 'He isn't doing medicine by any chance, or literature? You know, if you need a word putting in with examinations, Cottard can do anything, and I can do what I like with him. As for the Academy, for later on, for I imagine he's not yet of an age, I can call on several votes. Your friend'll be on familiar ground here and it'd perhaps amuse him to see the house. It's not much fun, Doncières. Anyway, you must do as you like, whatever suits you best,' she ended, without insisting, so as not to appear to be trying to get an introduction to the nobility, and because her claim was that the name of the regime under which she made the faithful live, her tyranny, was liberty. 'Hello, what's the matter?' she said, catching sight of M.

Verdurin, who, gesturing impatiently, had gone out on to the wooden verandah that stretched above the valley on one side of the drawing-room, like a man who is choking with rage and has need of fresh air. 'Is it Saniette again who's been annoying you? But since you know he's an idiot, resign yourself to the fact, and don't get into these states… I don't like it, she said to me, because it's bad for him, he goes blue in the face. But I have to say, too, that you sometimes need the patience of an angel to put up with Saniette and to remind yourself above all that it's an act of charity to take him in. For my own part, I confess, such is the magnificence of his stupidity, it delights me rather. I imagine you heard his bon mot after dinner: "I can't play whist, but I can play the piano!" Isn't that lovely! The greatest thing you've ever heard, and a lie as it happens, because he can't play one any more than the other. But my husband, underneath his rough exterior, is very sensitive, very kind, and that sort of selfishness in Saniette, forever taken up with the effect he's going to create, drives him wild… Come, *mon petit*, calm yourself, you know very well Cottard told you it was bad for your liver. And it's I who'll have to bear the brunt, said Mme Verdurin. Tomorrow Saniette's going to come with his little *crise de nerfs* and his tears. Poor man! He's very ill. But then, that's no reason why he should kill others. Besides, even at the times when he's too unwell, when you'd like to feel sorry for him, his silliness stops pity dead. He's simply too stupid. You just need to tell him very gently that these scenes are making the two of you ill, that he mustn't come back; since that's what he most dreads, it'll have a calming effect on his nerves,' whispered Mme Verdurin to her husband.

You could barely make out the sea through the right-hand windows. But those on the other side showed the valley, on which there had now fallen the snow of the moonlight. From time to time, the voice of Morel and that of Cottard could be heard. 'Have you got a trump?' A '*yes*' in English. 'Oh, you've got some good ones, *vous en avez de bonnes*,' said M. de Cambremer to Morel, in answer to his question, for he had seen that the Doctor's hand was full of trumps. 'Here's the wife of diamonds,' said the Doctor. That's a trump, you know? Oy play, oy take… But there isn't a Sorbonne any more, said the Doctor to M. de Cambremer; there's only the University of Paris now.' M. de Cambremer confessed himself ignorant of why the Doctor had made this remark. 'I thought you were talking about the Sorbonne, the Doctor went on. I heard you say "You're bringing out the right one, *tu nous la sors bonne*," he added with a wink, to show that this was a witticism. Wait, he said, pointing to his adversary, I'm getting ready to deliver the knock-out blow'. And the blow had to be an excellent one so far as the Doctor was concerned, for in his delight he began as he laughed to shake both shoulders voluptuously, which in the family, in the Cottard 'genus', was an almost zoological mark of satisfaction. In the previous generation, the movement of rubbing the hands together as if one were soaping them had accompanied this movement. Cottard himself had originally used this double mimicry simultaneously, but one fine day, without anyone knowing to what conjugal, or perhaps magisterial, intervention it was to be attributed, the rubbing of the hands had disappeared. Even at dominoes, when he forced his partner to 'draw' and take the double-six, which was for him the keenest of pleasures, the Doctor contented himself with the movement of the shoulders. And when – as rarely as possible – he went to his native village for a few days, and met his first cousin again, who for his part was still at the hand-rubbing stage, he would say on returning to Mme Cottard: 'I thought poor René very common.' 'Have you got any of these little theengs? he said, turning to Morel. No? Then I shall play this old David.[135] – But you've got five then, you've won! – A fine victory, Doctor, said the Marquis. – A victory à la Pyrrhus,' said Cottard, turning to the Marquis and peering over his eyeglass to judge of the effect of his bon mot. 'If we've still got time, he said to Morel, I'll give you your revenge. It's me to… Ah, no, here are the carriages, it'll be for Friday, and I'll show you a trick you don't see every day.' M. and Mme Verdurin led us outside. The Patronne was especially ingratiating with Saniette, so as to be sure he would come back the next day. 'But you don't look covered up to me, *mon petit*, M. Verdurin said to me, his advanced years sanctioning this fatherly form of address. It's as though the weather had changed.' These words filled me with joy, as if the profound life, the sudden appearance of different combinations that they implied in nature, must herald other changes, occurring this time in my own life and creating new possibilities there. Merely by opening the door on to the gardens before leaving, you felt that a different 'weather' had just then occupied the scene; breaths of cool air, one of summer's delights for the senses, were stirring in the pine wood (where Mme de Cambremer had once dreamed of Chopin) and almost imperceptibly, in caressing meanders and capricious eddies, had begun their faint nocturnes. I refused the rug that I would accept on the subsequent evenings when Albertine would be there, more for the secrecy of our pleasures than against the risks of the cold. The Norwegian philosopher was searched for in vain. Had he been taken with a stomach-ache? Had he been afraid of missing the train? Had an aeroplane come to fetch him? Had he been carried up in an Assumption? The fact was that he had vanished without anyone having had the time to notice, like a god. 'You're wrong, M. de Cambremer said to me, it's as cold as charity. – Why charity? asked the Doctor. Beware of breathless attacks, the Marquis went on. My sister never goes out in the evenings. But then she's none too good at present. Don't stay bare-headed like that, anyway, get your headgear on quickly. – They're not breathless attacks *a frigore*, said Cottard sententiously. Oh, in that case, said M. de Cambremer, bowing, since that's your opinion… – Get a second opinion,' said the Doctor, sneaking glances outside his eyeglass for a laugh. M. de Cambremer did laugh but, convinced that he was right, he insisted. 'Yet each time my sister goes out in the evenings he said, she has an attack. – There's no point in quibbling, answered the Doctor, without being aware of his own rudeness. I don't practise medicine at the seaside in any case, unless summoned to a consultation. I'm here on holiday.' He was even more so as it happens than he might have wished. M. de Cambremer having said to him as they got into the carriage together: 'We're fortunate in having another medical celebrity, Doctor du Boulbon, so close by (not on your side of the bay, on the other, but it's so shut in at that point),' Cottard, who normally, on *deontological* grounds, abstained from criticizing his colleagues, could not help exclaiming, as he had in front of me on that fateful day when we had gone into the little casino: 'But he's not a doctor. He practises literary medicine, a therapeutics of fantasy, quackery. We're on good terms even so. I'd take the boat to go and visit him one time were I not obliged to absent myself.' But from the expression that Cottard assumed in order to discuss du Boulbon with M. de Cambremer, I sensed that the boat on which he would have gladly gone in search of him bore a close resemblance to the vessel which the doctors of Salerno had fitted out to go and destroy the waters discovered by another literary doctor, Virgil (who had also taken away their entire clientèle), but which foundered with them during the crossing.[136] 'Good-bye, *mon petit Saniette*, don't fail to come tomorrow, you know that my husband is very fond of you. He likes your wit, your intelligence; yes, he does, you know that, he likes putting on a show of brusqueness, but he can't do without seeing you. It's always the first question he puts to me: "Is Saniette coming? I so love seeing him!" – I've never said that,' said M. Verdurin to Saniette, with a simulated candour that seemed perfectly to reconcile what the Patronne had been saying with his own treatment of Saniette. Then, looking at his watch, no doubt so as not to to prolong the farewells in the evening damp, he advised the coachmen not to dawdle, but to be careful on the descent, and assured us that we would get there before the train. The latter would be setting down the faithful, one at one station, another at another, ending with myself, none of the others going as far as Balbec, and starting with the Cambremers. They, so as not to make their horses go all the way up to La Raspelière in the dark, took the train with us to Douville-Féterne. The nearest station to them was not in fact this one, which is some little way from the village and even further from the château, but La Sogne. On arriving at the station of Douville-Féterne, M. de Cambremer insisted on 'crossing the palm', as Françoise used to put it, of the Verdurins' coachman (the same gentle, sensitive coachman, with the melancholy ideas), for M. de Cambremer was generous, being 'from his mama's side' rather in this. But whether it was that 'his papa's side' intervened at this juncture, even as he gave it, he felt qualms that a faux pas was being committed – either by himself because, unable to see properly, he might for example be giving a sou instead of a franc, or by the recipient, who could not notice the size of the gift he was getting. He drew attention to it, therefore. 'That *is* a franc I'm giving you, isn't it?' he said to the coachman, causing the coin to reflect the light, and so that the faithful might report it to Mme Verdurin. 'Isn't it? It's twenty sous, as it's only a short ride.' He and Mme de Cambremer left us at La Sogne. 'I shall tell my sister that you have breathless attacks, he repeated to me. It's sure to interest her.' I realized he meant: to please her. As for his wife, in taking leave of me, she employed two of those abbreviations which, even when written, used in those days to shock me in a letter, although we have grown used to them since, but which, when spoken, seem to me still, even today, to have about them, in their studied familiarity, something intolerably pedantic: 'Glad to have spent the evening with you, she said to me; regards to Saint-Loup if you see him.' In saying which words, Mme de Cambremer pronounced it Saint-Loupe. I have never found out who had pronounced it like that in her presence, or what had given her to believe that it was to be so pronounced. The fact remains that for several weeks she pronounced it Saint-Loupe, and that a man who had great admiration for her and followed her in

everything, did likewise. Were other people to say Saint-Lou, they insisted, emphasizing the Saint-Loupe, either indirectly to put these other people right, or else to mark themselves off from them. But no doubt women more brilliant than Mme de Cambremer told her, or gave her indirectly to understand, that it should not be pronounced that way, and that what she had taken to be originality was an error which would have it thought that she was not au fait with the ways of society, for shortly afterwards Mme de Cambremer was again saying Saint-Lou, and her admirer likewise abandoned all resistance, either because she had lectured him, or because he had noticed she was no longer sounding the final consonant, and had told himself that if a woman of her worth, her energy and her ambition had given in, it had to be with good reason. The worst of her admirers was her husband. Mme de Cambremer loved teasing other people, often very impertinently. As soon as she set about someone in this way, whether myself or somebody else, M. de Cambremer began looking at the victim, and laughing. As the Marquis had a squint – which can lend an intention of wit to the amusement even of an imbecile – the effect of this laugh was to bring a bit of the pupil back into the otherwise unbroken white of his eye. Thus does a bright interval produce a patch of blue in a sky fleecy with clouds. The monocle, moreover, protected this delicate operation like the glass over a valuable painting. As for the actual intention behind the laugh, one hardly knew whether it was friendly: 'Ah, you rascal, you're to be envied, and no mistake. You've found favour with a woman with a strong sense of humour'; or catty: 'Well Monsieur, I hope that's taught you a lesson, put that in your pipe and smoke it'; or obliging: 'I'm here, you know, I can laugh because it's all in fun, but I shan't let you be maltreated'; or cruelly complicit: 'I don't have to add my own pennyworth, but, you can see, I find the insults she's heaping on you hilarious. I'm convulsed, so I approve, I her husband. And so if you take it into your head to return the compliment, you'll find you've got me to deal with, *mon petit Monsieur*. First you'd receive two good sound slaps on the cheek, then we'd go and cross blades in the forest of Chantepie.'

Whatever the truth of these various interpretations of the husband's mirth, the wife's passing whims soon came to an end. M. de Cambremer would then leave off laughing, the temporary prunella would vanish, and as you had, for the past few minutes, lost the habit of that completely white eye, it lent this red-faced Norman something at once bloodless and ecstatic, as though the Marquis had just been operated on, or were imploring Heaven, beneath his monocle, for a martyr's crown.

CHAPTER 3

Sorrows of M. de Charlus. – His fictitious duel. – The stations of the 'Transatlantic'. – Weary of Albertine, I want to break with her.

I could not keep awake. I was taken up as far as my floor in the lift, not by the liftboy, but by the cross-eyed *chasseur*, who struck up a conversation to relate to me that his sister was still with the very rich gentleman, and that one time, because she had wanted to return home rather than behave responsibly, her gentleman had sought out the mother of the cross-eyed *chasseur*, and of the other, more favoured children, who had taken the nonsensical girl back to her friend as quickly as possible. 'You know, Monsieur, she's a great lady, my sister. She plays the piano and can speak Spanish. You mightn't believe it, of the sister of the mere employee who takes the lift up, but she denies herself nothing; Madame has her own maidservant, it wouldn't amaze me if one day she had her own carriage. She's very pretty, if you could see her, a bit too stuck-up, but Lord, that's understandable! She's quite a humorist. She never leaves a hotel without relieving herself in a wardrobe or a chest of drawers, so as to leave a small memento for the chambermaid who'll have to clean up. Sometimes, she even does it in a cab, and after she's paid her fare, she hides in a corner, so's to have a good laugh watching the driver curse and swear who's got to wash down his cab again. My father had a stroke of luck, too, finding that Indian prince he'd met in the old days for my young brother. Of course, that's a different kind of arrangement. But it's a superb position. If it weren't for the travelling, what you dream of. There's only me up till now who's been left out. But you can never tell. Luck runs in my family; who knows whether I won't one day be President of the Republic? But I'm making you chatter on (I had not said a single word and was starting to fall asleep listening to his words). Good night, Monsieur. Oh, thank you, Monsieur! If everyone was as kind-hearted as yourself, there'd be no poor people any more. But as my sister says, there'll always need to be some so that now I'm rich, I can tell them to go to blazes. Pardon the expression. Good night, Monsieur.'

Every night perhaps we accept the risk of experiencing, while we sleep, sufferings that we consider to be null and void because they will be endured only in the course of a sleep that we believe is without consciousness. In fact, on the evenings when I returned home late from La Raspelière, I was very sleepy. But as soon as the cold weather arrived, I was unable to get to sleep straight away because the brightness from the fire was as if a lamp had been lit. It had only flared up, however, and – as with a lamp, or the daylight when dusk falls – its too bright light was not long in dying down; and I entered into sleep, which is like a second apartment that we have, into which, abandoning our own, we go in order to sleep. It has its own system of alarms, and we are sometimes brought violently awake there by the sound of a bell, heard with perfect clarity, even though no one has rung. It has its servants, its particular visitors who come to take us out, so that, just when we are ready to get up, we are obliged to recognize, by our almost immediate transmigration into the other apartment, that of our waking hours, that the room is empty, that no one has come. The race which inhabits it, like that of the earliest humans, is androgynous. A man there will appear a moment later in the aspect of a woman. Objects have the ability to turn into men, and men into friends or enemies. The time that elapses for the sleeper, in sleep of this kind, is utterly different from the time in which a waking man's life transpires. Its passage may now be far more rapid, a quarter of an hour seeming like a whole day; or at other times much longer, we think we have just dozed off, and have slept right through the day. And then, on sleep's chariot, we descend into depths where the memory can no longer keep pace with it and where the mind stops short and is forced to turn back. Sleep's horses, like those of the sun, move at so uniform a pace, in an atmosphere where no resistance can any longer arrest them, that some small alien aerolith is needed (hurled from the azure by what Unknown Hand?) if this regular sleep is to be affected (which would otherwise have no reason to stop but would endure with a similar motion until the end of time) and made to return, wheeling suddenly about, towards reality, traversing without drawing breath the borderlands of life – the sounds of which, vague almost as yet, but already perceptible, though distorted, the sleeper will soon be hearing – and comes abruptly to earth at our waking. From these deep sleeps we then awake in a dawn, not knowing who we are, being nobody, quite new, prepared for anything, our brain finding itself emptied of the past that had hitherto been our life. And perhaps it is better still when the return to earth of our waking is a brutal one and when our sleeping thoughts, concealed behind a vestment of oblivion, do not have time progressively to return before sleep has ended. Then, from the black storm through which we seem to have passed (but we do not even say *we*) we emerge lying prostrate, without any thoughts: a 'we' it may be without content. What hammer-blow has this person or thing that is here received that it should be aware of nothing, be stupefied, up until such time as the memory comes hurrying back, and restores its consciousness or personality? For these two kinds of reawakening, however, we must not go to sleep, not even deeply, under the law of habit. For habit keeps watch over all that it imprisons in its nets; we must elude it, find sleep at the moment when we thought we were doing something quite other than sleeping, find the sleep in short that does not dwell under the tutelage of foresight, in the company, even concealed, of reflection. At all events, in reawakenings such as I have just described them, and which were mine most often after I had dined the evening before at La Raspelière, everything took place as if this were how it was, and I can testify, I, the strange human being who, while waiting for death to deliver him, lives behind closed shutters, knows nothing of the world, stays unmoving as an owl and, like an owl, can see with any clarity only in the dark. Everything takes place as if this were how it was, but perhaps only a layer of cotton-wool has prevented the sleeper from perceiving the inner dialogue between his memories and the incessant verbiage of sleep. For (which can be explained just as readily for that matter in the first, vaster, more mysterious, more astral system), at the moment when waking occurs, the sleeper hears an inner voice that says to him: 'Will you be coming to that dinner this evening, my dear friend? How pleasant that would be!' and thinks: 'Yes, since it'll be pleasant, I shall go'; then, his wakefulness increasing, he suddenly remembers: 'My grandmother has only a few weeks to live, so the doctor assures us.' He rings the bell, weeps at the thought that, unlike in the past, it will not be his grandmother, his dying grandmother, who will come to answer it, but an indifferent *valet de chambre*. Moreover, when sleep carried him so far away from the world inhabited by memory and thought, through an ether in which he was alone, more than alone, without that companion even in whom we perceive ourselves, he was outside of time and its measurement. The *valet de chambre* is already entering, and he does not dare ask him the time, for he does not know whether he has been asleep, nor how many hours he has slept (he wonders whether it is not how many days, having returned so broken in body, so rested in spirit, and so homesick in his heart, as if from a journey too distant not to have lasted for a long time). True, we can claim that there is only one time, for the futile reason that it is by looking at the clock that we have confirmed that what we thought was a whole day was only a quarter of an hour. But at the moment when we confirm it, we are of course a man awake, plunged into the time of waking men, we have deserted the other time. Perhaps even more than another time: another life. We do not include the pleasures we have during sleep when reckoning up those we have experienced in the course of our existence. To allude only to the most crudely sensual of them, which of us, on waking, has not felt some irritation at having experienced, while we slept, a pleasure which, unless we want to overtax ourselves, we cannot, once awake, repeat indefinitely on that particular day? It is as if a part of our substance has been wasted. We have felt pleasure in another life that is not ours. Were we to include the pains and pleasures of our dreams (which generally vanish very quickly on waking) in a budget, it would not be in that of our everyday life.

Two kinds of time, I have said; perhaps there is only one, not because that of the waking man holds good for the sleeper, but perhaps because the other life, that in which we sleep, is not – in its profound part – subject to the category of time. That is what I imagined when, in the aftermath of the dinners at La Raspelière, I went so completely asleep. Here is why. I was beginning to feel desperate when, on waking, I found that, after I had rung ten times, the valet had not arrived. At the eleventh, he entered. It was only the first time. The other ten had been mere adumbrations in my still continuing sleep of the summons that I wanted. My numbed hands had not even moved. On these mornings (which is what makes me say that sleep perhaps knows nothing of the law of time), my attempt to wake up consisted above all in an attempt to introduce the obscure, undefined block of sleep that I had just been living into the framework of time. This is no easy task; the sleep that does not know whether we have slept for two hours or for two days cannot provide us with a point of reference. And if we do not discover one outside of it, and do not succeed in re-entering time, we go back to sleep again, for five minutes that seem to us like three hours.

I have always said – and proved by experience – that sleep is the most potent of hypnotics. Having slept deeply for two hours, fought with any number of giants, and formed any number of undying friendships, it is far more difficult to come awake than after taking several grams of veronal. And so, reasoning from one to the other, I was surprised to learn through the Norwegian philosopher, who had had it from M. Boutroux, 'his eminent associate – forgive me, his colleague', what M. Bergson thought about the particular ill effects on the memory produced by hypnotics. 'Of course, M. Bergson will have said to M. Boutroux, if the Norwegian philosopher is to be believed, hypnotics taken from time to time in moderate doses do not affect the solid memory of our everyday lives, so firmly fixed in us. But there are other kinds of memory, higher and more unstable ones. One of my colleagues is lecturing on ancient history. He has told me that if, the night before, he had taken a pill to get to sleep, he had difficulty, during his lecture, in recovering the Greek quotations that he needed. The doctor who had recommended the pills to him assured him they did not affect the memory. "Perhaps that's because you don't have to give Greek quotations," the historian had replied, not without a mocking vanity.'

I do not know whether this conversation between M. Bergson and M. Boutroux is accurate. The Norwegian philosopher, very profound and lucid though he was, and so passionately attentive, may have misunderstood. My personal experience has given me the opposite results. The moments of oblivion that ensue, the next day, after we have ingested certain narcotics, bear only a partial, if troubling, resemblance to the oblivion that reigns in the course of a night of deep, natural sleep. Now, what I forget in either case is not some line of Baudelaire's which wearies me rather, 'like a dulcimer',[1] not some concept from one of the philosophers I have been citing, but the very reality of the common objects that surround me – if I am asleep – my non-perception of which turns me into a madman; it is – if I am awake and emerging after an artificial sleep – not the system of Porphyry or Plotinus, which I am as able to discuss as on any other day, but the answer I have promised to give to an invitation, the memory of which has been replaced by a complete blank. The elevated idea has remained in place; what the hypnotic has disabled is our capacity to act in minor matters, in everything that calls for action if we are to repossess it just in time, to seize hold of some memory of our everyday life. Despite all that may be said about survival after the destruction of the brain, I observe that to every deterioration in the brain there corresponds a fragment of death. We possess all our memories, if not the faculty of recalling them, says, following M. Bergson, the great Norwegian philosopher, whose language I have not tried to imitate, so as not to slow things down any further. If not the faculty of recalling them. But what is a memory that we cannot recall? Or let us go further. We do not recall our memories of the last thirty years; but we are totally steeped in them; why then stop at thirty years, why not continue this previous existence back beyond our birth? Given that I do not know a whole portion of the memories that are behind me, given that they are invisible to me, that I do not have the faculty of summoning them, who is to say that in this mass which is unknown to me, there are not memories that date back long before my life as a man? If I can have, in me and around me, so many memories that I do not remember, this oblivion (a *de facto* oblivion at least, since I do not have the faculty of seeing anything) may apply to a life that I have lived in the body of another man, or even on another planet. The one oblivion erases everything. But what then would the immortality of the soul signify whose reality the Norwegian philosopher had asserted? The person that I shall be after death has no more reason to remember the man that I have been since my birth than this latter remembers what I was before it.

The *valet de chambre* had entered. I did not tell him that I had rung several times, for I realized that hitherto all I had done was to dream that I had rung. I was alarmed to think, however, that this dream had had the clarity of a cognition. Could cognition, by the same token, have the unreality of a dream?

I asked him on the other hand who had rung so many times during the night. He told me 'no one', and could say that with certainty, because it would have shown up on the 'board'. Yet I had heard repeated, almost furious peals, which vibrated still in my ear and were to remain audible for several days. It is rare, however, for sleep thus to discharge into waking life memories which do not die with it. Such aeroliths can be counted. If it is an idea that sleep has forged, this quickly disintegrates into tenuous, irretrievable fragments. But here sleep had fabricated sounds. Being more physical and simpler, they had lasted longer. I was astonished at the relatively early hour the *valet de chambre* told me that it was. I felt rested nonetheless. It is light sleeps that are of long duration, because, being intermediate between waking and sleeping, and preserving a partly erased but permanent notion of the former, they require an infinitely longer time to refresh us than does a deep sleep, which may be short. I felt thoroughly at ease for another reason. If reminding ourselves that we are tired is enough to make us painfully aware of our tiredness, to say to ourselves 'I feel rested' is enough to create repose. Now I had dreamed that M. de Charlus was a hundred and ten years old and had just twice slapped his mother, Mme Verdurin, in the face for spending five billion on a bunch of violets; I was assured therefore of having slept deeply, and of having dreamt the contrary of my notions of the day before and of all the possibilities of my current life; that was enough for me to feel fully rested.

I would have greatly astonished my mother, who could not understand M. de Charlus's assiduousness *chez* Verdurin, if I had told her (on the very day on which Albertine's toque had been ordered, without my saying a word to her, so that it might come as a surprise) with whom M. de Charlus had come to dine in a private room at the Grand-Hôtel in Balbec. His guest was none other than the footman of a cousin of the Cambremers. This footman was dressed with great elegance, and when he crossed the hall with the Baron, 'played the man-of-the-world' in the eyes of the tourists, as Saint-Loup would have put it. Even the young *chasseurs*, the 'Levites', a crowd of whom were descending the steps of the temple at that moment, which was that of their going off duty, paid no attention to the two new arrivals, one of whom, M. de Charlus, was anxious to show, by his lowered gaze, how very little he was according them. He seemed to be pushing his way through their midst. '*Prospérez, cher espoir d'une nation sainte*,'[2] he said, recalling some lines from Racine, quoted in a very different sense. 'I beg your pardon?' asked the footman, none too well versed in the classics. M. de Charlus did not answer, for he took a certain pride in discounting questions and in walking straight ahead of him, as if there were no other guests in the hotel and as if he alone, the Baron de Charlus, existed in the world. But having continued with Josabeth's lines: '*Venez, venez, mes filles*'[3], he felt distaste and did not add, as she does, '*il faut les appeler*',[4] for these children had not yet reached the age when sexuality is fully developed, and which appealed to M. de Charlus. Although, moreover, he had written to Mme de Chevregny's footman, because he did not doubt his docility, he had hoped he would be more virile. On seeing him, he found him more effeminate than he would have liked. He told him that he would have expected to be dealing with someone else, for he knew another of Mme de Chevregny's footmen by sight, having in fact noticed him on her carriage. This was a sort of country bumpkin, the complete opposite of the present one, who, adjudging his fancy ways to be so many marks of superiority, and not doubting that it was these man-of-the-world qualities that had seduced M. de Charlus, could not even understand who the Baron meant. 'But I've no workmates except for one and you can't have had your eye on him, he's a fright, he looks like a great fat peasant.' And at the thought that it was perhaps this yokel whom the Baron had seen, he felt punctured in his self-esteem. The Baron guessed as much, and widening his inquiries: 'But I haven't made a special vow to know only Mme de Chevregny's people, he said. Couldn't you, whether here or in Paris, since you'll soon be going, introduce many of your workmates to me, from one house or another? – Oh no, replied the footman, I don't associate with anyone from my own class. I only speak to them when on duty. But there's one highly respectable person – could introduce you to. – Who? asked the Baron. – The Prince de Guermantes.' M. de Charlus was greatly put out that he should be offered only a man that old, and with whom, what was more, he had no need of a recommendation from a footman. Thus he curtly declined the offer and, not allowing himself to be deterred by the flunkey's social pretensions, he began again to explain to him what he would like, the style, the type, a jockey maybe, and so on. Afraid that the lawyer who was passing at that moment might have overheard him, he thought it canny to show that he had been talking about something quite other than what might have been supposed, and said with insistence, and to the company at large, but as if all he were doing was continuing the conversation: 'Yes, despite my years, I have kept my taste for curio-hunting, my taste for pretty curios, I'll spend more than I can afford on an old bronze or an antique chandelier. I worship Beauty.' But to get the footman to understand the change of subject that he had executed so rapidly, M. de Charlus laid so much stress on each word, and in addition, so that the lawyer should hear, shouted them all out so loudly, that this whole bit of play-acting would have sufficed to reveal what it was concealing to ears more alert than those of the legal official. The latter no more suspected anything than any other of the hotel guests, all of whom saw an elegant foreigner in the very well-turned-out footman. On the other hand, if the men of the world were deceived and took him for an ultra-smart American, hardly had he appeared before the servants before they saw through him, just as one convict will recognize another convict, even quicker, nosed out from afar, as one animal is by certain others. The *chefs de rang* raised an

eyebrow. Aimé cast a suspicious glance. The *sommelier*, shrugging his shoulders, said behind his hand, because he thought this was politeness, a disobliging phrase that everyone heard. And even our old Françoise, whose sight was failing and who was passing the bottom of the stairs at that moment, to go and eat with the guests' servants, looked up, recognized a domestic where the hotel guests had not suspected one – just as the old nurse Euryclea recognizes Ulysses long before the suitors at the banquets[5] – and, seeing M. de Charlus walking with him in this familiar manner, appeared overcome, as if all of a sudden, wicked things that she had heard spoken but had not believed had assumed in her eyes a distressing probability. She never mentioned this incident, to me or to anyone else, but it must have set her brain to working hard, for later on, whenever in Paris she had occasion to see 'Julien', of whom she had hitherto been so fond, she always treated him with politeness, but which had cooled and was always diluted by a strong admixture of reserve. This same incident led someone else to entrust me with a confidence, on the other hand; this was Aimé. When I passed M. de Charlus, the latter, who had not been expecting to come across me, had called out, raising his hand, 'Good evening', with the indifference, apparent at least, of a great nobleman who believes he is a law unto himself and deems it more adroit not to appear to be hiding. But Aimé, who had just then been observing him with a distrustful eye and saw that I greeted the companion of the man in whom he was sure of having recognized a domestic, asked me that same evening who he was. For Aimé had for some time now liked to chat or rather, as he put it, no doubt in order to mark the, as he saw it, philosophical nature of these chats, to 'debate' with me. And as I had frequently told him it embarrassed me that he should remain standing beside me as I ate, when he could have sat down and shared my meal, he declared that he had never come across a guest having 'such sound powers of argument'. He was talking at that moment with two waiters. They had bowed to me, I did not know why; their faces were not known to me, although there sounded in their conversation a confused murmur that did not seem new. Aimé was upbraiding the two of them for having become engaged, of which he disapproved. He called me as a witness, I said I could not have an opinion, not knowing them. They reminded me of their names, and that they had often waited on me in Rivebelle. But one of them had let his moustache grow, the other had shaved his off and been shorn; as the result of which, although it was the old heads that were set on their shoulders (and not a different one, as in the faulty restorations at Notre-Dame),[6] they had remained as invisible for me as those objects that elude the most painstaking search, yet are simply lying in full view, unnoticed by anyone, on a mantelpiece.[7] The moment I learned their names, I recognized exactly the uncertain music of their voices, for I could again see the old faces that had determined it. 'They want to get married and they don't even know English!' Aimé said to me, without reflecting that I was not well up in the profession of hotelier and hardly understood that if you do not know foreign languages you cannot rely on finding a position. I, who had expected him to find out soon enough that this new diner was M. de Charlus, and even imagined that he must remember him, having waited on him in the dining-room when the Baron had come to see Mme de Villeparisis during my first stay in Balbec, told him his name. Not only did Aimé not remember the Baron de Charlus, but the name appeared to make a strong impression on him. He told me that the next day he would hunt among his belongings for a letter that I might be able to explain to him. I was all the more surprised in that M. de Charlus, when he had wanted to give me one of Bergotte's books in Balbec, that first year, had made a special point of asking for Aimé, whom he must have come across again subsequently in the restaurant in Paris where I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and his mistress, and where M. de Charlus had come to spy on us. It is true that Aimé had not been able to carry out these missions in person, having been, in the one instance, in bed, and the second time busy serving. I had serious doubts, however, as to his sincerity when he claimed not to know M. de Charlus. For one thing, he must have suited the Baron. Like all the *chefs d étage* at the Balbec hotel, and like several of the Prince de Guermantes's *valets de chambre*, Aimé belonged to a race more ancient than that of the Prince and hence more noble. When you asked for a private room, you thought at first you were alone. But soon, in the pantry, you observed a sculptural *maître d'hôtel*, of that red-haired Etruscan kind of which Aimé was the type, somewhat aged by an excess of champagne and seeing the moment for Contrexéville water unavoidably approaching. Not all the guests asked them only to wait on them. The commis waiters, who were young, scrupulous and in a hurry, with a mistress waiting for them in the town, made their escape. And so Aimé would criticize them for their irresponsibility. He had the right. He *was* responsible. He had a wife and children, and was ambitious for them. Thus he did not repel the advances made to him by a stranger, male or female, even though he might have to remain all night. For work must come before anything else. He was so much the kind of person to appeal to M. de Charlus that I suspected him of a falsehood when he told me he did not know him. I was wrong. It was the simple truth when the *chasseur* told the Baron that Aimé (who had hauled him over the coals the next day) had gone to bed (or gone out), and on the other occasion was busy serving. But the imagination goes beyond the reality in supposition. And the *chasseur*'s embarrassment had probably sown doubts in M. de Charlus as to the genuineness of his excuses, doubts which had wounded feelings in him that Aimé had not suspected. We have seen also that Saint-Loup had prevented Aimé from going to the carriage, in which M. de Charlus, who had somehow or other obtained the *maître d'hôtel*'s new address, had suffered a fresh disappointment. Aimé, who had not noticed him, felt the astonishment one can imagine when, on the evening of the same day on which I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and his mistress, he received a letter sealed with the Guermantes arms, from which I shall quote a few passages as an example of unilateral madness in an intelligent man addressing an imbecile of good sense. 'Monsieur, I have not succeeded, in spite of efforts that would surprise many people seeking uselessly to be received and acknowledged by me, in getting you to listen to the few explanations for which you did not ask me but which I thought it befitting both my dignity and your own to offer you. I shall therefore write here what it would have been simpler to say to you in person. I shall not hide from you that the first time I set eyes on you in Balbec, I found your face frankly unsympathetic.' There then followed reflections on the resemblance – remarked only on the second day – to a deceased friend for whom M. de Charlus had felt great affection. 'I then had the idea for a moment that you might, without it at all hindering you in your profession, come and have with me the games of cards with which his gaiety was able to dispel my sadness, and give me the illusion that he was not dead. Whatever the nature of the more or less foolish supposition that you have probably arrived at, and more within reach of a servant (who does not even deserve that name since he has refused to serve) than the comprehension of so elevated a sentiment, you probably thought to make yourself seem important, not knowing who I was and what I was, by sending reply, when I made them ask you for a book, that you were in bed; but it is a mistake to believe that an incivility can ever add to one's charms, of which you are in any case totally devoid. I would have broken things off then had I not, by chance, been able to speak to you the following morning. Your resemblance to my poor friend became so marked, causing even the unbearable shape of your protuberant chin to vanish, that I realized that it was the deceased who, at that moment, was lending you something of his own very kindly expression so as to enable you to take hold of me again, and prevent you from wasting the unique good fortune that was being offered to you. Indeed, although I do not wish, since all this has no longer any object, and I shall have no further occasion to meet you in this life, to bring into all this brutal questions of self-interest, I would have been only too happy to obey my dead friend's prayer (for I believe in the communion of saints and their impulse to intervene in the destiny of the living), to behave towards you as towards him, who had his own carriage and his servants, and to whom it was perfectly natural that I should devote the greater part of my resources since I loved him like a son. You have decided otherwise. To my request that you bring me a book, you sent reply that you had to go out. And this morning, when I sent to ask you to come to my carriage, you, if I can so put it without committing a sacrilege, denied me for a third time. You will forgive me for not enclosing in this envelope the elevated gratuities that I had counted on giving you in Balbec, and to which I would find it too painful to adhere in respect of someone with whom I had thought for a moment to share everything. You might at the very least spare me making a fourth futile approach to you, in your restaurant, to which my patience will not extend. (And here M. de Charlus gave his address, an indication of the times when he could be found in, etc.) Farewell, Monsieur. Since I believe that, resembling as you do the friend that I have lost, you cannot be entirely stupid, as otherwise physiognomy would be a false science, I am persuaded that if, one day, you think back on this incident, it will not be without experiencing a certain regret and a certain remorse. For my own part, believe me when I quite genuinely say that I harbour no bitterness. I would have preferred us to part on a less unhappy memory than this third futile overture. It will be quickly forgotten. We are like those vessels that you must have seen now and again from Balbec, which have crossed for a moment; it might have been to the advantage of either one to stop; but one of them has seen things differently; soon they will be out of sight of one another on the horizon, and the encounter is erased; but before this final separation, each salutes the other, as does here, Monsieur, wishing you every good fortune, the Baron de Charlus.'

Aimé had not even read this letter to the end, able to make neither head nor tail of it, but suspecting a hoax. Once I had explained to him who the Baron was, he appeared somewhat thoughtful and experienced that regret which M. de Charlus had predicted. I would not even swear that he did not then write to apologize to a man who gave carriages to his friends. But in the interim, M. de Charlus had made the acquaintance of Morel. At most, his relations with the latter being perhaps Platonic, M. de Charlus would now and again seek out company for an evening such as that in which I had just met him in the hall. But he could no longer turn away from Morel the violent sentiments which, free a few years earlier, had asked for nothing better than to attach themselves to Aimé and had dictated the letter that made me feel embarrassed for M. de Charlus's sake and which the *maître d'hôtel* had shown me. It was, because M. de Charlus's love was of an anti-social kind, a more striking example of the imperceptible yet mighty force of these currents of passion, in which the lover, like a swimmer being swept away unawares, very soon loses sight of land. Doubtless the love of a normal man also can, when, by the successive inventions of his desires, his regrets, his disappointments and his projects, the lover constructs an entire novel around a woman whom he does not know, enable us to measure the notable divergence between the two legs of the compass. At the same time, this divergence was singularly widened by the nature of a passion that is not usually shared, and by the difference in status between M. de Charlus and Aimé.

I went out with Albertine every day. She had made up her mind to go back to painting and had chosen to work first at the church of Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise, which no one any longer visits and is known to very few, hard to get directions to, impossible to find without being guided, and takes a long time to reach in its isolation, more than half an hour from the station at Epreville, the last houses in the village of Quetteholme having been left well behind. Where the name Epreville was concerned, I found no agreement between the *curé*'s book and Brichot's indications. According to the one, Epreville was the ancient *Sprevilla*; the other gave *Aprivilla* as the etymology. The first time we took the little railway in the opposite direction to Féterne, that is to say towards Grattevast. But it was the dog-days and terrible enough in itself to be leaving straight after lunch. I would have preferred not to go out so soon; the burning, luminous air awoke thoughts of indolence and refreshment. It filled my and my mother's rooms, according to their exposure, with unequal temperatures, like rooms at a spa. Mama's bathroom, festooned with sunlight, of a brilliant, Moorish whiteness, seemed plunged in the bottom of a well, on account of the four plaster walls on which it looked out, while up above, in the square left empty, the sky, whose fleecy, superimposed billows of cloud could be seen gliding past, one above the other, resembled (because of the longing you felt) a pool, situated on a terrace (or seen inverted in a mirror attached to the window) and filled with blue water, reserved for your ablutions. Despite the burning temperature, we had gone to catch the one o'clock train. But Albertine had felt very hot in the compartment, and hotter still during the long journey on foot, and I was afraid she might catch cold by then remaining motionless in that damp hollow to which the sun does not reach. On the other hand, having realized, ever since our first visits to Elstir, that she would appreciate not simply the luxury, but even a certain measure of comfort of which her lack of money had deprived her, I had arranged with a livery stable in Balbec that a carriage should come to fetch us every day. To avoid the heat, we took the road through the forest of Chantepie. The invisibility of the innumerable birds, some of them half seabirds, that were calling to one another in the trees beside us, gave the same impression of repose as you get with your eyes shut. At Albertine's side, imprisoned by her arms in the back of the carriage, I listened to these Oceanides. And when I chanced to catch sight of one of these musicians, passing from one leaf underneath another, there was so little apparent connection between it and its songs that I could not believe I was seeing their source in that humble little body, as it hopped, surprised and unseeing. The carriage could not take us right to the church. I made it stop on the way out of Quetteholme and said good-bye to Albertine. For she had alarmed me by saying about this church, as about other monuments and about certain paintings: 'It'd be such a pleasure to see it with you!' That was a pleasure I did not feel capable of giving. I felt it in front of beautiful things only if I was alone, or pretended to be so, and was silent. But since she had thought she would be able to experience, thanks to me, artistic sensations that cannot be communicated in this way, I found it wiser to tell her that I was leaving her, would come to fetch her at the end of the day, but that meanwhile I needed to go back with the carriage to pay a call on Mme Verdurin or the Cambremers, or even to spend an hour with Mama in Balbec, but never any further. The first times, at least. For Albertine having once said to me out of caprice: 'It's a nuisance that nature has arranged things so badly and put Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise on one side and La Raspelière on the other, so that you're incarcerated for the whole day in the place that you've chosen', as soon as I had received the toque and the veil, I ordered, as my ill-fortune would have it, a motor-car in Saint-Fargeau (*Sanctus Ferreolus*, according to the *curé*'s book). Albertine, whom I had kept in ignorance, and who had come to fetch me, was surprised to hear the throb of the engine in front of the hotel and overjoyed when she learned that the car was for us. I made her come upstairs to my room for a moment. She was jumping for joy. 'Are we going to pay a call on the Verdurins? – Yes, but it would be better not to go there dressed like that since you're going to have your car. Here, you'll look better in these.' And I brought out the toque and veil, which I had hidden. 'Are they for me? Oh, you're so sweet!' she exclaimed, jumping at my neck. Aimé encountered us on the stairs and, proud of Albertine's elegance and of our means of transport, for such vehicles were something of a rarity in Balbec, granted himself the pleasure of descending the stairs behind us. Albertine, wanting to be seen for a moment in her new outfit, asked me to have the hood folded back, which we could lower later on so as to have greater freedom together. 'Come on, said Aimé to the mechanic, whom he did not in fact know and who had not stirred, didn't you hear them say to fold the hood back?' For Aimé, educated in the ways of the world by life in a hotel, where he had moreover achieved an eminent rank, was not as shy as the cab-driver, for whom Françoise was a 'lady'; despite the lack of any earlier introduction, he addressed plebeians whom he had never met as *tu*, without your quite knowing whether this was aristocratic disdain on his part or a fraternizing with the people. 'I'm not free, replied the chauffeur, who did not know me. I was ordered for Mademoiselle Simonet. I can't drive Monsieur.' Aimé gave a guffaw: 'Come on, you great oaf, he replied to the mechanic, whom he at once convinced, this is Mademoiselle Simonet in fact and Monsieur, who is ordering you to fold your hood back, is in fact your employer.' And since Aimé, although personally not feeling any sympathy for Albertine, was, on account of me, proud of the outfit she was wearing, he whispered to the chauffeur: 'You'd be happy to drive a princess like her every day if you could, wouldn't you!' On this first occasion, it was not I alone who was able to go to La Raspelière, as I did on other days while Albertine was painting; she wanted to go with me. She intended for us to stop here and there along the way, but thought it impossible to start by going to Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise, that is to say in a different direction, and to make an excursion that seemed meant for another day. She learned on the contrary from the mechanic that nothing could be simpler than to go to Saint-Jean, where he would be in twenty minutes, and where we could remain, if we wanted, for several hours, or push on much further, for from Quetteholme to La Raspelière he would not take more than thirty-five minutes. We realized this the moment the car leaped forward and in a single bound covered twenty paces of an excellent horse. Distances are simply the ratio of space to time and vary with it. We express the difficulty that we have in getting to a place in a system of leagues and kilometres, which becomes false the moment that difficulty decreases. The art of distance, too, is modified, since a village that had seemed to be in a different world from some other village, becomes its neighbour in a landscape whose dimensions have altered. At all events, learning that there perhaps exists a universe in which 2 and 2 make 5, and where a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points, would have surprised Albertine much less than hearing the mechanic tell her that it was easy to go in one afternoon to Saint-Jean and to La Raspelière. Douville and Quetteholme, Saint-Mars-le-Vieux and Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, Gourville and Balbec-le-Vieux, Tourville and Féterne, prisoners hitherto as hermetically locked away in the cells of separate days as Méséglise and Guermantes of old, and on which the same pair of eyes could not rest in a single afternoon, released now by the giant in the seven-league boots, came to congregate around our tea-time, their towers and their belfries, and their old gardens, which the nearby wood had been eager to disclose.

Having arrived at the foot of the corniche road, the car climbed it in a single movement, with a continuous sound, like a knife being ground, while the sea dropped away and broadened out beneath us. The ancient rustic houses of Montsurvent came rushing up, clutching their vines and rosebushes tightly to them; the pine trees of La Raspelière, more agitated than when the evening wind got up, ran off in all directions to avoid us, and a new manservant whom I had never seen before came to open the door to us on the front steps, while the gardener's son, betraying a precocious aptitude, gazed hungrily at the driving seat. As it was not a Monday, we did not know whether we would find Mme Verdurin, for except on that day, when she was 'at home', it was unwise to call on her without warning.

No doubt she stayed in 'in principle', but this expression, which Mme Swann had used in the days when she, too, was attempting to form her little clan and attract a clientèle without having to stir, even though this often failed to pay its way, and which she translated mistakenly into 'on principle', simply meant 'as a general rule', that is to say, with numerous exceptions. For not only did Mme Verdurin like going out, but she carried her duties as a hostess to extremes, and when she had had company for lunch, immediately after the coffee, the liqueurs and the cigarettes (despite the first torpor from the heat and from having to digest, when they would have preferred to watch the Jersey packet passing across the enamel sea through the foliage on the terrace), the programme included a series of excursions in the course of which the guests, forcibly installed in carriages, were taken willy-nilly to one or other of the viewpoints that abound round Douville. This second part of the entertainment was not, however (the effort of getting up and climbing into the carriage having been achieved), found any less attractive by guests already prepared, by the succulent dishes, the fine wines or the sparkling cider, to let themselves be easily intoxicated by the purity of the breeze and the magnificence of the beauty spots. Mme Verdurin showed these off to strangers a little as if they were (more or less distant) annexes of her own property, which you could not fail to go and see once you came to lunch with her and which, conversely, you would not have known about had you not been entertained by the Patronne. This pretension, of arrogating to herself the sole rights to their excursions, as to Morel's and, in the old days, Dechambre's playing, and of constraining the landscape to form part of the little clan, was not, however, as absurd as it may at first seem. Mme Verdurin made fun of the lack of taste which, as she saw it, the Cambremers had shown in the furnishing of La Raspelière and the arrangement of the garden, as well as in the excursions they took, or made others take, in the neighbourhood. Just as, according to her, La Raspelière had only begun to be what it should have been since it became the asylum of the little clan, so she declared that the Cambremers, forever retracing in their barouche, along the railway line, beside the sea, the one unpleasant road to be found in the vicinity, had always lived in the district but did not know it. There was some truth in this assertion. From routine, a lack of imagination and a want of curiosity about a region that seemed trite for being so close by, the Cambremers only ever left home to visit the same places and by the same roads. To be sure, they laughed heartily at the Verdurins for presuming to teach them about their own neighbourhood. But had they been cornered, they, and even their coachman, would have been incapable of taking us to the splendid, slightly secret, places to which M. Verdurin conducted us, here lifting the gate into a private but abandoned property, where others would not have felt free to venture; there getting down from the carriage in order to follow a lane that was not negotiable, but always with the certain reward of a marvellous landscape. Let me say for the rest that the garden at La Raspelière was in some sense a summation of all the excursions one could make for many kilometres around. First of all on account of its commanding situation, overlooking the valley on one side, and the sea on the other, and then because, even on the one side, that of the sea for example, clearings had been created amidst the trees, so that from here you took in one horizon, from there a different one. At each of these viewpoints, there was a garden seat; you went and sat by turns on that from which you could make out Balbec, or Parville, or Douville. In one direction even, seats had been placed more or less above the sheer cliff, and a little way back from it. From these, you had a foreground of greenery and a horizon that already seemed the vastest possible, but which became infinitely larger if, by continuing along a small path, you went as far as the next seat, from which you took in the whole amphitheatre of the sea. Here you could perceive the precise sound made by the waves, which did not, on the other hand, penetrate to the more sunken parts of the garden, from where the waves still allowed themselves to be seen, but no longer heard. For our hosts, these places of repose at La Raspelière bore the name of 'views'. And indeed, they had gathered round the house the best 'views' of the neighbouring villages, beaches and woodlands, glimpsed much reduced by the distance, like Hadrian assembling in his villa scale reproductions of the most celebrated monuments from various provinces. The name that accompanied the word 'view' was not necessarily that of a place on the coast, but often on the opposite side of the bay, which you could make out and which had preserved a certain relief despite the extensiveness of the panorama. Just as you might take down a volume from M. Verdurin's shelves to go and read for an hour at 'the Balbec view', so, if the weather was clear, you went to have liqueurs at 'the Rivebelle view', on condition, however, that there was not too much wind, for, despite the trees planted on either side, the air there was keen. To come back to the excursions by carriage that Mme Verdurin used to organize in the afternoons, if, on her return, the Patronne found the cards of some society person who was 'passing along the coast', she pretended to be overjoyed, but was desolate at having missed their visit and (although they might have come only to see 'the house' or to meet for a day with a woman whose artistic salon in Paris was celebrated, but unfre-quentable) quickly made M. Verdurin invite them to dinner for the following Wednesday. As, frequently, the tourist was obliged to leave before then, or was afraid of returning late at night, Mme Verdurin had agreed that on Saturdays, she was always to be met with at tea-time. There were not so very many of these tea-parties, and I had known more brilliant ones in Paris at the Princesse de Guermantes's, Mme de Gallifet's or Mme d'Arpajon's. But then this was no longer Paris and for me the charm of the setting reacted not only on the attractions of the gathering but on the quality of the visitors. The encounter with some society person which, in Paris, afforded me no pleasure at all, but which, at La Raspelière, where he had come from some way off via Féterne or the Forest of Chantepie, changed in character and significance, became an agreeable incident. Now and again it was someone I knew perfectly well and would not have taken a single step to meet again at the Swanns'. But his name had a different ring to it on these cliffs, like that of an actor, whom you often hear in a theatre, appearing on the playbills, in a different colour, for some unscheduled or gala performance, where his celebrity is suddenly magnified by the unexpectedness of the context. Since, in the country, there is no standing on ceremony, the society person would often take it upon himself to bring the friends with whom he was staying, emphasizing to Mme Verdurin in an undertone by way of an excuse that he could not leave them behind, living as he was in the house; to his hosts, in return, he made out that it was as a sort of courtesy that he was offering to introduce them to this distraction, amidst the monotony of seaside life, of going into a centre of the mind, of touring a magnificent house and of eating an excellent tea. This at once made up a gathering of several half-worthy individuals; and if a small patch of garden with a few trees, which would look mean in the country, acquires an extraordinary charm in the avenue Gabriel or the rue de Monceau, where multi-millionaires alone can treat themselves to one, inversely, noblemen who take a back seat at a Paris soirée acquired their full value on Monday afternoons at La Raspelière. No sooner seated around the table, covered with a cloth embroidered in red on which, beneath the trumeaux painted in camaieu, they were served *galettes*, Normandy *feuilletés*, boat-shaped tarts filled with cherries, like coral pearls, and 'diplomats',[8] than these guests at once underwent, from their closeness to the deep bowl of azure on to which the windows gave and which one could not help seeing at the same time, an alteration, a profound transmutation which turned them into something more precious. What was more, even before having seen them, when you came to Mme Verdurin's on a Monday, the people who in Paris looked only with a weariness born of habit at the elegant turn-outs drawn up in front of a sumptuous *hôtel*, felt their hearts beat faster at the sight of two or three wretched traps halted in front of La Raspelière, beneath the tall pine trees. No doubt it was because the rustic setting was different and that, thanks to this transposition, your social impressions had been refreshed. It was also because the miserable vehicle hired in order to go and visit Mme Verdurin evoked a beautiful drive and a costly 'arrangement' reached with a coachman who had demanded 'so much' for the whole day. But the faint stirrings of curiosity felt towards new arrivals, as yet impossible to distinguish, derived also from the fact that everyone asked themselves 'Who's it going to be?', a question that was hard to answer, not knowing who might have arrived to spend a week at the Cambremers' or elsewhere, but which we always like to put to ourselves in these solitary, rural existences, in which the encounter with a human being you have not seen for a long time, or the introduction to someone you do not know, ceases from being the tiresome affair it is living in Paris, and makes a delightful interruption in the empty space of lives that are too isolated, in which even the arrival of the postman becomes a pleasure. And the day when we arrived by motor-car at La Raspelière, since it was not a Monday, M. and Mme Verdurin must have fallen victim to that need to see company which troubles both men and women, and makes the invalid who has been shut away in isolation, far from his family, to get cured, long to throw himself from the window. For the new servant, who was more mobile, and familiarized already with such expressions, having answered that 'if Madame had not gone out she must be at "the Douville view", that he would go and find out', he at once returned to say that she would receive us. We found her looking a little dishevelled, for she had come from the garden, the farmyard and the kitchen-garden, where she had gone to feed her peacocks and her chickens, to look for eggs, and to pick flowers and fruit for 'her table runner', a reminder, in miniature, of one of her garden walks; but on the table it conferred the distinction of making it support only things that were useful and good to eat; for around the other gifts from the garden that were the pears and the whipped egg whites, there rose the tall stems of viper's bugloss, pinks, roses and coreopsis, between which were to be seen, as if between flowering

signposts, through the window-panes, the boats going past out to sea. From the surprise that M. and Mme Verdurin displayed, breaking off from arranging the flowers in order to receive the visitors who had been announced, on seeing that these visitors were none other than Albertine and myself, I could tell that the new servant, full of zeal but not as yet familiar with my name, had repeated it wrongly and that Mme Verdurin, hearing the name of unknown guests, had nonetheless said for them to come in, feeling a need to see anyone at all. And the new servant was studying the spectacle from the doorway in order to understand what role we played in the household. Then he went off at a run, with long strides, for he had been taken on only the day before. Once Albertine had shown off her toque and her veil to the Verdurins, she gave me a look to remind me that we did not have too much time ahead of us for what we wished to do. Mme Verdurin wanted us to wait for tea, but we refused, when all of a sudden a plan was unveiled which would have reduced to nothing all the pleasures I had been promising myself from my outing with Albertine: the Patronne, unable to make up her mind to leave us, or perhaps to allow a new diversion to elude her, wanted to go back with us. Long accustomed to the fact that offers of this kind on her part did not give pleasure, and being uncertain probably whether this one would cause us any, she concealed the diffidence that she felt in making it beneath an excessive self-assurance, and not even looking as though she supposed there to be any doubt as to our answer, she asked us no questions, but said to her husband, referring to Albertine and me, as if she were doing us a favour: 'I'll bring them back!' At the same time, there was applied to her lips a smile that did not belong to her personally, a smile I had already seen on certain people when they said to Bergotte, with a knowing air: 'I've bought your book, it's tremendous', one of those collective, universal smiles that, when they have need of them – just as we make use of the railway and of removal vans – individuals borrow, except for a few ultra-refined ones, such as Swann or M. de Charlus, on whose lips I have never seen that particular smile settle. From that moment on, my visit was poisoned. I made a pretence of not having understood. After a moment, it became obvious that M. Verdurin would be of the party. 'But M. Verdurin'll find it very long, I said. – No, no, replied Mme Verdurin with a cheerful, condescending expression, he says it'll amuse him greatly to retrace with young people the road he travelled so often in the old days; if need be he can get up next to the driver, that doesn't frighten him, and we'll come quietly back together by the train, like a good husband and wife. See, he looks delighted.' She seemed to be talking about some great painter, old but full of bonhomie, who, younger than the young, finds delight in scrawling likenesses to get a laugh from his grandchildren. What added to my unhappiness was that Albertine seemed not to share it but to find it fun to drive all round the countryside like this with the Verdurins. For my own part, the pleasure I had promised myself I was going to take with her was so imperious that I refused to allow the Patronne to spoil it; I invented falsehoods that Mme Verdurin's irritating threats had made excusable, but which Albertine, alas, contradicted. 'But we've a call to make, I said. – What call? asked Albertine. – I'll explain, it's essential. – All right, we shall wait for you,' said Mme Verdurin, resigned to anything. At the last minute, my anguish at feeling a long-desired happiness being snatched away from me lent me the courage to be impolite. I refused point-blank, alleging in Mme Verdurin's ear that, because of some trouble that Albertine had had, about which she wished to consult me, I had absolutely to be alone with her. The Patronne assumed a look of fury: 'Right, we shan't come,' she said to me, in a voice quivering with anger. I sensed that she was so angry that, to seem to be giving way a little: 'But we might have been able to… – No, she went on, more furious still, once I've said no, it's no.' I thought I was in her bad books, but she called us back in the doorway to advise us not to 'let her down' on Wednesday next, and not to come in that contraption, which was dangerous in the dark, but by the train with all the little group, and she got the car to stop when it was already going down the sloping driveway into the gardens because the new servant had forgotten to put into the hood the square of tart and the shortbreads she had had packed up for us. We set off again escorted for a moment by the little houses that had come hurrying up with their flowers. The face of the locality seemed quite altered, so far is the notion of space from playing the major role in the topographical image of each one that we create for ourselves. I have said that the notion of time divides them further. Nor is it alone. Certain scenes that we see always isolated seem to us to lack any common measure with the rest, almost outside the world, like the people whom we have known at special periods in our lives, in the Army, during our childhood, whom we connect with nothing. The year of my first stay in Balbec, there was an eminence to which Mme de Villeparisis liked to take us because from it you could see nothing but the water and the woodland, and which was called Beaumont. As the road she made them take to go there, which she thought the prettiest because of its old trees, was all uphill, her carriage was obliged to go at a walk and took a very long time. The top once reached, we got down, we took a short walk, we got back into the carriage and we returned by the same road, without having encountered a single village or a single house. I knew that Beaumont was something very curious, very distant, very high up, but I had no idea in which direction it lay, never having taken the road for Beaumont to go anywhere else; it took in any case a long time to get there by carriage. It obviously formed part of the same *département* (or the same province) as Balbec, but for me was situated on a different plane, and enjoyed a special privilege of extraterritoriality. But the motor-car, which is no respecter of mystery, after passing Incarville, whose houses I could still see before me, and as we were descending the cross-gradient which leads to Parville (*Paterna villa*), catching sight of the sea from the piece of level ground on which we were, I asked what this place was called, and before the chauffeur had even answered, I recognized Beaumont, near to which I had thus passed without realizing every time I took the little railway, for it was two minutes from Parville. Just like an officer in my regiment, who might have struck me as someone special, too kindly and simple to be from a grand family, too remote and mysterious to be simply from a grand family, and who I learned was the brother-in-law or cousin of one or other lot of people where I had been to dinner, so Beaumont, linked all of a sudden to places from which I had thought it quite distinct, lost its mystery and took up its place in the region, leading me to reflect in terror that Mme Bovary and La Sanseverina[9] would perhaps have struck me as creatures like any other had I come across them anywhere except in the enclosed atmosphere of a novel. It might seem as though my love of fantastic journeys by train should have prevented me from sharing Albertine's wonderment at the motor-car, which takes us, even an invalid, where we will, and prevents us – as I had been doing up until now – from regarding their location as the individual sign, the irreplaceable essence of immovable beauties. And doubtless the motor-car did not make of this location, as the railway once had, when I had come from Paris to Balbec, an objective abstracted from the contingencies of normal life, ideal almost when you set off and which, remaining so on your arrival, the arrival in that great house where nobody lives but which simply bears the name of the town and the station, seems finally to promise its accessibility, just as it is its materialization. No, the motor-car did not carry us in this fantastic way into a town that we saw first of all as the whole encapsulated in its name, and with the illusions of a spectator in the theatre. It made us go backstage into the streets, stopping to ask directions of an inhabitant. But as compensation for this very familiar progression, you have the very hesitations of the chauffeur, unsure of his road and turning back, the *chassés-croisés* of the perspective, causing a château to play hide-and-seek with a hill, a church and the sea, as you approach, huddle in vain though it may beneath its centuries-old foliage; these ever tightening circles that the motor-car describes around a fascinated town that runs off in all directions in order to escape it and on to which it finally swoops down vertically, in the bottom of the valley, where the town lies prostrate; so that the motor-car, having seemed to strip the location, this unique point, of the mystery of the express train, gives us, on the contrary, the impression of discovering it, of ourselves determining it as if with a compass, of helping us to feel, with a more lovingly exploratory hand, with a more delicate precision, its true geometry, the beautiful 'measure of the earth'.

What I did not alas know at that time, and only learned more than two years later, was that one of the chauffeur's customers was M. de Charlus, and that Morel, responsible for paying him and keeping part of the money for himself (by getting the chauffeur to triple or quintuple the number of kilometres), had struck up a close friendship with him (while making out he did not know him in front of company) and used his vehicle for distant errands. Had I known this at the time, and that the confidence which the Verdurins soon felt in this chauffeur had derived, unbeknownst to them, therefrom, perhaps many of the sorrows of my life in Paris, the following year, many of my misfortunes relative to Albertine, might have been avoided; but I had not the least suspicion of it. In themselves, the drives that M. de Charlus took in the car with Morel were of no direct interest to me. They were in any case confined most often to lunch or dinner in a restaurant along the coast, where M. de Charlus passed for a penniless old domestic and Morel, whose business it was to settle the bill, for an over-generous member of the gentry. I shall recount one of these dinners, which may give an idea of the others. It was in an oblong-shaped restaurant in Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu. 'Couldn't they remove this?' M. de Charlus asked Morel, as if to an intermediary, so as not to address the waiters directly. By 'this' he denoted three wilted roses with which a well-intentioned *maître d'hôtel* had thought fit to decorate the table. 'Yes…, said Morel, embarrassed. You don't like roses? – I am proving on the contrary by the request in

question that I do like them, since there are no roses here (Morel seemed surprised), though in point of fact I do not like them a lot. I am somewhat sensitive to names; and as soon as a rose is at all beautiful, one finds out that it is called the Baronne de Rothschild or the Maréchale Niel,[10] which puts one right off. Do you like names? Have you found some pretty titles for your little concert pieces? – One of them's called *Poème triste*. – That's ghastly, snapped M. de Charlus in a high-pitched voice that was like a slap in the face. Did I not ask for champagne?' he said to the *maître d'hôtel*, who supposed that he had brought some, setting two glasses filled with sparkling wine down beside the two customers. 'But Monsieur… – Remove this filth, which bears no relation to even the worst champagne. It's the vomitive known as "cup" where they generally trail three rotting strawberries in a mixture of vinegar and seltzer water… Yes, he went on, turning back to Morel, you appear not to know what a title is. And even in the interpretation of what you play best, you seem not to notice the mediumistic aspects of the thing. – You're saying?' asked Morel who, having understood not the first thing in what the Baron had said, was afraid of being deprived of some useful piece of information, such as, for example, an invitation to lunch. M. de Charlus having omitted to take 'You're saying?' as a question, Morel, in consequence, having received no response, thought he should change the conversation and turn it in a sensual direction: 'I say, the little blonde who's selling the flowers you don't like; another one who's bound to have a young friend. And the old woman eating at the table down the end, too. – But how do you know all this?' asked M. de Charlus, amazed by Morel's prescience. 'Oh, I can see through them in an instant. If the two of us were walking in a crowd, you'd see I'm never wrong twice.' And whoever had been observing Morel at that moment, with his girlish look in the midst of his masculine beauty, would have understood the obscure divination which marked him out to certain women no less than them to him. He was keen to supplant Jupien, vaguely desirous of adding to his 'salary' the income that, so he believed, the waistcoat-maker was extracting from the Baron. 'And I'm even more expert where gigolos are concerned, I'd avoid you making any mistakes. It'll soon be the Balbec fair, we'd find lots of things. And then in Paris! You'd have fun, you'll see.' But the hereditary wariness of a servant led him to give the sentence on which he had already begun a different twist. With the result that M. de Charlus thought it still had to do with girls. 'You know, said Morel, anxious to excite the Baron's senses in a manner that he adjudged to be less compromising for himself (although it was in point of fact more immoral), my dream would be to find a perfectly innocent young girl, make her fall in love with me and take her virginity.' M. de Charlus could not refrain from tenderly pinching Morel's ear, but added artlessly: 'What good would that do you? If you took her maidenhead, you'd certainly be obliged to marry her. – Marry her?' exclaimed Morel, who felt the Baron must be drunk, or else was oblivious of the man, more scrupulous all things considered than he imagined, to whom he was speaking. 'Marry her? Rubbish! I'd promise, but the minute the little operation had been brought to fruition, I'd ditch her the same evening.' M. de Charlus was in the habit, when a fiction was able to produce in him a moment's sensual pleasure, of giving it his approval, while being prepared to withdraw this altogether a few moments later, once the pleasure had worn off. 'Really, you'd do that?' he said to Morel, laughing and holding him all the tighter. 'Would I not!' said Morel, seeing that he was not displeasing the Baron by continuing genuinely to explain what was indeed one of his desires. 'It's dangerous, said M. de Charlus. – I'd pack my bags in advance and clear off without leaving an address. – And what about me? asked M. de Charlus. I'd take you with me, of course,' Morel hastened to say, who had not thought about what might become of the Baron, who was the least of his concerns. 'Listen, there's a little one who'd appeal to me greatly, as far as that goes, a young seamstress who has her shop in M. le Duc's house. – Jupien's daughter![11] exclaimed the Baron, as the *sommelier* entered. Oh, never!' he added, whether because the presence of a third party had cast a chill, or because, even in these sorts of black Mass during which he took pleasure in defiling the most sacred things, he could not bring himself to involve people for whom he felt friendship. 'Jupien's a good fellow, the little one is charming, it would be dreadful to cause them any unhappiness.' Morel sensed that he had gone too far and fell silent, but his gaze continued to fix itself, in the void, on the girl in front of whom one day he had wanted me to address him as '*cher grand artiste*', and from whom he had ordered a waistcoat. The young girl was very hard-working and had not taken any holiday, but I have learned since that, while the violinist was in the neighbourhood of Balbec, she could not leave off thinking of his handsome face, ennobled by the fact that, having seen Morel with me, she had taken him for a 'gentleman'.

'I never heard Chopin play, said the Baron, yet I could have done, I took lessons with Stamati,[12] but he forbade me from going to hear the master of the *Nocturnes* at my aunt Chimay's. – What a silly thing to do! exclaimed Morel. – On the contrary, replied M. de Charlus sharply, in a shrill voice. It was proof of his intelligence. He'd realized I was a "natural" and that I'd come under Chopin's influence. It doesn't matter because I gave up music when I was quite young, like everything else for that matter. Besides, one can use one's imagination, he added, in a protracted nasal drawl, there are always people who did hear, who can give you an idea. But anyway, Chopin was only a pretext for getting back to the mediumistic aspect that you're neglecting.'

It will be observed that, after an interpolation in the vulgar tongue, that of M. de Charlus had abruptly become once more as precious and haughty as usual. The fact was that the idea that Morel would have no compunction in 'ditching' a girl he had violated had suddenly caused him to experience total pleasure. From that moment on, his senses were appeased for a time and the sadist (who truly was mediumistic) who had momentarily taken the place of M. de Charlus had fled and handed the floor back to the real M. de Charlus, full of artistic refinement, sensitivity and kindness. 'The other day you played the transcription for piano of Quartet No. 15, which is absurd in itself because nothing could be less pianistic. It's meant for people who get earache from the glorious Deaf One's over-taut strings. Yet it's that same almost sour mysticism which is divine. At all events, you played it very badly, altering all the tempi. You need to play it as if you were composing it: the young Morel, afflicted with a temporary deafness and a non-existent genius, remains motionless for an instant; then, seized by the sacred frenzy, he plays, he composes the opening bars; then, exhausted by this attempt to cast a spell, he collapses, letting his pretty lock of hair fall to please Mme Verdurin, and takes the time, in addition, to re-create the prodigious quantity of grey matter that he called upon for the Pythic objectification; then, having recovered his strength, and seized by a fresh, supereminent inspiration, he springs towards the sublime, inexhaustible phrase that the Berlin virtuoso (we believe M. de Charlus was here referring to Mendelssohn) was unwearyingly to imitate. It's in this, the one truly transcendent and enlivening manner, that I shall make you play in Paris.' When M. de Charlus gave him advice of this nature, Morel was much more alarmed than on seeing the *maître d'hôtel* remove his spurned roses and 'cup', for he asked himself anxiously what effect this might have on the 'class'. But he could not dwell on these reflections for M. de Charlus was saying to him imperiously: 'Ask the *maître d'hôtel* if he's got any *bons Chrétiens*. – *Bons Chrétiens*? I don't understand.' – As you can see, we've got to the fruit, it's a pear. You can be sure Mme de Cambremer'll have some at her house, because the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas, which she is, used to have them. M. Thibaudier sends them to her and she says: "Here's a really beautiful *bon Chrétien*."[13] – No, I didn't know. – I can see for that matter that you don't know anything. If you haven't even read Molière… Oh well, since you can't know how to order any more than the rest, quite simply ask for a pear that's in fact picked near here, the *Louise-bonne d'Avranches*. – The…? – Wait, since you're so awkward, I'll ask myself for others which I prefer: *Maître d'hôtel*, do you have any *doyenné des comices*? Charlie, you must read the ravishing passage written about that pear by the Duchesse Emilie de Clermont-Tonnerre. – No, Monsieur, I don't have any. – Do you have any *triomphe de Jodoignes*? – No, Monsieur. – Any *Virginie-dallet*? Any *passe-Colmar*? No? Oh well, since you don't have anything we shall leave. The *Duchesse d'Angoulêmes* aren't yet ripe; come, Charlie, we're going.' Unfortunately for M. de Charlus, his lack of common sense, and perhaps the chasteness of the relationship he probably enjoyed with Morel, made him rack his brains from that time on to overwhelm the violinist with strange acts of kindness that the latter could not understand and to which his nature, wild in its way, yet also mean and ungrateful, could respond only with an ever-increasing indifference or violence, which plunged M. de Charlus – once so proud, now quite timid – into fits of genuine despair. We shall see how, in the smallest things, Morel, who saw himself as having become an infinitely more important M. de Charlus, had understood amiss, by taking them literally, the Baron's arrogant teachings concerning the aristocracy. For the present let me simply say, while Albertine is waiting for me in Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise, that if there was one thing that Morel set above the nobility (and this was, as a principle, noble enough, especially in someone whose pleasure it was to go in search of young girls – 'without anyone being any the wiser' – with the chauffeur), it was his artistic reputation and what his violin class might think. It was ugly no doubt that, because he felt M. de Charlus belonged exclusively to him, he should have appeared to disown him, to make fun of him, just as, the moment I had promised to keep the secret of his father's duties at my great-uncle's,

he treated me with lordly disdain. On the other hand, his name as an artist graduated from the Conservatoire, Morel, seemed to him superior to a 'name'. And when M. de Charlus, in his dreams of Platonic affection, tried to make him accept a title from his own family, Morel energetically refused.

When Albertine found it more sensible to stay in Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise to paint, I would take the car, and it was not just to Gourville and Féterne, but to Saint-Mars-le-Vieux and as far as Criquetot, that I was able to go before returning to collect her. While pretending to have other things than her on my mind, and to be obliged to desert her for other pleasures, I thought only about her. Very often, I went no further than the broad plain that overlooks Gourville, and since it a little resembles that which begins above Combray, in the direction of Méséglise, even when quite some distance from Albertine, I had the joy of reflecting that, though my gaze might not be able to go all the way to her, the powerful but mild sea breeze that was passing beside me would outreach it, would go hurrying down, with nothing that might arrest it, all the way to Quetteholme, and come to stir the branches of the trees that bury Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise beneath their foliage, caressing the face of my loved one, and thus throw up a double link between her and me in this indefinitely enlarged, yet safe, retreat, like in those games when two children find themselves momentarily out of sight and earshot of one another, yet, though separated, remain joined. I returned by the roads from which you can see the sea, and where once, before it appeared between the branches, I used to close my eyes to reflect that what I was about to see was indeed the plaintive ancestress of the earth, pursuing, as in the days when no human beings as yet existed, its crazed, immemorial agitation. Now, they were nothing more for me than the means of going to rejoin Albertine; when I recognized them, quite unchanged, knowing how far they would run straight ahead, and where they would bend, I remembered that I had followed them thinking of Mlle de Stermaria, and that I had been in just the same hurry to find Albertine again in Paris, when going down the streets along which Mme de Guermantes had passed; they had taken on for me the profound monotony and the moral significance of a sort of line that my character was following. It was natural, but not thereby a matter of indifference; they reminded me that my fate was to pursue only phantoms, beings whose reality lay in large part in my imagination; there are human beings indeed – and this had been my own case since my early days – for whom whatever has a fixed value, recognizable by others, fortune, success, a high position, counts for nothing; what they must have is phantoms. To this they sacrifice all the rest, use every possible means, bend all their efforts, to encounter some phantom. But the latter is not long in vanishing; then they pursue some other phantom, while being ready to return later to the first one. This was not the first time that I had gone in search of Albertine, the girl glimpsed that first year in front of the sea. Other women, it was true, had been interposed between the Albertine loved on that first occasion and the one whom at present I hardly ever left; other women, notably the Duchesse de Guermantes. But, people will say, why agonize so over Gilberte, or go to so much trouble over Mme de Guermantes, if, having become the latter's friend, it was solely in order not to think about her any more, but only about Albertine? Swann, before his death, might have known the answer, he who had been a connoisseur of phantoms. These Balbec roads were full of them, of phantoms pursued, forgotten, sought after afresh, sometimes for a single interview and so as to touch an unreal life that had at once made its escape. Reflecting that their trees, pears, apples and tamarisks would outlive me, I seemed to be receiving from them the advice finally to set to work while the hour of eternal rest had yet to sound.

I got out of the car in Quetteholme, ran down the steep sunken lane, crossed the stream by a plank and found Albertine painting in front of the church, which was all turrets, thorny and red, in blossom like a rose-bush. The tympanum alone was smooth; and on the smiling surface of the stone there appeared angels, who continued, before our twentieth-century couple, to celebrate, taper in hand, the ceremonies of the thirteenth. They it was whose portrait Albertine was attempting to paint on her prepared canvas and, in imitation of Elstir, she was making long strokes with the brush, attempting to obey the noble rhythm which, the great master had told her, made these angels so different from all those that he knew. Then she gathered up her things. Leaning one against the other, we re-ascended the sunken lane, leaving the little church as quiet as if it had not seen us, to listen to the constant sound of the stream. Soon the car was speeding along, making us take a different road back from the one coming. We passed in front of Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse. Over its church, half new, half restored, the declining sun had spread a patina as lovely as that of the centuries. Through it, the great bas-reliefs seemed to be seen only beneath a fluid coating, half liquid, half luminous; the Holy Virgin, Saint Elizabeth, Saint Joachim, were still swimming in the impalpable eddies, almost in the dry, on the surface of the water or the sunlight. Looming suddenly into view in a warm dust, the numerous modern statues rose on their columns, half-way up the golden veils of the sunset. In front of the church, a tall cypress seemed to be in a sort of consecrated enclosure. We got out for a moment to look at it, and took a few steps. As much as of her limbs, Albertine was directly conscious of her Italian straw toque and her silk scarf (which for her were no lesser a seat of feelings of well-being), and received from them, as we walked round the church, another kind of impulsion, betrayed by a contentment that was inert yet which for me had charm; a scarf and toque that were only a recent, adventitious part of my loved one, but which was already dear to me and whose wake I followed with my eyes, along the cypress, in the evening air. She herself could not see it, but suspected that this elegance was having its effect, for she smiled at me, cocking her head in harmony with the headgear that completed it: 'It doesn't appeal to me, it's been restored,' she said, pointing to the church and remembering what Elstir had said to her about the precious, the inimitable beauty of the old stonework. Albertine knew at once how to recognize a restoration. You could not but be astonished at the sureness of taste that she already possessed in architecture, instead of the deplorable taste she had preserved in music. No more than had Elstir did I like this church, it was without affording me any pleasure that its sunlit façade had come and set itself down before my eyes, and I had got out to look at it only as a kindness to Albertine. Yet I found that the great impressionist was in contradiction with himself; why make a fetish of the objective architectural value, without taking any account of the transfiguration of the church in the setting sun? 'No, I definitely don't like it, Albertine said; I like its name of Orgueilleuse. But what we must remember to ask Brichot is why Saint-Mars is called le Vêtu. We'll go next time, won't we?' she said, looking at me out of her black eyes, over which her toque had been pulled down, like her little cap in the old days. Her veil was floating loose. I got back into the car with her, glad that the next day we were to go together to Saint-Mars where, in this torrid weather, when your one thought was of bathing, the two ancient, salmon-pink belfries, with their diamond-shaped tiles, slightly out of true and as if palpitating, looked like old, pointed fish, imbricated with scales, moss-covered and ruddy, which, without appearing to move, were rising in a blue, transparent water. On leaving Marcouville, to take a short cut, we forked off at a crossroads where there is a farm. Sometimes Albertine made us stop there and asked me to go on my own and fetch, so that she could drink it in the car, some calvados or cider, which we were assured was not fizzy yet which sprayed all over us. We sat pressed one against the other. The people from the farm could barely see Albertine in the closed car, and I gave them back the bottles; we left again, as if to carry on with our life, the two of us together, with the lovers' life which they may have supposed we led, in which this pause to drink would have been simply one insignificant moment; a supposition that might have seemed all the less improbable had they seen us after Albertine had drunk her bottle of cider; she then indeed seemed unable any longer to tolerate a gap between herself and me, which normally did not trouble her; under her linen skirt her legs were pressed against my legs, she brought close to mine cheeks that had become pallid, hot, and red over the cheekbones, with something burning and faded about them such as street girls have in the suburbs. At these times, she changed her voice almost as quickly as her personality, lost her own in order to assume another, hoarse, brazen, almost crapulous. Dusk was falling. What a pleasure to feel her against me, with her scarf and her toque, reminding me that it is always thus, side by side, that we encounter those who love one another! I perhaps felt love for Albertine, but did not dare to let her see it, so that if it existed in me, it could only be as a truth without value until it had been able to be verified by experience; but it seemed to me unrealizable, and outside the plane of life. As for my jealousy, it led me to leave Albertine as seldom as possible, although I knew that it would be cured altogether only by parting from her for ever. I was even capable of feeling it in her presence, but then contrived not to allow the circumstances to recur which had excited it. Thus it was that, on a day of fine weather, we went to have lunch in Rivebelle. The big glass doors of the dining-room, and of the corridor-shaped hall which was used for teas, had been opened, level with the lawns, turned to gold by the sun, of which the huge luminous restaurant seemed to form part. The waiter with the pink face and the black hair twisted like a flame, dashed about in this vast expanse less rapidly than before, for he was no longer a commis but a *chef de rang*; nevertheless, because of his natural industry, now in the distance, in the dining-room, and now closer to, but outside, serving customers who had preferred to eat in the garden, you saw him first in one place then in another, like the successive statues of a young god running, some in the – well-lit – interior of a house that extended into the green lawn, others beneath the foliage, in the bright

light of life in the open air. Momentarily, he was at our side. Albertine replied distractedly to what I had been saying. She was gazing at him through widened eyes. For a minute or two, I felt that you could be close to the person that you love yet not have them with you. They appeared to be involved in a mysterious tête-à-tête, rendered wordless by my presence, and the continuation perhaps of former assignations of which I knew nothing, or simply of a look that he had given her – where I was the intrusive third party from whom one hides. Even when, after a violent summons from his superior, he had gone off, Albertine, while continuing to eat her lunch, appeared to regard the restaurant and gardens as nothing more than an illuminated running-track, on which there appeared here and there, against various backgrounds, the running god with the black hair. For a moment I wondered whether, in order to follow him, she might not be going to leave me on my own at the table. But from the days that followed I began to forget this painful impression once and for all, because I had decided never to return to Rivebelle, and had made Albertine promise, who assured me that this was the first time she had been there, that she would never go back. And I denied that the waiter with the nimble feet had had eyes only for her, so that she might not believe that my company had deprived her of a pleasure. It so happened that I did, on occasions, go back to Rivebelle, but alone, and drank too much, as I had done there before. As I drained a last glass, I looked at a rosette painted on the white wall, and transferred on to it the pleasure that I felt. It alone in the world existed for me; I pursued it, touched it and lost it by turns with my shifting gaze, and I was indifferent to the future, content with my rosette, like a butterfly that circles about a butterfly that has settled, with which it is about to end its life in an act of supreme voluptuousness. But I thought it dangerous to allow there to take up residence in me, in however mild a form, a sickness which resembles those habitual pathological states to which we pay no heed, but which, should the least accident, unforeseeable but inevitable, befall it, suffice at once to lend it an extreme gravity. The moment was particularly well chosen perhaps to renounce a woman whom no very recent or very acute suffering obliged me to ask for that balm against a sickness which those who have caused it possess. I was calmed by these same excursions, which, although I looked on them at the time simply as an anticipation of a tomorrow which itself, in spite of the longing with which it filled me, would be no different from the day before, had the attraction of having been wrenched away from the places where Albertine had been up until now but where I had not been with her, at her aunt's, or at her girl-friends'. The attraction not of a positive joy, but simply of the allaying of an anxiety, yet very powerful even so. For within the space of a few days, when I thought back to the farm in front of which we had drunk our cider, or simply to the few steps we had taken in front of Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, remembering that Albertine had walked beside me under her toque, the sense of her presence added such healing properties all of a sudden to the indifferent image of the new church, that at the moment when the sunlit façade came thus and set itself down of its own accord in my memory, it was like a great soothing compress that had been applied to my heart. I set Albertine down in Parville, but only so as to meet her again in the evening and go and stretch out beside her, in the darkness, on the shore. I did not see her every day, it is true, yet I was able to tell myself: 'Were she to recount the time-table of her life, it's I still who would have pride of place'; and we passed long hours on end together, which introduced so sweet an intoxication into my days that even when, in Parville, she jumped down from the car that I would be sending back for her in an hour's time, I no more felt alone in the car than if, before getting out, she had left flowers behind. I could have gone without seeing her every day; I would be happy when I left her, I sensed that the calming effect of this happiness might endure for several days. But then I would hear Albertine, as she left me, saying to her aunt or to a girl-friend: 'Tomorrow at eight-thirty, then. We mustn't be late, they'll be ready from a quarter past eight.' The conversation of a woman that you love is like the earth covering a dangerous, subterranean lake; you are constantly aware of the presence, behind the words, of the penetrating cold of an invisible sheet of water; here and there it is to be seen oozing perfidiously out, but the lake itself remains hidden. As soon as I heard Albertine's words, my calm was destroyed. I wanted to ask to see her the next morning, so as to prevent her going to this mysterious rendez-vous at half past eight, which had been referred to in my presence only in veiled terms. She would no doubt have obeyed me the first times, while regretting having to give up her plans; then she would have discovered my permanent need to disrupt them; I would be the one from whom everything must be kept. It is of course likely that these entertainments from which I was excluded amounted to very little, and that it was perhaps out of a fear that I might find one or other female guest vulgar or tedious that I was not invited. Unfortunately, this life, so closely involved with that of Albertine, did not have its effect only on myself; to me it brought peace of mind; in my mother it caused anxieties the confession of which destroyed that peace of mind. As I returned home contented, determined to bring to an end from one day to the next an existence whose termination I believed depended on my own volition alone, my mother said to me, hearing me send to the chauffeur to go and fetch Albertine after dinner: 'All the money you're spending! (Françoise, in her simple and expressive language, put it more forcefully: "Money burns a hole in your pocket.") Try, Mama went on, not to become like Charles de Sévigné, whose mother used to say, "His hand is a crucible in which money melts." Besides, I do think you've been out enough with Albertine. I assure you you're overdoing it, that even she may find it ridiculous. I've been delighted that it takes your mind off things, I'm not asking you not to see her again, but just so that's it's not impossible to meet one of you without the other.' My life with Albertine, a life devoid of great pleasures – as perceived by me at least – this life that I was counting on changing from one day to the next, by choosing a moment of calm, suddenly became necessary to me once again for a time, when it found itself under threat from Mama's words. I told my mother that her words had just put back by two months perhaps the decision that they were demanding, which, but for them, would have been taken by the end of the week. Mama began to laugh (so as not to make me unhappy) at the effect that her advice had instantly produced, and promised not to mention it again so as not to prevent my good intentions from being revived. But since my grandmother's death, every time that Mama allowed herself to laugh, the laughter was cut short almost before it began, and ended on an almost sobbing expression of suffering, either out of remorse at having been able for a moment to forget, or else out of the recrudescence whereby this short-lived forgetfulness had again revived her cruel preoccupation. But to that caused by the memory of my grandmother, lodged in my mother like an *idée fixe*, I sensed that this time another preoccupation had been added, having to do with myself, and with the fact that my mother dreaded the consequences of my intimacy with Albertine; an intimacy she did not dare stand in the way of, however, on account of what I had just told her. But she did not seem convinced that I was not deceiving myself. She could remember all those years during which she and my grandmother had no longer raised the question of my work or of a healthy form of life, on which, I used to say, only the agitation into which their exhortations cast me was preventing me from starting, but which, despite their obedient silence, I had not pursued.

After dinner the car brought Albertine back; there was still a little daylight left; the air was less hot, but after a burning-hot day we were both dreaming of unknown forms of coolness; then, to our fevered eyes the moon appeared, all narrow at first (as on the evening when I had gone to the Princesse de Guermantes's and when Albertine had telephoned me), like the thin, fragile rind, then like the fresh quarter of a fruit that an invisible knife had begun to peel in the sky. On occasions, it was I who went to fetch my loved one, a little later in that case; she was to wait for me in front of the market arcade in Maineville. To start with, I could not make her out; I was already worried that she might not be coming, that she had misunderstood. Then I would find her, in her white blouse with the blue polka dots, jumping into the car beside me with the light spring more of a young animal than of a girl. And it was like a dog, again, that she at once began endlessly to fondle me. Once the darkness was complete and, as the manager of the hotel used to say, the sky was all skittered with stars, if we did not go for a drive in the forest with a bottle of champagne, unconcerned by the strollers still sauntering along the dimly lit esplanade, who would not have been able to see a thing two paces away on the black sand, we would stretch out below the dunes; and that same body, in whose suppleness there lived all the feminine, marine and sportive grace of the girls I had seen that first time passing across the horizon of the waves, I now held it pressed tightly against my own, under the same rug, on the very edge of the motionless sea, divided by a trembling shaft of moonlight; and we listened to it without wearying and with the same pleasure, whether as it held its breath, long enough suspended for you to suppose its reflux had been halted, or as, finally, it exhaled the anticipated but delayed murmur at our feet. In the end I would take Albertine back to Parville. Having arrived in front of the house, we had to interrupt our kisses for fear of being seen; having no desire to go to bed, she would come back with me as far as Balbec, from where I took her back for a last time to Parville; in those early days of the motor-car, chauffeurs were men who went to bed at all hours. In fact, I got home to Balbec only with the first dampness of early morning, alone this time, but still surrounded by the presence of my loved one, gorged with a supply of kisses that I would be long in exhausting. On my table I would find a telegram or a postcard. It was from Albertine again! She had written them at Quetteholme while I was off on my own in the car, to tell me that she was thinking of me. I reread them as I got into bed. Then,

above the curtains, I would see the band of broad daylight and tell myself that we must be in love after all, to have spent the night kissing one another. When, the next morning, I saw Albertine on the esplanade, I was so afraid that she would answer that she was not free that day and could not agree to my request that we go out together that I delayed for as long as I could before making it. I was the more concerned in that she appeared distant and preoccupied; people of her acquaintance were passing; no doubt she had made plans for that afternoon from which I was excluded. I looked at her, I looked at that entrancing body, at those pink features of Albertine's, raising the enigma of their intentions in front of me, the unknown decision on which turned the happiness or unhappiness of my afternoon. It was a whole state of being, a whole future existence, which had assumed in front of me the fateful, allegorical form of a girl. And when at last I had come to a decision, when, with as indifferent an air as I could, I asked: 'Shall we go off together this afternoon and this evening?' and she replied: 'I'd love to', then the whole sudden replacement, in that pink face, of my prolonged anxiety by a delectable quietude, made more precious to me still those contours to which I was perpetually indebted for my well-being, the assuagement we feel after a storm has broken. I repeated to myself: 'She's so sweet, what an adorable creature!' in an exaltation less fertile than that owed to intoxication, hardly any more profound than that of friendship, but much superior to that of life in society. We cancelled the car only on the days when there was a dinner party at the Verdurins', and on those when, Albertine not being free to go out with me, I took the opportunity to let the people who wished to visit me know that I would be remaining in Balbec. I authorized Saint-Loup to come on these days, but on these days alone. For once when he had arrived without warning, I had preferred to forgo seeing Albertine rather than risk his meeting her, jeopardizing the state of contented calm in which I had been for some time now, and reviving my jealousy. I felt easy in my mind only once Saint-Loup had left again. He therefore bound himself, regretfully but scrupulously, never to come to Balbec without a summons from me. In the old days, reflecting enviously on the hours that Mme de Guermantes spent with him, I had set such great store by seeing him! People never cease to change position in relation to ourselves. In the world's imperceptible but everlasting march, we think of them as motionless, in a moment of vision, too brief for us to perceive the motion that is bearing them along. But we need only choose from our memory two pictures of them taken at different times, yet sufficiently close together for them not to have changed in themselves, perceptibly at least, and the difference between the two pictures measures the displacement they have effected relative to ourselves. He worried me dreadfully by talking about the Verdurins, I was afraid he might ask me to have him received there, which would have been enough, because of the jealousy I would not have ceased to feel, to mar all the pleasure that I enjoyed there with Albertine. But happily, Robert admitted that, quite to the contrary, he wished above all not to meet them. 'No, he said, I find that type of clerical circle exasperating.' I did not at first understand the adjective 'clerical' as applied to the Verdurins, but Saint-Loup's concluding words enlightened me as to his thought, and to the concessions to linguistic fashion that one is often surprised to find adopted by intelligent men. 'They're circles, he said, where they play at being tribes, where they play at being congregations and chapels. You're not going to tell me it isn't a small sect; they're all sweetness and light to the people who belong, and couldn't be more contemptuous of the ones who don't. The question isn't, like for Hamlet, to be or not to be, but to be one of them or not to be one of them. 'You're one, my uncle Charlus is one. What d'you expect? I've never liked all that, it's not my fault.'

Naturally, I enacted the rule I had imposed on Saint-Loup, not to come and visit me except when summoned, equally strictly in the case of the people, whoever they were, with whom I had gradually become friendly in La Raspelière, Féterne, Montsurvent and elsewhere; and when from the hotel I saw the smoke of the three o'clock train, whose plume long remained stationary, clinging to the sides of the green slopes in the anfractuosities of the Parville cliffs, I felt no hesitation concerning the visitor who was coming to have tea with me but was as yet, in the manner of a god, concealed beneath that little cloud. I am obliged to confess that this visitor, previously authorized by me to come, was almost never Saniette, and I have often reproached myself for this. But Saniette's consciousness of being a bore (even more so when paying a visit, naturally, than when recounting a story) meant that although he was better educated, more intelligent and better than many others, it seemed impossible to experience in his company, not only any pleasure, but anything except an almost intolerable lowness of spirits which spoiled your afternoon. Probably, if Saniette had confessed openly to the boredom he was afraid of causing, you would not have dreaded his visits. Boredom is one of the less serious evils which we have to endure, and his existed perhaps only in the imagination of others, or had been inoculated in him thanks to a kind of suggestion through them, which had found a purchase on his likeable modesty. But so anxious was he not to let it be seen that he was not sought after, that he did not dare offer himself. Admittedly, he was right not to behave as the people do who are so glad to take off their hats to you in a public place that, not having seen you in a long while but catching sight of you in a box together with a brilliant set whom they do not know, they cast you a furtive but resounding good evening, while apologizing for the pleasure, for the emotion, they felt on seeing you, on discovering that you were returning to old pleasures, that you were looking so well, and so forth. Saniette, on the contrary, was far too lacking in boldness. He could, at the Verdurins' or in the little tram, have told me that he would have great pleasure in coming to call on me in Balbec were he not afraid of putting me out. Such a proposal would not have alarmed me. On the contrary, he offered nothing, but with a tortured face and a gaze as indestructible as a fired enamel, but into the composition of which there entered, together with a breathless desire to see you – unless he found someone more amusing – the determination not to let that desire show, he said to me with a detached air: 'You don't know what you're doing these days? Because I'll no doubt be coming near Balbec. But no, it's of no account, I was only asking you on the off chance.' There was no mistaking his expression, and the inverse signs with the help of which we express our feelings by their opposite are so transparent that you wonder how there can still be people who say, for example: 'I've had so many invitations I don't know which way to turn,' to hide the fact that they have not been invited. Moreover, this offhand air, because most likely of what had entered into its turbid composition, produced in you what the fear of boredom or a frank admission of the desire to call on you could never have produced, namely that sort of unease, or repulsion, which, in the order of relations of simple social politeness, is the equivalent of the disguised offer made to a lady during a love affair by the lover whom she does not love, to see her the following day, while protesting that he does not insist, or not even this offer, but an attitude of false indifference. There at once emanated from Saniette's person some *je ne sais quoi* which meant that you answered him wearing the most affectionate of expressions: 'No, unfortunately, this week, I'll explain…' And I allowed there to come instead people who were by no means his equal but who did not have his melancholy-filled eyes, nor a mouth puckered by all the bitterness of all the visits that he longed, while not saying a word, to pay to one person or another. Unfortunately, only rarely did Saniette fail to meet on the 'slowcoach' the guest who had just been to see me, even supposing that the latter had not said to me, at the Verdurins': 'Don't forget I'll be coming to see you on Thursday,' the selfsame day when I had told Saniette I would not be free. So that he ended up by imagining life as being filled with amusements arranged without him knowing, if not actually against him. On the other hand, since we are never all of a piece, this too discreet man was morbidly indiscreet. The one time when he chanced to call on me in my despite, a letter, from I forget who, was lying on the table. After a moment, I saw that he was listening with only half an ear to what I was telling him. The letter, of whose provenance he was wholly ignorant, had fascinated him and I thought that at any moment his enamelled eyes were going to detach themselves from their sockets and join the letter, without importance yet which his curiosity had magnetized. He was like a bird that is about to hurl itself fatally at a snake. Finally, he could no longer restrain himself, and first of all changed its position as if he were tidying up my room. This being no longer enough for him, he picked it up, turned it over, turned it back again, as if mechanically. Another form of tactlessness was that, once riveted to you, he could not leave. As I was unwell on the day in question, I asked him to catch the next train and leave in half an hour. He did not doubt I was unwell, but replied: 'I'll stay for an hour and a quarter and after that I'll go.' Since then, I have suffered for not having told him, whenever I could have done, to come. Who knows? Perhaps I would have exorcized his ill-fate, others might have invited him for whom he would at once have given me up, so that my invitations would have had the twofold advantage of restoring his happiness and ridding myself of him.

On the days that followed those on which I entertained, I was naturally not expecting any visits and the car returned to fetch us, Albertine and me. And when we got back, Aimé, on the top step of the hotel, could not help watching, through impassioned, inquisitive and greedy eyes, to see what tip I was giving the chauffeur. It was no use my closing my fist around my coin or note, Aimé's gaze would part my fingers. He would look away a moment later for he was discreet, well brought-up and himself content with relatively small perquisites. But the money someone else received aroused an incompressible curiosity in him and made his mouth water. For a few brief instants, he would wear the feverish, attentive expression of a child reading a Jules Verne novel, or of a diner sitting not far away

from you in a restaurant who, seeing them carving for you a pheasant to which he cannot or will not treat himself, abandons his serious thoughts for an instant to fix on the poultry eyes made to smile by love and envy.

Thus did these excursions by motor-car follow one another daily. But one time, just as I was going back up in the lift, the liftboy said to me: 'This gentleman came, he left me a message for you.' The liftboy spoke these words in a terribly croaky voice, and coughing and spitting in my face. 'I've got such a bad cold!' he added, as if I were incapable of noticing it for myself. 'The doctor says it's whooping-cough,' and he began again to cough and spit over me. 'Don't tire yourself by talking,' I said with a kindly expression, which was put on. I was afraid of catching whooping-cough, which, with my tendency to breathless attacks, would have been very distressing. But, like a virtuoso refusing to cry off sick, he prided himself on talking and spitting all the while. 'No, it doesn't matter, he said (to you perhaps, I thought, but not to me). Anyway, I'll soon be going back to Paris (so much the better, provided he does not give it to me first). It seems, he went on, that Paris is very magnificent. It must be even more magnificent than here and than Monte-Carlo, although *chasseurs*, guests even, and all the way up to *maîtres d'hôtel* who used to go to Monte-Carlo for the season, have often told me that Paris was less magnificent than Monte-Carlo. They got it wrong maybe, though to become a *maître d'hôtel*, you mustn't be an imbecile; you need brains in your head to take all the orders and reserve the tables! I've been told it's even more terrifying than writing plays and books.' We had almost reached my floor when the 'lift' made me go all the way down again because he had found the button was not working properly, and in a trice he had fixed it. I told him I preferred to go back up on foot, the hidden meaning of which was that I preferred not to catch whooping-cough. But with a cordial and contagious fit of coughing, the liftboy thrust me back into the lift. 'There's no longer any risk, I've fixed the button.' Seeing that he had not left off talking and preferring to know the name of my visitor and the message he had left to the parallels between the beauties of Balbec, Paris and Monte-Carlo, I said to him (as to a tenor who is overtaxing you with Benjamin Godard:[14] Sing me some Debussy rather): 'But who was it who came to see me? – It was the gentleman you went out with yesterday. I'll go and fetch his card, it's with the porter.' Since the day before I had dropped Saint-Loup off at the station in Doncières before going to fetch Albertine, I thought the 'lift' meant Saint-Loup, but it was the chauffeur. And by referring to him as 'the gentleman you went out with', he had taught me at the same time that a workman is just as much a gentleman as is a society man. A verbal lesson simply. Because, as for the thing itself, I had never made any distinction between the classes. And if, on hearing a chauffeur referred to as a gentleman, I had felt the same astonishment as the Comte X, who had been that only for the past week and whom, by saying 'the Comtesse looks tired,' I had caused to look behind him to see whom I was talking about, this was simply because I was unused to the vocabulary; I had never discriminated between workmen, bourgeois and great noblemen, but would have accepted all of them as friends without distinction, with a certain preference for workmen, and after them the noblemen, not from taste, but knowing that you can demand greater courtesy from them towards workmen than you can obtain from the bourgeoisie, either because great noblemen do not despise workmen, as the bourgeoisie does, or else because they are ready to be courteous to anyone at all, like pretty women, happy to bestow a smile they know will be received with so much delight. I cannot say on the other hand that this way that I had of putting the common people on an equal footing with members of society, although the latter were very happy to accept it, always gave my mother entire satisfaction. Not that, humanly speaking, she made any distinction at all between people, and if ever Françoise was upset or unwell, she was always comforted and tended by Mama with the same affection and the same devotion as her best friend. But my mother was too much my grandfather's daughter not, socially speaking, to be a respecter of caste. For all that the people of Combray showed themselves kind-hearted and sensitive, and had taken on the noblest theories of human equality, my mother, when a *valet de chambre* got above himself, used *vous* one time and slipped imperceptibly into no longer addressing me in the third person, showed the same displeasure at these usurpations as bursts out in Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* each time a nobleman who has no right to it seizes on a pretext to assume the title of 'Highness' in some legal instrument, or not to show a proper deference to dukes, with which he gradually dispenses. There was a 'Combray spirit', so refractory that it will take centuries of kindness (my mother's was boundless), and of egalitarian theories, to succeed in dissolving it. I cannot say that, in my mother's case, certain particles of this spirit had not remained insoluble. She would have found it as hard to offer her hand to a manservant as it was easy to give him ten francs (which anyway afforded him far greater pleasure). For her, whether she admitted it or not, masters were masters and servants the people who ate in the kitchen. When she saw a chauffeur eating with me in the dining-room, she was not altogether pleased and used to say to me: 'It seems to me you could do better where friends are concerned than a mechanic,' as she might have said, were it a question of marrying: 'You could find a better match.' The chauffeur (luckily, I had never thought of inviting this one) had come to tell me that the car company that had sent him to Balbec for the season was recalling him to Paris as from tomorrow. This excuse, all the more so because the chauffeur was charming and expressed himself so simply that you would always have said it was the Gospel truth, seemed to us to have to conform to the truth. It only half did so. There was indeed nothing to do any more in Balbec. And in any case, the company only half trusting in the veracity of the young evangelist, bent over his wheel of consecration, wished for him to return to Paris as soon as possible. And indeed, if the young apostle had achieved a miraculous multiplication of the kilometres when reckoning them up for M. de Charlus, in return, once it was a question of accounting to his company, he divided what he had earned by six. As a consequence of which, the company, believing, either that no one was any longer taking excursions in Balbec, which the season made seem plausible, or that it was being robbed, considered that on either one of these hypotheses the best thing was to summon him back to Paris, where, as it happens, there was also little activity. The desire of the chauffeur was to avoid, if possible, the off season. I have said – what I did not then know and knowledge of which would have spared me much unhappiness – that he was very friendly (without their ever seeming to be acquainted in front of other people) with Morel. As from the day on which he was recalled, without our yet knowing he had a means of not leaving, we had to make do for our excursions with hiring a carriage or sometimes, in order to amuse Albertine and since she liked riding, saddle-horses. The carriages were bad. 'What an old rattletrap!' Albertine would say. I would anyway often have liked to be in them on my own. Without being willing to fix a date, I wanted this life to end which I reproached with making me renounce, not so much work as pleasure. However, it could also happen that the habits which were holding me back were suddenly abolished, most often when some former self, full of the desire to live with cheerfulness, replaced my present self momentarily. I experienced this longing for escape most notably one day when, having left Albertine at her aunt's, I rode over on horseback to call on the Verdurins and when I had taken an unmarked route through the woods whose beauty they had extolled to me. Hugging the contours of the cliffs, by turns it climbed and then, hemmed in between dense clumps of trees, sank deep into wild gorges. For a moment, the bare rocks by which I was surrounded, and the sea, which could be glimpsed through the jagged gaps, floated before my eyes like fragments from some other universe: I had recognized the landscape of mountains and sea that Elstir has used as the setting for those two admirable water-colours, 'Poet meeting with a Muse' and 'Young Man meeting with a Centaur', which I had seen at the Duchesse de Guermantes's. The memory of them relocated the place in which I found myself so far outside the present-day world that I would not have been surprised if, like the young man of ante-historic times painted by Elstir, I had in the course of my ride come upon some mythological personage. All of a sudden my horse reared; he had heard a strange noise, I had difficulty in controlling him and not being thrown to the ground, then I raised my tear-filled eyes to the spot from where the noise appeared to be coming, and I saw, fifty metres or so above me, in the sunlight, between two great wings of glittering steel that were bearing him away, a being whose indistinct face I fancied resembled that of a man. I was moved as might a Greek have been setting eyes for the first time on a demigod. I was weeping also, for I had been ready to weep from the moment when I recognized that the noise was coming from above my head – aeroplanes were still a rarity in those days – and at the though that what I was about to see for the first time was an aeroplane. Then, as when you sense some moving words to be approaching in a newspaper, I waited only to have seen the aeroplane before bursting into tears. The aviator meanwhile seemed to be hesitating over his course; I felt there to lie open before him – before me, had habit not made me its prisoner – every course through space, or through life; he flew further on, glided for a moment or two above the sea, then, abruptly making up his mind, seeming to yield to some inverse attraction to that of gravity, as if returning to his native land, with a slight movement of his golden wings, he headed straight up into the sky.

To come back to the mechanic, he asked of Morel not just that the Verdurins should replace their break by a car (which, given the Verdurins' generosity in respect of the faithful, was relatively easy), but also, something much more awkward, their head coachman, the sensitive young man given to gloomy thoughts, by

him, the chauffeur. This was effected within a few days in the following manner. Morel had begun by getting them to steal from the coachman everything he needed to harness up. One day he could not find the bit, another day the curb-chain. On other occasions, it was his seat cushion that had vanished, or even his whip, his blanket, the martingale, the sponge, the chamois leather. But he always came to an arrangement with neighbours; only he would arrive late, which made M. Verdurin annoyed with him, and plunged him into a state of sadness and black thoughts. The chauffeur, in a hurry to be taken on, declared to Morel that he was returning to Paris. Some master-stroke was required. Morel persuaded M. Verdurin's menservants that the young coachman had declared that he was going to lead them all into an ambush and had boasted of getting the better of all six of them, and he told them that they could not allow that to happen. For his own part, he could not get involved, but he was warning them so that they might get their blow in first. It was agreed that while M. and Mme Verdurin and their friends were out walking, they would all set on the young man in the stables. I must record that, although it was only the occasion for what was about to take place, but because the persons concerned interested me later on, that on the day in question a friend of the Verdurins was holidaying with them, whom they wanted to take out on foot before his departure, fixed for that same evening.

What greatly surprised me when we left to go out was that, on that particular day, Morel, who was coming with us on our walk, where he was to play his violin under the trees, said to me: 'Listen, I've got a bad arm, I don't want to tell Mme Verdurin, but ask her to bring one of her footmen, Howsler for example; he can carry my instruments. – I think one of the others'd be a better choice, I replied. They need him for dinner.' A look of anger passed across Morel's face. 'No, no, I'm not entrusting my violin to just anybody.' Afterwards, I understood the reason for this preference. Howsler was the much loved brother of the young coachman and, had he stayed at the house, could have gone to his assistance. During the walk, low enough for the elder Howsler to be unable to hear us: 'He's a good fellow, that one, said Morel. His brother is, too, for that matter. If it wasn't for that fatal habit of drinking… – What, drinking? said Mme Verdurin, turning pale at the thought of having a coachman who drank. – You wouldn't notice it. I'm forever telling myself it's a miracle he hasn't had an accident while he was driving you. – But does he drive other people then? – You only need to see how many times he's tipped over, his face today is covered in bruises. I don't know how he hasn't killed himself, he's broken his shafts. – I've not seen him today, said Mme Verdurin, trembling at the thought of what might have happened to her, you distress me.' She wanted to cut the walk short so as to get home, Morel chose an air by Bach with countless variations so as to make it last. As soon as we got back, she went to the coachhouse, saw the brand-new shaft and Howsler all bloodied. She was about to tell him, without remarking on it, that she no longer had need of a coachman and to hand him some money, but he, of his own accord, not wishing to accuse his workmates, to whose animosity he had retrospectively attributed the daily theft of all the saddles and the like, and finding that his forbearance led merely to his letting himself be left for dead on the floor, asked to leave, which settled the whole affair. The chauffeur came in the following day and afterwards, Mme Verdurin (who had been obliged to take on a second one) was so satisfied with him that she recommended him to me warmly as someone totally trustworthy. I, all unknowing, employed him by the day in Paris; but I am getting too far ahead of myself, all this will be met with again in the story of Albertine. At this moment, we are at La Raspelière, where I have come to dine for the first time with my loved one, and M. de Charlus with Morel, the purported son of a 'steward' who earned a salary of thirty thousand francs a year, had a carriage, and a number of subordinate majordomos, gardeners, factors and farmers at his beck and call. But since I have been running ahead so, I do not want all the same to leave the reader under the impression that Morel might have been wicked through and through. Rather, he was full of contradictions, capable on certain days of genuine kindness.

I was naturally most surprised to learn that the coachman had been shown the door, and even more so to recognize his replacement as the chauffeur who had been taking Albertine and me out. But he reeled off some complicated story, according to which he was supposed to have returned to Paris, whence he had been sent for on behalf of the Verdurins, and I did not doubt him for a moment. The sacking of the coachman was a reason for Morel to talk briefly with me, so as to express his sadness at the good fellow's departure. For the rest, even aside from the times when I was alone, when he would literally bound towards me in an effusion of delight, Morel, finding that everyone welcomed me with open arms at La Raspelière, and feeling that he had been wilfully excluding himself from familiarity with someone who did not represent any danger to him, since he had made me burn my bridges and removed any possibility of my behaving patronizingly towards him (which I had as it happens never had any thought of doing), ceased to keep his distance from me. I put his change of attitude down to the influence of M. de Charlus, which had indeed made him less limited and more artistic in some things, but in others, where he applied the eloquent, mendacious and anyway ephemeral formulae of the master to the letter, had made him even more stupid. What M. de Charlus had been able to tell him was in fact the one thing that I had assumed. How at the time could I have guessed what I was told afterwards (and of which I have never felt certain, Andrée's assertions concerning anything connected with Albertine, later on especially, having always struck me as needing to be taken with caution, for, as we saw earlier, she was not genuinely fond of my loved one but was jealous of her), what in any event, if it were true, had been remarkably well hidden from me by the two of them: that Albertine knew Morel well? The new attitude which, around the time of the coachman's dismissal, Morel adopted towards me, allowed me to alter my opinion of him. I retained the low opinion of his character I had been led to form by the obsequiousness that this young man had displayed towards me when he had need of me, followed, immediately the service had been rendered, by a contempt taken to the point of seeming not to see me. To which had to be added the evidence of his venal relationship with M. de Charlus, as well as of the instinct for incoherent bestiality whose non-gratification (when that occurred), or the complications that it entailed, was the source of his unhappiness; that character was not uniformly ugly, however, but was full of contradictions. It resembled an old book of the Middle Ages, full of errors, of absurd traditions, of obscenities, it was extraordinarily composite. I had thought at first that his art, in which he was truly a past master, had given him superior abilities that went beyond the virtuosity of the performer. Once, when I was telling him of my desire to get down to work: 'Work, achieve renown, he said to me – Who's that from? I asked him. – From Fontanes, to Chateaubriand.'[15] He also knew a collection of Napoleon's love-letters.[16] Good, I thought, he's literate. But this phrase that he had read who knows where was most probably the only one he knew in the whole of literature, ancient or modern, for he repeated it to me every evening. Another one, which he repeated even more frequently, to stop me from telling anyone anything about him, was the following, which he thought equally literary, but which is scarcely French or at least presents no sort of sense, except perhaps to a manservant obsessed with secrets: 'Put no trust in the mistrustful.' In fact, by going from this stupid maxim to Fontanes's words to Chateaubriand, you would have scanned one whole part, varied but less contradictory than it seems, of Morel's character. This boy who, provided there were money to be made by it, would have done no matter what, and without remorse – perhaps not without a bizarre contrariness, going as far as nervous overexcitement, but which was far from meriting the name of remorse – who would, if he thought it was in his own interest, have plunged whole families into grief or even into mourning, this boy who put money ahead of everything else, ahead of, let alone kindness, the most natural sentiments of a common humanity, this same boy yet put ahead of money his diploma as first prize-winner at the Conservatoire and that no disobliging remarks should be made about him to his flute or counterpoint classes. Thus his greatest rages, his gloomiest and least justifiable outbursts of bad temper stemmed from what he called (no doubt generalizing from a few particular instances when he had encountered men of ill-will) the universal duplicity. He flattered himself he avoided this by never discussing anyone, by keeping his cards hidden, by mistrusting everybody. (As misfortune would have it, given what was to result from it after my return to Paris, his mistrust had not 'worked' in respect of the Balbec chauffeur, in whom he had no doubt recognized one of his own kind, that is to say, contrary to his maxim, a man mistrustful in the proper meaning of the word, who remains stubbornly silent when with decent people but at once sees eye to eye with a debauchee.) It seemed to him – and he was not altogether wrong – that this mistrust would always enable him to come off unscathed, to slip uncaught through the most perilous adventures, without their being able to hold, let alone prove, anything against him in the establishment in the rue Bergère.[17] He would work, would achieve renown, would one day perhaps, his respectability intact, be chairman of the violin jury at the prestigious Conservatoire.

But it is perhaps again to introduce too great a logic into Morel's head, to make his contradictions follow one from the other. In actual fact, his nature was really like a sheet of paper in which so many folds have been made in every direction that it is impossible to know where you are. He seemed to have quite lofty

principles, and in a magnificent handwriting, marred by the crudest spelling mistakes, spent hours writing to his brother that he had behaved badly towards his sisters, that he was the oldest and their support; to his sisters, that they were guilty of a breach of good manners vis-à-vis himself.

Soon now, with summer coming to an end, when you alighted from the train at Douville, the sun, muffled by the mist, was no more than a block of red in the uniformly mauve sky. To the great peace that descends in the evening on these lush, saline meadows, which had induced many Parisians, painters for the most part, to come and spend their holidays in Douville, there was added a dampness which made them return in good time inside their little chalets. In several of these, the lamp was already lit. A few cows alone remained outside, gazing at the sea and lowing, while others, more interested in humankind, turned their attention to our carriages. One painter alone, who had set up his easel on a narrow eminence, was working to try and render this great calm and the still light. The cows perhaps would be serving him as unwitting and benevolent models, for their contemplative air and their solitary presence once the human beings had returned home, contributed in their way to the powerful impression of repose that the evening gives off. And a few weeks later, the transposition was no less agreeable when, with the autumn advancing, the days became decidedly short and the journey had to be made in the dark. If I had been taking a stroll during the afternoon, I needed to go home and get dressed by five at the latest, by when the round, red sun had already descended half-way down the slanting mirror I had once detested, and, like Greek fire, had set light to the sea in the glass fronts of all my bookcases. Some incantatory gesture having excited, as I was putting on my dinner jacket, the alert and frivolous self that had been mine when I used to go with Saint-Loup to dine in Rivebelle or on the evening when I thought I would be taking Mlle de Stermaria to dine on the island in the Bois, I was unconsciously humming the same tune as then; and it was only on becoming aware of this that, by the song, I recognized the intermittent singer, who indeed knew only that one song. The first time that I had sung it, I was beginning to be in love with Albertine, but I thought I would never get to know her. Later in Paris, it was when I had ceased loving her and a few days after having possessed her for the first time. Now, it was on loving her again and at the moment of going to have dinner with her, to the great regret of the manager, who thought I would end up living at La Raspelière and abandoning his hotel, and who assured me he had heard that fevers were rife there, due to the marshes of Le Bec and their 'pregnant' waters. I was pleased by this multiplicity, which I could see thus deployed in my life on three planes; besides, when we become for a moment a former self, different that is from the one that we have been for a long time, our sensibilities, no longer deadened by habit, receive from the least shock impressions so vivid as to make all that has gone before seem pallid, and on which, because of their intensity, we fasten with the fleeting exaltation of a drunkard. It was already dark when we got into the omnibus or the carriage which was to take us to the station to catch the little train. And in the foyer the First President would say to us: 'Ah, you're going to La Raspelière! *Sapristi*, she's got a nerve, Mme Verdurin, making you spend an hour in the train in the dark, just to have dinner. And then start the journey all over again at ten o'clock at night in the very devil of a wind. It's obvious you can't have anything to do,' he added, rubbing his hands. He no doubt spoke thus out of displeasure at not having been invited, and also because of the satisfaction that 'busy' men feel – be their work perfectly fatuous – at 'not having the time' to do what you are doing.

It is legitimate, admittedly, for the man who drafts reports, lines up figures, answers business letters, or follows prices on the Bourse, to feel, when you say to him sneeringly, 'It's all right for you who have nothing to do,' an agreeable sense of his own superiority. But the latter would assert itself equally contemptuously, if not more so (for the busy man, too, dines out), were your recreation writing *Hamlet* or simply reading it. In which busy men are unthinking. For they ought to reflect that the disinterested culture which strikes them as a comic pastime for the idle when they come upon it at a moment when it is being practised is the same as that culture which, in their own *métier*, singles out men who are not perhaps better magistrates or administrators than themselves, but before whose rapid promotion they bow their heads, saying: 'It appears he's very well-read, altogether someone of distinction.' But above all the First President did not realize that what pleased me about these dinners at La Raspelière was that, as he rightly said, though in criticism, they 'represented a real journey', a journey whose attraction seemed all the keener because it was not an end in itself, that one was not looking for any enjoyment from it, this last being assigned to the gathering for which one was bound and which never failed to be greatly modified by the whole atmosphere surrounding it. It was already dark now when I exchanged the warmth of the hotel – of the hotel that had become my home – for the compartment into which we got with Albertine, where the reflection of the lamplight on the window told us, at certain of the wheezy little train's stops, that we had arrived in a station. So as not to risk Cottard's failing to notice us, and not having heard the station being shouted out, I would open the door, but what came dashing into the carriage was not the faithful, but the wind, the rain and the cold. In the darkness, I could make out the fields and I could hear the sea, we were in open country. Before we joined the little nucleus, Albertine would inspect herself in a little mirror taken from a gold vanity case that she carried. The first times indeed, Mme Verdurin having made her go upstairs to her dressing-room so that she could tidy herself before dinner, I had, in the midst of the profound calm in which I had been living for some time past, experienced a slight stirring of disquiet and jealousy at being obliged to leave Albertine at the foot of the stairs, and I had felt so anxious while I was alone in the drawing-room in the midst of the little clan, and wondering what my loved one was doing upstairs, that the following day I had, by telegram, after asking M. de Charlus for advice as to what was most fashionable, ordered from Cartier's a vanity case that was the joy of Albertine and of myself. For me it was a token of my peace of mind as well as of my solicitude for my loved one. For she had certainly guessed that I did not like her remaining without me at Mme Verdurin's and had contrived to make all her toilet preparations before the dinner in the compartment.

To the number of Mme Verdurin's regulars, and the most faithful of all, there had for several months now been added M. de Charlus. Regularly, three times a week, the passengers parked in the waiting-rooms or on the platform at Doncières-Ouest would see this fat man going past, with his grey hair, his black moustaches, and red make-up on his lips that was less noticeable at the end of the season than in the summer, when the broad daylight had made it more garish and the heat half liquid. As he made his way towards the little train, he could not help (merely out of a connoisseur's habit, since he now had an attachment that had made him chaste, or at least, most of the time, faithful) casting, at the labourers, the soldiers, the young men in tennis clothes, a furtive glance, at once inquisitorial and timorous, after which he would at once lower his eyelids over eyes that were almost closed, with the unctuousness of an ecclesiastic busy telling his beads, and the reserve of a bride plighted to her one love, or of a well-brought-up young girl. The faithful were the more convinced that he had not seen them when he entered a compartment other than theirs (as the Princesse Sherbatoff also often did), like a man who has no idea whether people will be happy or not to be seen with him and who gives you the option of coming to look for him if you so desire. No such desire had been felt in the very early days by the Doctor, who had wanted us to let him remain on his own in his compartment. Making a virtue of his hesitant nature now that he stood so high medically, it was with a smile, and leaning back, while looking at Ski from over the top of his eyeglass, that he said, either out of mischievousness or to learn his companions' opinion by a roundabout means: 'You understand, if I was on my own, a bachelor… but because of my wife, I ask myself whether I can allow him to travel with us after what you've told me, whispered the Doctor. – What's that you're saying? asked Mme Cottard. – Nothing, it's none of your business, it's not for women,' replied the Doctor with a wink, and with a majestic self-satisfaction that came half-way between the poker-faced expression that he maintained in front of his pupils and his patients and the anxiety that had accompanied his shafts of wit in the old days at the Verdurins', and he went on talking in an undertone. Mme Cottard made out only the words 'of the brotherhood' and '*tapette*',[18] and since in the Doctor's idiom the first denoted the Jewish race and the second those who talked too much, Mme Cottard concluded that M. de Charlus must be a garrulous Israelite. She could not understand why the Baron should be ostracized on that account, and thought it her duty as the clan's doyenne to demand that he should not be left on his own, and we all made our way towards M. de Charlus's compartment, guided by a still perplexed Cottard. From the corner where he was reading a volume of Balzac, M. de Charlus remarked this hesitation; he had not, however, looked up. But just as deaf mutes can recognize, by a current of air imperceptible to others, that someone has come up behind them, he had, for alerting him to the coldness felt in respect of him, a veritable hyperacuity of the senses. This, as it customarily does in whatever domain, had given rise in M. de Charlus to imaginary sufferings. Like the neuropaths who, feeling a slight freshness, infer that a window must be open on the floor above, fly into a rage and start sneezing, M. de Charlus, if someone had displayed a preoccupied expression in his presence, concluded that a comment he had made about that person had been repeated to

them. But there was no need even for anyone to be wearing a distracted, or a grim, or a laughing expression, he would invent them. In return, cordiality easily masked from him the backbiting of which he was unaware. Having detected Cottard's hesitation the first time, although, much to the surprise of the faithful, who did not think they had yet been noticed by this reader with the lowered eyes, he held out a hand to them when they were a suitable distance away, he contented himself with an inclination of his whole body, at once quickly straightened, for Cottard, without taking the hand that the Doctor had held out in his own suede-gloved hand. 'We absolutely insisted on doing the journey with you, Monsieur, and not leaving you on your own like this in your little corner. It's a great pleasure for us, Mme Cottard said good-naturedly to the Baron. – I'm most honoured, recited the Baron, bowing coldly. – I was very glad to learn that you had finally chosen this region to set up your tabern…' She was going to say tabernacles, but the word struck her as Hebraic and disobliging for a Jew who might see some allusion in it. So she caught herself up to choose another of the expressions with which she was familiar, namely a solemn expression: 'to set up, I meant to say, "your penates" (it is true that these divinities do not belong to the Christian religion either, but to one that has been dead for so long it no longer has any adepts to whom one might be afraid of giving offence). – We, alas, what with the academic year starting, and the Doctor's hospital duties, we can never elect domicile for very long in one place.' And pointing to a cardboard box: 'You can see what's more how we women are less fortunate than the strong sex; to go only as far as to our friends the Verdurins, we're obliged to take with us a whole range of impedimenta.' During this time, I was looking at the Baron's volume of Balzac. This was not a paper-covered copy, bought at random like the volume of Bergotte he had lent me the first year. It was a book from his library, and as such bearing the device '*Je suis au Baron de Charlus*', or 'I belong to the Baron de Charlus', for which was sometimes substituted, to display the studious tastes of the Guermantes, '*In proeliis non semper*' or still another one, '*Non sine labore*.'[19] But we shall soon see these being replaced by others, in order to try and please Morel. After a moment, Mme Cottard took up a subject she considered was more personal to the Baron, 'I don't know if you're of my opinion, Monsieur, she said after a moment, but I'm very broad-minded and as I see it, provided you practise them sincerely, all religions are good. I'm not like those people who start frothing at the mouth at the sight of a… Protestant. – I was taught that mine was the true one,' replied M. de Charlus. 'He's a fanatic, thought Mme Cottard; Swann, except towards the end, was more tolerant, it's true he was a convert.' But quite to the contrary, the Baron was not simply a Christian, as we know, but pious in the fashion of the Middle Ages. For him, as for the sculptors of the thirteenth century, the Christian Church was, in the living sense of the word, peopled by a crowd of beings he believed to be perfectly real: prophets, apostles, angels, sacred personages of every sort, surrounding the Word made flesh, his mother and her espoused, the Eternal Father, all the martyrs and doctors, the race of whom in high relief crowd the porch or fill the nave of the cathedrals. From amongst them all, M. de Charlus had chosen as his patron intercessors the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, with whom he held frequent conversations so that they might convey his prayers to the Eternal Father, before whose throne they stand. Thus Mme Cottard's error amused me greatly.

To get off the terrain of religion, let us say that the Doctor, having come to Paris with the meagre baggage of a peasant mother's advice, then been absorbed by the almost purely physical studies to which those who wish to carry their medical careers all the way through are obliged to devote themselves for a great many years, had never become cultured; he had acquired more authority, but not experience; he took the word 'honoured' literally, was at once gratified by it because he was vain and pained because he was a good-natured fellow. 'That poor de Charlus, he said that evening to his wife, he upset me when he told me he was honoured to be travelling with us. You sense, poor devil, that he has no connections, that he's demeaning himself.'

But soon, without having needed to be guided by the charitable Mme Cottard, the faithful had succeeded in overcoming the awkwardness they had all more or less felt at the start, on finding themselves next to M. de Charlus. No doubt in his presence, they kept always before them the memory of Ski's revelations and the idea of the sexual strangeness enclosed within their travelling companion. But this strangeness even held a sort of attraction for them. For them, it lent the Baron's conversation, remarkable in any case but in parts that they were hardly able to appreciate, a savour which, by comparison, made the conversation of even the most interesting of the others, of Brichot himself, seem a little colourless. They had been pleased to acknowledge right from the start, moreover, that he was intelligent. 'Genius may lie next to madness,' announced the Doctor, and if the Princesse, hungry for instruction, insisted, he would say no more, this axiom being all that he knew about genius, and seeming moreover less demonstrable than anything having to do with typhoid or arthritis. And since he had become arrogant and remained ill-bred: 'No questions, Princesse, don't interrogate me, I'm at the seaside for a rest. In any case, you wouldn't understand me, you don't know medicine.' And the Princesse would apologize and fall silent, finding that Cottard was a charming man and gathering that celebrities are not always approachable. In this first period, they had in the end therefore found M. de Charlus to be intelligent in spite of his vice (or what is generally so termed). Now it was, without their realizing it, because of that vice that they found him more intelligent than the others. The simplest maxims which, at the adroit provocation of the university man or the sculptor, M. de Charlus pronounced concerning love, jealousy or beauty, because of the singular, secret, refined and monstrous experience from which they had been drawn, assumed for the faithful that charm of the foreign which a psychology analogous to that offered to us from time immemorial by our own dramatic literature wears in a Russian or a Japanese play, as performed by artistes from those places. They still risked, when he was out of earshot, an unkind joke: 'Oh! the sculptor would whisper, catching sight of a young railwayman with the long eyelashes of a nautch-girl whom M. de Charlus had been unable to stop himself from eyeing, if the Baron's starting to make eyes at the ticket collector, it'll take us for ever to get there, the train'll start going arsy-versy. Just look at the way he's looking at him, we're not on a train any more but a bummel.' In fact, however, if M. de Charlus did not come, they felt disappointment almost at travelling only among people who were like everyone else and not to have next to them this bedizened, pot-bellied and impenetrable personage, reminiscent of a box, of some suspect and exotic provenance, which gives off a curious smell of fruit, the mere thought of sampling which would turn the stomach. From this point of view, the faithful of the masculine sex derived a keener satisfaction, during the short section of the journey between Saint-Martin-du-Chêne, where M. de Charlus got in, and Doncières, the station where we were joined by Morel. For, so long as the violinist was not there (and provided the ladies and Albertine, keeping to themselves so as not to hamper the conversation, remained at a distance), M. de Charlus did not hold back, so as not to appear to be avoiding certain topics, from talking about 'what it is agreed should be termed vice'. Albertine could not embarrass him, for she was always with the ladies, out of the graciousness of a girl who does not want her presence to restrict the freedom of the conversation. But I was easily able to bear not having her beside me, always on condition that she remained in the same carriage. For I, who no longer felt jealousy nor scarcely any love for her, and gave no thought to what she might be doing on the days when I did not see her, when, in return, I was there, a simple partition that might conceivably have been concealing a betrayal was unbearable to me, and if she went with the ladies into the next-door compartment, a moment later, no longer able to remain in my seat, and at the risk of offending whoever might be speaking, Brichot, Cottard or Charlus, to whom I was unable to explain the reason for my flight, I would get up, leave them sitting there, and, in order to see whether something abnormal might not be going on, move next door. And all the way to Doncières, M. de Charlus, not being afraid to shock, would talk, often very crudely, of habits which he declared that for his own part he considered neither good nor bad. He did so out of cleverness, to display his broad-mindedness, persuaded as he was that his own habits had aroused hardly any suspicions in the minds of the faithful. He believed indeed that there existed in the world a few people who had, following an expression that later became common with him, 'got him straight'. But he imagined that there were no more than three or four such persons and that none of them were on the Normandy coast. This illusion may seem surprising on the part of someone so discerning and so anxious. Even in the case of those whom he thought more or less in the know, he flattered himself that it was only in the abstract, and, according to whether he told them one thing or another, aspired to place the person in question outside the suppositions of an interlocutor who, from politeness, pretended to take him at his word. Even suspecting what I might know or suppose about him, he imagined that this opinion, which he thought was of longer standing on my part than in reality it was, was quite general, and that it was enough for him to deny one or other detail in order to be believed, whereas, on the contrary, even if knowledge of the whole always precedes that of the details, it makes the investigation of these infinitely simpler and, having destroyed the capacity for invisibility, no longer allows the dissembler to hide whatever he pleases. Certainly, when M. de Charlus, asked out to dinner by one or other of the faithful or some friend of the faithful, took the most complicated detours in order to introduce, into the middle of the names of ten people whom he was citing, the name of Morel, he hardly suspected that to the reasons he gave, always different, for the pleasure or convenience he might find in being invited with him on that particular evening, his hosts, while appearing to believe him implicitly, had substituted a single reason, always the same, which he thought was not known to them, namely that he was in love with him. Similarly, Mme Verdurin, seeming always to appear quite to have accepted the motives, part artistic, part humanitarian, that M. de Charlus gave her for the interest he took in Morel, never stopped thanking the Baron feelingly for the touching kindnesses, as she put it, that he showed the violinist. But how astonished would M. de Charlus have been if, on a day when he and Morel were late and had not come by the train, he had heard the Patronne say: 'We shan't wait for the young ladies any longer!' The Baron would have been all the more astounded in that, hardly ever stirring from La Raspelière, the figure he cut there was that of chaplain, of an *abbé* from the repertory, sometimes (when Morel had a 48-hour leave) sleeping there two nights in a row. Mme Verdurin would then give them two communicating rooms, and, to set them at their ease, say: 'If you feel like making music, don't hesitate, the walls are like those of a fortress, you've no one on your floor, and my husband sleeps like the dead.' On these days, M. de Charlus would relieve the Princesse and go to meet the new arrivals at the station, apologizing for Mme Verdurin's not having come on account of a state of health that he described so graphically that the guests entered wearing suitably concerned expressions and let out a cry of surprise on finding the Patronne up and about, in a demi-décolletage.

For M. de Charlus had become, momentarily, for Mme Verdurin the faithful of faithfuls, a second Princesse Sherbatoff. She was much less sure of his social standing than of the Princesse's, imagining that if the latter wished to see only the little nucleus, this was out of contempt for others and a predilection for it. Since this selfsame pretence was peculiar to the Verdurins, who treated as bores all those with whom they could not associate, it is incredible that the Patronne should have believed the Princesse to be a soul of steel, detesting what was fashionable. But she stuck by her opinion and was convinced that in the case of the *grande dame*, too, it was in all sincerity and out of a liking for intellectuality that she did not associate with bores. The number of these had in any case gone down where the Verdurins were concerned. The life of a seaside resort removed from an introduction the consequences for the future that might have been dreaded in Paris. Brilliant men, having come to Balbec without their wives, which made things easier, put out feelers towards La Raspelière, and went from boring to delightful. This was the case with the Prince de Guermantes, whom the absence of the Princesse would not, on the other hand, have decided to go to the Verdurins' 'as a bachelor', had the magnet of Dreyfusism not been so powerful as to cause him to ascend the rise leading to La Raspelière in a single go, on a day, alas, when the Patronne was out. Mme Verdurin was not certain in any case that he and M. de Charlus were from the same social world. The Baron had certainly said that the Duc de Guermantes was his brother, but that perhaps was the falsehood of an adventurer. However fashionable he had shown himself to be, however affable, and however faithful to the Verdurins, the Patronne yet hesitated almost to invite him with the Prince de Guermantes. She consulted Ski and Brichot: 'The Baron and the Prince de Guermantes, do they go together? – Good heavens, Madame, where one of them's concerned, I think I can say… – One of them, what

good's that to me? Mme Verdurin had gone on, in annoyance. I'm asking you whether they go together? – Ah, Madame, that sort of thing's very hard to find out.' There was no malice in this on Mme Verdurin's part. She was certain as to the Baron's habits, but in expressing herself as she did it was not they that she had in mind, wanting only to know whether the Prince and M. de Charlus could be invited together, whether they would hit it off. There was no unkind intention in her use of these ready-made expressions, which are favoured by the 'little clans' of the artistic. To parade M. de Guermantes, she wanted to take him, on the afternoon following the lunch-party, to a charity event when some sailors from the coast would be enacting a ship setting sail. But not having the time to take care of everything, she delegated her functions to the faithful of faithfuls, to the Baron. 'You understand, they're not to stay standing about, like mussels, they've got to be coming and going, be seen clearing the decks for action, or whatever you call all that. But you who often go to the harbour in Balbec-Plage, you could certainly make them rehearse without tiring yourself. You must have a better idea than I do, M. de Charlus, of how to get young sailors going. But then we're giving ourselves a lot of trouble over M. de Guermantes. Perhaps he's one of those imbeciles from the Jockey Club. Oh, good heavens, I'm saying bad things about the Jockey Club, and I seem to remember you're one of them. What, Baron, you're not answering, are you one of them? Will you not come out with us? Look, here's a book I've received, I think it'll interest you. It's a Roujon. It's got a pretty title: *Parmi les hommes*.'[20]

For my own part, I was all the happier that M. de Charlus should quite often have stood in for Princesse Sherbatoff in that I was in ill odour with the latter, for a reason at once trivial and profound. One day when I was in the little train, showering attentions, as ever, on the Princesse Sherbatoff, I saw Mme de Villeparisis get in. She had in fact come to spend a few weeks with the Princess of Luxembourg, but, shackled to this daily need to see Albertine, I had never replied to the proliferating invitations from the Marquise and her royal hostess. I felt remorse at the sight of my grandmother's friend and purely as a duty (without leaving the Princesse Sherbatoff), I talked with her for quite some time. I had absolutely no idea, however, that Mme de Villeparisis knew very well who my companion was but had no wish to meet her. At the next station, Mme de Villeparisis left the compartment, and I even reproached myself for not having helped her alight; I went to resume my seat next to the Princesse. But it was as though – a cataclysm common among people whose position is insecure and who fear that you may have heard ill reports of them, and despise them – a change of scenery had been effected. Ensconced in her *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Mme Sherbatoff did little more than move her lips in answer to my questions and finally told me that I was giving her a migraine. I had no inkling of what my crime was. When I said goodbye to the Princesse, the usual smile did not light up her face, a curt nod depressed her chin, she did not even offer me her hand and she has never spoken to me since. But she must have spoken – but what to say, I do not know – to the Verdurins, for the moment I asked them whether I would not do well to make some polite gesture to the Princesse Sherbatoff, they came hastily out in chorus: 'No, no, no! That least of all. She doesn't like courtesies!' This was not done so as to cause a rift between us, but she had managed to make them believe that she was indifferent to attentions, a soul impervious to the vanities of this world. One needs to have met the politician who passes for being the most plain-spoken, the most intransigent, the most unapproachable once he has come to power; one needs to have seen him in his days out of favour, timidly soliciting, with the dazzling smile of a lover, the haughty salute of some journalist or other; one needs to have seen the straightened spine of Cottard (whom his new patients mistook for a ramrod), and to know from what unrequited passions, what snobbish rebuffs, the seeming haughtiness, the universally acknowledged anti-snobbery of the Princesse Sherbatoff had been formed, to understand that the rule amongst humankind – which allows of exceptions, naturally – is that the hard are the weak whom no one has wanted, and that the strong alone, caring little whether they are wanted or no, have that gentleness that the crowd mistakes for weakness.

For the rest, I must not judge the Princesse Sherbatoff harshly. Hers is so very common a case! One day, at the funeral of a Guermantes, a distinguished man standing beside me pointed out a slim gentleman graced by a pretty face. 'Of all the Guermantes, my neighbour said, that's the most extraordinary, the oddest. It's the Duc's brother.' I answered unwisely that he was mistaken, that the gentleman was no relation at all to the Guermantes but was called Fournier-Sarlovèze.[21] The distinguished man turned his back on me and has never acknowledged me since.

A great musician, a member of the Institute, a high official dignitary who knew Ski, stopped off in Arembouville, where he had a niece, and came to one of the Verdurins' Wednesdays. M. de Charlus was especially affable towards him (at Morel's request), above all so that, on his return to Paris, the Academician might enable him to attend various private performances, rehearsals and the like, where the violinist would be playing. The Academician, flattered and a charming man in any case, promised, and kept his promise. The Baron was deeply touched by all the kindnesses that this personage (who in fact, where he himself was concerned, loved only, and with passion, women) showed him, by all the facilities he procured for him so that he might meet Morel in those official places into which the layman cannot go, by all the opportunities offered the young virtuoso by the celebrated artist to put himself forward, to become known, by nominating him, in preference to others equally talented, for recitals that would be much talked about. But M. de Charlus did not suspect that he owed the maestro all the more gratitude in that the latter, doubly deserving, or if you prefer, twice as culpable, was fully aware of the relationship between the violinist and his noble patron. He encouraged them, while admittedly having no sympathy with them, being unable to understand any love except that for a woman, which had inspired all his own music, but out of moral indifference, a professional wish to please and to be of service, a worldly amiability and snobbery. As for his doubts concerning the nature of that relationship, so few did he have that, at the very first dinner at La Raspelière, he had asked Ski, referring to M. de Charlus and Morel, as he might have done to a man and his mistress: 'Have they been together long?' But, too much the man of the world to allow any of this to appear to those concerned, and prepared, had it given rise to tittle-tattle among Morel's fellow-students, to suppress it and to reassure Morel by saying to him in a fatherly way: 'They say that about everyone these days', he did not cease to shower the Baron with kindnesses, which the latter thought charming, but natural, being incapable of suspecting the celebrated maestro of so much vice or so much virtue. For no one was so mean-spirited as to repeat to M. de Charlus the witticisms spoken in his absence, or the *à peu près* about Morel. Yet this simple situation suffices to demonstrate that even that universally decried thing, which would nowhere find anyone to defend it, 'gossip', has, whether we are ourselves its object so that it then becomes particularly disagreeable, or whether it teaches us something we did not know about a third person, its psychological value. It prevents the mind from falling asleep over the factitious view that it takes of what it believes things to be like, which is only their outward appearance. It turns this inside out with the magical dexterity of an idealist philosopher and quickly offers us an unsuspected corner of the reverse side of the fabric. Could M. de Charlus have imagined these words spoken by a certain fond female relative: 'How can you expect Mémé to be in love with me? You're forgetting I'm a woman!' Yet she had a genuine, deep attachment to M. de Charlus. Why be surprised then, that, in the case of the Verdurins, on whose affection and kindness he had no right to rely, the remarks that they made when far away from him (and it was not only remarks, as we shall see) should have been so unlike what he imagined them to be, that is to say the simple echo of those that he heard when he was there? These last alone decorated with fond inscriptions the little ideal pavilion into which M. de Charlus sometimes went in order to dream on his own, when he would introduce his imagination for a moment into the idea that the Verdurins had of him. The atmosphere there was so sympathetic, so cordial, the respite so comforting, that when M. de Charlus, before going to sleep, had come there for a moment to relax from his cares, he never re-emerged without a smile. But, for each of us, a pavilion of this kind is double: facing what we think is the only one, there is the other, customarily invisible to us, the real one, symmetrical with the one that we know, yet very different, whose decoration, where we would recognize nothing of what we were expecting to see, would alarm us as being formed of the odious symbols of an unsuspected hostility. How aghast M. de Charlus would have been, had he found his way into one of these adverse pavilions, by virtue of some piece of gossip, as if by one of those servants' staircases where obscene graffiti have been chalked on the doors of the apartments by disgruntled tradesmen or dismissed domestics! But, just as we are devoid of that sense of direction with which certain birds are endowed, so we lack the sense of visibility as we lack that of distances, imagining as close the concerned attention of people who, on the contrary, never give us a thought, and not suspecting that during this same time we are the sole preoccupation of others. Thus M. de Charlus lived deluded, like the fish which believes that the water in which he is swimming extends beyond the glass of his tank, which offers him his reflection, whereas he does not see, beside him, in the shadows, the amused passer-by who is following his antics, or the all-powerful pisciculturalist who, at the unforeseen and fatal moment, deferred at this moment in the case of the Baron (for whom the

pisciculturalist, in Paris, will be Mme Verdurin), will pull him ruthlessly out from the medium in which he had liked living, to toss him into another one. Whole nations, what is more, insofar as they are simply collections of individuals, can provide examples, vaster yet identical in each of their parts, of this profound, obstinate and disconcerting blindness. Up until now, though it may have been a reason why M. de Charlus passed remarks in the little clan of a pointless cleverness or a daring that gave rise to surreptitious smiles, it had not yet had for him, nor was it to have in Balbec, any serious disadvantages. A little albumen, or sugar or cardiac arrhythmia does not stop life from continuing normally for someone who does not even notice them, while the doctor alone sees them as prophetic of catastrophes. At present, M. de Charlus's liking – whether Platonic or not – for Morel merely led the Baron readily to say in Morel's absence that he found him very good-looking, thinking this would be taken quite innocently, and thereby behaving like a shrewd man who, summoned to testify in court, will not be afraid to enter into details that seem on the face of it to be to his disadvantage, but which, on this very count, have more that is natural and less that is vulgar about them than the conventional protestations of a stage defendant. With the same freedom, always between Doncières-Ouest and Saint-Martin-du-Chêne – or conversely, on the return journey – M. de Charlus gladly talked about people who have, it seems, very strange habits, and would even add: 'I say strange after all, I don't know why, for there's nothing so very strange about it,' in order to prove to himself how thoroughly at ease he felt with his audience. And he was so in fact, provided that the initiative in these proceedings lay with him and he knew that the gallery was mute and smiling, disarmed by credulity or by a good upbringing.

When M. de Charlus was not speaking of his admiration for Morel's beauty, as if it had no connection with a proclivity known as a vice, he would treat of this vice, but as if it were by no means his own. At times, indeed, he did not hesitate to call it by its name. When, after looking at the fine binding on his Balzac, I asked what he liked best in the *Comédie humaine*, he answered, steering his thoughts towards an *idée fixe*: 'All one thing or all the other, the little miniatures like *Le Curé de Tours* or *La Femme abandonnée*, or the great frescos like the series of the *Illusions perdues*. What, you don't know *Les Illusions perdues*? It's so fine, the moment when Carlos Herrera asks the name of the château his barouche is passing: it's Rastignac, the home of the young man he had once been in love with. Whereupon the *abbé* falls into a reverie that Swann used to call, which was very witty, the "Tristesse d'Olympio" of pederasty.[22] And the death of Lucien! I no longer recall what man of taste[23] it was whose reply, to whoever asked him what event had most distressed him in his life, was: "The death of Lucien de Rubempré in *Splendeurs et misères*".' – I know everyone's wearing Balzac this year, just as last year it was pessimism, Brichot broke in. But at the risk of grieving those souls yearning for a Balzacian deference, and without aspiring, damn it all, to the role of literary gendarme and to institute charges of faults of grammar, I will admit that the copious improviser whose alarming lucubrations you appear strangely to overrate, has always seemed to me an insufficiently meticulous wielder of the pen. I have read those *Illusions perdues* of which you speak, Baron, torturing myself to attain to the fervour of an initiate, and I confess in all simplicity of soul that these *romans-feuilletons* worded in pathos and in double or triple gobbledegook ('Esther happy', 'Where the wrong paths lead', 'The price old men pay for love') [24] have always had the effect on me of Rocambole[25] mysteries elevated by some inexplicable favour to the precarious status of masterpiece… – You say that because you know nothing of life,' said the Baron, doubly irritated, for he sensed that Brichot would understand neither his artistic nor his other reasons. 'I quite understand, replied Brichot, that, to talk like Master François Rabelais, you mean I am *moult sorbonagre, sorbonicole et sorboniforme*.[26] Yet, equally as much as my fellows, I like a book to give an impression of life and sincerity, I am not one of those clerks… – The *quart d'heure de Rabelais*,[27] broke in Doctor Cottard, with an expression no longer of uncertainty but of witty self-assurance –… who take a vow of literature following the rule of l'Abbaye-aux-Bois in the obedience of M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand, grand master of humbug, according to the strict rule of the humanists. M. le Vicomte de Chateaubriand… – *Chateaubriand aux pommes*?[28] broke in Doctor Cottard. – He is the patron saint of the brotherhood,' Brichot continued, without picking up on the Doctor's joke, who, in return, alarmed by the university man's words, looked anxiously at M. de Charlus. Brichot had seemed lacking in tact to Cottard, whose pun had brought a delicate smile to the lips of the Princesse Sherbatoff. 'With the Professor, the mordant irony of the complete sceptic never loses its rights,' she said, out of friendliness and to show that the doctor's 'witticism' had not gone unnoticed by her. 'The wise man is of necessity a sceptic, replied the Doctor. What do I know? "*Gnothi seauton*", said Socrates. That's very true, excess in anything is a fault. But I'm flabbergasted when I reflect that that was enough for the name of Socrates to have endured up until our own day. What is there in that philosophy? Little enough, when all's said and done. When you reflect that Charcot and others have done work a thousand times more remarkable and which at least rests on something, on the suppression of the pupillary reflex as a syndrome of general paralysis, and that they're almost forgotten! When all's said and done, Socrates isn't so extraordinary. They're people who had nothing to do, who spent their whole day walking about chopping logic. It's like Jesus Christ: "Love one another," how very pretty. – My friend…, pleaded Mme Cottard. – Naturally, my wife is protesting, women are all neurotics. – But, *mon petit docteur*, I'm not a neurotic, murmured Mme Cottard. – What, she's not a neurotic? When her son's ill, she presents phenomena of insomnia. Still, I acknowledge that Socrates and the others, they're necessary for a superior culture, to get a gift for exposition. I always quote the *gnothi seauton* to my pupils at the first lecture. Old Bouchard, who found that out, congratulated me. – I'm not one of the supporters of form for form's sake, any more than in poetry I'd hoard millionaire rhymes,[29] resumed Brichot. All the same, the *Comédie humaine* – not so very human – is too much the opposite of those works in which the art outweighs the subject-matter, as that faithful old steed Ovid has it.[30] And it's permissible to prefer a path half-way up the slope, which leads to the vicarage of Meudon or the Hermitage of Ferney, equidistant from the Vallée-aux-Loups, where René majestically fulfilled the functions of an unyielding pontificate, and from Les Jardies, where Honoré de Balzac, harassed by the bailiff's men, never stopped cacographying, for the sake of a Polish woman, as a zealous apostle of double Dutch.[31] – Chateaubriand is much more alive than you say, and Balzac is a great writer nonetheless, replied M. de Charlus, still too imbued with the tastes of Swann not to be irritated by Brichot, and Balzac was familiar with those passions even that everyone ignores or studies only in order to castigate them. Not to refer again to the immortal *Illusions perdues, Sarrasine, La Fille aux yeux d'or, Une Passion dans le désert*, even the somewhat enigmatic *Fausse maîtresse*, will bear out what I'm saying. When I spoke of this "outside Nature" side of Balzac with Swann, he used to say: "You're of the same opinion as Taine."[32] I didn't have the honour of meeting Taine, added M. de Charlus (with that irritating habit among society people of the pointless "Monsieur", as if they believed that, by qualifying a great writer as Monsieur, they were bestowing an honour on him, or perhaps keeping their distance, and letting it be seen that they did not know him), I didn't know Monsieur Taine, but I took it as a great honour to be of the same opinion as him.' Despite these ridiculous society habits, M. de Charlus was in fact highly intelligent, and it is probable that if some ancient marriage had established links between his family and that of Balzac, he would have felt (no less than Balzac, for that matter) a self-satisfaction of which he would not, however, have been able to stop himself boasting, as though of a mark of admirable condescension.

On occasions, at the station that came after Saint-Martin-du-Chêne, some young men would get into the train. M. de Charlus could not help looking at them, but since he cut short and disguised the attention he was paying to them, it came to look as though it were concealing a secret, more particular even than the real one; you would have said that he knew them, and had let this show in spite of himself after accepting the sacrifice, before turning back to us, as those children do who, following a quarrel between parents, have been forbidden to greet certain classmates, but who, when they meet them, cannot forbear to raise their heads before falling back under the ferrule of their tutor.

At the word coming from the Greek with which M. de Charlus, in speaking of Balzac, had followed the allusion to the 'Tristesse d'Olympio' in *Splendeurs et misères*, Ski, Brichot and Cottard had looked at one another with a smile that was less ironic perhaps than imbued with the satisfaction that dinner guests might feel who had succeeded in getting Dreyfus to talk about his own Affair, or the Empress about her reign. They were counting indeed on pressing him a little further on the subject, but already we were at Doncières, where Morel joined us. In front of him, M. de Charlus kept careful watch on the conversation, and when Ski wanted to bring him back on to the love of Carlos Herrera for Lucien de Rubempré, the Baron assumed the annoyed, mysterious and finally (seeing they were not listening to him) severe and judicial expression of a father hearing improprieties being spoken in front of his daughter. Ski having shown persistence in pursuing the matter, M. de Charlus, his eyes bulging and raising his voice, said meaningfully, indicating Albertine, who could not however hear us, being busy

talking to Mme Cottard and the Princesse Sherbatoff, and in the ambiguous tone of someone wishing to teach a lesson to people of no breeding: 'I think it might be time to talk about things that might interest this young lady.' But I saw clearly that for him, the young lady was not Albertine but Morel; he later confirmed the accuracy of my interpretation by the expressions he used when asking that we should not have any more such conversations in front of Morel. 'You know, he said to me, referring to the violinist, he's not at all what you might think, he's a very decent boy who's always stayed very sensible, very responsible.' And you felt from these words that M. de Charlus looked on sexual inversion as a danger equally as threatening for young men as prostitution is for women, and that if he used the epithet 'responsible' in connection with Morel, it was in the sense that it acquires when applied to a young working-girl. Then, to change the conversation, Brichot asked me whether I was counting on staying much longer in Incarville. For all that I had pointed out to him more than once that I was living not in Incarville but in Balbec, he always fell back into his error, because it was under the name of Incarville or of Balbec-Incarville that he designated this part of the littoral. There are people who talk in this way about the same things as ourselves but calling them by a slightly different name. A certain lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain always asked me, when she wanted to talk about the Duchesse de Guermantes, whether I had seen Zénaïde lately, or Oriane-Zénaïde, which meant that at the outset I did not understand. There had probably been a time when, a relation of Mme de Guermantes's being called Oriane, she, for her part, had been called, to avoid confusion, Oriane-Zénaïde. Perhaps, too, there had originally been a station only in Incarville, and you went on from there to Balbec by carriage. 'What were you talking about, then?' said Albertine, surprised by the solemn, paterfamilias tone that M. de Charlus had just usurped. 'About Balzac, the Baron hastened to reply, and this evening you're wearing the exact outfit of the Princesse de Cadignan,[33] not the first one, the one at the dinner, but the second.' This coincidence derived from the fact that, in choosing Albertine's outfits, I drew my inspiration from the taste she had acquired thanks to Elstir, who greatly valued a sobriety that might have been called British had it not gone with a greater comfort, a French softness. The dresses he preferred most often offered to the eye a harmonious combination of grey shades, like that of Diane de Cadignan. M. de Charlus was almost alone in knowing how to appreciate Albertine's outfits at their true worth; his eye would at once pick out what constituted their rarity, their price; he would never have named one fabric in mistake for another, and he recognized the maker. Only he preferred – for women – rather more dash and colour than Elstir could tolerate. And so, on that particular evening, she threw me a glance, half smiling, half anxious, lowering her little pink kitten's nose. Indeed, overlapping with her grey crêpe-de-chine skirt, her grey cheviot jacket made you suppose that Albertine was all in grey. But signalling to me to help her, because her bouffant sleeves needed smoothing down or pulling up for her to get into or out of her jacket, she took the latter off, and since her sleeves were of a very soft tartan, pink, pale blue, greeny, dove-coloured, it was if a rainbow had formed in a grey sky. And she had been wondering whether M. de Charlus was going to like it. 'Ah! exclaimed the latter, in ecstasies, look there, a sunbeam, a prism of colour. All my compliments to you. – But Monsieur alone has earned any, replied Albertine kindly, indicating me, for she liked to show what had come to her from me. – It's only the women who don't know how to dress that are afraid of colour, M. de Charlus went on. One can be brilliant without vulgarity and soft without being drab. Anyway, you don't have the same reasons as Mme de Cadignan to want to appear detached from life, because that was the idea she wanted to instil in d'Arthez with that grey outfit.' Albertine, interested by this wordless language of dresses, questioned M. de Charlus about the Princesse de Cadignan. 'Oh, it's an exquisite short novel, said the Baron dreamily. I know the little garden where Diane de Cadignan walked with Mme d'Espard. It's the garden of one of my cousins. – All these things about his cousin's garden, muttered Brichot to Cottard, may, just like his genealogy, be something that the excellent Baron values. But what interest can it have for us, who don't have the privilege of walking in it, don't know the lady and have no claim to a title?' For Brichot did not suspect that one might be interested in a dress or a garden as in a work of art, and that it was as if in Balzac that M. de Charlus could again see Mme de Cadignan's little garden paths. The Baron continued: 'But you know her, he said to me, referring to the cousin in question and in order to flatter me by addressing himself to me as if to someone who, exiled among the little clan, was, for M. Charlus, if not of his world, then at least went into his world. At all events, you must have met her at Mme de Villeparisis's. – The Marquise de Villeparisis that the château of Baucreux belongs to? asked Brichot, looking captivated. – Yes, you know her? M. de Charlus asked curtly. – Not at all, replied Brichot, but our colleague Norpois spends part of his holidays every year at Baucreux. I've had occasion to write to him there.' I told Morel, thinking to interest him, that M. de Norpois was a friend of my father's. But not a single movement of his face attested to his having heard, so poor an opinion did he have of my parents, as having not come near to being what my great-uncle had been, whose manservant his father was and who, moreover, unlike the rest of the family, rather liked 'cutting a dash' and had left his servants dazzled by the memory of him. 'It seems that Mme de Villeparisis is a superior woman; but I've never been admitted to judge of that for myself, any more than my colleagues for that matter. For Norpois, who is as it happens the soul of courtesy and amiability at the Institute, has never introduced any of us to the Marquise. The only one I know who's been received by her is our friend Thureau-Dangin, who had an old family connection, and also Gaston Boissier,[34] whom she wanted to meet following a study she found especially interesting. He dined there once and came back under the spell. Mme Boissier hasn't been asked, though.' At these names, Morel gave a feeling smile: 'Ah, Thureau-Dangin! he said to me, with an expression as interested as that which he had displayed on hearing speak of the Marquis de Norpois and of my father had remained indifferent. Thureau-Dangin and your uncle were inseparable. When a lady wanted a centre seat for a reception at the Academy, your uncle used to say: "I'll write to Thureau-Dangin." And of course the seat was sent straight away, for you can well understand that M. Thureau-Dangin wouldn't have risked refusing your uncle anything, who'd have got his own back on him. It amuses me, too, to hear the name Boissier, for it was there your great-uncle did all his shopping for the ladies at the New Year.[35] I know because I know the person who was responsible for doing it.' He had done more than know him, it was his own father. Certain of these affectionate allusions by Morel to my uncle's memory touched on the fact that we were not counting on remaining for ever in the Guermantes *hôtel*, where we had only come to lodge on account of my grandmother. There was talk now and again of a possible move. But in order to understand the advice that Charles Morel was giving me in this regard, you need to know that in the old days my great-uncle had lived at 40 *bis* boulevard Malesherbes.[36] The consequence of which was that, in the family, since we used to go frequently to my uncle Adolphe's up until the fateful day when I had caused a rift between him and my parents by retailing the story of the lady in pink, instead of saying 'at your uncle's', we would say 'at 40 *bis*'. Some of Mama's cousins would say to her, in the most natural way: 'Ah, we can't have you on Sunday, you're dining at 40 *bis*.' If I was going to visit a relative, I was advised to go first of all to '40 *bis*', so that my uncle should not be offended that we had not begun with him. He was the owner of the house and proved, truth to tell, very difficult when it came to choosing his tenants, who were all friends, or became so. Colonel le Baron de Vatry came every day to smoke a cigar with him in order to get his repairs done more easily. The *porte cochère* was always closed. If my uncle caught sight of any washing or a carpet at a window, he would enter in a fury and have them taken back in more quickly than a policeman would today. He nonetheless let part of the house, keeping for himself only two floors and the stables. In spite of which, knowing how to please him by praising the excellent state of upkeep of the house, we extolled the comfort of the 'little hôtel', as if my uncle had been its sole occupant, and he let it pass, without offering any formal denial as he should have done. The 'little *hôtel*' was certainly comfortable (my uncle having introduced all the new inventions of the day). But there was nothing extraordinary about it. My uncle alone, while talking with false modesty about 'my little hovel', was convinced, or had at all events instilled into his manservant, his manservant's wife, the coachman and the cook, the idea that nowhere in Paris did there exist anything comparable, where comfort, luxury and attraction were concerned, to the little *hôtel*. Charles Morel had grown up in this belief. In it he had remained. And so, even on the days when he was not talking to me, if on the train I mentioned to someone the possibility of our moving, he would at once smile at me and wink knowingly, saying: 'Ah, what you need is something in the style of 40 *bis*! You'd be really comfortable there! It can be said your uncle knew what he was doing. I'm quite sure there's nothing that comes up to 40 *bis* in the whole of Paris.'

From the melancholy expression which M. de Charlus had assumed when talking about the Princesse de Cadignan, I had a clear sense that that novel had not set him thinking only about the small garden of a cousin who meant little to him. He fell into a profound reverie and, as if talking to himself: '*Les Secrets de la Princesse de Cadignan*! he exclaimed, what a masterpiece! So very profound, so very painful, and Diane's bad reputation, which she's so afraid of the man she loves finding out about! How eternally true, and more general than it may appear! There's so much to it!' M. de Charlus uttered these words with a sadness that

you felt he found not without its charm, however. Certainly, M. de Charlus, not knowing the precise extent to which his habits were or were not known, had been fearful for some time past that, once he had returned to Paris and he was seen with Morel, the latter's family might step in and his happiness be thus put in jeopardy. This eventuality had probably appeared to him hitherto only as something profoundly disagreeable and painful. But the Baron was very much the artist. And now that he had, in these past few moments, merged his own situation with that described by Balzac, he had in some sense taken refuge in the novel and, in the misfortune that perhaps threatened him, or which did not at all events fail to alarm him, he had the consolation of discovering in his own anxiety what Swann, and Saint-Loup also, would have called something 'very Balzacian'. This identification with the Princesse de Cadignan had been made easy for M. de Charlus by virtue of the mental transposition which had become habitual with him and of which he had already given various examples. This was enough, indeed, for the mere replacement of the woman, as the beloved object, by a young man, at once to set in train around the latter that whole process of social complications which develops around a normal liaison. When, for whatever reason, they introduce a change once and for all into the calendar, or into time-tables, if the year is made to start a few weeks later or midnight to strike a quarter of an hour earlier, since the days will nevertheless contain twenty-four hours and the months thirty days, everything that depends on the measurement of time will remain identical. Everything can have been changed without leading to any disturbance, since the ratio between the figures is still the same. So, too, with the lives that adopt 'Central European Time' or the Eastern calendar. It even seems that the pride we take in keeping an actress may have played a part in this particular liaison. When, from the very first day, M. de Charlus had made inquiries into Morel's origins, he had certainly learned that he was of humble extraction, but a *demi-mondaine* with whom we are in love is no less glamorous in our eyes for being a daughter of poor people. On the other hand, the well-known musicians to whom he had written – not even out of self-interest, like the friends who, when introducing Swann to Odette, had portrayed her as more difficult and more sought-after than she was – but out of the simple triteness of men in the public eye overpraising a beginner, had replied to the Baron: 'Ah, a great talent, considerable position, given how young he is, of course, much appreciated by the cognoscenti, will make his way.' And out of that obsession which people who know nothing of inversion have, to talk about masculine beauty: 'And then he looks pretty when he's playing; he does better than anyone at a concert; he has pretty hair and distinguished attitudes, his expression is ravishing, he's the very picture of a violinist.' And so M. de Charlus, over-excited in any case by Morel, who did not fail to let him know of how many propositions he was the object, was flattered to take him back with him, and to create for him a garret to which he often returned. For he wanted the rest of the time free, as was necessitated by his career, with which M. de Charlus was anxious, however much money he might have to give him, that Morel should continue, either in the very Guermantes-like belief that a man has to do something, that we are only as good as our talents, and that noble birth or money are merely the zero that multiplies a value, or because he was afraid that, if he were unoccupied and never out of his sight, the violinist might become bored. He did not want in any case to deprive himself of the pleasure he got, at certain major concerts, from telling himself: 'The man they're applauding at this moment will be at home with me tonight.' Fashionable people, when they are in love and whatever the form of that love, stake their vanity on what may destroy the advantages in which their vanity would previously have found satisfaction.

Morel, sensing that I bore him no malice, genuinely attached to M. de Charlus, and perfectly indifferent physically to both of us moreover, ended by displaying in my own case the same feelings of warm sympathy as a cocotte who knows that you do not desire her and that in you her lover has a genuine friend who will not try to make trouble between them. Not only did he talk to me exactly as Rachel, Saint-Loup's mistress, had once done, but even, judging by what M. de Charlus repeated to me, said the same things about me in my absence as Rachel had said about me to Robert. Indeed, M. de Charlus said to me: 'He's very fond of you,' like Robert: 'She's very fond of you.' And like the nephew for the sake of his mistress, it was for Morel's sake that the uncle frequently invited me to go and dine with them. There were moreover no fewer storms between them than between Robert and Rachel. It is true that Charlie (Morel) once out of the way, M. de Charlus never tired of singing his praises, repeating, what he found flattering, that the violinist was so good to him. It was noticeable nonetheless that frequently, even in front of all the faithful, Charlie wore an irritated expression instead of appearing always happy and submissive as the Baron would have wished. This irritation even got later on to the point where, in consequence of the weakness that led M. de Charlus to forgive Morel any unseemliness in his attitude, the violinist did not try to conceal it, or even affected it. I have seen M. de Charlus, on entering a railway compartment where Charlie was sitting with some of his soldier friends, greeted by a shrug of the shoulders from the musician, accompanied by a wink to his comrades. Or else he would make out he was asleep, like someone overcome by boredom at this new arrival. Or he would start to cough, the others would laugh, jokingly adopt the mincing speech of men of M. de Charlus's kind, and draw Charlie into a corner, who finally returned, as though having been forced, next to M. de Charlus, whose heart had been pierced by all these arrows. It is inconceivable that he should have borne with them; and these ever-changing forms of suffering posed once again for M. de Charlus the problem of happiness, forced him not only to demand more, but to long for something other, the previous arrangement finding itself vitiated by an awful memory. Yet, however painful these scenes were afterwards to become, it has to be acknowledged that, in the early stages, the genius of the French man of the people traced for Morel, caused him to be clothed in, charming forms of simplicity, of apparent candour, of an independent pride even that seemed inspired by disinterestedness. This was false, but the advantage of such an attitude lay all the more with Morel inasmuch as, while the one who loves is forever obliged to return to the charge, to raise the bidding, it is, on the contrary, easy for the one who does not love to follow a straight line, at once inflexible and graceful. It existed by virtue of a racial privilege in the very open face of the same Morel whose heart was so tightly closed, a face embellished by that neo-Hellenic grace which flowers in the basilicas of Champagne. For all his simulated pride, often, on catching sight of M. de Charlus at a moment when he was not expecting it, he was embarrassed for the little clan's sake, blushed and looked down, to the great delight of the Baron, who read a whole novel into it. It was a sign merely of irritation and of shame. There were times when he gave vent to the first; for however calm and strenuously proper Morel's attitude might normally be, it did not go without being frequently belied. At times even, at some remark made to him by the Baron, there would burst from Morel, in a harsh voice, an insolent riposte by which everyone was shocked. M. de Charlus would lower his head, with a sad expression, without making any answer, and, with that ability which idolatrous fathers have of believing that their children's coldness or harshness has gone unnoticed, continued just the same to sing the violinist's praises. M. de Charlus was not always so submissive, but his rebellions generally failed to achieve their end, mainly because, having lived among society people, in calculating the reactions he might evoke, he made allowance for obsequiousness, if not inborn then acquired through upbringing. But, with Morel, he came up instead against some plebeian whim of momentary indifference. Alas for M. de Charlus, he had not understood that, so far as Morel was concerned, everything else took second place to matters where the Conservatoire and the Conservatoire's good reputation (though this, which was to become more serious, was not as yet an issue) were at stake. Thus does the bourgeoisie, for example, find it easy to change their names out of vanity, great noblemen for advantage. For the young violinist, on the contrary, the name of Morel was indissolubly linked to his first prize for violin, hence any modification was out of the question. M. de Charlus would have liked Morel to have everything from him, including his name. Having remarked that Morel's first name was Charles, which resembled Charlus, and that the property where they used to meet was called Les Charmes, he sought to persuade Morel that, a pretty name agreeable to pronounce being one half of an artistic reputation, the virtuoso should not hesitate to take the name of 'Charmel', a discreet allusion to the scene of their rendezvous. Morel gave a shrug. As a clinching argument, M. de Charlus had the unfortunate idea of adding that he had a manservant of that name. All this did was to arouse the young man to a furious indignation. 'There was a time when my forebears were proud of the title of *valet de chambre*, of *maître d'hôtel* to the King – There was another time, answered Morel haughtily, when my forebears cut the throats of yours.' M. de Charlus would have been greatly surprised had he been able to imagine that, failing 'Charmel', and resigned to adopting Morel and bestowing on him one of the Guermantes family titles that he had at his disposal, but which circumstances, as we shall see, did not permit him to offer the violinist, the latter might refuse, thinking of the artistic reputation attaching to his name of Morel and to the comments that would have been made 'in class'. So far above the Faubourg Saint-Germain did he set the rue Bergère! M. de Charlus had of necessity to content himself for the present with having symbolic rings made for Morel bearing the ancient inscription, PLUS ULTRA CAROL'S.[37] Certainly, faced by an adversary of a kind of which he had no experience, M. de Charlus ought to have changed his tactics. But who is capable of that? Moreover, if M. de Charlus had moments of awkwardness, so, equally, did Morel. Far

more than the actual circumstance which brought about the rupture, what was, at least temporarily (but this temporary turned out to be final), to prove his undoing with M. de Charlus, was that there was in him not just the servility that made him grovel before any harshness and answer gentleness with insolence. Along with this servile nature there went a neurasthenia, made more complicated by his faulty upbringing, which, being aroused in circumstances where he was in the wrong or was becoming a responsibility, meant that, at the very moment when he would have needed all his kindness, all his gentleness, all his cheerfulness, to disarm the Baron, he became gloomy and quarrelsome, attempting to start arguments where he knew people did not agree with him and maintaining his own hostile point of view with a weakness of reasoning and a peremptory violence which even enhanced that weakness. For, soon running out of arguments, he would invent some nonetheless, in which he laid bare the full extent of his ignorance and stupidity. These scarcely showed through when he was being friendly and seeking only to please. Conversely, you saw nothing else during his fits of moroseness when, from having been inoffensive, they became hateful. M. de Charlus would then feel overcome and invest all his hopes in a better tomorrow, whereas Morel, forgetting that the Baron was keeping him in luxury, would give an ironic smile of pitying condescension, and say: 'I've never accepted anything from anybody. That way, I've no one I have to say a single thank you to.'

Meanwhile, and as if he were dealing with a man of the world, M. de Charlus continued to exercise his rages, whether genuine or feigned, but by now without effect. They were not always so, however. Thus one day (which belongs in fact after this early period), when the Baron was returning with Charlie and myself from a lunch at the Verdurins', and expecting to spend the late afternoon and evening with the violinist in Doncières, the latter's taking leave of him, the moment we left the train, with: 'No, I've got things to do,' caused so keen a disappointment in M. de Charlus that, although he may have tried to put a brave face on it, I saw tears melting the make-up on his eyelashes, as he remained bewildered in front of the train. Such was his grief that, since she and I were planning on ending the day in Doncières, I whispered to Albertine that I would certainly not like us to leave M. de Charlus on his own because he seemed, I had no idea why, unhappy. The dear child agreed with all her heart. I then asked M. de Charlus if he would not like me to accompany him for a little way. He, too, agreed, but refused to put my cousin to any trouble on that account. I derived a certain comfort (and no doubt for the last time, since I was resolved to break with her) from ordering her gently, as though she had been my wife: 'You go home in your direction, I'll see you again this evening,' and from hearing her, as a wife would have done, giving me permission to do as I wished, and agreeing that, if M. de Charlus, of whom she was very fond, had need of me, I should make myself available. We went, the Baron and I, he swaying his fat body, his Jesuit's eyes lowered, and I following, as far as a café, where they brought us some beer. I sensed that, in his anxiety, M. de Charlus had some plan in view. He suddenly demanded paper and ink, and began writing with a strange rapidity. As he covered sheet after sheet, his eyes were flashing with some furious daydream. Once he had written eight pages he said: 'Can I ask a great favour of you? Forgive my sealing this note. But I must. You are to take a cab, a motor-car if you can, to get there quicker. You'll certainly find Morel still in his room where he's gone to change. Poor boy, he tried to play the bully just as he was leaving us, but you may be sure that his heart is heavier than my own. You are to give him this note and, if he asks where you saw me, you will tell him that you stopped off in Doncières (which is in any case the truth) in order to see Robert (which is not, perhaps), but that you met me with someone you don't know, that I seemed to be in a furious temper, that you thought you caught something about sending seconds (I am fighting tomorrow, indeed). Above all, don't tell him that I'm asking for him, don't try to bring him back, but if he wants to come with you, don't stop him doing so. Off you go, my boy, it's for his own good, you may be averting a great drama. While you're gone, I shall write to my seconds. I have stopped you going off with your cousin. I hope she won't hold it against me, I believe so even. For hers is a noble soul and I know she's one of those women who know how not to overlook the greatness of the occasion. You must thank her on my behalf. I am personally indebted to her and it pleases me that it should be so.' I felt much pity for M. de Charlus; it seemed to me that Charlie might have prevented this duel, of which he was perhaps the cause, and I was revolted, were this the case, that he should have gone off so unfeelingly instead of assisting his patron. My indignation grew when, on arriving at the house where Morel was lodging, I recognized the violinist's voice, who, in the need he felt to broadcast his high spirits, was singing lustily: 'On Saturday evenings, after the weekly grind!'[38] If only poor M. de Charlus could have heard him, he who wanted you to believe, and himself believed no doubt, that Morel at this moment was heavy at heart! Charlie started jigging with delight when he saw me. 'Hello, *mon vieux* (forgive me calling you that, one picks up vile habits from this ghastly life in the Army), what a stroke of good luck, seeing you! I've got my evening to myself. Do please let's spend it together. We can stay here if you like that, we can take a boat out if you'd rather, we can have some music, I don't have any preference.' I told him that I was obliged to dine in Balbec, he was most anxious for me to invite him, but I refused. 'But if you're in such a hurry, why did you come? – I've brought you a note from M. de Charlus.' At that name, all his high spirits evaporated; his face contracted. 'What, he has to come pestering me even here! Then I'm a slave! Do me a kindness, *mon vieux*. I'm not opening the letter. You can tell him you couldn't find me. – Wouldn't you do better to open it? I imagine it's something serious. – No, a hundred times over, you don't know that old crook's lies, his infernal stratagems. It's a device to get me to go and see him. Well, I'm not going, I want a peaceful evening. – But isn't there a duel tomorrow, I asked Morel, whom I had supposed was in the know. – A duel? he said, looking stupefied. I've not heard a word about that. And anyway, I don't give a damn, that disgusting old man can happily go and get himself massacred if he wants. But hold on, you intrigue me, I'm going to take a look at his letter all the same. You can tell him you left it on the off-chance in case I came home.' As Morel was talking, I was gazing in amazement at the splendid books that M. de Charlus had given him and which were cluttering the room. The violinist having refused those that bore 'I belong to the Baron' and the like, a device that he found insulting to himself, as signifying possession, the Baron, with that sentimental ingenuity in which an unhappy love takes pleasure, had varied it by others, originating with his forebears, but ordered from the binder's according to the circumstances of a melancholy affection. Sometimes these were brief and confident, such as '*Spes mea*' or '*Exspectata non eludet*';[39] sometimes merely resigned, such as '*J'attendrai*';[40] some were gallant: '*Mesmes plaisirs du mestre*',[41] or recommending chastity, like that borrowed from the Simiane, semy of towers azure and fleurs-de-lis, and twisted as to its meaning: '*Sustentant lilia turres*';[42] others finally, despairing and fixing a rendez-vous in Heaven with him who had wanted nothing to do with him on earth: '*Manet ultima caelo*';[43] and, finding the bunch of grapes he had been unable to reach too green, and pretending not to have been seeking for what he had not obtained, in one of them M. de Charlus had said: '*Non mortale quod opto*'.[44] But I did not have time to look at them all.

If, in dashing this letter down on paper, M. de Charlus seemed to have fallen prey to the demon of inspiration that was causing his pen to fly, the moment Morel had broken the seal, '*Atavis et armis*',[45] charged with a leopard accompanied by two roses gules, he began to read with a feverishness as great as that which M. de Charlus had shown when writing, and his eyes travelled no less quickly across these hastily scrawled pages than had the Baron's pen. 'Oh, my God, he exclaimed, that's all it needed. But where can I find him? God knows where he is now.' I hinted that, by hurrying, he would still find him perhaps at a brasserie, where he had asked for beer in order to recompose himself. 'I don't know whether I'll be coming back,' he said to his housekeeper, and added *in petto*: 'It'll depend on how things turn out.' A few minutes later, we arrived at the café. I observed M. de Charlus's expression at the moment he caught sight of me. Finding that I had not returned alone, I had the feeling that breath, that life itself, had been restored to him. Being in a mood that evening not to be able to do without Morel, he had invented that it had been reported to him that two of the regimental officers had slandered him in connection with the violinist, and that he was going to send his seconds to them. Morel had glimpsed the scandal, his life in the regiment made impossible, and had come running. In which he was not altogether wrong. For, to make his falsehood more plausible, M. de Charlus had already written to two friends (one was Cottard) to ask them to be his seconds. And had the violinist not come, it is certain that, out of control as he was, M. de Charlus (to turn his unhappiness into rage) would have sent them at random to some officer or other, whom he would have found solace in fighting. In the meantime, M. de Charlus, reminding himself that he was of purer stock than the House of France, told himself that it was very good of him to be thus fretting and fuming for the son of a *maître d'hôtel*, with whose master he would not have deigned to associate. On the other hand, if he now took pleasure in consorting with hardly anyone except debauchees, the latter's ingrained habit of not answering letters and of failing to keep an assignation, without warning, and without apologizing afterwards, produced so many emotions in him, since a love affair was often involved, and the rest of the time caused him so much irritation, inconvenience and rage, that there were times when he felt nostalgia for the multiplicity of

letters about nothing at all and the scrupulous exactitude of ambassadors and princes, who, though, sadly, they might have no attraction for him, yet afforded him a sort of respite. Accustomed to Morel's ways, and knowing how little hold he had over him and how incapable he was of insinuating himself into a life in which vulgar companionships, consecrated by habit, took up too much space and time for an hour to be set aside for the evicted, proud and vainly imploring nobleman, M. de Charlus was so convinced that the musician would not come, was so afraid of having caused a permanent rift between them by overstepping the mark, that it was all he could do to stifle a cry when he saw him. But feeling himself victorious, he insisted on dictating the peace terms and on himself extracting such advantages as he could. 'What have you come here for? he said. And you? he added, looking at me, I specifically told you not to bring me him back. – He didn't want to bring me,' said Morel, rolling towards M. de Charlus, in his artless coquettishness, conventionally sad and languorously old-fashioned glances, with an expression he no doubt thought irresistible, of wanting to kiss the Baron and longing to burst into tears. 'It's I who came in spite of him. I've come in the name of our friendship, to implore you on both knees not to commit this folly.' M. de Charlus was delirious with joy. The reaction was almost too much for his nerves; in spite of which he retained control of them. 'The friendship which you invoke somewhat inopportunely, he replied curtly, ought on the contrary to make you approve of me when I do not think I should allow the impertinences of a fool to go unchecked. In any case, if I wanted to obey the entreaties of an affection that I have known better inspired, it would no longer be in my power to do so, my letters to my seconds have gone and I don't doubt their accepting. You have always behaved towards me like a young imbecile and, instead of priding yourself, as you had a right to do, on the predilection I had shown you, instead of letting that rabble of non-commissioned officers and domestic servants amongst whom military law obliges you to live see what a source of incomparable pride a friendship such as mine was for you, you sought to apologize, to make a stupid virtue almost out of being insufficiently grateful. I know that in this, he added, so as not to let it be seen how deeply humiliated he had been by certain scenes, you are guilty only of allowing yourself to be led on by the jealousy of others. But how, at your age, can you be such a child (and a rather badly brought-up child) as not to have guessed straight away that your election by me and all the advantages that would result from it for you were going to stir up jealousy, that all your comrades, while they were egging you on to quarrel with me, would be working to take your place? I did not see fit to warn you of the letters I have received in that connection from all those whom you trust the most. I despise the overtures of these flunkeys just as I do their ineffectual mockery. The one person who concerns me is you, because I am very fond of you, but affection has its limits, as you should have suspected.' However harsh the word 'flunkey' might sound in the ears of Morel, whose father had been one, indeed precisely because his father had been one, the explanation of every social misadventure by 'jealousy', a simplistic and absurd explanation, yet hard-wearing and which, among a certain class, always 'takes', just as unfailingly as do old tricks of the trade with audiences in the theatre, or the threat of the clerical menace in political assemblies,[46] found almost as ready an acceptance with him as with Françoise or Mme de Guermantes's servants, for whom it was the one source of humanity's misfortunes. He did not doubt that his comrades had been trying to nab his place and was all the more unhappy about this calamitous, albeit imaginary duel. 'Oh, I despair! exclaimed Charlie. I shan't survive it. But aren't they to see you before they go and find this officer? – I don't know, I think so, yes. I sent to tell one of them I'd be remaining here this evening and I shall give him my instructions. – I hope between now and him coming to make you hear reason; just allow me to remain here with you,' Morel asked him fondly. This was all that M. de Charlus had wanted. He did not give in straight away. 'You'd be wrong to apply here the proverbial "Spare the rod and spoil the child", for it's you who are the child and I intend to use the rod, even after our quarrel, on those who tried despicably to do you harm. Up until now, to their prying insinuations, daring to ask me how a man like myself could consort with a gigolo of your sort, risen from nowhere, my one response was the motto of my La Rochefoucauld cousins, "*C'est mon plaisir*".[47] I have even stressed to you more than once that this pleasure was susceptible of becoming my greatest pleasure, without your arbitrary elevation resulting in my own abasement.' And in an almost insane impulse of pride, he exclaimed, raising his arms: '*Tantus ab uno splendor!*'[48] To condescend is not to descend, he added, more calmly, after this delirium of pride and joy. I hope at least that my two adversaries, despite the inequality of rank, are of a blood that I can cause to flow without shame. I have made discreet enquiries in that regard which have reassured me. If you retained any gratitude to me, you ought on the contrary to be proud to see that, because of you, I am recovering the bellicose temperament of my forebears, saying like them, in the event of a fatal outcome, now that I have realized what a young rogue you are, "*Mort m'est vie*".'[49] And M. de Charlus spoke with sincerity, not only out of love for Morel, but because a liking for combat that he innocently believed he had got from his forefathers put him in such good heart at the thought of fighting that he would now have felt regret at giving up this duel, originally contrived only in order to get Morel to come. He had never had an affair of honour without at once seeing himself as valorous and identifying himself with the celebrated Connétable de Guermantes, whereas for anyone else this same act of taking the field would have seemed of the utmost insignificance. 'I think it'll be very beautiful, he said to us, with sincerity, intoning each word. To see Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, what is that? Excrement. Mounet-Sully in *Oedipus*?[50] Excrement. It acquires at most a certain pallor of transfiguration when it takes place in the Arena in Nîmes. But what is it compared with that unprecedented thing, of seeing the actual descendant of the Connétable do battle?' At the mere thought of which, M. de Charlus, unable to contain his delight, began to perform *contre-de-quartes* reminiscent of Molière,[51] leading us to move our beer-glasses closer for safety, and to fear that the first clash of blades might wound the adversaries, the doctor and the seconds. 'What a tempting spectacle it would be for a painter! You who know M. Elstir, he said to me, you should bring him along.' I replied that he was not on the coast. M. de Charlus hinted that he might be sent a telegram. 'Oh, I say that for his sake, he added, faced by my silence. It's always interesting for a master – in my opinion, he is one – to capture such an example of ethnic revivescence. There's perhaps only one a century.'

But if M. de Charlus was enchanted by the prospect of a fight that he had at first thought purely fictitious, Morel was reflecting in terror on the rumours which, thanks to the stir that the duel would make, might be hawked all the way from the regimental band to the temple in the rue Bergère. Already seeing his 'class' knowing everything, he became more and more insistent with M. de Charlus, who continued to gesticulate before the heady prospect of fighting. He implored the Baron to allow him not to leave him until the next day but one, the supposed day of the duel, so as to keep him in sight and try to make him hear the voice of reason. So affectionate a proposal overcame M. de Charlus's last hesitations. He said that he would try to find a way out, that he would defer a final decision until the next day but one. In this way, by not settling the matter all at once, M. de Charlus would be able to keep Charlie for two days at least and use them to obtain from him undertakings for the future in exchange for his giving up the duel, an exercise which in itself, he said, enchanted him, and which he would not forgo without regret. And in this, moreover, he was being sincere, for he had always found pleasure in taking the field when it was a matter of crossing steel or exchanging shots with an adversary. Cottard finally arrived although having been much delayed, for, overjoyed to be acting as a second but even more excited, he had been obliged to stop at every café and farmhouse along the way, asking whether they would be kind enough to direct him to 'No. 100' or the 'the smallest room'. The moment he was there, the Baron led him off into a room apart, for he thought it more in keeping with the rules that Charlie and I should not be present at their interview, and he excelled in the temporary appointment of some nondescript room as a throne-room or debating chamber. Once alone with Cottard, he thanked him warmly, but declared that it was likely that the remark retailed had not in actual fact been made, and that in these circumstances the Doctor might be so good as to warn the other second that, barring possible complications, the incident was considered as closed. The danger receding, Cottard was disappointed. He even wanted momentarily to display anger, but remembered that one of his mentors, who had enjoyed the most successful medical career of his day, having failed to get into the Académie the first time by only two votes, had put a brave face on things and gone to shake the hand of his successful rival. And so the Doctor dispensed with an expression of pique that would no longer have changed anything and, after muttering, he the most fearful of men, that there are some things that one cannot let pass, he added that it was better this way, that this solution delighted him. M. de Charlus, anxious to evince his gratitude to the Doctor, in the same way as M. le Duc his brother might have arranged the collar of my father's overcoat, or a duchess above all have put an arm round the waist of some woman of the people, brought his chair up close to that of the Doctor, in spite of the distaste with which the latter filled him. And not only without any physical pleasure, but overcoming a physical revulsion, as a Guermantes, not as an invert, in order to take leave of the Doctor he held his hand and stroked it for a moment, with the kindness of a master fondling the muzzle of his horse and giving it a lump of sugar. Cottard, however, who had never allowed the Baron to see

that he had heard even the vaguest dark rumours circulating as to his habits, but nevertheless saw him, in his heart of hearts, as forming part of the class of the 'abnormal' (with his usual terminological impropriety, and in the most serious tone, he even used to say of one of M. Verdurin's manservants: 'Isn't he the Baron's mistress?'), persons of whom he had scant experience, imagined that this stroking of his hand was the immediate prelude to a rape, for the accomplishment of which, the duel having served merely as a pretext, he had been drawn into an ambush and led by the Baron into this lonely saloon, where he was about to be taken by force. Not daring to leave his chair, to which fear kept him rooted, he rolled his eyes in alarm, as though he had fallen into the hands of a savage whom he was not altogether certain might not feed off human flesh. Finally, M. de Charlus letting go his hand, and wishing to be affable to the bitter end: 'You'll take a little something with us, as they say, what in the old days was called a mazagran or a gloria,[52] drinks you now meet with, except as archaeological curiosities, only in the plays of Labiche and the cafés of Doncières. A "gloria" would be quite appropriate to the setting, would it not? And to the occasion, what d'you say? – I am President of the Anti-Alcohol League, replied Cottard. It would only need some provincial quack to come past, for them to say I don't practise what I preach. *Os homini sublime dedit caelumque tueri*',[53] he added, although there was no connection, but because his stock of Latin quotations was somewhat meagre, if adequate for impressing his students. M. de Charlus gave a shrug and brought Cottard back to us, having demanded from him a confidentiality that mattered all the more to him inasmuch as, the motive for the abortive duel being purely imaginary, it had to be prevented from reaching the ears of the officer thus arbitrarily accused. As we were all four of us drinking, Mme Cottard, who had been waiting for her husband outside, in front of the door, and whom M. de Charlus had certainly seen, but had not troubled to bring in, entered and bid the Baron good day, who held out his hand to her as if to a chambermaid, without moving from his chair, partly as a king receiving homage, partly as a snob who does not want a less than fashionable woman to sit down at his table, partly as an egotist who takes pleasure in being alone with his friends and does not wish to be intruded on. Mme Cottard remained standing therefore, talking to M. de Charlus and her husband. But perhaps because politeness, the 'done thing', is not the exclusive privilege of the Guermantes, but may suddenly illuminate and guide the most uncertain brains, or because, having frequently been unfaithful to his wife, there were moments when Cottard, by a sort of requital, felt the need to protect her against whoever was being disrespectful to her, the Doctor suddenly gave a frown, something that I had never seen him do, and without consulting M. de Charlus, magisterially: 'Come, Léontine, don't stay standing up, sit down. – But am I not disturbing you?' Mme Cottard asked M. de Charlus timidly, who, taken aback by the Doctor's tone, had made no answer. And, not allowing him a second opportunity, Cottard went on authoritatively: 'I told you to sit down.'

A moment or two later, we broke up and then M. de Charlus said to Morel: 'I conclude from this whole business, which has ended better than you deserved, that you do not know how to conduct yourself, and that at the end of your military service I shall take you back myself to your father, as did the Archangel Raphael, sent by God to the young Tobias.'[54] And the Baron began to smile with an air of grandeur, and a delight that Morel, who found scant pleasure in the prospect of being thus taken home, did not seem to share. In the headiness of likening himself to the Archangel, and Morel to the son of Tobit, M. de Charlus had lost sight of the object of his remark, which had been to test the ground to learn whether, as he wanted, Morel would consent to go with him to Paris. Intoxicated by his love, or by his vanity, the Baron did not see, or pretended not to see, the face that the violinist pulled, for, having left the latter on his own in the café, he said to me with an arrogant smile: 'Did you notice, when I compared him to the son of Tobit, how delirious with joy he was? That's because, highly intelligent as he is, he realized at once that the Father with whom he was going henceforth to live, was not his father according to the flesh, who must be some frightful moustachioed manservant, but his spiritual father, that is to say Myself. How glorious for him! How proudly he drew back his head! What joy he felt at having realized! I'm sure he'll repeat every day: "O God who didst give the blessed Archangel Raphael to be a *guide* to Thy servant Tobias on a long journey, grant to us, Thy servants, that we may be always protected by him and armed with his succour." I had no need even, added the Baron, strongly persuaded that he would one day sit before the Throne of God, to tell him that I was the heavenly messenger, he realized that for himself and was speechless with happiness!' And M. de Charlus (who, on the contrary, had not been deprived of the power of speech by happiness), unconcerned by the few passers-by who looked round, thinking they had a lunatic on their hands, exclaimed all alone and at the top of his voice, raising his hands, 'Alleluia!'

This reconciliation put an end to M. de Charlus's torments only for a time; often Morel, having left on manoeuvres, too far away for M. de Charlus to be able to go and visit him, or send me to talk to him, would write the Baron fond and despairing letters, in which he assured him that he would have to put an end to his life because some frightful affair meant that he needed twenty-five thousand francs. He did not say what the frightful affair was, and had he done so, it would no doubt have been a fabrication. As for the money itself, M. de Charlus would willingly have sent it had he not felt that this would have provided Charlie with the means of dispensing with him and also of enjoying the favours of someone else. Thus he refused, and his telegrams had the curt, sharp-edged tone of his voice. Once he was certain of their effect, he wished that Morel might have fallen out with him for good, for, convinced that it was the opposite that would materialize, he was made aware of all the disadvantages that would be reborn from this inevitable liaison. But if no reply came from Morel, he could no longer sleep, he no longer knew a moment's peace of mind, so many in number indeed are the things that we experience without knowing them, and the profound inner realities that remain hidden from us. He then entertained all manner of suppositions as to the enormity which had led to Morel having need of twenty-five thousand francs, he made it take every form and attached many proper names to it one after the other. I believe that at such moments, M. de Charlus (and although by that time his snobbery was on the decline, and had already been caught up, if not overtaken, by the growing curiosity the Baron felt towards the common people) must have recalled with a certain nostalgia the graceful, variegated whirl of social gatherings at which the most charming men and women sought him out only for the disinterested pleasure that he afforded them, and where no one would have dreamed of 'taking him for a ride', or of inventing some 'frightful affair' for which one is ready to put an end to one's days unless one is in immediate receipt of twenty-five thousand francs. I believe that, and perhaps because he had all the same remained more a man of Combray than had I, and had grafted a feudal pride on to German arrogance, he must then have discovered that you do not become the fancy man of a domestic servant with impunity, that the common people are not quite the same thing as society, and 'did not have confidence' in the people as I myself always have.

The little train's next stop, Maineville, reminds me indeed of an incident relating to Morel and M. de Charlus. Before speaking of it, I ought to say that the stop in Maineville (when you were conducting a fashionable new arrival to Balbec who, so as not to be in the way, preferred not to stay at La Raspelière) was the occasion of scenes less painful than the one that I shall recount in a moment. The new arrival, having his hand baggage in the train, generally found the Grand-Hôtel rather too far away, but since, before Balbec, there were only small beach resorts with uncomfortable villas, he had, out of a taste for luxury and well-being, resigned himself to the long journey when, just as the train came to a stop in Maineville, he saw, suddenly looming up, the Palace, which he could not have suspected was a house of prostitution. 'Don't let's go any further, he would invariably say to Mme Cottard, a woman known for being of a practical bent and for her sound advice. That's exactly what I need. What's the point of going all the way to Balbec, where it certainly won't be any better? Simply from the look of it, I adjudge it'll have every comfort; I could perfectly well bring Mme Verdurin there, for, in return for her civility, I count on giving a few small gatherings in her honour. She won't have so far to travel as if I stay in Balbec. This strikes me as exactly right for her, and for your wife, my dear Professor. They must have private rooms, we'll bring the ladies here. Between ourselves, I don't know why, instead of leasing La Raspelière, Mme Verdurin didn't come and live here. It's a lot healthier than old houses like La Raspelière, which is bound to be damp, without being clean for that matter; they don't have hot water, one can't wash as one would like to. Maineville strikes me as far pleasanter. Mme Verdurin could have played her role of Patronne there to perfection. Everyone to his own taste anyway, I shall establish myself here, Madame Cottard, will you not alight with me? Wasting no time, for it won't be long before the train leaves again. You must pilot me into the establishment, which will be yours and which you must have often frequented. It's a setting simply made for you.' We had the utmost difficulty in silencing the luckless newcomer and above all in preventing him from alighting, for, with the obstinacy that often emanates from a gaffe, he would insist, would pick up his suitcases and refuse to hear another word until he had been assured that neither Mme Verdurin nor Mme Cottard would come and visit him there. 'At all events, I shall elect domicile there. Mme Verdurin will only have to write to me there.'

The recollection concerning Morel relates to an incident of a more particular order. There were others, but I shall content myself here, as the 'meanderer' comes to a halt and the porter shouts out Doncières, Grattevast,[55] Maineville, etc., with noting what the small beach resort or garrison evokes for me. I have already spoken of Maineville (*media villa*) and of the importance it had acquired on account of the sumptuous house of prostitution that had recently been constructed there, not without exciting futile protests from the mothers. But before saying how Maineville comes to be linked in my memory to Morel and M. de Charlus, I must note the disproportion (which I shall have to go into more thoroughly later) between the importance that Morel attached to keeping certain hours free and the insignificance of the occupations to which he claimed to devote them, this same disproportion being found again amidst the explanations of another kind that he gave to M. de Charlus. He, who played at being disinterested with the Baron (and could do so without risk, given his patron's generosity), when he wanted to have the evening to himself, in order to give a lesson, and so on, did not fail to add to his excuse these words, spoken with an avaricious smile: 'Besides, it may earn me forty francs. That's not nothing. Allow me to go there, because you can see it's in my interest. I mean, I don't have a private income like you, I've a position to make, it's time to be earning a few sous.' In wanting to give his lesson, Morel was not being altogether insincere. For one thing, to say that money has no colour is untrue. A new means of earning it can make coins grown dull with use shine like new. Had he really gone out for the sake of a lesson, it is possible that two louis handed him on leaving by a pupil would have affected him differently from two louis fallen from the hand of M. de Charlus. And then the wealthiest of men would journey miles for the sake of two louis, which become leagues when you are the son of a manservant. But M. de Charlus often had his doubts as to the reality of the violin lesson, made all the stronger by the fact that the musician often invoked pretexts of another kind, of an entirely disinterested order materially speaking, and in any case absurd. Morel could thus not help presenting a picture of his life, but intentionally, as well as unintentionally, of such murkiness that certain bits of it alone let themselves be clearly seen. For a whole month, he placed himself at M. de Charlus's disposal on condition that he had his evenings free, for he wanted to keep up with a course of lectures on algebra. Come and see M. de Charlus afterwards? Ah, that was impossible, the lectures sometimes went on very late. 'Past two in the morning even? asked the Baron. – Sometimes. – But you can learn algebra just as easily from a book. – Even more easily, because I don't understand much at the lectures. – Well then? Anyway, algebra's not going to be of any use to you. – I love it. It drives away my neurasthenia.' 'It can't be algebra which makes him ask for leave at nights, M. de Charlus said to himself. Can he be attached to the police?' At all events, Morel, whatever objections might be raised, reserved certain late hours, whether on account of the algebra or of the violin. On one occasion, it was neither one nor the other, but the Prince de Guermantes who, having come to spend a few days on the coast to pay a visit to the Duchess of Luxembourg, encountered the musician, without knowing who he was and without being known to him, and offered him fifty francs to spend the night together at the house of prostitution in Maineville; a twofold pleasure, where Morel was concerned, of the profit he would make out of M. de Guermantes and the voluptuousness of being surrounded by women whose dark-skinned breasts were displayed quite openly. Somehow or other, M. de Charlus had an idea of what had transpired and where, but not of the seducer. Frantic with jealousy, and to know who this latter was, he telegraphed to Jupien, who arrived two days later, and when, at the beginning of the following week, Morel announced that he would again be absent, the Baron asked Jupien if he would undertake to bribe the madam of the establishment and arrange that Jupien and he be hidden in order to witness the scene. 'Understood. Leave it to me, my little charmer,' Jupien replied to the Baron. It is hard to credit the extent to which his anxiety had disturbed, and by the same token had even momentarily enriched, M. de Charlus's mind. Love causes these veritable geological upheavals in our thoughts. In those of M. de Charlus, which, a few days before, had resembled a plain so smooth that, away into the distance, he would not have been able to spot an idea lying on the surface, there had abruptly arisen, hard as stone, a mountain massif, but of mountains so sculpted it was as if some statuary, instead of carrying the marble away, had carved it where it lay, and where there writhed, in giant, titanic groups, Fury, Jealousy, Curiosity, Envy, Hatred, Suffering, Pride, Terror and Love.

The evening on which Morel was to be absent had meanwhile arrived. Jupien's mission had been successful. He and the Baron were to go there around eleven o'clock at night and they would be hidden. Three streets before reaching this magnificent house of prostitution (to which they came from all the fashionable places round about), M. de Charlus was walking on tiptoe, disguising his voice and begging Jupien to lower his voice, in case Morel should hear them from inside. But, the moment he made his stealthy entrance into the hallway, M. de Charlus, who had little experience of places of this sort, found himself, to his terror and amazement, in a place noisier than the Bourse or the Hôtel des Ventes.[56] It was in vain that he recommended the soubrettes who were crowding round him to talk more quietly; their voices were being drowned in any case by the noise of lots being cried and knocked down, made by an old *sous-maîtresse*,[57] with a very dark wig and a face creased with the gravity of a lawyer or a Spanish priest, and who, with a noise like thunder, was forever coming out, as she allowed doors to be alternately opened and closed again, like someone controlling the traffic, with: 'Put Monsieur in No. 28, in the Spanish room.' 'No more to go in.' 'Open the door again, these gentlemen are asking for Mlle Noémie. She's waiting for them in the Persian saloon.' M. de Charlus was as terrified as a provincial having to cross the boulevards; and, to choose a comparison infinitely less sacrilegious than the subject portrayed on the capitals in the porch of the old church in Couliville, the voices of the young maids tirelessly repeated, in a lower register, the *sous-maîtresse*'s orders, like the catechisms you can hear schoolchildren chanting in the sonority of a country church. Alarmed though he was, M. de Charlus, who, in the street, had been fearful of being overheard, having persuaded himself that Morel was at the window, was perhaps less frightened even so amidst the bellowing on these immense staircases, where you realized that from the bedrooms nothing could be seen. Finally, his calvary at an end, he found Mlle Noémie, who was to hide him together with Jupien, but who began by shutting him in a very sumptuous Persian saloon from where he could see nothing. She told him that Morel had asked for a drink of orangeade and that as soon as he had been served it, the two travellers would be taken into a viewing room. Meanwhile, since she was being asked for, she promised them, like in a folk-tale, that to help them pass the time, she would send them in 'an intelligent little lady'. For she herself was being sent for. The intelligent little lady wore a Persian wrap which she wanted to take off. M. de Charlus asked her to do nothing of the sort, and she had champagne brought up that cost forty francs a bottle. In point of fact, during this time, Morel was with the Prince de Guermantes; he had, for form's sake, made a pretence of mistaking the room, and had gone into one in which there were two women, who had made haste to leave the two gentlemen to themselves. M. de Charlus knew nothing of all this, but was cursing and trying to open doors, and he asked for Mlle Noémie again, who, having overheard the intelligent little lady giving M. de Charlus details concerning Morel that did not accord with those that she herself had given Jupien, sent her packing and quickly sent in, as a replacement for the intelligent little lady, 'a nice little lady', who did not show them anything either, but told them what a responsible establishment it was and likewise asked for champagne. The Baron, fuming, got Mlle Noémie back once more, who told them: 'Yes, it's a bit long-winded, the ladies are adopting poses, he doesn't look as though he wants to do anything. At last, faced by the Baron's promises, and his threats, Mlle Noémie went off looking annoyed, assuring them they would not have to wait more than another five minutes. These five minutes lasted for an hour, after which Noémie led a M. de Charlus mad with rage and a despondent Jupien stealthily towards a door that was ajar, telling them: 'You'll have a very good view. On the other hand, it's not very interesting at present, he's with three ladies, he's telling them about his life in the Army.' Finally, the Baron was able to see through the gap in the door, as well as in the mirrors. But a mortal terror forced him to lean against the wall. It was indeed Morel that he had before him but, as though the pagan mysteries and enchantments still existed, it was the shade of Morel rather, Morel embalmed, not even Morel resuscitated like Lazarus, an apparition of Morel, a spectral Morel, Morel revenant or conjured up in this room (where the walls and divans everywhere repeated emblems of sorcery), who was a few metres away from him, in profile. Morel was, as after death, drained of colour; between the women, with whom it seemed he should have been disporting himself joyously, livid, he remained frozen in an artificial immobility; in order to drink the goblet of champagne that stood in front of him, his lifeless arm tried slowly to reach out and fell back. You got the impression of that equivocation where a religion talks of immortality, but means by it something that does not exclude nothingness. The women were plying him with questions: 'You see, said Mlle Noémie in a low voice to the Baron, they're talking to him about his life in the Army, amusing, isn't it? – and she laughed – are you satisfied? He's peaceful, isn't he?' she added, as she might have said of a dying man. The women plied him with questions but Morel, inanimate, did not have the strength to answer them. The miracle of even one murmured word did not occur. M. de

Charlus knew only a moment's hesitation before grasping the truth, that, whether it was Jupien's gaucheness when going to make the arrangements, or the potentiality of secrets to expand once confided, which means that they are never kept, or the indiscreet natures of the women, or fear of the police, Morel had been warned that two gentlemen had paid a lot of money in order to watch him, and they had brought out the Prince de Guermantes metamorphosed into three women, and so positioned poor Morel, quaking and paralysed by stupefaction, that, if M. de Charlus could see him only with difficulty, he, terror-stricken, incapable of speech, not daring to pick up his glass for fear of dropping it, had a clear view of the Baron.

Nor did the story end any more happily for the Prince de Guermantes. When he had been made to leave so that M. de Charlus might not see him, furious at this setback, but unsuspecting of who was behind it, he had pleaded with Morel, though still unwilling to let him know who he was, to fix a rendezvous for the following night in a small villa that he had rented and which, despite the short time he would be staying there, he had, in accordance with the same obsessive habit as we have earlier remarked in Mme de Villeparisis, decorated with a number of family mementos, so as to feel more at home. The next day, therefore, Morel, looking behind him the whole time, fearful of being followed and spied on by M. de Charlus, had finally, not having observed any suspicious passers-by, entered the villa. A valet showed him into the drawing-room, saying that he would go and inform Monsieur (his master had warned him not to utter the word 'Prince' for fear of arousing suspicion). But once Morel found himself alone and wanted to look in the mirror, to see whether his lock of hair might have been disarranged, it was like a hallucination. On the mantelpiece, the photographs, recognizable to the violinist, he having seen them at M. de Charlus's, of the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchess of Luxembourg and Mme de Villeparisis, petrified him at first with fright. At the same moment, he caught sight of that of M. de Charlus, which stood a little further back. The Baron seemed to have immobilized Morel with a strange, fixed stare. Wild with terror, Morel, recovering from his initial stupefaction, and not doubting that this was an ambush into which M. de Charlus had led him as a test of his fidelity, tumbled down the villa's few steps four at a time, and began running as fast as his legs could carry him along the road, so that when the Prince de Guermantes (after believing that he had made this passing acquaintance serve his period of probation, and not without wondering whether it was altogether wise and whether the individual in question might not be dangerous) entered the drawing-room, he found no one there any longer. In vain did he explore with his valet and, for fear of burglars, revolver in hand, the whole house, which was not large, every corner of the little garden and the basement, the companion whose presence he had thought certain had vanished. He came across him several times in the course of the following week. But each time it was Morel, the dangerous individual, who ran off, as if the Prince had been more dangerous still. Immovable in his suspicions, Morel never dispelled them, and even in Paris the sight of the Prince de Guermantes was enough to cause him to turn tail. Whereby M. de Charlus was protected against an infidelity that made him despair, and avenged, without ever having imagined it, or above all in what way.

But already the memories of what had been retailed to me on this matter are being replaced by others, for the *T.S.N.*, resuming its snail-like progress, is continuing to set down and pick up passengers at the next stations.

At Grattevast, where his sister lived, with whom he had gone to spend the afternoon, there sometimes got in M. Pierre de Verjus, Comte de Crécy (who was known simply as the Comte de Crécy), a poor but extremely distinguished member of the gentry whom I had met through the Cambremers, with whom, however, he was by no means intimate. As he was reduced to an exceedingly modest, almost impoverished, way of life, I felt that a cigar and a 'glass of something' were things so agreeable to him that I acquired the habit, on the days when I was unable to meet Albertine, of inviting him to Balbec. Very discerning, expressing himself beautifully, his hair quite white, with charming blue eyes, he talked above all, in an artificial way, very tactfully, about the comforts of the seigneurial life, which he had evidently known, as well as about genealogies. When I asked him what was engraved on his ring, he told me, smiling modestly: 'It's a sprig of verjuice.' And he added with the pleasure of a wine-taster: 'Our arms are a branch of verjuice – symbolic since my name is Verjus – stalked and foliated vert.' But I fancy he would have felt disappointment if, in Balbec, I had offered him only verjuice to drink. He liked the most expensive wines, from deprivation no doubt, and a profound knowledge of what he had been deprived of, from taste, perhaps also from a propensity for exaggeration. Thus, when I invited him to dinner in Balbec, he would order the meal with a knowledgeable refinement, but ate rather too much, and above all drank, making them serve the wines that need it at room temperature, and chill those that demand to be put on ice. Before dinner and after, he would indicate the date or the number he wanted for a port or a *fine*, as he might have done for the generally unknown raising of a marquisate, with which he was also familiar.

As I was for Aimé a favourite guest, he was overjoyed that I should be giving these extra dinners and would shout to the waiters: 'Quick, get table 25 ready'; he did not say 'get' even but 'get me', as though it had been for him. And since the language of *maîtres d'hôtel* is not altogether the same as that of *chefs de rang, demi-chefs*, commis and so on, just as I was asking for the bill, he would say to the waiter who had been serving us, with a repeated, soothing gesture with the back of his hand, as though he were trying to quieten a horse preparing to take the bit between its teeth: 'Don't rush things (over the bill), gently, very gently does it.' Then, as the waiter went off, armed with this *aide-mémoire*, Aimé, fearing that his injunctions might not be strictly adhered to, called him back: 'Wait, I'm going to reckon it up myself.' And as I was telling him that it was no matter: 'I hold it as a principle that, in the common parlance, one mustn't fleece a guest.' As for the manager, seeing my guest's simple clothes, always the same and somewhat threadbare (yet no one would have been more adept at the art of dressing ostentatiously, like one of Balzac's dandies, had he had the means), he contented himself, on my account, with inspecting from a distance to see that everything was in order, and by a glance, getting a wedge set beneath one of the legs of the table which was not level. It was not that he would have been unable, although he had concealed his origins as a dishwasher, to lend a hand like anyone else. It required some exceptional circumstance, however, for him one day to carve the guinea-fowls himself. I had gone out but I learned that he had done so with a sacerdotal majesty, surrounded, at a respectful distance from the sideboard, by a ring of waiters less intent on learning thereby than on letting themselves be seen, and who appeared vacuously admiring. Seen, however, by the manager (plunging with a slow gesture into the flanks of his victims, and no more removing from them eyes imbued with his high office than if an augury were to be read there), they were not. The sacrificer did not even remark my own absence. When he learned of it, he was desolate. 'What, you didn't see me carve the guinea-fowls myself?' I replied that, having not been able thus far to see Rome, Venice, Siena, the Prado, the Dresden museum, India, or Sarah in *Phèdre*, I knew all about resignation and that I would add his carving of the guinea-fowls to my list. The comparison with the dramatic art (Sarah in *Phèdre*) was the only one he appeared to understand, for he knew through me that, on days of gala performances, the elder Coquelin[58] had accepted beginners' roles, even that of a character who has only one line or no lines at all. 'It's no matter, I'm distressed for your sake. When shall I carve again? It would require an event, it would require a war.' (It required in fact the Armistice.) From that day forward, the calendar was changed, and was reckoned thus: 'It was the day after the day when I carved the guinea-fowls myself.' 'It was a week to the day after the manager carved the guinea-fowls himself.' This prosectomy thus provided, like the birth of Christ or the Hegira, the starting-point for a calendar different from the others, but which did not achieve their extension nor match their duration.

The sadness of M. de Crécy's life derived, equally as much as from his no longer keeping horses or a succulent table, from rubbing shoulders only with people capable of believing that Cambremer and Guermantes were all one. When he found that I knew that Legrandin, who now styled himself Legrand de Méséglise, had no sort of title to it, and being inflamed moreover by the wine he was drinking, he experienced a sort of transport of delight. His sister used to say to me with a knowing look: 'My brother's never so happy as when he can talk with you.' He had felt himself to exist indeed since discovering someone who knew how second-rate the Cambremers were, and how grand the Guermantes, someone for whom the social world existed. Just so, following a conflagration of all the libraries on the globe, and the rise of a wholly ignorant race, might an old Latinist regain his footing and his trust in life on hearing someone quote him a line from Horace. And so, if he never left the compartment without saying to me: 'When's our next little get-together to be?', it was as much from the gourmandise of a scholar as the avidity of a parasite, and because he saw these Balbec agapes as an opportunity to talk, at the same time, about subjects close to his heart that he could not talk about with anyone else, and analogous in this to the dinners at which the Société des Bibliophiles gathers, on certain fixed dates, at the especially succulent board of the Cercle de l'Union.[59] Very unassuming where his own family was concerned, it was not through M. de Crécy that I learned that it was very

grand and a genuine offshoot in France of the English family that bears the title of Crécy. When I learned that he was a true Crécy, I told him that a niece of Mme de Guermantes had married an American by the name of Charles Crécy and said that I supposed there was no connection with himself. 'None, he said. Any more than – though my family's not so very illustrious in any case – the many Americans calling themselves Montgommery, Berry, Chandos or Capel have any connection with the families of Pembroke, Buckingham or Essex, or with the Duc de Berry.'[60] I thought several times of telling him, to amuse him, that I had known Mme Swann who, as a cocotte, had gone in the old days under the name of Odette de Crécy; but although the Duc d'Alençon may not have taken offence had anyone spoken of Emilienne d'Alençon,[61] I did not feel sufficiently well in with M. de Crécy to carry the joke as far as that. 'He comes from a very great family, M. de Montsurvent said to me one day. His patronymic is Saylor.' And he added that on his old *castel* above Incarville, grown all but uninhabitable in fact and which, although born very wealthy, he was today too penniless to repair, there could still be read his family's ancient motto. I thought this motto very fine, whether it be applied to the impatience of a predatory race perched in that eyrie from which they must once have taken flight, or, today, to the contemplation of its decline, and the anticipation of impending death in that savage and imposing retreat. It is in this double sense indeed that the motto makes play with the name of Saylor: '*Ne sçais l'heure*.'[62]

At Hermonville M. de Chevregny sometimes got in, whose name, Brichot told us, signified, like that of Mgr de Cabrières, 'a place where goats gather'. He was related to the Cambremers, on which account, and out of a false appreciation of what was fashionable, the latter frequently invited him to Féterne, but only when they had no guests to dazzle. Living all year round at Beausoleil, M. de Chevregny had remained more provincial than they were. Thus, when he went to spend a few weeks in Paris, there was not a single day to be wasted, on account of 'all there was to see'; to the point where, at times, a little dazed by the number of spectacles too rapidly digested, when he was asked whether he had seen a certain play, it happened that he was no longer quite sure. But this vagueness was rare, for he had that detailed knowledge of things Parisian peculiar to the people who rarely go there. He recommended to me the 'new things' to go and see ('It's worth the effort'), regarding them on the other hand purely from the point of view of the pleasant evening they enabled you to spend, and ignoring the aesthetic point of view to the point of not even suspecting that they might in fact constitute a 'new thing' in the history of art. Thus, speaking of everything on the same plane, he would say: 'We went once to the Opéra-Comique, but the show isn't up to much. It's called *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It's insignificant. Périer[63] is always good, but you'd do better to see him in something else. On the other hand, at the Gymnase, they're doing *La Châtelaine*.[64] We went back twice; don't fail to go, it's worth seeing; and then the acting is a joy; you've got Frévalles, Marie Magnier, Baron *fils*;[65] he even quoted the names of actors to me that I had never heard spoken, and without preceding them by Monsieur, Madame or Mademoiselle, as the Duc de Guermantes would have done, who referred in the same ceremoniously contemptuous tone to the 'songs of Mademoiselle Yvette Guilbert'[66] and 'the experiments of Monsieur Charcot'. That was not M. de Chevregny's way, he said Cornaglia and Dehelly[67] as he might have said Voltaire and Montesquieu. For with him, in respect of actors as of everything to do with Paris, the aristocrat's desire to display his contempt came second to the provincial man's desire to show familiarity.

Straight after the first dinner-party that I had been to at La Raspelière, with what was still referred to at Féterne as 'the young couple', although M. and Mme Cambremer were no longer, far from it, in the first flush of youth, the old Marquise had written me one of those letters whose style you could have picked out from among thousands. It said: 'Bring your delightful – charming – agreeable cousin. It will be an enchantment, a pleasure', always failing so infallibly to achieve the progression anticipated by whoever received the letter that I ended by altering my opinion as to the nature of these diminuendos, believing them now to be deliberate, and finding in them the same depravation of taste – transposed into the social order – that drove Sainte-Beuve to break all the alliances between words and to alter any expression that was in the least usual. Two methods, taught no doubt by different teachers, were contrasted in this epistolary style, the second of them leading Mme de Cambremer to redeem the banality of her multiple adjectives by employing them on a descending scale and avoiding ending on a common chord. On the other hand, I tended to see in these inverse gradations, no longer refinement, as when they were the work of the dowager Marquise, but awkwardness, every time they were employed by her son the Marquis or by her cousins. For throughout the family, to quite a remote degree and in admiring imitation of Aunt Zélia, the three-adjective rule was held in high esteem, as was a certain enthusiastic way of catching your breath when speaking. An imitation that had passed into the blood, what was more; when in the family, a girl, from childhood on, broke off from speaking to swallow her saliva, they would say: 'She takes after Aunt Zélia', and felt that later on her lips would quite soon tend to be shadowed by a faint moustache and promised themselves they would cultivate the aptitude that she must show for music. It was not long before the Cambremers' relations with Mme Verdurin were less ideal than with myself, for various reasons. They wanted to invite her. The 'young' Marquise said to me contemptuously: 'I don't see why we shouldn't invite the woman; you can see anyone at all in the country, it doesn't lead to anything.' But somewhat impressed deep down, they never ceased consulting me as to the manner in which they should realize their desire to be polite. As they had invited us, Albertine and me, to dinner, with some friends of Saint-Loup's, fashionable people from the region, the owners of the château in Gourville, who represented rather more than the cream of Norman society, to which Mme Verdurin, without appearing to touch it, was partial, I advised the Cambremers to invite the Patronne at the same time. But the châtelains of Féterne, from fear (so timid were they) of upsetting their noble friends, or (so naïve were they) of M. and Mme Verdurin being bored by people who were not intellectuals, or again (so impregnated were they by a spirit of routine that experience had not fertilized) of mixing kinds and 'putting their foot in it', declared that they would not go together, that they would not 'hit it off', and that it would be better to keep Mme Verdurin (who would be invited with all her little group) in reserve for another dinner-party. For the next one – the fashionable one, with Saint-Loup's friends – they invited only Morel from the little nucleus, so that M. de Charlus might be informed indirectly of the brilliant people whom they entertained, and also so that the musician might be a source of entertainment for the guests, for he would be asked to bring his violin. To him they added Cottard, because M. de Cambremer declared that he was a livewire and 'an asset' at a dinner-party; besides, it might prove convenient to be on good terms with a doctor should they ever have someone who was ill. But he was asked on his own, so as 'not to start anything with the wife'. Mme Verdurin was outraged when she learned that two members of the little group had been invited without her to an 'informal dinner' at Féterne. She dictated to the Doctor, whose first instinct had been to accept, a haughty reply, in which he said: '*We* are dining that evening at Mme Verdurin's', a plural intended as a lesson to the Cambremers and to show them he was not separable from Mme Cottard. As for Morel, Mme Verdurin had no need to trace out an impolite course of action for him, he adopted one spontaneously, and for the following reason. If, in regard to M. de Charlus, and where his pleasures were concerned, he enjoyed an independence that saddened the Baron, we have seen that the latter's influence made itself felt more in other spheres, that he had, for example, broadened the virtuoso's musical knowledge and purified his style. But, at this point in our story at least, it was still only an influence. There was one terrain on the other hand where what M. de Charlus said was believed and acted on blindly by Morel. Blindly and crazily, for not only were M. de Charlus's teachings false, but, even had they been valid for a great nobleman, as applied to the letter by Morel they became ludicrous. The terrain on which Morel had become so credulous and so easily led by his mentor, was that of society. The violinist, who, before he met M. de Charlus, had had no notion of society, had taken literally the arrogant and summary sketch-map of it drawn for him by the Baron: 'There are a certain number of preponderant families, M. de Charlus had told him, the Guermantes above all, who can count fourteen alliances with the House of France, which is flattering mainly in fact for the House of France, moreover, for it was to Aldonce de Guermantes and not to Louis the Fat, his younger half-brother, that the throne of France should have passed.[68] Under Louis XIV, we wore black at the death of Monsieur, as having the same grandmother as the King. Far beneath the Guermantes, one can nevertheless cite the La Tremoïlles, descendants of the Kings of Naples and the Comtes de Poitiers;[69] the d'Uzès,[70] far from ancient as a family but the most ancient peers; the Luynes,[71] altogether recent, but with the distinction of great alliances; the Choiseuls, the Harcourts, the La Rochefoucaulds.[72] Add the Noailles, despite the Comte de Toulouse, the Montesquious, the Castellanes[73] and, barring some oversight, that's all. As for all those nobodies who call themselves the Marquis de Cambremerde or de Vatefairefiche,[74] there's no difference between them and the meanest private in your regiment. Whether you go and piss at the Comtesse Shit's, or shit at the Comtesse Piss's, it's the same thing, you'll have risked your

reputation and used a brown-stained rag as toilet paper. Which is unhygienic.' Morel had piously taken in this perhaps somewhat cursory history lesson; he judged things as if he were himself a Guermantes and hoped for an opportunity of finding himself with the false La Tour d'Auvergnes so that he could let them see, by a contemptuous shake of the hand, that he hardly took them seriously. As for the Cambremers, he could show them here and now that they were 'no better than the meanest private in his regiment'. He did not reply to their invitation, and on the evening of the dinner begged off at the very last moment by telegram, as overjoyed as if he had just behaved like a prince of the blood. It must be added, however, that one cannot imagine just how, in a more general way, unbearable, niggling and even, he who was so discerning, stupid M. de Charlus could be, on all those occasions when the defects of his character came into play. It can be said indeed that these are like an intermittent sickness of the mind. Who has not observed this fact with women, or even with men, endowed with a remarkable intelligence, but afflicted by nervousness? When they are happy, at peace, satisfied by their surroundings, they cause us to admire their precious gifts; it is literally the truth that speaks through their mouths. A migraine, some small puncturing of their *amour-propre* is enough to change everything. The luminous intelligence, abrupt, convulsive, shrunken, now reflects only a self that is irritated, suspicious, coquettish, doing all it can to be unattractive. The anger of the Cambremers ran high; and in the meanwhile, other incidents led to a certain tension in their relations with the little clan. As we were returning, the Cottards, Charlus, Brichot, Morel and I, from a dinner at La Raspelière, and the Cambremers, who had been going to have lunch with some friends in Arembouville, had made part of the outward journey with us: 'You who are so fond of Balzac and able to recognize him in contemporary society, I had said to M. de Charlus, you must think that the Cambremers have escaped from the *Scènes de la vie de province*.'[75] But M. de Charlus, absolutely as if he had been their friend and as if I had offended him by my remark, abruptly cut me short: 'You're saying that because the wife is superior to the husband, he said curtly. – Oh, I didn't mean that she was the 'Muse du département', nor Madame de Bargeton,[76] although…' M. de Charlus interrupted me once more: 'Say rather Madame de Mortsauf.'[77] The train stopped and Brichot got out. 'No good our signalling to you, you're terrible. – What d'you mean? – Oh come, haven't you noticed that Brichot is madly in love with Mme de Cambremer?' I could see by the attitude of the Cottards and of Charlie that there was not a shred of doubt about this among the little nucleus. I thought it showed ill-will on their part. 'Come, you didn't notice how agitated he was when you were talking about her,' M. de Charlus went on, who liked to show that he had experience of women and spoke naturally of the sentiment they inspire, as if it were one that he himself was in the habit of feeling. But a certain tone of equivocal fatherliness with all the young men – despite his exclusive love for Morel – gave the lie by his tone to the lady's-man views he was expressing: 'Oh, these children, he said, in a high-pitched, affected, measured voice, you have to teach them everything, they're innocent as a new-born babe, they can't recognize when a man's in love with a woman. I knew what's what better than that at your age,' he added, for he liked using these expressions from the world of the Paris apaches, perhaps from taste, perhaps so as not to appear, by avoiding them, to be admitting that he associated with those whose current vocabulary they were. A few days later, I had indeed to yield to the evidence and recognize that Brichot was smitten with the Marquise. Unfortunately, he accepted several lunch invitations from her. Mme Verdurin adjudged that it was time to put her oar in. Apart from the usefulness she could see in an intervention where the politics of the little nucleus was concerned, she took an increasingly keen enjoyment in these sorts of explanation and the dramas they gave rise to, an enjoyment born of idleness as much among the bourgeoisie as in the world of the aristocracy. It was a day of high emotion at La Raspelière when Mme Verdurin was seen to disappear for a whole hour with Brichot, whom she was known to have told that Mme de Cambremer made fun of him, that he was the laughing-stock of her drawing-room, that he was about to dishonour his old age and jeopardize his position in academic life. She even went so far as to refer in touching terms to the washerwoman he had lived with in Paris and to their little girl. She carried the day, Brichot stopped going to Féterne, but his unhappiness was such that for two days it was thought he was going to lose his sight altogether, and his malady had in any case taken a leap forward from which there was no going back. Meanwhile, the Cambremers, whose anger against Morel was great, invited M. de Charlus one time, and very deliberately, without him. Not receiving any reply from the Baron, they feared they had made a gaffe, and deciding that resentment was a poor counsellor, wrote rather belatedly to Morel, an obsequiousness that made M. de Charlus smile by revealing the extent of his influence. 'You will answer for the two of us, that I accept,' the Baron told Morel. The day of the dinner having arrived, they were waiting in the large drawing-room at Féterne. The Cambremers were in point of fact giving the dinner for the flower of fashion that were M. and Mme Féré. But so afraid were they of displeasing M. de Charlus that, although she had met the Férés through M. de Chevregny, Mme de Cambremer became frantic when, on the day of the dinner, she found the latter arriving to pay a call on them at Féterne. They invented all manner of excuses to send him back to Beausoleil as quickly as possible, not quickly enough, however, to stop him running into the Férés in the courtyard, who were as shocked to see him being expelled as he was ashamed. But whatever the cost, the Cambremers wanted to spare M. de Charlus the sight of M. de Chevregny, judging the latter to be provincial on the strength of nuances that are overlooked *en famille* and of which account is taken only in the presence of outsiders, the very people who would alone fail to notice them. But we do not like to show off to them relations who have remained what we have tried hard to cease from being. As for M. and Mme Féré, they were in the highest degree people out of what is called 'the top drawer'. In the eyes of those who described them thus, no doubt the Guermantes, the Rohans and many others were also people out of the top drawer, but their name excused you from saying so. Since not everyone knew of the high birth of M. Féré's mother, or of Mme Féré's mother, and the extraordinarily closed circle in which she and her husband moved, when they had just been introduced, in order to explain, it was always added that they were people 'of the very best kind'. Had their obscure name dictated a sort of haughty reserve in them? The fact was that the Férés did not visit people whom the La Tremoïlles would have frequented. It had taken her position as queen of the sea-side, which the old Marquise de Cambremer held in the Manche, for the Férés to come to one of her matinées each year. They had been invited to dinner and great store was laid on the effect that M. de Charlus would have on them. It was given out discreetly that he would be among the guests. By chance, Mme Féré did not know him. Mme de Cambremer experienced a keen satisfaction at this, and the smile of the chemist who is about to bring into contact for the first time two especially important bodies strayed across her face. The door opened and Mme de Cambremer almost felt sick when she saw Morel enter alone. Like a private secretary charged with making his minister's apologies, or like a morganatic spouse expressing the Prince's regrets that he is feeling unwell (as Mme de Clinchamp used to do in respect of the Duc d'Aumale),[78] Morel said, in the airiest of tones: 'The Baron won't be able to come. He's slightly indisposed, at least I think that's the reason; I haven't come across him this week,' he added, these last words causing Mme de Cambremer quite to despair, she having told M. and Mme Féré that Morel saw M. de Charlus at all hours of the day. The Cambremers pretended that the Baron's absence merely added to the pleasures of the occasion and, without letting themselves be overheard by Morel, said to their guests: 'We can make do without him, can we not? I'll be all the pleasanter.' But they were furious, suspecting a conspiracy mounted by Mme Verdurin and, tit for tat, when the latter invited them once again to La Raspelière, M. de Cambremer, unable to resist the pleasure of revisiting his house and of finding himself once again amongst the little group, went, but alone, saying that the Marquise was most upset, but that her doctor had ordered her to keep to her room. By this half-presence, the Cambremers thought both to teach M. de Charlus a lesson and to show the Verdurins that only a limited politeness was due to them, just as in the old days princesses of the blood used to escort duchesses out, but only as far as half-way across the second chamber. After a few weeks, the breach was more or less complete. M. de Cambremer justified it to me thus: 'I must tell you that with M. de Charlus it was difficult. He's an out-and-out Dreyfusard… – Not so! – Oh yes, he is…, at all events, his cousin the Prince de Guermantes is, they've met with a fair bit of hostility on that account. I've relations who are very touchy about that. I can't mix with such people, I'd fall out with the whole of my family. – Since the Prince de Guermantes is a Dreyfusard, it'll go all the better, said Mme de Cambremer, because Saint-Loup, who, they say, is to marry his niece, is one, too. It could even be the reason for the marriage. – Come, my dear, don't say that Saint-Loup, of whom we're so fond, is a Dreyfusard. You shouldn't broadcast these allegations lightly, said M. de Cambremer. What might they not think of him in the Army! – He was one, but he isn't any longer, I said to M. de Cambremer. As for his marrying Mlle de Guermantes-Brassac, is that true? – It's all people talk about, but you're in a good position to know. – But I say again, he told me himself he was a Dreyfusard, said Mme de Cambremer. He's got every excuse anyway, the Guermantes are half-German. – In the case of the rue de Varenne Guermantes, you can say one hundred per cent, said Cancan. But Saint-Loup's a different kettle of fish; he may well have any number of German relations, but his father claimed his title above all as a great French nobleman, he served

again in 1871 and was killed in the finest manner during the war. I may well fuss too much about that sort of thing, but one mustn't exaggerate either in one direction or the other. *In medio… virtus*,[79] oh, I don't remember! It's something Doctor Cottard says. He's never at a loss for the right words. You ought to have a Petit Larousse here.' To avoid having to pronounce on the Latin quotation, and to get off the subject of Saint-Loup, on which her husband seemed to find her lacking in tact, Mme de Cambremer fell back on the Patronne, whose quarrel with them was even more in need of an explanation. 'We were happy to lease La Raspelière to Mme Verdurin, said the Marquise. Only she has appeared to think that, along with the house, and everything she's found a way of laying claim to, the use of the meadow, the old hangings, all things that certainly weren't in the lease, she'd have in addition the right to become friends with us. Those are two quite distinct things. Our mistake is simply not to have done things through a factor or an agency. At Féterne that's of no account, but I can see now the expression on my Aunt de Ch'nouville's face if she saw old Mother Verdurin turning up on my at-home day, with her hair all over the place. In the case of M. de Charlus, of course, he knows some highly respectable people, but he also knows some who were far from it.' I asked who. Pressed by questions, Mme de Cambremer finally said: 'They claim it's he who was keeping a Monsieur Moreau, Morille, Morue,[80] I no longer know. No connection, of course, with Morel, the violinist, she added, blushing. When I sensed that Mme Verdurin imagined that, because she was our tenant in the Manche, she'd have the right to call on me in Paris, I realized we had to cut our moorings.'

Despite this breach with the Patronne, the Cambremers were on good enough terms with the faithful, and gladly got into our carriage when they were on the line. When we were on the point of arriving in Douville, Albertine, pulling her mirror out for one last time, sometimes found it helpful to change her gloves or remove her hat for a moment, and with the tortoiseshell comb I had given her and which she wore in her hair, would smooth down her ringlets, fluff them up, and, if necessary, put up her chignon above the undulations that descended in regular valleys as far as her nape. Once in the carriages that were waiting for us, we no longer had any idea at all where we were; the roads were not lit; we could tell by the louder sound the wheels made that we were passing through a village, we thought we had arrived, we found ourselves in open country again, we could hear church-bells in the distance, we forgot we were in dinner-jackets, and we had almost dozed off when, at the end of this long margin of darkness which, because of the distance we had travelled and the incidents characteristic of any journey by train, seemed to have borne us on to an advanced hour of the night and almost half-way back towards Paris, all of a sudden, after we felt the carriage glide on a finer sand, revealing that we had just entered the park, there burst forth, reintroducing us into the life of society, the brilliant lights of the drawing-room, then of the dining-room, where we were suddenly made to recoil by hearing it strike eight, an hour we thought long since past, whereas the numerous courses and fine wines were about to follow one another, around men in tails and women semi-décolletées, in a dinner rutilant with light, like a true *dîner en ville*, which was surrounded only, and had its character thereby altered, by the strange, sombre double sash woven by the nocturnal, pastoral and marine hours, deflected by this worldly use from their original solemnity, of the double journey. This latter obliged us indeed to abandon the radiant, quickly forgotten splendour of the brightly lit drawing-room for the carriages, where I contrived to be with Albertine so that my loved one might not be with other people without me, and frequently for another reason also, which was that we could the two of us do lots of things in a dark carriage, where the jolts of the descent would anyway excuse us, in the event of a sudden shaft of light entering, for our having clutched hold of one another. When M. de Cambremer had not as yet fallen out with the Verdurins, he used to ask me: 'You don't think, with this fog, that you'll have one of your breathless attacks? My sister had terrible ones this morning. Ah, you did, too, he would say, with satisfaction. I shall tell her so tonight. I know that when I get back she'll be inquiring straight away how long it is since you had them.' He talked to me about mine in fact only in order to get on to those of his sister, and made me describe the particulars of the first the better to mark the differences there were between the two. In spite of these, as his sister's attacks seemed to him to carry authority, he could not believe that what 'worked' with hers was not advisable for my own and he was annoyed that I should not have tried them, for there is one thing even more difficult than sticking to a regimen and that is not imposing it on others. 'Anyway, what am I saying, me, a layman, when you're here in front of the Areopagus, the very fountainhead. What does Professor Cottard think?'

I saw his wife again another time, it so happens, because she had said that my 'cousin' had a funny way with her and I wanted to know what she meant by this. She denied having said it, but finally owned that she had been talking about someone whom she thought she had met with my cousin. She did not know her name but said finally that, if she was not mistaken, it was the wife of a banker, of the name of Lina, Linette, Lisette, Lia, or something of the sort. I fancied that 'wife of a banker' was put in only in order to remove any marks of identity. I wanted to ask Albertine whether it was true. But I preferred appearing to be the one who knew rather than the one asking questions. Albertine would in any case either not have given me any answer or else a 'no' in which the *n* would have been too hesitant and the *o* too resonant. Albertine never recounted facts that might harm her, but others which could only be explained by the earlier ones, the truth being a current which flows from what we are told and which we pick up, invisible though it is, rather than the actual thing we have been told. Thus, when I assured her that a woman whom she had met in Vichy was disreputable, she swore that the woman in question was certainly not what I imagined and had never tried to make her do anything bad. But another day she added, when I was speaking of my curiosity regarding that sort of person, that the lady in Vichy had a friend like that whom Albertine did not meet, but to whom the lady had '*promised* to introduce her'. For her to have made such a promise, must mean that Albertine had wanted it, or that the lady had, by so offering, known how to please her. But if I had raised this objection with Albertine, I would have seemed to have had my revelations from her alone, I would at once have put a stop to them, I would have learned nothing further, I would have ceased to make myself feared. Moreover, we were in Balbec and the Vichy lady and her friend lived in Menton; the remoteness, the impossibility of any danger, would have soon put an end to my suspicions.

Often, when M. de Cambremer hailed me from the station, I had, with Albertine, just been taking advantage of the darkness, and with all the more difficulty inasmuch as the latter had fought somewhat, fearing it was not sufficiently total. 'You know I'm sure that Cottard saw us; anyway, even without seeing, he certainly heard you choking back your voice, just when they were talking about your other sort of choking,' Albertine said to me on arrival at the station in Douville, where we caught the little train for the return journey. But this return journey, like the outward one, if, by giving me a certain impression of poetry, it reawoke in me the longing to travel, to lead a new life, and thereby made me wish to abandon any plan of marrying Albertine, and even to break off our relationship once and for all, it also, by the very fact of this relationship's contradictory nature, made the break easier. For on the return journey, as on the outward one, at each station there either got in with us or greeted us from the platform people of our acquaintance; the furtive pleasures of the imagination were dominated by the – continual – pleasures of sociability, which are so calming, so soporific. Already, before the stations themselves, their names (which had so set me to dreaming ever since the day I first heard them, on that first evening when I had been travelling with my grandmother) had been humanized, had lost their strangeness since the evening when Brichot, at Albertine's request, had explained their etymologies to us more fully. I had found the *-fleur* charming that ended certain names, such as Fiquefleur, Honfleur, Flers, Barfleur, Harfleur and so on, and the *-boeuf* to be found at the end of Bricqueboeuf amusing. But the *fleur* vanished along with the *boeuf* when Brichot (and he had told me this that first day, in the train) taught us that '*fleur*' means 'harbour' (like *fiord*) and that '*boeuf*', *budh* in Norman, signifies 'hut'. As he cited various examples, what had seemed to me particular became general: Bricqueboeuf went to join Elbeuf, and even in a name at first sight as individual as the place itself, such as the name of Pennedepie, in which oddities impossible of elucidation by the reason seemed to have become amalgamated since time immemorial into a vocable as hard, strong-tasting and unpleasant as a certain Normandy cheese, I was distressed to discover the Gallic *pen*, which signifies 'mountain' and is found in Penmarch as well as in the Apennines. As, each time the train stopped, I felt that we should have friendly hands to shake, if not visits to receive, I said to Albertine: 'Hurry up and ask Brichot the names you want to know about. You mentioned Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse. – Yes, I just love that *orgueil*, it's a proud village, said Albertine. – You'd think it prouder still, replied Brichot, if, instead of its French form, or even the Low Latin, such as you find it in the Bishop of Bayeux's cartulary, *Marcovilla superba*, you were to take the more ancient form, closer to the Norman, *Marculphivilla superba*, the village, or domain, of Merculph. In almost all these names that end in *-ville*, you can still see, erect above this coast, the ghost of the rude Norman invaders. At Hermonville, you had, standing in the carriage doorway, only our excellent Doctor, who, obviously, has nothing of the Norse chieftain about him. But by

closing your eyes, you might have seen the celebrated Herimund (*Herimundivilla*). Although, I don't know why, people go by these roads, in between Loigny and Balbec-Plage, rather than the very picturesque ones that go from Loigny to old Balbec, Mme Verdurin has perhaps taken you out in that direction by carriage. In which case you'll have seen Incarville or the village of Wiscar, and Tourville, before you get to Mme Verdurin's, is the village of Turold. Moreover, there weren't only the Normans. It seems that Germans may have got this far (Aumenancourt, *Alemanicurtis*); don't tell this to the young officer I see there; he'd be capable of refusing to go to his cousins' any more. There were Saxons, too, witness the fountain of Sissonne (one of Mme Verdurin's favourite destinations for her excursions, and rightly so), just like in England, Middlesex and Wessex. Something inexplicable, it seems that the Goths, '*gueux*' as they used to say, got this far, and even Moors, for Mortagne comes from *Mauretania*. The trace of them has remained in Gourville (*Gothorumvilla*). The odd vestige of the Latins survives, too, moreover, Lagny (*Latiniacum*). –I shall ask for an explanation of Thorpehomme, said M. de Charlus. I can understand "*homme*", he added, as the sculptor and Cottard exchanged meaningful glances. But Thorp? – "*Homme*" does not at all signify what you are naturally led to believe, Baron, replied Brichot, glancing mischievously at Cottard and the sculptor. "*Homme*" has nothing to do in this case with the sex to which I am not indebted for my mother. "*Homme*" is *Holm*, which signifies "small island", and so on. As for *Thorp*, or "village", you find it again in dozens of words with which I've already bored our young friend. So in Thorpehomme there isn't the name of a Norman chieftain, but words of the Norman tongue. You can see how this whole region was Germanized. – I think he's exaggerating, said M. de Charlus. Yesterday, I went to Orgeville – This time I give you back the man I took away in Thorpehomme, Baron. Let it be said without pedantry, a charter of Robert I gives us, for Orgeville, the domain of Otger. All these names are those of ancient lords. Octeville-la-Venelle is for l'Avenel. The Avenels were a family well known in the Middle Ages. Bourguenolles, which Mme Verdurin took us to the other day, used to be written "Bourg de Môles", because the village belonged in the eleventh century to Baudoin de Môles, as did La Chaise-Baudoin; but here we are in Doncières. – Good Lord, all the lieutenants that are going to try and get in!, said M. de Charlus in mock terror. I'm thinking of you, it doesn't trouble me as I'm getting out. – You hear, Doctor? said Brichot. The Baron's afraid of having officers clambering over his person. Yet they're quite in character, by being here in strength, for Doncières is none other than Saint-Cyr,[81] *Dominus Cyriacus*. There are lots of names of towns in which *sanctus* and *sancta* have been replaced by *dominus* and *domina*. Moreover, this peaceful Army town sometimes gives a false impression of being Saint-Cyr, Versailles or even Fontainebleau.

During these homeward journeys (as on the outward one), I used to tell Albertine to dress herself, for I knew very well that at Amnancourt, Doncières, Epreville and Saint-Vast, we would be receiving brief visits. I did not find these at all disagreeable, as it happens, whether it was, at Hermonville (the domain of Herimund), that of M. de Chevregny, taking advantage of having come to fetch guests to ask me to go and have lunch the following day at Montsurvent, or, at Doncières, the abrupt invasion of one of Saint-Loup's charming friends, sent by him (if he was not free) to pass on an invitation from Captain de Borodino, from the officers' mess at the Coq Hardi, or from the NCOs at the Faisan Doré. Saint-Loup often came in person, and all the time he was there, without it being apparent to anyone, I held Albertine captive with my eyes, pointlessly vigilant as it happens. On one occasion, however, I interrupted my watch. The stop being prolonged, Bloch, having greeted us, ran off almost immediately to rejoin his father, who had just inherited from his uncle and, having leased a château called 'La Commanderie', thought it very much the grand seigneur to travel about only in a post-chaise, with postilions in livery. Bloch asked me to go with him as far as the carriage. 'But make haste, for these quadrupeds are impatient; come, man beloved of the gods, you will bring pleasure to my father.' But I could not bear to leave Albertine in the train with Saint-Loup, they might, while my back was turned, talk together, get into another carriage, smile at one another, touch one another; my adhesive gaze could not be removed from Albertine for as long as Saint-Loup was there. But I could see very well that Bloch, who had asked me as a favour to go and greet his father, found it first of all unfriendly that I should refuse when nothing was stopping me, the porters having warned us that the train would be remaining for another quarter of an hour at least in the station, and that almost all the passengers, without whom it would not leave, had alighted; and for another thing he did not doubt that it was definitely because – my conduct on this occasion was a decisive response – I was a snob. For he was not unaware of the names of the people I was with. Indeed, M. de Charlus had said to me, some time before and not remembering or caring that this had been done in the old days, in order to get close to him: 'But introduce me to your friend then, what you're doing shows a lack of respect for me,' and he had talked with Bloch, with whom he seemed exceedingly taken, to the point where he had gratified him with an 'I shall hope to meet you again.' 'It's irrevocable then, you refuse to walk those hundred metres to say hallo to my father, to whom it'd give so much pleasure?' Bloch said. I was unhappy at seeming to be failing in comradeship, and even more so at the reason Bloch imagined I had for failing in it, and at sensing that he supposed I was not the same with my bourgeois friends when people of 'birth' were present. From that day forward, he ceased to show me the same affection and, what I found more hurtful, no longer had the same high regard for my character. But in order to undeceive him as to the motive that had led me to remain in the train, I would have needed to tell him something – namely, that I was jealous of Albertine – that would have been even more painful than allowing him to believe that I was stupidly worldly. Thus it is that, in theory, we find we ought always to explain ourselves frankly, to avoid misunderstandings. But very often life combines these in such a way that, in order to dispel them, in the rare circumstances when that might prove possible, we would have to reveal either – which was not the case here – something that would offend our friend even more than the imaginary wrong he imputes to us, or a secret the divulging of which – this was what had just happened in my own case – strikes us as even worse than the misunderstanding. Moreover, even without explaining to Bloch, since I was unable to, the reason I had for not accompanying him, had I begged him not to be offended, I would merely have doubled the offence by showing that I had been aware of it. There was nothing to be done but to submit to this *fatum* which had decreed that the presence of Albertine should prevent me from escorting him and that he should believe that, on the contrary, it was the presence of brilliant people who, had they been a hundred times more so, would have simply had the effect of making me concern myself exclusively with Bloch and reserve all my courtesies for him. It is thus enough that, accidentally, absurdly, an incident (in this case, the coming together of Albertine and Saint-Loup) should interpose itself between two destinies whose lines had been converging for these to be made to deviate, to grow further and further apart and never approach one another again. And there are more beautiful friendships than that of Bloch with myself which have found themselves destroyed, without the involuntary author of the quarrel having ever been able to explain to the one quarrelled with what would surely have healed his *amour-propre* and retrieved his fugitive sympathy.

Friendships more beautiful than Bloch's would not be saying very much, on the other hand. He had all the defects that displeased me the most. My fondness for Albertine, it so happened, made them quite unbearable. Thus, at that simple moment when I was talking with him while keeping an eye on Robert, Bloch told me he had lunched at Mme Bontemps's and that everyone had talked about me in the most laudatory terms until 'the declension of Helios'. 'Good, I thought, since Mme Bontemps thinks Bloch is a genius, the enthusiastic vote of approval he will have given me will do more than what all the others may have said, it'll get back to Albertine. She can't fail to find out some day soon, and it surprises me that her aunt hasn't already repeated it to her, that I'm a "superior" man.' 'Yes, added Bloch, everyone heaped praises on you. I alone preserved a silence as profound as if I had absorbed, in place of the, in fact somewhat mediocre, meal that we were served, the poppies beloved of the blessed brother of Tanathos and Lethe, the divine Hypnos, who envelops the body and the tongue in his sweet bonds. It's not that I admire you any less than the band of ravening dogs with whom I had been invited. But I admire you because I understand you, and they admire you without understanding you. The truth is, I admire you too much to speak of you in that way in public, it would have seemed to me a profanation to praise aloud what I carry in the deepest recesses of my heart. It was in vain that they questioned me about you, a sacred Pudor, the daughter of Kronion, made me remain mute.' I was not so tasteless as to appear disgruntled, but this particular Pudor seemed to me akin – much more than to Kronion – to the reticence that prevents a critic who admires you from talking about you because the secret temple where you sit enthroned would be invaded by the mob of ignorant readers and journalists; to the reticence of the statesman who does not give you a decoration so that you should not be lost to view amidst people of less worth than yourself; to the reticence of the Academician who does not give you his vote, so as to spare you the shame of being the colleague of X…, who is without talent; to the reticence finally, more respectable yet more criminal, of the sons who beg you not to write about their late father, who was full of fine qualities, in order to ensure

silence and repose, to prevent people maintaining him in life and creating a halo around the poor dead man, who would rather have his name issuing from men's mouths than the wreaths borne, however piously, to his grave.

If Bloch, while distressing me by not being able to understand the reason that had prevented me from going to salute his father, had exasperated me by confessing that he had depreciated me at Mme Bontemps's (I now understood why Albertine had never alluded to that lunch and remained silent when I spoke to her of Bloch's affection for me), the young Israelite had had an effect on M. de Charlus that was anything but irritation. Certainly Bloch now believed, not only that I could not for one second keep away from people of fashion, but that, jealous of the overtures they might have made to him (like M. de Charlus), I was trying to put a spoke in his wheel and prevent him from becoming friendly with them; but for his part, the Baron regretted not having seen more of my schoolfellow. As was his habit, he was careful not to show it. He began by putting to me, without appearing to, a few questions about Bloch, but in so offhand a tone and with an interest that appeared so put on, that you would not have supposed that he was attending to the answers. With an air of detachment, in a sing-song voice expressive of more than indifference, of distraction, and as if out of simple politeness towards myself: 'He looks intelligent, he said he was writing, has he any talent?' I told M. de Charlus it had been very good of him to say he hoped to meet him again. The Baron gave not the slightest indication that he might have heard my words, and as I repeated them four times without getting any reply, I finally suspected I might have been the victim of an acoustic mirage when I thought I heard what M. de Charlus had said. 'Is he staying in Balbec?' crooned the Baron, with so uninquiring an expression it is unfortunate that the French language has no sign other than the question-mark with which to end these sentences that appear so unlike questions. It is true that such a sign would be of scant use save to M. de Charlus. 'No, they're renting near here, La Commanderie.' Having learned what he wanted, M. de Charlus pretended to despise Bloch. 'How ghastly! he exclaimed, restoring to his voice all its clarion vigour. All the localities or properties called "La Commanderie" were built or owned by the Knights of the Order of Malta (of whom I am one), just as the places known as "Le Temple" or "La Cavalerie" were by the Templars. Were I staying at La Commanderie, nothing could be more natural. But a Jew! Not, however, that it surprises me; it comes from a curious liking for sacrilege, peculiar to that race. As soon as a Jew has enough money to buy a château, he always chooses one called Le Prieuré, l'Abbaye, Le Monastère, La Maison-Dieu. I had dealings with a Jewish functionary, can you guess where he resided? In Pont-l'Evêque.[82] Having fallen out of favour, he got himself sent to Brittany, to Pont-l'Abbé. When, in Holy Week, they put on those indecent spectacles known as Passion plays, half the auditorium is filled with Jews, exulting at the thought that they are going to put Christ on the Cross for a second time, at least in effigy. At the Lamoureux concerts, I had for my neighbour one day a rich Jewish banker. They were giving Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*; he was appalled. But he soon recovered the beatific expression that is usual with him on hearing "L'Enchantement du Vendredi Saint".[83] Your friend is staying at La Commanderie, the wretch! What sadism! You must show me how to get there, he added, resuming his indifferent air, so that I can go one day and see how our ancient domains are withstanding such a profanation. It's unfortunate, for he's polite, he seems clever. All it needs now is for him to live in Paris in the rue du Temple!' By which words, M. de Charlus seemed simply to be looking for a fresh example by which to support his theory; but in reality he was posing a question whose intention was twofold, the principal one being to learn Bloch's address. 'Indeed, Brichot pointed out, the rue du Temple used to be called the rue de la Chevalerie-du-Temple. Apropos of which, will you permit me an observation, Baron? said the university man. – What? What is it? said M. de Charlus curtly, the remark having prevented him from obtaining his information. – No, nothing, replied Brichot, abashed. It was apropos of the etymology of Balbec that I was asked for. The rue du Temple was once called the rue Barre-du-Bec, because the Abbey of Bec, in Normandy, had its bar of justice there in Paris.' M. de Charlus made no reply and pretended not to have heard, which was one of the forms his insolence took. 'Where does your friend live in Paris? Since three-quarters of the streets take their name from a church or an abbey, there's a good chance of the sacrilege continuing. You can't stop Jews living on the boulevard de la Madeleine, in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré or the place Saint-Augustin. As long as they don't carry perfidy to the point of electing domicile in the place du Parvis-Notre-Dame, the quai de l'Archevêché, the rue Chanoinesse or the rue de l'Ave Maria, allowance must be made for their difficulties.' We were unable to satisfy M. de Charlus, Bloch's current address not being known to us. But I knew that his father's offices were in the rue des Blancs-Manteaux.[84] 'Oh, the very height of perversity, exclaimed M. de Charlus, seeming to derive a profound satisfaction from his own cry of ironic indignation. Rue des Blancs-Manteaux, he repeated, laying weight on each syllable and laughing. What sacrilege! To think that these Blancs-Manteaux polluted by M. Bloch were those of the mendicant friars, known as serfs of the Holy Virgin, that Saint Louis established there.[85] And the street has always belonged to the religious orders. The profanation is all the more diabolical in that, no distance from the rue des Blancs-Manteaux, there's a street whose name escapes me but which is entirely given over to the Jews; there are Hebrew characters on the shops, factories making unleavened bread, Jewish butchers, it's quite simply the *Judengasse* of Paris. M. de Rochegude calls that street the Paris ghetto.[86] That's where M. Bloch should have been living. Of course, he went on, in a somewhat emphatic, lordly tone and, to make his aesthetic pronouncements, lending to the face that he had drawn back, by a reaction addressed to him in spite of himself by his heredity, the look of one of Louis XIII's old musketeers, I concern myself with all that only from the point of view of art. Politics are not my thing and I can't condemn en bloc, even if Blochs there are, a nation that numbers Spinoza amongst its illustrious sons. And I admire Rembrandt too much not to know what beauty may be had from the frequentation of the synagogue.[87] But then a ghetto is all the better the more homogeneous and the more complete it is. You may be sure, in any case, so closely bound up are the practical instinct and cupidity with sadism among that race, that the proximity of the Hebraic street I am speaking of, and the convenience of having Israelite butchers close to hand led your friend to choose the rue des Blancs-Manteaux. How curious it is! It was there, as it happens, that there lived a strange Jew who boiled the Host,[88] after which I believe they boiled him, which is stranger still since that seems to signify that the body of a Jew can be of equal value to the body of God. Perhaps something could be arranged with your friend so that he takes us to see the church of the Blancs-Manteaux. To think that it was there they laid the body of Louis d'Orléans after his assassination by Jean the Fearless, who, alas, did not deliver us from the Orléans.[89] Personally, I get on very well as it happens with my cousin the duc de Chartres, but in the end they're a race of usurpers, who had Louis XVI assassinated, and Charles X and Henri V despoiled.[90] They've much to live up to, moreover, having for ancestors Monsieur, so called no doubt because he was the most astonishing old woman, and the Regent and all the rest. What a family!' This speech, anti-Jewish or pro-Hebrew – according to whether you fastened on the surface of the words or the intentions they concealed – had been comically watered down for me by a remark whispered to me by Morel which would have made M. de Charlus despair. Morel, who had not failed to observe the impression Bloch had been making, thanked me surreptitiously for having 'despatched' him, adding cynically: 'He'd have liked to stay, all that's jealousy, he'd like to take my place. Typical of a yid! – We could have profited from this prolonged stoppage to ask for a few ritual explanations from your friend. Couldn't you catch him up? M. de Charlus asked me, with the anxiety of doubt. – No, it's impossible, he went off in a carriage and angry with me, moreover. – Thank you, thank you, breathed Morel. – The reason's absurd, you can always overtake a carriage, there's nothing to stop you taking a motor-car,' replied M. de Charlus, as a man accustomed to having everything submit to him. But, observing my silence: 'What is this more or less imaginary carriage?' he said, insolently, and with a last flicker of hope. – It's an open post-chaise which must already have got to La Commanderie.' Faced by an impossibility, M. de Charlus resigned himself and affected to joke. 'I can understand that they should have been put off by the superfluous brougham. It would have been a new broom.' Finally, we were advised that the train was departing and Saint-Loup left us. But that was the one day when, by getting into our compartment, he unwittingly caused me to suffer, from the thought I entertained for an instant of leaving him with Albertine in order to go with Bloch. On the other occasions, his presence did not torment me. For of her own accord, Albertine, to spare me any anxiety, took up a position, on some pretext or other, such that she would have been unable, even involuntarily, to brush against Robert, almost too far away even to have to offer him her hand; looking the other way, she would begin, as soon as he was there, to talk ostensibly and almost with affectation with one or other of the other travellers, keeping up this game until Saint-Loup had gone. In this way, the visits he made to us in Doncières, causing me neither pain nor even embarrassment, did not form an exception to the others, all of which were agreeable for bringing me in some sense the homage and the invitation of this land. Already, from the end of the summer, on our journey from Balbec to Douville, when I spotted the station

of Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs in the distance where, for a moment, in the evenings, the crest of the cliffs sparkled pink like the snow on a mountain in the setting sun, it no longer put me in mind (I do not say of the sadness even that the sight of its sudden strange rearing-up had produced in me on that first evening by giving me so strong a desire to catch the train back to Paris instead of going on to Balbec) of the spectacle which you could see from there in the mornings, so Elstir had told me, in the hour before the sun came up, when all the colours of the rainbow are refracted on the rocks, and where he had so many times woken up the young boy who, one year, had served him as a model, to paint him, stark naked, against the sand. The name of Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs merely announced to me that there was about to appear a strange, witty, bedizened fifty-year-old, with whom I would be able to discuss Chateaubriand and Balzac. And now, in the mists of evening, behind the Incarville cliffs that had so set me to dreaming in the old days, what I could see, as if its ancient sandstone had grown transparent, was the beautiful house of an uncle of M. de Cambremer's, where I knew they would always be glad to take me in if I did not want to dine at La Raspelière or return to Balbec. Thus it was not simply the place-names of the region which had lost their original mystery, but the places themselves. The names, already half voided of a mystery that etymology had replaced by reason, had descended one step further still. On our return journeys to Hermonville, Saint-Vast, Arembouville, just as the train was stopping, we would catch sight of shadows that we did not at first recognize and which Brichot, who could not see a thing, might perhaps have mistaken in the darkness for the phantoms of Herimund, Wiscar and Herimbald. But they approached the carriage. It was merely M. de Cambremer, his breach with the Verdurins now complete, seeing guests off, and who, on behalf of his wife and his mother, came to ask me whether I would not like him to 'kidnap' me, to keep me for a few days at Féterne, whither there would be following one another, an excellent lady musician who would sing me the whole of Gluck, and a chess-player of repute with whom I would have excellent games, which would not get in the way of the fishing or yachting parties in the bay, or even the Verdurin dinners, for which the Marquis gave his word of honour that he would 'lend' me, having me driven there and fetched again so as to make it easier, as well as safer. 'But I can't imagine it's good for you to go that high up. I know my sister wouldn't be able to stand it. She'd come back in such a state! She's not as it happens all that good at present… Really, you've had that bad an attack! Tomorrow you won't be able to stand up!' And he doubled up, not out of unkindness, but for the same reason that he could not not laugh when he saw a lame man go sprawling in the street, or talked with a deaf person. 'And before that? What, you hadn't had one for a fortnight? D'you know, that's very fine! You really ought to come and install yourself at Féterne, you could discuss your attacks with my sister.' At Incarville, it was the Marquis de Montpeyroux who, not having been able to go to Féterne, for he had been away hunting, had come 'to the train' in boots and a hat decorated with a pheasant feather, to shake the hand of some relations and of myself at the same time, announcing, for the day of the week that would not inconvenience me, the visit of his son, whom he thanked me for entertaining and would be very happy if I got him to do some reading; or else M. de Crécy, come there, so he said, smoking his pipe, to settle his digestion, who accepted one or even several cigars, and said to me: 'Well, you haven't told me what day our next get-together à la Lucullus is to be? We've nothing to say to one another? Permit me to remind you that we left unfinished the question of the two families of Montgommerys. We have to settle that. I'm counting on you.' Others had come simply to buy their newspapers. Many also exchanged a few words with us, whom I have always suspected of finding themselves on the platform, at the station nearest to their small château, only because they had nothing better to do except meet for a moment with people of their acquaintance. These stops the little train made were, all in all, as much a setting for social life as any other. It seemed aware itself of the role that had devolved on it, and had developed a certain human friendliness: patient and docile in character, it waited for as long as was required for the stragglers, and even once it had left would stop to pick up those who signalled to it; they would then run after it, puffing, in which they resembled the train itself, with the difference that they caught it up going at full speed, whereas it had resorted to a sensible dilatoriness. Thus Hermonville, Arembouville, Incarville no longer even evoked for me the savage magnificence of the Norman conquest, not content with having entirely divested themselves of the unaccountable sadness in which, once upon a time, I had seen them bathed in the evening damp. Doncières! Even after I had come to know it and had woken up from my dream, how long there had remained in that name for me agreeably icy streets, lighted shop-windows and succulent poultry! Doncières! Now it was nothing more than the station at which Morel got in; Egleville (*Aquilaevilla*) that where the Princesse Sherbatoff was generally waiting for us; Maineville, the station where Albertine would alight on fine evenings, when, not feeling too tired, she was anxious to spend a moment or two longer with me, having scarcely any further to walk, up a steep path, than if she had alighted at Parville (*Paterni villa*). Not only did I no longer experience the anxious fear of isolation that had gripped me that first evening, but I no longer had to fear that it might reawaken, nor feeling homesick, nor finding myself alone in this land productive not only of chestnut trees and tamarisks, but of friendships, which, all along the journey, formed a long chain, broken, like that of the blue-coloured hills, hidden now and again in the anfractuosity of the rocks or behind the lime-trees of the avenue, but at each relay delegating an amiable gentleman who came, with a cordial shake of the hand, to interrupt my journey, to prevent my becoming conscious of its length, if need be to offer to continue it with me. Another one would be at the next station, so that the little tram's whistle made us abandon one friend only so as to enable us to meet again with others. Between the more scattered châteaux and the train that skirted them almost at a fast walking pace, the distance was so short that at the moment when, on the platform, in front of the waiting-room, their owners hailed us, we might almost have thought that that they were doing so from their own doorsteps or from their bedroom window, as if the little departmental railway-line were nothing more than a provincial street and the isolated manor house an urban *hôtel*; and even at the rare stations where I did not hear anyone's 'good evening', the silence had a calming and nutritious fullness, because I knew it to be formed of the sleep of friends who had retired early in the nearby manor, where my arrival would have been greeted with delight had I had to awaken them in order to ask for some favour of hospitality. Except that habit so takes up our time that, at the end of a few months, we no longer have a free moment in a town where, when we arrived, the day offered us the free disposal of its twelve hours; had by any chance one of these become vacant, I would no longer have thought of using it in order to visit some church or other for the sake of which I had once come to Balbec, nor even to compare a beauty-spot painted by Elstir with the sketch of it I had seen in his house, but to go and have one more game of chess with M. Féré. Indeed, such was the degrading influence, and also the charm, of the country around Balbec, that it had become truly familiar ground for me; if their territorial distribution, their being sown along the full extent of the coast, in diverse crops, necessarily lent to the visits I made to these various friends the form of a journey, they also now confined the attractions of that journey to the social ones, of a succession of visits. The same place-names, so disturbing for me in the old days that merely leafing through the chapter for the department of the Manche in the *Annuaire des châteaux* produced as much emotion in me as the railway time-table, had become so familiar that I might have consulted that same time-table, on the Balbec–Douville via Doncières page, with the same contented peace of mind as a dictionary of addresses. In this too social valley, to the sides of which I sensed there clung, whether visible or not, a numerous company of friends, the poetic cry of evening was no longer that of the owl or the frog, but the 'How goes it?' of M. de Criquetot, or the 'Kaire' of Brichot. The atmosphere no longer aroused anxieties and, laden with purely human effluvia, was breathable without difficulty, too soothing even. The benefit that I derived from it, at least, was no longer to see things except from the practical point of view. Marriage with Albertine struck me as foolishness.

CHAPTER 4

Sudden reversion to Albertine. – Desolation at break of day. – I leave at once for Paris with Albertine.

I was only awaiting an opportunity for the final rupture. And one evening, as Mama was leaving the next day for Combray, where she was going to attend a sister of her mother's in her last illness, leaving me behind so that I might benefit, as Grandmother would have wanted, from the sea air, I announced to her that I had decided irrevocably not to marry Albertine and would shortly stop from seeing her. I was pleased to have been able, by these words, to give my mother satisfaction on the eve of her departure. She made no secret of the fact that it was indeed for her a very keen satisfaction. I needed also to have things out with Albertine. As I was returning with her from La Raspelière, the faithful having alighted, some at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, others at Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs, still others at Doncières, feeling especially happy and detached from her, I had made up my mind, now that there were only the two of us in the compartment, finally to broach the conversation. The truth in any case was that that one of the Balbec girls whom I loved, although she was then away, along with her friends, but would be returning (I enjoyed being with all of them, for each of them had for me, as on the first day, something of the essence of the others, was as if from a race apart), was Andrée. Since she would be arriving back in Balbec in a few days' time, she would certainly come and see me straight away, and then, in order to remain free, and not to marry her if I did not want to, so as to be able to go to Venice, but yet to have her all to myself in the meantime, the means I would adopt would be not to appear to be going to her but, as soon as she arrived, when we were talking together, I would say: 'What a pity I didn't see you a few weeks earlier! I'd have loved you; now my heart is taken. But that doesn't matter, we'll see each other often, for I'm unhappy in my other love and you will help to console me.' I smiled inwardly on imagining this conversation, for in this way I would be giving Andrée the illusion that I did not really love her; thus she would not grow tired of me and I would take joyful and consoling advantage of her affection. But all this only made it the more necessary finally to talk seriously to Albertine, so as not to act unscrupulously, and since I was resolved to devote myself to her friend, she, Albertine, needed certainly to know that I did not love her. She needed to be told right away, since Andrée might arrive any day. But as we were nearing Parville, I felt that we would not have time that evening and that it would be better to put off until the following day what had now been irrevocably decided on. I contented myself therefore with talking to her about the dinner we had been to at the Verdurins'. As she was putting her coat back on, the train having just left Incarville, the last station before Parville, she said: 'Tomorrow then, re-Verdurin, you won't forget that it's you who are coming to fetch me.' I could not help answering, somewhat curtly: 'Yes, unless I "default", because I'm beginning to find this life really stupid. At all events, if we go there, so that my time at La Raspelière shouldn't be time totally wasted, I shall have to think of asking Mme Verdurin something that could interest me greatly, be a subject for study, and give me pleasure, because I'm really getting very little this year in Balbec. – That's not being very nice, but I won't hold it against you, because I can tell you're nervous. What is this pleasure? – That Mme Verdurin should get them to play me things by a musician whose works she knows very well. I, too, know one of them, but it seems there are others and I'd need to find out if it's been published, if it differs from the early ones. – What musician? – If I tell you that his name's Vinteuil, my sweet one, are you any the wiser?' We may have turned over in our minds every possible idea without the truth ever entering, and it is from outside, when we least expect it, that it delivers its fearsome sting and wounds us for ever. 'You can't know how much you amuse me, replied Albertine, standing up, for the train was about to stop. Not only does it mean much more to me than you think, but even without Mme Verdurin I can get you all the information you want. You remember my speaking to you about a girl-friend, older than me, who was like both a mother and sister to me, whom I spent my best years with in Trieste and who, moreover, I'm due to meet in Cherbourg in a few weeks' time, from where we'll be travelling together (it's a little weird, but you know how I love the sea), well, this friend (oh, not at all the type of woman you might suppose!), and isn't this extraordinary, is in actual fact the best friend of this Vinteuil's daughter, and I know Vinteuil's daughter almost as well. I only ever call them my two big sisters. I'm not unhappy at showing you that your little Albertine can be useful to you in these musical matters, where you say, rightly as it happens, that I don't understand a thing.' At these words, uttered as we were entering the station in Parville, so far from Combray and from Montjouvain, so long after Vinteuil's death, a picture came to life in my heart, a picture held in reserve during so many years that, even had I been able to guess, when long ago storing it away, that it had the power to do harm, I would have supposed that in the course of time it had lost it entirely; preserved alive deep inside me – like Orestes, whose death the gods had prevented so that on the day appointed he might return to his homeland to punish the murder of Agamemnon – as my torment, as my punishment perhaps, who knows, for having allowed my grandmother to die; suddenly rising up out of the depths of that darkness where it had seemed to lie forever entombed and striking like an Avenger, in order to inaugurate for me a new life, terrible and deserved, perhaps also to explode before my eyes the fateful consequences to which wicked actions give rise indefinitely, not only for those who have committed them but for those who were no more than, who thought they were merely, onlookers at a curious and diverting spectacle, like me, alas, on that far-off day's end in Montjouvain, hidden behind a bush, where (as when I had listened complaisantly to the account of Swann's amours) I had perilously allowed to broaden out within me the fateful path of Knowledge, destined to become so sorrowful. And at that same moment, of my greatest sorrow, I had a feeling, proud almost, almost joyful, that of a man caused to leap so far upwards by the shock that he has received that he has attained a point to which no effort could have raised him. Albertine the friend of Mlle Vinteuil and of her friend, a practising and professional Sapphist, this, compared with what I had imagined at my most suspecting, was what, in comparison with the little acoustic device at the 1889 Exhibition, which you hardly hoped might reach from one end of the house to the other, the telephone now is, soaring over streets, towns, fields and seas, linking regions. This was a terrible *terra incognita* on which I had just set foot, a new phase of unsuspected suffering that was opening. And yet the deluge of reality that submerges us, enormous though it may be compared with our timid and negligible suppositions, had been anticipated by them. It was no doubt something like what I had just learned, something like the friendship between Albertine and Mlle Vinteuil, something that my mind would have been incapable of inventing, but which I had obscurely apprehended when I was so concerned at seeing Albertine next to Andrée. It is often only for want of the creative spirit that we do not go far enough in suffering. And the most terrible reality brings us, at the same time as suffering, the joy of a beautiful discovery, for all that it does is to lend a new and explicit form to what we had long been turning over in our minds without suspecting it. The train had stopped in Parville, and as we were the only passengers to be found on it, it was in a voice made limp by his sense of the futility of the task, by the same habit that yet made him fulfil it, and inspired him at once with indolence and punctiliousness, and even more out of the longing for sleep, that the porter shouted: 'Parville!' Albertine, standing facing me and seeing that she had reached her destination, took a few steps from the back of the carriage where we were and opened the door. But the movement that she thus performed in order to alight tore unbearably at my heart as if, contrary to the position that Albertine's body, independently of my own, seemed to be occupying a short step away, this separation in space, which a truthful draughtsman would have been obliged to represent between us, was only an appearance, and as if whoever might have wanted, in accordance with the true reality, to re-draw things would have now had to place Albertine, not at some little distance from me, but inside me. Her moving away caused me such pain that, catching her up, I pulled her despairingly by the arm. 'Would it be physically impossible, I asked her, for you to come and spend the night in Balbec? – Physically, no. But I can't keep awake. – You'd be doing me an immense favour… – All right then, though I don't understand; why didn't you say sooner? Anyway, I'll stay.' My mother was asleep when, after getting them to give Albertine a room on another floor, I returned to my own room. I sat down near the window, stifling my sobs so that my mother, who was separated from me only by a thin partition, might not hear me. I had not even thought to close the shutters, for at one moment, raising my eyes, I saw, facing me, in the sky, that same faint glow of a dull red that was to be seen in the restaurant at Rivebelle in a study Elstir had made of a sunset. I recalled the exaltation that, when I had caught sight of it from the train on the day of my arrival in Balbec, this same image of a dusk that was the prelude not to the night, but to a new day, had given me. But no day now would ever again be new for me, would ever again awaken the longing for an unknown happiness, but would merely prolong my sufferings, until I would no longer have the strength to withstand them. The truth of what

Cottard had said to me in the casino in Parville[1] was no longer in any doubt. What I had dreaded, had long vaguely suspected of Albertine, what my instinct had isolated from her whole being, but what my arguments, guided by my desire, had slowly led me to deny, was true! Behind Albertine I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room in Montjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle Vinteuil, with that laugh in which she made you hear as it were the unknown sound of her sexual pleasure. For, pretty as Albertine was, how could Mlle Vinteuil, with her proclivities, not have asked her to satisfy them? And the proof that Albertine had not been shocked by this, but had consented, was that they had not quarrelled, but that their intimacy had not ceased to grow. And that graceful movement of Albertine's, resting her chin on Rosemonde's shoulder, gazing at her with a smile, and planting a kiss on her neck, that movement which had reminded me of Mlle Vinteuil, and in the interpretation of which I had yet hesitated to admit that the same line traced by a gesture had necessarily to result from the same penchant, who knows whether Albertine had not simply learned it from Mlle Vinteuil? The colourless sky was slowly catching fire. I, who up until now had never woken up without smiling at the humblest things, at the bowl of *café au lait*, the sound of the rain, the thunder of the wind, I felt that the day which would be breaking in a moment, and all the days that came after, would never again bring me the hope of an unknown happiness, but a prolonging of my martyrdom. I still held to life; I knew that I could now expect from it only what was cruel. I ran to the lift, despite the unseemly hour, to ring for the 'lift' who filled the duties of night watchman, and I asked him to go to Albertine's room, to tell her I had something important to convey to her, if she were able to receive me. 'Mademoiselle would rather she came to you, was the reply. She'll be here in a moment.' And soon, indeed, Albertine came in in a dressing-gown. 'Albertine,' I said very softly, and warning her not to raise her voice so as not to wake my mother, from whom we were separated only by the same partition, the thinness of which, inopportune today, and obliging us to whisper, had once resembled, when my grandmother's intentions had been so clearly depicted on it, a sort of musical diaphaneity, 'I'm ashamed to have disturbed you. Here. So that you'll understand, I must tell you something you don't know. When I came here, I left a woman whom I was due to marry, who was ready to give up everything for my sake. She was due to leave on a journey this morning and for the past week, every day, I've been wondering whether I'd have the courage not to telegraph her that I was returning. I had the courage, but I was so wretched that I thought I'd kill myself. That's why I asked you last night if you couldn't come and sleep in Balbec. If I was going to die, I'd have liked to say goodbye to you.' And I gave free rein to the tears that my fiction had made natural. 'My poor lamb, had I known, I'd have spent the night with you,' exclaimed Albertine, into whose head the idea that I would perhaps marry this woman, and that her own opportunity of making a 'good marriage' had vanished, never even entered, so sincerely moved was she by an unhappiness whose source I could keep from her, but not its reality and its strength. 'Anyway, she said, yesterday, during the whole journey from La Raspelière, I could certainly tell you were on edge and unhappy, I was afraid of something.' In actual fact, my unhappiness had begun only at Parville, and my edginess, very different but which Albertine happily had confused with it, came from the tedium of living a few more days with her. She went on: 'I shan't leave you again, I'm going to stay here all the time.' She was in fact offering me – and she alone could offer it – the one remedy against the poison that was burning me, homogeneous with it, moreover; the one sweet, the other cruel, both alike had derived from Albertine. At that moment, Albertine – my sickness – relenting from causing me to suffer, left me – she, Albertine the remedy – as susceptible as a convalescent. But I reflected that she would soon be leaving Balbec for Cherbourg and thence for Trieste. Her habits of old were going to be revived. What I wanted above all else, was to prevent Albertine from catching the boat, to try and take her to Paris. Admittedly, from Paris she could, if she wanted, more easily than from Balbec, go to Trieste, but in Paris we would see; perhaps I would be able to ask Mme de Guermantes to influence Mlle Vinteuil's friend indirectly so that she would not remain in Trieste, to get her to accept a position elsewhere, perhaps with the Prince de***, whom I had met at Mme de Villeparisis's and even at Mme de Guermantes's. And he, even if Albertine wanted to go there in order to meet her friend, might, forewarned by Mme de Guermantes, prevent them from coming together. True, I might have told myself that in Paris, if Albertine had these proclivities, she would find a great many other people with whom to gratify them. But each impulse of jealousy is particular and bears the stamp of the individual – on this occasion, Mlle Vinteuil's friend – who has excited it. It was Mlle Vinteuil's friend who remained my chief preoccupation. The mysterious passion with which I had once thought about Austria because it was the country from which Albertine had come (her uncle had been a counsellor in the embassy there), and I was able to study its geographical singularity, the race that inhabited it, its monuments, its landscapes, as if in an atlas, in a collection of views, in Albertine's smile and her mannerisms, I experienced that passion again but, its signs now inverted, in the domain of horror. Yes, it was from there that Albertine had come. It was there that, in every house, she would be sure to find again, either Mlle Vinteuil's friend, or else others. Childhood habits would revive, they would be gathering in three months' time for Christmas, then the First of January, dates that were already sad for me in themselves, because of the unconscious memory of the unhappiness I had experienced when, in the old days, they had separated me, all through the New Year holiday, from Gilberte. After the long dinners, after the *réveillons*,[2] when everyone would be joyful and animated, Albertine would be adopting, with her friends from there, the same attitudes that I had seen her take up with Andrée, and whereas Albertine's friendship with her was innocent, who knows, perhaps the ones that had brought Mlle Vinteuil, pursued by her friend, close before me at Montjouvain. To Mlle Vinteuil, while her friend was tickling her before pouncing on her, I now lent the inflamed features of Albertine, of Albertine whom I could hear, as she ran off, then gave herself up, letting out that strange, deep laugh. What, compared with the pain I was experiencing, was the jealousy I had been able to feel on the day when Saint-Loup had met Albertine with me in Doncières, and when she had led him on? Or that which I had felt when thinking back to the unknown initiator to whom I may have owed the first kisses she had given me in Paris, on the day when I was awaiting Mlle de Stermaria's letter? That other jealousy, provoked by Saint-Loup, or by some young man or other, was nothing. I might in that case have had to fear at most a rival over whom I could have tried to prevail. But this time the rival was not of my own kind, their weapons were different, I could not give battle on the same terrain, or afford Albertine the same pleasures, or even conceive of them accurately. At many moments in our lives, we would barter the whole of the future against an in itself insignificant power. In the old days, I would have renounced all life's advantages to get to know Mme Blatin, because she was a friend of Mme Swann's. Today, in order that Albertine should not go to Trieste, I would have endured all manner of suffering and, were that insufficient, would have inflicted it on her, would have isolated her, locked her away, would have taken away the little money she had so that penury might prevent her physically from making the journey. As. in the old days, when I had wanted to go to Balbec, what drove me to leave was the longing for a Persian church, or for a storm at dawn, what now rent my heart when I thought that Albertine would perhaps be going to Trieste, was that she would spend Christmas night there with Mlle Vinteuil's friend; for the imagination, when it changes its nature and is transformed into sensibility, does not thereby have at its disposal a greater number of simultaneous images. Had I been told that she was not at that moment in Cherbourg, nor in Trieste, that she could not meet Albertine, how I would have wept, for joy and in relief! How my life and its future would have changed! Yet I knew very well that this localization of my jealousy was arbitrary, that if Albertine had these tastes she could gratify them with others. Perhaps even these same girls, if they could have met her elsewhere, would not have tortured my heart so. It was from Trieste, from that unknown world where I felt that Albertine had found enjoyment, where her memories were, her friendships, her childhood loves, that there was exhaled this hostile, inexplicable atmosphere, like that which used to rise up into my room of old in Combray, from the dining-room, where I could hear, laughing and talking with strangers, amidst the sound of forks, Mama, who would not be coming up to say goodnight; like that which, for Swann, had filled the houses where Odette had gone to a soirée in search of unimaginable delights. It was no longer as of some delectable land where the people are pensive, the sunsets golden, the carillons sad, that I now thought of Trieste, but as an accursed city that I would have liked instantly to have burned down and erased from the real world. That town had become lodged in my heart like a permanent arrowhead. To let Albertine leave soon for Cherbourg and Trieste filled me with horror; or even to remain in Balbec. For now that the revelation of my loved one's intimacy with Mlle Vinteuil had made me all but certain, I fancied that at every moment when Albertine was not with me (and there were whole days when, on account of her aunt, I could not see her), she was at the mercy of Bloch's cousins, and perhaps of others. The thought that this very evening she might be meeting Bloch's cousins drove me mad. And so, after she had told me that she would not leave me for the next few days, I replied: 'But the fact is I'd like to leave for Paris. Won't you leave with me? And wouldn't you like to come and live with us for a bit in Paris?' I had at all costs to prevent her being on her own, at least for a few days, to keep her beside me so as to be sure that she could not meet Mlle Vinteuil's friend. It would in

reality mean her staying alone with me, for my mother, taking advantage of a tour of inspection that my father would be making, had prescribed it as her duty to obey my grandmother's wish, who had wanted her to go for a few days to Combray to be with one of her sisters. Mama did not like her aunt because she had not been for Grandmother, so affectionate towards her, the sister that she should have been. Thus, once grown up, do children remember with resentment those who have treated them badly. But Mama having become like my grandmother, herself incapable of resentment, her mother's life was for her like a pure and innocent childhood she would draw on for those memories whose sweetness or bitterness governed her actions towards this person or that. My aunt might have supplied Mama with certain invaluable details, but now it would be hard for her to obtain them, her aunt had fallen seriously ill (it was said with cancer), and she reproached herself for not having gone sooner, so as to keep my father company, and saw this simply as one more reason to do as her mother would have done; and just as she went on my grandmother's father's anniversary, who had been such a bad father, to take to his grave the flowers that my grandmother had been in the habit of taking, so, to the side of the grave that was about to open, my mother wanted to bring the consoling conversations that my aunt had not come to offer my grandmother. While she was in Combray, my mother would be taken up with certain building work that my grandmother had always wanted, but only if it was carried out under her daughter's supervision. Thus it had not yet been begun, Mama not wanting, by leaving Paris before my father, to make him feel too much the weight of a loss in which he shared, but which could not afflict him as much as it did her. 'Oh, it wouldn't be possible at this moment, replied Albertine. Anyway, why do you need to go back to Paris so soon, when the lady in question has gone? – Because I shall be calmer in a place where I knew her, rather than in Balbec, which she has never seen and which I've come to abominate.' Did Albertine later come to realize that this other woman did not exist, and that if, on that particular night, I had truly wanted to die, it was because she had thoughtlessly revealed to me that she was friendly with the friend of Mlle Vinteuil? It is possible. There are times when it strikes me as probable. At all events, on the morning in question, she believed in the woman's existence. 'But you should marry this lady, *mon petit*, she said, you'd be happy and she would surely be happy also.' I answered that the thought that I might make this woman happy had indeed all but decided me; recently, when I had come into a large inheritance that would enable me to give my wife every pleasure and luxury, I had been on the verge of accepting the sacrifice of her whom I loved. Intoxicated by the gratitude inspired in me by Albertine's kindness, so soon after the atrocious suffering she had caused me, just as we would gladly promise the café waiter a fortune who is pouring us a sixth glass of brandy, I told her that my wife would have a motor-car and a yacht; that, from this point of view, since Albertine was so fond of motoring and of yachting, it was unfortunate that it was not her whom I loved; that I would have been the perfect husband for her, but that we would see, we would perhaps find it agreeable to see one another. In spite of everything, just as, in a state of drunkenness, we refrain from accosting passers-by for fear of blows, I refrained from the imprudence I would have committed in the days of Gilberte, of telling her that it was her, Albertine, that I loved. 'You see, I all but married her. But I didn't dare do it, however, I wouldn't have wanted to make a young woman live with someone so sickly and so tiresome. – But you're crazy, everyone would like to live with you, look how everyone seeks you out. You're all they ever talk about at Mme Verdurin's, and in the wider world, too, so I'm told. So she wasn't being nice to you, this lady, was she, by having the effect of making you doubt yourself? I can tell what she is, she's spiteful and I hate her, oh, if it'd been me…! – No, no, she's very kind, too kind. As for the Verdurins and all the rest, I don't give a fig. Apart from the woman that I love and whom I've anyway given up, I care only for my little Albertine, she's the only one, by seeing a lot of me – in the early days at least, I added, so as not to alarm her and to be able to ask a lot of her during these days – who can console me a little.' I made only a vague allusion to the possibility of marriage, while saying that it was unrealizable because our characters would not be in harmony. In spite of myself, still pursued in my jealousy by the memory of Saint-Loup's relations with 'Rachel when of the Lord' and of those of Swann with Odette, I was too given to believing that the moment I was in love, I could not be loved and that self-interest alone could attach a woman to me. It was no doubt foolish to judge Albertine in terms of Odette and Rachel. But it was not her, it was me; it was the sentiments I might inspire which my jealousy caused me to underestimate. And of this – perhaps erroneous – judgment were no doubt born many of the misfortunes that would befall us. 'You refuse my invitation for Paris, then? – My aunt wouldn't want me to leave at present. Anyway, even if I can later on, wouldn't it look funny, my coming to stay with you like that? In Paris they'd know very well I'm not your cousin. – Well, we'll say we're more or less engaged. What does it matter, since you know it isn't true?' Albertine's neck, the whole of which was protruding from her nightdress, was powerful, golden, coarse-grained. I kissed it as innocently as if I had been kissing my mother, to still a childish unhappiness that I thought then I would never be able to tear out from my heart. Albertine left me to go and get dressed. Her devotion was already weakening, in any case; a little earlier, she had said she would not leave me for a second. (And I felt indeed that her resolution would not last because I was afraid that, if we stayed in Balbec, she might that same evening, if it were not for me, meet Bloch's cousins.) Yet now she had just told me she wanted to go over to Maineville and would come back and see me during the afternoon. She had not been home the previous evening, there might be letters for her, moreover her aunt might be worried. I had replied: 'If that's the only reason, we can send the "lift" to tell your aunt you're here and fetch your letters.' And, wanting to show she was kind, though annoyed at being subjugated, she had wrinkled her brow and then, suddenly, very kindly, said 'That's right', and had sent the 'lift'. Albertine had left me only for a moment before the 'lift' came and tapped on the door. I had not expected him, while I was talking with Albertine, to have had the time to go to Maineville and then return. He came to tell me that Albertine had written a note to her aunt and that she could, if I wanted, come to Paris that same day. She had on the other hand been wrong to give him the message orally, for already, despite the earliness of the hour, the manager had heard and came, distraught, to ask me if I was unhappy about something, if I really was leaving, if I could not wait at least for a few days, the wind today being somewhat fearful (to be feared). I refused to explain that I wanted at all costs for Albertine no longer to be in Balbec at the hour when Bloch's cousins took their walk, especially with Andrée, who alone might have able to shield her, not being there, and that Balbec was like those places in which an invalid, who can no longer breathe there, has decided, even though he may die along the way, not to spend another night. For the rest, I was going to have to battle against entreaties of the same kind, in the hotel first of all, where Marie Gineste and Céleste Albaret were red-eyed. (Marie, moreover, gave vent to the urgent sobbing of a mountain torrent; the more lethargic Céleste urged her to calm; but Marie having murmured the only lines of poetry that she knew, '*Ici-bas tous les lilas meurent*', Céleste could not contain herself and a sheet of tears spilled across her lilac-coloured face; I imagine, on the other hand, that they had forgotten me by that same evening.) Then, on the little branch-line train, despite all my precautions against being seen, I encountered M. de Cambremer, who, at the sight of my trunks, turned pale, for he had been counting on me for two days' hence; he exasperated me by trying to persuade me that my breathless attacks depended on the change in the weather and that October would be ideal for them, and he asked me whether, at all events, I could not 'put off my departure for a week', an expression whose stupidity enraged me only perhaps because what he was proposing made me feel sick. And while he was speaking to me in the carriage, I was afraid at each station of seeing there appear, more terrible than Herimbald or Guiscard, M. de Crécy begging for an invitation, or more dreadful still, Mme Verdurin, insisting on inviting me. But that would happen only in a few hours' time. I had not yet reached that point. I had to confront only the despairing lamentations of the manager. I showed him the door, because I was afraid that, though he was whispering, he would wake Mama. I remained alone in the room, that same room with the too-high ceiling where I had been so unhappy on my first arrival, where I had had such tender thoughts of Mlle de Stermaria, had watched out for Albertine and her friends to go past like migrating birds that had paused on the beach, where I had possessed her with such indifference when I had sent the 'lift' to fetch her, where I had experienced my grandmother's goodness, then learned that she was dead; these shutters, at the foot of which the morning light was falling, I had opened them that first time to see the first foothills of the sea (the shutters that Albertine had made me close so that we should not be seen kissing). I became more clearly aware of my own transformations by contrasting them with the self-identity of things. Yet we become accustomed to these as we do to people and when, suddenly, we recall the different meaning that they carried, and then, once they had lost all meaning, the events, very different from those of today, for which they had been the setting, the diversity of the actions performed beneath the same ceiling, between the same glass-fronted bookcases, the change in our hearts and in our lives which that diversity implies seems further enhanced by the immutable permanence of the décor, reinforced by the unity of place.

I two or three times had the idea, momentarily, that the world in which this room and these book-cases were, and in which Albertine counted for so little, was perhaps an intellectual world, which was the sole reality, and my unhappiness something like that which we get from reading a novel, and which a madman alone

could make into a lasting and permanent unhappiness, extending into his life; that it would take only a slight effort of will perhaps to attain to that real world, to return into it by passing beyond my grief, as though bursting through a paper hoop, and no more to care about what Albertine had done than we care about the actions of the imaginary heroine of a novel after we have finished reading it. Moreover, the mistresses whom I have loved the most have never coincided with my love for them. This love was true, since I subordinated everything else to seeing them, to keeping them for myself alone, since I would sob if, one evening, I had waited for them. But they had the peculiar quality of arousing that love, of carrying it to a paroxysm, rather than of being the image of it. When I saw them, when I listened to them, I found nothing in them that might resemble my love or be able to explain it. Yet my one joy was to see them, my one anxiety to wait for them. It was as if a virtue having no connection with them had been adjoined to them incidentally by nature, and that this virtue, this electricity-like power, had the effect on me of exciting my love, that is to say of directing all my actions and causing all my sufferings. But from this, the beauty, or the intelligence, or the goodness of these women were wholly distinct. As though by an electric current that moves you, I have been shaken by my love affairs, I have lived them, I have felt them; never have I succeeded in seeing them or thinking them. I incline even to think that in these affairs (I leave aside the physical pleasure which is of course their habitual accompaniment, but is not enough to constitute them), beneath the outward appearance of the woman, it is to these invisible forces by which she is incidentally accompanied that we address ourselves, as if to obscure divinities. It is they whose good-will is necessary to us, contact with which we seek without finding any positive pleasure in it. During our assignations, the woman puts us in touch with these goddesses, and hardly anything more. We have, as offerings, promised jewels and voyages, and uttered forms of words which signify that we adore her, and contrary forms of words which signify our indifference. We have expended all our influence on obtaining a fresh assignation, but one to be accorded without annoyance. But is it for the woman herself, were she not completed by these occult forces, that we would go to so much trouble, when, once she has gone, we would be unable to say how she was dressed, and we realize that we have not even looked at her?

What a deceitful sense sight is! A human body, even when loved, as was that of Albertine, seems, from a few metres, a few centimetres away, distant from us. And the soul that belongs to it likewise. Except that, should something come violently to alter the position of that soul in relation to us, to show us that it loves other human beings and not ourselves, then, by the beating of our dislocated hearts, we feel that the cherished creature was not a few feet away, but inside us. Inside us, in more or less superficial regions. But the words 'That friend is Mlle Vinteuil' had been the 'Open sesame' that I would have been incapable of finding for myself, which had caused Albertine to penetrate deep into my lacerated heart. And I might have searched for a hundred years without knowing how the door might be reopened that had closed on her.

I had ceased hearing these words momentarily while Albertine was with me a little earlier. In kissing her as I had used to kiss my mother in Combray to calm my anguish, I almost believed in Albertine's innocence or at least did not think in any coherent way of the discovery I had made of her vice. But now that I was alone, the words rang out once more like those noises inside the ear that we hear as soon as someone has stopped talking to us. Her vice was now no longer in any doubt. The light of the sun, which was about to come up, by modifying the objects around me, made me once again, as if shifting my position for a moment in relation to it, aware, even more cruelly, of my pain. Never had I seen so beautiful and so sorrowful a morning. Reflecting on all the indifferent landscapes that were about to be illuminated, and which, only yesterday, would have filled me only with the desire to visit them, I could not contain a sob, when, in a mechanically executed gesture of oblation, seeming to symbolize for me the bloody sacrifice that I was about to have to make of all joy, each morning, until the end of my life, a renewal, solemnly celebrated at each dawning of my daily unhappiness and of the blood from my wound, the golden egg of the sun, as if propelled by the break in equilibrium produced at the moment of coagulation by a change of density, barbed with flames as in paintings, burst in one bound through the curtain behind which I had sensed it quivering for the past few moments, ready to enter on to the stage and to spring upwards, and whose mysterious, congealed purple it erased beneath floods of light. I could hear myself crying. But at that moment, against all expectation, the door opened, and, my heart pounding, I seemed to see my grandmother before me, as in one of those apparitions that I had already had, but only in my sleep. Was all this only a dream, then? Alas, I was wide awake. 'You think I look like your poor grandmother,' said Mama – for it was her – gently, as if to calm my fright, admitting, however, to the resemblance, with a lovely smile of modest pride in which coquettishness had never had any part. Her disordered hair, in which the grey strands had not been hidden but were wound about her anxious eyes and her ageing cheeks, my grandmother's dressing-gown even that she was wearing, all had prevented me for a second from recognizing her and made me unsure whether I was asleep or whether my grandmother had been resurrected. For a long time now, my mother had resembled my grandmother far more than the young and laughing Mama that my childhood had known. But I had never given it another thought. Thus it is, when we have been sitting for a long time reading, distracted, we have not noticed that time has been passing and we suddenly find, round about us, the sun, drawn inevitably to pass through the same phases, unmistakably recalling the sun there was at the same hour the day before, and awakening around it the same harmonies, the same correspondences preparatory to the sunset. It was with a smile that my mother drew my attention to my mistake, for it was a comfort to her to bear so close a resemblance to her mother. 'I came, she said, because when I was asleep I thought I could hear someone crying. It woke me up. But how is it you're not in bed? And your eyes are full of tears. What's the matter?' I took her head in my arms: 'Mama, there, I'm afraid you'll think me very changeable. But first of all, yesterday I didn't talk to you very nicely about Albertine; what I said was unfair. – But why should that matter?' my mother said, and catching sight of the rising sun, she gave a sad smile, thinking of her mother, and so that I should not lose the benefit of a spectacle that my grandmother regretted that I never watched, she pointed to the window. But behind the beach of Balbec, the sea, and the sunrise, to which Mama was pointing, I could see, in a fit of despair that did not escape her, the room in Montjouvain where Albertine, pink, curled up in a ball like a big cat, with her mischievous nose, had taken the place of Mlle Vinteuil's friend and was saying, to peals of her voluptuous laughter: 'Oh well, if we're seen, that'll only make it better. Me, I wouldn't dare spit on that old ape?' This was the scene I could see behind that spread out in the window, which was nothing more than a mournful veil, superimposed on the other like a reflection. It seemed itself indeed almost unreal, like a painted view. Facing us, where the Parville cliffs jutted out, the leafy tableau of the little wood where we had played hunt-the-ring sloped all the way down to the sea, beneath the still golden sheen of the water, as at that hour when often, at the day's end, when I had gone to have a siesta there with Albertine, we had got to our feet on seeing the sun go down. In the disorder of the night mists that still hung in blue and pink shreds over waters littered with the pearly debris of the dawn, boats were passing, smiling at the oblique light that had turned their sails and the tips of their bowsprits yellow, as when they return home in the evening: an imaginary scene, shivering and deserted, a pure evocation of the sunset, which did not rest, like the dusk, on the succession of hours of the day that I was in the habit of seeing precede it, slender, interpolated, more insubstantial even than the horrible image of Montjouvain that it had not succeeded in cancelling out, in covering, in concealing – a vain and poetic image of the memory and of the dream. 'But come, said my mother, you didn't speak any ill of her, you told me she bored you a little, that you were happy at having given up the idea of marrying her. That's no reason to cry like that. Remember that your Mama is leaving today and is going to be desolate at leaving her darling in this state. All the more, my poor child, because I hardly have time to console you. For though my things may be ready, one doesn't have all that much time on a day of departure. – It's not that.' And then, calculating the future, carefully weighing my determination, realizing that an affection such as that of Albertine for the friend of Mlle Vinteuil and over so long a period, can not have been innocent, that Albertine had been initiated, and, as all her gestures had demonstrated to me, had been born moreover with a predisposition to vice of which my anxiety had all too often had a presentiment, to which she can never have ceased to yield (to which she was perhaps yielding at this very minute, taking advantage of a moment when I was not present), I told my mother, knowing the pain I was causing her, which she did not show and which betrayed itself in her only by that look of serious concern she wore when she compared the gravity of making me unhappy or of doing me harm, the look she had worn in Combray for the first time when she had resigned herself to spending the night beside me, that look which at this moment bore an extraordinary resemblance to that of my grandmother when she allowed me to drink cognac, I said to my mother: 'I know the pain I'm going to cause you. First of all, instead of remaining here as you wanted, I'm going to leave at the same time as you. But that's by no means all. I don't feel well here, I prefer to go home. But listen, don't be too upset. It's this. I was mistaken, I misled you in good faith yesterday, I've been thinking it over all night. I absolutely must, and let that be decided here and now, because I now realize clearly, because I shan't change again, and I couldn't live without it, I absolutely must marry Albertine.'

BOOK V
The Prisoner

From early morning, with my face still turned to the wall and before I had seen, above the tall window curtains, the colour of the line of morning light, I already knew what kind of day it was. I could tell from the first street noises, whether they reached me muffled and distorted by dampness or twanging like arrows in the empty, resonant space of a wide-open morning, icy and pure. The rumbling of the first tram told me whether it was huddled against the rain or forging gaily towards a blue horizon. And maybe even those sounds had been preceded by some swifter, more penetrating emanation which had slid into my sleep and suffused it with a sadness foretelling snow, or had found there a certain little intermittent figure which it set to singing so many rousing hymns in praise of the sun that, though still asleep, I would begin to smile, my closed eyes preparing to be dazzled, until a crash of music finally brought me awake. It was, in fact, mainly from my bedroom that I perceived the world around me at this period. I know Bloch spread the story that when he came to see me in the evening, he would hear the sound of conversation; since my mother was at Combray and he never found anyone in my room, he concluded that I was talking to myself. When, much later, he found out that Albertine had been living with me then and realized that I had been hiding her from everyone, he declared that he understood at last why, at that time in my life, I never wanted to go out. He was wrong. Very understandably so, since reality, even if it is inevitable, is not completely predictable; those who learn some correct detail about the life of another promptly jump from it to quite incorrect conclusions and see in the newly discovered fact the explanation for things which in truth are completely unrelated to it.

When I think now of how my friend had left Balbec with me and come back to Paris to live under the same roof, giving up her idea of going on a cruise; of how she slept twenty paces from my bedroom, at the end of the corridor, in my father's little room with the tapestries, and how every evening, very late, before leaving me to sleep, she would slip her tongue into my mouth like my daily bread, like a nourishing food having the almost sacred character of all flesh on which suffering – the suffering that we have endured for its sake – has conferred a kind of spiritual sweetness, then the analogy which springs to my mind is not the night which Captain de Borodino allowed me to spend at the barracks – a favour which, after all, cured a mere passing malaise–but that other night when my father sent Mama to sleep in the little bed next to mine. So true is it that life, if it decides once more to spare us a trial which seems inevitable, does so in a different manner – such a contradictory manner, sometimes, that it appears almost sacrilegious to recognize that the grace granted to us is the same!

Once Albertine had learned from Françoise that, in the darkness of my room with its still-closed curtains, I was not sleeping, she did not bother to avoid making a small amount of noise as she washed in her bathroom. So then I would often go into another bathroom adjoining hers, which was a pleasant place. In former times a theatrical producer would spend hundreds of thousands of francs to stud with real emeralds the throne from which the diva would play the part of an empress. The Russian Ballet has taught us that simple, well-directed lighting effects can flood the stage with jewels just as sumptuous and more varied. This new décor, already more immaterial, is still not so charming as the one which the eight o'clock sun produces in place of what we were accustomed to see when we did not rise until midday. The windows of our two bathrooms were not clear but, so that we could not be seen from outside, were all puckered into an old-fashioned, artificial frost effect. The sun suddenly turned this net of glass to yellow, gilded it and, gently uncovering in me a young man of former times who had been long hidden by habit, intoxicated me with memories, as if I had been in the open air looking at gilded foliage in which not even the presence of a bird was wanting. For I could hear Albertine endlessly whistling:

> Sorrows are crazy
> And listening to them is crazier still.

I was too fond of her not to smile happily at her bad musical taste. Mme Bontemps, I may say, had had a passion for that song the previous summer, until she heard that it was a silly thing, whereupon, instead of asking Albertine to sing it when people called, she began to ask for:

> A farewell song rises from troubled springs

which in turn became 'that old thing of Massenet's that the child is always trotting out'. A cloud would pass, hiding the sun, and I would see the modest foliage of the glass curtain turn dull and lapse into a grisaille.

Albertine's bathroom was just like mine but, since there was another at the other end of the flat, Mama had never used this one for fear of disturbing me with noise. The walls separating the two were so thin that we could chat to each other as we washed, carrying on a conversation interrupted only by the sound of the water, in the kind of intimacy which is often produced in hotels by the cramped space and nearness of the rooms, but which in Paris is so rare. At other times, I stayed in bed, dreaming for as long as I liked, for the orders were never to come into my room until I had rung. Because of the inconvenient way in which the bell-push had been hung over my bed, reaching it took so long that sometimes, tiring of the effort to grasp it and enjoying being alone, I almost went back to sleep. Not that I was completely indifferent to Albertine's presence in the family flat. By separating her from her friends I had succeeded in sparing my heart further suffering. I had placed it in a position of rest, of near immobility which would help it to heal. But the state of calm which my friend's presence produced in me was an alleviation of suffering rather than actual joy. Not that it did not allow me to enjoy many pleasures from which my previous, acute pain had closed me off, but far from owing these pleasures to Albertine, whom I hardly even found pretty any more, in whose company I was bored and whom I had a clear sense of no longer loving, I experienced them, on the contrary, when she was not with me. So I would begin the morning by not having her called at once, especially if the weather were fine. For a few moments, knowing that his company made me happier than hers, I remained in private colloquy with the little inner figure, singer of salutations to the sun, whom I mentioned a moment ago. Of all the persons who make up our individual selves, the most apparent are not the most essential. When illness has eliminated them one by one, there will survive in me a final two or three, the hardest to kill off, and notably one, a philosopher who is happy only when he has discovered, between two works of art or between two sensations, a common factor. But I have sometimes wondered if the last of all will not be the little man very like another little man that the Combray optician kept in his shop window, who took his hood off whenever the sun shone and put it back on again if it was going to rain. I know that little man, with all his egoism; I can be suffering an asthma attack which only the coming of rain would relieve, he does not care and, at the first drops that I have been so longing for, he scowls and crossly pulls up his hood. On the other hand, I feel sure that on my deathbed, when all my other 'I's' are already gone, if there is a blink of sun, while I am drawing my last breaths, the little barometer man will be delighted and will take his hood off and sing, 'Ah! The sun at last!'

I rang for Françoise. I opened the *Figaro*. I looked for, and once more did not find, an article or something calling itself an article which I had sent to that newspaper and which was nothing but a slightly rearranged version of the recently rediscovered page which I had written in Dr Percepied's carriage while looking at the steeples of Martinville. Then I read Mama's latest letter. She found it strange, shocking, that an unmarried girl should be living alone with me. It may be that on the first day, when we were leaving Balbec, when she saw me looking so unhappy and was worried about leaving me alone, she had been pleased to hear that Albertine was coming with us and to see loaded on to the train, next to our luggage (the luggage I had spent the night weeping over in the hotel in Balbec), Albertine's narrow black boxes, which had seemed to me to have the shape of coffins, so that I did not know whether they would bring life into our house, or death. But I did not even think about Mama's feelings, being entirely caught up in the joy of that radiant morning and the thought that, after all my fear of staying in Balbec, I was taking Albertine home with me. Mama may not have been hostile to the scheme at first (she spoke kindly to my friend, as a mother does whose

son has been seriously wounded and who is grateful to the young mistress who is devotedly nursing him), but she became so as it was too thoroughly carried out, and as the young woman's stay in our house – in our house in the absence of my parents – became prolonged. I cannot say, however, that she ever made her hostility plain to me. Just as before, when she felt she could no longer reproach me with my nervous disposition, my laziness, now she was afraid – something I perhaps did not entirely understand at the time or did not wish to understand – that by expressing any reservations about the girl to whom I said I was going to become engaged, she might cast a shadow over my future life, make me less committed to my wife, perhaps lead me to reproach myself, once she was gone, for having hurt her by marrying Albertine. Mama preferred to seem to endorse a choice that she felt she would not be able to make me reconsider. But everyone who saw her at that time told me that her sorrow at having lost her own mother was aggravated by a look of perpetual worry. This mental strain, this constant argument with herself, made Mama's temples over-heat, and she was constantly opening windows to try to cool down. But she could not take a decision for fear of 'influencing' me in the wrong direction and spoiling what she thought was my happiness. She could not even make up her mind to stop me having Albertine in the flat in the meantime. She did not want to appear more strict than Mme Bontemps, whose place it was, if anyone's, to act, and who did not find the arrangement unsuitable, much to my mother's surprise. In any case she was sorry to have been obliged to leave the two of us together by having to set off just then for Combray, where she saw she might have to stay (and did indeed stay) for many months, during which time my great-aunt needed her by her day and night. Everything there was made easy for her by the kindness, the devotion of Legrandin, for whom nothing was too much trouble, who put off from week to week his return to Paris, simply because my aunt, whom he did not know particularly well, had been a friend of his mother's, and because he realized that the dying woman valued his attentions and could not do without him. Snobbery is a serious malady of the soul, but a localized one which does not affect it overall. I, on the other hand, was delighted by Mama's absence in Combray, for it meant that Albertine (whom I could not ask to conceal it) would not be able to mention to her her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. This relationship would, in my mother's eyes, have utterly precluded not only a marriage, which she had in any case asked me not to discuss in too definite terms with my friend and which furthermore was coming to seem intolerable to me, but even a stay in our house by Albertine as a guest. Failing such a serious reason, of which she was not aware, Mama, under the double effect of her mother's edifying and liberating example on the one hand (Grandmother, that admirer of George Sand, who defined virtue as nobility of heart) and on the other my own corrupting influence, now showed tolerance for women of whose conduct she would once have been severely critical and whom she would have condemned even now if they had been middle-class friends of hers from Paris or Combray, but whose great souls I praised to her and whom she forgave much because they were fond of me. In spite of everything, and even setting aside the question of propriety, I think Albertine would have exhausted Mama's patience, for Mama had learned at Combray, from Aunt Léonie and from all her female relations, habits of order of which my friend had not the slightest inkling. She would no more have closed a door nor, on the other hand, hesitated to enter a room where the door was open than would a dog or a cat. Her somewhat inconvenient charm consisted in being in the house not in the manner of a young girl but of a domestic animal which comes into a room, goes out, turns up in the place you least expect it, jumps on to the bed – I found this deeply restful – lies down beside one, makes a place for itself and lies there without moving, without annoying one as a person would. However, she finally adapted herself to my sleeping hours and learned, not just not to try to come into my room, but even not to make any noise until I rang. It was Françoise who set these rules for her. Françoise was one of those Combray servants who know their master's importance, and that the least they can do is to make everyone show him the respect they think is his due. When a visitor from outside gave Françoise a tip to be shared with the kitchen-maid, the donor hardly had time to hand over his coin before Françoise, with equal speed, discretion and energy, had primed the girl to appear and thank him, not under her breath but loudly and clearly, as Françoise had told her was the right way to do. The curé of Combray was not a genius, but he too knew how things should be done. Under his instruction, the daughter of some Protestant cousins of Mme Sazerat's had been converted to Catholicism, and the family had shown him all due appreciation. There was a question of her marrying a nobleman from Méséglise. The young man's parents wrote asking for information about her, a rather disdainful letter in which they showed contempt for her Protestant birth. The priest replied in such terms that the nobleman had to swallow his pride and write a very different letter, begging as the most precious favour to be allowed to form an alliance with the young lady.

There was no personal merit in the way Françoise taught Albertine to respect my sleep. She was steeped in the old tradition. Her silence, or her brusque reply to Albertine's no doubt innocent suggestion that she might enter my room or that Françoise might ask me for something, made my friend realize with astonishment that she had entered a new world of unknown customs, ruled by laws of behaviour that no one could think of breaking. Albertine had had a foretaste of this in Balbec, but in Paris she did not even try to resist, and waited patiently each morning for the sound of my bell before daring to make any noise.

Her education by Françoise was in any case good for our old servant herself, for it gradually moderated the level of the complaints that she had been uttering ever since our return from Balbec. For, just as we were getting into the tram, she had realized that she had forgotten to say goodbye to the 'housekeeper' of the hotel, a moustachioed person who watched over the landings and corridors, who barely knew Françoise but had been reasonably polite to her. Françoise was determined to turn back, to get off the tram, go back to the hotel, say a proper goodbye to the housekeeper and not leave until the next day. Good sense and above all my sudden horror of Balbec prevented me from allowing this, but ever since then she had been suffering from a feverish ill-humour, which the change of air did not relieve and which was persisting in Paris. For according to Françoise's code, as it is set forth in the bas-reliefs of Saint-André-des-Champs, to desire the death of an enemy, even to inflict it on him, is not forbidden, but it is dreadful not to do the right thing, not to return a favour, to be ignorant and not say goodbye to the lady on the landing. Throughout the journey, the constantly recurring memory of not having said goodbye to this woman would bring an alarming scarlet flush to Françoise's cheeks. And if she refused to eat or drink until we got to Paris, it was perhaps because this memory really 'weighed on her stomach' (every social class has its own pathology), and not just that she wanted to punish us.

One of the reasons why Mama wrote me a letter every day, every letter including a quotation from Mme de Sévigné,[1] was the memory of her mother. Mama would write to me, 'Mme Sazerat gave us one of her special little luncheons, the kind which, as your poor grandmother would have said, quoting Mme de Sévigné, take us from solitude without offering us company.' In an early answer, I was foolish enough to write to her, 'Your mother would recognize you at once from your choice of quotations,' only to receive the reply: 'Silly boy, imagine quoting Mme de Sévigné to talk to me about *my mother*. She would have answered you as she did Mme de Grignan: "Was she nothing to you? I thought you were related".'

At this point, I would hear my friend's footsteps coming or going from her bedroom. I would ring the bell, because this was the time when Andrée came with the chauffeur (a friend of Morel's, lent by the Verdurins) to collect Albertine. I had mentioned to Albertine the distant possibility of our marrying, but I had never made a formal proposal; she, for her part, out of modesty, when I had said, 'I don't know, but perhaps we could,' had shaken her head with a sad smile, saying, 'No, of course we couldn't,' meaning, 'I am too poor.' And so, while dismissing any long-term project with the words 'it's all very uncertain', I did everything possible to amuse her, to make her life pleasant, perhaps also, unconsciously, trying to make her want to marry me. Albertine herself laughed at all this luxury. 'Wouldn't Andrée's mother pull a face if she saw I'd become a rich lady like her, what she calls a lady with "horses, carriages, pictures". What? Didn't I ever tell you about her saying that? Oh, she's a real character. What surprises me is that she puts the pictures on the same level as the horses and carriages.'

For, as we shall see later, in spite of some silly habits of speech that she had retained, Albertine had developed astonishingly, something which was a matter of complete indifference to me, superior intelligence in a woman having always interested me so little that if I remarked on it to one or other of them, it has always been from mere politeness.

Only the curious genius of Céleste might have appealed to me. I could not keep from smiling for a few moments when, for example, knowing that Albertine was not there and seizing the opportunity, she approached me with the words, 'O heavenly being set down on a bed.' I said, 'Really, Céleste, what do you mean, "heavenly being"? – Well, if you think you're anything like the creatures who walk on our humble earth, you're much mistaken – But why "set down" on a bed?

You can see that I'm lying down. – You never lie down. No one lies down like that. You floated down there. Those white pyjamas you're wearing today and the way you move your neck make you look like a dove.'

Albertine, even when she was talking about trivial things, now spoke in quite a different manner from that of the little girl she had been just a few years before, at Balbec. She would go so far as to say, about a political event of which she disapproved, 'I think that's beyond everything,' and I am not sure if it was not around that time that she learned to say, meaning that she found a book badly written, 'It's interesting, but really, he's *made a pig's ear* of the writing.' The taboo on entering my room before I had rung amused her greatly. As she had caught our family habit of quotation, and chose hers from the plays in which she had acted at the convent and which I had said I liked, she always compared me to Ahasuerus:

Et la mort est le prix de tout audacieux
Qui sans être appelé se présente a ses yeux.
. . . . . .
Rien ne met a l'abri de cet ordre fatal,
Ni le rang, ni le sexe, et le crime est égal.
. . . . . .
Moi-même …
Je suis à cette loi comme une autre soumise,
Et sans le prévenir il faut pour lui parler
Qu'il me cherche ou du moins qu'il me fasse appeler.[2]

Physically, too, she had changed. Her long blue eyes – longer now – had taken on a new shape; they were still the same colour, but seemed to have changed to the liquid state, so that, when she closed them, it was like drawing curtains to shut out a view of the sea. It was no doubt this part of her that I chiefly remembered when I left her each night. For, on the contrary, the tight waviness of her hair, for example, came to me for a long time as a daily surprise, like something new, as if I had never seen it before. And yet, springing above the smiling gaze of a young girl, what is more beautiful than this curly crown of black violets? There is more promise of friendship in the smile; but the little shiny tendrils of flowering hair, nearer relatives of the flesh which they seem to transpose into tiny, moving waves, take a stronger hold upon our desire. She would come into my bedroom, jump straight on to the bed and sometimes begin to define the character of my intelligence, or swear in a genuine rush of feeling that she would rather die than leave me: those were the days when I had shaved before calling her in. She was one of those women who cannot disentangle the reasons for their feelings. Seeing a fresh complexion gives them pleasure; they attribute it to the personal qualities of the man who seems to promise them a future of happiness: happiness which seems to shrink and to become less necessary to them as one's beard grows back again.

I would ask where she planned to go that day. 'I think Andrée wants to take me to the Buttes-Chaumont;[3] I've never been there.' It was certainly beyond me to guess whether these words, among so many others, concealed a lie. In any case I trusted Andrée to tell me all the places she went to with Albertine. In Balbec, when I felt I had really had enough of Albertine, I had planned to say, untruthfully, to Andrée: 'Dear Andrée, if only I had met you again sooner! You're the one I should have fallen in love with. But now I'm in love with someone else. All the same, we can see a lot of each other, for my love for this other person is making me so unhappy and you will help me to get over it.' But these same lying words had become te truth only three weeks later. Maybe, once in Paris, Andrée did come to believe that it was a lie and that I did love her, as she would surely have come to think in Balbec. For the truth changes so much for us that other people can hardly keep track of it. And as I knew that she would tell me everything she and Albertine did together, I had asked her, and she had agreed, to come and take Albertine out practically every day. In this way I could safely stay at home. And Andrée's privileged position as one of the girls of the little gang gave me confidence that she would be able to influence Albertine to do anything I wanted. Truly, I could now have told her in all honesty that she would be able to give me peace of mind.

It is also true that my choice of Andrée (who happened to be in Paris at this time, having given up her plan to go back to Balbec) as my friend's companion had been influenced by what Albertine had told me about her friend's attachment to me when we were in Balbec, at a time when I feared I bored her; had I known of this at the time I might indeed have fallen in love with Andrée after all. 'What, you mean you didn't know?' said Albertine. 'We used to joke about it among ourselves. Anyway, didn't you notice how she'd started to talk like you, to use your arguments? Especially when she'd just been with you, it stood out a mile. She didn't have to tell us that she'd seen you. As soon as she arrived, if she'd been with you, we could tell at once. We'd look at each other and laugh. She was like a coalman trying to pretend he isn't a coalman, but he's all black. A miller doesn't have to tell you he's a miller, you can see the flour all over him and the place where the sack was on his back. Andrée was just the same, she moved her eyebrows like you, and then that long neck of hers, I can't explain. When I pick up a book that's been in your bedroom, I can take it out of doors, but anyone can still tell it's yours because there's always a trace of your horrible disinfectants. It's a tiny thing, I can't tell you, but there's just a hint which is actually quite nice. Every time somebody said anything nice about you, or seemed to think a lot of you, Andrée was in the seventh heaven.'

Even so, just to be sure that nothing had been planned without my knowledge, I would advise them not to go to the Buttes-Chaumont that day, but to go instead to Saint-Cloud, or somewhere else.

It was certainly not that I loved Albertine in the slightest: I knew that. Perhaps love is nothing but the ripple effect of those disturbances which, in the wake of an emotion, stir up the soul. My whole soul had been profoundly agitated when Albertine had told me, at Balbec, about Mlle Vinteuil, but these disturbances were over now. I no longer loved Albertine, for nothing remained of the pain, now cured, which I had suffered in the tram at Balbec when I learned what Albertine's adolescence had been, including, perhaps, visits to Montjouvain. I had turned it all over in my mind for too long, the pain was gone. But occasionally certain ways of speaking of Albertine's led me to think – I do not know why – that she must have received in her time, short as it still was, a great many compliments, declarations of love, propositions, and received them with pleasure: that is, sensual pleasure. For example, she said apropos of anything and everything, 'Really? Is that really true?' Certainly, if she had said like Odette and others of her kind, 'Really? Are all those lies really true?' I would have taken no notice, for the absurdity of the saying would simply have been typical of the stupid banality of women's humour. But her questioning look as she said 'Is it really?' gave, on the one hand, the strange impression of a creature which cannot take in things for itself, which appeals to your judgment, as if it did not have the same faculties as you (if you said, 'We left an hour ago' or 'It's raining', she would reply 'Did we really?' or 'Is it really?'). On the other hand, unfortunately, this apparent difficulty in registering outward phenomena for herself was probably not in fact the origin of her 'Really? Is it really?' It seemed more likely that these words had developed, at the time of her precocious sexual maturity, as a response to 'You know, I've never known anyone as pretty as you,' 'You know I'm really in love with you, I'm dreadfully excited,' sayings which were received with the yielding, coquettishly modest 'Really?', 'Are you really?' which, with me, Albertine now only used in response to such observations as, 'You've been dozing for an hour' – 'Really?'

Without feeling at all in love with Albertine, without numbering among my pleasures the moments we spent together, I still worried about how she spent her time; certainly, I had fled Balbec so as to be sure that she would no longer be able to see certain women or girls with whom I was afraid that she might transgress, laughing the while – perhaps laughing at me – so afraid that I had craftily tried, by my departure, to break off in one go all her dangerous friendships. And Albertine's passivity was so intense, her ability to forget and to submit so extreme, that these friendships had in fact been broken off and the phobia which obsessed me, cured. But this phobia can take on as many forms as the uncertain evil which is its object. For so long as my jealousy was not reincarnated in new persons, I had enjoyed, after my earlier sufferings, an interval of calm. But a chronic illness needs only the smallest pretext to recur, just as the perverse impulses

of the being which is the cause of the jealousy need only the slightest opportunity to reassert themselves (after an interval of chastity) with new partners. I had managed to separate Albertine from her accomplices and thereby to exorcize my hallucinations; but even though it was possible to make her forget particular people, to shorten her attachments, still her love of pleasure, like my jealousy, was chronic and perhaps was only waiting for an opportunity to resurface. Now, Paris offers as many such opportunities as Balbec. Whatever city she found herself in, she had no need to look for temptation, for the evil was not in Albertine alone, but in other women, for whom every chance of pleasure was worth taking. A look from one of them, immediately understood by the other, brings the sex-starved pair together. And a clever woman can easily appear not to have seen anything, and then five minutes later follow the other person, who did understand and is waiting for her in a side-street, and in a few words arrange a meeting. Who is to know? And to keep the relationship going, it was so easy for Albertine to tell me that she wanted to go back to some part of Paris that had appealed to her. It follows that she only had to come home late, her outing only had to have lasted an inexplicably long time (though no doubt it could easily have been explained without introducing any sexual motive) and my sufferings would begin again, attached this time to mental images that did not date from Balbec, and which I would try to erase, as I had erased their predecessors, as if the destruction of a temporary cause could bring about the cure of a congenital disease. I did not realize that by these eradications, in which I was assisted by Albertine's own changeability, her readiness to forget, even to hate the recent object of her love, I sometimes caused deep suffering to one or another of these unknown beings with whom she had, in turn, taken pleasure, and I caused them to suffer in vain, for they would be cast off, but replaced; parallel to the path marked out by so many light-hearted desertions, there would be a pitiless one for me, broken only by the shortest of respites, so that my sufferings, as I should have realized, could end only with Albertine's life or with my own. Even in our early days back in Paris, when I was dissatisfied with the information that Andrée and the chauffeur had given me about their outings with my friend, I had felt the surroundings of Paris to be as cruel as those of Balbec and I had gone off on a few days' journey with Albertine. But everywhere my uncertainty about what she was doing was the same, the possibilities for wrongdoing were just as numerous, keeping a watch on her was even more difficult, so that I had brought her back to Paris. The truth was that in leaving Balbec I had thought that I was leaving Gomorrah behind, that I was tearing Albertine away from it; alas! Gomorrah was dispersed to the four corners of the Earth. And, partly because of my jealousy, and partly out of ignorance about these pleasures (a most unusual ignorance), I had unwittingly set up this game of hide-and-seek in which Albertine would forever escape me. I would fire questions directly at her: 'Ah, that reminds me, Albertine, am I imagining it, or didn't you tell me you used to know Gilberte Swann?' – 'Yes, that's to say, she talked to me once at school, because she had the French history notes, she was really nice, she let them me borrow them and I gave them back to her the next time I saw her.' – 'Is she one of those women, you know, the kind I don't like?' – 'Oh no, not at all, quite the opposite.'

But, rather than engaging in these investigative conversations, I often expended on imagining Albertine's outing the energy I was saving by not taking part in it, and when I spoke to my friend about a project, it was with all the enthusiasm that is not dissipated by actually carrying it out. I would express so strong a desire to go and look again at such-and-such a stained-glass window in the Sainte Chapelle, such regret that we could not go there alone, that she would tenderly reply, 'But darling, if you want to go there so much, you can do it, come with us. We'll wait for you as long as you like, until you're ready to go. And then, if you'd rather go with just me, I can easily send Andrée home, she can come another time.' But by begging me to go out like this, she calmed me down to the point where I was able to stay at home.

I did not stop to think that by relying on Andrée or the chauffeur to keep me calm, by using them to keep watch on Albertine, I was becoming apathetic, allowing all the imaginative powers of the intelligence, the inspirations of the will which allow one to foresee and prevent the actions of another, to stiffen and become inert. This was all the more dangerous in that my nature has always made me more open to the world of the possible than to that of real-life contingencies. This approach helps one to understand the human soul, but one runs the risk of being deceived by individuals. My jealousy sprang from images, its purpose was suffering; it did not derive from any probability. Now, in the life of men and of nations there may come (and did come, one day, in my own life) a moment when one needs to find within oneself a prefect of police, a clear-sighted diplomat, a head of criminal investigation who, instead of letting his mind wander among all the possibilities between here and the four corners of the universe, reasons logically and says to himself, 'If Germany announces this, it's because she wants to do something else, not any odd thing at random, but precisely this or that, which she has perhaps already begun to do' – 'If such-and-such a person has escaped, he will not be heading for *a*, *b*, or *d*, but for *c*, and the place to begin our search is, *etc*.' Alas, this faculty was not very highly developed in me, and I was letting it grow sluggish, fade, disappear as I formed the habit of calm, relying on others to do my surveillance for me. As for my desire to stay at home, I had no wish to explain it to Albertine. I told her that the doctor said I had to stay in bed. That was not true. And even if it had been, his directions would not have had the power to stop me going out with my friend.

I asked her to excuse me from coming with her and Andrée. I shall give only one of my reasons, which was a reason of self-preservation. As soon as I was in public with Albertine, if she was out of my sight for a moment I was anxious, I began imagining that she had been speaking to someone or even looking at someone. If she was not in the very best of moods, I would think that I was making her miss or have to postpone some planned meeting. Reality is always a mere starting-point towards the unknown, on a path down which we can never travel very far. It is better not to know, to think as little as possible, not to feed jealousy on the smallest concrete detail. Unfortunately, failing contact with the outside world, the inner world can also provide incidents; even when I did not go out with Albertine, chance meetings in my own solitary thoughts sometimes provided those little fragments of reality that magnetically draw to themselves scraps of the unknown which immediately begin to hurt. One may choose to live under the equivalent of a bell jar; associations of ideas and memories continue their play. But these internal shocks did not appear immediately; as soon as Albertine had left for her drive I was filled with life, if only for a few moments, by the elating powers of solitude. I shared in the pleasures of the day to come; the arbitrary desire – the capricious, purely personal wish – to enjoy them would not have been enough to put them within my reach, had not the day's special weather not only called up the images of such pleasures in the past, but affirmed their real existence in the here and now, immediately accessible to all men not obliged by an accidental (and therefore negligible) circumstance to stay at home. On certain fine days it was so cold, one was in such extensive communication with the street outside, that it was as if the walls of the house had been wrenched apart, and each time the tram passed, its note sounded out as if a silver knife were striking a house made of glass. But it was above all inside myself that I heard with delight a new sound struck from the inner violin. Its strings are tightened or slackened by simple variations in temperature, in exterior light. Within our being, that instrument which the uniformity of habit has reduced to silence, melody springs from these changes, these variations, which are the source of all music: the weather on particular days makes us move immediately from one note to another. We hear once more the forgotten tune whose mathematical necessity we could have worked out and which, for the first few moments, we sing without recognizing it. Only these inner changes (though they came from outside) brought the outer world alive again for me. Connecting doors, long walled up, were opening again in my brain. The life of certain towns, the gaiety of certain promenades took their place within me again. With my whole being trembling around the vibrating string, I would have given my dreary past life and all my life to come, both rubbed flat by the eraser of habit, to prolong this peculiar state.

I had not gone with Albertine on her long drive, but my mind would only travel the further and, having refused to experience with my senses that particular morning, I could enjoy in imagination every morning of the same kind, past and future, or, more exactly, a certain type of morning of which all mornings of the same kind were a fleeting apparition and which I had quickly recognized; for the sharp air itself turned up the right pages and set before me, so that I could follow it from my bed, the Gospel for the day. This ideal morning filled my mind with permanent reality, identical with all similar mornings, and with a gaiety unimpaired by my weak physical state; for, since our well-being results much less from our good health than from the surplus of our unexpended energy, we can attain it not only by increasing our strength, but by reducing our activity. I was overflowing with energy, held in reserve in my bed; it made me start, inwardly leap, like a machine with the brake on running in neutral.

Françoise came in to light the fire, and to get it going threw on a few twigs whose smell, forgotten all through the summer, traced a magic circle around the fireplace in which, seeing myself reading now at Combray, now at Doncières, I was as happy, staying in my room in Paris, as if I had been on the point of leaving for a walk towards Méséglise or meeting Saint-Loup and his friends on field exercises. It often happens that the pleasure that everyone takes in recalling his store of remembered scenes is more intense, for example, in those who on the one hand are prevented by the tyranny of physical illness and the hope of a cure from seeking in nature pictures which resemble their memories, but on the other can still hope that they will soon be able to do so, so that their attitude towards these scenes remains one of desire, of appetite, and they do not consider them simply as scenes, as pictures. But even if they could have remained mere pictures for me; if, recalling them, I could simply have gazed upon them, they still immediately recreated in me, in my whole being, by the power of an identical sensation, the child, the adolescent who had first seen them. It was not just the weather outside that had changed, or the smells in my room, but inside me there was a change of age, the replacement of one person by another. The smell of the twigs in the icy air was like a piece of the past, an invisible ice-floe broken off from a distant winter and floating into my room, striated here and there with a perfume or a light as if by different years into which I found myself plunged once again, swept away even before I had recognized them by the light-heartedness of hopes long since abandoned. The sun reached my bed and shone through the transparent barrier of my thin body, warmed me, made me as fiery as crystal. Then, like a starving convalescent feeding already on all the dishes he is not yet allowed to have, I would ask myself whether marrying Albertine would not ruin my life, both by making me take on the impossible task (impossible for me) of dedicating myself to another human being and by separating me from myself by her continual presence, depriving me for ever of the joys of solitude. And not only of those. Even if we ask of the day only desires, there are some – those provoked not by things, but by human beings – which by nature cannot be shared. Thus, if I got out of bed and went to open my curtains for a moment, it was not only in the way a musician opens his piano for a moment, and to see whether on the balcony and in the street the light had exactly the same quality as in my memory, it was also to see some laundry-woman carrying her linen-basket, a baker's wife in her blue apron, a dairy-woman in white linen bib and sleeves holding the hook for the milk-jugs, some proud, fair-haired young girl following her governess, an image which tiny differences in outline (perhaps so small as to be insignificant) made as different from any other as a musical phrase differs from another by a note or two. Without this vision I should have deprived my day of the objects it could offer to my desires for happiness. But if the increase in joy, brought to me by the sight of women I could not have imagined *a priori*, made the street, the town, the world seem more desirable, more worthy of being explored, it made me, for that very reason, more anxious to get well, to go out, and, without Albertine, to be free. How many times, at the moment when the unknown woman of whom I would soon be dreaming was passing in front of the house, sometimes on foot, sometimes with all the speed of her motor-car, I suffered because my body could not follow my gaze in its pursuit of her and, falling upon her as if shot from my window by a stone-bow, arrest the flight of that face in which there awaited me the promise of a happiness that, shut away as I was, I should never enjoy.

Albertine, on the other hand, held nothing new for me. Every day I found her less pretty. Only the desire which she excited in others, when I learned of it and began to suffer again, in my desire to keep her from them, could put her back on her pedestal. Suffering alone gave life to my tedious attachment to her. When she disappeared, taking with her the need to alleviate my pain, which demanded all my attention like some dreadful hobby, I realized how little she meant to me – as little, no doubt, as I meant to her. It made me unhappy that things should go on this way, and sometimes I longed to hear of some really unforgivable thing that she had done, something that, until I was cured, would come between us, so that we could then make it up, remake, in a different and more flexible form, the tie that held us together. In the meantime, I relied on a thousand circumstances, a thousand pleasures, to give her, while she stayed with me, the illusion of that happiness which I felt incapable of giving her myself. I wanted to go to Venice as soon as I was better, but how could I do that, married to Albertine, when I was so jealous of her that, even in Paris, when I did decide to move, it was to go out with her? Even when I stayed at home all afternoon, my thoughts followed her wherever she went, tracing out a distant, blue horizon, creating, around the centre where I lay, a moving zone of uncertainty and vagueness. 'Albertine could spare me so much of the anguish of separation,' I said to myself, 'if only, on one of these outings, seeing that I no longer speak to her of marriage, she would decide not to come back, and go off to her aunt's without my having to say goodbye!' My heart, now that its wound was forming scar tissue, was beginning to detach itself from that of my friend. I could imagine her removed, at a distance from me, without suffering. Failing myself, some other man would no doubt be her husband, and, once free, she would perhaps have some of those adventures that filled me with horror. But it was such a fine day, I was so sure that she would be back in the evening, that even if this idea of possible transgressions came into my mind, I could by an act of free-will shut it off in one part of my brain, where it impinged on me no more than the vices of an imaginary person would on my real life. Turning my thought on its newly oiled hinges, using a new energy which I could feel, in my head, as both a physical and a mental force, like a muscular movement and a spiritual departure, I had left behind the customary state of preoccupation in which I had hitherto been confined and was beginning to move in the free air, so that the idea of sacrificing everything to stop Albertine marrying someone else and to frustrate her taste for women seemed as unreasonable in my eyes as it would have to someone who had never known her. Besides, jealousy is one of those intermittent diseases whose causes are arbitrary, inescapable, always the same in a given patient but sometimes entirely different in another. Some asthmatics can moderate their attacks only by opening the windows, breathing a strong breeze or the pure air of the mountains; others take refuge in the centre of town, in a smoky room. There is hardly a victim of jealousy whose illness does not admit of some palliations. One accepts being deceived provided he is told of it, another provided it is hidden from him, and in this one is hardly more absurd than the other, for if the second is more truly deceived, since the truth is hidden from him, the first needs the truth to feed his sufferings, to extend and renew them. What is more, these two inverse obsessions of jealousy often go beyond words, whether they beg for confidences or refuse them. We see some victims who are jealous only of men with whom their mistress has relations far away from them, but who allow her to give herself to another man if it is with their permission, near them, and if not actually in front of their eyes, at any rate under their roof. This behaviour is quite often found in old men in love with a young woman. They know how difficult it is to please her, sometimes feel themselves incapable of satisfying her, and, rather than be deceived, prefer to allow someone to come into their house, to a neighbouring room, someone who they think will not be able to give her bad advice, even if he is able to give immediate pleasure. Others are quite the opposite: not allowing their mistress to go out alone for a moment in a city they know, keeping her in veritable slavery, they let her go away for a month to a country they do not know, where they cannot imagine what she is doing. In relation to Albertine I longed to achieve peace by either of these means. I would not have been jealous if she had taken pleasures close to me, encouraged and entirely overseen by me, sparing me in that way my fears of her lying; perhaps the same would have been true if she had gone somewhere far away and so unfamiliar to me that I could not imagine how she was living, nor have any hope of finding out, nor be tempted to try. In either case, doubt would have been suppressed, whether by complete knowledge or complete ignorance.

The waning of the day plunged me back, through memory, into a cool atmosphere of former times; I breathed it in with the same delight as Orpheus did the rarefied air, unknown to this earth, of the Elysian Fields. But already the day was ending and I was engulfed in my evening sadness. Looking mechanically at the clock to see how many hours had still to pass before Albertine came home, I saw that I still had time to dress and go downstairs to ask my landlady, Mme de Guermantes,[4] for some ideas about certain pretty items of dress that I wanted to give to my friend. Sometimes I used to meet Her Grace in the courtyard, going out to do her shopping on foot, even in bad weather, wearing a small, neat hat and a fur coat. I knew very well that for many intelligent people she was no different from any other lady, the name of Duchesse de Guermantes having no meaning now that there are no more dukedoms or principalities, but I had adopted another point of view as part of my way of deriving enjoyment from people and places. All the manors of the lands of which she was duchess, princess or viscountess seemed to accompany this fur-coated lady striding out in the rain; she bore them with her, as the characters carved on the lintel of a church door carry in their hand the cathedral they built or the city they defended. But those châteaux, those forests could be seen only by my inward eye in the gloved hand of the fur-clad lady, cousin to the King. My bodily eye could see only, on days when the weather was threatening, an umbrella,[5] with which the Duchesse did not disdain to equip herself. 'You never know, it makes sense, suppose I'm very far from home and a cab is much too *dear*.' The words 'too dear', 'beyond my means'

recurred constantly in the Duchesse's conversation, along with 'I'm too poor'; it was impossible to tell whether she spoke this way because she found it amusing to call herself poor when she was so rich, or whether it seemed to her elegant, as a great aristocrat, to speak like a country-woman and show that she did not attach any importance to wealth, unlike people who have nothing but riches and who despise the poor. Maybe it was, rather, a habit which she had contracted at a time in her life when she was already rich, but not rich enough to cover the upkeep of so many properties, and felt a certain lack of money which she did not wish to seem to be concealing. The things people joke about most are usually those which irritate them, but which they do not want to seem to be irritated by; there is perhaps, too, an unspoken hope of further advantage: that the person we are speaking to, hearing us admit something jokingly, will believe that it is not true.

But most often, at that time, I knew I would find the Duchesse at home, and I was glad of that, for it made it easier to question her at length about the subjects which interested Albertine. And I went downstairs, hardly stopping to think how extraordinary it was that I should be going to see the mysterious Mme de Guermantes of my childhood, simply to use her as a source of practical information, as one uses the telephone, that supernatural instrument before whose wonders we were once all in awe, and which we now use unthinkingly, to call our tailor or order an iced dessert.

The 'little touches' of dress gave Albertine enormous pleasure, and I could not resist making her a small present of this kind every day. And every time she spoke to me about a scarf, a stole, a parasol which, looking out of the window or passing in the courtyard, with her sharp eyes that picked out so quickly anything relating to elegance, she had seen around the neck, on the shoulders or in the hand of Mme de Guermantes, I knew that her naturally demanding taste (which had been further refined by those lessons in elegance which Elstir's conversations had been to her) would not be content with some approximation, even a pretty thing which, to the vulgar eye, would be a perfect substitute but in no way resembles the original, and I would go in secret to have the Duchesse explain to me how, where, on what pattern, the thing Albertine admired had been made, how I should go about procuring exactly the same object, what was the maker's secret, the charm (what Albertine called 'the knack') of his manner, the precise name – for the beauty of the material was important too – and the quality of the fabrics which I should ask to be used.

I had told Albertine, when we arrived home from Balbec, that the Duchesse de Guermantes lived opposite us, in the same building; when she heard the grand title and the great name, her face had taken on that indifferent look – no, more than indifferent, hostile, contemptuous – which is the sign of frustrated desire in proud and passionate natures. Albertine's nature was splendid, but its hidden qualities had been able to develop only under the restrictions constituted by our tastes, or our mourning for the tastes which we have had to renounce – in Albertine's case, the taste for social superiority: the result is what people call hatreds. Albertine's hatred for upper-class people was, however, a very small element in her character and I liked its hint of the revolutionary spirit – that is to say, unrequited love for the nobility – which forms the opposite face of the French character from the aristocratic style of Mme de Guermantes. Being unable to achieve it herself, Albertine would perhaps have thought nothing of this aristocratic style, but when she remembered that Elstir had spoken of the Duchesse as the best-dressed woman in Paris, my friend's republican disdain for a Duchess was replaced by an intense interest in a woman of fashion. She often asked me about Mme de Guermantes and liked me to go and visit the Duchesse to collect fashion hints for her. No doubt I could have asked Mme Swann for the same advice, and I even wrote to her once for this purpose. But Mme de Guermantes seemed to me to carry the art of dress to even greater heights. If I went down to see her for a moment (having first made sure that she had not gone out, and arranged to be told as soon as Albertine came home) and found her enclouded in the mists of a dress of grey crêpe de Chine, I accepted this appearance, which I felt to be due to complex causes and unchangeable, I let myself be swept into the atmosphere it created, like that of certain late afternoons muffled in a pearl-grey floating mist. If, on the other hand, the chosen gown were Chinese with a pattern of red and yellow flames, I saw it as a brilliant sunset; these costumes were not a trivial decoration which could have been replaced by any other, but an inescapable reality, poetic in the same way as the weather, or the light peculiar to a certain time of day.

Of all the gowns or tea-gowns that Mme de Guermantes wore, the ones which seemed most expressive of a particular intention, most endowed with a special meaning, were those gowns which Fortuny based on ancient Venetian designs. Is it their historic appearance, is it rather the fact that each one is unique, which gives them such an individual character that the pose of the woman who is wearing one to wait for you, to talk with you, takes on an exceptional importance, as if this costume had been chosen after long deliberation, and makes the conversation stand out from everyday life like a scene from a novel? In Balzac's novels we see the heroines choose particular costumes to wear on the days when they are to receive a particular visitor. The costumes of today have no such clearly defined character, with the exception of Fortuny dresses. There can be no vagueness in the novelist's description since this dress really exists, the smallest elements of its design as unalterable as those of a work of art. Before putting on this or that dress, the woman has had to make a choice, not between two that are more or less similar, but between two wholly individual ones, each of which could have its own name.

But the dress did not keep me from noticing the woman. Mme de Guermantes herself seemed to me more likeable then than at the time when I was still in love with her. I expected less of her now that I was not going to see her for her own sake, and as I listened to her talk I felt almost the same peaceful informality that one enjoys when home alone, with one's feet on the fender. It was like reading a book written in the language of another time. I had enough detachment to enjoy, in what she said, that pure, particularly French grace that one no longer finds either in the speech or the writing of the present day. I listened to her conversation as if to a deliciously French popular song, and I understood how I could once have heard her laugh at Maeterlinck (whom she now admired with all the weakness of a woman's judgment, swayed by late-flowering literary fashion), just as I understood how Mérimée could have laughed at Baudelaire, Stendhal at Balzac, Paul-Louis Courier at Victor Hugo, Meilhac at Mallarmé. I knew that the laugher's mind was narrow compared to the mind he laughed at, but his vocabulary was purer. Mme de Guermantes's vocabulary, almost as much as Saint-Loup's mother's, was so to an enchanting degree. The old language and the true pronunciation of words are not to be found in the pedantic pastiches of today's writers who say *in truth* (for *in fact*), *peculiar* (for *particular*), *dumbfounded* (for *astonished*), and so forth, but in the conversation of a Mme de Guermantes or a Françoise. I had learned from the second of these, by the age of five, that you do not say 'le Tarn' but 'le Tar', not 'le Béarn' but 'le Béar'. So that when at twenty I went into society, I did not have to learn not to say, as Mme Bontemps did: Madame de Béar*n*.

I would be lying if I said that this 'country', this almost peasant side of her was something the Duchesse was unconscious of, or that there was not a shade of affectation in the way she displayed it. But in her, it was not so much the fake simplicity of a great lady playing the country-woman, or the pride of a duchess cocking a snook at rich ladies and their contempt for the peasantry, but rather a sign of the almost artistic taste of a woman who understands the charm of what she possesses and does not mean to spoil it with a coat of modern distemper. In just the same way, everyone remembers a Norman restaurant-keeper, the owner of the *William the Conqueror* at Dives, who had been at pains – a very rare thing – not to give his inn the modern luxury of a hotel and who (though a millionaire himself) retained the speech and the smock of a Norman peasant and let the customers come into the kitchen, as in the country, to see him making the dinner himself – a dinner which was none the less far better and even more expensive than in the grandest four-star hotels.

All the local sap in the veins of old aristocratic families is not enough; they also have to give birth to a being intelligent enough not to despise it, not to hide it under a fashionable varnish. Mme de Guermantes, unfortunately a witty Parisian who when I first knew her had nothing left about her of her native region but the accent, had at least, when she wanted to describe her girlhood, found a language half-way between the involuntarily provincial and what might have seemed too consciously literary: one of those compromises which make George Sand's *La Petite Fadette* so delightful, or some of the legends repeated by Chateaubriand in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. I especially loved to hear her tell some story in which peasants appeared alongside her. The ancient names, the old customs gave a pleasing quaintness to these meetings between the manor and the village. Having remained in contact with the lands where they once ruled, a certain part of the aristocracy remains regional, so that their simplest remark unrolls before our eyes a whole historical and geographical map of the history of France.

If there was no affectation in Mme de Guermantes's speech, no wish to create a personal language, then her pronunciation was a real oral museum of French history. 'My great-uncle Fitt-jam' did not come as a surprise, for everyone knows that the Fitz-James always insist that they are French nobles and do not wish their name to be pronounced in the English fashion. One is, however, forced to admire the touching docility of those people who had hitherto felt they must make the effort to pronounce certain names according to the rule-book, and who, once they had heard the Duchesse de Guermantes say them differently, applied themselves to learning the new, unsuspected pronunciation. Thus the Duchesse, one of whose great-grandfathers had been in the circle of the Comte de Chambord, liked to tease her husband, who had become an Orléanist, by saying, 'We, the old guard of Frochedorf'. The visitor, who up to that moment had always said 'Frohsdorf', would turn his coat then and there and take every opportunity of saying 'Frochedorf'.

Once when I asked Mme de Guermantes who a delightful young man was whom she had introduced to me as her nephew and whose name I had not caught, I had no more success when, in her throaty voice, the Duchesse said very loudly but indistinctly: 'It's … le Éon, Robert's brother. He says he has the head-shape of the ancient Gauls.' Then I realized that she had said, 'It's little Léon' (the Prince de Léon, in fact Robert de Saint-Loup's brother-in-law). 'I don't know if he has an ancient Gaul's skull,' she went on, 'but his way of dressing, which in fact is very smart, certainly doesn't come from that quarter. One day when I was staying at Josselin with the Rohans, and we went to a religious fête, country people had come to it from all over Brittany and a great villager from Léon was looking in astonishment at Robert's brother-in-law's fawn breeches. "Why are you staring at me?" said Léon. "I bet you don't know who I am." And when the man said no, "Well, I am your prince." "Well I never!" said the man, doffing his cap and apologizing, "and I thought you was an Englishman." ' And if I picked up on the name of Rohan and encouraged Mme de Guermantes to say more about that family (with which her own had repeatedly intermarried), her conversation took on some of the melancholy charm of Breton religious gatherings and, as that real poet Pampille[6] would say, 'the bitter taste of buckwheat pancakes cooked over a furze fire'.

Speaking of the Marquis du Lau (whose sad end is well known, when he was deaf and used to have himself taken to the house of Mme H***, who was blind), she told of the happier years when after hunting, at Guermantes, he would put on his slippers to have tea with the King of England, whom he did not regard as his superior and in whose company he clearly did not stand on ceremony. She described all this in such a lively fashion that she added to his portrait the musketeer's plume of the somewhat boastful noblemen of the Périgord.

Anyway, even when she was giving the simplest descriptions of people, her careful way of assigning them to their home provinces gave to Mme de Guermantes, faithful in this to her origins, a charm that no native Parisian could ever have had, and the very names of Anjou, Poitou or Périgord recreated whole landscapes in her conversation.

To return to Mme de Guermantes's pronunciations and vocabulary, it is in things like these that the aristocracy shows itself truly conservative, in the full sense of that word: at the same time slightly childish and slightly dangerous, resistant to evolution but amusing for the artist. I wanted to know how the word Jean used to be written. I found out when I received a letter from Mme de Villeparisis's nephew, who signs his name – as he received it in baptism, as it appears in the Almanac de Gotha – Jehan de Villeparisis, with the same beautiful, useless, heraldic *h* that one loves to see, illuminated in vermilion or ultramarine, in a book of hours or a stained-glass window.

Unfortunately I could not prolong these visits indefinitely since I wished, if possible, not to arrive home after my friend. Now, it was always a slow and painful business extracting information from Mme de Guermantes about her clothes so as to have them copied (in so far as a young girl could wear them) for Albertine.

'For example, Ma'am, the day you were going to dinner with Mme de Saint-Euverte before going on to the Princesse de Guermantes's, you were wearing an all-red dress with red shoes, you were beyond belief, you looked like some kind of great flower of blood, a burning ruby, now what was that called? Could a young girl wear something like that?'

The Duchesse's tired face took on the radiant expression that the Princesse des Laumes would wear when Swann paid her compliments in the old days; she laughed gaily and directed a mocking look, questioning and delighted, towards M. de Bréauté, who was always there at that time of day, and behind whose monocle a lukewarm smile of indulgence stood ready for the intellectual's overblown compliment, which he imagined hid a young man's physical desire. The Duchesse seemed to be saying, 'What's the matter with him? He's mad.' Then, turning to me with a gently teasing look, 'I didn't know that I looked like a burning ruby or a flower of blood, but I do remember wearing a red dress; it was red satin, the way they were making them just then. I suppose a young girl *could* wear it, but you said that your friend never goes out in the evening. That was definitely an evening dress, you couldn't wear it to pay calls.'

What is remarkable is that in recalling that evening, not after all so long past, Mme de Guermantes should remember only the dress she was wearing and forget one thing which, as we shall see, should have been close to her heart. It is as if the minds of people of action, and smart people are people of action (on a minuscule, microscopic scale, but still action), are so consumed by attention to what will be happening in an hour's time that they commit very little to memory. Very often, for example, it was not a wish to deceive or to seem not to have been mistaken that made M. de Norpois, when the conversation turned to prognostications he had made about a German alliance that never, in fact, came off, say, 'You must be mistaken, I can't remember saying that, and it doesn't sound like me, for in that kind of conversation I usually say the minimum, and I would never have predicted success for one of those unplanned initiatives that begin as a show of strength and usually have to end with a show of force. There is no doubt that, in the very distant future, we could see a Franco-German rapprochement which would greatly benefit both countries, and would not, I believe, be a bad bargain for France, but I have never spoken of it, because the time is not yet ripe and, if you ask my opinion, I believe that if we tried to push our old enemies into a shotgun wedding we should be heading for a great fall and have to pick up the pieces.' When he said these things, M. de Norpois was not lying, he had simply forgotten. One quickly forgets thoughts which had no depth, ideas dictated by imitation or the passions of the moment. They change and our memories change with them. Even more than diplomats, politicians forget the positions they took at a given point in time, and some of their volte-faces owe less to ambition than to a failure of memory. As for grand people, they remember very little at all.

Mme de Guermantes maintained to me that at the party when she wore the red dress, she couldn't remember seeing Mme de Chaussepierre, that I must be wrong to think she was there. Now heaven knows the Chaussepierres had figured largely enough since in the thoughts of the Duc, and even of the Duchesse! Here is why. M. de Guermantes was the senior vice-president of the Jockey Club when the president died. Some members of the club who have no connections in society and find their only pleasure in blackballing people who do not ask them to their parties, got up a campaign against the Duc de Guermantes, who, in the certainty of being elected, and caring little for this presidency, which was of small importance to a man in his social position, did nothing to secure it. It was argued that the Duchesse had been a Dreyfus supporter (the Dreyfus Affair was long over, but twenty years later people would still be talking about it, and at this time only two years had passed), that she received the Rothschilds, that too much favour had been shown recently to powerful cosmopolitan figures like the Duc de Guermantes, who was half a German. The campaign quickly took root: clubmen always envy the famous and hate great fortunes. Chaussepierre was not poor, but no one could be offended by his wealth as he never spent a penny of it; he lived with his wife in a modest flat, she appeared dressed in black woollen. A passionate music-lover, she did give little parties where many more singers were seen than at the Guermantes'. But nobody talked about them, no food was served, the husband did not even come, and all this happened in the obscurity of the rue de la Chaise. At the Opéra, no one noticed Mme de Chaussepierre; she was always with people whose names recalled the most reactionary circles of former times, the intimates of Charles X, but obscure people, not smart at all. On the day of the election, to everyone's surprise, Chaussepierre, the junior vice-president, was elected president of the Jockey Club and the Duc de Guermantes was left standing, that is, had to continue as senior vice-president. Certainly, being president of the Jockey Club is a trifle to a family of princely rank like the Guermantes. But not being elected when your turn comes, seeing the post going to a Chaussepierre, when Oriane had not only failed to acknowledge his wife's

bow two years before, but had even showed her displeasure at being greeted by this unknown, dowdy figure, all this was hard for the Duc to bear. He claimed to be above noticing his failure, maintaining at the same time that it was his long-standing friendship with Swann that had caused it. In fact, he was furious. It was characteristic that the Duc had never been heard to use the banal expression 'thoroughgoing', but after the Jockey Club election, whenever the Dreyfus case was mentioned, 'thoroughgoing' would pop up: 'The Dreyfus case, the Dreyfus case, it's all very well to call it that, but it's a misnomer; it wasn't a matter of religion but a thoroughgoing political quarrel.' Five years could pass without 'thoroughgoing' being heard again, provided that during that time no one mentioned the Dreyfus case, but if at the end of the five years the name of Dreyfus was heard again, 'thoroughgoing' would follow immediately upon it. In any case, the Duc could not bear anyone to mention the case, 'which caused so much unhappiness', he would say, though in reality he was conscious of only one instance of unhappiness, his own failure to win the presidency of the Jockey Club.

So, on the afternoon I am speaking of, when I reminded Mme de Guermantes of the red dress she was wearing at her cousin's party, M. de Bréauté struck a wrong note when he broke into the conversation and, by an obscure association of ideas he did nothing to elucidate, manoeuving his tongue to the point of his pursed lips, began by saying, 'Speaking of the Dreyfus case …' (why the Dreyfus case? we were only talking about a red dress, and certainly poor Bréauté, who only ever wanted to please, did not mean anything unkind). But the mere name of Dreyfus wrinkled the Jove-like brow of the Duc de Guermantes. 'Someone told me a very clever saying, really sharp, of our friend Cartier's (I should make it clear that this Cartier, Mme de Villefranche's brother, had nothing whatever to do with the jeweller of the same name!), and of course I wasn't surprised, for he always has wit and to spare. – Well, Oriane interrupted, I can certainly spare his wit. I can't tell you how much your friend Cartier has always *paralysed* me, and I've never been able to understand how Charles de la Trémoïlle and his wife can be so in thrall to such a crashing bore: I find him there every time I go to their house. – My d-dear d-Duchesse, replied Bréauté, who had a slight stammer, you are very hard on Cartier. Perhaps he has rather moved in on the La Trémoïlles, but he's a sort of, what shall I say, b-bosom friend to Charles, and that is a *rara avis* these days. Anyhow, here is the saying I was told about. It seems Cartier said that if M. Zola had gone out of his way to be charged and convicted, it was so as to experience a completely new sensation: going to p-prison. – And that's why he fled the country before he could be arrested, said Oriane. It doesn't make sense. And anyway, even if it were true, I think the remark was simply idiotic. If that's what you call wit … – Oh, Oriane d-dear, replied Bréauté, beginning to retreat in the face of opposition, *I* didn't say it, I'm just repeating what was said to me, take it for what it's worth. Anyway, it earned M. Cartier a severe telling-off from La Trémoïlle – excellent chap – who won't have anybody talking in his house – and he's quite right – about – what shall I say – the politics of the day, and who was all the more angry because Mme Alphonse Rothschild was there. Cartier had to take a real dressing-down from La Trémoïlle. – Of course, said the Duc very crossly, we all know that the Alphonse Rothschilds, though they are tactful enough never to speak of the wretched affair, are Dreyfusards at heart, like all Jews. In fact, that's an argument *ad hominem* (the Duc used the expression *ad hominem* in rather a slapdash way) that could be used more often to show how dishonest the Jews are. If a Frenchman commits theft or murder, I don't feel I have to say he's innocent, just because he's a Frenchman like me. But the Jews will never admit that one of them could be a traitor, even though they know it's true, and they don't care in the least about the terrible repercussions (the Duc was naturally thinking about the unspeakable election of Chaussepierre) that can result from their friend's crime … Really, Oriane, you must admit it's disgraceful, the way all the Jews defend a traitor. You won't tell me that it's not because they're Jews themselves. – Yes I will, said Oriane (by now somewhat annoyed and feeling a certain desire to resist the Jove-like thunderings, and also to show 'intelligent' people's detachment from the Dreyfus case). But perhaps it's just because, being Jewish and knowing themselves, they know that a man can be a Jew without having to be treacherous and anti-French, as M. Drumont apparently would have us believe. Certainly if Dreyfus had been a Christian the Jews wouldn't have taken such an interest in his case, but they did, because they realize that if he hadn't been a Jew, people wouldn't have been so ready to believe him a traitor *a priori*, as my nephew Robert would say. – Women don't understand anything about politics, cried the Duc, glaring at the Duchesse. That appalling crime wasn't only a Jewish affair, but a *thoroughgoing* national scandal which may have the most dreadful consequences for France. And France should expel all the Jews, even though I recognize that the only measures so far have been taken (in the most disgraceful fashion, which should be reversed at once) not against them but against their most distinguished opponents, men of the first rank, excluded from public life to our country's great cost.'

I saw danger ahead and hurriedly began to talk frocks again.

'Do you remember, Ma'am, I said, the first time you were kind to me? – The first time I was kind to him,' she repeated with a laughing look towards M. de Bréauté, the end of whose nose got even thinner, while his smile became more tenderly polite towards Mme de Guermantes and his voice, like a knife being sharpened, let out a few vague, rusty sounds. 'You were wearing a yellow dress with big black flowers. – But dear boy, it's the same thing, those are evening dresses. – And your hat with the cornflowers that I liked so much! But anyway, that's all in the past. What I'd really like to have made for the girl I mentioned is a fur coat like the one you were wearing yesterday morning. Could I see it? Would that be out of the question? – No, Hannibal has to go in a moment. You can come into my dressing-room and my maid will show it to you. The only thing is, I can lend you anything you like, but if you have Callot's, or Doucet's, or Paquin's designs made up by a little dressmaker, they won't ever look the same. – But I've no intention of going to a little dressmaker, I know that wouldn't be the same, but I'd love to be able to understand why it wouldn't. – But you know I can't explain anything, I'm a *h*idiot, I talk like a peasant woman. It's a question of skill, of handling; for the furs I can at least introduce you to my furrier, which will mean he doesn't rob you. But you know it will cost you another eight or nine thousand francs. – And that loose gown you were wearing the other evening, the one that smells so strange, it's dark, velvety, with spots and gold streaks like a butterfly's wing? – Oh, that's a Fortuny dress. Your young friend can certainly wear that kind of thing at home. I have lots of them, I'll show you some, I can even give you some if you like. But I'd really like you to see the one my cousin Talleyrand has. I must write and ask her to lend it to me. – But you had such pretty shoes too, are they Fortuny as well? – No, I know the ones you mean, they're gold kid that we found in London, when I was shopping with Consuelo Manchester. They're extraordinary. I could never understand how they gilded the leather, it looks like a golden skin. Just that, with a little diamond in the middle. The Duchess of Manchester is dead, sadly, but if you like I'll write to Lady Warwick or the Duchess of Marlborough to see if I can find some more like it. In fact, I think I might have some of the skin left. Perhaps we could have some made up here. I'll have a look this evening and let you know.'

Since I tried as far as possible to have left the Duchesse before Albertine got home, I was often leaving Mme de Guermantes's at an hour that meant I would meet M. de Charlus and Morel, crossing the courtyard on their way to have tea with … Jupien, high favour for the Baron! I did not meet them every day, but they went there every day. We should note that the regularity of a habit is usually a function of its absurdity. Striking actions are usually carried out on irregular impulse. But insensate lives, where the madman deprives himself of all pleasures, and seeks out the most terrible sufferings, are usually the lives that change the least. At ten-year intervals, if one cared enough to check, one would find the sufferer still sleeping away the hours when he could be living, going out at hours when the best that could happen to him is to be murdered in the streets, drinking iced drinks when he is hot, always nursing a cold. A tiny burst of energy, on a single day, could change everything for him. But these lives are usually led by beings devoid of energy. Perversity is another aspect of these monotonous existences, which the smallest exercise of will would make less dreadful. Both aspects came into play when M. de Charlus paid his daily tea-time visit to Jupien. Only one cloud had ever shadowed the daily ritual. One day the waistcoat-maker's niece had said to Morel: 'That's right, come tomorrow, I'll treat you to tea.' The Baron had, rightly, thought the expression a vulgar one, particularly in the mouth of someone he was planning to make his almost-daughter-in-law. But, with his love of wounding and carried away by his own anger, instead of simply asking Morel to teach her the right thing to say, he had made a violent scene that lasted all the way home. In the most haughty, insolent tone he began: 'Your "touch", which I see has nothing to do with "tact", must have prevented the normal development of your sense of smell, since you allowed that fetid expression "treat you to tea" (twopenny tea no doubt) to lift up its cesspit odour to my royal nostrils. When you finish a violin solo at my house, have you ever been rewarded with a fart, instead of delirious applause or the silence which is even more

eloquent as it comes from the fear of being unable to hold back – not what your fiancée gives us in such quantity, but tears, tears that you have brought to the edge of our lips?'

When a junior civil servant has received such a dressing-down from his superior, he is inevitably sacked the next day. But nothing would have been more painful to M. de Charlus than to have to send Morel away and, even fearing that he might have gone too far, he began to praise the young girl: detailed praises, showing fine taste, with every now and then unintended notes of impertinence. 'She is delightful. As you are a musician, I suppose you were charmed by her voice; it's beautiful in the high notes, where she seems to be waiting for your accompanying B sharp. I like her lower register less; I'm sure that must have something to do with the slimness of her neck and the strange way it seems to stop and start three times, always stretching a little higher; rather than commonplace details, it's her shape that is so pleasing. And as she's a dressmaker and clever with her scissors, she must make me a pretty silhouette of herself out of paper.'

Charlie had not been listening to these praises, all the less since the beauties they celebrated in his fiancée had always passed him by. But he answered M. de Charlus, 'That's all right, dear boy, I'll tell her what's what, I'll make sure she doesn't talk like that again.' If Morel called M. de Charlus 'dear boy', it was not that the handsome violinist did not know he was barely a third of the Baron's age. He did not say it, either, with Jupien's insinuating manner, but in the simple way that shows how, in certain relationships, a forgetting of the age difference has tacitly preceded the development of affection. Feigned affection in Morel's case, sincere affection in others. For example, about this time, M. de Charlus received a letter written in these terms: Dear Palamède, when am I going to see you? I'm missing you ever so much and thinking about you all the time (etc.) Your loving PIERRE.' M. de Charlus racked his brains to discover which of his relatives had dared to write to him in so familiar a style; it must be someone he knew very well, and yet he did not recognize the writing. For several days all the princes mentioned, however briefly, in the Almanac de Gotha trooped through M. de Charlus's brain. At last, suddenly, an address written on the back of the letter gave him the answer: it was the work of the pageboy at a gaming club where M. de Charlus occasionally called. The pageboy had not thought he was being rude in writing in this style to M. de Charlus, whom in fact he greatly admired. No, he thought it would not be nice not to call someone '*tu*' who had kissed you several times, and thereby – as he naïvely imagined – given you a sign of his affection. M. de Charlus was in fact delighted by his familiarity. He even walked back from an afternoon party with M. de Vaugoubert so as to show him the letter. And yet heaven knows M. de Charlus did not like to be seen with M. de Vaugoubert. For the diplomat, with his monocle stuck in his eye, stared in all directions at the lads passing by. What was more, when he was with M. de Charlus, he grew more daring, and began to use a language which the Baron hated. He put all men's names in the feminine and, as he was very stupid, thought this was the height of wit and was constantly bursting out laughing. As he was also hugely attached to his diplomatic post, his deplorable giggliness in the street was constantly interrupted by waves of terror when he saw his social equals, or worse, civil servants approaching. 'There goes little Miss Telegram,' he would say, nudging the scowling Baron, 'I used to know her, but she's settled down now, horrid thing! Ooh, isn't that Galeries Lafayette messenger delicious! Oh Lord, there's the chief secretary for Commercial Affairs. I hope he didn't see me nudging you! He's the sort who might talk to the minister about it and he might suspend me from duties, especially as he's one of the girls himself, so they say.' M. de Charlus was trembling with rage. Finally, to bring the infuriating walk to an end, he decided to take out his letter and give it to the ambassador to read, requesting his discretion, however; he pretended that Charlie was jealous in order to suggest that he loved him. 'Now, he added, with an inimitable air of benevolence, we should always try to cause as little unhappiness as we can.'

Before returning to Jupien's shop, the author wishes to make clear how unhappy he would be if the reader were offended by these strange scenes. On the one hand (and this is the less important aspect) it may be thought that the aristocracy, in this book, is disproportionately taxed with degeneracy as compared to the other social classes. If that were so, it would not be surprising. As time passes, old families develop peculiarities – a red, hooked nose, a deformed chin – which are admired as specific signs of 'blood'. But among these persisting and ever intensifying traits, there are some which are not visible: tendencies and tastes.

It would be a more serious objection, if true, to say that all these feelings are remote from us, and that poetry should be drawn from what is true and near at hand. Art derived from the most familiar reality does exist, and its range is perhaps the greatest. But it is none the less true that great interest, sometimes even beauty, can spring from actions which derive from a mode of thinking and feeling so remote from anything we feel, anything we believe, that we cannot even begin to understand them, that they unfold before us like an unexplained spectacle. What is more poetic than Xerxes, son of Darius, having the sea whipped with rods, the sea that had swallowed up his fleet?[7]

Morel, using the power that his good looks gave him over the young girl, must certainly have passed on the Baron's comment, disguised as his own, for the expression 'treating to tea' disappeared as completely from the waistcoat-maker's shop as a former close friend disappears from a salon where he used to be welcomed every day, when the hosts have quarrelled with him for some reason or other, or wish to hide their friendship with him and see him only in other people's houses. M. de Charlus was pleased at the disappearance of 'treating'; he saw in it the sign of his power over Morel and the removal of the only little flaw in the perfection of the young person. Then, like all men of his kind, while being genuinely a friend to Morel and his near-fiancée, and looking forward eagerly to their marriage, he took a certain pleasure in his power to stir up at will more or less trivial quarrels between them, above which he could float with the Olympian detachment that his brother would have shown in the same circumstances. Morel had said to M. de Charlus that he loved Jupien's niece and wanted to marry her, and the Baron was delighted to accompany his young friend on visits where he played the part of the future father-in-law, indulgent and discreet.

My own opinion is that 'treat you to tea' was a saying of Morel's own, and that, blinded by love, the young dressmaker had adopted an expression of her adored one's which, in its ugliness, stood out painfully against her pretty, young girl's speech. Thanks to this speech, the charming manners that matched it, and the protection of M. de Charlus, many of her customers treated her as a friend, asked her to dinner, accepted her into their social circle, though she only accepted with the Baron's permission and on the evenings when it suited him. 'A young dressmaker go into society?' you will say, 'how improbable.' If you stop to think, it was no more unlikely than that Albertine should formerly have come to see me at midnight and should now be living with me. And that would perhaps have been improbable in anyone else, but not at all in Albertine, an orphan, living such a free life that in Balbec, at first, I had taken her for the mistress of a cycle-racer, and having as her nearest relative Mme Bontemps, who in the old days, at Mme Swann's, saved all her admiration for her niece's worst behaviour, and now turned a blind eye to everything in the hope that she would take herself off and marry money, some of which might find its way to her aunt (in the highest society mothers who are very well born and very poor, once they have found a rich wife for their son, are happy to live at the young couple's expense, accepting furs, a motor-car, money from a daughter-in-law they do not like but whom they launch in society).

Perhaps the day will come when dressmakers – and I wouldn't find that at all shocking – will go into society. Jupien's niece, being an exception, cannot yet allow us to foresee that day, one swallow does not make a summer. In any case, if the modest social success of Jupien's niece scandalized anyone, it was not Morel, for on some points his stupidity was such that not only did he find the girl, who was a hundred times more intelligent than he was, 'not very bright' – perhaps only because she loved him – but he saw adventuresses, dressmakers in disguise pretending to be ladies, in persons of very good social position who welcomed her to their houses and of whom she never boasted. Naturally these were not Guermantes, nor even people who knew them, but rich, elegant bourgeoises, emancipated enough to think there was no disgrace in having a dressmaker as a guest and conventional enough to derive some pleasure from taking under their wing a young girl whom His Highness the Baron de Charlus visited – on terms of complete propriety – every day.

Nothing gave the Baron more pleasure than the idea of this wedding, which would ensure – so he thought – that Morel could not be taken away from him. Apparently Jupien's niece had once, when she was still hardly more than a child, made a 'slip'. And M. de Charlus, in the course of singing her praises to Morel, would not have been averse to mentioning this fact to his friend, who would have been furious, thus creating bad blood between them. For M. de Charlus, though thoroughly malevolent, was like a large number of good people who praise this man or that woman to show how good they are themselves, but would sooner die

than say the kind words, so rarely spoken, that would end a quarrel. Nevertheless, the Baron did not allow himself any insinuation, for two reasons. 'If I tell him', he said to himself, 'that his fiancée is not spotless, his self-conceit will be wounded and he will be angry with me. And then how do I know that he is not in love with her? If I don't say anything, this little passion will soon be over, and I shall be able to control their relationship to suit myself; he will only love her as much as I want him to. Whereas, if I tell him about about the girl's fall from grace, how do I know that Charlie isn't still enough in love to be jealous? I would be turning an insignificant little affair, that I can direct as I please, into a grand passion, which is something difficult to control.' For these two reasons, M. de Charlus kept a silence which bore only a superficial resemblance to discretion, but which was still meritorious, given that not speaking is almost impossible for people of his sort.

Besides, the girl was enchanting, and M. de Charlus, in whom she satisfied all the aesthetic taste for women that he could possibly have, would have liked to have hundreds of photographs of her. Not so stupid as Morel, he learned with pleasure of the smart ladies who invited her to their houses and whom, with his experience, he was able to place socially. But he was careful (wishing to maintain the upper hand) not to enlighten Charlie, who, utterly ignorant of social matters, continued to think that outside the 'violin class' and the Verdurin circle, there existed only the Guermantes, the few almost royal families enumerated by the Baron, the rest of society being only the 'dregs', the 'plebs'. Charlie took these expressions of M. de Charlus's literally.

What, you will say, M. de Charlus, awaited in vain every day of the year by so many ambassadors and Duchesses, declining to dine with the Prince de Croy because he would have to give precedence to him, the same M. de Charlus spent all the time that he refused to these great lords and ladies with the niece of a waistcoat-maker? First and most important reason, Morel was there. But even if he had not been, I do not think the thing is so improbable; if you do, you are thinking like one of Aimé's boys. Only restaurant waiters think that an extremely rich man always wears eye-catching new clothes, and that a real swell gives dinners for sixty people and goes everywhere by motor. They are wrong. Very often an extremely rich man always wears the same shabby coat. A swell is the sort of man who, in a restaurant, talks only to the waiters and, when he gets home, plays cards with his footmen. That does not mean that he will not refuse to go through a door after Prince Murat.

Among the reasons for M. Charlus's happiness at the thought of the young people's wedding was his feeling that Jupien's niece would be a kind of extension of Morel's personality and hence of the Baron's knowledge of and power over him. The idea of 'deceiving', in the conjugal sense, the violinist's wife-to-be would not have given the Baron one moment's scruple. But having a 'young couple' to guide, feeling himself the mighty, all-powerful protector of Morel's wife (who, by considering the Baron as a god, would prove that the beloved Morel had inspired her with this notion and so would contain within her something of Morel), these things varied the form of M. de Charlus's dominance and brought to birth in his 'creature' Morel another being, the husband, that is, gave him something more, something new and curious to love in him. Perhaps this domination would now be even greater than before. For while Morel on his own, naked as it were, often resisted the Baron, whom he could be sure of winning over again, once he was married his fears for his household, for his flat, for his future would give M. de Charlus's wishes a stronger purchase upon him. All these prospects, and even, if necessary, on evenings when he was bored, the thought of setting the two at loggerheads (the Baron had always rather liked battle-scenes), gave pleasure to M. de Charlus. Less, however, than the thought of the young couple's future dependence on him. M. de Charlus's love for Morel took on a charming novelty when he thought to himself: 'His wife will belong to me as well, he belongs to me so completely; they will behave only in ways that cannot annoy me, they will obey my every whim and in that way she will be a sign (of a kind I have never had before) of the thing I had almost forgotten and which is so close to my heart: everyone will see, as they see me protecting them, putting a roof over their heads, I shall see myself that Morel is mine.' This unmistakeableness in the eyes of everyone, in his own eyes, made M. de Charlus happiest of all. For the possession of what one loves is a joy greater than love itself. Often those who hide their possession from everyone do so only for fear that the loved object will be taken away from them. And their happiness, by this prudent choice of silence, is diminished.

The reader will perhaps remember that Morel had once said to the Baron that his dream was to seduce a young girl, in particular this girl; to do so he would promise to marry her, but, once the rape was accomplished, he would 'clear off out of it'. But all that was forgotten after the confession of love for Jupien's niece that Morel had made to M. de Charlus. Indeed, it may be that Morel had forgotten it himself. There was perhaps a genuine gap between Morel's nature, as he had cynically described it – or perhaps even cleverly exaggerated it – and the moment when it would assert itself once more. As he got to know the young girl better, he was attracted to her, he fell in love with her. He knew himself so little that no doubt he thought he loved her, perhaps even that he would love her for ever. Certainly his initial desire, his wicked scheme were still there, but overlaid with so many different feelings that we cannot be certain that the violinist would have been insincere in saying that this perverse desire was not the true motive of his present actions. There was, furthermore, a brief period when, without his entirely admitting it to himself, he saw marriage as necessary. At that moment Morel had quite severe cramps in his hand and was having to consider the possibility of giving up the violin. Since, in everything outside his art, he was unbelievably lazy, he would need to find someone to keep him, and he felt he would rather it were Jupien's niece than M. de Charlus. This arrangement would offer him more freedom and also a great choice of different women, from the ever-changing apprentices that Jupien's niece would hire and provide for him to the rich and beautiful ladies to whom he would prostitute her. The thought that his future wife might be so unreasonable as to refuse to take part in these schemes did not cross Morel's mind for a moment. In any case, they soon sank into the background, replaced by pure love, once the cramps got better. The violin would provide for them, with his allowance from M. de Charlus, who was sure to become less demanding once he, Morel, was married to the young woman. Marriage was the urgent thing now, because of his love and for the sake of his freedom. He asked for Jupien's niece's hand in the proper way; her uncle asked her what she felt. There was no need. The young girl's passion for the violinist streamed around her like her hair when it was down, like the joy that overflowed in her eyes. In Morel everything that was pleasant or profitable for himself produced moral sentiments and words of the same order, sometimes even tears. It was therefore with sincerity – if such a word can be applied to him – that he made to the young girl speeches as sentimental (young noblemen who want to live in idleness can be sentimental too, when they are talking to the delightful daughter of some middle-class moneybags) as the theories he had set forth to M. de Charlus about seduction and deflowering had been unrelievedly base. The only thing was, that the virtuous enthusiasm he felt for a person who gave him pleasure, and the solemn commitments he made to her, had, in Morel's case, a debit side. As soon as the person no longer gave him pleasure, and even, for example, if the need to face up to the promises he had made to her caused him any displeasure, then she at once became, in Morel's mind, the object of a violent antipathy which he justified to himself and which, after some neurasthenic disturbances, allowed him to prove to his own satisfaction, once he had re-established the euphoria of his nervous system, that, even looking at things from the point of view of strict virtue, he was now freed from all obligation.

In the same way, at the end of his stay in Balbec, he had somehow or other lost all his money and, not daring to confess to M. de Charlus, was looking for someone who might give him some more. He had learned from his father (who nevertheless had forbidden him ever to 'touch' people) that in this situation it is permissible to write to the person one wants to approach, saying that one 'needs to talk to him about a business matter', and asking for a 'business meeting'. This magic formula so delighted Morel that I almost think he would have chosen to lose money so as to have the pleasure of asking for a 'meeting to talk about business'. In the years that followed, he had seen that the spell was not always so powerful as he had thought. He had noted that some people, to whom he himself would never have written except in such circumstances, did not reply to him within five minutes of receiving the 'business' letter. If the afternoon passed without Morel's receiving a reply, he did not imagine that, perhaps, the gentleman he approached was not at home, or had had other letters to write, if indeed he wasn't on holiday or ill, etc. If, by extraordinary luck, Morel were given an appointment for the following morning, he would open the conversation with these words, 'There you are! I was so surprised when you didn't answer, I wondered if you were all right, but you are, aren't you, quite well, etc.' So, at Balbec, and without telling me he wanted to speak to him about 'business', he had asked me to introduce him to Bloch, the same Bloch to whom he had been so unpleasant in the tram the week before. Bloch had immediately agreed to lend him – or rather, to get M. Nissim Bernard to lend him – five thousand francs. From that day forward, Morel had

adored Bloch. He asked with tears in his eyes how he could ever repay someone who had saved his life. Finally, I approached M. de Charlus and asked him to give Morel a thousand francs a month, which Morel would immediately give to Bloch, paying off the debt reasonably quickly. The first month Morel, still impressed by Bloch's goodness, sent him the thousand francs straight away, but after that he reflected, no doubt, that a more agreeable use could be made of the remaining four thousand francs, for he began to speak ill of Bloch. The very sight of him put him in a black mood, and when Bloch, having forgotten exactly how much he had lent to Morel, asked him for three thousand five hundred francs instead of four thousand, which would have saved the violinist five hundred francs, Morel reacted by saying that in the face of such an irregularity, not only would he not pay a centime, but Bloch should think himself lucky he did not sue him. All this was said with flashing eyes. Not only did he say that Bloch and M. Nissim Bernard had no reason to be angry with him, but soon that they should be glad he was not angry with them. Finally, when he heard that M. Nissim Bernard had been saying that Thibaud played as well as he did, Morel threatened to drag him before the courts for doing him professional damage; then, as there was no justice in France any more, especially when one was up against the chosen race (for anti-Semitism was, in Morel, the natural result of having been lent five thousand francs by a Jew), he refused to leave the house without a loaded revolver. Such a nervous state, following upon an intense affection, was bound to occur soon in Morel, in relation to the waistcoat-maker's niece. It is true that M. de Charlus perhaps unintentionally played a part in the change, for he often said, without meaning it for a moment and simply to tease them, that once they were married he would not see them any more and would leave them to stand on their own feet. This idea on its own would certainly not have been enough to detach Morel from the girl, but, lodging in Morel's mind, it would, when the time came, join up with other related ideas to form a powerful force for break-up.

I did not meet M. de Charlus and Morel all that regularly. They were often already inside Jupien's shop when I took leave of the Duchesse, for I enjoyed her company so much that it made me forget not only the period of anxious waiting which would precede Albertine's return, but even the time when I expected her. Among the days when I stayed late at Mme de Guermantes's, I shall single out one which was marked by a little incident whose cruel significance escaped me entirely and which I only came to understand much later. That late afternoon, Mme de Guermantes had given me, because she knew I liked them, some syringas that had come from the South of France. When I left the Duchesse and went upstairs, Albertine was already back, and on the stairs I met Andrée, who seemed distressed by the overpowering smell of the flowers I was carrying.

'Goodness, are you back already? I said. – Just this minute, but Albertine had a letter to write and she sent me away. – You don't think she was planning something unsuitable? – Of course not, she's writing to her aunt, I think. But she hates strong scents, remember: she won't be pleased with your syringas. – Oh dear, how silly of me. I'll tell Françoise to put them on the backstairs landing. – Don't you think Albertine will pick up the smell of them about you? After tuberoses, it's the most persistent scent there is. Anyway, I think Françoise has gone to the shops. – But I haven't got my key today, however shall I get in? – Ring the bell, Albertine will let you in. Or perhaps Françoise will be back by now.'

I said goodbye to Andrée. As soon as I knocked on the door, Albertine came to let me in, but it was quite a complicated business, for with Françoise being out Andrée did not know where to switch on the light. Finally she let me in, but fled at the smell of the syringas. I put them down in the kitchen, and while I was doing so my friend, abandoning her letter (I had no idea why), had time to go into my bedroom, lie down on the bed and call to me from there. I repeat that at the time everything seemed quite normal to me, perhaps a little confused, but quite insignificant. I had almost surprised her with Andrée, and she had given herself a breathing-space by switching off all the lights, had gone into my bedroom so that I should not go into hers and see her unmade bed, and pretended she had been writing. But all this will be explained later, all these things which might have been true or not, I have never been able to say.

Apart from this one incident, everything followed a predictable pattern when I came back up from the Duchesse's. Albertine, not knowing whether I would want to go out with her before dinner, usually left her hat, coat and parasol untidily in the hallway. When I saw them as I came in, the atmosphere of the house became breathable. I felt that, in place of a thin, depleted air, happiness filled it up. I was released from my sadness, the sight of these trivial things made Albertine mine, I ran to find her.

The days I did not go down to Mme de Guermantes's, to make the time pass more quickly during the hour before my friend's return, I would leaf through an album of Elstir's or one of Bergotte's books.

Then – as even those works which seem to be addressed solely to our sight or hearing require, if we are to appreciate them fully, a close collaboration between our awakened intelligence and these two senses – I unconsciously brought out of myself the dreams which Albertine had sown there in former times when I did not know her and which had shrivelled away in the familiarity of daily life. I threw them into the musician's phrase or the painter's image as if into a crucible, I used them to nourish the book that I was reading. And no doubt they made it more vivid for me. But Albertine gained just as much by being thus transported from one to the other of the two worlds we live in and in which we can alternately place the same object, by escaping the crushing pressure of matter and floating free in the weightless spaces of thought. I found myself able, suddenly and for a moment, to have ardent feelings for the fastidious young girl. At that moment she seemed like a work of Elstir or of Bergotte, I felt a moment of lofty enthusiasm for her, seeing her distanced by imagination and art.

Soon I was told that she had come home; but I had given orders that her name was not to be mentioned unless I were alone. If, for example, Bloch was visiting me, I would make him stay a few minutes longer, so as to be sure that he would not cross paths with my friend. For I was concealing the fact that she lived with me and even that I ever saw her at home, such was my fear that one of my friends might take a fancy to her, might wait for her outside the flat, or that in the split second of an encounter in the corridor or the hall, she might make a sign to him and arrange a meeting. Then I heard the rustle of Albertine's skirt moving towards her bedroom, for, out of discretion and, no doubt, also the consideration that she had shown in the old days when we dined at La Raspelière and she did her best to prevent me from being jealous, she would not come near my room, knowing I was not alone. But that was not the only reason, I suddenly realized. I remembered now, I had known an initial Albertine, then all of a sudden she had turned into another, the present one. And no one could be blamed for this change but myself. All the confessions she would have made to me readily, even gladly, when we were just friends, had dried up once she believed that I loved her, or perhaps, without mentioning the word Love to herself, recognized an inquisitorial feeling which desires knowledge, even when knowledge means pain, and constantly seeks to find out more. From that day onwards she had hidden everything from me. She turned away from my room if she thought, not even that I was with a woman friend, but with any friend, she whose eyes used to light up at the mention of any girl: 'You must have her round, I'd like to meet her. – But she has what you call a reputation. – Exactly, it'll be all the more fun.' At that moment, I could have perhaps heard the whole story. And even in the little casino, when she moved her breasts away from Andrée's, I do not think it was because I was there, but because of Cottard, who she no doubt thought might gossip about her. And yet even then she had begun to freeze, the confident words no longer sprang from her lips, her gestures were more reserved. Then she distanced herself from everything that might bring an emotional reaction from me. When she spoke of the parts of her life that I did not know, she colluded with my ignorance to give them the most reassuringly harmless character. And now the transformation was complete, she went straight to her room if I was not alone, not only so as not to disturb me, but to show that she cared nothing for anyone but me. There was only one thing she would not do for me, a thing she would have done only at the time when I would have cared nothing for it, and which she would have happily done then for that very reason: that is, tell me the truth. I would therefore always be reduced, like an examining magistrate, to drawing uncertain conclusions from slips of language which could perhaps be explained without invoking the hypothesis of guilt. And she would always see me as jealous and judging of her.

Our engagement was turning into a trial and giving her the timid manner of a guilty prisoner. Now she changed the subject when we spoke of anyone, man or woman, who was not old. If only I had seized the time before she knew I was jealous of her to ask her the things I wanted to know. One should make the best use of that time. That is when the woman we love will tell us what she enjoys, and even the means she uses to keep her tastes from other people. Albertine would never have confessed to me now, as she had at Balbec, partly because it was true and partly to excuse herself for not showing her feelings for me more clearly in

public (for I had already begun to bore her and she had seen from my kindness to her that she did not have to show me as much affection as to other people in order to receive more in return), she would not have said to me now as she did then: 'I think it's stupid to let people see who you love; with me it's the opposite, as soon as I'm attracted to somebody, I seem to take no notice of them. That way nobody knows what's going on.' What! Was it the Albertine of today, with her pretensions to honesty and to treating everyone the same, who told me that? She would never have spelled out that rule for me today! She simply applied it when talking to me about anyone who might worry me: 'Oh, I don't know, I've never taken any notice of her, she's too uninteresting.' And from time to time, to forestall me in areas that I might find out about, she would own up to things in that tone of voice which, even before one learns of the reality the confession is designed to disguise or whitewash, marks it out as a lie.

As I listened to Albertine's footsteps, reflecting comfortably that she would not be going out again that evening, I thought again with surprise and delight that for this young girl, whom I had once despaired of getting to know, coming home every day now meant coming to my home. The mysterious, sensual, fleeting, fragmentary pleasure that I had experienced in Balbec the night that she came to sleep at the hotel had become whole, stable, and now filled the emptiness of my dwelling with an enduring provision of domestic, almost familial sweetness, which shone into the very corridors, and on which all my senses, sometimes directly and at other times, when I was alone, by imagination and in the promise of her return, could peacefully feed. Once I had heard Albertine's door close, if I had a friend with me I would hurry him out, not leaving him until I was quite sure that he was on his way downstairs, even if I had to go down a few steps myself. In the corridor Albertine would come towards me: 'Listen, while I take my things off, here's Andrée, she came up for a moment to say hallo.' And, still wrapped in the long grey veil which fell from the chinchilla toque I had given her at Balbec, she would disappear into her room, as if she guessed that Andrée, whom I had set to watch over her, would, by giving me copious details, describing how the two of them had met someone they knew, introduce some clarity into the vague regions where their whole day had been spent, and which I had not been able to imagine. Andrée's faults had become more marked, she was not such pleasant company as when I had first met her. A sort of sharp uneasiness hovered about her, ready, like a mist over the sea, to gather into storm-clouds if I were to mention any pleasure that Albertine and I shared. This did not stop Andrée being kinder to me, fonder of me than – and I have had many proofs of this – many more obviously pleasant people. But the smallest sign of happiness, if not caused by her, made an impression on her nerves as unpleasant as the sound of a slamming door. She could accept suffering in which she was not involved, but not pleasure; if she found me ill, she took it to heart, felt sorry for me, would have looked after me. But if I seemed pleased at anything, however small, if I stretched out blissfully as I closed a book and said, 'There! I've spent a delightful two hours reading such-and-such an amusing book,' these words, which would have given pleasure to my mother, to Albertine or Saint-Loup, produced in Andrée a kind of reproach, perhaps simply a nervous reaction. My pleasure irritated her in a way she could not conceal. Alongside these weaknesses were other, more serious faults; one day, when I was speaking of the young man, such an expert on racing, sport, golf and so ignorant about everything else, whom I had met with the little gang at Balbec, Andrée began to sneer: 'You know his father was a thief, he only just escaped the courts. They try to brazen it out, but I make sure I tell everyone. I'd like to see them charge me with slander. I could make quite a statement!' Her eyes were glittering. Now, I learned later that the father had done nothing wrong; Andrée knew that as well as anyone. But, imagining that the son looked down on her and wanting to find something that would embarrass and shame him, she had invented this whole fanciful story of statements to be made and had repeated it so many times to herself that perhaps by now she half believed it was true.

So, given the way Andrée had changed (and even ignoring her short, passionate bursts of hatred) I would not have chosen to spend time with her, if only because of the ill-natured edginess that set a sharp, chilly barrier around her warmer, kinder real nature. But the information that only she could give me about my friend was too important for me to neglect such a rare opportunity of acquiring it. Andrée came in, closed the door behind her; they had met a friend, one that Albertine had never mentioned to me. 'What did they say to each other? – I don't know; seeing that Albertine was with a friend, I went to buy some wool. – Buy some wool? – Yes, Albertine asked me to get it. – That's the very reason why you shouldn't have gone, she was probably trying to get you out of the way. – But she asked me before we met her friend. – Ah!' I said, breathing freely once more. But immediately my suspicion returned: 'But supposing she had arranged beforehand to meet her friend and thought of this as a way to be alone with her when the time came.' Anyway, could I be certain that my first idea (that Andrée was not telling me the whole truth) was not the right one? The person we love, I used to say to myself at Balbec, is a person whose actions seem particularly to attract our jealousy; we feel that if she told us of all her doings, we could perhaps easily stop loving her. No matter how cleverly the jealous lover hides his feelings, they are easily discovered by the woman who inspires them and who begins to use strategies of her own. She tries to deceive us about the things that might make us unhappy, and she succeeds, for how could a harmless phrase betray to the unwary hearer the lies that it conceals? We do not distinguish this phrase from others; spoken in fear and trembling, it is heard without particular attention. Later, when we are alone, we will come back to this phrase, and find that it does not seem to correspond exactly to reality. But are we remembering the phrase itself perfectly? It is as if there arises in us, in relation to the phrase and to the exactness of our memory, a doubt of the same kind as is found in certain neurotic states, when we can never remember whether we bolted the door; the fiftieth attempt is as uncertain as the first, as if we could carry out the action any number of times without its ever giving us the clear, liberating memory of having performed it. But at least we can shut the door for the fifty-first time, whereas the phrase exists in the past, in an uncertain body of sound which we have not the power to recreate. So we begin to dwell on other phrases which hide nothing, and the only, unacceptable cure would be not to know anything, so as not to want to know more. As soon as jealousy is discovered, it is considered by its object as a lack of trust which gives her a right to deceive us. Furthermore, in order to try to find out something, we ourselves have taken the initiative in lying, in deceiving. Andrée, Aimé promised not to say anything, but will they keep their word? Bloch could not promise as he knew nothing, and Albertine will only have to talk to the three of them separately and do some of what Saint-Loup would have called 'triangulation', to find out that we are lying when we pretend to be indifferent to what she does, and far too honourable to have her followed. Thus, coming to replace – in relation to Albertine's actions – my usual infinite doubt, which was too indistinct not to be painless, and was to jealousy what those beginnings of forgetfulness, where peace comes from sheer vagueness, are to grief, the little fragment of an answer which Andrée had just brought me immediately raised further questions; by exploring a small part of the great empty zone that spread around me, I had succeeded only in pushing further back into it that unknowable thing – when we actually try to picture it for ourselves – the real life of another human being. I went on questioning Andrée while Albertine, to be discreet and to give me time (did she do that on purpose?) to interrogate her as much as I wanted, spun out her undressing in her bedroom.

'I think Albertine's uncle and aunt like me,' I was sometimes foolish enough to say to Andrée, forgetting her character. Immediately I would see her sugary face turn sour, like a fruit syrup going off; she looked as if she would never smile again. Her mouth was bitter. Andrée had lost all the youthful gaiety which, like the rest of the little gang and in spite of her sickly disposition, she had shown at Balbec and which now (it is true that Andrée was now some years older) had deserted her so quickly. But I could make it reappear before Andrée left to go home for dinner. 'I met someone today who was full of praise for you,' I would say to her. Immediately a ray of joy lit up her face, it was as if she really loved me. She would not look straight at me, but laughed aimlessly, her eyes suddenly quite round. 'Who was it?' she would ask with naïve, greedy interest. I would tell her and, whoever it was, she would be happy.

Then the time came for her to leave. Albertine reappeared at my side; she had taken off her outdoor clothes and was wearing one of the crêpe de Chine dressing-gowns or Japanese kimonos made to the designs I had got from Mme de Guermantes; for the final details of several of them I had written to Mme Swann, who had replied in a letter beginning with the words, 'After your long eclipse, when I read your letter asking about my *robes de chambre*, I thought I was hearing from a ghost.' Albertine was wearing black slippers with rhinestone ornaments (which Françoise angrily called house-shoes) like the ones she had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing at home in the evening when she looked through the salon window, just as a little later she was to wear mules, some of gilt kid and others of chinchilla, which I loved to see because they were both signs (as other shoes would not have been) that she really lived with me. She had other things too, that I had not bought her, like a handsome gold ring. I admired the open eagle's wings that adorned it. 'My aunt gave me that,' she said. 'I must admit she sometimes is kind to me. It makes me feel old, because she gave it to me for my twentieth birthday.'

Albertine's taste for these pretty things was much sharper than the Duchesse's, because, like any obstacle placed in the way of possession (like my illness, which made travel so difficult and so desirable for me), poverty, more generous in this than riches, gives women something more than the clothes they cannot buy: the desire for these clothes, which is the true way, detailed, thorough, of getting to know them. She, because she could not afford to buy these things herself, and I, because by having them made for her I was trying to please her, were like students who know every detail of the pictures they long to go and see in Dresden or Vienna. Meanwhile rich women, surrounded by their countless hats and dresses, are like people who, having had no desire to visit a museum, find there only sensations of dizziness, fatigue and boredom. A particular hat, a sable coat, a Doucet indoor gown with pink-lined sleeves, took on for Albertine, who had spotted them, coveted them and, with the exclusive and detailed attention that are the mark of desire, isolated them in a vacuum in which the lining or the scarf stood out perfectly, and come to know them in every particular – and for me, who had gone to Mme de Guermantes's to try to have her explain to me what constituted the uniqueness, the superior character, the smartness of each thing, and the inimitable manner of the great craftsman – an importance, a fascination which they certainly did not have for the Duchesse, who was sated before she could even have an appetite, and which they would not have had even for me if I had seen them a few years earlier when I was accompanying some fashionable woman or other on her tiresome trail round the couturiers. Certainly, Albertine herself was developing into a woman of fashion. For if each thing I had made for her was the prettiest of its kind, with all the fine points that Mme de Guermantes or Mme Swann would have brought to it, she was coming to own quite a few such things. But that did not matter, given that she had begun by loving each of them for itself. When one has fallen in love first with one painter, then with another, one can finally admire the whole museum in a way that is not chilly, for the admiration is made of successive loves, each of which in its time was exclusive, but which have finally coalesced. I should add that she was not empty-headed; she did a great deal of reading when she was alone, and read aloud to me when I was at home. She had become extremely intelligent. She used to say (wrongly, in fact): 'It frightens me to think that if I hadn't met you I'd have gone on being stupid. Don't deny it, you opened up a world of ideas for me that I didn't know existed, and if I've made anything of myself, it's because of you.'

I have already mentioned that she spoke in similar terms of my influence over Andrée. Did either of them care at all about me? And, in themselves, what were Albertine and Andrée? To know the answer, we should have to be able to arrest your movement, stop our lives being one long wait for you, who when you arrive are always different; to fix your image we should have to stop loving you, no longer experience your endlessly postponed and always disconcerting arrival, O young girls, O successive flashes in the whirlwind where we tremble to see you reappear, barely recognizing you in the dizzying velocity of light. We should perhaps remain unaware of this rapid movement, and everything might seem to be standing still, if sexual attraction did not make us rush towards you, O drops of gold, each different from the next and always defying our expectation. Each time, a girl is so unlike what she was the time before (shattering as soon as we see her the memory we had kept of her and the desire we had planned to experience) that the stable identity we ascribe to her is purely fictitious, a convenience of language. We have been told that a certain beautiful girl is kind-hearted, loving, full of the most delicate feelings. Our imagination takes all this as gospel, and when we behold for the first time, under the curling halo of her blond hair, the disc of her rosy face, we almost fear that this too-virtuous sister will chill our passion by her very virtue, and will never be the mistress we have dreamed of. And yet, how many things we confide in her from the first moments, trusting in that nobility of heart, how many plans are made together! But a few days later, we regret having been so trusting, for the rosy young girl, when we meet her again, speaks to us in the words of a lubricious Fury. In the successive faces presented to us by the interception, after a lapse of several days, of the rosy light, it is not certain that a *movimentum* independent of the young girls has not played a part. That could have happened in the case of my young friends at Balbec. People praise to us the sweetness, the purity of a virgin. But quite soon one feels that something spicier would be more appealing and one advises her to be bolder in her manners. In herself, was she rather one than the other? Perhaps not, but capable of taking on so many different forms in the rushing current of life. There were others whose whole attraction lay in a certain implacable quality (which we planned to bend in our favour), for example the terrifying jumping girl of Balbec,[8] whose leaps just cleared the heads of frightened old gentlemen; what a disappointment when this figure showed us a different face, on our beginning to utter compliments inspired by the memory of her cruelty to others, and told us that she was shy, that she could never think of anything sensible to say to anyone the first time they met, she was so scared, and we'd have to wait a fortnight to have a proper conversation. The steel had turned to cotton wool, there would be no question of trying to break her resistance as she had already completely changed consistency. Of her own accord, it seemed, but perhaps the fault was ours, for the soft words we had addressed to Hardness had perhaps suggested to her, without there having been any conscious calculation, that she ought to become soft. (A depressing outcome for us, but perhaps only half a miscalculation on her part, since our gratitude for her yieldingness would perhaps produce a stronger commitment than our imagined delight in overcoming ferocity.) I do not suggest that one day we shall not assign quite clear-cut characters even to these radiant young girls, but that will be when they no longer appeal to us, when their entrance is no longer the apparition that our heart was awaiting in a different form, and which stuns it each time with new incarnations. Their fixity will be the product of our indifference, which delivers them up to our considered judgment. Even this, however, will not be much more conclusive, for having established that a certain fault, conspicuous in one girl, is happily absent from another, we shall notice that this fault was accompanied by a precious compensating virtue. So the false judgment of the intelligence, which comes into play only when they no longer interest us, will establish stable characters of young girls, which will tell us no more than the surprising faces, new every day, of our friends when, caught up in the dizzying whirl of our expectation, they appeared each day, each week so different that we could not arrest them in their passage, classify or rank them. As for our feelings, we need hardly repeat that love is often only the association between the image of a girl (of whom otherwise we would very quickly have tired) and the increased heart rate inseparable from a long, futile wait when the young lady in question has 'stood us up'. All this is true not only of imaginative young men and fickle young girls. At the time when our story is set, I have since learned, it seems that Jupien's niece had already changed her view of Morel and M. de Charlus. My chauffeur, trying to strengthen the love she already felt for Morel, had praised to her the violinist's supposed infinite delicacy of feeling, in which she was only too ready to believe. And on the other hand, Morel never tired of telling her what a slave-driver M. de Charlus was to him; she put this down to an evil nature, not guessing at the Baron's love. She could not, in any case, fail to notice M. de Charlus's tyrannical determination to attend all their meetings. And in corroboration of this impression, she heard her ladies speaking about the Baron's great cruelty.

Now, shortly before this, her judgment had been completely reversed. She had discovered in Morel (though it did not make her stop loving him) depths of wickedness and treachery, balanced however by frequent gentleness and real sensitivity, and in M. de Charlus an astonishing and limitless kindness, mixed with an occasional hard-heartedness that she had not yet experienced for herself. So she had been no more able to form a more definite judgment on what, each in himself, the violinist and his protector were, than I about Andrée, whom I saw every day, and Albertine, who lived in my house.

The evenings Albertine did not read aloud to me, she played the piano for me or we embarked on games of draughts or conversations, both of which I would interrupt to kiss her. Our relationship was restfully simple. The very emptiness of her life seemed to make Albertine all the more obedient, all the readier to do the few things I asked of her. Behind her young girl's shape, as once behind the crimson light that glowed beneath my curtains at Balbec, while the band's concert blared out, one could sense the bluish, mother-of-pearl undulations of the sea. Was she not, after all (she in the depths of whose being there lived an idea of me, so much at home there that, after her aunt, I was perhaps the person whom she distinguished least from herself), was she not the young girl that I had seen for the first time at Balbec, with her bold, laughing eyes under her jockey-cap, still unknown to me, thin as a cut-out figure silhouetted on the waves? These effigies, stored intact in the memory, when we return to them, astonish us by their lack of resemblance to the being we know now; we understand then how they are daily, painstakingly remodelled by habit. In Albertine's charm, as she sat by my fireside in Paris, there still lived the desire I had felt for the whole insolent, flower-decked procession as it wound along the beach, and just as Rachel retained for Saint-Loup, even after he had made her give it up, the glamour of the stage, so in the new Albertine, shut up in my house, far from Balbec, from where I had snatched her away, there survived the excitement, the social unease, the anxious vanity, the roving desires of seaside life. Her cage was so secure that some evenings I did not even call for her to come from her room to mine, she, the former

leader of every party, whom I could never catch as she flew past on her bicycle and whom even the liftboy could not bring back to me, leaving me with no hope that she would come, yet still ready to wait for her all night. Albertine in front of the hotel – was she not the leading actress of the fiery beach, stirring up jealousies as she advanced on that natural stage, speaking to no one, disdaining the regular audience, dominating her friends; and this actress, so lusted-after, was she not now (removed from the stage by me, enclosed in my quarters) safe from all those whose desires would seek her in vain, as she sat, sometimes in my bedroom and sometimes in her own, drawing or doing some small piece of carving.

Certainly, in the first days at Balbec, Albertine seemed to be living in a parallel plane, separate from mine. But the two had come closer (after my visit to Elstir) and had finally touched, as I came to know her better, at Balbec, in Paris and then at Balbec again. Besides, if I compare my two pictures of Balbec, on the first visit and the second, though they are made up of the same villas from which the same girls appear in front of the same sea, what a difference there is! In Albertine's friends of the second stay, whom I knew well, whose good and bad qualities were so clearly written on their faces, how could I find again the freshness of those mysterious strangers who, the year before, could not make their chalet doors squeak on the sand or brush the trembling tamarisks as they passed, without making my heart beat faster? Their wide eyes had shrunk since, no doubt because they were no longer children, but also because these enchanting strangers, dramatis personae of the romantic first year, about whom I was constantly seeking details, held no more mystery for me. They had become, now that they accepted my demands, simply girls in the bloom of youth, among whom I felt no little pride in having plucked, carried off, the fairest rose.

Between the two, so different pictures of Balbec, there was an interval of several years in Paris, its length punctuated by repeated visits from Albertine. I saw her, in different years of my life, occupying different positions in relation to myself, which made me conscious of the beauty of the intervening spaces, the long periods when I had not been seeing her; against this diaphanous background the rosy person before my eyes took shape, a strongly modelled figure with mysterious shadows. Its three-dimensional character was due to the superposition, not only of the successive images that Albertine had been for me, but also of admirable traits of intelligence and feeling, and grave faults of character, all unsuspected by me, which Albertine, in a kind of germination, a multiplication of herself, a sombre-hued flowering of flesh, had added to a nature once almost characterless, but now difficult to know in depth. For human beings, even those of whom we once dreamed so much that they seemed to us mere images, Benozzo Gozzoli figures standing out against a greenish ground, the only variation in which depended (so we thought) on our distance from them, our angle of vision, the prevailing light, these same beings, while they change in relation to us, are also changing within themselves; and there had been enrichment, solidification and growth in volume in the two-dimensional figure once silhouetted against the sea. Nor was it only the sea at twilight that lived for me in Albertine, but sometimes the calm of the sea on the shore on moonlit nights. Sometimes, when I left my room to fetch a book from my father's study, my friend would ask if she could lie there till I got back. She would be so tired from her long excursion, all morning and all afternoon in the open air, that, even if I had only been gone for a moment, I would come back to find Albertine sound asleep. I did not wake her. Lying at full length on my bed, in a pose so natural that it could never have been adopted deliberately, she seemed to me like a long, flowering stem that had been laid there; and that was what she was: normally I could dream only when she was not there, but at these times the power of dreaming returned as I lay next to her, as if in her sleep she had turned into a plant. In that way her sleep realized, to a certain degree, the promise of love; when I was alone, I could think about her, but she was not there, she was not mine. When she was there, I could speak to her, but was too removed from myself to be able to think. When she was asleep, I did not have to speak any more, I knew that she could not see me, I did not have to live on the surface of myself. By closing her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had put off, one by one, the various marks of humanity which had so disappointed me in her, from the day that we first met. She was animated only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, stranger, and yet which I possessed more securely. Her individuality did not break through at every moment, as it did when we talked, through unconfessed thoughts and unguarded looks. She had drawn back into her self all the parts of her that were normally on the outside, she had taken refuge, enclosed and summed up in her body. Watching her, holding her in my hands, I felt that I possessed her completely, in a way I never did when she was awake. Her life was subject to me, was breathing out its light breath in my direction. I listened to that mysterious, murmuring emanation, gentle as a soft breeze over the sea, fairylike as the moonlight: the sound of her sleep. So long as it continued I could dream of her and look at her at the same time, and when her sleep became deeper, touch her and kiss her. What I experienced then was a love for something as pure, as immaterial, as mysterious as if I had been before those inanimate creatures that we call the beauties of nature. And indeed, once she had fallen into a deeper sleep, she was no longer just a plant; her slumber, on the edge of which I dreamed, experiencing a new, limpid pleasure of which I would never have tired and which I could have gone on enjoying indefinitely, had become for me a whole landscape. Having her asleep at my side offered something as sensually delicious as my moonlit nights on the bay at Balbec, when the water was calm as a lake amid scarcely moving branches, and one could lie on the beach forever, listening to the sound of the sea.

On entering the room I had stood still on the threshold, not daring to make any noise, and I heard no other sound than her breath, rising and dying away on her lips, like the sound of waves, but softer and more subdued. And at the moment when my ear picked up that heavenly sound, it was as if it held, condensed in itself, the whole person, the whole life of the charming captive who lay there before my eyes. Traffic was passing noisily in the street, her forehead remained as motionless, as pure as before, her breath as light, reduced to the simple expiration of the necessary air. Then, seeing that her sleep would not be disturbed, I advanced carefully, sat down on the chair beside the bed, then on the bed itself. I have spent delightful evenings talking or playing games with Albertine, but I was never so happy as when watching her sleep. When chatting or playing cards, she had a naturalness that no actress could have imitated, but it was a far deeper naturalness, a naturalness in the second degree, that her sleep offered to me. Her hair, falling the length of her rosy face, lay beside her on the bed, and sometimes a stray lock, standing on end, gave the same perspective effect as those frail, pale lunar trees that stick up in the background of Elstir's Raphaelesque paintings. If Albertine's lips were closed, on the other hand, from where I was sitting her eyelids seemed partly open, so that I could almost have wondered whether she was actually sleeping. Still, her lowered lids gave her face that perfect unity that open eyes would have disrupted. There are some faces which take on an unaccustomed beauty and majesty the moment they no longer have a gaze. My eyes measured Albertine as she lay at my feet. Every now and then a slight, inexplicable tremor ran through her, like an unexpected breeze momentarily convulsing the leaves. She touched her hair, then, not having had the effect she wanted, put her hand to it again, in such a coherent, apparently intentional set of movements that I was sure she was going to wake up. But no, she settled into her sleep again without stirring, and from then on stayed quite still. Letting her arm fall, she had dropped her hand on her breast in such a naïvely childish pose that, as I looked at her, it was hard not to smile as we do at babies in their innocent gravity and grace. I already knew several Albertines in one; now I felt I was seeing many more at rest beside me. Her eyebrows, arched as I had never known them, surrounded the globes of her lids like a halcyon's downy nest. Whole races, atavisms, vices slept in her face. Every time she moved her head she created a new woman, often undreamed of by me. I felt that I possessed not one, but innumerable young girls. Her breathing, growing deeper, raised and lowered her breast, and on it, her folded hands and her pearls, which moved differently under the same impulse, like boats and their mooring-chains oscillating in the ebb and flow of the waves. Then, realizing she was in a deep sleep, and that I would not go aground on reefs of consciousness now covered by the waters of oblivion, I carefully, noiselessly moved up on to the bed; I lay down alongside her, put one of my arms around her waist, touched my lips to her cheek and her heart, and then rested my free hand on every part of her body in turn. My hand, too, was raised and lowered, like the pearls, by Albertine's breathing: my whole body was gently rocked by its regular movement. I had set sail on Albertine's sleep.

Sometimes, it brought me a less pure pleasure. I did not have to move at all, I let my leg loll against hers, like a trailing oar to which one gives every now and then a tiny impulsion like the occasional wing-beat of a bird asleep in mid-air. I looked at her, choosing the profile that she never showed, and which was so beautiful. It is just possible to understand how the letters someone writes to us could be so similar to each other, could create an image so distinct from the person we know, that they constitute a second personality. But how much stranger it is that a woman should be attached, like Rosita and Doodica,[9] to another woman whose different beauty makes us deduce the existence of another personality, and that to see the one we should have to look at her in profile, the other full face. The sound of Albertine's breathing, growing louder, could almost have been mistaken for the breathlessness of pleasure, and as my own pleasure reached

completion, I could kiss her without breaking into her sleep. It seemed to me at those moments that I had possessed her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting part of dumb nature. I paid no attention to the words she sometimes uttered in her sleep, their meaning escaped me, and in any case, whatever unknown person they might refer to, it was on my hand, my cheek, that her hand closed, when a slight shudder occasionally passed through it. I experienced her sleep with a disinterested, calming love, as I might spend hours listening to the unrolling of the waves. Perhaps it is only people who can make us suffer a great deal who can offer us, in our hours of remission, that same, pacifying calm that nature can give. I did not have to answer her, as I did when we talked, and even had I been able to keep silent, as I did when she was speaking, listening to her did not allow me to enter so deeply into her as I did now. As I went on listening, collecting up from moment to moment the murmur, calming as an imperceptible breeze, of her sweet breath, a whole physiological existence was laid before me, was mine; the hours that I had once spent lying on the beach in the moonlight, I would now gladly have spent looking at her, listening to her. Sometimes it seemed that the sea was beginning to swell, that the coming storm could be sensed even in the bay, and I listened to the gentle rumble of her breathing as it turned into a snore.

Sometimes when she was too warm, already almost asleep she would slip out of her kimono and throw it over a chair As she slept, I said to myself that all her letters were in the inside pocket of her kimono, where she always kept them. A signature, an appointment would have been enough to convict her of a lie or disprove a suspicion. When I knew that Albertine was sound asleep, leaving the foot of her bed from which I had been studying her for a long time without moving, I took one bold step, gripped by a burning curiosity and conscious that the whole secret of her life lay there for the taking, limp and defenceless in that armchair. And so, one step at a time, constantly turning round to check that Albertine was not waking up, I moved towards the chair. When I got there I stopped, for a long time I stood looking at the kimono as I had stood looking at Albertine. But (perhaps mistakenly) I never touched the kimono, never put my hand in the pocket or looked at the letters. Finally, realizing that I would not take the step, I crept back to Albertine's bed and went on looking at her as she slept, she who told me nothing, while I could see on the arm of the chair the kimono which could have told me so much. And just as people pay a hundred francs a day for a hotel room at Balbec just to breathe the sea air, I thought it quite natural to spend more than that on her, since I had her breath near to my cheek or in her mouth, which I slowly opened upon mine, feeling her very life pass over my tongue. But this pleasure of watching her sleep, which was as sweet as that of feeling her live, was soon replaced by another: that of seeing her wake up. This was the same, though in an intenser and more mysterious form, as the pleasure of having her living with me. Certainly I loved to think that when she got out of the car in the afternoons, it was to my flat that she was coming home. But it was even more delightful to think of her rising from the depths of sleep, climbing the last steps of the ladder of dreams and awakening to consciousness and life in my bedroom; asking herself for a moment 'where am I?' and seeing the objects that surrounded her, the lamp whose light hardly even made her blink, and being able to say 'at home', as she realized she was waking up under my roof. In this first delicious moment of uncertainty I felt that I was taking a new, more complete possession of her, for when she came back from outside, she would go first into her room, but now it was my room, as Albertine recognized it, that would enfold her, contain her, without my friend's eyes giving any sign of anxiety, for they remained as untroubled as if she had never been asleep. The hesitancy of waking, revealed in her silence, made no mark on her gaze.

Now she began to speak; her first words were 'darling' or 'my darling', followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would produce 'darling Marcel' or 'my darling Marcel'. From that moment I stopped allowing my relations, at home, to call me 'darling', so as not to destroy the unique charm of the words Albertine used in speaking to me. As she said them, she formed her lips into the shape of a kiss, which she soon turned into a real one. She had fallen asleep in an instant; now she woke up just as quickly. But it was not my movement through time, any more than the fact of looking at a girl sitting close to me under the lamp which cast a different light on her from the light of the sun as she strode along the sea-shore; not the real enrichment or independent progress of Albertine's character that were the true cause of the difference between the way I looked at her now and the way I had looked at her in the early days at Balbec. Many more years could have separated the two images without bringing about such a complete change; it had happened, radical and sudden, when I learned that my friend had been almost brought up by the associate of Mlle Vinteuil. Once I had been excited by the mystery I thought I saw in Albertine's eyes, but now I could be happy only when I briefly managed to eliminate from those eyes, or from her cheeks, which were almost as expressive as her eyes, sometimes so kindly but so quickly turning to brusqueness, any suggestion of the mysterious. The image I sought, the image in which I found repose, lying next to which I would have longed to die, was no longer the Albertine with a secret life; it was an Albertine I knew, as thoroughly as a person can be known (and that was why my love for her could last only so long as it remained unhappy, for by definition it could not satisfy the need for mystery), it was an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but instead desired nothing – and there were indeed moments when that seemed to be true – nothing but to be with me, to be exactly like me, an Albertine who was precisely the image of what was mine and not of the unknown. When, as here, love is born in a particular, anguished moment of our relation to a person, born of our uncertain hold on that person and the fear that he or she may escape, then that love always bears the sign of the upheaval of its creation; there is little left of the vision we previously had when we thought of the one we now love. My first impressions of Albertine at the edge of the waves perhaps survived in some small measure in my love for her: but really such previous impressions play only a very small part in a love of this kind, in its strength, its pain, its need for gentleness and its harking-back to a peaceful, pacifying world of memory, where one would wish to live forever, learning no more about the loved one, even if some vile revelation were there for the asking, but rather relying only upon such earlier impressions: a love of this kind is made of very different stuff! Sometimes I put out the light before she came in. It was in darkness, guided only by the light of an ember, that she came to my side. Only my hands, my cheeks recognized her, without my eyes seeing her, my eyes which so often feared to find her changed. So that, thanks to this blind love, she perhaps felt herself bathed in more tenderness than she was used to.

I would undress and get into bed, and with Albertine sitting at one corner of the bed, would take up again the game of cards or the conversation that our kisses had interrupted; and our desire (the only thing that makes us take any interest in the existence or character of a person) is such a constant reflection of our underlying nature, even if we abandon in turn the various beings we have loved, that once, catching sight of myself in the glass as I kissed Albertine, calling her 'little girl', and seeing the sad, passionate expression of my face, just as it would have been years ago when I was with Gilberte, whom I had now forgotten, and would be again, perhaps, with someone else if I were ever to forget Albertine, I thought that beyond any consideration of persons (for instinct demands that we always consider the present partner as the only true one) I was carrying out a duty of ardent and painful devotion, offered like a tribute to feminine youth and beauty. And still this desire which I placed like an *ex voto* in honour of youth, those memories of Balbec too, only partly explained the need I had to keep Albertine beside me every evening; there was another thing which so far had been alien to me, to me as a lover at any rate, even if it was not wholly new to my life. It was a calming effect so powerful that I had experienced nothing like it since the far-off evenings in Combray when my mother came and, leaning over my bed, brought me rest in a kiss. Certainly I would have been astonished in those days if someone had told me that I was not a wholly kind person, and still more that I would ever try to deprive someone of a pleasure. Clearly I had little self-knowledge at that time, for my pleasure in having Albertine living with me now was much less a positive pleasure than satisfaction at having removed from the world, where everyone could enjoy her in turn, the blossoming young girl who, even if she caused no great joy to me, at least could not offer it to anyone else. Ambition, glory could never have meant anything to me. Still less was I capable of experiencing hatred. All the same, carnal love for me was above all the joy of triumphing over so many competitors. I cannot repeat it too often, more than anything else it was relief from pain.

Before Albertine came home I might have suspected her, imagined her in the room at Montjouvain, but once she was in her dressing-gown, sitting facing my armchair or my bed, if, as usual, I was lying at the foot of it, I brought all my doubts to her, placed them before her so as to be freed from them, laying down my burden as a believer does when he prays.

She might have spent the whole evening mischievously curled up on my bed, playing with me like an oversized cat; her little pink nose, whose tip seemed all the smaller for her flirtatious way of glancing, giving her the special daintiness that some quite plump people have, might have given her a fiery, rebellious look; she might have let a lock of her long black hair fall across her pink wax doll's cheek and, half closing her eyes and uncrossing her arms, have seemed to be saying, 'Do what you like with me.' Still, when it was time for her to leave and she came close to me to say good-night, what I kissed was the now almost familial sweetness of the two sides of her strong young neck, which never seemed to me sufficiently tanned or coarse-grained, as if these robust qualities had been the sign of some reliable goodness in Albertine.

'Are you coming out with us tomorrow, bad boy?' she would ask me before she left. – 'Where are you going?' – 'That depends on the weather, and on you. *Did* you write anything this afternoon, dearest? No? Well then, you might just as well have come out. By the way, when I came in just now, you recognized my footsteps, didn't you, you guessed it was me?' – 'Of course. How could I mistake them? I'd know my little goosey's footsteps anywhere. Little goosey sit down and let me take off her shoes before she goes to bed. I'd like that. You're so sweet and pink among all that snowy lace.'

That was how I answered her; among the expressions of carnality, the reader will recognize others belonging to my mother and my grandmother. For I was slowly coming to resemble all my relatives: my father who – in a completely different manner from myself, of course, for if things repeat themselves it is always with wide variations – took such a strong interest in the weather; and not only my father, but more and more my aunt Léonie. Without her influence, Albertine would have been an obvious reason for me to go out, so as not to leave her alone, outside my control. Yes, Aunt Léonie, steeped in piety and with whom I would have sworn I did not have a single thing in common, I who was so mad for pleasures, quite unlike that obsessive who did not know what pleasure was and spent the whole day saying her rosary, I who was desperate to establish a life in literature, when she was the only person in the family who had never managed to understand that reading was not simply a pastime, something one did 'for fun', so that even in the Easter season reading was allowed on Sundays, when all serious work is forbidden, so that the whole day can be sanctified by prayer. Now, even though I found the explanation in some different ailment each day, what made me so often spend the whole day in bed was another being, not Albertine, not a being I loved but one with more power over me than any I did love; it was a soul transmigrated into me, despotic enough to reduce my jealous suspicions to silence, or at any rate to stop me going to find out whether they were true or not: it was Aunt Léonie. Was it not enough that I should bear an exaggerated resemblance to my father, not just consulting the barometer as he did but becoming a kind of human barometer myself, was it not enough that I should be driven by my aunt Léonie to spend the day observing the weather, but from my room and even from my bed? Here I was now talking to Albertine, sometimes like the child I had been at Combray talking to my mother, and sometimes like my grandmother talking to me. Once we pass a certain age, the soul of the child we used to be and the souls of the dead from whom we spring come and scatter over us handfuls of their riches and their misfortunes, asking to bear a part in the new feelings we are experiencing: feelings which allow us, rubbing out their old effigies, to recast them in an original creation. Thus, all my past since my earliest years, and beyond those, my relatives' past, mixed into my carnal love for Albertine the sweetness of a love both filial and maternal. Once a certain hour has come we have to welcome them, all those relatives who have come so far to assemble around us.

Before Albertine, obeying my wishes, had taken off her shoes, I would open her nightdress. The two high little breasts were so round that they seemed not so much integral parts of her body as two fruits that had ripened there; and her belly (hiding the place which, in men, is made ugly by something like the metal pin left sticking out of a statue when it is removed from its mould) was closed, at the meeting of the thighs, by two curves as gentle, as restful, as cloistered as the horizon when the sun has disappeared. She took off her shoes and lay down beside me.

O noble attitudes of Man and Woman in which, with all the innocence of the first days and the humility of clay, what Creation put asunder tries to join together once more, in which Eve is astonished and compliant before the Man by whose side she awakes, as he is, still alone, before the God who made him! Albertine twisted her arms behind her black hair, her hip swelling, her leg falling away in a swan's-neck curve, lengthening and turning back on itself. Only when she was lying quite on her side did her features (so kind and beautiful when seen full face) appear intolerably ugly, hooked like certain Leonardo caricatures, seeming to reveal wickedness, greed, the deviousness of a spy whose presence in my house would have appalled me, and who seemed to be unmasked by those particular profiles. I would immediately take Albertine's face in my hands and reposition it to face me.

'There's a good boy, promise me that if you don't come out tomorrow you'll do some work,' said my friend, putting her night-dress back on. 'All right, but don't put your dressing-gown on yet.' Sometimes I fell asleep next to her. The bedroom had got cold, we needed more wood. I would try to find the bell-rope behind me, but I could not; I would feel all the brass posts but the two between which it hung, and say to Albertine, who had jumped out of bed so that Françoise would not see us together, 'No, get back in for a minute, I can't find the bell.'

These were happy, cheerful moments, innocent in appearance but hiding the growing possibility of disaster: this is what makes the life of lovers the most unpredictable of all, a life in which it can rain sulphur and pitch a moment after the sunniest spell and where, without having the courage to learn from our misfortunes, we immediately start building again on the slopes of the crater which can only spew out catastrophe. I was carefree in the way of those who think their happiness can last. It is just because this sweetness was necessary to give rise to suffering – and will also return intermittently to relieve it – that men can be being sincere with their friends, and even with themselves, when they speak warmly of a woman's kindness to them, even though, to tell the truth, their relationship is undermined secretly, in a way they do not confess to others or which is revealed involuntarily in response to questions, to inquiries, by a painful anxiety. But this anxiety could not have arisen if not for the previous happiness: and later, the intermittent happiness is necessary to make the suffering bearable and to avoid a complete break; and the way the lover hides the secret hell which living with this woman has become, even going so far as to boast of their intimacy and its pretended happiness, has an element of truth in it, expresses a general connection between cause and effect, one of the means by which the production of suffering is made possible.

It no longer surprised me that Albertine should be there and should only be able to go out the following day with me or under the protection of Andrée. These shared habits, these boundaries which marked off my existence and which no one could cross but Albertine, and also (in the plan, as yet unknown to me, of my future life, drawn as if by an architect designing monuments which will be built only much later) the distant lines, parallel to these but on a grander scale, which sketched out in me, like a lonely hermitage, the somewhat rigid, monotonous pattern of my future loves, had in fact been drawn that night in Balbec when, after Albertine had told me, in the little tram, who it was who had brought her up, I had decided at all costs to remove her from certain influences and prevent her from being out of my sight for several days. Days had followed upon days, my habits had become mechanical, but as with those rites for which History tries to discern a meaning, I could have said (and would not have wished to say) to anyone who asked me what was the meaning of this sequestered life, where I shut myself away to the point of no longer going to the theatre, that it had its origin in the anxiety of a single evening, and the need to prove to myself in the days that followed that the girl whose unfortunate childhood had just been revealed to me would no longer have the chance, even if she wished to do so, of exposing herself to similar temptations. I rarely thought about these temptations any more, but they must still have been present at the back of my mind. The fact of destroying them day by day – or of trying to do so – was no doubt what made me so happy as I kissed those cheeks, in themselves no more beautiful than many other cheeks; under every physical pleasure of any intensity there lies an abiding sense of danger.

I had promised Albertine that if I did not go out with her I would start work. But the next day, as if, while we were asleep, the house had miraculously travelled, I found myself waking up to different weather, a different climate. No one works immediately on landing in a strange country; there are the new conditions to get used to. Now, for me, each new day was a new country. Even my laziness constantly took on new forms: how could I have recognized it? Sometimes, on days when the weather was pronounced hopelessly bad, just living in a house placed at the centre of steadily falling rain had the gentle smoothness, the calming silence, the absorbing interest of a sea-voyage; then, on a bright day, simply lying still in bed would allow the shadows to pivot around

me as if around a tree-trunk. Or else, from the first sound of the bells of a nearby convent, few and hesitant as their early morning worshippers, barely lightening the dark sky with their tentative showers of sound which were fused or broken up by the warm wind, I had already recognized one of those stormy days, mild and unpredictable, when the roofs, briefly dampened by rain, then dried by a breath of wind or a ray of sunshine, poutingly display a few drops and, as they wait for the wind to turn again, preen in the passing sunshine the rainbow glints of their shot-silk slates; one of those days which is filled with so many changes in the weather, so many atmospheric incidents, so much turbulence, that the lazy man feels he has not wasted it, since he has taken an interest in all the activity that the atmosphere, failing any action on his part, has undertaken in his place; days like those times of rioting or war that do not seem empty to the schoolboy missing his classes, since, hanging around outside the Palais de Justice or reading the newspapers, he has the illusion that the unfolding events replace the work he is not doing, developing his intelligence and excusing his idleness; days, in a word, to which we can compare those which bring our lives to some exceptional crisis and which make the man who has never done anything believe that he will, if all turns out happily, adopt new habits of diligence: for example, it is on the morning when he is going out to fight a duel in particularly dangerous circumstances that, when he is perhaps on the point of losing it, he suddenly becomes aware of the value of a life which he might have used to establish a body of work, or simply to enjoy himself, and of which he has made no use at all. 'Only let me not be killed,' he says to himself, 'and see how I shall work, starting this minute, and how I shall enjoy life!' Life suddenly seems more valuable to him, because he has included in it everything it might be able to give, and not the small amount that he usually makes it give to him. He sees it through the eyes of desire and not as what experience has shown him he can make of it, that is, something so very commonplace. It has, in an instant, been filled with work, travel, mountain-climbing, all the fine things that he thinks the dreadful outcome of this duel may make impossible for him, without realizing that they were already impossible long before the duel was thought of, because of his bad habits which, even without the duel, would have continued. He comes home without a scratch. But he goes on finding the same objections to pleasures, to outings, to journeys, to everything of which he feared for a moment being deprived by death; life is enough to cut him off from them. As far as work is concerned – since extreme circumstances exaggerate what was already present in a man, diligence in the hard worker and laziness in the idler – he awards himself a holiday.

I followed his example, and did as I had always done since the original decision to start writing which I had made long ago, but which always seemed to date from the day before, since I treated each day, one after another, as if they did not count. Today was just the same; I was letting its showers and spells of sunshine pass without doing anything and still promising myself that I would start working tomorrow. But I was not the same person under a cloudless sky; the golden sound of the bells contained not only, as honey does, light, but the sensation of light (and also the sweetish scent of preserved fruit, since at Combray it had often hung around our table, like a wasp, after the dishes had been cleared). On a day of such brilliant sunshine, keeping one's eyes closed all day was something permissible, usual, healthy, pleasant, seasonable, like closing one's shutters against the heat. The weather had been like this at the beginning of my second stay in Balbec, when I would hear the violins of the band between the bluish flows of the rising tide.

How much more Albertine belonged to me now! There were some days when the sound of a bell striking the hour bore on the sphere of its sound a patch of dampness or of brightness that was so fresh, so powerfully applied that it was like a translation for the blind, or, if you like, a musical transposition of the charm of the rain or the sunshine. So that at that moment, lying in bed with my eyes shut, I would say to myself that everything can be transposed, and that a universe made up only of sound could be as varied as any. Travelling lazily upstream from day to day as if on a boat, and seeing appear before me ever-new, magical memories which I had not chosen, which, the moment before they appeared, were invisible, and which memory presented to me one after the other without my being able to choose, I lazily pursued, over these smooth spaces, my outing in the sun.

The morning concerts at Balbec did not belong to the distant past. And yet, even after such a relatively short lapse of time, I was not thinking of Albertine. In fact, in the days just after my arrival, I had not known that she was in Balbec. Who was it who had told me she was there? Ah yes, Aimé. It was a lovely day, like today. Dear Aimé! He was glad to see me again. But he doesn't like Albertine. Not everyone can like her. Yes, he was the one who told me she was in Balbec. How did he know? He had met her, he thought she looked 'not quite the thing'. At this moment, approaching Aimé's account from a different angle from the one it had presented when I first heard it, my thoughts, which had so far been sailing smilingly over the happy waters I have just described, exploded, as if they had hit an invisible, dangerous mine, treacherously placed at this point in my memory. He said he had met her and she was looking 'not quite the thing'. What did he mean by that? I had thought he meant vulgar: indeed, I had immediately contradicted him by saying she looked distinguished. But no, perhaps he meant a lesbian look. She was with a friend, perhaps they had their arms round each other's waists, perhaps they were eyeing other women, maybe they had that 'look' that I had never seen on Albertine when I was around. Who was the friend? Where had Aimé met this hateful Albertine? I tried to remember exactly what Aimé had said, to see if it fitted with what I was now imagining, or if he was simply suggesting that her manners were common. But I asked these questions in vain, the person asking and the person who could supply the memory were, alas, one and the same person, myself, who could split himself in two for a moment, but could not add anything to himself. All my questioning was useless. I myself was giving the answers and I learned nothing new. I had stopped thinking about Mlle Vinteuil. Born of a new suspicion, the fit of jealousy I was suffering was also new, or rather it was simply an extension, a prolonging of this new suspicion; it had the same setting, no longer Montjouvain but the stretch of road where Aimé had met Albertine, and for characters the small group of friends, one or other of whom could have been the person with Albertine on that day. Perhaps it was a certain Élisabeth, or perhaps the two girls Albertine had watched in the mirror at the casino, when she didn't seem to be watching them. No doubt she had sexual relations with them, and with Esther besides, Bloch's cousin. Such relations, if they had been revealed to me by a third person, would have been almost enough to kill me, but as it was I who was imagining them myself, I was always careful to include enough uncertainty to make the pain bearable. One can absorb, in the form of suspicions, an enormous daily dose of the idea that one is deceived: when the same idea would be fatal in a much smaller quantity, if administered in the single injection of a destructive word. And that is no doubt the reason, allied to a form of the self-preservation instinct, why the jealous man is ready to form the most dreadful suspicions on the basis of innocent events, provided that, when the first piece of real evidence is brought to him, he can refuse to recognize the obvious. In any case, love is an incurable ailment, like those groups of related diseases in which respite from, say, rheumatism can be had only when it is replaced by epileptiform migraines. My jealous suspicions once pacified, I would begin to blame Albertine for not being loving, for having perhaps laughed about me with Andrée. I was afraid to think what idea she might have formed of me if Andrée had repeated all our conversations, the future seemed appalling. This sadness left me only if a new jealous suspicion plunged me into further inquiries or if, on the other hand, Albertine's affectionate behaviour robbed my happiness of meaning. Who could the girl have been? I must write to Aimé, try to see him, and then I could check on what he said by talking to Albertine, by drawing her out. In the meantime, convinced that it must be Bloch's cousin, I asked him, without giving him the least idea why, to show me a picture of her or, better still, to introduce me to her.

How many people, towns, pathways jealousy makes us desperate to know! It is a thirst for knowledge thanks to which we come to have, on a series of isolated points, all possible information except the information we really want. We never know when a suspicion will arise, for suddenly we remember a phrase that was unclear, an alibi which must have been given for a purpose. It is not that we have seen the person again, but there is a jealousy after the event, which arises only after we have left the person in question, a 'staircase jealousy' like staircase wit. Perhaps the habit I had developed of keeping certain desires secret within myself, the desire for a young girl of good society like the ones I saw passing under my window followed by their governesses, and particularly the one Saint-Loup, who frequented brothels, had told me about, the desire for pretty lady's-maids, and particularly Mme Putbus's, the desire to go to the country in spring and see the hawthorns again, the desire for storms, for Venice, to set to work, to live like other people, perhaps the habit of keeping all these desires alive in me without satisfying them, simply promising myself that I would not forget to realize them one day, perhaps this habit, formed over so many years, of perpetual postponement, of what M. de Charlus damned under the name of procrastination, had become so general in me that it had invaded even my jealous suspicions and led me, while making a mental note that one day I would certainly demand an explanation from Albertine about the young girl (or young girls, for this part of

the story was confused, half erased, in other words unreadable in my memory) in whose company Aimé had met her, to delay this demand. In any case, I would not raise the subject with my friend this evening, for fear of seeming jealous and annoying her. Nevertheless, the following day when I received the photograph of Bloch's cousin Esther, I immediately sent it on to Aimé. And at the same moment I remembered that in the morning Albertine had refused me a pleasure which could, indeed, have tired her. Was she keeping it for someone else, that afternoon perhaps? For whom? It is in this way that jealousy knows no bounds, for even if the loved one, perhaps because of her death, can no longer provoke it by her actions, it can happen that memories, occurring long after any events, can behave in our minds like events in their own right: memories that we had not explored until then, which we had thought unimportant but which our own reflection on them, without bringing any further facts to bear, can endow with a new, dreadful meaning. There is no need for two players, one need only be alone in one's room, thinking, for new betrayals by one's mistress to occur, even after she is dead. It is not enough in love, as in everyday life, to fear only the future: one must fear the past, which often becomes real to us only after the future, and I am not simply speaking of the past about which we learn only after the event, but of the one we have carried within us for many years, and which we only now learn to read.

No matter, I was very happy, as the afternoon ended, that the hour was approaching when I would be able to seek in Albertine's presence the source of calm that I needed. Unfortunately, the evening was one of those which did not bring me that calm, one when the kiss Albertine gave me as she left, unlike her usual kiss, would not settle me, any more than my mother's kiss did on those evenings when she was cross with me, when I dared not call her back even though I knew I would not be able to go to sleep. Those evenings were now the ones when Albertine had made some plan for the following day that she did not want me to know about. If she had confided in me, I would have applied myself to realizing her plans with an energy that no one but Albertine could have inspired in me to the same degree. But she said nothing, and indeed had no need to say anything: as soon as she came in, as she stood at her bedroom door with her hat still on, I had already seen in her face the unknown, fractious, determined, irrepressible desire. Now these were often the evenings when I had looked forward to her return with the tenderest thoughts, imagining throwing my arms round her with the greatest affection. Alas, misunderstandings like the ones I had often had with my parents, whom I found distant or cross at the moment I ran towards them overflowing with affection, are nothing compared with those that come between lovers. Suffering here is much less superficial, much harder to bear; they affect a deeper layer of the heart. On this evening, Albertine could not avoid telling me a little about the plan she had made: I understood immediately that she wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's the next day, to make a visit to which normally I would not have objected at all. But certainly she meant to meet someone there, to prepare the ground for some pleasure. Otherwise she would not have been so determined to go. That is, she would not have kept repeating that she did not care whether she went or not. As I got older, I had developed in the opposite direction from those peoples who adopt a phonetic script only after having used characters as symbols; for so many years I had looked for people's real lives and thoughts only in the direct expressions of them that they deliberately provided, but now, thanks to them, I had come to do the opposite, to attach importance only to those statements that are not a rational, analytical expression of the truth; I relied on words only when I could read them like the rush of blood to the face of a person who is unsettled, or like a sudden silence. A certain phrase (like the one M. de Cambremer used when he thought I was 'a writer' and when, not having yet spoken to me, he was describing a visit he had made to the Verdurins, and said, turning to me, 'De Borrelli was there – *you* know') flaring up, sparked by the unintended, sometimes dangerous proximity of two ideas unexpressed by the speaker, from whose discourse I could, by appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis, extract them, told me more than a whole speech. Albertine sometimes left such loose ends trailing in her speech, precious compounds which I hastened to 'process' so as to turn them into clear ideas.

It is one of the most dreadful things for the lover that, while particular facts – which only the test of experience, or even spying, can verify from among so many possibilities – are so difficult to unearth, the truth, on the other hand, is so easy to discover or simply to intuit. I had often seen her at Balbec give passing girls an offhand, lingering look, like a touch, and then, if I knew them, say, 'Shall we have them round? I'd like to be rude to them.' And for some time now, since she had learned to understand me, no doubt, there had been no requests to invite anyone, not a word, and even a turning-away of her gaze, which was now unfocussed and silent, and accompanied by a faraway, absent-minded look that was just as revealing as their former intensity. Now I could not reproach or question her about things which she would have said were so tiny, so insignificant that I must just be noticing them for the fun of 'nitpicking'. It is not easy to say, 'Why did you look at that girl we passed?' but even harder to say, 'Why didn't you look at her?' And yet I knew, or at least I would have known, if I had not chosen to believe what Albertine said rather than all the tiny signs included in a glance, proved by a glance, and certain inconsistencies in her words that I often did not notice until after I had left her, and which then made me suffer all night; I did not dare mention them to her afterwards, but they would nonetheless favour my memory with periodic return visits. Often these furtive or averted looks on the beach at Balbec or in the streets of Paris left me wondering if the person who provoked them was simply the subject of a passing desire, or whether she were not an old acquaintance, or else a girl to whom Albertine had simply spoken and to whom, when I learned of it, I was astonished that she should have spoken, so far removed was she, apparently, from the range of girls it was possible for Albertine to know. But modern Gomorrah is a jigsaw puzzle made up of pieces from the most unlikely places. I once observed a grand dinner at Rivebelle all of whose ten female guests I happened to know, if only by name; they were as disparate as possible socially and yet had a perfect understanding, so that I never saw a dinner where the guests, seemingly so ill-matched, mixed so well.

To return to the young passers-by, Albertine would never have looked at an old lady or an elderly man with that degree of fixity or, on the other hand, of discretion, seeming not to see them. Deceived husbands who 'do not know', in fact know everything. But one needs a stronger basis of factual evidence before making a jealous scene. Then, while jealousy teaches us to recognize a propensity to lying in the woman we love, it also multiplies that propensity a hundredfold once she has learned that we are jealous. She lies (on a scale on which she has never lied to us before), whether from pity, or fear, or an instinctive desire to hide, to flee which is proportionate to the energy of our investigations. Certainly there are affairs in which from the beginning a woman with a past has tried to pose as irreproachable in the eyes of the man who loves her. But in how many more do we see two completely contrasting phases! In the first, the woman speaks almost carelessly, simply softening the truth a little, about her taste for pleasure and the irregular life it has led her into, admissions which she will later deny with the utmost force to the same man, once she has sensed that he is jealous of her and is spying on her. He will come to look back fondly on the days of those early confidences, the memory of which none the less tortures him. If the woman would still confess to him in the same way, she would almost herself be giving up to him the secret of those offences which he vainly pursues every day. And then what a proof of confidence it would be, of trust, of friendship! If she cannot live without deceiving him, at least she would be deceiving him like a friend, telling him of her pleasures, sharing them with him. And he mourns the loss of such a life, which the beginning of their affair had seemed to hint at, but its development had made impossible, turning their love into something atrociously painful, and making a separation either inevitable or, as it might be, wholly impossible.

Sometimes the script in which I deciphered Albertine's lies was not ideographic, but simply had to be read backwards; thus, on this particular evening she had thrown out in my direction the message, designed to pass almost unnoticed: 'I might perhaps go to the Verdurins' tomorrow, I don't really know, I don't much feel like going.' A childish anagram of the admission, 'I'm going to the Verdurins' tomorrow, I simply must go, it's really important.' This apparent hesitation was the sign of a firm resolve and was designed to reduce the importance of the visit in the very moment of telling me about it. Albertine always used a tentative tone for irrevocable decisions. I was no less resolved: I would see to it that the visit to Mme Verdurin did not take place. Jealousy is often nothing but an uneasy desire for domination, applied in the context of love. I had no doubt inherited from my father this sudden, arbitrary need to threaten the beings I loved the most in their most comfortable hopes, so as to show that their security was illusory. When I saw that Albertine had planned, without consulting me, while hiding her scheme from me, an outing which I would have been the first to try to make easier and more pleasant for her if only she had told me about it, I would carelessly suggest, so as to alarm her, that I intended to go out that day myself.

I began to suggest to Albertine other places to visit which would have made calling on the Verdurins impossible, colouring my words with a feigned indifference under which I tried to disguise my annoyance. But she had spotted it. In her it encountered the electric force of a contrary will which repelled it strongly, throwing off sparks which I could see in Albertine's eyes. Anyway, why should I have paid attention to what her eyes were saying at that moment? How could I not have noticed long ago that Albertine's eyes belonged to the family of those (found even in unremarkable beings) which seem made up of different elements for all the different places where their owner would like to be – and will not admit that she would like to be – on a given day? Eyes always lyingly motionless and passive, but dynamic, measurable by the metres or kilometres to be covered in order to arrive at the desired – implacably desired – meeting-place, eyes given not so much to smiling at the temptations of pleasure, as to clouding over with sadness and discouragement at the thought of possible difficulties separating them from the goal. Even held in one's hands, these beings are creatures of flight. To understand the feelings they inspire and which other beings, even more beautiful ones, cannot, we must consider them not as immobile but in movement, and add to their description a sign corresponding to the sign for speed in physics.

If you upset their day's programme, they admit to the pleasure they were hiding from you: 'I was so looking forward to having tea with So-and-so, I do love her.' Well, if six months later you finally meet So-and-so, you discover that the girl whose plans you upset, who in order to escape your trap admitted to you that on the afternoons when you did not see her she always had tea with this friend, had in fact never been to her house; you learn that they never had tea together, for your friend was always too busy: that she was, in fact, seeing you.

So, the person she had confessed she was going to have tea with, that she had begged you to let her have tea with, this person, whose name she had produced under the pressure of necessity, was not the person at all, it was someone else, something quite different. What? Who was the other person? Alas, those fragmented eyes, sadly reaching into the distance, might perhaps allow you to judge distances, but not directions. The field of possibilities extends to infinity, and if by chance the truth appeared before us, it would be so utterly improbable that, suddenly stunned, we should charge into this wall that had appeared from nowhere and knock ourselves out. Actual movement, observed flight are not even necessary, it is enough that we should intuit their possibility. She had promised us a letter, we were calm, no longer in love. The letter does not come, successive posts do not bring one, 'what is happening?', anxiety is reborn and with it, love. These are the creatures we usually fall in love with, only to suffer the more. For each new anxiety they cause us blots out from our eyes a part of their personality. We were resigned to suffering, thinking we loved something outside ourselves, and we come to realize that our love is a function of our sadness, that perhaps it is our sadness, and that its object is only to a small extent the young girl with raven hair. But there it is, these are the creatures that above all inspire love. Most often love has for its object a body only if an emotion, the fear of losing the loved object, the uncertainty of finding it again, are fused with that body. Now this kind of anxiety has a great affinity for bodies. It gives them a quality which surpasses even beauty: that is one of the reasons why we see men, indifferent to the most beautiful women, fall in love with certain others who seem to us ugly. To those creatures, creatures of flight, their nature, our anxiety attaches wings. And even when they are with us, their eyes seem to say that they are about to fly away. The proof of this beauty beyond beauty which is lent to them by their wings, is that often the same being is first wingless for us, and then winged. As soon as we fear losing it, we forget all others. If we are sure of keeping it, we can compare it to others and quickly prefer them. And as these emotions and certainties can vary from one week to the next, a person can one week see everything that previously pleased us sacrificed to her, and the next week be sacrificed herself, and this can go on for a long time. All this would be incomprehensible if we did not know, from the experience every man has of having, at least once in his life, stopped loving a woman, of having forgotten her, how insignificant in itself a human being is when it has ceased to be, or has not yet become, permeable to our emotions. And certainly if we use the phrase 'creatures of flight', it is equally true of imprisoned creatures, the captive women whom we feel we shall never possess. Men hate procuresses, because they encourage flight, hold out temptations, but if they are in love with a woman who is shut away, they will seek out a procuress to help her escape and bring her to us. If relationships with women who have been 'carried off' end more quickly than others, it is because the fear of not being able to win them or the apprehension of their escape was all our love, and once stolen from their husbands or torn from their theatres, cured of the temptation to leave us, in a word dissociated from our emotion, whatever it is, they are only themselves, that is, next to nothing, and, having been so long desired, they are soon left by the very man who was so afraid of being left by them.

I said: 'Why hadn't I guessed?' But had I not guessed from the first day in Balbec? Had not I recognized in Albertine one of those girls under whose fleshly covering there palpitate more hidden beings, not just than in a deck of cards still in its box, in a locked cathedral or a theatre before the doors open, but in the whole vast, ever-changing crowd? Not simply so many beings, but the desire for, the voluptuous memory of, the anxious search for so many more. At Balbec I had not been worried by this, because I had never imagined that I should one day be following trails, even false ones. But still this multiplicity had given Albertine the plenitude of a being filled to overflowing with so many other, superimposed beings, so many desires for and pleasure-laden memories of other beings. And now that she had once said to me 'Mlle Vinteuil' I longed, not to tear off her dress and see her body, but to see through her body to the whole note-book of her memories and plans for further, ardent lovers' meetings.

What an extraordinary value the most insignificant things take on as soon as the person we love (or whom it will take only this piece of duplicity to make us love) hides them from us! Pain in itself does not necessarily produce love or hatred in us for the person who causes it: we remain indifferent to a surgeon who hurts us. But a woman who has been telling us for some time that we are everything to her, without her being quite everything to us, a woman whom we delight in

seeing, kissing, taking on our knees, surprises us if we sense, from a sudden resistance, that she is not completely at our disposal. Disappointment can then awaken in us the forgotten memory of an old sorrow, which we know was not caused by this woman, but by others whose treacheries punctuate our past. How, then, can one dare hope to go on living, how can one take the least step to preserve oneself from death, in a world where love is provoked only by lies and consists only of our need to have our sufferings calmed by the person who makes us suffer? To escape from the dejection we experience when we discover this lie, this moment of resistance, there is the sad expedient of trying, without her knowledge, using people who we feel are closer to her everyday life than we are, to act upon the woman who is lying to us and resisting us, to become devious ourselves, to make her hate us. But the pain of such a love is of the kind that makes the patient seek in changes of position an illusory relief. Such means of action are not hard to find, alas! And the horror of these loves born only of anxiety comes from the way we sit in our cages, turning over and over insignificant remarks; to say nothing of the fact that the creatures we love in this way rarely appeal completely to us physically, since it is not our conscious taste, but a chance moment of suffering, a moment endlessly multiplied by our weakness of character, which returns each evening to its experiments and descends to the use of sedatives, that made the original choice for us. No doubt my love for Albertine was not the most impoverished of those to which the want of will-power can reduce us, since it was not entirely platonic; she did give me physical pleasures, and she was also intelligent. But all that was secondary. What stayed in my mind was not something intelligent she might have said, but some remark that aroused my suspicion about her actions. I tried to remember whether she had said this or that, with what expression, at what moment, in response to what words of mine, to reconstitute the whole dialogue of her scene with me, at what point she had said she wanted to go to the Verdurins', what it was I had said that had given her face its angry expression. I could not have been more concerned to establish the truth, to reconstitute the atmosphere and exact colour of the most important event. No doubt these anxieties, even when they have reached an intolerable intensity, can sometimes be wholly pacified for a single evening. Our friend is to attend a party, and for days we have been worrying about what kind of party it will be. Suddenly we are asked too, our friend has eyes only for us, talks only to us, we take her home and, with all our worries set aside, enjoy a repose as complete, as restorative as the deep sleep which follows upon long marches. But usually we are only changing one anxiety for another. One of the phrases which was supposed to set our mind at rest sets off our suspicions on a new track. Certainly, such relief is worth a high price. But would it not have been simpler not to buy, of our own free will, new worries, and more dearly than before? In any case, we know very well that however deep these moments of respite may be, anxiety will soon have the upper hand again. Often it is renewed by the phrase that was supposed to bring us relief. The demands of our jealousy and the extent of our blind credulity are both greater than the woman we love could have imagined. When she swears, unasked, that such-and-such a man is just a good friend, we are horrified to learn – what we had never suspected – that he is a friend at all. While she displays her sincerity by telling us how they had tea together, this very afternoon, with every word that she says the invisible, the unsuspected take shape before our eyes. She admits that he asked her to be his mistress, and we are tortured by the idea of her listening to his advances. She said no, she says. But soon, going through her account again, we shall wonder if she really refused, for between the various things she said there is a lack of that logical, necessary connection which, rather than the facts one recounts, is the sign of truth. And then she used that dreadful tone of contempt: 'I said no, absolutely not' which one hears at every level of society when a woman is lying. And yet we must thank her for having refused, encourage her by our kindness to make more such agonizing confessions in the future. At the most we remark, 'But if he had already propositioned you, why did you agree to have tea with him? – So that he wouldn't be angry with me and say I had been unkind.' And we do not dare point out that to have refused would perhaps have been kinder to us.

Albertine always alarmed me when she said that I was quite right to protect her reputation by saying that I was not her lover, since, as she said, 'you aren't, are you, not really'. Perhaps I was not, in the complete sense, but was I then to think that she did with other men all the things that we did together, only to say that she had not been their mistress? Knowing at all costs what Albertine was thinking, whom she was seeing, whom she loved – how strange it was that I should sacrifice everything to this need, given that I had felt the same need, in relation to Gilberte, for knowledge of proper names, facts which were now so indifferent to me! I knew quite well that in themselves Albertine's actions held no greater interest. It is strange how a first love, by the lesions it leaves on our heart, may open the way for later loves, but yet fail to offer us, in the identical character of our symptoms and sufferings, the means of curing them. In any case, do we need to know any single fact? Do we not have an initial, general understanding of the habits of lying and even of discretion of these women who have something to hide? Can we possibly be mistaken? They pride themselves on their silence when we long to make them speak. And we can hear them saying to their accomplice, 'I never say anything. He won't learn anything from *me*, I never say a word.'

We give up our fortunes, our very lives for someone, even while knowing that at ten years' distance, earlier or later, we would hold back the fortune, hold on to the life. For then this being would be detached from us, on its own and therefore a blank. What attaches us to other human beings is the thousand tiny roots, the innumerable threads formed by memories of the previous evening, hopes for the following morning; it is this continuous web of habit from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Just as there are misers who pile up wealth from generous motives, we are prodigals who spend from avarice, and we sacrifice our lives not so much to a particular human being, but to all the sum of our hours, our days that he has managed to accrete around himself, everything in comparison with which the life we have still to live, the relatively future life, seems to us a life more distant, more detached, less close to us, less ours. What we would need to do would be to break these bonds which are so much more important to us than he is, but they have the effect of creating in us a transient sense of obligation to him; we feel obliged not to leave him for fear of incurring his displeasure, whereas later we would do so, since then, detached from us, he would no longer be us; in reality, we are only creating obligations (even if, paradoxically, they drive us to suicide) towards ourselves.

If I did not love Albertine (and I was not sure whether I did or not), her place in my household was not extraordinary: we choose to live only with the thing we do not love, which we have brought to live with us precisely in order to kill off intolerable love, whether the thing in question is a woman, a country or a woman embodying a country. We would even be afraid of beginning to love once more, were the thing once more absent from us. I had not reached this point with Albertine. Her lies, her confessions left me with the unfinished task of uncovering the truth. Her lies were so numerous, because she did not simply lie in the way all human beings do when they believe themselves to be loved, but because she was by nature, quite independently, mendacious and, what is more, so changeable that even if she had told me the truth every time I asked, for example, what she thought of a person, the answer would have been different each time. Her confessions were so few and stopped so short that they left between them, in so far as they concerned the past, great blanks which it was my duty to fill in with the story of her life, which I therefore had to learn. As for the present, in so far as I could interpret Françoise's deliberately cryptic utterances, it was not just on particular points but on a whole range of things that Albertine was lying to me, as I should 'find out one fine day'; Françoise pretended to know the answer already, but would not tell me, and I dared not ask. No doubt it was the same jealousy she had once felt towards Eulalie that made Françoise drop the most improbable hints, so vague that they seemed to add up to no more than the unlikely suggestion that the poor captive (who preferred women) was angling for a marriage to someone who did not quite seem to be me. If that had been true, how could Françoise, for all her telepathic powers, have known about it? Certainly Albertine's accounts of her doings could offer me no certainty on the subject, for they were as different every day as the colours of a top which is slowing to a halt. In any case, it did seem as if Françoise's stories were inspired by hatred. No day passed without her saying to me, and my submitting to hear, in my mother's absence, things like: 'Of course, *you* are kind and I shall never forget everything I owe you (this probably so that I should create new claims on her gratitude). But the air in this house has been poisoned, ever since someone who is kindness itself has brought trickery into it, since the picture of intelligence has started protecting the stupidest creature ever seen. To see a gentleman with brains, manners, taste, dignity in everything, a real prince and not just in his ways, letting a vulgar, vicious creature, the lowest of the low, lay down the law to him, hatch her plots, and humiliate a person who has served this family for forty years.'

Françoise particularly held against Albertine the fact of having to take orders from someone outside the family, and the extra housework tired our old servant to the point of impairing her health (not that she became any readier to accept help with her work: *she* wasn't one of those 'useless females'). All this would have explained her irritation, her malevolent rages. Certainly she would have liked to see Albertine– Esther banished. That was Françoise's wish. And by relieving her

feelings, it would already have given a respite to our old servant. But, in my opinion, that was not the whole story. Such hatred could have been born only in an exhausted body. And more even than regard for her feelings, Françoise needed sleep.

While Albertine was taking off her things, and to make my plans as quickly as possible, I picked up the telephone receiver and invoked the implacable Divinities, but succeeded only in arousing their ire, which expressed itself in the words 'The number is engaged.' Andrée was busy talking to someone else. While I waited for her to finish her call, I let myself wonder why, when so many of our painters are trying to revive the traditions of female portraiture of the eighteenth century, with its ingenious settings forming a pretext for expressions of anticipation, pique, interest or reverie, none of our modern Bouchers or Fragonards has painted, instead of *The Letter, The Harpsichord*, etc., the scene which could be called *On the Telephone*, with, playing on the lips of the lady listener, a smile all the more genuine because she knows it is unseen. Finally Andrée heard me say, 'Are you calling for Albertine tomorrow?' and as I pronounced Albertine's name, I thought of how I had envied Swann when he had said, on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes's party, 'You must come and see Odette,' and I had thought what strength there was in a name which in the eyes of the whole world and in Odette's own eyes had only in the mouth of Swann this sense of absolute possession. Such control – summed up in a single word – over the whole of a human existence must be so delightful, I had thought every time I was in love. But in reality, once one can speak that word, either one's power has become indifferent, or else habit has not blunted one's love, but has changed all its pleasures into pains. Lying is a trivial thing, we live in the midst of it and simply smile at it, we practise it without imagining we are hurting anyone, but jealousy suffers from it and sees in it more than is really behind it (often our friend refuses to spend the evening with us and goes to the theatre simply so that we shall not see her looking off-colour), just as it often is blind to what is hidden by truth. But jealousy cannot be satisfied, for women who swear that they are not lying would not admit to their true character even under the knife. I knew that only I could say 'Albertine' to Andrée in that particular way. And yet I knew that I was nothing to Albertine, to Andrée, to myself. And I understood the impossible obstacle facing love. We imagine that love has for its object a being which can lie down before us, enclosed in a body. Alas! It is the extension of that body to every point in space and time which that being has occupied or will occupy. If we do not grasp its point of contact with a given place, a given time, then we do not possess it. But we cannot touch all these points. If at least they were indicated to us, perhaps we could stretch out to reach them. But we can only feel for them blindly. Hence our mistrust, our jealousy, our persecutions. We waste irreplaceable time on an absurd trail and pass by the truth without knowing it.

But already one of the irascible Divinities, she of the dizzyingly fleet-fingered handmaidens, was becoming angry, not at my speaking but at my failing to speak. 'Speak up, sir, the line is clear! You've been connected for such a long time, I'm going to cut you off.' But she did not, and instead produced Andrée for me, wrapped, thanks to the poetic magic shared by all young ladies of the telephone, in the unique atmosphere of the home, the neighbourhood, the very life of Albertine's friend. 'Is that you?' said Andrée, her voice conveyed to me with instant speed by the goddess who has the power to make sounds move faster than light. 'Listen, I answered, go wherever you like, anywhere, except Mme Verdurin's. You simply must keep Albertine away from there tomorrow. – But that's exactly where she's planning to go tomorrow. – Oh.' But at that point I had to stop speaking and make threatening gestures, for while Françoise still refused – as if it were something as unpleasant as vaccination or as dangerous as flying – to learn to use the telephone, which would have allowed her to make our calls for us, at least those that she could safely know about, on the other hand she invariably came into my room as soon as I was making any call that I was determined to keep secret from her. When she finally left the room, having painstakingly removed various objects which had been there since the day before and could perfectly well have waited for another hour or two, and put back on the fire a log whose heat was made quite superfluous by the burning sensation caused in me by her intrusion and the fear of being 'cut off' by the young lady, 'Sorry, I said to Andrée, I was interrupted. You're absolutely sure that she means to go to the Verdurins' tomorrow? – Absolutely, but I can tell her you'd rather she didn't. – No, don't do that, what I thought is that I might come with you. – Oh,' said Andrée, sounding rather put out, almost as if she were alarmed by my daring, which only increased as a result. 'So I'll ring off now; I'm sorry to have troubled you for nothing. – Not at all, said Andrée, adding (for now that the telephone was in common use, a decorative language of special phrases had grown up around it, as formerly around 'tea-parties'), it's a pleasure to hear your voice.'

I could have said the same, and more truthfully than Andrée, for I had just been particularly struck by her voice, never having noticed before how different it was from others I had heard. And so I began to recall other voices, women's voices especially, some slowed down by the precision of a question and attention to the reply, others out of breath and even brought to a brief halt by the lyric enthusiasm of the story they were telling; I remembered one by one all the voices of the young girls I had known at Balbec, then Gilberte's, then my grandmother's, then Mme de Guermantes's, I found them all different, each moulded to a language peculiar to its owner, each played on a different instrument, and I thought to myself what a poor concert must be given in Heaven by the three or four angel-musicians of the old painters, when I saw rising up towards God the dozens, hundreds, thousands, the many-sounding, harmonious salutation of all the Voices. I did not hang up the telephone without a few, propitiatory words of thanks to Her who reigns over the speed of sounds, for having deigned to endow my humble words with a power which made them a hundred times faster than thunder. But my prayer of thanksgiving met with no other reply than being 'cut off'.

When Albertine came back into my room, she was wearing a black satin dress which made her skin paler, gave her the look of the pallid Parisienne, intense, her colour destroyed by the want of fresh air, the atmosphere of crowds and perhaps habits of vice, whose eyes seemed more anxious because not brightened by any pinkness in the cheeks. 'Guess who I've just been talking to on the telephone, I said, Andrée. – Andrée?' she cried, with a note of astonishment and emotion not demanded by such a simple piece of news. 'I hope she remembered to tell you that we met Mme Verdurin the other day. – Mme Verdurin? I don't remember,' I answered, as if thinking of something else, both in order to seem indifferent to this meeting and so as not to betray Andrée, who had told me where Albertine was going the following afternoon. But who knows if she, Andrée, were not betraying me, if she would not tell Albertine that I had begged her at all costs to stop her going to the Verdurins', if she had not already given away to her that I had often made such requests in the past. She swore to me that she had never repeated them, but the force of this promise was counterbalanced in my mind by my impression that for some time now Albertine's face no longer showed the confidence in me that she had had for so long.

The pain of love sometimes stops for a moment, but only to return in a different form. We weep to see the one we love no longer drawn to us by rushes of spontaneous feeling, no longer taking the initiative in loving as she did in the early days; we suffer even more to think that, having lost them for us, she perhaps now has these feelings for others; then we are distracted from that pain by a new, more desperate one, the suspicion that she lied to us about where she was the previous evening, when no doubt she was deceiving us; that suspicion also fades, our friend's sweetness to us pacifies us; but then a forgotten remark comes back into our mind, someone once told us that she was passionate in her love-making, whereas we have only ever seen her calm; we try to imagine what her frenzy with others could have been like, we realize how little we mean to her, we find a hint of boredom, of nostalgia, of sadness in her manner when we are speaking to her, we notice with foreboding the simple dresses she wears when with us, keeping for others the splendid ones with which, at the beginning, she tried to dazzle us. If for once she is affectionate, what a moment of joy! But seeing that little tongue poking out, like a signal to attract someone's eyes, we think of all the girls at whom it was directed, so often that even when Albertine was with me, and not thinking of them, it had become, from long habit, an automatic sign. Then the feeling returns that we are boring her. But suddenly that pain shrinks to something insignificant at the thought of the dastardly presence in her life, the unknowable places she has been, perhaps still is during the hours when we are not with her, assuming she is not intending to go and live there permanently: those places where she is far from us, does not belong to us, is happier than when with us. Such is the revolving fire of jealousy.

Jealousy is also a demon that cannot be exorcized and always reappears, clad in a new form. Even if we managed to exterminate them all, to hold on to the one we loved for ever, the Evil One would take on a new, still more pathetic form: despair at having been able to win her fidelity only by force, despair at not being loved.

Between Albertine and myself there was often the barrier of a silence made up no doubt of grievances which she kept to herself, believing them beyond repair. However sweet Albertine could be on some evenings, there were no more of those spontaneous reachings-out that I had seen in her at Balbec, when she would say, 'You really *are* nice, you know!' and the depths of her heart seemed to move towards me, uninhibited by any of her present grievances, which remained unspoken, no doubt because she judged them irreparable, unforgettable though unadmitted, but which still placed between her and myself the telling caution of her words or the gap of an uncrossable silence.

'And why did you telephone Andrée, or is it a secret? – To ask if she wouldn't mind my joining you tomorrow and paying the Verdurins the visit I've been promising them since La Raspelière. – As you please, but I should warn you that there's a terrible fog this evening and I'm sure it will be the same tomorrow. I'm telling you because I don't want you to make yourself ill. If it was up to me, you know I'd much rather you came with us. Anyway, she added with a preoccupied look, I'm not at all sure I shall go to the Verdurins. I really should, they've been so kind to me. Apart from you, they're the people who've done the most for me, but there are some things about their house I don't like. I must go to the *Bon Marché* or the *Trois Quartiers* and buy a white trimming for this dress, it's too black.'

The idea of Albertine's going alone to a department store, rubbing shoulders with so many people, in a place with so many exits that one can say afterwards that on leaving one could not find one's carriage which was waiting down the street, was quite unacceptable to me, but more than anything I felt sad. And still I had not admitted to myself that I should have stopped seeing Albertine long before, for she had entered, in relation to me, that wretched period when a being, dispersed in space and time, is no longer a woman in our eyes, but a series of events on which we cannot shed light, a series of insoluble problems, a sea which, like Xerxes, we absurdly try to beat, to punish it for all that it has swallowed up. Once this period has begun, one is inevitably defeated. Happy are those who see it in time not to be drawn into a useless, exhausting battle, surrounded on all sides by the limits of our imagination, where jealousy struggles so humiliatingly that the same man who once, if the eyes of his constant companion fell for a moment on another man, imagined a conspiracy, suffered who knows what torments, may later allow her to go out alone, sometimes with the man he knows is her lover, choosing this torture which is at least familiar in preference to the terrible unknown. It is a question of finding a rhythm which one afterwards follows from habit. Some sufferers from nervous ailments will not miss a dinner-party, after which they follow rest-cures which never seem long enough; women lately loose now live a life of penance. Jealous men who sacrificed their sleep, lived without rest in order to spy on the woman they loved, feeling now that her desires, the world with all its secrets, time itself are too strong for them, first let her go out without them, then travel, and finally separate from her. Jealousy finally peters out for want of fuel and lasted as long as it did only because it endlessly sought new supplies. I was far from having reached this state.

Certainly I controlled much more of Albertine's time than I had at Balbec. I could now go out with her as often as I wanted to. As aircraft hangars had quickly grown up around Paris – they are to aeroplanes what harbours are to boats – and ever since the day at La Raspelière when my almost mythical meeting with an aviator, whose flight overhead had made my horse rear, had become for me a kind of image of freedom, I liked – and Albertine, with her passion for all sports, agreed – to conclude our days out with a visit to one of these aerodromes. We went there, she and I, drawn by the incessant bustle of arrivals and departures which enlivens walks on piers and even by the shore for those who like the sea, and attracts to airfields those who like the sky. At every moment, among the resting and, as it were, anchored craft, we would see one being dragged along by several mechanics, as a boat is dragged along the sand for a tourist who wants to go for a sail. The engine was started, the plane was running, it gathered speed, finally, suddenly, at right angles, it rose,[10] slowly, in rigid ecstasy, as if motionless, its horizontal speed transformed into majestic, vertical climbing. Albertine could not contain her joy and would ask for explanations from the mechanics who, now that the craft was safely launched, were coming back. The passenger meanwhile was quickly covering the miles, the great ship on which our eyes were still fixed was no more than an indistinct point in the sky, though it would slowly recover its materiality, its size, its volume when it was time to return to the harbour. And we gazed enviously, Albertine and I, on the passenger who had been out at sea, in those solitary horizons, enjoying the limpid calm of the evening. Then from the aerodrome, or from some church or museum that we had been visiting, we would come home in time for dinner. And yet I was not pacified, as I had been at Balbec by our less frequent outings, which made me so proud if they lasted a whole afternoon, and on which my mind dwelt afterwards, seeing them standing out like imposing floral borders from the rest of Albertine's life, as if against an empty sky where one's eyes can rest thoughtlessly, in a dream. Albertine's time did not belong to me then in the measure it did today. And yet it seemed much more mine, because I counted only – as a great favour to my love – the hours that she spent with me; and now – my anxious jealousy seeking in them opportunities for betrayal – only the hours we spent apart. Now, tomorrow, she was sure to want some of these. I would have to choose to stop suffering, or to stop loving. For, just as it is first created by desire, love is later kept alive only by painful anxiety. I could feel that part of Albertine's life escaped me. Love, in painful anxiety as in happy desire, is the need for complete possession. It is born, it lives only for so long as there is something left to conquer. We love only that which we do not wholly possess. Albertine was lying when she said that she would probably not go to the Verdurins', just as I was lying when I said I did want to go there. She was simply trying to stop me going out with her, and I, by the sudden mention of this plan which I had no intention of carrying out, to touch her at the point where I felt she was most vulnerable, to hunt down the desire she was hiding and make her admit that my presence at her side tomorrow would prevent her from satisfying it. She had already done that, in fact, when she suddenly lost interest in going to the Verdurins'.

'If you don't want to come to the Verdurins',' I said, 'there's a marvellous charity performance at the Trocadéro.' She listened to this piece of advice with an expression of deep gloom. I was starting to be unkind to her again, as I had been at Balbec, in the days of my first jealousy. Her face showed her disappointment and I used against my friend the same arguments that had so often been used against me by my parents when I was small and which had seemed so stupid and cruel to my misunderstood childhood. 'No, I don't care how long a face you pull,' I would say to Albertine, 'I'm not sorry for you, I'd be sorry for you if you were sick, if something bad had happened to you, if you'd lost one of your relations, though that might not upset you at all, given the way you throw away your feelings on things that don't matter. Anyway, I don't think much of the feelings of people who say how much they love someone and then can't do the least thing to help them, and who are so busy thinking of the person that they can't remember to post a letter for them, even when their whole future depends on it.'

All of these words – for a large part of what we say is merely recitation – I had already heard from my mother, who (concerned as she was that I should not confuse real sensibility, which the Germans, whose language she greatly admired despite my father's loathing for that nation, called *Empfindung*, and mere tearfulness, *Empfindelei*) once went so far, when I was crying, as to say to me that Nero might have been highly strung, but that did not make him any more admirable. In truth, as in those plants which develop double forms as they grow, over against the nervous child which I had once alone been, there now stood a man who was the opposite: full of good sense, stern with the over-sensitivity of others, a man who was to others what my parents had been to me. No doubt, since everyone must carry on in himself the life of his progenitors, the steady, humorous man who had not existed in me at the beginning had come to join the sensitive one, and it was natural that I should become in turn what my parents had been. Furthermore, as this new me took shape, he found his words ready and waiting for him in the memory of the ironic, reproving language that had been used to me, and which I was now to use to others, and which came to my lips quite naturally, whether I was reviving it by imitation and association of memories, or whether the delicate and mysterious incrustations of genetic power had also drawn in me, without my knowing, patterns like those on the leaves of a plant: the same intonations, the same gestures, the same postures as had belonged to those from whom I sprang. For sometimes, as I played the wise man to Albertine, I seemed to hear my grandmother speaking. Had my mother not had the experience (such were the obscure, unconscious influences moulding even the way I flexed my fingers, to make them conform to the same patterns as my parents') of thinking that it was my father who was coming in, so similar was my way of knocking to his? After all, the coupling of opposites is the law of life, the principle of fertilization and, as we shall see, the cause of much misery. Normally, we detest what is like us, and our own failings, seen in others, exasperate us. How much more a person who has passed the age when weaknesses are voiced naïvely, and who has learned to keep an icy countenance at the most burning moments, will execrate these same failings, if it is another person, younger, more naïve or more foolish, who gives them expression. There are some sensitive people for whom the sight, in the eyes

of another, of the tears that they themselves are holding back, is insufferable. It is over-strong resemblance that divides families despite the affection between their members, and sometimes all the more the fonder they are of each other. Perhaps in me, and in many people, the second man I had become was only another face of the first, idealistic and sensitive in his dealings with himself, a sage Mentor to others. Maybe the same was true of my parents according as one considered them in relation to me or in themselves. It was only too easy to see that my grandmother and my mother forced themselves to be strict with me, and perhaps even suffered as they did so, but perhaps even my father's coldness was an outward manifestation of his sensibility? For it was perhaps the human truth of this double aspect, one side facing the inner life, the other social relationships, that people meant to express in those words which seemed to me in those days as false in their content as they were banal in their expression: 'Behind his chilly exterior, he's extraordinarily sensitive; he's ashamed to show his feelings, that's what it is.' Had it not perhaps been a cover for constant, secret storms within, that calm marked where necessary by sententious observations, by ironic responses to clumsy manifestations of sensibility, which was so characteristic of him, but which I myself now affected in all my dealings with others, and in particular never set aside when discussing certain topics with Albertine?

I believe that that day I was really about to decide to break with her and leave for Venice. What chained me again to the relationship had to do with Normandy, not that Albertine showed any intention of going to that part of the country where I had first been jealous of her (for her plans fortunately never took her near the real danger points in my memory), but because, when I happened to say to her 'That would be like talking about your aunt's friend who lived in Infreville,' she angrily replied, with the joy of a person who wants to have all the arguments on her side, to show me that I was wrong and she always in the right: 'But my aunt doesn't know anyone at Infreville, I've never even been there.' She had forgotten the lie she had told me one evening about the easily offended lady at whose house she absolutely had to go and have tea, even if seeing the lady were to cost her my friendship, even if she died in the attempt. I didn't remind her of her lie. But it dealt me a terrible blow. And again I put off the separation to another day. To be loved, one need not be sincere, nor even good at lying. By love, I mean here a kind of mutual torture. I saw nothing wrong, this evening, in speaking to her as my grandmother, that excellent woman, had spoken to me, nor in using, to tell her I would be going to the Verdurins' with her, the same brusque manner as my father, who never told us of a decision except in the way that would cause us the maximum, and in this case wholly disproportionate, anxiety. In this way it was easy for him to find us absurd for showing such dismay at something so unimportant, when in fact the reason was the upset he had caused us. And if – like my grandmother's inflexible wisdom – these arbitrary impulses of my father's had come to complete in me the sensitive nature to which they had so long been alien, and to which, throughout my childhood, they had caused so much suffering, the same sensitive nature kept them very precisely informed of the most effective points at which to aim: there is no better police informer than a retired thief, or spy than a subject of the nation we wish to conquer. In certain families given to lying, a brother who visits his brother for no obvious reason and asks him, apropos of nothing, in the doorway, as he is leaving, a question the answer to which he hardly seems to take in, conveys to his brother by his very off-handedness that this question was the purpose of his visit, for the brother recognizes the faraway look, the words spoken as if between brackets, at the last moment, from having often used them himself. Now there are also pathological families, related sensibilities, sibling temperaments, initiated into that silent language which allows families to understand each other without speaking. After all, who can 'string us up' more than the highly strung? And then, there was perhaps a more general, deeper cause for my behaviour on these occasions. It is that, during those brief but inevitable moments when one hates someone one loves – moments that can last a lifetime with people one does not – one does not wish to appear good, and be pitied, but evil – as evil as possible and as happy as possible, so that one's happiness should be really detestable and eat into the soul of the temporary or permanent enemy. I have told dreadful, invented stories about myself to so many people, simply so that my 'conquests' should seem immoral to them, and make them all the more furious. One ought, of course, to do the opposite: show, without ostentation, that one has good feelings, rather than hiding them so carefully. And it would be easy if one knew how never to hate, always to love. Then, one would be so happy only ever to say the things that make other people happy, make them warm to one, love one!

Certainly, I felt some remorse about being so irritating to Albertine, and I said to myself, 'If I didn't love her, she'd be more grateful to me, for then I wouldn't be nasty to her; no, that's not right, it would balance out, for I wouldn't be so nice to her either.' And I could have justified myself by telling her that I loved her. But admitting my love in this way, besides the fact that it would not have told Albertine anything she did not already know, would perhaps have made her cool towards me even more than the very unkindnesses and the tricks for which love was the only excuse. Unkindness and deviousness in love are so natural! If the interest we take in other people does not prevent us from being gentle with them and helpful to them in their wishes, then that interest is feigned. Other people are a matter of indifference to us, and indifference does not prompt us to cruelty.

The evening was passing away; there was not much time to spare before Albertine went to bed, if we wanted to make it up and start kissing again. Neither of us had yet made the first move. Sensing that she was angry in any case, I took the opportunity of speaking to her about Esther Levy. 'Bloch told me', I lied, 'that you used to be a good friend of his cousin Esther's.' 'I wouldn't know her if I saw her,' said Albertine with a vague look. 'I've seen her picture,' I added angrily. I did not look at Albertine as I said this, so that I did not see her expression, which would have been her only reply, since she did not speak.

What I experienced with Albertine on these evenings was not the calming effect of my mother's kiss at Combray, but on the contrary, the anguish of the evenings when my mother said good-night to me only hurriedly, or worse, did not come up to my room at all, whether she was cross with me or kept downstairs by guests. That anguish, not its transposition into love, but the anguish itself, which had once been hived off to love, assigned to that single passion when the division, the specialization of the passions had taken place, now seemed to spread again over them all, to have returned to its undifferentiated state, as if all my feelings, which trembled at being unable to keep Albertine next to my bed as a mistress, a sister, a daughter all at once, and as a mother whose good-night kiss I was beginning, in childish fashion, to need once more, had begun to coalesce again, to become one in the premature evening of my life, which promised to be no longer than a winter's day. But though I suffered the anguish of my childhood, the changed being who now inspired it, my different feelings about her, the very changes in my own character made it impossible for me to seek peace from Albertine as I had from my mother. I no longer knew how to say 'I am sad.' I restricted myself, with death in my heart, to talking about trivial things which did not help me at all in moving towards a happy solution. I marked time, repeating painful banalities. And with the intellectual egotism that leads us, the moment some insignificant truth seems to have a bearing on our love, to think the world of the person who voiced it, perhaps by sheer chance, like the fortune-teller who makes some commonplace prediction which then comes true, I came near to thinking Françoise more intelligent than Bergotte or Elstir because she had said to me, at Balbec, 'That girl will bring you nothing but grief.'

Every moment brought me closer to Albertine's 'Good-night', which she would eventually say to me. But on these evenings her absent-minded kiss, which did not really touch me, left me so anxious that, with my heart pounding, I would watch her walk to the door, thinking, 'If I want an excuse to call her back, to keep her here, to make up with her, I must hurry, a few more steps and she'll be out of the room, just two more, one, she's turning the handle, she's opening the door, too late, she's closed it.' But perhaps it was not too late. Just as at Combray in the old days, when my mother had left me without her calming kiss, I longed to run after Albertine, I felt that there could be no more peace for me until I had seen her again, that this seeing her again would be something immense that it had never been hitherto, but also, that if I did not manage to overcome this sadness by myself I would perhaps fall into the shameful habit of begging Albertine for comfort; so I would jump out of bed when she was already in her room and walk up and down the corridor, hoping that she would come out of her room and call to me; I would stand stock-still outside her door so as to be sure of hearing even the faintest call, then go back into my own room for a moment to see if my friend had not, by great good luck, left behind a handkerchief, a bag, something that I could seem to think she might need and which would give me a pretext to go into her room. But no. I took up my station outside her door again. But there was now no light under the door. Albertine had put out her light, she was in bed, I stood there motionless, hoping in vain for I am not sure what; and much later, chilled to the bone, I would go back, get under my blankets and cry all the rest of the night.

So sometimes, on those evenings, I used a trick to get Albertine's kiss for myself. Knowing how quickly, once she had lain down, she fell asleep (she knew it too, for instinctively, as soon as she stretched out, she took off the mules I had given her and her ring, which she put down beside her as she did in her own room before going to bed), knowing how soundly she slept and how affectionate she was on waking, I would make the excuse of going to fetch something and persuade her to lie down on my bed. When I came back she would be asleep, and I saw before me the other woman she became when seen full face. But her personality soon changed again, for I would lie down beside her and look at her in profile once more. I could put my hand in hers, touch her shoulder, her cheek, Albertine went on sleeping. I could take her head, tip it back, place it against my lips, put my arms round her neck, she went on sleeping like a watch that never stops, like an animal that goes on living whatever position you put it in, like a climbing plant, a convolvulus that goes on throwing out branches whatever kind of support you give it. Only her breathing was affected by each of my touches, as if she had been an instrument I was playing and from which I drew new chords by producing from one and then another of its strings a variety of notes. My jealousy was being calmed, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature of respiration and nothing more, as was shown by her regular breathing, the expression of this purely physiological function, which in its fluidity lacks the consistency of either speech or silence; lacking all knowledge of evil, this sound, which seemed to be drawn from a hollow reed rather than a human being, was truly heavenly for me who at those moments felt Albertine removed from everything, not just materially but morally; it was the pure song of the Angels. And still in this breathing, I would suddenly say to myself, human names, the residue of memory, must be suspended.

Sometimes, indeed, the music of breathing was supplemented by the human voice. Albertine spoke some words. If only I could have understood them! The name of a person we had been talking about, someone I was jealous of, might rise to her lips, but without making me unhappy, since it seemed that the memory that accompanied the name was simply that of the conversations she had had with me about its owner. All the same, one evening, just as she was waking, with her eyes still shut, she spoke lovingly to me, calling me 'Andrée'. I hid my alarm. 'You're dreaming, I'm not Andrée,' I said laughingly. She smiled too: 'Don't be silly, I wanted to ask you what Andrée had been talking to you about this afternoon. – I'd be more inclined to think you had once lain like that next to her. – Of course not, never.' Only, just before making me that answer, she had hidden her face in her hands for a moment. Her silences, it seemed, were only veils, her surface affection kept out of sight a thousand memories which would have torn me apart – her life, then, was full of those events the mocking account of which, recounted with laughter, fills up our everyday chatter about others, those we do not care about; but when a creature is lodged in our heart every such detail seems to cast such precious light on its life that to know this hidden world we would gladly sacrifice our own. Her slumber seemed to me then like a wonderful, magic world where there can rise up, through the barely translucent element, the revelation of a secret which we shall not understand. But normally, when Albertine was sleeping, she seemed to have recovered her innocence. In the position where I had placed her, but which in sleep she quickly made her own, she seemed to be trusting herself to me. Her face had lost any expression of deviousness or vulgarity, and when she raised her arm towards me or laid her hand upon me, each of us seemed entirely given up to the other, indissolubly joined. Besides, her sleep did not take her away from me; the notion of our affection survived somewhere in her; it was all the rest that was wiped out; I could kiss her and say I was going out for a little walk, she would half-open her eyes and say in astonishment – it was already night-time – 'But where are you going, darling?' calling me by my name, and then go straight back to sleep. Her slumber was a kind of blotting-out of the rest of life, a level silence from which familiar words of affection would sometimes take flight. By piecing these words together one could have composed the perfect conversation, the secret intimacy of pure, unalloyed love. The calm of her sleep delighted me as a child's sound sleep delights its mother, who elevates it into a moral virtue. And hers was a child's sleep. Her awakening too: it was so natural, so tender, even before she knew where she was, that I sometimes asked myself trembling whether she had lost the habit, before she came to me, of sleeping alone, and was used to waking to find someone else beside her. But her childish grace overpowered me. Like a mother again, I marvelled at the way she always woke in such a good temper. After a few moments she came to herself, and said such charming, disconnected things, like a bird chirping. By a kind of interchange, her neck, which I normally hardly noticed, but which now seemed almost too beautiful, took the place of her eyes, once so important but now veiled in sleep – her eyes, with which I usually communicated but which I could not address now that her lids had closed over them. Just as closed eyes lend an innocent, solemn beauty to the face by eliminating everything that is only too clearly expressed when they are open, the not wholly meaningless but fragmentary words that Albertine spoke as she awoke had the pure beauty that is not constantly sullied, as conversation is, by verbal habits, repetition, traces of incorrect speech. Furthermore, when I decided to wake Albertine, I knew I could safely do so, for her awakening would bear no resemblance to the evening we had just spent together, but would emerge from her sleep as morning does from night. She would smile as she opened her eyes, hold up her mouth to me, and before she had said anything I would have tasted its freshness, calming as that of a garden still silent before the break of day.

The morning after the evening when Albertine had told me that she was, then was not going to the Verdurins', I woke early, and before I was properly awake my joy told me that, interpolated into the midst of winter, this was a day of spring. Outside, a series of popular melodies, elegantly arranged for various instruments, from the china-mender's horn to the chair-caner's trumpet, and including the flute of the goat's-milk seller who, on this fine day, seemed like a Sicilian shepherd, were lightly orchestrating the morning air into a Festival Overture. Hearing, that delightful sense, brings indoors all the company of the street, tracing out its lines, sketching all the forms which pass through it and showing us their colours. The metal grilles of the butcher's or the dairy, which had come down last night, closing off every possibility of feminine attraction, were now going up like the light pulleys of a ship making ready to sail away across the transparent sea on a dream of pretty shop-girls. This sound of grilles going up might have been my only pleasure, had I lived in a different neighbourhood. In this one there were a hundred others for my delight, and I would not have wanted to miss one of them by sleeping too late. The enchantment of old aristocratic quarters is that they are working-class as well. Just as cathedrals had a variety of trades being carried on not far from their doors (and sometimes preserved their names, as at Rouen with its 'Booksellers' Door', from the tradesmen who displayed their goods in the open air directly opposite it), various street-traders would pass in front of the noble Guermantes town house and recall for a moment the France of former times and the power of its Church. For the call that they addressed to the neighbouring small houses did not, except in a very few cases, at all resemble a song. It was as different from it as the declamation – coloured by barely perceptible variations – of *Boris Godunov* or *Pelléas*;[11] on the other hand, it recalled a priest intoning offices of which these street scenes are the good-natured, raffish counterpart, but still half liturgical in their character. I had never enjoyed them so much as I did now that Albertine was living with me. They seemed to me the joyous signal of her awakening and, by involving me in the life outside, made me more conscious of the calming power of a dear presence, now as constant as I could wish. Some of the foodstuffs being sold in the street, which I myself hated, were among Albertine's favourites, so that Françoise sent her kitchen-boy out to buy them, even if he perhaps felt it beneath his dignity to have to mingle in this way with the common herd. The cries sounded clearly in this quiet neighbourhood, where noise was no longer a grievance for Françoise, and had become a source of pleasure to me. Each had its different modulation: they were recitatives declaimed by these common people, as they would be in the music of *Boris*, with all its folk influences, where an initial intonation is barely varied by the inflection of one note leaning on another: music of the crowd which is more language than music. 'Winkles, winkles, two sous your winkles' had us rushing to buy the paper cones in which they sold those ghastly little molluscs which, had it not been for Albertine, I should have refused in disgust, just like the snails which I could hear being sold at the same time. Here again the seller's voice recalled the barely musical declamation of Mussorgsky, but that was not all. For after having delivered 'Snails, snails, lovely fresh snails' almost *parlando*, it was with the vague sadness of Maeterlinck, transposed into music by Debussy, that the snail man, in one of those sorrowful final phrases which the author of *Pelléas* seems to have learned from Rameau[12] ('If I am to be conquered, must you be my conqueror?'), added, with melancholy plangency, 'Six sous a do-zen …'

I have never been able to understand why these perfectly clear words were sighed out in such an inappropriate manner: mysteriously, like the secret of why everyone is so sad in the old palace where Mélisande has not been able to bring joy, and profoundly, like a saying of old Arkel, who tries to utter in very simple words the whole of wisdom and destiny. The very notes on which the voice of Golaud or of the old king of Allemonde[13] rises, ever more sweetly, to say 'No one

knows what they will find here. It may seem strange. Perhaps everything that happens has a meaning,' or 'You must not be frightened … He was a poor, mysterious little thing, like all of us,' were the ones the snail-seller used to repeat, in an unending cantilena, 'Six sous the do-zen …' But his metaphysical lament did not have time to fade away to infinity, it was interrupted by a lively trumpet. This time it was not food, the words of the libretto were, 'We clip dogs, we clip cats, we cut tails and ears.'

Certainly imagination, the wit of each seller, often introduced variations into the words of these melodies I heard from my bed. Still a ritual pause, placing a moment of silence in the middle of a word, constantly revived the memory of old churches. In the little donkey-cart which he stopped in front of each house so as to go into the courtyards, the old-clothes man, whip in hand, would intone, 'Old clothes! Have you any old clo-othes?' with the same gap in the last syllable as if he had been chanting '*Per omnia saecula saeculo-rum*' or '*Requiescat in pa-ce*',[14] even though he could hardly have believed in the eternity of his wares, and was not offering them as shrouds for perpetual rest. And in the same way, as the tunes began to interweave in the morning air, a coster-woman, pushing her cart, used a Gregorian mode for her litany:

> Tender, sweet, fresh to eat,
> Here they are, ar-ti-chokes!

even though she probably knew nothing of the antiphonal and the seven tones, four of them symbolizing the quadrivium and three the trivium.

Drawing from a penny whistle or bagpipes melodies from his southern homeland, whose light the fine morning recalled, a man in a smock with a bludgeon in his hand and wearing a beret, stopped in front of the houses. This was the goat's-milk man with his two dogs and his herd of she-goats in front of him. As he had come a long way he arrived late in our neighbourhood; and the women came running with bowls for the milk which was to build up their children. But the Pyrenean melodies of this beneficent shepherd were already being interrupted by the knife-grinder's bell as he cried 'Knives, scissors, razors.' The saw-doctor, who had no instrument, could not compete with him and was reduced to calling out, 'Sharpen your saws? Sharpen your saws?' while the tinker more cheerily sang a list of all the things he could mend, soup-pots, saucepans and so forth, with the recurring refrain,

> Tinker, tinker, tin, tin, tin
> Any old hole, I'll fill it in

and little Italians carrying large metal boxes painted red and marked with winning and losing numbers, swung their rattles and called out, 'Come on, girls, give it a whirl.'

Françoise brought me the *Figaro*. A glance was enough to show me that my article had still not appeared. She said that Albertine was asking to come in and see me and had asked her to tell me in any case that she had given up her idea of going to the Verdurins' and would be going instead, as I had suggested, to the 'special' matinée at the Trocadéro (this was what would now be called a 'gala' matinée, but on a much less grand scale), after a short ride with Andrée. Now that I knew she had gone back on her perhaps dangerous wish to visit Mme Verdurin, it was with a smile that I said, 'Let her come in!' and I said to myself that she could go wherever she pleased for all I cared. I knew that by the end of the afternoon, when twilight came, I would no doubt be a different man, a sadder one, attaching to Albertine's smallest comings and goings an importance which they did not have now, on this beautiful morning. For my insouciance was accompanied by a clear understanding of its cause, which however did not diminish it. 'Françoise said you were awake and I wouldn't be disturbing you,' Albertine said as she came in. And since, after the danger of giving me a chill by opening her window at the wrong time, Albertine most feared coming into my room when I was still dozing, 'I hope it's all right,' she added. 'I was afraid you'd say

> Quel mortel insolent vient chercher le trépas?

And she laughed, with the laugh that always moved me so strongly. I answered in the same joking tone

> Est-ce pour vous qu'est fait cet ordre si sévère?

And so that she should never infringe it, I added, 'Though I would be furious if you woke me up.' – 'I know, I know, don't worry,' said Albertine. And to soften my harshness I went on playing the scene from *Esther* with her, while the street cries continued as a wholly confused background to our conversation, saying,

> Je ne trouve qu'en vous je ne sais quelle grâce
> Qui me charme toujours et jamais ne me lasse[15]

(while thinking to myself, 'She does, though, often'). And remembering what she had said the day before, while I thanked her fulsomely for having given up the Verdurins, so that she would be equally ready to obey me on another occasion, I added: 'Albertine, I love you but you don't trust me: you trust other people who don't love you' (as if it were not natural to mistrust those who love us, the only people who have an interest in lying to us, whether to find things out or to stop us doing what we want), and I added these lying words: 'You don't really believe I love you, it's strange. Of course, I don't *worship* you.' She went on to lie to me, saying that I was the only one she trusted, and then told the truth, assuring me that she knew I loved her. But this statement did not seem to imply that she did not think me a liar or suspect me of spying on her. And she seemed to forgive me, as if she had seen in my jealousy the intolerable consequences of a great love, or as if she had come to see herself as less good.

'Now darling, please, no gymnastics this time, not like the other day. Just think, Albertine, if you were to have an accident!' Naturally I did not wish her any harm. But how wonderful if, once on horseback, she had ridden off into the blue yonder, liked it there, and never come home! How much simpler it would have been if she could have gone and been happy somewhere else, I didn't even want to know where! 'Oh, I know you couldn't live without me, you'd kill yourself within two days.'

This was how we lied to each other. But a deeper truth than the one we would be speaking if we were sincere can sometimes be expressed and foretold by another means than that of sincerity. 'Don't you mind all those noises from outside? she asked. I love them. But you sleep so lightly …' On the contrary, I often slept very soundly (as I have said before, but as the event I am soon to speak of forces me to repeat), and especially when I did not get to sleep until early morning. Since that kind of sleep has usually been four times more restorative, it seems to the sleeper to have been four times as long, when in fact it was four times shorter. Splendid, sixteenfold error which lends such beauty to our awakening and introduces a real transformation into life, like one of those great changes of rhythm which in music mean that a quaver in an *andante* lasts as long as a minim in a *prestissimo*, and which never occur in the waking state. There life is almost always the same – hence the disappointments of travel. Dreams do seem sometimes to be made from the coarsest material of life, but this material is processed, kneaded, with an elasticity deriving from the fact that there are none of the time limits of the waking state to prevent its being spun so fine, raised to such heights, as to be unrecognizable. On the mornings when I had had this good fortune, when sleep had wiped from my brain the signs of my daily preoccupations which are written there as if on a blackboard, I had to set my memory going again; by the exercise of will one can relearn what the amnesia of sleep or of a stroke has blanked out: it returns very slowly, as the eyes open or paralysis recedes. I had lived so many hours in a few minutes that when I called Françoise and wanted to speak to her in a language connected to reality and appropriate to the hour, I had to use all my inner powers of control not to say, 'Well, Françoise, here we are, it's five o'clock and I haven't seen you since yesterday afternoon,' and to suppress my dreams. Ignoring them and lying to myself, using all

my strength to keep the truth unspoken, I would shamelessly say, 'Françoise, is it ten o'clock yet?' I did not even say 'ten in the morning', so as to be able to speak the unbelievable words in a more convincing manner. Still, to say these words instead of the ones which still seemed true to the half-awakened sleeper cost me the same effort as someone who jumps from a moving train and runs along the track beside it has to make to keep his balance. He runs for a moment because the world he is leaving is a world in rapid movement, very unlike the motionless earth on which his feet do not at first feel at home. Because the world of dreams is not the waking world, it does not follow that the waking world is less real, quite the opposite. In the world of sleep our perceptions are so densely layered, each overlaid by another, superimposed one which duplicates it, obscures it needlessly, that we can hardly work out what is happening in the disorientation of waking; had Françoise come in, or had I tired of calling and gone to look for her? At that moment, silence was the only means of giving nothing away, as when one has been arrested by a judge who is informed about all sorts of things concerning one, but which have not been divulged to oneself. Was it Françoise who had come, was it I who had called out? Wasn't it perhaps Françoise who had been sleeping, and I who had wakened her? Or rather, wasn't Françoise somehow enclosed within me, for distinctions between people and their interactions hardly exist in that sepia darkness where reality is no more translucent than in the body of a porcupine, and where our minimal perceptions can perhaps give an idea of those of certain animals? Furthermore, even in the lucid madness which precedes these periods of heavy sleep, if fragments of wisdom float luminously, if the names of Taine or George Eliot are not unknown, the waking world still enjoys the superiority of being able to be continued every morning, unlike dreams which are different every night. But perhaps there are other worlds more real than the waking world. For have we not seen how the 'real world' is transformed by every revolution in the arts, and without waiting for that, by the degree of aptitude or cultivation which distinguishes an artist from an ignorant fool?

And sometimes an hour of sleep is a paralytic stroke after which we must regain the use of our limbs, learn to speak again. Will is not enough. We have slept too long, we have ceased to exist. Waking is barely experienced, without consciousness, as a pipe might experience the turning-off of a tap. This is followed by a life more inanimate than that of a jelly-fish; one might think one had been dredged up from the depths of the sea, or released from prison, if one could think anything at all. But then the goddess Mnemotechne[16] leans out from heaven and offers us, in the form of 'habit of calling for coffee', the hope of resurrection. But the sudden gift of memory is not always so simple. One often has at hand, in those first minutes when one is letting oneself slip towards awakening, a range of different realities from which one thinks one can choose, like taking a card from a pack. It is Friday morning and one is coming back from a walk, or else it is tea-time at the seaside. The idea of sleep and that one is in bed in one's nightshirt is often the last to occur. Resurrection does not come immediately, you think you have rung, you haven't, you turn over insane ideas in your mind. Movement alone restores thought, and when you have actually pressed the electric bell-push, you can say, slowly but clearly, 'It must be ten o'clock. Bring me my coffee please, Françoise.'

Wonders! Françoise could not have guessed at the sea of unreality in which I was still submerged, and through which I had managed to utter my strange question. For she answered, 'It's ten past,' which made me sound reasonable, and allowed me to keep hidden the strange conversations in which I had been so long caught up (on the days when it was not a mountain of nothingness that had swept my life away). By force of will, I had rejoined the world of reality. I was still enjoying the last remains of sleep, that is to say the only originality, the only novelty which exists in the telling of stories, since all waking narratives, even those embellished by literature, lack the mysterious incongruities which are the true source of beauty. It is easy to speak of the beauty created by opium. But for a man accustomed to depend on sleeping drugs, one unexpected hour of natural sleep will uncover the morning immensity of a landscape just as mysterious and far fresher. Varying the time and place where one goes to sleep, inducing sleep by artificial means or, on the other hand, returning to natural sleep – the strangest of all for those accustomed to rely on sleeping draughts – will produce varieties of sleep a thousand times more numerous than any gardener's varieties of roses or carnations. Gardeners manage to grow some flowers which are like delicious dreams, and others like nightmares. When I fell asleep in a certain manner, I would wake up shivering, thinking I had measles or, much more distressing, that my grandmother (whom I never thought of now) was suffering because I had laughed at her that day in Balbec when she had thought she was dying and wanted me to have a photograph of her. Immediately, even though I was awake, I wanted to go to her and tell her she had misunderstood me. But I was already warming up. The fear of measles was gone and my grandmother so far away from me that she could no longer pain my heart.

Sometimes these various forms of sleep were overshadowed by a sudden darkness. I felt fear as I walked further than usual, into a dark avenue where I could hear prowlers moving about. Suddenly I would hear a argument between a policeman and one of those women who often worked as drivers and whom, from a distance, one could mistake for young coachmen. On her box, surrounded by darkness, I could not see her, but she was speaking, and in her voice I could read the perfections of her face and the youth of her body. I walked towards her, meaning to get into her carriage before she set off again. It was a long way. Fortunately, she was still arguing with the policeman. I got to the carriage while it was still stationary. This part of the avenue was lit by street-lamps. The driver could now be seen. It was a woman, but an old woman, big and strong, with white hair escaping from her peaked cap and a large, red mark disfiguring her face. I would walk away, thinking, 'Is this what happens to the youth of women? We meet them, and then, if suddenly we want to see them again, will they always have grown old? Is the young, desirable woman like one of those stage roles which are created by particular actresses and then, as they decay, inevitably passed on to other stars? But then it is no longer the same role.' Then I was overcome by sadness. We experience in our sleep many instances of Pity, like the different *pietàs* of the Renaissance, but unlike them ours are not carved in marble but evanescent. They have their value, however, which is to keep us in touch with a certain kinder, more humane view of things that is only too easily submerged in the chilly, even hostile good sense of the waking state. Thus I was reminded of the promise I had made to myself at Balbec, always to feel pity for Françoise. And for the rest of that morning at least I would manage not to be irritated by Françoise's quarrels with the butler, and to be gentle with her, in whom others saw so little good. For that morning only, however; and I should have tried to provide myself with a somewhat more stable code of conduct, for, just as a people cannot long be governed by policies based on pure sentiment, men cannot be in thrall to the memory of their dreams. Already this dream was beginning to fade. By trying to hold on to it in order to describe it, I sent it fleeing all the faster. My eyelids were no longer so firmly sealed over my eyes. If I tried to reconstruct my dream, they would open altogether. We constantly have to choose between health and wisdom on the one hand, and spiritual pleasures on the other. I have always been too much of a coward to choose the second. What is more, the dangerous power I was renouncing was even more dangerous than we realize. By deliberately varying the conditions in which we fall asleep, we can forfeit the power, not only of dreaming but of falling asleep: it is not only our dreams that vanish but, sometimes for days or years together, sleep itself, which is divine but unstable: the smallest shock can render it volatile. It is to be found in the company of habit, which anchors it every evening to its accustomed place, preserving it from any disturbance. But if habits are altered, if it is no longer tied to them, it dissolves like a vapour. Like youth and love, once lost it cannot be found again.

In these various kinds of sleep, as in music, it was the augmentation or diminution of the interval that created beauty. I delighted in this beauty, but it was true that my morning sleep, however brief, had cost me a good part of the street-cries that brought home to me the circulating life of the trades and foodstuffs of Paris. So I usually tried to wake early so as not to miss them (without, alas, foreseeing the drama which was soon to be brought into my life by my late waking and the draconian, Persian laws acted out in my Racinian Ahasuerus scenes). As well as the pleasure of knowing how much Albertine liked these cries, and of getting outdoors without leaving my bed, I heard in them a symbol of the atmosphere outside, the dangerous, bustling world in which I would not let her move around except under my guardianship, in a kind of outdoor extension of her confinement, from which I could recall her whenever I wished and make her come home to me.

So it was with complete sincerity that I was able to reply to Albertine, 'Not at all, I like them because I know that you do. – Fresh from the sea, oysters, fresh from the sea – Oh, oysters, I must have some!' Fortunately Albertine's combination of fickleness and docility meant that she quickly forgot her wants, and before I could even say that she would get better ones at Prunier's, she had wanted in turn everything that she heard the fishwife crying: 'Shrimps, lovely shrimps, skate all alive, all alive-oh. – Whiting to fry, whiting! – Here's mackerel, fresh mackerel, new mackerel. Mackerel, ladies, lovely mackerel! – Mussels, all fresh, mussels!'

At the words, 'Here's mackerel' I could not suppress a shudder.[17] But as this announcement could hardly apply to my chauffeur, I thought only of the fish I hated and my anxiety was short-lived. 'Ooh, mussels,' said Albertine. 'I'd *love* some mussels.' – 'Darling, mussels at Balbec was one thing, but here they'll be no good; anyway, remember what Cottard said about mussels.' But my remark was ill-timed, for the next thing we heard was a coster-woman selling something Cottard disapproved of even more:

> Lettuces-oh, lettuces-oh
> They're not for sale, they're just for show.

Still Albertine agreed to do without the lettuce provided I promised her that in a few days I would make Françoise buy from the woman who calls out, 'Lovely Argenteuil asparagus, get your fine asparagus.' A mysterious voice, which one would have expected to hear making odder offers, insinuated, 'Barrels, barrels!' One had to swallow one's disappointment that he was offering only barrels, since the word was almost completely drowned out by the cry of 'Glazier, mend your panes, gla-zier', on a Gregorian division; still more reminiscent of the liturgy, however, was the cry of the rag-and-bone man which unwittingly reproduced one of those sudden changes of sonority in the middle of a prayer which are quite frequent in the ritual of the Church: '*Praeceptis salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formati audemus dicere*,'[18] says the priest, finishing hurriedly on '*dicere*'. Without irreverence, just as the pious townsfolk of the Middle Ages acted farces and fools'-plays in front of the cathedrals, the ragman recalled that '*dicere*' as, having dragged out the words of his call, he spoke the last syllable with an abruptness worthy of the rules of accentuation of the great seventh-century pontiff: 'Rags, old iron to sell'[19] (all slowly intoned, as were the two syllables that followed, while the last one was dispatched even more rapidly than '*dicere*') 'raa-bbit *skins*'. 'Valencia, Valencia, oranges straight from Spain', even humble leeks ('Lovely lovely leeks!'), onions ('Eight sous your onions'), the cries rolled on for me like an echo of the waves where Albertine, left to herself, could have been lost, and took on the sweetness of a *Suave mari magno*.[20]

'Carrots, carrots, tuppence a bunch.' 'Oh,' cried Albertine, 'cabbages, carrots, oranges. I feel like eating them all. Do have Françoise buy some. She can cook the carrots in cream. And then we'll eat everything together, it'll be wonderful. All these sounds that we're listening to, turned into a lovely meal. No, ask Françoise to make skate with black butter, won't you, it's so good!' – 'Of course I will, dearest. But you mustn't stay, otherwise you'll want to buy everything on all the barrows.' 'Right, I'm going, but for our dinners I want us only ever to have the things we've heard being sold in the street. It'll be such fun. To think we'll have to wait another two months before we hear "Fresh beans, tender beans, fresh green beans". Doesn't that sound delicious: tender beans! You know I want the thin, thin ones, dripping in vinegar, you hardly know you're eating them, it's like dew. And those little heart-shaped cream cheeses, they don't come for ages yet: "Cream cheese, lovely cream cheese", and chasselas grapes from Fontainebleau, "Buy my chasselas!" ' And my heart sank to think how long I would have to stay with her, right up to the chasselas season. 'Listen, I know I said only wanted to eat things that I'd heard them selling in the street, but of course I'll make a few exceptions. I might very well call at Rebattet's and order an ice dessert for the two of us. You'll say it's not the season for ices, but I do so want one!' The mention of going to Rebattet's alarmed me, the phrase 'I might very well' particularly arousing my suspicions. Today was the Verdurins' at-home day, and since Swann had told them that Rebattet's was the best place, that was where they ordered their ices and *petits fours*. 'I've no objection to an ice, Albertine dearest, but let me order it; I'll get it from Poiré-Blanche's, or Rebattet's or the Ritz, I'm not sure, I'll see. – Are you going out, then?' she asked suspiciously. She always said that she would be delighted if I went out more, but if I ever said anything that implied I might not be staying at home, her anxious reaction suggested that her joy at seeing me constantly going out would not be wholly sincere. 'I may go out, I may not, you know I never make plans. Anyway, they don't sell ices in the street,[21] why do you want one?' The answer brought home to me how much intelligence and latent good taste had suddenly developed in her since Balbec; her words were of a kind that she maintained were owed solely to my influence, to her living permanently with me, but they were words that I myself would never have used, constrained as I felt by some unknown influence never to use literary forms in conversation. Perhaps Albertine's future and mine were not going to be the same. I almost felt it must be so when I saw her at pains to use such 'written' images, which I felt should be put to another, more sacred use with which I was not yet familiar. She said to me (and I was deeply moved in spite of everything, for I thought, 'I should never speak like that, of course, but still, without me she would never have spoken that way, she has really come under my influence, so she can't not love me, she is my creation'): 'What I love about the food they sell in the street, is to see a sound I have heard, like a rhapsody, change its nature on the table and address itself to my palate. As for ices (and I hope you will order me only the old-fashioned sort, moulded into every kind of improbable architecture), every time I eat one, the temples, churches, obelisks and rocks are like a picturesque geographical tableau that I study first, before changing its raspberry or vanilla monuments into a cool sensation in my throat.' I thought that was a little too elegantly phrased, but she sensed that I did find it well phrased, and went on, stopping for a moment to laugh when she felt she had drawn an effective comparison; her laugh, though beautiful, hurt me because it so clearly expressed her love of pleasure: 'Oh dear, I'm afraid that at the Ritz hotel you will find Vendôme columns of ice, chocolate or raspberry ice, and then you will have to buy several so that they can look like votive columns or an avenue of pylons raised to the glory of Cold. They make raspberry obelisks too, which can stand here and there in the burning desert of my thirst until I melt their pink granite in the back of my throat and they cool it better than an oasis (and here she laughed deep in her throat, whether impressed by her own eloquence, or amused by her ability to sustain such a lengthy metaphor, or, alas, from the physical sensation of imagining something so delicious, so cool in her mouth, which gave her an almost sexual pleasure). Those ice mountains you get at the Ritz sometimes look like the Monte Rosa, but when the ice is lemon-flavoured I don't mind if it doesn't have a monumental shape; it can be a bit irregular, with cliffs, like one of Elstir's mountains. In that case it shouldn't be too white, more yellowish, with that look of dirty, bleak snow that he gives to his mountains. It needn't be a big one, a half-ice if you like, but those lemon ices are always like miniature mountains, tiny ones, but your imagination puts everything in scale, like those little dwarf trees from Japan that you can see are really oak trees or cedars or upas trees, so that if I put some next to a little trickle of water, in my room, I could have a huge forest sloping down to a river, where little children could get lost. So, at the foot of my yellowy lemon half-ice, I can see postilions, travellers, post-chaises on whom my tongue brings down icy avalanches to swallow them up' (the cruel pleasure with which she said this aroused my jealousy); 'then', she added, 'I use my lips to demolish, pillar by pillar, those Venetian porphyry churches that are made of strawberry ice-cream, and bring down what I don't swallow on the heads of the faithful. Yes, all those monuments will leave their stony sites and travel into my chest: I can feel their melting coolness there already. But leaving ices aside, nothing is more exciting and thirst-inducing than advertisements for thermal springs. When I was at Mlle Vinteuil's, at Montjouvain, there was no good place to buy ices nearby, but we used to sit in the garden and travel all round France by drinking a different sparkling mineral water every day: there's Vichy water, for example; when you pour it it sends up a white cloud from the bottom of the glass that settles down again if you don't drink it fast enough.' But the mention of Montjouvain was too much for me to bear, and I would interrupt her. 'I'm boring you, darling, good-bye.' What a change from Balbec, where I would defy even Elstir himself to have spotted in Albertine such rich potential for poetry. Not such strange or such personal poetry as Céleste Albaret's was, when she had come to see me the day before and, finding me in bed, had said, 'O heavenly majesty set down on a bed – Why heavenly, Céleste? – Oh, because you're like nobody else, you're quite wrong if you think you have anything in common with those who tread the humble earth. – Well, why "set down", then? – Because you don't look like a man lying down, you're not *in* bed, it looks as if angels flew down and put you there.' Albertine would never have thought of anything like that, but love, even in its last stages, is biased. I preferred the 'picturesque geography' of sorbets, whose rather facile fantasy seemed to me a reason for loving Albertine more, and a sign of my power over her, a proof that she loved me.

Once Albertine had gone out, I felt how fatiguing her perpetual presence was for me, endlessly hungry for movement and life, disturbing my sleep with her comings and goings, making me live in a perpetual draught by leaving the doors open, obliging me – in order to find daily pretexts for not going out with her, without ever seeming too ill, and while making sure that someone else did go – to deploy an ingenuity worthy of Scheherazade.[22] Unfortunately, while the Persian storyteller's ingenuity delayed her death, I was bringing mine closer. Such situations do occur in life, not always caused, as here, by sexual jealousy and frail health

which does not allow one to share the life of someone young and active, but where the problem of whether to go on living together or revert to separate lives poses itself in almost medical terms: which sort of peace should one put first (either by continuing one's daily, exhausting activity, or by resuming the pain of separation) – peace of mind, or the peace of the heart?

In any case, I was pleased that Andrée was going to the Trocadéro with Albertine, for certain recent incidents – tiny ones, it is true – without, of course, shaking my confidence in my chauffeur's honesty, had suggested a certain falling-off in his vigilance or at any rate his powers of observation. Thus, one day quite recently when I had sent Albertine to Versailles alone with him, she said she had lunched at the Reservoirs. As the chauffeur had mentioned Vatel's, noting the discrepancy I made an excuse to go down and talk to him (it was still the same chauffeur we had had at Balbec), while Albertine was dressing. 'You said you had lunch at Vatel's, but Miss Albertine mentioned the Reservoirs: how do you explain that? The chauffeur replied, 'Ah, I said I ate at Vatel's; I've no way of knowing where Miss Albertine ate. She left me when we got to Versailles and took a horse-cab; she prefers them when she hasn't any distance to go.' I was already furious to think that Albertine had been on her own; still, it was only for the time it took to eat lunch. 'Couldn't you, I said pleasantly, (for I did not want him to think that I was actually having Albertine watched, which would have been humiliating for me, and doubly so as it would have meant she was keeping me in the dark about her actions) have eaten your lunch, not actually with her of course, but in the same restaurant? – But she told me to be in the Place d'Armes at six o'clock, not before. I wasn't to pick her up after lunch. – Ah!' I said, trying to conceal the depths of my dismay. And I went back upstairs. So Albertine had been alone, left to her own devices, for more than seven hours together. It was true that taking the cab was not simply a trick to get rid of the chauffeur. In town Albertine liked riding slowly in a cab better than in the car; she said you could see better, that the air was sweeter. But still, she had had seven hours to herself, about which I would never know anything. And I dared not think about how she must have spent them. I thought the chauffeur had been thoroughly inept, but my confidence in him now became complete. For if he had been at all in league with Albertine, he would never have admitted to me that he had left her alone from eleven o'clock in the morning till six in the evening. Only one other explanation of the chauffeur's admission was possible, and that was absurd. If he had quarrelled with Albertine, he might have decided to give me an inkling of what was going on, and thus to show my friend that he could talk if he chose; if, after this harmless revelation, she did not do things his way, he really would spill the beans. The idea was ridiculous: one had to imagine a non-existent quarrel between him and Albertine, and credit the chauffeur, that handsome young man, with a blackmailer's outlook, when he had always shown himself so good-natured and obliging. In any case, a mere two days later, he showed that, more than I had ever dreamed in my jealous madness, he could keep a discreet but effective watch over Albertine. I had taken him on one side and, coming back to what he had told me about Versailles, I smiled and said off-handedly, 'That visit to Versailles that you were telling me about the other day, you were right to do as you did, of course, you always do the right thing. But if I can make just a small point, it's not important at all, I do feel such a responsibility since Mme Bontemps left her niece with me, I'm so afraid of accidents, I feel so bad about not going everywhere with her, that I'd rather you always drove Miss Albertine yourself, you are such a good driver, so clever with the car, you'd never have an accident. That way I needn't worry at all.' The charming, apostolic chauffeur laid his hand on his wheel as a saint might on his crucifix[23] and said these words which, dispelling all anxiety from my heart and immediately replacing it with joy, made me feel like throwing my arms around him: 'Don't worry, he said, she won't come to any harm, for even when I'm not driving her around I keep my eye on her. At Versailles, without anybody noticing, I went all round the town with her, you might say. From the Reservoirs she went to the Château, from there to the Trianons, and I followed her all the time without seeming to look at her, and the best of it is she never saw me. Well, and if she had, there'd have been no harm done, after all, with the whole day in front of me why shouldn't I have decided to see the Château as well? Especially as Miss Albertine must have noticed that I'm a reader myself and I love to see all the old things.' (It was true, and if I had known then that he was a friend of Morel's, I should have been surprised, he was so superior to the violinist in intelligence and taste.) 'But she never did see me. – She must have met some friends, she knows several ladies in Versailles. – No, she was on her own the whole time. – People must have been looking at her, then, such a striking young lady and all alone. – They looked at her all right, but she didn't take any notice of them, all the time with her head in her book, when she wasn't looking at the pictures.' The chauffeur's account seemed all the more convincing as the cards Albertine had sent me that day were one of the Château and the other of the Trianons. The care with which the kind chauffeur had followed in her footsteps touched my heart. How could I have imagined that his lengthy, reassuring expansion of his previous story could have been caused by a meeting with Albertine in the intervening two days, when, alarmed at the chauffeur's having spoken to me, she had submitted her will to his and made it up with him? I did not dream of such a thing.

The chauffeur's story, by removing any fear that Albertine had been deceiving me, naturally reduced my interest in my friend and the day she had spent at Versailles. I do believe, however, that his explanations, which by exonerating Albertine made her even more tedious to me, might perhaps not have been enough in themselves to pacify me so quickly. Two little pimples which appeared on my friend's forehead were perhaps more effective in changing the feelings of my heart. These feelings were finally turned away from her, to the point that I forgot her very existence except when I was in her presence, by the extraordinary confidence made to me by Gilberte's maid, whom I met by chance at this time. I learned from her that at the time I was calling on Gilberte every day, she was in love with another young man of whom she saw much more than she saw of me. I had briefly suspected this at the time, and remembered questioning this same maid. But as she knew I loved Gilberte, she had denied everything, sworn that Mlle Swann never set eyes on the young man. But now, knowing that my love was so long dead, that for years I had left all Gilberte's letters unanswered – and perhaps also because she was no longer in Gilberte's service – she told me of her own accord the whole story of the amorous episode I had known nothing about. It seemed to her quite natural to do so. Remembering her protestations then, I supposed that she had not known about the affair at the time. But she had: it was she who, on Mme Swann's orders, had gone to let the young man know whenever the girl I loved was alone. The girl I loved then … But I wondered for a moment whether my old love was as dead as I had thought, for the maid's story caused me pain. As I do not think that jealousy can revive a dead love, I imagined that my pained reaction was due, at least in part, to wounded self-esteem, for several people whom I disliked, and who at this time and for some while after – things were to change later – affected a contemptuous attitude towards me, must have known quite well, while I was so in love with Gilberte, that I was being fooled. And that made me look back and wonder whether my love for Gilberte had not had an admixture of vanity, since it was now so painful for me to realize that all the hours of friendly intimacy which had made me so happy were seen as nothing but a trick of my friend's at my expense, by people whom I did not like. Whether it was love or vanity, Gilberte was almost dead within me, but not entirely, and this new displeasure quite made me forget to worry over-much about Albertine, who occupied only such a narrow part of my heart. Nevertheless, to return to her (after such a long parenthesis) and her visit to Versailles, the postcards she sent me from there (can one's heart really be simultaneously assailed from different angles by two jealousies, each relating to a different person?) gave me rather a disagreeable feeling whenever I turned them up among the papers on my desk. And I thought that if the chauffeur hadn't been such a good sort, the way his second story matched Albertine's choice of cards would not have proved very much, for what would anybody send one from Versailles but 'views' of the Château and the Trianons, unless the choice were being made by a connoisseur in love with a particular statue, or by some idiot whose idea of a view was the horse-tram depot or the goods station?

I should not say an idiot, for that kind of postcard is not always sent by them, chosen simply because it came from Versailles. There were two years during which intelligent men, artists, decided that Siena, Venice and Granada had been done to death, and greeted the first omnibus or wagon with cries of 'Now that's beautiful'. Then that fad passed like the others. I am not even sure that we have not returned to the 'sacrilegious destruction of relics of the past'. In any case, a first-class railway coach is no longer considered *a priori* more beautiful than St Mark's in Venice. They used to say, 'Those are the *real* things, looking backwards is so artificial,' but without drawing any clear conclusions. In any case, and though I still trusted the chauffeur completely, I made sure that Albertine would not be able to park him and go off without his daring to refuse for fear of being thought a spy: I would only let her go out escorted by Andrée, whereas before I had thought the chauffeur was protection enough. I had even once let her (a thing I would never have done later) be away for three days, just her and the chauffeur, and go almost as far as Balbec, she was so keen to make the journey in a stripped-down vehicle, at great speed. During these three days I had been quite relaxed,

even though the deluge of postcards she sent me did not arrive, so dreadful is the post from Brittany (good in summer, but no doubt disorganized in winter), until a week after Albertine and the chauffeur had returned. They came back so full of energy that on the very morning of their return they went out, quite undaunted, on their usual daily excursion. But since the Versailles incident I had changed. I was delighted that Albertine should be going to the 'special' matinée at the Trocadéro, but above all reassured that she was going there in company, the company of Andrée.

Setting these thoughts aside, now that Albertine was gone, I went to the window for a moment. First there was a silence, against which the tripe-seller's whistle and the tramway horn resonated in the air octaves apart, like a blind piano-tuner at work. Then I was able to distinguish the interwoven melodies, to which new ones were constantly added. There was also a different whistle, blown by a seller of I never discovered what, which sounded exactly like a tram-whistle, and as it was not borne away at speed like the others, one imagined a single tram, lacking the power of movement or broken down, stuck in one position and piping feebly like a dying animal. And it seemed to me that if ever I had to leave that neighbourhood – unless for a completely working-class one – the streets and boulevards of the city centre (where the fruit, fish and other trades had been brought together in large food shops, rendering obsolete the cries of the street sellers which would in any case have been inaudible in the traffic) would strike me as very dull, unliveable in, stripped, emptied of all the litanies of the petty trades and perambulating delicacies, deprived of the orchestra which came to charm me at break of day. On the pavement, a woman, ill-dressed or following an ugly fashion, was passing, a too-light shape in a mohair sacque; no, it wasn't a woman, it was a chauffeur in his goatskin driving-coat, going on foot to his garage. Set loose from the grand hotels, the winged tribe of messengers in their rainbow colours sped towards the stations, bent over their bicycles, to meet the travellers from the morning trains. The throbbing of strings meant sometimes the passing of a car, and sometimes that I had not put enough water in my electric bed-warmer. In the middle of this modern symphony a false note was struck by an old-fashioned 'tune': replacing the sweet-seller who usually accompanied her song with a rattle, the toy-man, on whose military cap was mounted a puppet which he moved in all directions, was showing off other puppets and, with no regard for the ritual declamation of Gregory the Great, the reforms of Palestrina[24] or modern, operatic recitative, was bellowing out, like an old-fashioned partisan of pure melody,

> Come on Dad, come on Mum,
> Look, the kiddies' best friend has come.
> You've got the pennies, I've got the toys,
> All home-made for your girls and boys.
> Tra la la, tra la la la lero
> Tra la la la la la la la.
> Come on boys and girls!

Little Italians in berets did not try to compete with this *aria vivace*, but stood silently holding out their statuettes. Meanwhile a little fife-player was driving the toy-man to beat a retreat, still singing *presto* but more confusedly, 'Come on Dad, come on Mum'. Was the fife-player one of the dragoons I used to hear in the mornings at Doncières? No, for his notes were followed by the words, 'China to mend, china or earthenware? I mend everything, glass, marble, crystal, bone, ivory and antiques. Here's the men-der!' In a butcher's shop with on the left a sunburst and on the right a whole ox hanging up, a butcher's boy, very tall and thin, with blond hair, his neck emerging from a sky-blue collar, was, scrupulously and with dizzying speed, placing on one side exquisite fillet steaks and on the other low-grade rump, weighing them in gleaming scales with a cross on top, from which dangled fine chains, and though he was only setting out the displays of kidneys, tournedos or entrecôtes, he looked in fact much more like an angel on Judgment Day, separating out for God, according to their qualities, the Good and the Wicked, and weighing their souls. And now the thin, sharp note of the fife rose into the air again, announcing not the destruction that Françoise so feared every time she saw a cavalry column pass by, but 'restorations' to be done by an 'antique specialist', innocent or just cheeky, and in any case very eclectic, since far from specializing he exercised his skill on the most diverse materials. The little bakers' girls were hurriedly piling up in their baskets the long, thin loaves for 'midday dinner', and the dairy-girls speedily hanging from their carrying-poles the bottles of milk. Could the romantic view I had of these little girls have been accurate? Would it not have been different if I had been able to stop one of them for a moment and keep her beside me, instead of seeing them from my window, always in the shop or flying down the street? To understand what I was losing by always being shut indoors, and to measure the riches the day was offering, I would have had to stop the unrolling of the living frieze and catch one girl carrying her laundry or her milk, frame her, like a silhouette in a moving decoration, between the uprights of my door and focus on her, making sure to obtain enough information about her to be able to find her again another day, like the tags that ornithologists and ichthyologists attach to birds' legs or fishes' fins before freeing them to study their migrations.

I therefore told Françoise that I had an errand I wanted done, and that she should send up, as soon as one arrived, one or other of the little girls who were always coming to collect or deliver laundry or bread or milk, and whom she often sent with messages of her own. In this I was like Elstir, who, unable to leave his studio on certain spring days when the knowledge that the woods were full of violets made him desperate to see some, would send his portress to buy a bunch of them; then, his heart melting, almost hallucinating, he would see not the table on which he had placed the small botanical specimen, but all the carpet of the undergrowth where formerly, in their thousands, he had seen the twisting stems bending under their blue, beak-like blossoms; his eyes created an imaginary zone, marked off in his studio by the pure scent of the evocative flower.

There was no chance of a laundry-girl today, a Sunday. As for the baker's girl, ill luck would have it that she had rung while Françoise was out, left her loaves in the basket on the landing and made her escape. The greengrocer's girl would not come till much later. Once I had been in the dairy ordering a cheese, and among the shop-girls I had noticed one, extravagantly blond in colouring, very tall though still childish-looking, and who, among the other errand-girls, seemed to be far away, with a proud, dreamy look. I had seen her only from a distance, and so quickly that I could not really have described her, except to say that she must have shot up all at once, and that she had a head of hair that looked much less like individual locks than like a stylized sculpture of the meandering curves of parallel banks of snow. That was all I had noticed, apart from a strongly modelled nose (very unusual in young girls), recalling the beak of a baby vulture. It was not only her position, surrounded by the other shop-girls, that made it difficult for me to see her clearly, but also my uncertainty about the feelings that I, at that moment and later, might inspire in her: fierce pride, mockery, disdain which she would afterwards express to her friends? These various speculations which, in the first second, I made about her, had made even more impenetrable the troubled atmosphere in which she hid, like a goddess in a cloud shaken by thunder. For mental uncertainty is even more of an obstacle to clear visual perception than a physical defect of the eye would be. In this over-thin, over-eye-catching young person, the excess of what another man might have called attractions was exactly what I liked least, but all the same it had had the result of preventing me from noticing, still less remembering, anything about the other girls in the dairy, whom the first girl's hooked nose and her unpleasantly independent, thoughtful look, as if she were judging them, had relegated to obscurity, like a bolt of blond lightning throwing the countryside into darkness. And so from my visit to the dairy to order the cheese, I had remembered only (if one can speak of remembering a face so poorly recalled that one adapts ten different noses to the mist of the features) the little girl whom I had thought disagreeable. That can be a sufficient starting-point for love. Still, I would have forgotten the improbable blonde and would never have thought of seeing her again, if Françoise had not told me that, young as she was, she was very knowing and was going to leave her job because she spent too much on dress and owed money in the neighbourhood. It has been said that beauty is the promise of happiness. Reversing the idea, the prospect of pleasure can also be the beginning of beauty.

I began to read Mama's letter. Behind her quotations from Mme de Sévigné ('If my thoughts at Combray are not completely black, they are at least a dark grey-brown; I long for you and think of you every moment, your health, your business affairs, how far away you are, how do you think that feels on dark evenings?') I could feel that my mother did not like to see Albertine's stay in our house becoming so prolonged, and my ideas of marriage, though not yet declared to my intended, taking deeper root. She no longer said these things, because she was afraid that I would leave her letters lying around. Indeed, though

they were written in such veiled terms, she complained if I did not let her know when I received each one. 'You remember what Mme de Sévigné said: "When one is far away one no longer laughs at letters that begin 'Thank you for your letter' ".' She did not speak of what worried her most, but complained about my extravagance: 'What can you be spending all your money on? It's bad enough for me that you are like Charles de Sévigné, not knowing what you want and being "two or three different men at once", but try at least not to be as extravagant as he was, so that I do not have to say of you, "He has found the secret of spending money without making an impression, of losing without gambling and of paying his debts without removing the obligation".' I had just finished Mama's note when Françoise came back to tell me that the little dairy-girl whose forwardness she had told me about was in the kitchen at that moment. 'She can easily take your letter, sir, and do your errands if it's not too far. You'll see, sir, she's just like a Little Red Riding-Hood.' Françoise went to get her and I heard her showing her the way, saying, 'Look at you, you're scared because there's a corridor. Whatever next, I thought you had more sense, do I have to take you by the hand?' And Françoise, like a good and faithful servant who wants to make others respect her master as she respects him herself, had cloaked herself in the majesty which ennobles the bawd in those old master paintings where the lover and the mistress fade almost into insignificance next to her grandeur.

When Elstir gazed at his violets, he did not have to worry about what they were doing. The entrance of the little dairy-girl immediately dispelled my contemplative calm; now I had to concentrate on making the story of the letter to be delivered plausible, and I began to write rapidly, hardly daring to look at her, so as not to seem to have summoned her for that reason. She had for me all the charm of the unknown, which I would not have found in a pretty girl discovered in one of those houses where they are always waiting for you. She was not naked, nor in fancy dress, but a real dairy-maid, one of those girls one always thinks so pretty when one has not the time to get to know them, she had something of what makes for eternal desire, eternal regret in this life, whose double current has now at last been diverted, brought close to us. Double, because it is a question of the unknown, of a being we guess to be divine, given its stature, its proportions, its indifferent gaze, its haughty calm; on the other hand, we want the woman in question to belong to a clearly specialized trade, so that we can escape into the world which a particular costume convinces us must be romantically different. If one wanted to reduce to a formula the laws of amorous curiosity, one would have to seek it in the maximum divergence between a woman seen and a woman won, caressed. If the women in what used to be called houses of ill-fame, if even kept women (provided we know that is what they are) attract us so little, it is not that they are less beautiful than others, it is that they are ready and waiting for us: what we are trying to attain is already on offer, they are not conquests. Divergence here is at a minimum. A tart smiles at us in the street in the same way she will smile when she is alone with us. We are sculptors. We want to find in a woman a statue quite different from the one she first showed to us. We see an indifferent, insolent young girl at the seaside, a respectable shop-assistant busy at her counter who replies to our question abruptly, if only so as not to be teased by her workmates, a fruit-woman who barely answers us. Well, we cannot rest until we have tried to see whether the haughty seaside girl, the shop-girl with her worries about what people will think, the preoccupied fruit-seller cannot be persuaded, by crafty manœuvres on our part, to soften their unbending attitude, to wind round our neck the arms that carried the fruit, to turn upon our mouth, with a smile of consent, those hitherto chilly or faraway eyes – oh, the beauty of those eyes, so stern in working hours, when their owner feared the gossip of her companions, eyes which avoided our insistent looks and which, now that we are alone with her, drop their lids under the sunny weight of laughter when we speak of making love! Between the shop-assistant, the laundry-woman intent on her ironing, the fruit-seller, the dairy-woman, and the girl who is about to become our mistress, the maximum divergence is attained, stretched to its extreme limits, and varied by the habitual gestures of her trade, which make of her arms, during her hours of work, a pattern of curves as different as can be from the supple bonds which already, each evening, are winding round our neck, while her mouth prepares for our kiss. That is why we spend our lives in anxious, endlessly repeated approaches to respectable girls whose work seems to make them remote from us. Once in our arms, they are no longer what they were, the gap that we hoped to cross has disappeared. But we start again with other women, we give our whole time, all our money, all our strength to these pursuits, we roundly curse the coachman for driving too slowly and perhaps making us miss the first meeting, we are feverish with passion. The first meeting – and yet we know that it will mean the dispelling of an illusion. No matter: so long as the illusion lasts, we want to know if we can turn it into reality, and then we think of the laundry-woman whose coolness has struck us. The curiosity of love is like our curiosity about place-names: always disappointed, it is always reborn and remains insatiable.

Alas, once in my room, the blonde dairy-girl with the platinum streaks was stripped of all the imagination and desires I had invested in her and reduced to her unvarnished self. The trembling cloud of my curiosity no longer enveloped her in excitement. She looked shamefaced now at having only one nose (instead of the ten or twenty that I had been recalling in turn without being able to call up a precise memory), and that rounder than I had thought, giving a suggestion of stupidity to her face, which had in any case lost the power of self-multiplication. This captured flight, dead, pinned-down, incapable of adding anything to its pitiful obviousness, was no longer supplemented by my imagination. Falling into static reality, I tried to bounce back; the cheeks, which I had not observed in the shop, looked so pretty that I felt intimidated and, to give myself a countenance, I said to the girl, 'Would you be kind enough to pass me the *Figaro*, it's on the table there, I must look up the address of the place I want to send you.' As she picked up the paper she uncovered the red sleeve of her jacket up to the elbow, and held out the conservative sheet to me with a neat, helpful gesture which pleased me by its homely speed, its yielding appearance and its scarlet colour. As I opened the *Figaro*, so as to have something to say and without raising my eyes, I asked the child, 'What is that red, knitted thing you are wearing? It's very pretty.' She answered, 'That's my cardigan.' For, by a process of degeneration common to all fashions, the garments and words which, a few years earlier, had seemed to belong to the relatively elegant world of Albertine and her friends, had now passed down to working-girls. 'You really wouldn't mind', I went on, pretending to look in the *Figaro*, 'if I sent you quite a long way?' As soon as I appeared to think that sending her on an errand would be asking a great deal, she began to suggest that it would be difficult for her. 'The thing is, I'm supposed to be going for a bicycle ride later. We only get Sunday afternoons off, you know.' – 'But won't you be cold, bare-headed like that?' – 'Oh, I won't be bare-headed, I'll wear my jockey-cap, and anyhow, with all my hair …' I raised my eyes to the mass of curly yellow locks and felt their whirlwind carry me away, my heart beating faster in the light and gusts of wind of a hurricane of beauty. I kept on looking at the newspaper, but even though it was only to give myself a countenance and gain time, I did take in the sense of the words before my eyes and was struck by these: 'To the advertised programme of the matinée taking place this afternoon in the main hall of the Trocadéro, we must add the name of Mlle Léa, who has agreed to appear in *Naughty Nérine*. She will, naturally, play the part of Nérine, in which she displays dazzling verve and an enchanting gaiety.' It was as if some brutal hand had torn from my heart the dressing under which, since my return from Balbec, it had begun to heal. The flux of my anguish poured out in torrents. Léa was the actress who was friendly with the two young girls whom Albertine had looked at in the glass that afternoon in the casino, without seeming to see them. It is true that at Balbec Albertine, on hearing the name of Léa, had been at particular pains to assure me, as if she were shocked that such a virtuous person could possibly be suspected: 'Oh no, she's not that sort of woman at all, she's completely above board.' Sadly for me, when Albertine gave an assurance of this kind, it was only ever the prelude to further, contradictory affirmations. Soon after the first would come the second: 'I don't know her.' The third stage was when, Albertine having mentioned someone 'above suspicion', whom in any case (stage two) 'she did not know', she would first of all gradually forget that she was supposed not to know the person, and unwittingly 'trip herself up' by using some phrase which showed that she did know her.

After this first piece of forgetfulness and with the new story now established, she would then forget something else: that the person was above reproach. 'Isn't such-and-such a person one of them? – Of course she is, she's famous for it!' The original note of compunction returned, to support an assurance that was a distant, faint echo of the first one: 'I must say that she's always been perfectly all right with me. Of course she knew that I'd have put her in her place, no mistake about that. But that's not the point. I have to admit that she's always shown me complete respect. Obviously she knew who she was dealing with.' We can remember the truth because it bears a name, has roots in the past, but an improvised lie is quickly forgotten. Albertine would forget this last lie, her fourth, and one day when she was trying to gain my confidence by confiding in me, she would go so far as to say this same person, originally so respectable and whom she did not know: 'She fancied me at one time. She asked me back to her place three or four times. I didn't mind walking home with her, out in the open air in front of everybody, but when I got to the house I always found an excuse not to go upstairs.' Some time later Albertine would refer to the beautiful things the same lady

had in her house. By piecing together the various partial accounts, it would no doubt have been possible to get the truth out of her, a truth perhaps less serious than I was inclined to believe, for perhaps, though she had once been free with women, she preferred a man, and now that I was her lover she might have taken no notice of Léa. It would already have been enough, at least where a large number of women were concerned, for me to bring together in front of my friend her various contradictory statements about them, in order to convict her of her transgressions (transgressions which, like the laws of astronomy, are easier to establish by reasoning than to observe, to uncover in reality). But she would still have chosen to say that one of her statements was a lie and withdraw it, thus throwing my whole system out of kilter, rather than admit that the whole story from the beginning was a tissue of lying tales. There are such tales in the *Arabian Nights*, and there they delight us. In someone we love, they make us suffer, and for that reason allow us to go deeper in our knowledge of human nature, rather than happily playing on its surface. Sorrow enters into us, and painful curiosity forces us to dig deeper. There we learn truths which we feel we have not the right to hide, so much so that a dying atheist who has learned these truths, though he knows he is going into nothingness and is indifferent to glory, will still use up his last hours in trying to make them known.

No doubt I was still at the first stage of affirmation in relation to Léa. I did not even know if Albertine knew her or not. But it did not matter: the problem was the same. I simply had to stop her going to the Trocadéro and renewing this acquaintance, or getting to know this stranger. I say that I did not know if she knew Léa or not; but I must have known when I was at Balbec: Albertine herself must have told me. For a large part of what she told me there had vanished from my memory, just as from her own. For memory is not a copy, always present to our eyes, of the various events of our life, but rather a void from which, every now and then, a present resemblance allows us to recover, to resurrect, dead recollections; but there are also thousands of tiny facts which never fell into this well of potential memories and which we shall never be able to check. Everything which we think irrelevant to the day-to-day life of the person we love is dismissed without consideration; we immediately forget what she tells us about this or that fact or person unknown to us, and the expression on her face when she was saying it. So, when later our jealousy is aroused by these same persons and we need to know that we are not mistaken, that it is they who are the cause of our mistress's haste to go out, her annoyance with us for depriving her of their company by coming home too early, our jealousy, digging in the past for clues, finds nothing; always turned towards the past, it is like a historian trying to write a history for which there are no documents; always late, it rushes like a mad bull into the place just vacated by the haughty, shining being who irritates it with his darts, and whom the crowd admires for his splendour and guile. Jealousy thrashes about in the void, uncertain, as we are in those dreams in which we are distressed not to find in his empty house someone whom we knew in life, but who here is perhaps someone else, simply wearing the features of another character; uncertain as we are, to an even greater degree, on waking, when we try to identify this or that detail of our dream. How did our friend look as she said those words? Did not she look happy, was she not even whistling, something she does only when she is thinking of love and our unwelcome presence annoys her? Did she not say something then which contradicted what she is saying now, that she knew or did not know such and such a person? We do not know, we shall never know, we struggle to put together the debris of a dream, and in the meantime our life with our mistress goes on, our life of inattention to what we do not know is important to us, attention to what we think important but perhaps is not, a life made nightmarish by beings who have no real connection with us, filled with forgetfulness, gaps, vain anxieties: a life most like a dream. I realized that the dairy-girl was still there. I said that it was really a very long way, and that I would not send her on my errand. She agreed at once that it would be too much trouble: 'There's a big match later on, I don't want to miss it.' I guessed that she would already call herself 'a sports fan', and that soon she would talk about 'leading her own life'. I said that I would not be needing her, and gave her five francs. This unexpected tip made her think that, if she could get five francs for nothing, she would certainly be well paid for running my errand, and she began to suggest that her match was not so important after all. 'I could have gone for you. I can always make time.' But I pushed her towards the door: I needed to be alone. I absolutely had to stop Albertine going to the Trocadéro and meeting those friends of Léa's. I had to, I simply had to manage it; I didn't as yet see how, and I spent the first moments opening and closing my hands, staring at them, cracking my knuckles, whether it is that our mind, when it cannot see a solution, is overcome by laziness and decides to suspend its activity for a moment, during which it registers with great clarity the most irrelevant things, like the blades of grass on the embankment which we see trembling in the wind while our train is stopped in the middle of nowhere – this immobility, however, is not always any more productive than that of a captured animal which, paralysed with fear or spellbound, stares without moving – or whether I was holding my whole body in reserve, with my intelligence inside it and along with that the possibility of acting on a given person, as if it were simply a weapon which I should presently wield to separate Albertine from Léa and her two friends. Certainly, in the morning when Françoise had come to tell me that Albertine was going to the Trocadéro, I had thought, 'Albertine can do as she pleases,' and I had said to myself that until the evening of that glorious day her actions would have no perceptible importance for me. But it was not simply the morning sun, as I had thought, that had made me so confident; it was because, having forced Albertine to give up the plans that she could have embarked on or even carried out at the Verdurins', and having reduced her to going to a matinée that I had picked out for her myself, where she could not possibly have plotted anything, I knew that what she did all day could only be innocent. In the same way, when Albertine said a few moments later, 'I don't care if I get killed,' it was because she felt sure that she would not be. In front of my eyes, in front of Albertine's, there had been not just the morning sunshine but that invisible, translucent yet changeable medium through which we looked, I at her actions, she at the importance of her own life: that is to say, those beliefs which we do not perceive but which are no more a pure vacuum than the air we breathe; they compose around us a changing atmosphere, sometimes excellent, often unbreathable, which we could usefully measure and note as carefully as the temperature, pressure and season, for each of our days has its individual character, physical and psychological. The belief, unnoticed by me that morning, and which nonetheless had enveloped me in happiness until the moment I reopened the *Figaro*, that Albertine would spend the whole day in harmless pursuits, had now abandoned me. I was no longer living in that beautiful day, but in another day created within the first one by my anxious fear that Albertine would renew her friendship with Léa and – what would be even easier – with the two girls, if they went, as seemed likely, to see the actress at the Trocadéro, where it would not be difficult for them, during one of the intervals, to meet up with Albertine. Mlle Vinteuil had gone out of my mind: the name of Léa had brought back to me, reviving my jealousy, the image of Léa at the casino with the two girls. For I held in my memory only isolated, incomplete sequences of Albertines, silhouettes, snapshots; my jealousy was therefore focussed on a particular, intermittent expression, both elusive and fixed, and on the people who had caused it to appear on Albertine's face. I remembered how she had been at Balbec, when the two girls, or other women of their kind, looked too long and hard at her; I remembered how I had suffered to see her face raked by their eyes, as intent as a painter's when he wants to make a sketch; it was wholly covered by them, but, because of my presence no doubt, it underwent this contact without seeming to notice, with a passivity which perhaps concealed a secret pleasure. And before she recovered her wits and spoke to me, just for a second Albertine did not move, stood smiling at nothing in particular, with the same look of feigned naturalness and hidden pleasure as if she had been being photographed, or even were trying to adopt a more appealing pose for the camera – as she had done when we were walking with Saint-Loup at Doncières, laughing and licking her lips, as if she were teasing a dog. Certainly at these moments she was not at all the same as when it was she who was interested in some passing girl. In that case, her narrow, velvety gaze fastened on the passer-by, stuck to her, so gluey and corrosive that you felt it would not be able to detach itself without removing a patch of skin. But at this moment that particular look, which at least gave her expression a seriousness which made her seem almost ill, would have been welcome to me, compared to the blank, happy expression which her face took on when the two girls were there, and I would have preferred the sombre expression of desire which she perhaps sometimes felt herself, to the smiling look caused by the desire she inspired in others. It was in vain that she tried to veil her consciousness of it: the knowledge bathed her, enveloped her in a mist of pleasure, made her face rosy with delight. But all the feelings that Albertine held in suspension within herself at these moments, though they radiated around her and made me suffer so terribly, who could tell whether, in my absence, she would continue to suppress them: whether, once I was gone, she would not respond boldly to the two girls' advances? Certainly, these memories caused me much suffering. They were like a complete admission of Albertine's tastes, a general confession of her unfaithfulness, against which nothing could carry any weight: Albertine's individual promises, much as I wanted to believe them, the negative results of my incomplete enquiries and the assurances, perhaps concocted in collaboration with Albertine, of Andrée. Albertine could deny particular betrayals, but by words that she let slip, which contradicted these declarations, by these

very looks, she had revealed what she would have most wanted to hide, much more than any individual fact: what she would have let herself be killed rather than admit: her sexual tastes. For no being wants to give up its soul. In spite of the pain that these memories caused me, could I have denied that it was the afternoon's programme at the Trocadéro that had revived my need for Albertine? She was one of those women in whom ordinary attractions can be replaced by their offences and, almost as much, by the kindness which, following on these offences, restores to us the happiness which when we are with them, like an invalid who is never well two days running, we must constantly try to recover. Besides, even more powerful than the offences they commit while we love them, there are the offences they committed before we knew them, and the earliest of all: their nature. What makes this kind of love so painful is that it is preceded by what we might call an original sin by the woman, a sin which makes us love her, so that when we forget it, we need her less, and to begin loving her again we have to begin to suffer once more. At this moment, what mattered to me was ensuring that she should not see the two girls again, and finding out whether she knew Léa or not, although one should not concern oneself with particular facts except in so far as they have a general meaning, and it is childish, just as childish as the desire for travel or to know many women, to dissipate one's curiosity on whatever fragment of the invisible torrent of cruel realities which one will never know has chanced to crystallize in one's mind. Besides, even if one could destroy this fragment, it would promptly be replaced by another. Yesterday my fear was that Albertine should go to Mme Verdurin's. Now I was concerned only by Léa. Jealousy, whose eyes are bandaged, is not only powerless to see anything in the surrounding darkness; it is one of those tortures where a task has constantly to be begun again, like that of the Danaids or of Ixion.[25] Even if the two girls were not at the theatre, would not Albertine be impressed by Léa, more beautiful in costume, at the height of her success: would she not carry away dreams of her, desires which, even if they had to be suppressed in my house, would lead her to hate a life where she could not satisfy them? Then, perhaps she already knew Léa and would go to see her in her dressing-room, and even if Léa did not know her, how could I be sure that, having at least seen her at Balbec, she would not recognize her and make some sign to her from the stage that would allow Albertine to be admitted backstage? A danger seems avoidable once it has been averted. This one was not so yet, I was afraid that it could not be, and it seemed to me all the more terrible for that reason. And still my love for Albertine, which seemed almost to vanish when I tried to act upon it, seemed in a way proved by the intensity of my suffering at this moment. Nothing else mattered to me, I could think only of how to stop her staying at the Trocadéro, I would have given any money to Léa not to go there. If therefore one can judge one's true feelings by the action one takes rather than the idea one forms of them, I must have loved Albertine. But this renewal of my anguish did not give any greater consistency to my inner image of Albertine. She caused my sufferings like a goddess who remains invisible. Turning over countless possibilities in my mind, I tried to deaden my pain without thereby giving any more reality to my love.

First, I had to be certain that Léa really was appearing at the Trocadéro. Having sent the dairy-girl home with two francs, I rang Bloch, who was also a friend of Léa's, to ask him. He knew nothing about it and seemed surprised that I should want to know. I thought that I would have to act quickly, that Françoise was already dressed and I was not, I asked my mother to let me keep Françoise all day, and while I was getting up myself, I made her take a taxi; she was to go to the Trocadéro, buy a ticket, look for Albertine everywhere in the auditorium and give her a note from me. In the note, I said that I had been badly upset by a letter from the same lady who she knew had made me so unhappy one night at Balbec. I reminded her that the following day she had scolded me for not having had her called. So I felt, I said, that I could ask her to give up her afternoon at the theatre and come to collect me, so that we could go out together in the fresh air which I hoped would make me feel better. But as it would take me quite a long time to get dressed and be ready, I would like her to make use of her time with Françoise to go to the *Trois Quartiers* (this was a smaller shop which worried me less than the *Bon Marché*) and buy the white tulle collar that she needed.

My note probably served a purpose. To tell the truth, I knew nothing of what Albertine had been doing since I had known her, or even before. But in her day-to-day speech (Albertine could, if I had raised the matter with her, have said that I had misheard her), there were certain contradictions, certain alterations which seemed to me as conclusive as if I had caught her in the act, but they were less easy to use against Albertine, who, caught out like a child, would each time, by these quick strategic rephrasings, deflect my cruel attacks and regain control of the situation. The cruelty was turned on me. Not as a refinement of style, but to cover her careless mistakes, she used sudden leaps of syntax resembling what grammarians call anacoluthon or something like that. Talking about women, she would let slip the words, 'I remember not long ago I …'; then suddenly, after a 'quaver rest', 'I' would become 'she', and the action would be something she had seen while out for an innocent walk, and not something she had done herself. I wished I could remember the beginning of the sentence so as to decide myself, when she shifted her ground, what the ending would have been. But as I had been listening for the end, I could hardly remember the beginning, though it was perhaps the look of interest it had produced on my face that had made her change her tune, and I was left to my anxiety about her real thoughts, her authentic memory. The origins of one of our mistress's lies are unfortunately like the origins of our love, or of a vocation. They begin to form, take shape, pass, unnoticed by our attention. By the time one wants to remember how one began to love a woman, one is already in love; during earlier reveries, one did not say to oneself, 'this is the beginning of love, I must pay attention', and the feelings crept up on us almost unnoticed. In the same way, except in relatively rare cases, it is only to ease the telling of my story that I have often set one of Albertine's untruthful statements against her first assertions on the same subject. This first statement, given that I could not see into the future or guess what contradictory assertion would come to balance it, often slipped past me unnoticed; my ears certainly heard it, but without isolating it from the flow of Albertine's speech. Later, faced with a blatant lie or seized by anxious doubts, I longed to be able to remember it, but in vain; my memory, not forewarned, had not seen the need to take a copy.

I told Françoise, once she had got Albertine out of the theatre, to ring me and bring her home, whether she wanted to come or not. 'Not want to come home to you, sir, said Françoise, the very idea! – But I don't know if she likes seeing me all that much. – There's gratitude for you,' replied Françoise, in whom Albertine revived after so many years the torments of envy she had suffered when Eulalie was in favour with my aunt. Not knowing that Albertine's relationship to me was not of her seeking but mine (a fact that I preferred to hide from Françoise out of self-regard, and also to irritate her all the more), she admired and cursed her cleverness, and when speaking of her to the other servants called her a 'play-actress', a 'hussy' who could wind me round her little finger. She did not dare carry the fight to her openly, spoke pleasantly to her, and made sure I knew how she helped me in my relations with her enemy; thinking it would be useless and would achieve nothing to say anything to me against Albertine, she was still always looking for an opening, and if ever she spotted a crack in Albertine's position, she would work to widen it and to separate us completely. 'Gratitude? But Françoise, I feel I'm the ungrateful one, you don't know how kind she is to me. (I loved to seem to be loved!) Go quickly. – I'll toddle off then, pronto.'

Her daughter's influence was beginning slowly to debase Françoise's vocabulary. That is how all languages lose their purity, by the accretion of new terms. This decadence of Françoise's speech, which I had known in its golden age, was furthermore in part my responsibility. Françoise's daughter would never have made her mother's classical parlance degenerate into the lowest slang if she had been content to go on speaking patois to her. She had always done so, and if they were both with me and wanted to tell each other secrets, they did not go into the kitchen but built around themselves in the middle of my bedroom a protective wall more impassable than the most carefully closed door, by speaking patois. I could only guess that the mother and daughter did not always get on very well, by noting the frequent recurrence of the only word I could understand: *m'esasperate* (unless the source of their exasperation was myself). Unfortunately one learns to understand the most impenetrable language if one hears it constantly spoken. I was sorry it was patois I learned in this way, for I could have equally well learnt Persian if Françoise had been accustomed to speak in that tongue. Françoise, when she noticed my progress, began to speak faster and her daughter too, but all in vain. The mother was upset that I should understand patois, then pleased to hear me speaking it. To tell the truth, this pleasure was a kind of mockery, for though I was finally able to pronounce it much as she did, she could hear a gulf between our two pronunciations which delighted her, and she began to be sorry that she no longer saw certain people from her village that she had not thought about for years and who, according to her, would have split their sides laughing – she would have loved to hear them – when they heard me speaking patois. The very idea filled her with gaiety and regret, and she would list one peasant after another who would have laughed till he cried. In any case, no joy could relieve her unhappiness at the fact that, even if I pronounced patois badly, I understood it well. Keys

are useless when the person we are trying to keep out can use a skeleton key or a jemmy. Patois having become a worthless defence, she began to speak French to her daughter – a French which soon became that of the most decadent period.

I was ready. Françoise had not telephoned yet: should I leave without waiting? But how did I know if she would find Albertine? If she were not already backstage? And even if Françoise found her, would she let herself be taken home? Half an hour later, the telephone rang and hope and fear beat wildly in my heart. A flying column of sounds, commanded by an employee of the telephone company, brought to me with instant speed the words of the operator, not of Françoise, whose ancestral shyness and melancholy, applied to an object unknown to her forefathers, forbade her to approach a telephone receiver, even if the alternative were to visit a contagious invalid in person. She had found Albertine alone in the promenade gallery and she, taking only a moment to tell Andrée that she was going, had promptly left with Françoise. 'She wasn't angry? Oh, sorry! Would you please ask the lady if the young lady wasn't angry? – The lady asked me to tell you that she wasn't angry at all, quite the opposite; anyway, if she wasn't pleased, you couldn't tell. They're going to the *Trois Quartiers* now and they'll be back at two o'clock.' I knew that two o'clock must mean three o'clock, since it was after two already. But it was one of Françoise's particular weaknesses, a permanent, incurable weakness of the kind we call congenital, never to be able to tell the time correctly. I have never been able to understand what went on in her head when she looked at her watch and, if it were two o'clock, said that it was one o'clock, or three; I have never been able to tell whether the phenomenon which occurred then had as its locus Françoise's eyesight, or her thought, or her language; what is certain is that it always occurred. Humanity is very old. Heredity and breeding have given an irresistible strength to bad habits and vicious reflexes. One person sneezes and his chest rattles when he passes a rose-bush, another comes out in a rash at the smell of fresh paint; many people have stomach-aches when they have to travel, and grandsons of thieves who are millionaires and generous cannot resist robbing us of fifty francs. As far as explaining Françoise's inability to tell the time is concerned, she herself certainly never gave me any clues. For in spite of the anger usually produced in me by her wrong answers, Françoise would neither apologize for her mistake nor try to explain it. She stayed mute, looking as if she could not hear me, which completed my exasperation. I would have liked to hear one word of excuse, if only to throw it back at her, but there was nothing, only indifferent silence. In any case, as far as today was concerned, it was clear, Albertine was going to come back with Françoise at three o'clock, Albertine would not see Léa or her friends. So the danger that she would resume her relations with them having been averted, it promptly lost its importance in my eyes, and I was surprised, seeing how easily the thing had been done, that I should have doubted that it could be. I felt a lively sense of gratitude towards Albertine, who, I could now see, had not gone to the Trocadéro to meet Léa's friends, and who had shown me, by leaving the theatre and coming home at a word from me, that she belonged to me, even for the future, much more completely than I had realized. My gratitude was even more intense when a cycle messenger brought me a note from her to read while I waited, which was full of the charming expressions she so often used: 'Dear darling Marcel, I'll take longer than this cyclist, though I wish I could borrow his bike and get to you quicker. How could you think I would be angry, or that I could like anything as much as being with you? It will be fun to go out together, it would be even more fun to go out together always. Whatever is going through your head? Oh Marcel, Marcel! Your very own Albertine.' The very dresses I bought her, the yacht I had talked about, the Fortuny dresses, all the things which were, not repaid, but mirrored in this biddableness of Albertine's, seemed to me like privileges which I exercised; for the duties and expenses of a master form part of his dominion, define it and prove its existence just as much as his rights. And her recognition of my rights over her made clear the true character of my spending; I now had a woman of my own who, at one, unexpected word from me, would send a submissive telephone message to say that she was coming straight back, was letting herself be brought back, immediately. I was more of a master than I had thought. More of a master, that is to say, more of a slave. I was now in no hurry at all to see Albertine. The certain knowledge that she was shopping with Françoise, that they would arrive home together very shortly, was like a radiant, peaceful star lighting up a time which, now, I would have much preferred to spend on my own. My love for Albertine had made me get up and dress to go out, but it would now prevent me from enjoying my outing. I thought of how, on that Sunday afternoon, little working-girls, dressmakers, tarts would be walking in the Bois. And on the basis of these words, 'dressmakers', 'working-girls' (as had often happened with a proper name, the name of a young lady in the newspaper account of a ball) and of the image of a white bodice, a short skirt, because I placed behind them an unknown person who might love me, I created for myself desirable women, and said to myself, 'How attractive they must be!' But what use was their attractiveness to me, as I would not be going out alone?

Making the most of the fact that I was still alone, and half closing the curtains so that the sun would not stop me reading the notes, I sat down at the piano, opened Vinteuil's sonata which happened to be lying there, and began to play, since, Albertine's return being some time in the future but still absolutely certain, I had both some time at my disposal and a certain peace of mind. Secure in the expectation of her return with Françoise, my confidence in her docility bathed me in a blessed, inner light as warming as the sunlight outside; I could choose the direction of my thoughts, turn them for a moment away from Albertine and apply them to the sonata. Even in the piece of music, I did not trouble to notice how much more closely now the alternation of the sexual pleasure motif and the anxiety motif corresponded to my love for Albertine – a love from which jealousy had so long been absent that I had once been able to admit to Swann my ignorance of that feeling. No, approaching the sonata from another point of view, looking at it in itself as the work of a great artist, I was carried back on the wave of sound towards the old days at Combray – I do not mean Montjouvain and the Méséglise way, but our walks towards Guermantes – when I myself had wanted to be an artist. Having in practice abandoned this ambition, had I given up something real? Could life make up to me for the loss of art, or was there in art a deeper reality where our true personality finds an expression that the actions of life cannot give it? Each great artist seems so different from all the others, and gives us such a strong sense of individuality, which we seek in vain in everyday life! At the moment of having that thought, I was struck by a bar of the sonata, a bar which I knew very well, but sometimes a shift of attention casts a new light on things we have known for a long time, and shows us aspects of them that we had never noticed before. As I played the bar, and despite the fact that Vinteuil was at that point expressing a dream that would have remained quite alien to Wagner, I could not help murmuring, '*Tristan!*' with the smile of a family friend recognizing something of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who never knew him. And just as people then turn to a photograph to confirm the resemblance, I set on the music-stand the score of *Tristan*, fragments of which were being performed that very afternoon in the Lamoureux concert series. I could admire the master of Bayreuth without any of the scruples of those who, like Nietzsche, feel that duty requires them to flee, both in art and life, from any beauty which appeals to them, who tear themselves away from *Tristan* as they renounce *Parsifal*, and by a spiritual ascesis, piling mortification upon mortification, follow the bloodiest path of suffering until they raise themselves to the pure knowledge and perfect adoration of *The Longjumeau Postilion*.[26] I realised how intensely realistic Wagner's work is, as I recalled those insistent, fleeting themes which appear in one act, fade away only to return and, sometimes distant, muted, almost detached, are at other times, while still vague, so immediate, so pressing, so internal, organic, visceral that their return seems not so much that of a motif as of a nerve pain.

Music, unlike Albertine's company, helped me to go deeper into myself, to find new things there: the variety which I had vainly sought in life and in travel, yet the longing for which was stirred in me by that surge of sound whose sunlit wavelets came to break at my feet. It was a double diversity. Just as the spectrum makes the composition of light visible to us, the harmonies of a Wagner, the colour of an Elstir let us know the qualitative essence of another's sensations in a way that love for another being can never do. Then there is the variety within the work itself, achieved by the only means there is of being genuinely diverse: bringing together different individualities. Where a lesser musician would claim he is depicting a squire or a knight, while having them sing the same music, Wagner, on the other hand, places under each name a different reality, and each time his squire appears, a particular figure, at once complex and simplistic, bursts, with a joyous, feudal clashing of lines, into the immensity of sound and leaves its mark there. Hence the fullness of a music which, in fact, is filled with countless different musics each of which is a being in its own right. A being, or the impression given by a fleeting aspect of nature. Even the thing which is most independent of the feeling it arouses in us, the song of a bird, the note of a huntsman's horn, the tune a shepherd plays on his pipe, all these leave on the horizon the silhouette of their sound. Certainly, Wagner was to bring it closer to us, appropriate it, work it in to an orchestral score, subordinate it to the loftiest musical ideas, but while still respecting its original character, as a woodcarver does the grain, the individual essence of the wood he sculpts.

But despite the richness of these works, in which the contemplation of nature is found next to action, next to individuals who are not only the names of characters, I found myself thinking how strongly these works partake of the character of being – wonderfully, it is true – incomplete: that incompleteness which characterizes all the great works of the nineteenth century; the nineteenth century, whose greatest writers failed in their books, but, watching themselves at work as if they were both worker and judge, drew from this self-contemplation a new beauty, separate from and superior to their work, conferring on it retrospectively a unity, a grandeur which it does not have in reality. Setting aside the man who saw after the event, in his novels, a *Human Comedy*, and those who named disparate collections of poems or essays *The Legend of the Centuries* or *The Bible of Humanity*,[27] cannot we say of this last that it represents the nineteenth century so perfectly, that we must look for the greatest beauties in Michelet not in his writings but in the attitude he takes to his writings, not in his *History of France* or his *History of the Revolution*, but in his prefaces to these two books? Prefaces, that is to say, pages written afterwards, in which he considers them, and to which we must add a few phrases here and there, generally beginning with a 'Dare I say?' which is not a scholar's precaution, but a musician's cadence. The other musician, who was causing me such delight at this moment, Wagner, as he took from his desk a delicious fragment to introduce, as a retrospectively necessary theme, into a work of which he had not yet dreamed when he was composing it, and when, having written one mythological opera, then a second, then more, he realized he had composed a Ring Cycle, must have known something of the same intoxication Balzac felt when, casting over his novels the eye of both a stranger and a father, and seeing in one the purity of a Raphael and in another the simplicity of the Gospel, he suddenly saw, with the light of hindsight, that they would be even more beautiful if brought together in a cycle in which the same characters would recur, and added to his work the final brushstroke, the most sublime of all. This unity was an afterthought, but not artificial. Otherwise it would have crumbled into dust, like so many systematic constructions by mediocre writers who, by lavish use of titles and subtitles, try to make it look as if they have followed a single, transcendent design. Not artificial, perhaps all the more real for being an afterthought, born in a moment of enthusiasm when it is discovered between parts which only need to come together, a unity which was unaware of itself, and which therefore is vital and not born of logic, which has not ruled out variety or put a damper on execution. This new-found unity (but this time on the scale of the whole work) is like certain pieces composed independently, born of inspiration, not demanded by the artificial working-out of a plan, which appear and take their place in the larger work. Before the large-scale orchestral movement which precedes the return of Isolde, it was the work itself which called into being the half-forgotten shepherd's pipe tune. And just as the swelling sound of the orchestra, as the ship approaches, takes hold of those pipe notes, changes them, associates them with its elation, breaks their rhythm, lightens their tone quality, speeds up their movement, varies their instrumentation, just so Wagner, no doubt, felt his joy increase when he discovered in his memory the shepherd's tune, built it into his work, gave it all its meaning. This joy, indeed, never leaves him. In his music, however sad the poet is, his sadness is consoled, transcended – and therefore, unfortunately, in some measure destroyed – by the enthusiasm of the maker. But then, as much as by the similarity I had just noticed between Vinteuil's phrase and Wagner's, I was disturbed by this Vulcan-like skill. Could it be this power which creates in the work of great artists the illusion of an essential, irreducible originality, apparently the reflection of a superhuman reality, when it is in fact the product of unremitting industry? If art is nothing but that, it is no more real than life, and I needed to have no regrets. I went on playing *Tristan*. Separated from Wagner by the intervening sound, I could hear him exulting, inviting me to share his joy, I could hear over and over again the eternally youthful laughter and the hammer-blows of Siegfried, in which furthermore, the more perfectly struck out the phrases were, the more the workman's technique served to make them soar more freely above the earth, like birds resembling not Lohengrin's swan, but the aeroplane I had seen at Balbec turning its energy into elevation, gliding above the waves and disappearing into the sky. Perhaps, just as the birds who soar highest, who fly fastest, have the most powerful wings, we need those thoroughly material devices to explore the infinite, those hundred-and-twenty-horsepower Mysteries[28] in which, it must be said, however high one soars, one's appreciation of the silence of space is somewhat impeded by the powerful rumble of the engine!

I do not know why my wandering thoughts, which so far had been following memories of music, now turned to some of the best musical performers of our age, among whom, exaggerating his talent somewhat, I placed Morel. Immediately my thoughts took a sudden new direction and focussed on the character of Morel, and some of the strangenesses of that character. In fact – and that fact might be related to, but not confused with, the neurasthenia from which he suffered – Morel often spoke of his own life, but gave an image of it so shrouded in darkness that it was difficult to make anything out. For example, he was M. de Charlus's to command, provided he could keep his evenings free, for he wanted to go to an algebra class after dinner. M. de Charlus gave his permission, but wanted to see him afterwards. 'Impossible, it's an old Italian painting' (transcribed in this way, the joke is meaningless; but since M. de Charlus had given Morel *L'Éducation sentimentale*[29] to read, in the penultimate chapter of which Frédéric Moreau makes this statement, Morel now never spoke the word 'impossible' without adding, 'it's an old Italian painting'). 'The course often goes on very late; and the teacher's already doing us a big favour, and of course he'd be offended … – But you don't need to go to lessons, algebra isn't swimming, or even English, you could just as well learn it out of a book,' M. de Charlus would reply, having immediately recognized in the algebra lessons one of those images behind which one could see nothing. Perhaps Morel was sleeping with a woman, or, trying to raise money by dubious means, was having secret dealings with the police and now had to go on an expedition with them: or worse, perhaps he was on call as a gigolo in a house of prostitution. 'Even better from a book, Morel would reply to M. de Charlus, for you can't understand a word of algebra lessons. – Then why don't you study it at my house instead, where you'd be so much more comfortable?' M. de Charlus could have replied, but he was careful not to, knowing as he did that, keeping only the necessary characteristic of occupying all the evening hours, the imaginary algebra course would immediately have changed into indispensable drawing or dancing lessons. Actually, M. de Charlus could have observed that he was mistaken, at least in part: Morel often spent time at the Baron's house in solving equations. M. de Charlus did object that algebra was of little use to a violinist. Morel replied that he enjoyed it, that it passed the time and relieved his neurasthenia. No doubt M. de Charlus could have tried to learn the truth, to find out the real nature of these mysterious, indispensable algebra lessons that were given only at night. But M. de Charlus had not time to unravel the twisted skein of Morel's occupations: he was too taken up himself with those of society. Calls received or paid, hours spent at his club, fashionable dinner-parties, evenings at the theatre took his mind off Morel's doings and let him ignore the aggression, both violent and underhand, which Morel had, it was said, both displayed and concealed in the various social milieux, the successive towns through which he had passed, and where his name was now only mentioned with a shudder, in an undertone and without giving any details. It was one of these outbursts of nervous aggression that I had the misfortune to overhear that day when, having left the piano, I went down into the courtyard to meet Albertine, who had still not arrived. As I passed in front of Jupien's shop, where Morel was alone with the girl I imagined he was soon to marry, Morel was shouting at the top of his voice, which brought out an accent in him that I had not heard before, a peasant accent he normally suppressed, which sounded very strange. His words were no less strange, the French was bad, but then he knew nothing properly. 'Get out, slut, great slut, you great slut,'[30] he was repeating to the poor girl, who certainly at first had not understood what he was saying, but now, proud and trembling, stood stock-still in front of him. 'I said get out, great slut, you great slut, go and get your uncle till I tell him what you are, you whore.' Just at that moment I heard Jupien's voice coming into the courtyard, talking to one of his friends, and as I knew that Morel was extremely cowardly, I did not think it necessary to offer my help to Jupien and his friend, who would be entering the shop at any moment, and I went back upstairs so as to avoid Morel, who, although he had been loudly demanding (no doubt in order to frighten and dominate the girl by some kind of probably groundless blackmail) that Jupien should be fetched, made himself scarce as soon as he heard him in the courtyard. The words in themselves are nothing, they cannot explain the beating of my heart as I went back up the stairs. These scenes which we witness in real life gain an incalculable power from what soldiers call, when describing an attack, surprise effect, and despite the blessed calm which I felt at the thought that Albertine, instead of staying at the Trocadéro, was coming home to me, my ears were still full of the sound of those constantly repeated words, 'great slut, great slut', which had so upset me.

Slowly my agitation receded. Albertine would be home soon. I would hear her ring the door-bell in a moment. I could feel that my life was no longer what it once might have been; and that to have, in this way, a woman with whom, quite naturally, when she came home, I would be expected to go out, to whose embellishment the strength and activity of my being would be increasingly devoted, made me into something like a twig which has grown in length, but is

weighed down by the plump fruit in which all its reserves of strength have been concentrated. In contrast with the anxiety I had been suffering a mere hour before, the calm produced in me by Albertine's return was more complete than the one I had experienced in the morning, before she left. Confident in the future, of which I saw myself as master, thanks to my friend's docility, it was a stronger, fuller sense of calm, made stable by her imminent, inevitable, irritating, sweet presence: the calm (lulled by which we need not seek happiness within ourselves) of family feeling, of domestic happiness. Family, domestic bliss: that was the feeling which not only had brought me such peace while I was waiting for Albertine, but which I experienced again when I went out with her later. She took off her glove for a moment, either to touch my hand, or to dazzle me by letting me see, on her little finger, next to the ring Mme Bontemps had given her, another on which there gleamed the large, liquid expanse of a bright sliver of ruby. 'Another ring, Albertine! Your aunt is certainly generous! – No, this one isn't from my aunt, she laughed. I bought it myself: you're so good to me, I can save lots of money. I'm not even sure who it did belong to. A customer who had run out of money left it with the owner of a hotel I stayed in at Le Mans. He didn't know what to do with it and would have let me have it for much less than it was worth. But it was still much too dear for me. But now, thanks to you, I'm a smart lady, and I sent to ask him if he still had it. And here it is. – That's a lot of rings, Albertine. Where will you put the one I'm going to give you? Anyhow, this one is very pretty; I can't make out the carving around the ruby, it looks like the head of a man making a face. But I can't see well enough. – Even if your eyesight was better, you wouldn't be any further on. I can't make it out either.' In the past it had often happened to me while reading a novel, or memoirs, in which a man is always going out with a woman, having tea with her, to wish that I could do the same. I sometimes thought I had managed it, when I took out Saint-Loup's mistress, for example, and had dinner with her. But however hard I tried to believe that I was successfully playing the part of the character in the novel, this idea convinced me that I ought to be enjoying my time with Rachel, rather than allowing me actually to do so. The truth is that every time we try to imitate a truly real experience, we forget that that experience was produced, not by a wish to imitate anything, but by an unconscious force, itself also real. But this particular impression, which all my desire to experience a rare pleasure in going out with Rachel had not been enough to procure for me, now appeared spontaneously, without my having sought it at all, for quite different reasons, and sincere, profound ones: to name just one, for the reason that my jealousy did not allow me ever to be far from Albertine or, on the days when I could go out, to allow her to go out without me. It was only now that I felt this pleasure, because our knowledge is not of those things outside ourselves that we wish to observe, but of our involuntary sensations; because then, even though a woman was in the same carriage with me, she was not *really* beside me, so long as she was not recreated for me there from moment to moment by a need of her such as I had for Albertine, so long as the constant caress of my gaze did not renew in her complexion those colours that constantly need to be retouched, and my senses, ever-wakeful even when satisfied, lend taste and consistency to those colours; and so long as jealousy, joined with the senses and the imagination which exalts them, did not keep this woman suspended next to us by a balanced attraction as powerful as the law of gravity.

Our car was going quickly down the boulevards and avenues, whose rows of large houses, frozen pink cliffs of sun and cold, recalled to me my visits to Mme Swann, those afternoons gently illuminated by chrysanthemums as we waited for the lamps to be lit. I had hardly time to notice, being just as cut off from them by the car windows as I would have been behind the window of my bedroom, a young fruit-seller, a dairy-girl standing in front of her shop door, lit up by the winter sun, like a heroine whom my desire could involve in the most delicious complications, on the threshold of a novel which I should never read. For I could hardly ask Albertine to stop, and I had already lost sight of the young women, almost before my eyes had had time to distinguish their features and caress their youthful freshness in the blond vapour in which they were enveloped. The intensity of feeling which seized me at the sight of a wine-merchant's cashier at her desk or a laundry-girl chatting in the street was the feeling we have when we recognize goddesses. Now that there is no more Olympus, its inhabitants live on earth. And when, working on a mythological subject, painters have got working-class girls from the most humble occupations to pose as Venus or Ceres, far from committing a sacrilege, they have only restored to them the divine attributes of which they had been unjustly stripped. 'What did you think of the Trocadéro, sweetheart? – I'm jolly glad I left it to come and meet you. It's Davioud, isn't it? – Well, well, little Albertine is certainly learning a lot! It *is* Davioud, I'd forgotten that. – While you're asleep I read your books, lazybones. As a monument it's not much to look at, is it? – Dear child, you're changing so fast and getting so clever (it was true, but I was also quite pleased that she should have the satisfaction, in the absence of others, of being able to tell herself that the time she spent at my house was not completely wasted) that if I needed to I could tell you things that most people would think were nonsense but which have a kind of truth that I'm looking for. Do you know what Impressionism is? – Yes, of course. – Then think about this: do you remember the church at Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse that he[31] didn't like because it was new? Well, isn't he going against the ideas of his own Impressionism when he isolates these important buildings from the general impression surrounding them, takes them out of the light they're dissolved in and examines their intrinsic value like an archaeologist? When he is painting, don't a hospital or a school or a poster on a wall have the same value as a priceless cathedral standing next to them, in one indivisible image? Remember how the façade was baked in the sun, how the relief of those Marcouville saints floated in the light. What does it matter if a building is new, if it looks old; or even if it doesn't! The poetic quality of old neighbourhoods has been squeezed out to the last drop, but there are some houses newly built for the shopkeeper class, in new neighbourhoods, where the newly cut stone is still too white, that scream in the burning midday air of July, when the shopkeepers are coming home to lunch in the suburbs, with a note as acid as the smell of cherries waiting for the meal to be served in the shuttered dining-room, where the glass prism knife-rests glint with multicoloured lights as beautiful as the stained-glass windows of Chartres? – What a lovely idea! If I ever develop any intelligence, it will be thanks to you. – Why, on a beautiful day, should one take one's eyes off the Trocadéro, whose giraffe-neck towers[32] remind one of the Charterhouse at Pavia? – It made me think of something else, sitting on its little hill like that: a Mantegna reproduction of yours, *Saint Sebastian* I think, where there's a town in the background arranged in the shape of an amphitheatre and you'd swear one of the buildings is the Trocadéro. – You see! But how did you come to see the Mantegna? You're amazing.'

We had arrived in a more working-class neighbourhood, and the setting-up of an ancillary Venus behind every counter turned it into a kind of suburban altar before which I would gladly have spent my life in adoration. As one does on the eve of an untimely death, I was drawing up a list of the pleasures of which I was being deprived by Albertine's having set a final period to my freedom. In Passy the pavements were so crowded that young girls walking in the roadway itself, with their arms round each other's waists, showed me the wonder of their smiles. I had not time to make them out very clearly, but I do not think I exaggerated their beauty; for in any crowd, any youthful crowd, it is common to find the effigy of a noble profile. So that unruly holiday mobs are as fruitful terrain for the voluptuary as for the archaeologist the disorderly aftermath of an excavation which may turn up ancient medals. We arrived at the Bois.

I was thinking that if Albertine had not come out with me, I could, at that moment, have been in the Champs-Elysées Circus,[33] listening as the Wagnerian tempest set all the rigging of the orchestra groaning and drew towards itself like an airy foam the shepherd's pipe tune that I had just been playing, setting it flying through the air, kneading it, pulling it out of shape, splitting it, catching it up in an ever-growing whirlwind. At the very least, I wanted our outing to be a short one, and for us to go home early, since, unknown to Albertine, I had decided to spend the evening at the Verdurins'. They had recently sent me an invitation which I had thrown in the wastepaper basket like all the others. But I had changed my mind about this evening, for I wanted to try to find out who the people were that Albertine had been hoping to meet at their house that afternoon. To tell the truth, I had reached the point with Albertine where (if everything continues in the same way, if things follow the normal course) a woman has no more interest for us except as the means of transition to another woman. She still has a place in our heart, but only a very small place; we cannot wait to go out each evening and meet women we do not know, and particularly women unknown to us but known to her, who will be able to tell us how she has lived. Her we have already taken possession of, exhausted everything she has been willing to tell us about herself. Her life is her, of course, but precisely the part of her that we do not know, the things we vainly questioned her about and which we shall be able to collect from new lips.

If my life with Albertine was to keep me from going to Venice, from travelling, then today I could at least, if I had been alone, have got to know the young working-girls who were dotted about in the brilliant sunshine of that fine Sunday, and in whose beauty I mentally located a large part of the unknown life which animated them. When one sees a person's eyes, are they not suffused with a look which bears within it, inseparable from it, its own images, memories,

expectations, disdains? Will not this existence, which is that of the passing being, give, according to its own nature, a different meaning to the frown that we observe, to the dilation of the nostrils? Albertine's presence deprived me of the chance of approaching these girls and thereby, perhaps, of ceasing to desire them. The man who wants to keep alive in himself the wish to go on living and belief in something more delicious than the things of every day, must go out walking; for the streets, the avenues are filled with Goddesses. But Goddesses do not let us approach them. Here and there, among the trees, a servant kept watch like a nymph at the entrance to a sacred grove, while in the distance three young girls sat by the immense arc of their bicycles, which lay on the ground next to them, like three immortals leaning on the cloud or the magic steed which would bear them on their mythological journeys. I noticed that Albertine would look for a moment, with deep attention, at these girls and then turn immediately back towards me. But I was not unduly tormented by the intensity of this contemplation, nor by its brevity, for which the intensity compensated; as far as the latter was concerned, it often happened that Albertine, whether from tiredness or a characteristically attentive habit of looking, would let her eyes rest as if in a kind of meditation upon, perhaps, my father, or Françoise; and as for her way of rapidly turning back towards me, it could have been explained by the fact that Albertine, knowing my suspicions, might wish, even if they were unjustified, not to give them any grounds. The attention paid to these young girls would have seemed criminal to me in Albertine (and just as much so if she had been looking at young men); yet I directed the same attention, without a moment's guilt – and almost feeling that Albertine was guilty for keeping me, by her presence, from stopping the car and getting out – upon every shop-girl we passed. We find desiring innocent, and hideous that the other should desire. And this contrast between what applies to us and to the woman we love, is not only a matter of desire, but also of lying. What is more usual than to lie, whether we wish to conceal, say, the daily fluctuations of our health when we want to represent it as strong, or to hide a vice, or to go, without hurting another, towards the thing which we prefer? Lying is the most necessary means of self-preservation, and the most used. And yet it is the thing we are determined to expunge from the life of the woman we love, lying is what we spy upon, sniff out, hate above all. It turns our feelings upside down, it is enough to make us break off a relationship, it seems to us to hide the greatest faults, unless of course it hides them so well that we do not suspect their existence. What a strange state it is in which we are so sensitive to a pathogen whose ubiquitous pullulation makes it harmless to the world at large, and yet so dangerous to the unfortunate subject who happens to have lost his immunity to it! The life of those pretty girls, since – spending so much time as I did shut away indoors – I so rarely met any of them, seemed to me, as it does to all those in whom the ease of achievement has not impaired the power of ambition, something as different from anything I knew, something as desirable as the most wonderful cities to which one might dream of travelling.

The disappointment I had experienced with women whom I had known, or in cities to which I had travelled, did not prevent me from giving myself up to the attraction of new ones and believing in their reality, just as seeing Venice – Venice, which this springlike weather made me long for all the more, and which marriage to Albertine would prevent me from ever getting to know – seeing Venice in a panorama which Ski might have said was more prettily coloured than the city itself, would have in no way replaced for me the actual journey to Venice, a journey which, despite its length, arrived at without any reference to me, it seemed to me absolutely necessary to complete. In the same way, a young dressmaker artificially procured for me by a bawd would have been no possible substitute for the tall yet almost childish figure I saw passing under the trees at this moment, laughing with a friend. The one I found in a house of assignation might have been prettier, still it would not have been the same, because when we look at the eyes of a girl we do not know, it is not like looking at a little opal or agate plaque. No, we know that the little ray of light which strikes prismatic glints from them, the diamond dust which seems to glitter there, are all that we can see of a mind, a will, a memory in which dwell the family house we do not know, the dear friends whom we so envy. The hope of taking possession of all that – such a difficult, such a thankless task – is what gives her eyes their value, much more than any mere material beauty (and this explains how the same young man can set in train a whole romance in the imagination of a woman who has heard that he was the Prince of Wales, and be of no further interest to her as soon as she learns she was mistaken); to find the little dressmaker in the house of ill-fame is to find her emptied of that unknown life which we hope to possess in the act of possessing her, it is to look into eyes which have now indeed become nothing but precious stones; when she wrinkles her nose, the folds have no more meaning than those of a flower. No, in relation to the unknown working-girl who was passing just then, it seemed to me just as vital, if I wished to go on believing in her reality, as it would be to make a long railway journey if I wished to believe in the Pisa I would see at the end of it, which would then be something more than a pavilion at a universal exhibition, to put up with her refusals and wear down her resistance by changing my approach, risking an insult and returning to the attack, winning her agreement to a meeting, waiting for her when she came out of work, learning incident by incident what made up the girl's life, getting through the layers that, in her mind, surrounded the pleasure I was seeking, and covering the distance that her different habits and particular life placed between me and the attention, the favour that I wanted to win and make my own. But these very similarities between desire and travel made me promise myself that one day I would grasp more effectively the nature of this force, invisible but as strong as religious belief, or in the world of physics as atmospheric pressure, which so raised in my estimation cities, or women, for so long as I did not know them, but fell away beneath them as soon as I approached them, depositing them on the flat earth of vulgar reality. Further off another girl was kneeling by her bicycle, mending it. As soon as the repair was done, the young rider jumped on her machine, but without throwing her leg over it as a man would do. For a moment the bicycle swerved from side to side, and the young body seemed to have acquired a sail, a huge wing, and presently we saw the youthful being, half-human and half-winged, an angel or a peri, continuing her journey.

There exactly was what Albertine's presence, what my life with Albertine, was depriving me of. Depriving? Should I not have said, on the contrary, the gift it brought to me? If Albertine had not been living with me, if she had been free, I should have been imagining all these women, and quite rightly, as possible, as probable objects of her desire, of her pleasure. They would have appeared to me like dancers in some diabolical ballet, representing Temptations for one character, firing their arrows into the heart of another. Working-girls, young ladies, actresses, how I should have hated them all! Objects of horror to me, they would have been set apart from the beauty of the universe. The subjection of Albertine, by sparing me the suffering they could have caused me, replaced them in the world's beauty. Harmless as they now were, deprived of the dart which plants jealousy in our heart, I could freely admire them, caress them with my eyes and perhaps one day even more intimately. By shutting away Albertine, I had restored to the world all those glittering wings which rustle in public promenades, at balls, at the theatre, and which were coming to tempt me once more now that she could no longer succumb to their temptation. These wings made up the beauty of the world. They had once made the beauty of Albertine. It was because I had seen her as a mysterious bird, then as a great actress of the beach scene, desired and, who knows, enjoyed, that she had seemed wonderful to me. Once a captive in my house, the marvellous bird I had once seen walking with measured pace on the promenade, surrounded by the gathering of other girls like gulls alighting from nowhere in particular, had lost all its colours: they had vanished along with other people's chances of making Albertine their own. Little by little she had lost her beauty. It was only on outings like today's, when I could imagine her, if she were out without me, being accosted by some young woman or young man, that I could see her once more amid the splendour of the beach, even though my jealousy was on another plane from the declining pleasures of my imagination. But in spite of these sudden, recurring moments when, desired by others, she was beautiful once more in my eyes, I could easily divide the time she had spent with me into two periods: the first, when she was still, though less each day, the glittering actress of the beach, and the second when, having become the grey prisoner, reduced to her dull self, she needed those flashes in which I remembered the past to restore something of her brilliance.

Sometimes, during those hours when I felt the greatest indifference to her, a memory would return to me of a moment on the beach, when I did not know her yet; she was not far from a certain lady with whom I was now almost sure that she had had relations, and she was laughing loudly while giving me an insolent look. The polished, blue sea murmured all around. In the sunlight of the beach, Albertine, surrounded by her friends, was the most beautiful of all. She was a splendid-looking girl who, in this her usual setting of a vast seascape, had, under the eyes of this lady who so admired her, inflicted this slight upon me. It was ineradicable, for the lady might return to Balbec, might notice on the beach, full of light and the sound of the sea, the absence of Albertine. But she could not know that the girl now lived with me, belonged only to me. The vast, blue waters, her forgetfulness of the passing fancy she had had for Albertine, which had now turned towards others, had washed over Albertine's insult, enclosing it in a glittering and unbreakable casket. Then hatred for this woman would bite into my heart; for Albertine too, but that was a hatred mixed with admiration for the beautiful, worshipped young girl with her marvellous hair, whose sudden laugh on the beach was an affront. Shame, jealousy, the memory of initial desire and its dazzling setting had given Albertine back her former beauty, her value to me. And thus there alternated, with the slight weight of boredom I felt when I was with her, a trembling desire, full of splendid images and regret for the past, according to whether she was sitting next to me in my room, or I gave her back her freedom in my memory, setting her walking on the promenade, in her gay beach-dresses, against the background music of the sea, Albertine, now removed from that setting, possessed and retaining little value, and now placed in it once more, escaping from me into a past I could not know, insulting me in front of the lady, her friend, as real as the splashing of the waves and the dazzling of the sun, Albertine, put back on the beach or withdrawn from it into my bedroom, in a kind of amphibious love.

Elsewhere in the Bois a large group of girls was playing ball. All these little girls had wanted to make the best of the sunshine, for February days, even when they are as bright as these, do not last long, and the brilliance of their light cannot postpone its fading. Even before darkness fell we had a considerable time of half-light, because, after we had driven as far as the Seine, where Albertine admired, and by her presence prevented me from admiring, the reflections of red sails in the blue, wintry water, and a tile-roofed house huddled in the distance like a single poppy on the bright horizon which seemed, further to the west, at Saint-Cloud, to have become petrified and fragmented, crumbly and ribbed, we got out of the car and walked for a long time. For a few moments I even took her arm, and it seemed that the ring that her arm made as it passed under mine joined our two selves as a single being and linked our futures one to the other. At our feet our shadows, first parallel, then close and finally merged, drew an enchanting pattern. Of course it still seemed wonderful to me at home that Albertine should be living with me, that it should be she who lay down on my bed. But it was like a transference of that wonder out of doors, into nature itself, when in front of the lake in the Bois that I loved so much, at the foot of its trees, it should be her very shadow, the pure, simplified outline of her leg, her torso, that the sun was called upon to paint in ink-and-wash on the fine gravel of the path. And I found a charm, more immaterial no doubt but no less intimate than that of the nearness, the joining of our bodies, in the fusion of our shadows. Then we got back into the car. And it started back, down little, twisting paths where the winter trees, hung in ivy and brambles, looked as if they should lead to a magician's lair. As we emerged from their gloom and headed out of the Bois, we found ourselves in broad daylight once more, so bright that I thought I would have time to do everything I wanted before dinner; however, it was only a few moments later, as our car approached the Arc de Triomphe, that I was surprised and alarmed to see, hanging over Paris, the full moon, premature as the dial of a stopped clock which makes one think one is already late. We had told the driver to take us home. For her, that meant coming home with me. The presence of women, however much we love them, who have to leave us to go home, does not give us that sense of peace which I now enjoyed with Albertine sitting in the back of the car beside me, a presence which was taking us, not towards the emptiness of the hours when we are apart, but to an even more stable unity, better enclosed in my home, which was also her home, the material symbol of my possession of her. Certainly, to possess something one must have desired it. We can possess a line, a surface, a volume only if our love occupies it. But Albertine, as we rode in the car, had not been for me, as Rachel had been all those years before, an empty dust-cloud of flesh and fabric. The imagination of my eyes, my lips, my hands at Balbec had so solidly built up her body, polished it so lovingly, that now, in this car, to touch her body, to contain it, I did not have to press mine against her, nor even to see her, it was enough to hear her voice and, if she fell silent, to know that she was there, near me; my senses woven together wrapped around her completely, and when we arrived home and she quite naturally got out of the carriage, I stayed behind for a moment to ask the chauffeur to come back for me, but my gaze still enfolded her as she disappeared from my sight into the entrance, and I still experienced the same pleasantly inert, domestic calm as I saw her, heavy, her cheeks flushed, opulent and a prisoner, coming home with me as if it were the most natural thing in the world, like a woman who belonged to me, and, protected by the walls, vanishing into our house.

Unfortunately she seemed to feel imprisoned there, and to agree with that Mme de la Rochefoucauld, who, asked whether she were not pleased to be in so fine a house as Liancourt, replied that 'there is no such thing as a fine prison', if I could judge by the sad, tired look that she wore that evening as we dined alone in her bedroom. I did not notice it at first, and indeed it was I who was disconsolate at the thought that if I had not had Albertine (for, with her, I would have suffered too much from jealousy in a hotel where she would have been in contact all day with so many other human beings), I could at that moment have been dining in Venice in one of those semi-subterranean little dining-rooms, like the hold of a ship, from where you can see the Grand Canal through little arched windows surrounded with Moorish moulding.

I should add that Albertine much admired a large Barbedienne bronze[34] in my parents' flat, which Bloch rightly considered hideous. He was perhaps less justified in being astonished at my keeping it. Unlike him, I had never tried to create artistic surroundings, to compose room settings, I was too lazy for that, too indifferent to the things I had before my eyes every day. Since my taste was not involved, I had the right not to take notice of décor. All the same, I could have got rid of the bronze. But ugly, expensive things can be useful: they can impress people who do not understand us, do not share our taste, but with whom we might be in love, more than a difficult object which does not yield up its beauty at once. Now it is precisely and only those people who do not understand us whom it may be useful to impress with possessions, since our intelligence will be enough to win the regard of superior beings. Albertine was beginning to have taste, but she

still went in awe of the bronze to some extent, and this awe was transferred to me in the form of an admiration which, since it came from Albertine, was important to me (infinitely more important than the embarrassment of keeping a rather shaming bronze), since I loved Albertine.

But the thought of my slavery suddenly ceased to weigh upon me, and I even wished to prolong it when I seemed to see that Albertine was sorely oppressed by hers. Certainly, every time I had asked her if she found it tiresome living with me, she had always replied that she could not think of anywhere she would be happier. But these words were often belied by a look of longing or of irritation. Certainly, if her tastes were what I had imagined them to be, this situation of being unable ever to satisfy them must have been as irritating to her as it was pacifying to me; pacifying to the point that the hypothesis that I had accused her unjustly would have seemed to me the most probable, except that I would then have had great difficulty in explaining Albertine's extraordinary determination never to be alone, never to be free, not to stop for a moment outside the door as she came in, to have herself conspicuously accompanied to the telephone whenever she had a call to make, by someone who could repeat to me what she had said, Françoise or Andrée; always to leave me alone, as if by accident, with Andrée when they had been out together, so that I could get a detailed report of what they had done. In contrast with this wonderful docility, certain hints of impatience, quickly suppressed, made me wonder if Albertine had not formed the plan of shaking off her chains.

Other events underpinned this suspicion. For example, one day when I had gone out on my own, I met Gisèle near Passy and we talked about one thing and another. Presently, quite pleased to be able to give her this news, I told her that I was seeing quite a lot of Albertine these days. Gisèle asked me where she could find her as there was something she *really must* tell her. 'Oh, what? – Something about some little friends of hers. – What friends are those? I could pass on your message, not of course that that will stop you seeing her yourself. – Oh, just friends from the old days, I can't remember their names,' Gisèle answered with a vague look, beating a hasty retreat. She left me, imagining that she had spoken so cautiously that nothing could have aroused my suspicions. But untruth demands so little, needs only such tiny signs to make its presence obvious. If these had been friends of long ago, whose names she could not even remember, why would she have *really* needed to talk to Albertine about them just then? This adverb, closely related as it was to one of Mme Cottard's favourite expressions, 'it couldn't have come at a better time', could apply only to a particular piece of news, timely, perhaps urgent, concerning particular people. Besides, even her way of opening her mouth, as if in a stifled yawn, before saying vaguely (while almost pulling her body away from me, just as she began, from that moment, to backtrack in our conversation), 'Oh, I don't know, I can't remember their names,' turned her whole figure, and her voice along with it, into an embodiment of untruthfulness, just as her previous, quite different posture, intent, lively, forward-leaning, as she said 'I really must …', had been an indicator of truth. I did not question Gisèle. What would have been the use? Certainly, her way of lying was different from Albertine's. And certainly Albertine's lies hurt me more. But in the first instance there was a point of similarity between them, the mere fact of their being lies, which in some cases is thoroughly obvious. Not that the reality behind the lies is obvious. Everyone knows that although each single murderer thinks he has planned his crime so carefully that he will never be caught, in fact almost all murderers are caught. Liars, on the other hand, are rarely caught out, and among liars, particularly the women one loves. We do not know where she has been or what she has been doing there, but as soon as we hear her talking, talking about something different which conceals the thing she will not speak of, it is immediately obvious that she is lying. And jealousy is redoubled because we can hear the lie and cannot know the truth. With Albertine, the sensation of untruth was given by many details already mentioned in this story, but above all by the fact that, when she was lying, her account was either inadequate, whether from omissions or improbabilities, or else too complete, too full of little details intended to make it more plausible. Verisimilitude, whatever the liar may think, is not at all the same thing as truth. When, as we listen to a true account, we hear something which is merely plausible, which is perhaps more plausible than the truth, perhaps too plausible, the even slightly trained ear notices that something is wrong, as with a line of verse that does not scan, or a wrong word read aloud. The ear hears it and, if we are in love, the heart takes fright.

Why do we not stop to think, before changing our whole lives because we cannot know whether a woman went down the rue de Berri or the rue Washington, why do we not tell ourselves that those few metres of difference, and the woman herself, will shrink to a hundred millionth of their size (that is, to a size we can no longer perceive), if only we are wise enough not to see the woman for several years, and that she who was Gulliver-sized and much more will shrink to a Lilliputian whom no microscope – of the heart, that is, for the objective instrument of memory is more powerful and less fragile – will be any longer able to perceive! In any case, even if there was something in common between Albertine's and Gisèle's lies – the fact of being lies – still Gisèle did not lie in quite the same way as Albertine, or as Andrée, but their respective lies fitted so well one into the other, while still presenting a great variety, that the little gang had the impenetrable solidity of certain commercial, publishing or bookselling houses, in dealings with which the poor author, for example, can never succeed in finding out, despite the variety of different personalities making them up, whether or not he is being swindled. The newspaper or magazine editor lies with an air of sincerity all the more impressive for his need to conceal the fact that very often he is behaving in exactly the same way, resorting to the same commercial tricks, as the other editors, theatre directors or publishers he has condemned so roundly since raising and carrying into battle against them the standard of Sincerity. To have once proclaimed (as the leader of a political party, or in any capacity) that it is appalling to lie, usually obliges one to lie more than other people, without however putting aside the solemn mask, the august tiara of trustworthiness. The associate of the 'sincere man' lies in a different way and more naïvely. He deceives his author as he might deceive his wife, with tricks from stage farce. The managing editor, an honest, clumsy soul, lies quite straightforwardly, like an architect who assures you your house will be ready on a date when it will not have been started. The editor-in-chief floats in his unworldliness among the previous three and, not knowing what is going on, gives them, out of a sense of fraternal duty and loving solidarity, the valuable support of his unimpeachable word. These four people are constantly quarrelling, except when the arrival of the author reconciles them. Forgetting their particular disputes, they recall the great military duty to come to the aid of the threatened 'corps'. Without realizing it, I had long been playing the role of that author in relation to the 'little gang'. If Gisèle had been thinking, when she used the word 'really', about some friend of Albertine's who would have been happy to go travelling with her as soon as my friend found some pretext or other for leaving me, and had wanted to let Albertine know that the time had come or was at hand, Gisèle would have let herself be cut in pieces rather than give away the secret to me. There was therefore no point in asking her any questions.

Meetings like the ones with Gisèle were not the only thing which increased my suspicions. For example, I was looking at Albertine's paintings. And these paintings, touching pursuits of the prisoner, so moved me that I praised them to her. 'No, they're hopeless, but then I've never had a single drawing lesson. – But one evening at Balbec you sent me a message to say you were kept late at a drawing lesson.' I reminded her of the day and said that of course I had understood at once that people don't have drawing lessons at that time of night. Albertine blushed. 'You're right, she said, I wasn't taking drawing lessons, I told you a lot of lies at the beginning, I admit. But I never lie to you now.' How I should have loved to know what all those early lies were! But I knew already that her confessions would have been further lies. So I simply kissed her. I asked her to tell me just one of the lies. She answered, 'Well, for example, I said that the sea air was bad for me.' In the face of such an attitude, I asked no more.

Every being we love, up to a point every being, is a Janus, showing us its pleasant face as it moves away from us, and its gloomy face if we know it is permanently available to us. In the case of Albertine, living permanently with her was a source of pain in another way which I cannot describe in this story. It is dreadful to have another person's life attached to one's own, like carrying a bomb which one cannot let go of without committing a crime. But let us take as a comparison the elation and despair, the dangers, the worry, the fear of seeing people in later years believe things which are untrue but plausible, and which one will not then be able to explain, all the things one experiences if living in private contact with a madman. For example, I pitied M. de Charlus for living with Morel (and immediately the memory of that afternoon's scene made the left side of my chest feel much larger than the other); setting aside whatever their sexual relations might be, M. de Charlus could not have known at the beginning that Morel was mad. Morel's beauty, his commonplace mind, his pride must have ensured that M. de Charlus did not entertain such far-fetched ideas, until the appearance of the attacks of melancholy in which Morel blamed M. de Charlus for his unhappiness, without being able to offer any explanations, accused him of not trusting him, with a mixture of insults and devious but extremely subtle

reasoning, and threatened him with desperate solutions, in the midst of which threats could still be discerned the most twisted manœuvres of immediate cupidity. All this is just for comparison. Albertine was not mad.

To make her chains seem lighter, I thought the best idea was to convince her that I meant to break them. But I could not begin to feed her this lie now, when she had just been so good in coming back from the Trocadéro; what I could do, rather than upsetting her with threats of a separation, was to keep silent about the dreams of a permanent life together which were even then forming in my grateful heart. As I looked at her, I could hardly keep myself from pouring them out to her, and perhaps she realized it. Unfortunately the expression of such dreams is not contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, daily seeing in his own imagination only a proud young man, comes to believe in himself as a proud young man, the more so as he becomes more affected and more laughable, this case applies more generally, and the passionate lover is so unfortunate as not to recognize that, while he sees a beautiful face before him, his mistress sees his face which is not made more beautiful, quite the opposite, when deformed by the pleasure he feels at the sight of beauty. And love does not exhaust the applicability of this model; we do not see our own bodies, which others see, and pursue our own thought, the object invisible to others, wherever it leads. An artist is sometimes able to show this object in his work. That is why the admirers of the work are disappointed in the author, in whose face this inner beauty is but imperfectly reflected.

Retaining from my dream of Venice only what could relate to Albertine and make the time she spent with me more tolerable, I mentioned to her a Fortuny dress that we must go and order in the next few days. I was trying to discover new pleasures with which to divert her. I would have liked to be able to surprise her by giving her, if I could find any, some pieces of old French silver. In fact, when we had discussed the idea of having a yacht, a plan which Albertine dismissed as impossible – as I did whenever I thought her virtuous, and life with her therefore as ruinous as marriage with her would be impossible – we had, still without her thinking that I would buy one, taken advice from Elstir.

I learned that that day there had been a death which caused me great sadness, that of Bergotte. His illness had, of course, been a long one. Not his first, which had been of natural length. Nature seems unable to give any but short illnesses. But medicine has taken over the art of prolonging them. Medicines, the remission they secure, the symptoms which return when they are stopped, make up an artificial disease to which the patient's habituation gives a stable, stylized form, just as children regularly have coughing fits long after they have got over whooping-cough. Then the medicines become less effective, the dose is increased, they no longer do any good, but the patient has been keeping his bed so long that they begin to do harm. Nature would never have given them such a long reign. It is a marvellous thing that medicine should be almost as powerful as nature, should force the patient to stay in bed and, under pain of death, to continue a treatment. By this time, the artificially introduced disease has taken root, has become a secondary but true illness, the only difference being that natural diseases can get better, but never medical ones, for medicine knows nothing of the secrets of cure.

Bergotte had not been out of the house for years. He had never liked society, or rather he had once liked it for a single day, only to despise it afterwards as he despised everything, after his own fashion, which was not to despise what one cannot obtain, but what one has obtained, as soon as one has obtained it. He lived so simply that no one suspected how rich he was, and had people known it they would still have misunderstood him, imagining him to be a miser when in fact no one was more generous. He was particularly so to women, girls rather, who were ashamed to take so much from him in return for so little. He excused his behaviour to himself because he knew he could never produce so well as in an atmosphere where he felt he was in love. Love, no, pleasure well rooted in the flesh helps literary work because it cancels out other pleasures, the pleasures of social life, for example, which are the same for everyone. And even if this love brings disillusion, at least that too keeps the surface of the soul in motion, where otherwise it might become stagnant. Desire, therefore, can be useful to the man of letters, first by keeping him at a distance from other men and from resembling them, then by restoring some movement to a spiritual machine which otherwise, beyond a certain age, tends to seize up. None of this makes us happy, but we can examine the reasons that keep us from being so, reasons which would have remained hidden from us if not for these sudden irruptions of disappointment. And dreams cannot be made real, we know that; still, perhaps we would not form any without desire, and it is useful to have dreams so that we can see their collapse and learn from it. So it was that Bergotte said to himself, 'I spend more on girls than a multi-millionaire, but the pleasures or disappointments they bring me allow me to write a book and make money.' On economic grounds this reasoning was absurd, but no doubt he took some pleasure in transmuting gold into caresses in this way, and caresses back into gold. And then, as we saw when my grandmother died, his tired old age loved repose. Now in society, there is nothing but conversation. Stupid conversation, but it serves to eliminate women, who become nothing but questions and answers. Outside fashionable society, women become once more what is so restful for a tired old man – something to look at.

Anyway, none of that any longer arose. I said that Bergotte never went out, and when he got up for an hour in his room, he was covered in shawls and rugs, everything one wraps around oneself to face the bitter cold of a railway journey. He would apologize to the few friends whom he admitted to visit him, pointing to his plaids, his blankets and saying gaily, 'It can't be helped, dear boy, after all, as Anaxagoras said, life is a journey.' Thus he grew colder and colder, a little planet offering a foretaste of what the last days of the big one will be, when first warmth and then life recede from the Earth. Then there will be an end to resurrection, for however far into the world of future generations the works of men may cast their light, still they will need human beings to see them. Even if certain animal species stand up better than men to the encroaching cold, and even supposing Bergotte's glory to have survived for so long, at this moment it will suddenly be extinguished for ever. The last surviving animals will not read him, for it is hardly likely that, like the apostles at Pentecost, they will be able to understand the languages of the various human peoples without having learned them.

In the months preceding his death, Bergotte suffered from insomnia, and what is worse, as soon as he fell asleep, from nightmares, so that when he awoke he did his best not to go to sleep again. He had long been a lover of dreams, even bad dreams, because it is they, in the way they contradict reality, which give us, when we wake up if not before, the profound sensation that we have been asleep. But Bergotte's nightmares were not of that kind. When he spoke of nightmares, formerly he had meant unpleasant things happening in his brain. But now he experienced, as things coming from outside himself, a hand holding a wet cloth, the hand of an angry woman who was rubbing it over his face, trying to wake him up, intolerable itching of his sides, the fury – because Bergotte had muttered in his sleep that he was driving badly – of a raging mad coachman who threw himself on the writer, biting his fingers, trying to saw them off. Finally, as soon as darkness had gathered thickly enough over his sleep, nature would stage a kind of undress rehearsal of the apoplectic attack that was to carry him off: Bergotte would be passing through the carriage entrance of the Swanns' new house and wanting to alight. An overpowering dizziness would pin him to his seat, the concierge would try to help him down, but he would remain seated, unable to stand, to straighten his legs. He would try to hold on to the stone pillar in front of him, but would not find the support he needed to stay upright. He consulted the doctors who, flattered at having been called in by him, saw in his great commitment to work (he had done nothing for twenty years), in the way he had been over-working, the reason for his feeling so ill. They advised him not to read frightening stories (he never read anything), to get out more into the 'vital' light of the sun (if he had had a few years of somewhat better health, it was only because of never leaving the house), to eat more (which made him lose weight and above all intensified his nightmares). One of his doctors was endowed with the spirit of contradiction and teasing, and when Bergotte saw him in the absence of the others and, in order not to offend him, put forward as his own ideas what the other doctors had advised him, the disobliging doctor, thinking that Bergotte was trying to get him to prescribe something that he liked, forbade him it immediately, and often for reasons so quickly invented for the purpose that, faced with Bergotte's convincing, material objections, the contrary doctor had in the same breath to contradict himself, but still, for different reasons, maintained his prohibition. Bergotte went back to one of the original doctors, a man who prided himself on his intelligence, especially when faced with a master of the pen, and who, if Bergotte insinuated, 'I did think, though, that Dr X had said – long ago, of course – that that might produce congestion of the kidneys or the brain …', would smile knowingly, wag his finger and pronounce, 'I said use, not over-use. Of course any treatment, if one over-does it, becomes a two-edged sword.' There is in our body a certain instinctive sense of what is good for us, as in our heart of

what is right, which no doctor or medicine or theology can replace. We know that cold baths are bad for us, but we like them, so we can always find a doctor to prescribe them for us, if not to stop them harming us. From each of his doctors Bergotte accepted the things that, out of natural wisdom, he had forbidden himself for years. After a few weeks, his old problems had returned, the new ones had worsened. Made desperate by constant pain, to which was added insomnia punctuated by brief nightmares, Bergotte gave up seeing doctors and tried, with success but to excess, various sleeping-draughts, confidently reading the leaflet which accompanied each one, each of which proclaimed the necessity of sleep but insinuated that all the products that can induce it (except the one in the bottle around which the leaflet was wrapped, which never produced harmful side-effects) were little better than poison, cures that were worse than the disease. Bergotte tried them all. Some are of a different family from the ones we are used to, being derived, for example, from amyl and ethyl. One swallows the new product, with its different chemical composition, in delicious anticipation of the unknown. Where will the newcomer take us, towards what unknown kinds of sleep, of dreams? Now it is inside us, controlling the direction of our thoughts. How shall we fall asleep? And once we are asleep, down what strange paths, to what peaks or unexplored abysses will the all-powerful master lead us? What new system of sensations shall we meet on this journey? Will it lead us to sickness? To blessedness? To death? Bergotte's death had happened the previous day, a day when he had put his trust in one of these too-powerful friends (or enemies).

This is how he died: after a mild uremic attack he had been ordered to rest. But a critic having written that in Vermeer's *View of Delft* (lent by the museum at The Hague for an exhibition of Dutch painting), a painting he adored and thought he knew perfectly, a little patch of yellow wall (which he could not remember) was so well painted that it was, if one looked at it in isolation, like a precious work of Chinese art, of an entirely self-sufficient beauty, Bergotte ate a few potatoes and went out to the exhibition. As he climbed the first set of steps, his head began to spin. He passed several paintings and had an impression of the sterility and uselessness of such an artificial form, and how inferior it was to the outdoor breezes and sunlight of a palazzo in Venice, or even an ordinary house at the seaside. Finally he stood in front of the Vermeer, which he remembered as having been more brilliant, more different from everything else he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic's article, he now noticed for the first time little figures in blue, the pinkness of the sand, and finally the precious substance of the tiny area of wall. His head spun faster; he fixed his gaze, as a child does on a yellow butterfly he wants to catch, on the precious little patch of wall. 'That is how I should have written, he said to himself. My last books are too dry, I should have applied several layers of colour, made my sentences precious in themselves, like that little patch of yellow wall.' He knew how serious his dizziness was. In a heavenly scales he could see, weighing down one of the pans, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow. He could feel that he had rashly given the first for the second. 'I would really rather not, he thought, be the human interest item in this exhibition for the evening papers.' He was repeating to himself, 'Little patch of yellow wall with a canopy, little patch of yellow wall.' While saying this he collapsed on to a circular sofa; then suddenly, he stopped thinking that his life was in danger and said to himself, 'It's just indigestion; those potatoes were undercooked.' He had a further stroke, rolled off the sofa on to the ground as all the visitors and guards came running up. He was dead. Dead for ever? Who can say? Certainly spiritualist experiments provide no more proof than religious dogma of the soul's survival. What we can say is that everything in our life happens as if we entered it bearing a burden of obligations contracted in an earlier life; there is nothing in the conditions of our life on this earth to make us feel any obligation to do good, to be scrupulous, even to be polite, nor to make the unbelieving artist feel compelled to paint a single passage twenty times over, when the admiration it will excite will be of little importance to his body when it is eaten by the worms, like the little piece of yellow wall painted with such knowledge and such refinement by the never-to-be-known artist whom we have barely identified by the name of Vermeer. All these obligations which do not derive their force from the here-and-now seem to belong to a different world founded on goodness, conscientiousness, sacrifice, a world quite different from this one, which we leave to be born on to this earth, and to which we shall perhaps return, to live under those unknown laws which we have obeyed because we carried their teaching within us without knowing who had written it there, these laws to which we are brought closer by any profound work of the intellect, and which are invisible – if ever wholly invisible – only to fools. So that the idea that Bergotte was not dead for ever is not at all implausible.

They buried him, but all the night before his funeral, in the lighted bookshop windows, his books, set out in threes, kept watch like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection.

I learned, as I said, that Bergotte had died that day. And I marvelled at the inaccuracy of the newspapers who, all copying the same piece of information, said that he had died the day before. For Albertine had met him the day before, she told me about it that evening, and he had even kept her a little late, for he had talked to her for quite a long time. Probably she had been the last person he spoke to. She had met him through me; I had not seen him for a long time, but since she had wanted to be introduced to him, a year or so earlier I had written to the aged master to ask permission to bring her to see him. He had agreed to my request, while being a little hurt, I think, that I should come to see him only in order to please someone else, thereby showing how indifferent I was to him myself. Such cases are common; sometimes, the man or woman one begs for a meeting, not for the pleasure of talking to him or her again, but for the sake of a third person, refuses so stubbornly that our protégée believes we have been claiming a power we do not have; more often, the genius or celebrated beauty agrees to our request, but, feeling their fame impugned, or offended in their affection for us, retains for us only a diminished feeling, slightly painful, with a touch of contempt. I guessed long afterwards that I had been wrong in accusing the newspapers of inaccuracy, for Albertine had not met Bergotte on that day at all. But I had not suspected it for a moment, she had told me the story so naturally, and it was only much later that I recognized her charming gift for lying with simplicity. What she said, what she confessed had so much the same character as the forms of the obviously true – those things we see or learn quite undeniably – that she scattered into the empty spaces of life the episodes of another life whose falsehood I did not then suspect. This word falsehood would repay further examination. The universe is true for all of us and different for each one. The evidence of my senses, if I had been outside at that moment, might have told me that the lady had not walked a little way with Albertine. But if I had learned the opposite, it was by a chain of reasoning (one of those chains in which the words of those we trust form strong links), and not by the evidence of the senses. To be able to call on the evidence of the senses, I would precisely have had to be out of doors, which had not been the case. It is easy to see, however, that the hypothesis is not implausible. And then I would have known that Albertine had been lying. But could I have been sure even then? The evidence of the senses is itself a mental event in which conviction creates belief. We have often seen the sense of hearing bring to Françoise not the word actually spoken, but the one she believed to be right, and that this was sufficient for her to ignore the correction implicit in a better pronunciation. Our butler was no different. M. de Charlus was at that time in the habit of wearing very light-coloured trousers which would have been recognizable anywhere. Now the butler, who thought that the word *pissotière* (meaning what M. de Rambuteau had been so distressed to hear the Duc de Guermantes call a 'Rambuteau shelter'[35]) was *pistière*, never in his whole life actually heard anyone say *pissotière*, even though the word was often pronounced that way in his hearing. But error is more stubborn than faith and does not examine its beliefs. I constantly heard the butler say, 'M. le Baron de Charlus must have caught a disease, he spends so much time in the same *pistière*. That's what he gets for all those years running after women. You can tell from those trousers he wears. This morning, Madam sent me on an errand to Neuilly. As I went past the *pistière* in the rue de Bourgogne I saw M. le Baron de Charlus going in. On the way back from Neuilly, a good hour later, I saw his cream-coloured trousers in the same *pistière*, in the same place, in the middle, where he always stands so that nobody can see him.' I knew no one more beautiful, more aristocratic nor younger than a certain niece of Mme de Guermantes. But I heard the doorkeeper of a restaurant where I sometimes went say as she passed, 'Look at that old trout, what a sight! Eighty if she's a day.' As far as the age was concerned, I could not see how he could believe it. But the pageboys standing around him, who laughed every time she passed the hotel on her way to visit her two delightful great-aunts, Mmes de Fezensac and de Balleroy, who lived nearby, saw on the face of the young beauty the eighty years which, jokingly or not, the doorkeeper had ascribed to the 'old trout'. They would have split their sides if one had suggested to them that she was more elegant than one of the two lady cashiers of the hotel, who, disfigured by eczema and absurdly fat, seemed to them a handsome woman. Perhaps only sexual desire could have kept their mistake from taking shape, if it had intervened during the passing of the so-called old trout, and if the boys had found themselves suddenly coveting the youthful goddess. But for unknown reasons, probably of social class origin, this desire had not come into play.

But after all I could have gone out that evening and could have been passing at the time when Albertine would have told me (not having seen me) that she had walked a little way with the lady. A sacred darkness would have taken possession of my mind, I would have begun to doubt that I had seen her alone, I would hardly have even tried to understand what optical illusion could have prevented my seeing the lady, for the world of the stars is no more difficult to know than the real actions of human beings, especially the beings we love, protected as they are against our doubts by stories invented to protect them. For how many years will these stories allow our apathetic love to believe that the beloved has a sister living abroad, or a brother, or a sister-in-law who have never existed! Indeed, if the order of our story did not oblige me here to restrict myself to trivial reasons, how many more serious ones might be revealed behind the fallacious slightness of the beginning of this volume in which, from my bed, I hear the world waking up, sometimes to one kind of weather, sometimes to another! Yes, I have been forced to cut down the facts and to belie the truth, for it is not one universe but millions, almost as many as the number of human eyes and human intelligences, that wake up every morning.

To return to Albertine, I have never known any woman more gifted than she with a happy aptitude for animated lying, lying with the very colouring of life, unless it were a friend of hers, another of my blossoming girls, pink as Albertine, but whose irregular profile, first hollow, then projecting, then hollow again, was just like certain pink flower-heads whose name I have forgotten, but which have the same sinuous outline. This girl, in the realm of invention, was even better than Albertine, for her stories did not include any of those painful moments, any of those hints of underlying rage, which were frequent in my friend's. I have said, though, how charming she was when she was inventing a story which left no room for doubt, for as she spoke one could see before one's eyes the – wholly imaginary – thing she was describing, her speech substituting itself for the power of one's eyes. That was my real perception.

I have added, 'when she was admitting something', and for this reason. Sometimes surprising coincidences gave me jealous suspicions about her, in which there figured beside her another person from the past or, alas, the future. In order to seem sure of what I was saying I would mention the name, and Albertine would reply, 'That's right, I met her a week ago, not far from home. She said hallo and I felt I should reply. I walked a little way with her. But there was never anything between us and there never will be.' Now Albertine had never even met this person, for the very good reason that she had not been in Paris for ten months. But my friend thought that to deny everything would not be convincing. Hence this short, fictitious meeting, so simply described that I could see the lady stopping, saying hallo, walking a little way with her. Plausibility alone had inspired Albertine, not at all the wish to make me jealous. For Albertine, though perhaps not self-interested, liked people to be nice to her. Now although in the course of this work I have had and will have occasion to describe how jealousy intensifies love, it has always been from the lover's point of view. But if the lover has any pride, and even if a separation would kill him, he will not respond to an imagined act of treachery by a kindness, he will withdraw or, without staying away from his mistress, will force himself to feign coldness. So his mistress gains nothing by making him suffer so. On the other hand, if she uses a clever word, or loving caresses, to dissipate the suspicions that were torturing him even if he pretended to be indifferent to them, the lover will not, indeed, experience that desperate heightening of love which jealousy induces, but, suddenly relieved from his suffering, happy, tender, relaxed as one is after a storm when all the rain has fallen and, under the great chestnut trees, one can barely still hear the drip of the hanging drops, already gleaming in the returning sun, he cannot think how to express his gratitude to the one who has cured him. Albertine knew that I loved to reward her for her kindnesses to me, and perhaps that explained why she would invent natural-sounding confessions to justify herself, like her stories which I never doubted, one of which was her meeting with Bergotte at a time when he was already dead. The only ones of Albertine's lies I knew about at this time were the ones Françoise had told me about at Balbec, for example, and which I have not mentioned, much as they hurt me at the time: 'She didn't want to come so she said to me, "Couldn't you tell your master you couldn't find me, I'd gone out?" ' But our 'inferiors', when they love us, as Françoise did, always like to wound us in our self-regard.

After dinner, I said to Albertine that I wanted to take advantage of being out of bed to go and see some friends, Mme de Villeparisis, Mme de Guermantes, the Cambremers, I hardly knew, any of them that I found at home. The only name I did not mention was that of the people to whose house I was intending to go, the Verdurins. I asked Albertine if she wanted to come with me. She replied that she had nothing to wear. 'And besides, my hair's a mess. Do you really want me to go on wearing it in this style?' And to say goodbye to me she held out her hand in the abrupt fashion, arm extended, shoulders back, that she had used on the beach at Balbec, and never since. This forgotten movement, animating her body, turned it back into the body of the Albertine of those days, who hardly knew me yet. It restored to Albertine, formal under an air of abruptness, her original novelty, her unknownness, and even her setting. I saw the sea behind this girl, whom I had never seen take leave of me in this way since I had left the seaside. 'My aunt thinks it makes me look older,' she added crossly. 'If only her aunt were right! I thought. All she wants is for Albertine to look like a child, so that she, Mme Bontemps, will seem younger; that, and for Albertine not to cost her anything, while she waits for the day when, by marrying me, Albertine will start to bring in money.' But if Albertine could have looked less young, not so pretty, less able to turn heads in the street, that is what would have pleased me. For the aged looks of a duenna are less reassuring to a lover than the ageing of the face of the one he loves. My only worry was that the hair-style I had asked her to wear might seem to Albertine yet another form of imprisonment. And it was this same, new feeling of domesticity that continued to draw me towards Albertine, even when I was away from her.

Having told Albertine, who was not in the mood, so she said, to go with me to the Guermantes' or the Cambremers', that I was not sure where I would go, I headed straight for the Verdurins'. As I left for the Verdurins', and as the thought of the recital I would hear there reminded me of that afternoon's scene: 'great slut, great slut', a scene of disappointed love, jealous love perhaps, but in that case as bestial, with only the addition of words, as the scene an orang-utan might make to a woman for whom it has, so to speak, fallen, just as I was about to call a cab in the street I heard sobs, which a man, seated on a bollard, was trying to suppress. I walked up to the man, who had his head in his hands; he looked young, was elegantly dressed, and I was surprised to note, from the whiteness showing under his cloak, that he was in full evening clothes with white tie. Hearing me approach he uncovered his face, which was awash with tears, but immediately, recognizing me, he turned it away. It was Morel. He saw that I had recognized him and, trying to stem his tears, he said that he had stopped for a moment, he was so unhappy. 'I was appallingly rude, he said, just this afternoon, to someone I used to care a great deal about. It was a vile thing to do, for she still loves me. – Maybe in time she will forget,' I said, without thinking that by speaking in this way I might give the impression of having heard the afternoon's scene. But he was so wrapped up in his grief he did not even imagine that I could know anything about it. 'Perhaps she will forget, he said. But I can never forget. I feel so ashamed, I'm disgusted with myself! But there, I said those things, they can't be unsaid. When someone puts me in a rage, I don't know what I'm doing. And it's so bad for me, my nerves are all tied in knots now,' for like all neurasthenics he was very concerned for his own health. If in the afternoon I had seen the amorous rage of a furious animal, by this evening, a few hours later, centuries had passed, and the appearance of a new feeling, a feeling of shame, regret, grief, showed that a great step had been taken in the evolution of the animal towards human status. But I still heard 'great slut, great slut' and feared a sudden reversion to the savage state. In any case I had very little understanding of what had happened, and that was all the more natural given that M. de Charlus himself was wholly ignorant of the fact that in the preceding few days, and particularly on this day, even before the shameful episode which was not directly connected to the violinist's physical state, Morel had had a recurrence of neurasthenia. The month before he had pressed on as fast as he could, if much more slowly than he would have liked, with the seduction of Jupien's niece, whom, as her fiancé, he could now take out as much as he liked. But once his advances had come rather too close to rape, and, particularly when he had suggested that his fiancée should become friendly with other young girls and then procure them for him, he had encountered resistance which exasperated him. Suddenly (either because she had been too chaste, or, on the contrary, had given in to him), he lost his desire for her. He had made up his mind to break with her, but judging the Baron, with all his vices, to be more moral than himself, he was afraid that as soon as he broke the engagement M. de Charlus would throw him out. So he had decided, about a fortnight earlier, to stop seeing the girl, to let M. de Charlus and Jupien sort things out between them (he used a more Cambronnesque word[36]), and, before announcing the breaking-off, to 'piss off out of it' to an unknown destination. This ending to his love left

him a little sad; so that, even though his behaviour to Jupien's niece corresponded exactly to the plan he had set out before the Baron when they were dining at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, it was probably quite different in fact, and less brutal feelings, unforeseen in his theoretical conduct, had lent beauty, given a sentimental colouring to his behaviour in reality. The only point at which, on the other hand, reality was worse than the plan, is that in the plan he did not think it would be possible to stay in Paris after such an act of treachery. But now, 'buggering off' seemed to him an unduly high price to pay for something so simple. It meant leaving the Baron, who no doubt would be furious, and losing the position he had made for himself. He would lose all the money the Baron gave him. The thought that this was inevitable gave him hysterical fits. He wept for hours together, and to stop thinking about it took morphine, in safe doses. Then suddenly an idea came into his mind (it had no doubt been taking shape and life there for some time), and this idea was that the dilemma, the choice between breaking his engagement and completely falling out with M. de Charlus,[37] was not inescapable. Losing all the Baron's money was serious. Unable to decide, Morel spent several days in a black mood, like the one into which he was plunged by the sight of Bloch. Then he decided that Jupien and his niece had tried to trap him, that they should be thankful for having got away with it so cheaply. In his view, the girl was in the wrong, having so clumsily failed to keep his attraction to her alive. Not only did it seem absurd to him to give up his position with M. de Charlus, but he now grudged even the money he had spent on dinners with the girl since their engagement; he could have told you the cost of each one, like the valet's son he was: his father came every month to go through his 'book' with my uncle. For 'book' in the singular may mean 'printed work' to the general run of mortals: it changes its meaning for Highnesses and valets. For the latter it means 'account-book', for the former the bound volume where one writes one's name. (At Balbec, one day when the Princess of Luxembourg said she had not brought her book with her, I was about to lend her *A Fisherman of Iceland* and *Tartarin of Tarascon*, when I realized what she meant: not that she would be spending the time less pleasantly, but that I would not easily be able to write my name among those of her friends.) In spite of Morel's change of mind about the consequences of his conduct, even though such conduct would have seemed to him abominable two months previously, when he was madly in love with Jupien's niece, and despite the fact that for the last fortnight he had been constantly repeating to himself that this same conduct was natural, even praiseworthy, it still aggravated in him the nervous state in which he had, that afternoon, announced his decision to break with the girl. And he was ready at any moment to 'take out' his feelings, if not (except for one brief surge of rage) on the girl herself, for whom he still felt that residual fear which is the last trace of love, then certainly on the Baron. He was careful, however, not to say anything to him before dinner, for, placing above everything his own professional virtuosity, when he had difficult pieces to play (as he would have that evening at the Verdurins'), he avoided (as far as possible, and the afternoon's scene had already gone far too far) anything that could possibly make his movements jerky. In the same way, a surgeon who loves motoring will leave off driving when he has to operate. I realized that this was why, as he talked to me, he kept gently moving his fingers one after the other, to see if they had regained their suppleness. The hint of a frown seemed to suggest that there was still some nervous stiffness there. But so as not to increase it, he unwrinkled his face, as one tries not to let oneself be irritated by not being able to get to sleep or to possess a woman, for fear that the phobia itself should delay further the moment of sleep or of pleasure. So, wishing to regain his serenity so as to be able to give himself completely, as he always did, to the music he would be playing at the Verdurins', and wishing also, for so long as I was watching him, to be able to convey his suffering to me, the simplest solution seemed to him to ask me to leave immediately. There was no need to ask, and I was delighted to escape. I had been afraid that, as we were going to the same house at almost the same time, he would ask me to drive him there, and I remembered the afternoon's scene too well not to feel a certain disgust at the thought of having Morel next to me during the journey. It is quite possible that the love and then the indifference or hatred Morel felt towards Jupien's niece were both sincere. Unfortunately it was not the first time (and it would not be the last) that he had behaved in this way, suddenly 'throwing over' a young girl after swearing to her that he would love her for ever, even showing her a loaded revolver and saying that he would blow his brains out if he sank so low as to leave her. He left her just the same and felt, instead of remorse, a kind of resentment. It was not the first time he had acted like this, nor would it be the last, so that many young girls' heads – young girls less forgetful of him than he was of them – throbbed with pain – pain that Jupien's niece was to suffer for a long time yet, as she went on loving Morel and at the same time despising him – ready to split with the force of anguish surging up from inside – because each of them had, like a fragment of Greek sculpture, a glimpse of Morel's face, hard as marble and of an antique beauty, lodged in her brain, with his blossoming hair, his finely drawn eyes, his straight nose, a protuberance the skull was not designed to receive, and which could not be removed by surgery. But in the long run these rock-hard fragments slip into a place where they do not cause too much damage, settle there, and one no longer feels their presence; that is forgetfulness, or indifferent memory.

I had within myself two products of the day's experiences. One was the result of the calm produced by Albertine's docility: I saw that I could break with her and therefore resolved to do so. The other was the idea, formed from my reflections as I sat waiting for her at the piano, that Art, to which I planned to devote my new-found freedom, was not something for which I need make sacrifices, something apart from life, untouched by its vanity and emptiness, since the appearance of real individuality found in works of art was achieved only by the illusions of technical skill. If my afternoon had left other deposits in my mind, perhaps at a deeper level, they were not to rise to consciousness until much later. As for the two which I was consciously weighing, neither was to last; for that very evening, my ideas on art were to begin to recover from the downgrading they had experienced in the afternoon, while on the other hand the freedom which was to allow me to dedicate myself to art was to be once more taken from me.

As my carriage went along the embankment towards the Verdurins', I told the driver to stop, for I had just seen Brichot get off the tram at the corner of the rue Bonaparte, wipe his shoes with an old newspaper and pull on pearl-grey gloves. I went up to him. For some time now, since his sight had become much worse, he had been equipped – as elaborately as a laboratory – with new spectacles which, powerful and complicated as astronomical instruments, looked as if they were screwed into his eyes. He bent their exaggerated vision on me and recognized me. The glasses were marvellous. But behind them I saw the tiny, pale, convulsive, expiring gaze placed under this powerful apparatus, as in over-subsidized laboratories some insignificant little creature is left to die under a battery of the most up-to-date instruments. I offered my arm to the half-blind scholar to help him along. 'We meet this time not near the real Cherbourg, but the figurative Dunkerque,' a remark which seemed quite unamusing to me as I did not understand what it meant; however, I dared not ask Brichot, not so much for fear of his contempt as of his explanations. I replied that I was looking forward to seeing the salon where Swann used once to meet Odette every evening. 'What, do you know those old stories?' he said.

Swann's death had been a great shock to me at the time. Swann's death! The word Swann's, in this phrase, is not a simple genitive. I mean by it the particular death, the death sent by fate to release Swann. For we say 'death' for the sake of simplicity, but there are almost as many deaths as there are people. We lack the sense which would allow us to see them passing with great speed, flying in all directions, the various deaths, the active deaths sent by destiny after this man or that. Sometimes they are deaths which will not have fully accomplished their task until two or three years later. They fly to implant a cancer in the side of someone like Swann, then go off to do other work, and only return when, after the surgeons have operated, the cancer needs to be put back in position. Then the time comes when one reads in the *Gaulois* that Swann's health has been giving rise to concern, but that he is now on the way to making a full recovery. Then, a few minutes before one breathes one's last, death, like a nun who had been nursing rather than destroying one, comes to witness one's last moments and to set a final, crowning halo upon the being, now frozen for ever, whose heart has stopped beating. And it is this multitude of different deaths, the mystery of their functioning, the colour of their fatal draperies, that give a certain impressive ring to the lines in the newspapers: 'We regret to inform our readers that M. Charles Swann passed away yesterday at his home in Paris, after a long and painful illness. A Parisian whose wit was universally admired, as was his gift for select but faithful friendship, he will be much missed both in artistic and literary circles, to which he was drawn by his finely educated taste and where his opinions were eagerly sought after, and in the Jockey Club, of which he was one of the oldest and most respected members. He was also a member of the Union Club and the Society for the Promotion of Agriculture. He had recently resigned from the Rue Royale Club.

'His intelligent features and widespread reputation could not fail to arouse the curiosity of the public at the most important musical and artistic events, and particularly at the exhibition openings which he attended faithfully until recent years, when he only rarely went out. The funeral will be, etc.'

From this point of view, unless one is 'someone', the lack of a recognized title accelerates the decomposition of death. Certainly it is only in an anonymous fashion, without any marks of individuality, that one continues to be the Duc d'Uzès. But the ducal coronet keeps the elements of one's individuality together for a while, like the carefully sculpted ice-creams that Albertine liked so much. Meanwhile the names even of ultra-fashionable bourgeois, as soon as they are dead, are 'turned out', melt and disintegrate. We have heard Mme de Guermantes speaking of Cartier as the best friend of the Duc de la Trémoïlle, someone much in demand in aristocratic circles. For the following generation, Cartier has become something so formless that one would almost be raising him in the world by making him a relative of the jeweller Cartier, with whom he would have smiled to hear the ignorant confuse him! Swann, on the other hand, was an outstanding personality in the artistic and intellectual world, and so, even though he had not 'produced' anything, his name was able to survive a little longer. And yet, dear Charles Swann, whom I knew so little when I was still so young and you so near the grave, it is already because someone whom you must have considered a little idiot has made you the hero of one of his novels that people are beginning to talk about you again, and perhaps you will live on. If people talk so much about the Tissot painting[38] set on the balcony of the Rue Royale Club, where you are standing with Galliffet, Edmond de Polignac and Saint-Maurice, it is because they can see there is something of you in the character of Swann.

To come back to more general truths, it was of this expected and yet sudden death of Swann that I had heard himself speak at the Duchesse de Guermantes's house, on the evening of her cousin's party. This was the death whose particular strangeness had struck me one evening as I was scanning the newspaper and the announcement of it had brought me to a halt, as if it were written in mysterious lines inappropriately interpolated there. These lines had been enough to turn a living man into one who can no longer reply to what is said to him, a name, a written name, which has suddenly passed from the real world into the realm of silence. It was these same lines which now made me want to see the house where the Verdurins had once lived and where Swann, who was not then simply a set of letters printed in a newspaper, had so often dined with Odette. I must add (and this is something which long made Swann's death more painful to me than another's, even though these facts had nothing to do with the particular strangeness of *his* death) that I had not gone to see Gilberte as I had promised him at the Princesse de Guermantes's that I would; that he had never told me the 'other reason' that he referred to on that evening, which had made him choose me as confidant of his meeting with the prince; and that a thousand questions kept coming back to me (like bubbles rising through water), which I had wanted to ask him on the most varied subjects: about Vermeer, about M. de Mouchy, about himself, about a certain Boucher tapestry, about Combray, not urgent questions, clearly, as I had been putting them off from day to day, but which seemed to me of the utmost importance now that his lips were sealed and the answers would never come. Someone else's death is like being on a journey and remembering, a hundred kilometres from Paris, that one has left behind two dozen handkerchiefs, forgotten to give a key to the cook, to say goodbye to one's uncle, or to ask the name of the town where the ancient fountain is that one so wants to see. But all these forgotten things the memory of which assails one and which one mentions aloud, for form's sake, to one's travelling companion, come up against the stern reality of the carriage seat and the station name called out by the guard which only marks the increasing impossibility of doing these things, so that, turning our thoughts away from these irremediable acts of omission, we undo our parcel of food and begin to exchange newspapers and magazines.

'No, no, added Brichot, it wasn't here that Swann used to meet his wife-to-be, or at least not until the very end of that period, after the accident which destroyed Mme Verdurin's old house.' Unfortunately, not wishing to display before Brichot a luxury which seemed to me out of place, since the academic could not share in it, I had got out of the carriage too hurriedly and the driver had not understood the words I had thrown in his direction in my haste to distance myself from him before Brichot should see me. As a result, the coachman drove up behind us and asked if he was to come back to collect me. I hastily said yes and redoubled my attentions to the old don, who had arrived by bus. 'Ah, you were driven here, he said solemnly. – By pure chance, I swear; it almost never happens. I always take the bus or walk. But perhaps I shall have the great pleasure of taking you home this evening, if you are prepared to ride in this old rattle-trap. It will be rather a tight fit. But you are always so kind to me.' Alas, making this offer will cost me nothing, I thought, since I shall have to leave early in any case, because of Albertine. Knowing that she was in the flat, at a time when no one could call on her, left me as much the master of my time as in the afternoon when I knew she was on her way back from the Trocadéro and was in no hurry to see her again. But there again, as in the afternoon, I had the sense of having a wife, and knew that when I returned home it would not be to the excitement, the bracing sense of solitude. 'I should be delighted, Brichot replied. At the time to which you refer, our friends lived in the rue Montalivet, in a splendid ground-floor flat with a mezzanine, giving on to a garden; it was less sumptuous, naturally, than the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Venise, yet I preferred it.' Brichot informed me that that evening at 'Quai Conti' (that was how the faithful referred to Mme Verdurin's salon since it had migrated there), there was to be a great musical 'bunfight', organized by M. de Charlus. He added that in the old days I had been speaking of, the inner circle had been different and the tone quite other, and not only because the faithful were younger. He told me about tricks Elstir had played (what he called 'veritable harlequinades'); how one day, having pretended to cry off at the last minute, he came disguised as an extra butler and, as he handed the dishes, whispered improprieties in the ear of the highly prudish Baronne Putbus, whose face flushed red with alarm and annoyance; then, disappearing before the end of the dinner, he had had a bath full of water carried into the salon and, when the guests came through, jumped out of it stark naked, swearing at the top of his voice; also about the suppers to which everyone came in fancy dresses made of paper, designed, cut out and painted by Elstir, which were masterpieces. Brichot had come once as a nobleman of the court of Charles VII, with shoes with extravagantly turned-up toes, and another time as Napoleon I, when Elstir had made him a grand cordon of the Légion d'honneur out of sealing-wax. In a word, Brichot, seeing in his mind's eye the salon of those days, with its tall windows, its low sofas which, rotted by the midday sun, had had to be replaced, said that he still preferred it to today's. Of course I understood that by 'salon' Brichot meant – just as the word 'church' means not only the religious building but the community of believers – not only the mezzanine, but the people who frequented it and the particular pleasures they came to seek there, which in his mind had taken their form from the sofas on which, when one came to see Mme Verdurin in the afternoon, one sat to wait for her to be ready, while the pink flowers of the chestnut trees outside, and on the chimney-piece carnations in vases, seemed, in a gracious movement of sympathy for the visitor echoed in the smiling welcome of their rosy colours, to be fixedly watching for the belated arrival of the mistress of the house. But if that 'salon' seemed to him superior to the present one, it was perhaps because our spirit, like old Proteus, cannot remain the slave of any form and, even in the realm of fashion, suddenly detaches itself from a salon which has slowly and with difficulty been brought to its point of perfection, preferring some less brilliant gathering; just as the retouched photographs which Odette had had taken by Otto, showing her in a splendid princess-line gown and with her hair waved by Lenthéric,[39] did not appeal to Swann so much as a little carte-de-visite photograph taken in Nice where, wearing a cloth shoulder-cape and with her badly arranged hair protruding from a straw hat adorned with pansies and a black velvet bow (women usually do look older the older the photographs are in which they appear), despite being a woman of fashion twenty years younger, she looked like a little maidservant, but twenty years older. Perhaps it also gave him pleasure to cry up to me things that I should never know, to show me that he had tasted pleasures that I could not share. If that was his aim he succeeded, for simply by mentioning the names of three or four people who no longer existed and to whose charm he gave a mysterious quality by his way of speaking of it and of those moments of delicious intimacy, he made me wonder what it had been like, and feel that everything people had told me about the Verdurins was too coarsely drawn; even thinking of Swann, whom I had known, I reproached myself with not having paid enough attention to him, not having listened to him disinterestedly enough when I was at his house and he showed me beautiful things while we waited for his wife to come home to luncheon, now that I knew he could stand comparison with one of the finest talkers of former times.

As we arrived at Mme Verdurin's, I saw M. de Charlus steering his whole enormous body in our direction, unconsciously drawing along in his wake one of the street-arabs or young gangsters who now invariably sprang from the earth as he passed, even in the most apparently deserted spots, to escort the powerful monster, albeit at a certain distance, as a shark is accompanied by its pilot-fish, and presenting such a contrast with the haughty stranger of my first year at Balbec,

with his stern aspect and affectation of manliness, that I felt I was seeing, accompanied by its satellite, a heavenly body at quite a different moment of its orbit and now appearing in its full phase, or a patient now invaded by the illness which a few years ago was a mere pimple, easily concealed and whose gravity no one suspected. Even though Brichot had undergone an operation which had restored to him some of the sight he thought he had lost forever, I do not know if he had spotted the street-boy following in the Baron's footsteps. It hardly mattered in any case, for ever since La Raspelière, and despite Brichot's liking for him, M. de Charlus's presence made him feel a certain unease. No doubt for each man the life of every other man extends unsuspected winding paths into the darkness. Lies, so often misleading and which form the substance of all conversations, are less effective in covering up a feeling of dislike or of self-interest, or a visit one would rather people did not know about, or a one-day fling one wants to conceal from one's wife – than a good reputation is in utterly overshadowing disreputable habits. These habits can have remained unknown for a lifetime, a chance meeting on a jetty one evening will reveal them; even then the revelation is often misunderstood until a third person, better informed, supplies the elusive solution known to him alone. But once the truth is known, it is frightening, because it seems to threaten our sanity rather than our morals. Mme de Surgis le Duc's moral ideas were not at all highly developed, and she would have accepted in her sons any behaviour which could have been explained, and cheapened, by mercenary motives. But she forbade them to have anything further to do with M. de Charlus when she learned that, with a kind of clockwork regularity, whenever he came to visit her, he was drawn to pinch them under the chin and get them to do the same to him. She had the same disquieting sense of a physical mystery in the offing that one has when one begins to wonder whether the neighbour with whom one always got on so well is not affected by cannibalistic urges, and to the Baron's repeated questions, 'When shall I see the boys?' she replied, knowing the trouble she was storing up for herself, that they were very busy with their lessons, were preparing for a journey, etc. Diminished responsibility aggravates faults and even crimes, whatever the law may say. Landru[40] (assuming that he really killed women), if he did it for money, could be pardoned, but not if he acted out of irresistible sadism. Brichot's heavy jokes, in the early days of his friendship with the Baron, had been replaced, once it was a question not of repeating clichés but of understanding, with a painful feeling masked by gaiety. He reassured himself by repeating pages of Plato, lines of Virgil, because, intellectually as well as physically blind, he could not understand that in those days loving a boy (Socrates' jokes make it clearer than Plato's theories) was like keeping a dancer today, before one becomes engaged and settles down. M. de Charlus himself would not have understood this, confusing as he did his mania with friendship, which it does not at all resemble, and the athletes of Praxiteles with accommodating boxers. He refused to see that nineteen hundred years later ('a courtier who is pious under a pious ruler would have been an unbeliever under an unbelieving ruler,' said La Bruyère[41]), all everyday homosexuality – that of Plato's young men or Virgil's shepherds – has disappeared, and all that survives and multiplies is the involuntary kind, the nervous disease, the kind that one hides from others and disguises from oneself. And M. de Charlus would have been wrong not to reject openly the pagan genealogy of his condition. By giving up a little physical beauty, what a gain in moral standing! The Theocritean shepherd who sighs for a boy will have no claim in later life to be less insensitive or more intelligent than the other shepherd whose flute sounds for Amaryllis. For the first one is not suffering from an illness, he is simply following prevailing fashion. It is the homosexuality that survives in spite of obstacles, condemned, covered in shame, that is the real homosexuality; only that kind can be accompanied in the same being by a refinement of the inner life. One trembles to think of the connection there can be between physical and moral qualities when one thinks of the small variation in purely physical taste, the slight defect in one sense, which bring it about that the world of poets and musicians, so closed to the Duc de Guermantes, should be partly open to M. de Charlus. That the latter should take an interest in the decoration of his rooms – which are as full of objects as a knick-knack-loving housewife's – is hardly surprising; but that the same little chink should open on to Beethoven and Veronese! But none of this means that healthy people should not be alarmed when a madman who has written a sublime poem, having explained to them in the most rational way possible that he has been locked away by mistake or through his wicked wife's scheming, begging them to speak to the superintendent on his behalf and weeping as he describes the dreadful company he is forced to keep, concludes by saying, 'Do you see that man who is waiting to speak to me in the yard, whom I shan't be able to avoid? He thinks he is Jesus Christ. That is enough to show me the kind of madmen I am shut up with; he can't be Jesus Christ, I am.' A moment earlier one was on the point of going to tell the alienist of the mistake. Having heard these last words, and despite the thought of the wonderful poem on which the same man works every day, one moves away, just as Mme de Surgis's sons moved away from M. de Charlus, not because he had hurt them in any way, but because of his persistent invitations which always ended in his tickling them under the chin. Unfortunate poet, unguided by any Virgil, who must go down through the circles of a hell of sulphur and pitch and plunge into the fire that falls from heaven in order to bring back some inhabitants of Sodom! His work can have no charm; his life must be as austere as that of unfrocked priests who still observe the strictest celibacy, so that no one can say they left off the soutane for any other reason than the loss of their faith. Not that the writers are always able to keep this rule. Where is the mad-doctor in whom daily contact with his patients will not produce his own moment of madness? He will be lucky if he can say with confidence that it was not a pre-existing, latent condition that drove him into his speciality. His subject of study often has an effect on a psychiatrist. But why this subject in the first place? What obscure attraction, what fascinating apprehension, had made him choose it?

Pretending not to see the dubious individual who was following in his footsteps (when the Baron ventured out on the boulevards or crossed the waiting-room of the gare Saint-Lazare, these followers could be counted in dozens, never, in the hope of a coin, letting him out of their sight), and for fear that the boy should be bold enough to speak to him, the Baron piously lowered his mascaraed lashes which, in their contrast with his papier-poudréd cheeks, made him look like a Grand Inquisitor painted by El Greco. But this was a frightening priest and looked like one denied the sacraments, for the various compromises to which he had been forced by the need to indulge his tastes while keeping them secret had had the effect of bringing to the surface of the Baron's face exactly what he most wanted to hide, a squalid life reflected in moral decay. Such decay, whatever its cause, is easy to read in a face, for it takes material shape and spreads there, particularly in the cheeks and around the eyes, as unmistakably as the ochre tints of liver disease or the repulsive red patches of a skin complaint. In any case, it was not only in the cheeks, or rather jowls, of the painted face, in the plump breasts and bouncing buttocks of the self-indulgent body invaded by fat, that there now floated on the surface, visible as oil, the vice once so carefully hidden away by M. de Charlus in the furthest depths of his being. It now overflowed in his speech.

'I say, Brichot, out at night with a handsome young man! he said as he came up to us, while the disappointed street-boy faded into the background. Charming! We'll have to tell your little pupils at the Sorbonne that you're no better than you should be. Anyway, young company does you good, professor, you've got colour in your cheeks. And you, dear boy, how are you? he said, leaving off his bantering tone. We don't often see your youthful features at the Quai Conti. And your cousin, is she well? You haven't brought her with you. A pity, she's delightful. Shall we see the young lady this evening? How pretty she is! And she'd be even more so if she developed the art, such a rare art, for which she already has a natural gift, of dressing well.' I must point out here that M. de Charlus 'possessed' – in this the exact opposite of myself – the gift of carefully observing, of being able to describe in the finest detail, either an outfit or a 'canvas'. As far as the dresses and hats were concerned, certain unkind people or over-generalizing theoreticians will say that in a man the penchant for male charms is compensated by an inborn taste, a passion for the study, the science of female dress. And that does happen sometimes, as if, men having claimed all the physical desire, all the deep affection of someone like Charlus, the other sex found bestowed on it everything that could be called (very improperly) 'platonic' taste, or, more simply, taste itself, with all its most knowing and effective refinements. In this respect M. de Charlus would have deserved the nickname that was given him later, 'the Dressmaker'. But his taste, his powers of observation extended much further. I mentioned how, on the evening I went to visit him after a dinner at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, I had not noticed the masterpieces he had in his rooms until he showed them to me, one by one. He immediately recognized things that no one else would ever have noticed, and that was as true in works of art as in the dishes at a dinner (and everything else between painting and cookery). I have always been sorry that M. de Charlus, instead of restricting his artistic gifts to the painting of a fan as a present for his sister-in-law (we saw the Duchesse de Guermantes with it in her hand, opening it, not so much to fan herself with it as to boast of it, showing off her friendship with Palamède), or to the perfecting of his piano technique so as to be able to accompany Morel's violin bowings without making mistakes, I repeat I have always regretted and still regret that M. de Charlus

never wrote anything. Of course I cannot assume from the eloquence of his conversation and even letter-writing that he would have been a talented writer. The two are not on the same level. We have all seen tiresome sayers of the obvious write masterpieces, and lords of the spoken word fall below mediocrity as soon as they put pen to paper. All the same I believe that if M. de Charlus had tried his hand at prose, beginning with the artistic subjects on which he was so knowledgeable, he would have struck a spark, the lightning would have flashed out, and the man of fashion would have become a master of the pen. I often said this to him, but he would never try, perhaps simply from laziness, or being constantly busy with brilliant parties and sordid amusements, or the Guermantes family need for endless chat. I am all the more sorry as in his most sparkling conversation, his wit could never be separated from his character, the ingenuity of the one from the insolence of the other. If he had written books, then instead of detesting him even while admiring him as one did in salons where, in his moments of most striking intelligence, he would at the same time be trampling on the weak, taking vengeance on those who had not insulted him, or trying contemptibly to set friends at odds – if he had written books, one would have been able to isolate his intelligent side, decant it from his nastiness, nothing would have interfered with one's admiration of him and many of his traits would have inspired friendship.

In any case, even if I am mistaken about what he could have put down on the page, he would have done us all a great service in writing, for not only could he make the finest distinctions, but when he distinguished a thing he always knew its name. It is true that in talking with him, if I did not learn to see (my mind and my feelings were bent on other things), at least I saw things that without him I should never have noticed, but their names, which would have helped me to find their shapes and colours again, those names were always quickly forgotten. If he had written books, even bad ones, though I do not think they would have been bad, what an enchanting dictionary, what an inexhaustible work of reference they would have been! But then, who knows? Instead of unlocking his knowledge and his taste, he might have written undistinguished serial stories, or useless tales of travel or adventure.

'Yes, she knows how to dress or more precisely how to present herself, said M. de Charlus, returning to Albertine. My only doubt is whether she dresses in accordance with her own particular beauty, and perhaps I am slightly to blame for that, having given her advice without taking enough thought beforehand. The things I often used to say to her as we were going to La Raspelière – and now I see, and I am sorry for it, that what I said was prompted more by the character of the countryside, the nearness of the sea, than by the individual character of your cousin's type – made her incline too much towards light fabrics. I admit I've seen her in lovely tarlatans, charming gauze scarves, a certain small rose-coloured toque set off perfectly by a little pink feather. But I think her real, almost massive beauty needs something more than just pretty things about her. Is a toque right for that huge head of hair? A Russian tiara would hardly be excessive. Very few women can wear those antique dresses that have a look of stage costume about them. But this young girl, with her already womanly beauty, is the exception, and ought to have a dress in old Genoese velvet (I immediately thought of Elstir and the Fortuny dresses), which I should not hesitate to weigh down further with jewelled embroidery or pendants of those wonderful, old-fashioned stones (that's the biggest compliment you can pay them) like peridot, marcasite or the incomparable labradorite. In fact, she herself seems to have the sense of counterweight that a rather heavy beauty needs. Do you remember, when she went to dine at La Raspelière, all the things she carried with her, pretty boxes, heavy bags … when she is married, she will be able to put in them the carmine and white not just of rouge and powder, but – in a not-too-indigo lapis lazuli jewel-case – of pearls and rubies, and not cultured ones, I feel sure, for she should be able to marry very well.'

'Goodness, Baron,' Brichot interrupted, fearing that these last words would upset me, since he had some doubts about the purity of my relations and the authenticity of my cousinly connection with Albertine, 'you do take an interest in the young ladies!'

'Not in front of the children, scandal-monger,' M. de Charlus sniggered, lowering one hand in the gesture of imposing silence on Brichot, but making sure that it landed on my shoulder. 'I interrupted you, I'm sorry, you looked as if you were having such fun, like two naughty girls, without any help from a boring old granny like me. Still, I shan't feel too guilty, as you'd nearly arrived.' The Baron was all the more cheerful as he knew nothing at all about the scene of that afternoon, Jupien having decided that it was more important to protect his niece against a possible further attack than to go and warn M. de Charlus. So the Baron still believed in the forthcoming marriage and was pleased about it. It is as if it were a kind of consolation to these lonely figures to soften their tragic bachelorhood with a fictitious paternity. 'But really, Brichot, he added, laughing as he turned towards us, I feel decidedly *de trop* when I see you in such attractive company. You looked like two lovers. Arm in arm, Brichot, I must say, you are going a bit far!' Could such words have been the sign of an ageing mind, less in control than formerly of its reflexes and, in a moment's automatic response, betraying a secret so carefully buried for forty years? Or was it the disdain for middle-class opinion that all the Guermantes had underneath, and which M. de Charlus's brother, the Duc, displayed in a different way when, not caring in the least whether my mother could see him, he would stand at his window shaving, with his nightshirt undone? Had M. de Charlus, during his over-heated journeys from Doncières to Douville, acquired the habit of relaxation, and just as he pushed his straw hat back on his head to let his enormous forehead breathe, had he begun to loosen, at first just for a few moments, the mask too tightly covering his real face? His matrimonial manners with Morel would have rightly astonished anyone who knew that he no longer loved him. But in M. de Charlus's case, the narrow range of pleasures offered by his vice had come to bore him. He had instinctively sought to break new physical limits and then, tiring of the strangers he met, had gone to the opposite extreme and chosen what he had thought he would always loathe, the simulacrum of a 'marriage' or of 'fatherhood'. Sometimes even that did not satisfy him, he had to do something new, and he would go and spend the night with a woman, in the way a normal man might, once in his life, want to sleep with a boy, out of the same kind of curiosity, each the mirror-image of the other, and each equally unhealthy. The Baron's life as 'one of the crowd', living as he did, because of Charlie, entirely within the Verdurin clan, had had the same effect, in undoing the efforts he had made for so long to keep up a false appearance, as a voyage of exploration or a stay in the colonies can have on certain Europeans, who lose while abroad the guiding principles that ruled their lives in France. And yet the inward revolution of a mind, unconscious at first of the abnormality within itself, then frightened by it when it had recognized it, and finally becoming so familiar with it that it no longer recognized the danger of admitting it to other people, having learned to admit it without shame to itself, had been even more effective in freeing M. de Charlus from the last ties of social constraint than the time spent at the Verdurins'. For no exile at the South Pole or at the top of Mont Blanc can detach us more from other people than a lengthy stay inside an inner vice, that is to say, a way of thinking different from theirs. A vice (for such the Baron used to call it), to which he now gave the amiable character of a mere fault, very common, quite likeable and almost amusing, like laziness, forgetfulness or too great a liking for food. Recognizing the curiosity that his odd personality aroused, M. de Charlus took a certain pleasure in satisfying it, stimulating and encouraging it. Just as a certain Jewish journalist daily defends Catholicism, probably not expecting to be taken seriously, but in order not to disappoint the readers who appreciate his humour, M. de Charlus jokingly attacked immorality, in the little set, as he might have affected an English accent or imitated Mounet-Sully,[42] without waiting to be asked, a talented amateur singing for his supper with a good grace; so that M. de Charlus now threatened to report Brichot to the Sorbonne for walking out with young men, as the circumcised columnist punctuates his prose with 'France, the eldest daughter of the Church' and the 'Sacred Heart of Jesus', without the least hypocrisy, but with a certain theatrical affectation. And it is not only his new vocabulary, so different from the words he formerly allowed himself to use, that would be a rewarding study, but also the change in his intonations and gestures, which both now bore a surprising resemblance to everything he had once most scathingly condemned; he now emitted, quite without thinking, something like the little squeals – involuntary in his case, and therefore all the more revealing – that homosexuals produce – in their case deliberately – when they call out to each other – 'darling!'; as if this purposely 'camp' manner, which M. de Charlus had so long avoided like the plague, were nothing but a brilliant, faithful imitation of the intonations that the Charluses of this world inevitably develop when they reach a certain phase of their disease, just as a tertiary syphilitic or a sufferer from ataxia cannot fail in the end to present certain symptoms. In reality – as this deep-rooted affectation revealed – the only difference between the stern Charlus I had once known, dressed all in black, with his hair cut short, and made-up young men dripping with jewels, was the purely superficial one that we see between an agitated person, talking all the time and constantly fidgeting, and a mental sufferer who speaks slowly, is impossible to rouse, but in the eyes of a clinician is plainly affected by the same neurasthenia, eaten up by the same anxieties and suffering from the

same physical defects. There were other, physical signs that also showed M. de Charlus was getting old, like the surprisingly frequent repetition in his conversation of certain expressions which had multiplied there and now appeared at every other moment (for example 'the chain of circumstances'); the Baron's speech now advanced from sentence to sentence leaning on these phrases as if on a necessary support. 'Is Charlie here already?' Brichot asked M. de Charlus as we were about to ring the doorbell. 'I don't know, I'm afraid,' said the Baron, raising his hands in the air and half-closing his eyes like someone who does not want to be accused of indiscretion, the more so, no doubt, because he had been scolded by Morel for mentioning things which Morel (as cowardly as he was vain, and as ready to deny his friendship with the Baron as to boast of it) had thought revealing, though they were quite insignificant. 'You know I don't know anything about his plans. I don't know who else he is seeing, but I hardly see him at all.' If conversations between two people who are having an affair are full of lies, lies occur no less naturally in the conversations an outsider has with someone who is in love about the person he or she loves, regardless of that person's sex.

'Is it a long time since you saw him last?' I asked, not wishing to appear reluctant to speak to him of Morel, nor yet to seem to know that they lived together all the time. 'He called in for five minutes this morning, as it happens, while I was still half asleep, and came and sat on the end of my bed, as if he were going to rape me!' I immediately concluded that M. de Charlus had seen Charlie within the hour, for when one asks a man's mistress when she last saw the man one knows – and whom she perhaps thinks one believes – to be her lover, if she has just had tea with him, she will reply, 'I saw him just before lunch.' Between these two statements the only difference is that one is false and the other true, but each is as innocent or, if you like, as guilty as the other. So it would be difficult to understand why the mistress (or here, M. de Charlus) invariably chooses the falsehood, if one did not know that their replies are determined, in a way unknown to the speaker, by a number of factors which seems so disproportionate to the triviality of the issue that it seems absurd to dwell on them. But for a physicist the position of the tiniest ball of pith is explained by the action, the clash or the equilibrium of the same forces of attraction or repulsion whose laws govern much greater worlds. Let us simply recall the wish to appear natural and forthcoming, the instinctive movement to conceal a secret lovers' meeting, a mixture of modesty and ostentation, the need to speak of what is so pleasant to ourselves and to show that we are loved, a partial understanding of what the other person already knows, or guesses, which, outrunning or falling short of his understanding, constantly over- or under-estimates it, the involuntary drive to take risks or to cut one's losses. All these different laws, acting in conflicting directions, determine even the most general replies concerning the innocence, the 'platonic' character, or on the other hand the carnal reality of one's relations with the person one says one saw in the morning when in fact one saw him in the evening. Still, in general terms, we must say that M. de Charlus, despite the progress of his illness, which now constantly drove him to reveal, to hint at or simply to invent compromising details, was still at this period of his life trying to establish that Charlie was not the same kind of man as himself, and that there was nothing between them but friendship. Perhaps it was true, but that did not stop him sometimes contradicting himself on the subject (as he had just done about the time when he had last seen him), whether he was absent-mindedly telling the truth, or boastfully or sentimentally lying, or finding it amusing to mislead the listener. 'You know what he is to me, the Baron continued, a dear young friend, whom I'm so very fond of, as I'm sure (if he was so sure, why did he have to say it?) he is of me, but there's nothing else between us, none of that sort of thing, you know, none of that, said the Baron, as naturally as if he had been speaking of a lady. Yes, he came to shake me awake this morning, even though he knows how much I hate to be seen in bed. Don't you? Oh, it's dreadful, really upsetting, one looks so hideous, I know I'll never see twenty-five again, I'm not setting up to be Queen of the May, but one does have one's standards!'

Perhaps the Baron was being sincere when he spoke of Morel as a good friend, and unwittingly telling the truth when he said 'I don't know what he does, his life is a mystery to me.' Let us say (if we may now travel forward several weeks in the story, which we shall pick up again after this parenthesis which has opened up while M. de Charlus, Brichot and I are walking towards Mme Verdurin's), let us say that, shortly after this evening party, the Baron was plunged into suffering and amazement when he mistakenly opened a letter addressed to Morel. This letter, which was also, in a roundabout fashion, to cause me intense pain, was from Léa, the actress known for her exclusive attraction to women. Yet her letter to Morel (whom M. de Charlus had never even suspected of knowing her) was written in the most passionate terms. It was too indecent to be reproduced here, but one may note that Léa addressed him in the feminine throughout, calling him 'Dirty girl!' and saying 'Well, sweetheart, you *are* one and no mistake!' And the letter mentioned several other women with whom Morel seemed to be no less friendly than with Léa. Furthermore, the way she teased Morel about M. de Charlus, in the same way as she joked about an officer who was keeping her and about whom she said, 'He writes letters begging me to be a good girl! Me! What do you think, kitten?' had brought home to M. de Charlus a state of things of which he had had no more inkling than of Morel's unusual friendship with Léa.

The Baron was particularly worried by the expression 'you *are* one'. Having long been in ignorance of it, he had for a long time now accepted the fact that he 'was one'. Now this accepted idea was once more put in question. When he had discovered he 'was one', he had imagined it meant that his taste, as Saint-Simon puts it, was not for women. Now it appeared that for Morel the phrase had a range of meaning unfamiliar to M. de Charlus, to the point that the letter suggested Morel proved he 'was one' by having the same taste for women as certain women themselves. From then on M. de Charlus's jealousy had no reason to restrict itself to the men Morel knew, but would extend even to women. So it seemed that the beings who 'were one' were not only those he had thought, but covered a whole immense part of the planet, made up of women as well as men, and the Baron, encountering a new meaning for such a familiar expression, felt tortured by an uneasiness as much intellectual as emotional when faced with this double mystery involving both the expansion of his jealousy and the sudden inadequacy of a definition.

M. de Charlus had never in his life been anything but an amateur. It followed that incidents of this kind could never be of any use to him. He let the painful impression they produced on him spill over into violent scenes, in which he could sometimes be eloquent, or into underhand scheming. But for a person as gifted as Bergotte, for example, they could have had great value. It is perhaps this that partly explains (since we are always groping in the dark, but, like animals, head for the plant that does us most good) why beings like Bergotte generally live in the company of run-of-the-mill people, deceitful and unkind. The beauty of these people is all the writer needs; it elevates his goodness to a higher plane, but does nothing to transform the nature of the woman he lives with, whose life thousands of feet below him, whose improbable connections and lies carried to a degree and, above all, in a direction beyond all imagining, come to light in periodic flashes. A lie, a perfect lie about people we know, our past relations with them, our motives in acting which we presented to ourselves in quite a different light, a lie about who we are, about what we love, about what we feel for the person who loves us and thinks he has moulded us in his likeness because he holds us in a constant embrace, a lie of that kind is one of the few things in the world that can open up wholly new perspectives for us, can awaken our torpid senses to contemplate universes which otherwise we should never have known. We must say, in relation to M. de Charlus, that if he was astonished to learn a certain number of things about Morel that had been carefully hidden from him, he was wrong to conclude that it was a mistake to form close friendships with working-class people, and that such painful revelations (the most painful for him had been that of a journey which Morel had made with Léa at a time when he had assured M. de Charlus that he was studying music in Germany. To buttress the lie he had used well-disposed persons in Germany to whom he had sent the letters for posting on to M. de Charlus, who, in fact, was so convinced that that was where Morel was that he never even looked at the postmarks).[43] We shall see, in fact, in the last volume of this work, M. de Charlus doing things that would have been even more astonishing to his family and friends than the life revealed by Léa was to him.

But now we must return to the Baron, who, with Brichot and myself, was approaching the Verdurins' door. 'And what has happened, he added, turning towards me, to your young Jewish friend that we used to see at Douville? I thought that if you liked we might invite him one evening.' For M. de Charlus, while not hesitating to have Morel's comings and goings spied on by a detective agency, exactly like a husband or a lover, did not himself stop taking an interest in other young men. He had had an old servant organize, through an agency, surveillance of Morel which was so indiscreet that the very footmen thought they were being followed, and one chambermaid was living in terror and did not dare go out in the street, believing that a policeman was always on her trail. 'Let her do as she pleases, the old servant would exclaim ironically. I'd like to see us waste our time and money having her tailed! As if we cared what she gets up to!' for he was so passionately attached to his master that, even though he did not share the Baron's tastes at all, he served them with such heartfelt devotion that in the end he came

to speak of them as if they were his own. 'He's the salt of the earth,' M. de Charlus would say of this old servant, for the people we value most are always those who have great virtues, and apply them unstintingly to the furtherance of our vices. It was, by the way, only of men that M. de Charlus could feel jealous in relation to Morel. Women had no such effect. This is, in fact, nearly always the rule with Charluses. The love that the man they love has for a woman is something else, happening within a different species (lions don't go after tigers), and does not worry them: indeed, it may reassure them. Sometimes, it is true, among those who regard inversion as a priesthood, such love is seen as disgusting. Then they are angry with their friend for having given way to it, seeing his action not as a betrayal, but a degradation. A different kind of Charlus from the Baron would have been as outraged to see Morel having relations with a woman, as he would have been to read on a poster that the distinguished interpreter of Bach and Handel was now going to start playing Puccini. That is why young men who, for money, accept the love of Charluses, tell them that they find sex with women disgusting, as they might say to the doctor that they never drink spirits and only like spring water. But on this point M. de Charlus diverged somewhat from the general rule. Admiring everything about Morel as he did, his successes with women, since they did not offend him, gave him the same pleasure as did his successes on the concert platform or at cards. 'He has women, you know,' he would say to a friend, with an air of amazement, of scandal, perhaps of envy, certainly of admiration. 'He's astonishing. The most famous whores can't keep their eyes off him. He stands out everywhere, not just at the theatre, even in the metro. It becomes a bore! I can't go to a restaurant with him without the waiter bringing him notes from at least three women. And always pretty ones. But it's not surprising. I was looking at him yesterday and I understand them, he's grown so beautiful, he looks like a kind of Bronzino, it is marvellous.' But M. de Charlus liked to show that he loved Morel and to persuade others, perhaps to persuade himself, that Morel loved him. He must always have him near him, in spite of the damage the boy might do to his reputation in society: it seemed to be a matter of pride. For (and we often see men who have achieved a good social position throw it away out of vanity in order to be seen everywhere with a mistress, a semi-whore or lady of tarnished reputation, who is not received anywhere, but with whom it seems to them flattering to be connected) he had reached the point where self-regard applies all its energy to destroying the ends it had previously attained, whether because, under the influence of love, one finds a new prestige, which one is alone in perceiving, in an ostentatious relationship with the object of one's affection, or whether the ebbing of worldly ambitions, now satisfied, and the rising tide of curiosity about other forms of life, all the more absorbing the more academic it is, now make it seem that one's social ascent has not only reached but passed the level where other people have difficulty in clinging on.

As far as his taste for other young men was concerned, M. de Charlus found that Morel's existence offered no obstacle, and even that his glittering reputation as a violinist and his growing fame as composer and journalist in some cases acted as an attraction. When a young composer of attractive appearance was introduced to the Baron, he would turn to the talents of Morel to find something pleasant to say to the new arrival. 'You should bring me some of your compositions, he would say, so that Morel can play them in a concert or on tour. There is so little attractive music written for the violin! It's a pleasure to find something new. And foreigners are very appreciative too. Even in the provinces there are little musical circles where they love music with extraordinary passion and intelligence.' With no greater sincerity (for all this was just a way of leading the young men on, and Morel rarely if ever performed any of the pieces), since Bloch had said that he was 'by way of being' a poet, with the sarcastic laugh with which he accompanied a cliché when he could not think of anything original to say, M. de Charlus said to me, 'Do tell the young Hebrew, since he writes verses, to bring me some for Morel. It's always a problem for a composer to find something pretty to set to music. We might even think about a libretto. That's not an uninteresting idea, and it could attract notice because of the poet's talent, my patronage, a whole chain of helpful circumstances, among which Morel's talent must come first. For he does a lot of composing now and writes too, very prettily, I must tell you about it. As for his talent as a performer (you know he's quite a master now), you'll see this evening how well the boy can play Vinteuil's music. It takes my breath away to see how well he understands it at his age, when he seems such a child, just a schoolboy. Oh, this evening is just a rehearsal. The big performance is in a few days' time. But it will be much smarter today. We were so delighted you could come, he said, using the royal "we". Because it's such a splendid programme, I told Mme Verdurin she should have two parties. One in a few days' time, when she'll have all her duty guests, and the other this evening, when the Patronne will be, as they say in the law-courts, off the case. I sent out the invitations for this one and I asked some pleasant people from a different social world, who may be useful to Charlie and whom the Verdurins will like to meet. I'm sure you agree, it is wonderful to have the best music played by the finest artists, but what impact will the occasion have if the audience comes from the corner shop and the draper's across the way? You know what I think of the cultural standards of society people, but they can have an important part to play, for example the part the press plays on public occasions, of being an organ of publicity. You know what I mean: I've invited my sister-in-law Oriane, for example. She may or may not come, but if she does she certainly won't understand a thing. But the idea is not for her to understand, which would be beyond her, but to talk, which she is perfectly able to do and certainly will. Result: tomorrow, instead of the glum silence of the grocer and the draper's wife, there will be animated discussion at the Mortemarts', with Oriane telling how she heard the most wonderful things, how a certain Morel, etc., and indescribable fury on the part of the uninvited, who will say, "No doubt Palamède thought we were too uncultured; anyway, who on earth are these people at whose house it all happened": something just as useful in its own way as Oriane's praise, since the name Morel will keep coming back and will lodge in the memory like a lesson repeated a dozen times over. All this forms a chain of circumstances which can be valuable to the artist and to the hostess; it can act as a kind of megaphone to broadcast the event to a distant audience. It really is worth doing. You'll hear how he has come on. And then we've discovered a new talent in him, my dear, he writes like an angel. *Like an angel.*

'You know Bergotte, don't you? I thought you might perhaps have been able to refresh his memory about the writings of our young friend; you would be working along with me, helping me to create the right chain of circumstances to promote a double talent, for both music and writing, that might one day take its place alongside Berlioz's. You can see what you would have to say to Bergotte. You know what famous people are, they have their own preoccupations, everyone looks up to them, they often take no interest in anyone but themselves. But Bergotte, who is really unaffected and kind, should be able to make the *Gaulois*, or some other paper, take some of his little articles; they're half humorous, half musical, really charming, and I'd be so pleased to see Charlie adding to his violin a little bit of an Ingres pen.[44] I know I get too excited when I'm making plans for him, I'm like all the old sugar-mummies at the Conservatoire. What, dear boy, you didn't realize? But then you don't know how easily impressed I am. I stand about for hours outside the doors when the competitions are going on. I adore it, it's such fun. And Bergotte himself told me that Charlie's writing is really very good indeed.'

M. de Charlus, who had been introduced to him long before by Swann, really had been to see him to ask him to arrange for Morel to write a half-humorous column about music in a paper. On the way there M. de Charlus had felt a certain sense of guilt, for despite being a great admirer of Bergotte, he realized that he never went to see him for himself, but only to use his own half-intellectual, half-social standing in Bergotte's eyes to do a favour for Morel, for Mme Molé or certain other ladies. The fact of using his connections only for such purposes did not shock M. de Charlus, but it seemed to him worse to treat Bergotte in this way, since he felt that Bergotte was not simply someone useful like his society friends but deserved better of him. It was just that his life was extremely busy and he could find time in it only for something that he wanted very badly, for example anything involving Morel. Furthermore, though he was very intelligent himself, he cared little for conversation with another intelligent man, and particularly with Bergotte, who was too much the man of letters for his taste and belonged to another set which took a different view of things. Bergotte, for his part, was well aware of the utilitarian character of M. de Charlus's visits, but did not resent it; for he was incapable of sustained kindness but fond of giving pleasure when he could; he was understanding and incapable of taking pleasure in delivering a snub. As for M. de Charlus's vice, he did not share it in any degree but saw in it rather an element of colour in the character, *fas et nefas* consisting for an artist not in moral examples, but in memories of Plato or Il Sodoma.[45]

M. de Charlus had omitted to say that for some time now, like those great noblemen of the seventeenth century who disdained to sign or even to write their lampoons, he had been having Morel write little paragraphs loaded with low calumnies and directed against the Comtesse Molé. Insolent enough in the eyes of those who read them, how much more cruelly did they strike the young woman herself, who found in them, slipped in so cleverly that no one else could have

noticed them, passages of her own letters, quoted verbatim but slanted in such a way as to make her feel on the edge of madness: cruellest of revenges. It killed the young woman. But every day in Paris brings forth, as Balzac would say, a kind of spoken newspaper, more to be feared than any of the others. We shall see later how that verbal press could annihilate the power of a Charlus once he had ceased to be fashionable, and elevate above him a Morel who was not worth a millionth part of his former protector. At least this intellectual fashion is naïve, and really believes in the insignificance of a brilliant Charlus, and the unquestionable authority of a stupid Morel. The Baron's implacable revenges were less innocent. Hence no doubt the bitter venom in his mouth, the invasion of which seemed to give to his cheeks the yellow tint of jaundice when he was in a rage.

'I should have liked him to be here this evening, to hear Charlie in the things he really plays best. But he's stopped going out, I hear, he doesn't want to be bored by people, he's quite right. But what about you, fair youth, we never see you on the Quai Conti. You're not exactly exhausting your welcome!' I said that I mostly went out with my cousin. 'Do you hear that! The boy goes out with his cousin, how sweet!' said M. de Charlus to Brichot. 'But we don't want to know how you spend your time, dear *che-ild*. You can do whatever you fancy. We are just sorry not to have any part in it. Anyway, you have excellent taste, your cousin is charming, ask Brichot, who could speak of nothing else when we were in Douville. We shall miss her this evening. But perhaps you were right not to bring her. Vinteuil's music is admirable, but I learned this morning through Charlie that the composer's daughter and her friend were to be there, and they are two young women of dreadful reputation. These things are always difficult for an unmarried girl. I'm even a little worried about my guests. But as they have almost all reached years of discretion it's less important for them. So they will be there, unless the two young ladies haven't been able to come, for they had promised faithfully to spend the whole of this afternoon at a study rehearsal that Mme Verdurin had arranged just for her bores, her family, the people who couldn't be asked for this evening. But just a moment ago, before dinner, Charlie told me that after all their promises the Misses Vinteuil, as we call them, hadn't turned up.' In spite of the dreadful pain that I felt on juxtaposing (as one does an effect, originally unexplained, and its finally discovered cause) Albertine's recent desire to come to the Verdurins' and the expected presence (unknown to me) of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, I had enough presence of mind left to notice M. de Charlus's slip when, having told us a moment ago that he had not seen Charlie since the morning, he now admitted to having seen him before dinner. But my suffering was becoming apparent. 'What is the matter? said the Baron. You're turning green; come along, let's go inside, you really don't look well.' It was not that M. de Charlus's words had reawakened my original doubts about Albertine's virtue. So many further doubts had found their way into my mind; one thinks each one must be the last, that one can bear no more, and still one finds room for the newcomer, and once it has established itself in our inner life it finds itself competing with so many desires to believe, so many pretexts to forget, that quite soon they settle down together and in the end we hardly pay attention to it any more. It survives only as a half-deadened pain, a mere threat of future suffering, and being the other face of desire, a thing of the same order, it lodges at the centre of our thoughts and irradiates them, as if from an immense distance, with subtle hints of sadness, just as desire does with pleasures of unrecognizable origin, wherever anything can be associated with the idea of the woman we love. But pain springs back to life when a new, complete doubt, enters us; our first response may be to say 'I can cope, there will be a method of avoiding pain, the story can't be true,' all the same there was an initial moment when we suffered as much as if we believed it. If we had only limbs, only legs and arms, life would be tolerable. Unfortunately we have that little organ called the heart, which is subject to certain periods of weakness during which it is infinitely sensitive to everything that concerns the life of a certain person; at these times a lie – that harmless thing, alongside which we can live so happily whether it is told by ourselves or others – when it comes from this particular person, causes the little heart, which we ought to be able to have surgically removed, unbearable attacks of pain. Useless to mention the brain, for our thoughts can reason as much as they like during these attacks, they have no more impact on them than on a severe toothache. It is true that the person is wrong to lie to us, since she had sworn always to tell us the truth. But we know from experience, our own and others', what such promises are worth. And we chose to put our faith in them, when they were made by the person with the most obvious interest in lying to us, a woman whom we had not, in any case, chosen for her virtue. It is true that later she will hardly need to lie to us any more – precisely because our heart has become indifferent to her lying – because we shall then no longer have any interest in her life. We know that, and still we willingly sacrifice ours, either by killing ourselves for her, or having ourselves condemned to death for murdering her, or simply by spending our entire fortune on her in a few years, so that we then have to kill ourselves because we have nothing left. Anyway, no matter how calm one thinks one is when in love, the love in one's heart is always in unstable equilibrium. The smallest thing can move it into the positive position: one radiates happiness, one is overcome with tenderness, not for the beloved but for those who have set her in a good light, who have kept her away from wicked temptations; one believes oneself safe, and a single word: 'Gilberte isn't coming', 'Mlle Vinteuil has been invited', is enough to make the planned happiness towards which one was surging crumble away, to make the sun go in, the wind change and the inner storm break against which one day one will no longer be able to stand. On that day, the day when our heart is near breaking, friends who admire our work are distressed to see how such nobodies, such insignificant beings, can hurt us so badly, bring us to the point of death. But what can they do? If a poet is dying of infectious pneumonia, can one imagine his friends explaining to the pneumococcus that the poet is talented and that it should let him get better? The doubt related to Mlle de Vinteuil was not completely new. But such as it was, that afternoon's jealousy, prompted by Léa and her friends, had cancelled it out. Once I had removed the danger of the Trocadéro, I had experienced, I had thought I had regained for ever, complete peace. But what was really something new for me, was a certain outing about which Andrée had said to me, 'We walked a bit, here and there, we didn't meet anyone,' and during which in fact Mlle Vinteuil had obviously arranged to meet Albertine at Mme Verdurin's. Now I would have been happy to let Albertine go out by herself, go anywhere she liked, provided I could have locked away Mlle Vinteuil and her friend somewhere and be certain that Albertine would never see them. For jealousy is usually a partial thing, its location varies, either because it is the painful extension of an anxiety provoked sometimes by one person whom our friend might love and sometimes by another, or because of the narrow scope of our thought, which can make real only the area which it pictures to itself, and leaves the rest in a blur which cannot cause real suffering.

As we were about to enter the courtyard of the Verdurins' house, Saniette caught up with us, not having recognized us at first. 'I had been studying you for a while, however, he said in a breathless voice. Strange, was it not, that I should hesitate?' 'Wasn't it strange' would have seemed to him incorrect, and he was becoming infuriatingly familiar with historic forms of the language. 'And yet a man could own you for his friends.' His greyish skin seemed to reflect the leaden sky of a storm. His breathlessness which, the summer before, had still occurred only when M. Verdurin 'tore a strip off' him, was now constant. 'I know that a work of Vinteuil's is to be performed for the first time by excellent artists, and peculiarly by Morel. – What do you mean "peculiarly"?, asked the Baron, who took the adverb as a criticism. 'Our dear Saniette, Brichot hastily explained, playing the role of interpreter, often uses, as the cultured man he is, the language of a time when "peculiarly" corresponded to our "in particular".'

As we entered the ante-room, M. de Charlus asked me if I were working, and as I answered no, but that I was becoming very interested in old silver and porcelain services, he said that I could not see finer ones anywhere than at the Verdurins', as I must have seen at La Raspelière since, arguing that objects can also be also friends, they had the extravagant custom of taking all their possessions with them; it would be inconvenient, he said, to get everything out for me on a party day, but still he would ask them to let me see anything I wanted. I begged him not to. M. de Charlus unbuttoned his overcoat and took off his hat; I saw that the top of his head was turning silver in places. But, like a precious shrub which not only is coloured by autumn, but has had some of its leaves wrapped in cotton-wool for protection and others coated in plaster, M. de Charlus only appeared more colourful for these few white hairs at his top, when they were added to the patchwork of his face. And nevertheless, even under the layers of different expressions, of the make-up and hypocrisy which formed such an unconvincing mask, M. de Charlus's face still kept hidden from the world the secret which it seemed to me to be crying aloud. I was almost embarrassed by his eyes, in which I feared he would see me reading as if in an open book, and by his voice, which seemed to me to be repeating it in every possible tone, with an unflagging indecency. But human beings keep their secrets safe, for everyone who comes near them is deaf and blind. People who learned the truth from one source or another, for example from the Verdurins, believed it, but only until they met M. de Charlus. His face, so far from spreading dangerous rumours, quelled them. For we form such an

exaggerated idea of certain entities that we could never identify them with the familiar features of someone we actually know. And it is hard for us to believe in the vices, just as it is impossible to believe in the genius, of a person we were at the Opéra with only yesterday.

M. de Charlus was handing over his overcoat with the familiarity of a frequent guest. But the footman to whom he was offering it was a new one, just a boy. Now M. de Charlus often lost the place, as they say, nowadays and no longer had a sense of what was and was not done. He had had a praiseworthy desire, at Balbec, to show that he was not alarmed by certain subjects, not afraid to declare of someone, 'He's good-looking,' to say, in a word, the same things as anyone might have said who was not like him; now he sometimes gave expression to this desire by saying things that no one who was not like him would ever have dreamed of saying, things on which his mind was so constantly fixed that he forgot they were not part of everyone's daily preoccupations. In this way, looking at the new footman, the Baron raised his index finger in the air in a threatening fashion, and, thinking he was making an excellent joke, said, 'You! How dare you make eyes at me like that!' and turning to Brichot, 'He has a funny little face, hasn't he? Cute little nose'; then, to complete his teasing, or giving way to an urge, he lowered his finger to the horizontal, pointed it straight at the boy, hesitated a moment, then, unable to contain himself any longer, poked the end of his nose saying 'Beep, beep!' and, followed by Brichot, myself and Saniette, who told us that Princess Sherbatoff had died at six o'clock, walked into the drawing-room. 'What sort of a house is this?' the footman thought to himself, and asked his friends if the Baron was a wise guy or a nut. 'That's just the way he is, replied the butler (who thought he was a bit 'touched', a bit 'crackers'), but he's one of Madame's friends I've always had the most time for, his heart's in the right place.'

At this moment M. Verdurin came towards us; only Saniette, already fearful of catching cold, for the outside door kept opening and closing, was still resignedly waiting for someone to take his things. 'What are you doing there, standing there like the faithful hound, M. Verdurin asked. – I am waiting for one of the people charged with the coats to take mine and give me a number. – What's that you say? said M. Verdurin sternly. "Charged with the coats"! are you going gaga? It's "in charge of the coats". Do we have to teach you the language again, like someone who's had a stroke? – "Charged with" is right, muttered Saniette in a halting voice; the abbé Le Batteux[46] – I've had enough of you, cried M. Verdurin in a terrifying voice. Listen to your wheezing! Have you just run up six flights of stairs?' M. Verdurin's overbearing rudeness had the effect of making the cloakroom attendants put other people before Saniette and when he tried to hand in his things they said, 'In a moment, sir, don't be in such a hurry.' 'Well done, chaps, order and system, that's the way,' said M. Verdurin with an encouraging smile, fortifying them in their inclination to make Saniette wait till last. 'Come on, he said to us, that damn fool's trying to make us catch our deaths in his beloved draught. Let's go and warm up in the drawing-room. Charged with the coats, what an idiot! – He is a little precious, but he isn't a bad sort, said Brichot. – I didn't say he was a bad sort, I said he was an idiot,' was M. Verdurin's sharp retort. 'Will you come to Incarville again this year, Brichot asked me. I think our Patronne has taken La Raspelière again, even though she had a disagreement with the owners. But none of that matters, the clouds will roll by,' he added in the same optimistic tone as newspapers use when they say, 'Mistakes have been made, but who does not make mistakes?' But I remembered in what a miserable state I had left Balbec and I had no wish to return there. I kept putting off from day to day my arrangements with Albertine. 'But of course he will come, he must, we insist upon it,' declared M. de Charlus with the high-handed and uncomprehending egoism of kindness. M. Verdurin, to whom we offered our condolences on the death of Princess Sherbatoff, said, 'Yes, I know she's very ill – No, no, she died at six o'clock, cried Saniette. – You're always exaggerating, said M. Verdurin brutally, for, the party not having been put off, he preferred to stick to the story of illness. Meanwhile Mme Verdurin was deep in discussion with Cottard and Ski. Morel had just refused, because M. de Charlus could not go there, an invitation to the house of some friends to whom she had promised the violinist's services. Morel's reason for refusing to play at the Verdurins' friends' party, a reason soon to be supplemented, as we shall see, by other, more serious ones, had acquired its force from a habit general in the circles of the idle, but particularly strong in Mme Verdurin's inner group. Certainly, if Mme Verdurin spotted a newcomer and one of the faithful exchanging a quiet word that led her to think they might already be acquainted, or wish to know each other better ('Till Friday then, at the So-and-sos' ', or 'Come to the studio any day you like, I'm always there until five, I'd be delighted to see you') the Patronne, on edge, imagining that the newcomer had a 'position' which would make him a brilliant recruit to the little set, would pretend not to have heard anything and let her fine eyes drift (her Debussy habit had drawn darker rings under them than cocaine could ever have done, and their air of exhaustion was due only to the intoxication of music). Nevertheless, behind that domed forehead, swollen by so many quartets and their ensuing migraines, she would be turning over thoughts which were not exclusively polyphonic; till she could bear it no more, unable to wait a moment longer for her fix, and threw herself upon the two talkers, drew them to one side, and said to the newcomer, indicating the old hand, 'Wouldn't you like to come to dinner with *him*, let's say on Saturday, or whenever you like, with some nice people? Don't mention it too loudly because I won't ask all this mob' (a term describing, for five minutes, the inner circle, momentarily disdained in favour of the newcomer in whom such hopes were being invested). But this passion for new people, for bringing them together, had its counterpart. Faithful attendance at their Wednesdays produced in the Verdurins the opposite disposition. This was a desire to create quarrels, to push people apart. It had been intensified, brought to an almost insane pitch by the months they had spent at La Raspelière, where people were in each other's company from morning till night. M. Verdurin delighted in catching people out, in spinning webs to catch some innocent fly to feed to his spider bride. Where there had been no offence they invented contemptible traits. As soon as an old hand had been gone for half an hour, they made fun of him in front of the others, affected surprise that no one had noticed how he always had dirty teeth, or else brushed them obsessively twenty times a day. If someone presumed to open a window, such a want of manners made the Patron and the Patronne exchange looks of outrage. A moment later Mme Verdurin would ask for her shawl and give M. Verdurin the chance to say in furious tones, 'No, I'll close the window, I wonder who can possibly have opened it,' in the hearing of the guilty party, who would blush into his hair. They would reproach you with the amount of wine you had drunk. 'Doesn't it make you feel ill? It's one thing for a working man, but …' Walks taken together by two of the faithful without prior permission from the Patronne gave rise to endless comment, however innocent they might be. M. de Charlus's walks with Morel were not innocent at all. Only the fact that M. de Charlus was not living at La Raspelière (because Morel was in barracks) postponed the moment when they would have had enough of him, would turn against him, vomit him up. However, that moment was near at hand. She was furious and had made up her mind to 'open Morel's eyes' to the ridiculous and distasteful part which M. de Charlus was making him play. 'And besides, continued Mme Verdurin (who in any situation when she so much as felt herself under too heavy an obligation to someone she could not kill, would find some serious fault in him that would justify her in not showing him any gratitude), besides, I don't like the way he behaves in my house.' For Mme Verdurin in fact had an even more serious reason than Morel's letting down of her friends to feel angry with M. de Charlus. That gentleman, convinced of the honour he was doing the Patronne by bringing to the Quai Conti people who, indeed, would never have gone there on her account, had, at the first mention of names that Mme Verdurin put forward as possible guests, pronounced the most categorical sentence of exclusion, in a peremptory tone in which the vindictive pride of the testy great noble mingled with the dogmatism of the expert party organizer who would take off his play and refuse his collaboration sooner than descend to concessions which, according to him, would spoil the overall effect. M. de Charlus had only given his permission, hedged about with reservations, for Saintine, in relation to whom, so as not to be encumbered with his wife, Mme Guermantes had passed from daily intimacy to a complete break in relations, but whom M. de Charlus, finding him intelligent, continued to see. Certainly it was only in a bourgeois milieu with certain connections to the minor nobility, a world where everyone is very rich and related to an aristocracy of which the great aristocracy knows nothing, that Saintine, once the flower of the Guermantes set, had gone to seek his fortune and, as he thought, find support. But Mme Verdurin, knowing the pretensions to nobility of the wife's family, and not realizing the husband's position, for our impressions of elevation are formed from what is immediately above our heads and not from what is so high in the sky that we can barely see it, thought to justify an invitation to Saintine by boasting of his valuable connections 'since he married Mlle ***'. The degree of Mme Verdurin's ignorance that this assertion revealed made a smile of indulgent contempt and generous understanding spread over the painted lips of the Baron. He did not deign to reply directly but, as he liked to build structures of theory about fashionable life which bore witness to the fertility of his intelligence and the massiveness of his pride, together with the hereditary frivolity of his interests, 'Saintine should have come to me for advice before he married, he said, there is a social as well as a physiological eugenics, and I am perhaps the only expert in it. Saintine's was an open and shut case, it was obvious that in

making the marriage he did he was tying a millstone round his neck and hiding his light permanently under a bushel. His social life was over. I could have explained that to him and he would have understood, for he is clever. On the other hand, there was a different person who had everything needed to create a high, dominant, universally recognized position; but was being kept down by a dreadful attachment. I helped that person, half by pressure and half by force, to break his ties, and the resulting freedom, power and triumphant joy are owed to me. It took will-power, but what a reward! That is how it is, when people listen to me they can be the midwives of their own destiny.' It was only too evident that M. de Charlus had not been able to act on his destiny: action is not the same as words, even eloquent words, or thought, however ingenious. 'But as for myself, I am a philosopher; I observe with detachment the social reactions I have predicted, but do not influence them. I have continued to see Saintine, who has always shown me the affectionate deference that he owed me. I have even dined with him in his new establishment, where one is as bored amid all the luxury as one was formerly entertained when, living from hand to mouth, he brought together the choicest company in a little attic. You may invite him, I permit it. But I impose my veto on all the other names you mention. And you will thank me later, for I am not only an expert on marriages, but no less so on parties. I know the leading personalities who can lift an occasion, make it take off, give it height; and I can also spot the name that will puncture the balloon, make the whole thing fall flat.' These vetoes of M. de Charlus's were not always founded on crazy resentments or artistic hair-splitting; an actor's sharpness also came into play. When he had a really successful ready-made speech to deliver about someone or something, he liked to perform it to the largest possible number of people, but without accepting in the second batch of guests any of the first who might notice that the piece had not changed. He put together a new audience, just because he was not changing the programme, and when he had a real success in conversation would almost have been willing to organize a tour and make appearances in the provinces. Whatever the varied motives for these exclusions, M. de Charlus's dicta not only offended Mme Verdurin, who felt her authority as Patronne being undermined, they caused her real social damage, for two reasons. The first was that M. de Charlus, even more over-sensitive than Jupien, was constantly quarrelling for no perceptible reason with the people one would have thought most fitted to be his friends. Naturally, one of the first ways he thought of punishing them was not to have them invited to parties he gave at the Verdurins'. Now these outcasts were often people at the top of the tree, as they say, but who in M. de Charlus's eyes had fallen from that position as soon as they fell out with him. For he was equally imaginative in imputing faults to people he wanted to quarrel with, and in denying all importance to them once they were no longer his friends. If, for example, the guilty party were a man of extremely ancient family, but whose duchy dates only from the nineteenth century, the Montesquious for example, from one day to the next M. de Charlus recognized only the antiquity of the duchy, the family counted for nothing. 'They're not even dukes, he would say. The title belonged to the Abbé de Montesquiou and passed improperly to a relative, not eighty years ago. The present duke, if he is a duke, is the third. Compare that to people like Uzès, La Trémoïlle, Luynes who are the tenth or fourteenth dukes, or like my brother who is the twelfth Duc de Guermantes and seventeenth Prince de Condom. The Montesquious descend from an ancient family, what does that prove, even if you could prove it? They've descended so far they're at the bottom of the heap.' But if he was on bad terms with a gentleman, heir to an ancient duchy, with the most magnificent connections, related to ruling houses, but whose family had risen to this position quickly without being able to trace its history very far back, a Luynes for example, everything changed and only family now mattered. 'I ask you, M. Alberti, who only rose out of the dirt under Louis XIII! What is it to us if they pulled strings at court to get their hands on duchies they had no right to?' Furthermore, with M. de Charlus, disgrace followed closely upon favour because of his characteristic Guermantes predisposition to demand from the conversation of friends things it cannot give, together with a symptomatic fear of being the object of ill-intentioned gossip. And the greater the favour, the harder the fall. Now no one had enjoyed such favour with the Baron as the Comtesse Molé. By what sign of indifference had she shown herself unworthy of it? The Comtesse herself always maintained that she had never been able to find out. It is true none the less that the very mention of her name would launch the Baron into the most violent rages, the most eloquent but most dreadful invectives. Mme Verdurin, to whom Mme Molé had been very kind and who was looking forward eagerly to the Comtesse's seeing at her house the most noble names 'in all France and lands adjoining', as the Patronne put it, immediately proposed inviting 'Mme de Molé'. 'Well, well, there's no accounting for tastes,' M. de Charlus had replied, and if yours, dear lady, is to spend your time with Mrs Todgers, Sarah Gamp and Mrs Harris[47] I have nothing to say, but please let it be on an evening when I am not here. I can see from your first words that we are not speaking the same language, since I was speaking of the aristocracy and you are quoting me the obscurest names from the legal world, crafty little commoners, poisonous gossips, little ladies who think themselves patrons of the arts because they copy a cut-down version of my sister-in-law's manners, like the jay imitating the peacock. Let me add that it would be almost indecent to introduce into a party that I have agreed to give at Mme Verdurin's house a person whom I have deliberately excluded from the circle of my friends, a female without birth, honour or wit, who is deluded enough to think that she can play the Duchesse de Guermantes or the Princesse de Guermantes, a combination which is itself ridiculous, since the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes are exactly the opposite of each other. It's as if someone set up to be both Reichenberg and Sarah Bernhardt.[48] In any case, even if it were not contradictory, it would be deeply absurd. I may sometimes smile at the exaggerations of the one and be saddened by the limitations of the other, that is my right. But to see that little bourgeois frog trying to puff herself out to be the equal of those two great ladies who, at the very least, always show the incomparable distinction of their blood, it's enough, as they say, to make a cat laugh. *La* Molé! That is one name I never want to hear again, or I must wash my hands of the case,' he added, smiling, like a doctor who, desiring the good of his patient in spite of the patient himself, intends not to have forced on him the collaboration of a homeopath. However, certain persons judged insignificant by M. de Charlus might have been so for him, but not for Mme Verdurin. M. de Charlus, from the pinnacle of his birth, could disdain some of the smartest people whose presence would have made Mme Verdurin's salon one of the foremost in Paris. Now that lady was beginning to think that she had perhaps missed the bus once too often, to say nothing of the years she had lost by choosing the wrong side, in worldly terms, in the Dreyfus Affair. Her choice had done her some good, however. 'I don't know if I told you how displeased the Duchesse de Guermantes had been to see people from her social world subordinating everything to the Affair, shutting out elegant women and admitting others who were not, for reasons of revisionism or anti-revisionism, and how she had been criticized in her turn by the same ladies as lukewarm, unreliable and ready to place worldly etiquette before the interests of the country,' I might say to the reader as if to a friend with whom one has spent so much time that one no longer remembers whether one had thought or found the moment to tell him about a particular thing. Whether I did or not, the Duchesse's attitude at that time can be easily imagined and even, if we look back on it from a later period, can seem, from a social point of view, perfectly justified. It was a time when M. de Cambremer thought of the Dreyfus Affair as a foreign plot designed to destroy the Intelligence Service, to break down discipline, to destroy the army, divide the French and open the way for invasion. All literature, apart from a few fables of La Fontaine, being a closed book to the Marquis, he left it to his wife to establish that a cruelly observant literature, by creating disrespect, had brought about a comparable upheaval. 'M. Reinach and M. Hervieu[49] are in this together,' she used to say. No one will accuse the Dreyfus Affair of having had the same desperate designs on social life. But there too it broke down distinctions. Society people who do not want to let politics interfere with social life are just as wise as those soldiers who do not want to allow politics into the army. Society is like sexual tastes, about which one can never know what point of perversion they may reach once one lets aesthetic reasons determine the choice of them. Because they were nationalists, the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain fell into the habit of receiving ladies of another social milieu; when nationalism disappeared, the habit persisted. Mme Verdurin, thanks to Dreyfusism, had attracted to her salon some good writers who at that time were of no value to her social schemes because they were Dreyfusards. But political passions, like all other passions, wane. New generations spring up who no longer understand them, even the generation which first felt them changes, experiences new political passions which, as they do not correspond exactly to the earlier ones, rehabilitate a certain proportion of the excluded, the reasons for their exclusion having altered. The monarchists no longer cared, during the Dreyfus case, whether someone had been a Republican, even a Radical, even an anti-clerical, provided he was now an anti-Semite and a nationalist. If ever there were to be a war, patriotism would take a different form, and if a writer were chauvinistic enough, no one would care whether or not he had been a Dreyfusard. That explains how, with each new political crisis, each artistic renewal, Mme Verdurin had collected the little drops of water, little grains of sand, presently useless, which would one day make up her salon. The Dreyfus Affair had passed, she still had Anatole France.[50] Mme Verdurin's real strength

was her sincere love of art, the trouble she took for the faithful, the wonderful dinners she gave just for them, with no grand guests invited. Each of them was treated in her house as Bergotte had been in Mme Swann's. When, one fine day, a friend of this kind becomes a great man, a visit by him to someone like Mme Verdurin has nothing of the artificial, over-elaborate character of an official banquet or St Charlemagne's Day dinner with the dishes sent in from Potel and Chabot's, but is a deliciously homely occasion, with food that would have been just as perfect if no one had been invited. At Mme Verdurin's the company was perfectly trained, the repertory of the first order: she lacked only an audience. And since audiences' taste had begun to turn away from the rational, French art of a Bergotte and towards exotic music above all, Mme Verdurin, like a recognized Paris agent for all foreign artists, would soon, alongside the ravishing Princess Yourbeletieff, be playing the part of an elderly but all-powerful Fairy Carabosse in favour of the Russian dancers. This delightful invasion, against whose charms only those critics protested who were devoid of taste, brought to Paris, as is well known, a fever of curiosity less violent, more purely aesthetic, but perhaps just as intense as the Dreyfus Affair. In this battle too, Mme Verdurin was to be in the vanguard, but with a very different social dividend. As she had been seen shoulder to shoulder with Mme Zola, facing the might of the Cour d'Assises, so when the new humanity, rushing to acclaim the Russian Ballet, flocked to the Opéra crowned with the feathers of unknown birds, there again, in a grand circle box, was Mme Verdurin, flanking the Princess Yourbeletieff. And, just as after the day's excitement at the Palais de Justice we had gone in the evening to Mme Verdurin's to see Picquart or Labori at close quarters, and especially to hear the latest news, to find out what could be expected of Zurlinden, Loubet, Colonel Jouaust[51] or the Regulations, in the same way, not wanting to go to bed after the enthusiasm unleashed by *Shéhérazade* or the *Prince Igor* dances, we went to Mme Verdurin's, where every evening delicious suppers, jointly presided over by Princess Yourbeletieff and the Patronne, brought together the dancers who had not yet eaten, so as to be able to jump even higher, their director, the scene-painters, the great composers Igor Stravinsky and Richard Strauss, an unchanging inner circle around which, as at M. and Mme Helvetius's suppers, the greatest ladies in Paris and foreign Highnesses did not disdain to come and go. Even those society people who laid claim to taste and drew otiose distinctions between the various Russian ballets, finding the production of *Les Sylphides* 'subtler' than that of *Shéhérazade*, in which they saw an almost African influence, were delighted to observe close at hand these great men who were revolutionizing taste in the theatre and who, in an art perhaps somewhat more artificial than painting, had produced a renewal as radical as Impressionism.

To return to M. de Charlus, Mme Verdurin could have borne it if he had proscribed only Mme Bontemps, whom Mme Verdurin had singled out at Odette's for her love of the arts and who, during the Dreyfus Affair, had sometimes come to dinner with her husband, whom Mme Verdurin had called lukewarm since he did not support the call for a judicial review, but who, being highly intelligent and happy to create understandings with people from all the parties, was delighted to show his independence by dining with Labori, while carefully slipping in at the right moment a tribute to the honourable conduct, recognized by all parties, of Jaurès.[52] But the Baron had also proscribed certain ladies of the aristocracy with whom Mme Verdurin, in the context of musical celebrations, collections and charity events, had begun to establish contact, and who, whatever M. de Charlus thought of them, would have formed a good basis, much better than the Baron himself, on which to build a new Verdurin inner circle, an aristocratic one this time. She had in fact been counting on this party, to which M. de Charlus was bringing ladies of the same class, as an occasion to mix her new friends with his, and had been looking forward happily to their surprise on meeting at her house their own friends or relations, invited by the Baron. She was disappointed and furious at his prohibitions. It remained to be seen whether the evening, in these circumstances, would add up to a profit or a loss for her. The loss would not be too severe if at least M. de Charlus's lady guests, when they came, were so well disposed towards Mme Verdurin that they would become friends of hers in the future. In that case there would be something to be gained, and one day soon the two halves of society that M. de Charlus wanted to keep apart would be brought together, at the cost, of course, of not inviting him that evening. Mme Verdurin was therefore awaiting the arrival of the Baron's guests with a certain apprehension. She was soon to learn the frame of mind in which they were coming, and what kind of relations the Patronne could hope to enjoy with them. As she waited, Mme Verdurin consulted with the faithful, but seeing Charlus come in with Brichot and me, she immediately stopped speaking.

To our great astonishment, when Brichot said how sad he was to hear that her great friend was so ill, Mme Verdurin replied, 'Listen, I have to admit that I don't feel sad at all. There's no point in pretending that one feels something when one doesn't …' No doubt she spoke this way because she was tired and lacked the energy to put on a sad face for the whole length of her party; she was proud, too, and did not want to look as if she were hunting for excuses for not having put the whole thing off, but also concerned for her reputation and clever enough to see that the lack of sorrow she displayed would be more honourable if attributed to a particular antipathy, only now revealed, to the Princesse, than to a general want of feeling; then, no one could fail to be disarmed by such unquestionable sincerity: for if Mme Verdurin had not really been indifferent to the Princess's death, would she have chosen, in order to explain why she had not cancelled her party, to accuse herself of a much graver fault? This was to forget that in admitting her grief she would also have been confessing an inability to forgo any pleasure; now her hard-heartedness as a friend was something more shocking, more immoral, but less shaming, and consequently easier to admit to than the frivolous values of a hostess. In the case of a crime, when the culprit is in danger, any confession is dictated by self-interest. Where there is no punishment for the offence, the cause is self-esteem. Whether it was that, finding woefully hackneyed the excuse that people use to avoid having their life of pleasure interrupted by bereavements, when they say that they find it unnecessary to wear outward signs of mourning when their grief is in their heart, Mme Verdurin had chosen to imitate those intelligent criminals who reject the clichés of innocence and whose defence (half-way to an admission of guilt, if only they knew it) is to say that they would have seen no objection to the crime with which they are charged, but by chance, as it happens, they did not have the opportunity of committing it, or whether, having decided on indifference as the explanation of her conduct, and having once given way to her bad impulse, she had seen a certain originality in this feeling, unusual perspicacity in recognizing it, and unmistakable 'nerve' in proclaiming it so openly, Mme Verdurin continued to insist on her lack of sorrow, not without a certain pride such as might be felt by a paradoxical psychologist or a daring playwright. 'Yes, isn't it strange, she said, I felt almost nothing. Not that I wouldn't rather she had lived, heaven knows, I had nothing against her. – I had, interrupted M. Verdurin. – Oh, he doesn't like her, he thought it didn't look good for me to have her here, but he shouldn't have worried. – Now you must admit that I never approved of you seeing her. I always told you her reputation was bad. – But I have never heard that said, Saniette protested. – What!, cried Mme Verdurin, everyone knew. It wasn't just bad, it was shocking, dreadful. But no, it's not because of that. I just can't explain my reaction; I didn't dislike her, but I cared so little about her that, when we heard she was very ill, even my husband was surprised and said, "You don't seem affected at all." Listen, this evening he offered to call off the rehearsal, but I said no, we must go on with it, because I thought it would be hypocritical to pretend to be sad when I wasn't.' She said this because it had a curiously modern, 'problem-play' sound to it, and also it was gloriously convenient; for want of feeling or immorality, once confessed, simplify life as effectively as loose morals: they remove the need to find excuses for blameworthy actions, and transform them into obligations of sincerity. And the faithful listened to Mme Verdurin's words with the mixture of admiration and unease that certain cruelly realistic, painfully observed plays used once to provoke; and while they marvelled at this new display of their beloved Patronne's honesty and independent spirit, more than one, while saying to himself that of course it would be different for him, thought of his own death and wondered whether the sad day would be marked by tears or a party at the Quai Conti. 'I'm glad the evening wasn't cancelled, because of my own guests,' said M. de Charlus, little thinking that by speaking in this way he was further offending Mme Verdurin.

Meanwhile I was struck, as everyone was who came near Mme Verdurin that evening, by a strong and rather disagreeable smell of nose-drops. This was the reason. The reader will remember that Mme Verdurin's artistic emotions were never expressed by psychological, but only by physical means, so that they should seem deeper and more ineluctable. Now if anyone spoke to her of Vinteuil's music, her favourite, she would remain indifferent, as if she did not expect it to cause her any emotion. Then after a few minutes of looking straight in front of her, almost absent-mindedly, she would answer in a precise, down-to-earth, barely polite tone, as if she had been saying, 'I don't mind your smoking, of course, if it weren't for the carpet, which is a very fine one. Not that that matters either, but it would catch fire very easily, I'm terribly afraid of fire and I wouldn't want you all to be roasted alive just because somebody dropped a cigarette end.' With

Vinteuil it was the same. If someone spoke of him, she did not express any admiration, but a moment later said how sorry she was that he was to be played that evening: 'I've nothing against Vinteuil, in fact I think he's the greatest composer of the century, it's just that I can't listen to one of those pieces without crying all the way through (she did not say "crying" in a pathetic tone of voice, but with the same, natural voice as she would have said "sleeping" and indeed some unkind people maintained that the second verb would have been more appropriate, for she always listened to Vinteuil's music with her head in her hands, and certain snoring noises could have been sobs). I can cry, I don't mind, but the trouble is, crying gives me the most dreadful cold. My nose gets all congested, and two days later I look like an old drunkard and to get my vocal cords working again I have to have days of inhalations. So one of Cottard's pupils … – Oh, but I didn't have a chance to say, poor Dr Cottard, you must have been so sorry to lose him, and so young … – Well, there you are, he's dead, we all die, he'd killed patients enough, it was time to take his own medicine. Anyhow, as I was saying, one of his pupils, a lovely man, has been treating me for my colds. He has quite an original saying, "Prevention is better than cure". So he puts stuff up my nose before the music starts. The effect is dramatic. I can cry like I don't know how many mothers who have lost all their children, not a hint of a cold. Sometimes a touch of conjunctivitis, but that's all. Total relief. If it wasn't for that I couldn't have gone on listening to Vinteuil. It was just one bronchitis attack after another.' I could not keep any longer from talking about Mlle Vinteuil. 'Isn't the composer's daughter here? I asked Mme Verdurin, with one of her friends? – No, I've just had a telegram, said Mme Verdurin evasively, they've had to stay in the country.' And for a moment I dared hope that perhaps they had never agreed to come, and that Mme Verdurin had promised the appearance of these representatives of the composer only in order to make a favourable impression on the musicians and the audience. 'What, weren't they even at the afternoon rehearsal?' asked M. de Charlus with feigned interest, wishing to seem not to have spoken to Charlie. Morel himself came to say hallo to me. I questioned him in a whisper about Mlle Vinteuil's non-appearance. He seemed to know very little about it. I motioned to him not to speak of it aloud and said that we would talk about it later. He bowed to me and assured me that my wish would be his command. I noticed that he was much more polite, more respectful than formerly. I praised him – the man who could perhaps help me to clarify my suspicions – to M. de Charlus, who replied, 'Of course he is, there would hardly be any point in his living with people who know how to behave if he went on being ill-mannered.' Good manners, in M. de Charlus's eyes, were old French manners, without a hint of British stiffness. So when Charlie, coming back from a tour in the provinces or abroad, arrived in his travelling clothes at the Baron's, the older man, if there were not too many people present, would unaffectedly kiss him on both cheeks, perhaps in part to show by such an open display of his affection that there was nothing improper in it, perhaps in order not to deny himself a pleasure, but probably more from a sense of history, to uphold and demonstrate the old manners of France and, just as he would have protested against Secession style or Art Nouveau by keeping his great-grandmother's old armchairs, to set against the British stiff upper lip the affectionate sensibility of an eighteenth-century father not hiding his joy at the return of his son. Was there an incestuous streak in this paternal affection? It is more likely that the way in which M. de Charlus habitually relieved his lusts, and about which we shall learn more at a later stage, did not satisfy his emotional side, which had lain fallow since the death of his wife; it is certainly true that after having thought several times about marrying again, he was now exercised by an obsessive desire to adopt a child, and that some people in his circle were afraid it would fix upon Charlie. And this is not surprising. The invert who has been able to nourish his passion only with a literature written for men who love women, who thought of men as he read Musset's *Nights*, feels a need to share, in the same way, all the social roles of the man who is not an invert, to keep someone as the admirer of chorus-girls does, or the old habitué of the Opéra, and also to settle down, to marry or live with a man, to be a father.

He walked away with Morel, ostensibly to have him explain the pieces they would be playing, but more because he took great pleasure, while Charlie showed him his music, in this public display of their secret intimacy. I too spent this time in pleasure. For, even though the Verdurin set did not include many unmarried girls, they made up for this by inviting plenty of them to their big evening parties. Some of these, and some very pretty ones, I already knew. They were catching each other's eyes across the room, signalling a welcome and filling the air with the repeated brightness of a lovely young girl's smile. Such is the multiple, scattered ornament of evening parties, as of days. One recalls an atmosphere because of the young girls who smiled there. People would have been very surprised if they had picked up any of the furtive messages that M. de Charlus had been exchanging with several other important male guests. These were two dukes, an eminent general, a famous writer, great doctor and distinguished lawyer. The remarks were these: 'By the way, did you ever find out if the footman, no, the little one who rides on the coach … And at your cousin Guermantes's, is there anything? – Not at the moment, no. – I say, did you see, at the main door, looking after the carriages, there was a little blond thing in knee-breeches who looked very appealing. She called my carriage for me quite charmingly, I'd have liked to get talking. – Yes, but she's dead against, anyway she makes such difficulties, you know you like things to move quickly, you'd hate that. – Anyhow I know it's no go, one of my friends tried. – What a shame, the profile's wonderful and the hair! – Really, do you think so? I think if you'd seen more of her you'd soon have lost interest. No, you should have been at the buffet two months ago, you'd have seen something amazing, a great big lad over six feet tall, perfect skin, *and* he likes it. But he's in Poland now. – Oh! That's rather far. – You never know. He may come back. People do reappear.' There is no fashionable party, if one takes a cross-section of it at sufficient depth, that is not like those parties to which doctors invite their patients; the patients talk very sensibly, display excellent manners, and would give no sign of being mad if they did not whisper in your ear as an old gentleman passes, 'Do you see him? That's Joan of Arc.'

'I think we really have a duty to tell him, said Mme Verdurin to Brichot. It's not that I mean any harm to Charlus, quite the opposite. He's good company and as for his reputation, it's not one that can do *me* any harm! All right, I know that for the sake of our little set, at our dinners when we get together to talk, I hate flirting, men saying silly things to women off in a corner instead of talking about something interesting, but with Charlus I didn't have to worry the way I did with Swann or Elstir or any of those others. With him I knew I was safe, there could have been all the women in the world there, you knew that the conversation wouldn't break up into tête-à-têtes, there'd be no whispering in corners. Charlus is in a class by himself, like a priest. But he mustn't start thinking he can lay down the law to the young men who come here and upset the balance in our little group, otherwise it will be worse than having a ladies' man.' And Mme Verdurin was sincere in thus pronouncing her tolerance of Charlisme. Like every ecclesiastical power, she regarded mere human weaknesses as less serious than anything that could weaken the authority principle, damage orthodoxy, alter the ancient creed, in her little church. 'Otherwise, I shall have something to say. There's a gentleman who stopped Charlie coming to a recital because he was not invited. So, we shall give him a severe warning, I hope that will be enough for him, for if not he will have to take himself off. I swear he wants to make a fool of him.' And, using exactly the same expressions that almost anyone else would have, for there are some quite uncommon ones that a given subject, particular circumstances almost inevitably bring back to the speaker, who imagines that he is freely expressing his own thoughts while he is simply mechanically repeating the universal lesson, she added, 'You never see him without that great bogyman hanging over him, like some kind of a bodyguard.' M. Verdurin suggested taking Charlie on one side for a moment, saying he needed to ask him about something. Mme Verdurin feared that he would be upset and play badly. 'No, you'd better not say your piece until after the performance. Perhaps better wait for another time.' For much as Mme Verdurin looked forward to the delicious feeling of knowing that her husband was enlightening Charlie in a room nearby, she was afraid, if things went wrong, that he might be angry and let her down on the sixteenth.

What doomed M. de Charlus on that evening was the bad manners – so common among society people – of his guests, who were now beginning to arrive. They had come out of friendship for M. de Charlus, and curiosity about visiting such an unlikely spot; every duchess headed straight for the Baron as if he were the host, saying, a yard away from the Verdurins, who could hear everything, 'Show me, where is old Mother Verdurin, do you think I really have to be introduced to her? I do hope she doesn't put my name in the newspaper tomorrow, or I shall be in disgrace with all my relations. What, that woman with white hair? But she doesn't look too bad.' Hearing the name of Mlle Vinteuil, who in any case was not there, more than one lady said, 'What, the sonata girl? Do let me see her,' and meeting up with their own friends, they huddled together and kept watch, bubbling with ironic curiosity, for the arrival of the faithful, finding little to single out but the rather unusual hair-style of a person who, some years later, was to make the same style fashionable in the very smartest circles; all in all, they were disappointed to find this salon less different than they had hoped from those they were used to, just as smart people would feel let down if, having gone to

Bruant's night-club in the hope of being picked on by the singer, they were welcomed on arrival with a polite 'good evening' instead of the expected, 'Cor, what a mouth, what a North and South! Blimey, what a mouth she's got!'

M. de Charlus, at Balbec, had made a penetrating criticism in my hearing of Mme de Vaugoubert, who, despite her great intelligence, had caused first the unexpected success and then the irremediable disgrace of her husband. The sovereigns to whom M. de Vaugoubert was accredited, King Theodosius and Queen Eudoxia, having returned to Paris, this time for a stay of some length, there had been daily celebrations in their honour, during which the Queen, a close friend of Mme de Vaugoubert, whom she had known for ten years in her own capital, and not knowing the wife of the President nor of any of the ministers, had turned her back on them to spend her time with the ambassador's wife. For that lady, who believed her position to be unassailable, since M. de Vaugoubert had been the architect of the alliance between King Theodosius and France, the marked favour shown her by the Queen had been balm to her pride, but had not given her any sense of the danger which threatened her and which was to overwhelm her a few months later with the sudden, and to the over-confident couple unbelievable, announcement of M. de Vaugoubert's brutally sudden forced retirement. M. de Charlus, commenting in the 'slowcoach' on the fall of his childhood friend, expressed his surprise that such a clever woman should not, in these circumstances, have used all her influence with the sovereigns to make it appear that she had no such influence, and to have them direct all their amiability towards the President's and ministers' wives: an attention which would have flattered the wives all the more, and made them feel all the more grateful to the Vaugouberts, the more they thought that such amiability was unprompted, and not orchestrated by them. But the man who can see another's mistake need only be intoxicated, however gently, by circumstances and he will often fall into it himself. And M. de Charlus as his guests pushed their way through the crowd to come and congratulate him, to thank him as if he had been the host, did not think to ask them to say a word to Mme Verdurin. Only the Queen of Naples, in whose veins ran the same noble blood as in her sisters, the Empress Elizabeth and the Duchesse d'Alençon, began to talk to Mme Verdurin as if she had come to the house for the pleasure of seeing Mme Verdurin, more than for the music or to see M. de Charlus. She said a hundred kind things to the Patronne, spoke at length of how long she had wanted to meet her, complimented her on her house and talked to her of the most varied things as if she were paying a call. She would have so liked to bring her niece Elizabeth, she said (the one who was soon afterwards to marry Prince Albert of Belgium); the girl would be so sorry not to have come! She fell silent as she saw the musicians appear on the platform, and asked for Morel to be pointed out to her. She could have been under no illusion about M. de Charlus's motives in wanting the young virtuoso to be bathed in such glory. But the wisdom of an old sovereign in whose veins ran some of the noblest blood in history, the richest in experience, scepticism and pride, only led her to consider the inevitable blemishes of some of the people she loved most, like her cousin Charlus (the child, like her, of a Duchess of Bavaria), as misfortunes which made them value all the more the support they found in her, and made her take even greater pleasure in offering it to them. She knew that M. de Charlus would be doubly pleased that she had taken the trouble to come in these circumstances. It was just that, being as kind as she had once shown herself brave, this heroic woman who, as a soldier-queen, had fired the cannon on the ramparts at Gaeta,[53] was always chivalrously ready to go to the help of the powerless and, seeing Mme Verdurin alone and neglected (and quite unaware of the fact that she should not have left the Queen's side), had tried to pretend that for her, the Queen of Naples, the focal point of the evening, the attraction which had drawn her there, was Mme Verdurin. She apologized repeatedly for not being able to stay to the end, since she had, most unusually, to go to another party, and particularly asked that when she left no one should be disturbed on her account, thus forgoing the honours which Mme Verdurin did not in any case know should be paid her on her departure.

We must, however, do M. de Charlus the justice of remarking that, even though he forgot Mme Verdurin entirely and allowed her to be neglected to a scandalous degree by the people 'of his own world' whom he had invited, he did understand that he must not allow them to show the same offhand disregard for the 'musical entertainment' as they had for the Patronne herself. Morel had already gone up on the platform, the artists were taking their places, and the conversations were continuing, with laughter and comments that 'apparently you have to be in the know to make much of this'. Suddenly M. de Charlus, drew himself up, as if he had entered a different body from the one I had seen dragging its bulk towards Mme Verdurin's, took on the expression of a prophet and turned upon the assembled audience a look of seriousness that told them the time for laughter was past; more than one lady suddenly blushed, like a schoolgirl caught in misbehaviour before the whole class. I found something comical in M. de Charlus's attitude, noble as it was; for at one moment he silenced his guests with fiery looks, and then, so as to indicate to them, as if by an order of service, the religious hush, the detachment from all earthly things, that they were to observe, he offered them, lifting his white-gloved hands to his fine forehead, a model, to be imitated by all, of gravity, almost of ecstasy, not acknowledging the greetings of late arrivals, who lacked the decency to understand that it was now time for great Art. Everyone was hypnotized, no one dared make a sound or move a chair; respect for music – thanks to the prestige of Palamède – had suddenly been instilled into a crowd as ill-mannered as it was smart.

Seeing the little platform occupied not just by Morel and a pianist but other instrumentalists, I thought that they were going to begin with works by composers other than Vinteuil. For I thought that only his piano and violin sonata had survived.

Mme Verdurin was sitting off to one side, the hemispheres of her white and pale-pink forehead swelling magnificently, her hair drawn back and upwards, partly in imitation of an eighteenth-century portrait and partly by the need for fresh air of a fever patient reluctant to speak of her suffering, isolated, a divinity presiding over the musical solemnities, a goddess of Wagnerism and migraine, a kind of almost tragic Norn, summoned up by genius in the midst of all these bores, in whose presence she was going to disdain even more than usual to show any sign of being affected by this music which she knew so much better than they did. The concert began, I did not know what they were playing; I was in unknown territory. Where could I place it? In which composer's work was I? I longed to know, and not being near anyone I could ask, wished I could have been a character in the *Arabian Nights*, which I constantly reread, and in which at moments of uncertainty there appears a genie or a maiden of ravishing beauty, invisible to all but the perplexed hero, to whom she reveals exactly what he wants to know. Now at this moment I was suddenly vouchsafed just such a magic apparition. Just as, when walking in a landscape one does not know and which one has indeed approached from a new direction, one turns a corner and finds oneself suddenly on a new path every twist and turn of which one knows perfectly, but which one has never joined from this direction before, one says to oneself 'But this is the little path that leads to the back gate into my friends the ***s' garden; I'm only two minutes from their house,' and there indeed is their daughter who has seen one approaching and come out to say hallo; just so I found my bearings in this music which was new to me, and recognized the landscape of the Vinteuil sonata; and, more wonderful than any girl, the little phrase, wrapped, caparisoned in silver, streaming with brilliant sonorities light and soft as scarves, came towards me, still recognizable under these new ornaments. My joy at meeting it again was increased by the familiar, friendly tone in which it spoke to me, so persuasive, so simple, yet allowing its rich, shimmering beauty to unfold in all its splendour. Its purpose this time, however, was simply to show me the way, a different path from that of the sonata, for this was a different, hitherto unperformed work by Vinteuil, where he had simply chosen to make an allusion (explained at this point by a note in the programme which we should have had before us) by introducing, just for a moment, the little phrase. Having been recalled for a moment in this way, it disappeared and I found myself in an unknown world once more, but I now knew, and everything I heard confirmed, that this was one of the worlds that I had not even imagined Vinteuil could have created; for when, tiring of the sonata, whose universe was exhausted for me, I tried to imagine others equally beautiful but different, I simply did as those poets do who fill their imagined Paradise with meadows, flowers and rivers duplicating those on Earth. What I now heard caused me as much joy as the sonata would have done if I had not known it; that is to say, it was just as beautiful, but different. Whereas the sonata opened on a lily-like dawn in the country, dividing its floating whiteness but only to attach it to the light but thick tangle of a rustic bower of honeysuckle and white geraniums, the new work took off on a stormy morning over flat, level surfaces like those of the sea, amid an acid silence, in an infinity of emptiness, and then it was in a rosy dawn that this unknown universe began to be built before me, drawn out of silence and night. This new, red light, so absent from the tender, rustic and candid sonata, tinged all the sky, as dawn does, with a mysterious hope. And a cry was already piercing the air, a cry of seven notes, but the most unheard-of, the most different from anything I could ever have imagined, something both unvoiceable and strident, no longer a murmuring of doves as in the sonata, but something that tore the air, as bright as the scarlet note that had

suffused the opening bars, something like a mystic cock-crow, an inexpressible but shrill call of eternal morning. The cold, rain-washed, electric atmosphere – so different in quality, its pressures so other, belonging to a world so remote from the virginal, grass- and tree-inhabited world of the sonata – kept changing every moment, washing away the crimsoned promise of the Dawn. At midday, however, in a spell of burning sunshine, it seemed to reach a heavy, villagey and almost rustic happiness, in which the repetitive clanging of unleashed bells (like those which poured their burning heat down on the church square at Combray and which Vinteuil, who must often have heard them, had perhaps found at that moment in his memory, like a colour ready to hand upon a palette) seemed to give material form to the coarsest joy. To tell the truth, I did not find this joy motif aesthetically pleasing; it seemed to be almost ugly, its rhythm bumped so heavily along the ground that one could have copied it in almost all essentials just by a certain way of banging sticks on a table. I felt that in this passage Vinteuil had been lacking in inspiration, and as a result I allowed my own attention to drift slightly.

I looked at the Patronne, whose fierce stillness seemed a protest against the rhythmically nodding, ignorant heads of the ladies of the Faubourg. Mme Verdurin did not say, 'You know, I know this music really pretty well! If I had to express everything *I* feel, you'd be here all night!' She did not say it. But her straight-backed, unmoving posture, her expressionless eyes, her escaping locks of hair, said it for her. They also expressed her courage, said that the musicians could do their worst, trample her nerves, she would not flinch at the *andante* nor cry out at the *allegro*. I looked at the musicians. The cellist was dominating the instrument he held between his knees, his head to one side and his vulgar features giving his face, at particularly mannered moments, an involuntary expression of disgust; the double-bassist leaned over his instrument, plucking it with the same homely persistence with which he would have cleaned a cabbage, while next to him the harpist, still a child, in a short dress, with the horizontal rays of her golden quadrilateral extending beyond her in all directions, like those which stand for the ether in the magic chamber of a sibyl, according to conventional modes of representation, seemed to be trying to pluck from pre-arranged points in the network a delicious sound, in the same as way as, were she a little allegorical goddess standing before the golden trellis of the night sky, she would have picked stars one by one. As for Morel, a lock of hair hitherto invisible and lost among the others had come loose and now formed a curl on his forehead.

I turned my head a fraction towards the audience to see what M. de Charlus seemed to think of this curl. But my eyes only met the face, or rather the hands of Mme Verdurin, for the one was entirely hidden behind the others. Did the Patronne, by this meditative posture, mean to show that she considered herself to be somewhere like church, finding this music no different from the sublimest prayer; was she trying, as some people in church do, to hide from prying looks either, out of modesty, their imagined fervour or, for more worldly reasons, their guilty wandering thoughts or irresistible sleep? This last hypothesis I thought for a moment, hearing a regular, non-musical sound, must be the right one, but then I noticed that it came from the snoring, not of Mme Verdurin but of her little dog. But soon, the triumphant bell-motif having been dispelled, chased away by others, my attention was captured by the music again, and I realized that if the various voices in the septet came to the fore in turn only to combine at the end, in the same way his sonata and, I was later to learn, all his other works were mere sketches, charming but slight, compared to the complete, overwhelming masterwork that was now revealed to me. And I could not help making the comparison and remembering that I had thought of all the other worlds Vinteuil might possibly have created as closed universes, like each one of my loves; but in reality I had to admit to myself that, just as my latest love – the love for Albertine – contained within itself all my first impulses to love her (at Balbec at the very beginning, then after the ring game, then the night she had slept at the hotel, then on the foggy Sunday in Paris, then on the evening of the Guermantes party, then at Balbec again, and finally in Paris, where my life was now closely entwined with hers), in the same way, if I considered not just my love for Albertine but my whole life, then all my previous loves had been mere, slight essays preparing the way for, calling into existence this vaster love … love for Albertine. And I stopped listening to the music to wonder again whether Albertine had seen Mlle Vinteuil in the past few days or not, as one reinvestigates an inward pain from which one has been for a moment distracted. For it was inside me that all Albertine's actions took place. For every being that we know, we possess a double. But, normally located on the edge of our imagination, our memory, it remains relatively external to ourselves, and what it has or might have done has no more painful impact upon us than an object placed some distance away and able to cause only the painless sensations of sight. When something affects such beings as these, we perceive it in a detached manner, we can deplore it in the right terms which will convince others of our good-heartedness, we cannot really feel it. But since my injury at Balbec, it was in my heart, at a depth making removal impossible, that Albertine's double had lodged. What I saw of her hurt me as it might a patient whose senses were so unfortunately transposed that he experienced the sight of a colour as an incision deep into the flesh. Happily I had not yet given way to the temptation to break with Albertine; the irritation I felt, knowing that I would soon have to return to her as to a woman one loves, was insignificant compared to the anxiety I would have felt if the separation had been accomplished at a time when I still had doubts and before I had had time to become indifferent to her. And at the moment when I imagined her waiting for me at home, feeling the time passing slowly, perhaps having fallen asleep for a moment in her room, I felt the passing caress of a tender, homely phrase in the septet. Perhaps – everything is so closely intertwined and superimposed in our inner life – the phrase had been inspired by Vinteuil's daughter's sleep – that daughter who was now the cause of all my uneasiness, when its tranquillity surrounded the musician's work of an evening; the phrase calmed me by its soft background of silence which underlies certain reveries of Schumann's, during which, even when 'the poet is speaking', one senses that 'the child is asleep'.[54] Sleeping or waking, I would find her waiting for me this evening when I chose to go home, Albertine, my little girl. And yet, I said to myself, something more mysterious than Albertine's love seemed to be promised by the beginning of this work, by those first dawn cries. I tried to put aside the thought of my friend so as to concentrate on the musician. For he seemed to be there with us. It seemed as if the composer, reincarnated, was living for ever in his music; one could hear the joy with which he was choosing this or that tone-colour, matching it to the others. For, alongside deeper gifts, Vinteuil enjoyed one which few musicians and even few painters have possessed, that of choosing colours which are so durable but also so personal that not only can time not fade their freshness, but the pupils who imitate the original colourist, and even the masters who outperform him, cannot tarnish their originality. The revolution accomplished by their appearance will not be assimilated into anonymity with the passing of time; it is unleashed, it explodes anew and only when the works of the perpetual innovator are played again. Each timbre was underlined by a colour which all the rules in the world, learned by the best-educated musicians, could never imitate, so that Vinteuil, even though he had appeared at the appropriate moment to fill his assigned place in the evolution of music, would always break ranks and appear in the vanguard when one of his pieces was played, a piece which would give the impression of having been written after those of more recent musicians, because of its apparently contradictory and in fact deceptive character of enduring novelty. A passage of Vinteuil's symphonic work, first encountered in piano reduction and then heard in full score, was like a ray of sunshine broken up by a prism as it enters a dark dining-room; it unfolded an unsuspected, multicoloured treasure like all the jewels of the *Thousand and One Nights*. But how can one compare to such a static if glittering flood of light something that was life, blissful perpetual motion? M. Vinteuil, whom I remembered as so shy and so sad, had, when it was a matter of choosing a timbre, joining it to another, a boldness and in every sense of the word a happy touch of which there could be no doubt when one listened to his music. The joy that such sounds had caused him, the new strength they had given him to seek out more, still led the listener on from one discovery to the next, or rather it was the creator who led him on himself, drawing from the colours as he found them a wild joy which gave him the power to press on, to discover those which they seemed to summon up next, ecstatic, trembling as if at a spark when sublimity sprang spontaneously from the clash of brass, panting, intoxicated, dizzy, half-madly painting his great musical fresco, like Michelangelo tied to his ladder and, head down, flinging tumultuous brushstrokes at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Vinteuil had been dead for many years now; but in the midst of these instruments he had loved, he had been allowed to pursue, without limit of time, at least one part of his life. Of his human life only? If art was indeed only an extension of life, was it worth sacrificing anything for, was it not as unreal as life itself? The more I listened to the septet, the less I could believe so. No doubt the flaming red septet was singularly different from the white sonata; the timid questioning answered by the little phrase from the breathless insistence on finding the fulfilment of the strange promise which had sounded forth so sharply, so briefly, vibrating so uncannily in the still, motionless red light of the morning sky over the sea. And yet these phrases, different as they were, were all made up of the same elements, for just as there was a parallel universe, perceptible to us in fragments dispersed here and there in museums and private collections, which was Elstir's universe, so Vinteuil's music spread out, note by note, touch by touch, the unknown, priceless colorations of an unsuspected universe, fragmented by the lacunae which separated successive hearings of his work; these two such different questionings which determined the different progress of the sonata and the septet, one breaking up into short appeals a line in itself continuous and pure, the other welding scattered fragments together to form an indivisible framework, one so quiet and timid, almost detached and as it were philosophical, the other so pressing, anxious, imploring, were in fact the same prayer, springing up before different inner sunrises, and simply refracted through different milieux of disparate thoughts, artistic experiments in progress during the years when he had been trying to create something new. A prayer, a hope which was always essentially the same, recognizable under its disguises in the various works of Vinteuil, yet found only in the works of Vinteuil. Musicologists could take those phrases and find their analogues, their antecedants, in the works of other great musicians, but only for secondary reasons, outward resemblances, analogies discovered through ingenious reasoning rather than felt through direct impression. The impression conveyed by these phrases of Vinteuil's was different from any other, as if, in spite of the conclusions which science seems to be reaching, individuals did exist. And it was just when he was doing his utmost to be novel, that one could recognize, beneath the apparent differences, the deep similarities and the planned resemblances that underlay a work, when Vinteuil would pick up a given phrase several times, diversify it, playfully change its rhythm, bring it back again in the original form; this kind of deliberate echo, the product of intelligence, inevitably superficial, could never be so striking as the hidden, involuntary resemblances which sprang to the surface, under different colours, between the two distinct masterpieces; for then Vinteuil, striving powerfully to produce something new, searched into himself, and with all the force of creative effort touched his own essence, at a depth where, whatever question one asks, the soul replies with the same accent – its own. A particular accent, this accent of Vinteuil's, separated from the accent of other musicians by a distinction much more marked than the one we perceive between the voices of different people, or even between the bellowing and the cry of two animal species; a real difference, the one that existed between the thought of some other musician and the eternal investigations of Vinteuil, the question that he put to himself in so many different forms, his speculation, endlessly painstaking but as free from the analytical forms of reasoning as if it had been conducted in the realm of the angels, so that we can measure its depth but no more translate it into human speech than

disembodied spirits can when they are called up by a medium and interrogated about the secrets of death; his own accent, for in the end and even taking into account the acquired originality which had struck me in the afternoon, the family relationship which musicologists could trace between composers, it is to a single, personal voice that those great singers, the original musicians, always return in spite of themselves, a voice which is the living proof of the irreducible individuality of each soul. Vinteuil might try to make his music more solemn, grander, or to aim at liveliness and gaiety, to produce what he could see reflected as beauty in the mind of the public, the same Vinteuil, in spite of himself, saw everything else submerged in a groundswell which makes his song eternal and consequently recognized. This song, so different from everyone else's, so similar in all his own works, where had Vinteuil learnt it? Each great artist seems to be the citizen of an unknown homeland which even he has forgotten, different from the land from which another great artist will soon set sail for the earth. At most, Vinteuil seemed to have got nearer to this homeland in his last works. The atmosphere in them was not the same as in the sonata, the questioning phrases had become more pressing, more uneasy, the answers more mysterious; the damp breezes of its morning and evening seemed to exercise an influence even on the strings of the instruments. Morel was playing wonderfully, yet the sounds issuing from his violin seemed to me strangely piercing, even shrill. This sharpness was pleasing and one seemed to hear in it, as one does in certain voices, a kind of moral quality, as if of superior intelligence. But it could also be shocking. When an artist's vision of the universe changes, becomes purer, closer to the memory of the lost homeland, it is natural that that should be reflected in a general alteration of sound quality in the musician, as of colour in the painter. In any case, the most intelligent part of the audience understands, for it would later be said that Vinteuil's last works were his most profound. Now there was no programme here, no title to allow one to form an intellectual judgment. So one simply guessed that this was a transposition, into the realm of sound, of profundity.

It is not that musicians can remember this lost homeland, but each of them always remains unconsciously in tune with it; he is overcome with joy when he sings the songs of his country, he may sometimes betray it for the sake of glory, but when he seeks glory in this way he moves further away from it, and only finds it when he turns his back on it, and when, whatever his subject may be, he gives voice to that particular song whose repetitive character – for whatever the ostensible subject it remains identical – proves the continuity in the musician of the constituent elements of his soul. But is it not the case that these elements, this final residue which we are obliged to keep to ourselves, which speech cannot convey even from friend to friend, from master to pupil, from lover to mistress, that this inexpressible thing which reveals the qualitative difference between what each of us has felt and has had to leave on the threshold of the phrases which he uses to communicate with others, something which he can do only by dwelling on points of experience common to all and consequently of no interest to any, can be expressed through art, the art of a Vinteuil or an Elstir, which makes manifest in the colours of the spectrum the intimate make-up of those worlds we call individuals, and which without art we should never know? Wings, another respiratory system which allowed us to cross the immensity of space, would not help us. For if we went to Mars or Venus while keeping the same senses, everything we might see there would take on the same aspect as the things we know on Earth. The only real journey, the only Fountain of Youth, would be to travel not towards new landscapes, but with new eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them can see, or can be; and we can do that with the help of an Elstir, a Vinteuil; with them and their like we can truly fly from star to star.

The *andante* had just finished on a phrase full of tenderness to which I had given myself up completely; then there was, before the next movement, a moment's break during which the musicians put down their instruments and the listeners began to exchange impressions. A duke, to show his knowledge of the subject, said, 'That piece is very difficult to play well.' Some more likeable people talked to me for a moment. But what was I to make of their words, which like all spoken human words seemed so meaningless in comparison with the heavenly musical phrase that had just been occupying me? I was really like an angel fallen from the delights of Paradise into the most insignificant reality. And just as certain creatures are the last examples of a form of life which nature has abandoned, I wondered whether music were not the sole example of the form which might have served – had language, the forms of words, the possibility of analysing ideas, never been invented – for the communication of souls. Music is like a possibility which has never been developed, humanity having taken different paths, those of language, spoken and written. But this return to the unanalysed was so intoxicating that on leaving its Paradise contact with other, more or less intelligent beings seemed to me extraordinarily insignificant. I might have remembered certain human beings during the music, have involved them with it; or rather, I had really connected the memory of only one person with the music, Albertine. And the final phrase of the *andante* seemed to me so sublime that I said to myself it was a pity that Albertine should not know – and if she had known, would not have understood – what an honour it was for her to be connected with something so splendid which brought us together, and with whose moving voice she had seemed to speak. But once the music ceased, the people who were there seemed too colourless for words. Refreshments were handed round. M. de Charlus spoke every now and then to a servant: 'How are you? Did you get my message? Will you come?' No doubt this hailing of them was in part a sign of the freedom and condescension of the great noble who is closer to working people than the bourgeois is, but it also showed the deviousness of the guilty individual who thinks that anything one does in the public eye will for that very reason be judged innocent. And he added, in Mme de Villeparisis's Guermantes voice, 'He's a fine lad, a good type, I often use him at home.' But his cleverness often misfired, for people were astonished by his intimately friendly manner and the *pneumatiques* he sent to footmen. The footmen themselves were not so much flattered as embarrassed by what their friends would say.

Meanwhile the septet, having begun again, was moving towards its end; several times a phrase from somewhere in the sonata reappeared, but each time changed, set to a different rhythm, with a different accompaniment, the same and yet another, as things are when they recur in life; and it was one of those phrases which, though one cannot tell which affinity has determined as their only possible dwelling-place the past of a given musician, can be found only in his works and constantly appear there, being the fairies, the dryads, the familiar divinities of the place. I had first noticed two or three such phrases in the septet which reminded me of the sonata. Soon – emerging from the violet mist which above all pervaded the last period of Vinteuil's work, so that even when he introduced a dance measure here or there, it remained trapped in an opal – I noticed another phrase of the sonata, still keeping so aloof that I barely recognized it; hesitantly it approached, disappeared as if startled, then returned and began to link arms with others arriving, as I was to learn later, from other works, called together still others which quickly became equally appealing and persuasive as they became more familiar, and entered into the dance, the heavenly dance which remained invisible to the majority of listeners who, seeing before them only a confused mist behind which they could discern nothing, punctuated with random, admiring exclamations a boredom of which they thought they would die. Then the phrases faded away, except one which I saw pass by again up to five or six times, not letting me see her face, but so tender, so different – as the little phrase from the sonata no doubt was for Swann – from anything that any woman had yet led me to desire, that that phrase, offering me in such a gentle voice a kind of happiness which would have truly been worth attaining – that invisible creature whose language I could not understand and yet whom I understood so well – was perhaps the only Unknown Woman it has ever been granted to me to meet. Then that phrase dissolved, changed its shape, like the little phrase in the sonata, and turned into the mysterious call of the beginning of the piece. A phrase of sorrowful character came to counter it, but it was so deep, so formless, so inward, so almost organic and visceral that each time it reappeared one was not sure if what was recurring was a theme or a nerve-pain. Soon the two motifs vied for supremacy in a struggle in which sometimes one disappeared entirely, and then one saw only a small part of the other. It was a wrestling-match of pure energies, however; for if these beings struggled against each other, it was without the encumbrance of their bodies, their outward appearances, their names, and they found in me an inward spectator – equally indifferent to names and individual character – ready to involve himself in their immaterial, dynamic combat and to follow with passion its vicissitudes of sound. Finally the joyous motif triumphed, it was no longer an almost anxious call from behind an empty sky, it was an inexpressible joy which seemed to come from heaven itself; a joy as different from that of the sonata as, compared to a sweetly grave Bellini angel playing the theorbo, would be an archangel of Mantegna robed in scarlet and blowing into a mighty trumpet. I knew that I should never forget this new kind of elation, this appeal to a joy not of this earth. But should I ever be able to attain it? The question seemed to me all the more important since this phrase was what could best have summed up – as something set apart from the rest of my life, from all the visible

world – those impressions, separated by long intervals, which I recalled from my previous existence as landmarks, points of departure for the construction of a true life: the impression I had felt before the spires of Martinville, before a line of trees near Balbec. In any case, to return to the particular sound of this phrase, how strange it was that that this premonition, so completely at odds with anything day-to-day life can offer, this, the most daring approximation to the joys of the next world, should have come to me from the sad, respectable lower-middle-class figure that we used to meet at the Month of Mary services at Combray! But above all, how could I possibly owe this revelation, the strangest I had yet received, of an unknown type of joy, when, it was said, he had died leaving only his sonata, with the rest non-existent, buried in indecipherable notes? Indecipherable, perhaps, but in the end, by dint of endless patience, intelligence and respect, they had been deciphered by the one person who had lived alongside Vinteuil long enough to know his way of working, to understand his hints for orchestration: Mlle Vinteuil's friend. During the lifetime of the great composer she had already assimilated the daughter's veneration for her father. It was because of this veneration that the two girls had taken an insane pleasure in the desecrations described earlier. Adoration of her father was the very precondition of the daughter's sacrilege. And no doubt they should have denied themselves the pleasure of this sacrilege, but it did not completely define them. And besides, such pleasures had become less frequent and finally disappeared altogether as their morbid physical relations, that dark, choking fire, had given way to the clear flame of a lofty, pure friendship. Mlle Vinteuil's friend was sometimes troubled by the thought that she had perhaps caused the premature death of Vinteuil. If so, by spending years sorting out the impenetrable mass of notes he left behind, by establishing reliable readings of those unknown hieroglyphs, she had had the consolation of ensuring for the composer whose last years she had darkened, a compensating immortality. Relationships not sanctioned by the law can give rise to family connections no less varied and complex, and only more solid, than those created by marriage. Without dwelling on relationships as unusual as this one, do we not see every day that adultery, when it is based on true love, not only does not shake family attachments and duties, but gives them new life? A good daughter who will, out of a sense of propriety, wear mourning for her mother's second husband, will weep real tears for the man whom her mother had chosen from among all others to be her lover. Then, Mlle Vinteuil acted as she did simply out of sadism, which does not excuse her, but comforted me a little when I thought about it afterwards. She must have understood, I would say to myself, that all this was just an illness, a form of madness, and not the true delight in wickedness that she wanted it to be. But if she was able, later, to think of this for herself, it must have eased her suffering as it had formerly spoiled her pleasure. 'That wasn't me, she must have said, I was out of my mind. I can still pray for my father, and not despair of his goodness.' However, it is possible that this idea, which must have come to her during her pleasure, did not occur to her during her suffering. I wished I could have put it into her mind. I am sure it would have done her good, and that I could have re-established between her and the memory of her father a reasonably pleasant form of communication.

As if from the illegible note-books where a chemist of genius, not knowing death is at hand, has written down discoveries which will perhaps remain for ever unread, she had extracted from papers more illegible than papyri marked with cuneiform script, the ever-true, ever-fertile formula for that unknown joy, that mystic hope of the scarlet angel of morning. And even I to whom, even if not in the same degree as to Vinteuil, she had caused, and had that very evening, by reviving my jealousy of Albertine, continued to cause, and would cause even more in the future, such suffering, owed to her, in compensation, the possibility of receiving the strange call which had come to me and which I would never again cease to hear – as it were the promise that something else existed, something perhaps reachable through art, besides the nothingness that I had found in all pleasures, and even in love, and that even if my life seemed so empty, at least it was not over.

The part of Vinteuil that she had made accessible through her work was indeed the entire work of Vinteuil. In comparison with this piece for ten instruments, the few passages of the sonata that were all the public had known before seemed so banal that one could not understand how they had excited such admiration. In the same way we are surprised that for years such insipid pieces as 'O Star of Eve' or 'Elisabeth's Prayer' could have brought audiences to their feet, applauding wildly and crying 'encore' at the last notes of what seems to us poor, colourless stuff now that we have heard *Tristan*, *The Rhinegold* and *The Mastersingers*. We must suppose that these characterless melodies nevertheless contained in tiny and therefore perhaps more easily assimilable quantities something of the originality of the masterworks which now are the only important ones for us, but which then would perhaps have been too perfect to be understood; the first ones may have prepared the way for them in the public's hearts. It is none the less true that, though they may have given a confused premonition of the beauties to come, they left them still completely undiscovered. The same is true of Vinteuil; if at his death he had left nothing – if we except certain parts of the sonata – but what he had been able to finish, what we could have known of him would have been as little, in comparison with his real greatness, as we should have known of Victor Hugo if he had died after 'The Combat of King John', 'The Silversmith's Daughter' or 'Sarah Bathing', without having written anything of *The Legend of the Centuries* or *The Contemplations*. What we think of as his real work would have remained in a virtual state, as unknown as those universes our perception cannot reach, and of which we shall never have an idea.

The same apparent contrast and profound unity between genius (talent too, and virtue) and the sheath of vices within which, as had happened for Vinteuil, it is so often contained and protected, could be read, as in a crude allegory, in the collection of guests among whom I found myself when the music was finished. This group, confined this time to Mme Verdurin's drawing-room, was like many others whose composition is unknown to the general public, and which journalists with intellectual pretensions – if they are a little better informed – call Parisian, or Panamist, or Dreyfusard, without realizing that they can be found just as well in St Petersburg, Berlin or Madrid, and at all historical periods; for if the Under-Secretary for Arts, a man of real taste and perfect manners, with a strong sense of his position, several Duchesses and three ambassadors with their wives were at Mme Verdurin's this evening, still the real, proximate reason for their presence lay in M. de Charlus's relations with Morel, relations which made the Baron wish to achieve the greatest possible publicity for his young idol's artistic success, and to get him the cross of the Légion d'honneur, another reason, at several removes, which had made the evening possible, was that a young woman enjoying the same sort of relations with Mlle Vinteuil as the Baron's with Charlie, had brought to light a whole series of works of genius that had come as such a revelation that a subscription was soon to be got up, under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, to put up a statue of Vinteuil. The cause of these works had, in fact, been served not only by Mlle Vinteuil's relations with her friend but by Charlie's with the Baron, and a sort of field path or short-cut would now allow the public to reach them without going the long way round via an incomprehension which might have lasted for years, if not complete ignorance lasting for ever. Every time something happens which can be grasped by the vulgar mind of the high-class journalist, that is to say usually something in the world of politics, the high-class journalists become convinced that nothing will be the same in France, there will be no more such evenings, people will stop admiring Ibsen, Renan, Dostoevsky, d'Annunzio, Tolstoy, Wagner or Strauss. For these journalists allow the dubious undercurrents of these official evenings to convince them that there is something decadent about the art celebrated there, which is often the most austere of all. For there is no name among those most revered by high-class journalists that did not in its time give rise to equally strange gatherings, though their strangeness was perhaps less flagrant, better concealed. At this party, the impure elements which came together there struck me from another point of view; certainly, I was as well placed as anyone to dissociate them, having met them separately; but the memories connected with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, especially, spoke to me of Combray and also of Albertine, that is to say of Balbec, since it was because I had once seen Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvain and then learned of her friend's association with Albertine, that I would be going home in a moment to find not solitude but Albertine awaiting me; and my memories of Morel and M. de Charlus's first meeting on the platform at Doncières, spoke to me of Combray and its two walks, for M. de Charlus was one of those Guermantes who lived in Combray without having a house there, half-way to heaven like Gilbert the Wicked in his stained-glass window, while Morel was the son of the old valet who had let me in to meet the lady in pink and had been the means of my recognizing her, so many years later, as Mme Swann.

'Well played, eh? said M. Verdurin to Saniette. – I only fear, he replied with a stutter, that Morel's very virtuosity may have obfuscated the general feeling of the work. – Obfuscated, what on earth do you mean?' yelled M. Verdurin, as the guests closed in, like lions ready to devour a man on the ground. 'Oh, I do not advert only to him. – He doesn't know what he's saying. Advert to what? – I should … have … to hear it again to form a considerate judgment. – Considerate!

He's insane!' said M. Verdurin clutching his head in his hands. 'I mean, one that is well weighed. You speak of judging with d-d-due consideration. I say that I cannot form a considerate judgment – And I say to you, get out!' cried M. Verdurin, drunk on his own anger, pointing to the door. 'I won't have people talking like that in my house.' Saniette went out, weaving in circles like a drunk man. Some people thought that he had not been invited, and that was why he was being put out in such a way. And a lady who had been very friendly with him up to that point, to whom he had lent a valuable book the day before, sent it back to him the next day, loosely wrapped in a piece of paper on which she simply had her butler write Saniette's address; she did not want to be 'under any obligation' to a person who was obviously in such bad odour with the inner circle. Saniette never knew anything of this insult. For not five minutes had passed from M. Verdurin's outburst when a footman came to tell the Patron that M. Saniette had dropped unconscious in the courtyard of the house. But the evening was not over yet. 'Have him taken home, he'll be all right,' said the Patron, whose house ('private house', the Balbec hotel manager would have said) thus came to resemble those grand hotels where sudden deaths are swiftly concealed so as not to frighten the guests, and where the dead man may be hidden in a larder until, however grand, however generous he may have been in life, he can be smuggled out of the back door used by the sauce-cooks and the washers-up. Saniette was not quite dead, however. He lived for some weeks more, but without regaining consciousness for more than a few minutes at a time.

When the music was finished and his guests began to take their leave, M. de Charlus fell into the same error as on their arrival. He did not ask them to speak to the Patronne, to include her and her husband in the thanks they were expressing to him. A long line of people were waiting, but only to see the Baron, and he was not unconscious of them, for he said to me a few minutes later, 'The artistic evening took on a rather comical "after Mass" aspect afterwards.' People protracted their thanks in different ways, in the hope of spending a moment more with the Baron, while those who had not yet congratulated him on the success of *his* party stood waiting, marking time. (More than one husband wanted to leave; but his wife, socially ambitious even though a duchess, would protest: 'No, no, even if we have to wait an hour we can't leave without thanking Palamède, he's taken such trouble. He's the only person who gives parties like this any more.' No one would have thought of asking to be introduced to Mme Verdurin, any more than to an old usherette at a theatre where some great lady has invited the whole aristocracy for one evening.) 'Did you go to Eliane de Montmorency's yesterday evening, Palamède dear? asked Mme de Mortemart in the hope of prolonging the conversation. – Well no, I didn't; I do love Eliane, but I can never understand her invitations. No doubt I'm dreadfully stupid,' he added with a beaming smile, while Mme de Mortemart prepared herself to be the first recipient of a 'Palamedism', just as she often received 'Orianisms'. 'I did receive a card about a fortnight ago from dear Eliane. Above the slightly suspect name of Montmorency there was a delightful invitation: *Dear cousin, do think of me this Friday at 9.30*. Underneath were written two less charming words: *Czech Quartet*. I couldn't understand them at all, they seemed to have no more connection with what went before than those letters where one finds that on the back the writer has begun another with the words "Dear friend" and no more, without taking a clean sheet of paper, whether from absent-mindedness or the spirit of economy. I'm fond of Eliane, so I wasn't angry with her, I simply ignored the strange, irrelevant words *Czech Quartet*, and, orderly as always, I put the invitation on my chimney-piece with its instruction to think of Mme de Montmorency at half-past nine on Friday. In spite of my obedient nature, steady and gentle, as Buffon says of the camel[55] – and here a laugh spread among all M. de Charlus's hearers, for, as he knew, he was regarded as particularly difficult to get on with – I was a few minutes late (the time it took me to take off my day clothes), but did not feel too much remorse, thinking that nine-thirty might have meant ten o'clock. And on the stroke of ten o'clock, wearing a nice warm dressing-gown, with my feet in thick slippers, I sat down at my fireside to think about Eliane as she had asked me to do, and with a concentration that only began to flag at about half-past ten. You will tell her, won't you, that I complied strictly with her unusual request. I'm sure she will be pleased.'

Mme de Mortemart was helpless with laughter, in which M. de Charlus joined. 'And tomorrow, she added, not caring that she had over-run, and by a long way, the time allotted to her, will you go to our cousins the La Rochefoucaulds'? – Oh no, that is out of the question, they have invited me, as they have you, I see, to something quite impossible to imagine and to carry out, something called, if I can believe the invitation card, a *thé dansant*. Dancing tea! I was considered very agile as a young man, but even then I doubt if I could, without offending propriety, have drunk tea while dancing. I've always hated the idea of eating or drinking messily. Now you will say that a man of my age won't be called upon to dance. But even if I were sitting comfortably drinking tea – and what strange tea it must be, if it's described as dancing – I should be afraid that younger guests, perhaps not so agile as I was at their age, might spill their cup over me and spoil my pleasure in emptying mine.' And M. de Charlus was not content to leave Mme Verdurin out of the conversation as he spoke on every kind of subject (seeming to take delight in developing and varying them for the cruel pleasure, which he had always enjoyed, of keeping his friends standing in a 'queue' as they waited with long-suffering patience for their turn to speak to him). He went so far as to criticize all that part of the evening for which Mme Verdurin had been responsible: 'But, speaking of cups, what were those near-bowls like the ones the sorbets used to come in from Poiré-Blanche's when I was a boy? Someone told me a moment ago that they were for iced coffee. But I haven't seen any coffee or any ice. What strange objects, and what can be their function?' To say these words M. de Charlus had placed his white-gloved hands vertically over his mouth, and narrowed the focus of his gaze as if he were afraid to be heard or even seen by the owners of the house. But this was only a feint, for a moment later he was to voice the same criticisms to the Patronne herself, and later still to add, with further insolence, 'And please, no more iced coffee cups! Give them away to one of your friends, someone whose house you want to spoil. But don't let her put them in the drawing-room, people might think they've wandered into the wrong room, for they look exactly like chamber-pots.' 'But, dear, his cousin was saying, lowering her voice too and giving M. de Charlus a tentative look, not for fear of offending Mme Verdurin but of offending him, perhaps she doesn't know exactly what … – She'll learn. – Well, laughed the guest, she couldn't have a better teacher. How lucky she is! With you to guide her she'll never strike a wrong note. – Well, there weren't any in the music at least. – Oh, it was wonderful. Unforgettable. The violinist was a genius, and that reminds me, she continued, believing in her innocence that M. de Charlus was interested in the violin for its own sake, there's another one I heard the other day playing a Fauré sonata wonderfully, he's called Frank … – I know, he's dreadful, M. de Charlus replied, not caring how rudely he contradicted his guest and implied that she had no taste. If you want a violinist I advise you to stick to mine.' A new exchange of looks now began between M. de Charlus and his cousin: lowered, furtive looks because, blushing at her gaffe and determined to repair it by enthusiasm, Mme de Mortemart was about to suggest to M. de Charlus that she should give a party and ask Morel to play. She was not really concerned to launch a talent but more to display what she thought was her own, when it really belonged to M. de Charlus. She saw in this occasion only an opportunity to give a particularly smart party, and was already planning whom she would invite and whom leave out. This exercise of choice, the chief preoccupation of party-givers (those people whom the fashionable papers have the nerve or the stupidity to call the 'elite'), immediately changes the look of the eyes – and written style – more deeply than hypnotic suggestion can do. Even before thinking about what Morel might play (a consideration she judged secondary and with good reason, for even if everyone, thanks to M. de Charlus, had the good manners to be quiet during the music, certainly no one would dream of listening to it), Mme de Mortemart, having decided that Mme de Valcourt would not be among the chosen, had taken on, for that very reason, that conspiratorial, plotting look that so disfigures even those women in fashionable society who have the least need to care what others think of them. 'Couldn't I give a party to introduce your friend?' said Mme de Mortemart in a low voice; though her question was directed to M. de Charlus alone, she could not keep her eyes from drifting, as if mesmerized, towards Mme de Valcourt (the excluded one) so as to check that that lady was far enough away not to hear her. 'No, she can't make out what I am saying,' Mme de Mortemart privately concluded, reassured by her swift look, which had had quite the opposite effect on Mme de Valcourt from that intended. 'Well, well, thought Mme de Valcourt, intercepting the look, Marie-Thérèse is plotting something with Palamède that is not going to include me.' 'You mean my protégé,' corrected M. de Charlus, who had no higher opinion of his cousin's linguistic knowledge than of her musical gifts. Then, taking no notice of the her silent pleas and the smiles with which she attempted to excuse them, 'But of course …, he boomed, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the whole room, though there is always a danger in that kind of transplantation of a mesmeric personality into a context in which it cannot but suffer a depletion of its transcendental powers and the setting of which, in any case, is yet to be determined.' Mme de Mortemart felt that the *pianissimo*, the *mezza voce* of her question had been wasted, given the triple-*forte* delivery of the reply. But she was wrong. Mme de Valcourt heard nothing for the simple reason that she did not understand

a single word. Her uneasiness lessened and would have quickly died away if Mme de Mortemart, fearing to be outmanoeuvred and to find herself having to invite Mme de Valcourt, who was too close a friend to be 'left out' if she found out about the party beforehand, had not raised her eyes in Edith's direction to forestall an impending danger, only to drop her lids hurriedly again so as not to establish real contact. She had planned to write to her the day after the party, one of those letters which is the unfailing accompaniment of the tell-tale look, letters which the writer thinks cleverly worded and which are like an open, signed confession. For example: *Dear Edith, I can't wait to see you, I didn't really think that you would come yesterday evening* (how could she imagine I would come, Edith would think, when she hadn't asked me?) *for I know you're not over-fond of that sort of gathering, and find them rather boring. Still, we should have been honoured to have you with us* (Mme de Mortemart never used the term 'honoured' except in letters where she was trying to give a lie the appearance of truth). *You know we're always delighted to see you here. Anyway, you did the right thing, for the evening was a complete frost, as things always are when they've been put together at the last minute*, etc. But already the furtive look turned upon her for a second time had made Edith aware of everything that lay behind M. de Charlus's convoluted language. Indeed, the look was so powerful that after striking Mme de Valcourt, the unmistakable mystery and secretive intention that it conveyed bounced off and hit a young Peruvian whom Mme de Mortemart was in fact intending to invite. But he, filled with suspicion, seeing so plainly the smokescreen that was being set up without realizing it was not meant for him, promptly experienced a violent hatred for Mme de Mortemart and swore to play countless cruel jokes on her: to have fifty iced coffees sent to her on a day when she had no guests, for example, or, when she did have a party, to put a note in the papers saying it was postponed, and to write lying accounts of subsequent parties which would include the well-known names of people whom, for various reasons, no one would wish to invite, or even be willing to meet.

Mme de Mortemart was wrong to worry about Mme de Valcourt. M. de Charlus was about to undertake a transformation of the planned party much more radical than Edith's presence could ever have achieved. 'But cousin,' said Mme de Mortemart, in response to the phrase about the 'setting' whose meaning, in her momentary state of hyperaesthesia, she had been able to guess at, 'you needn't trouble yourself with that. I promise to ask Gilbert to make all the arrangements. – No, don't think of it, especially as he won't be invited. I will do everything. The important thing is to keep out all of those who have ears but hear not.' M. de Charlus's cousin, who had banked on the attraction of Morel to give a party at which she would be able to say, unlike so many of her female relations, that she had 'had Palamède', began to reconsider her sense of M. de Charlus's prestige in the light of all the enemies he would make for her if he took charge of the inviting and excluding. The thought that the Prince de Guermantes (to whom her decision to exclude Mme de Valcourt was partly due, since she was not accepted in his house) might not be invited, filled her with fear. 'Is the light a little too bright for you?' M. de Charlus asked with an apparent seriousness whose underlying irony passed unnoticed. 'No, not at all, I was thinking of the difficulties it might create, not for me of course, but with my relations, if Gilbert found out that I had had a party and not invited him, when he never has the smallest get-together without … That's it exactly, where two or three are gathered together we can expect nothing but pointless gossip; I think that with all this noisy conversation going on you have failed to understand that it's not a question of giving a party to flatter all your friends, but of carrying out the due rites of any true celebration.' Then, judging, not that the next person had been waiting too long, but that it was not appropriate to show further favour to the woman who was much less concerned with Morel than with her own invitation lists, M. de Charlus, like a doctor who brings the consultation to an end when he feels he has spent the due time on it, gave his cousin leave to withdraw, not by saying goodbye to her but by turning to the person immediately following her. 'Good evening, Madame de Montesquiou; wasn't that wonderful? I didn't see Hélène here, do tell her that any general policy of renunciation, even the noblest, that is to say, hers, must make exceptions where the occasion is a brilliant one, as it was this evening. To be seen rarely is good, but the rare, which is a negative value, must sometimes give way to the precious. No one values more than I do your sister's systematic *absence* from places where there is nothing worthy of her, but on a memorable occasion like this to be present would have been to take her due precedence, and would have added a further prestige to your sister's already prestigious reputation.' With that he passed on to a third lady.

I was very surprised to see there, now as pleasant and flattering to M. de Charlus as he had once been cutting to him, insisting on being introduced to Charlie and saying that he hoped he would come and visit him, M. d'Argencourt, once the scourge of men of Charlus's sort. Now he lived surrounded by them. It was not, certainly, that he had become one of the Charlus kind. But some time earlier he had practically abandoned his wife for a young society woman whom he adored. She was intelligent and had brought him to share her liking for intelligent people, and dearly wished to have M. de Charlus as a regular visitor. But above all M. d'Argencourt, who was extremely jealous and not very potent, felt that he was not satisfying his conquest and, wishing both to hold on to her and to amuse her, could safely do so only by surrounding her with unthreatening men, whom he thus cast in the role of guardians of the harem. They in turn found that he had become most agreeable and declared him much more intelligent than they had thought, thus pleasing both his mistress and himself.

M. de Charlus's lady guests melted away quite rapidly. Many of them said, 'I'd rather not go to the vestry (the small drawing-room where the Baron, with Charlie at his side, was receiving congratulations), but I must make sure Palamède sees me and knows I stayed right to the end.' None took the least notice of Mme Verdurin. Some pretended not to recognize her and to say a mistaken goodbye to Mme Cottard, saying to me of the doctor's wife, 'That's Mme Verdurin, isn't it?' Mme d'Arpajon asked me, within earshot of the real hostess, 'Was there ever really a M. Verdurin?' The Duchesses who were last to leave, not finding any of the expected strangenesses in this place which they had hoped would be different from everything they knew, consoled themselves by stifling wild giggles in front of Elstir's paintings; everything else, which they found much more similar than they had expected to what they were used to, they put to the credit of M. de Charlus, saying, 'Isn't Palamède clever! He could stage a fairy-play in a broom-closet, it would still be breathtaking.' The highest-ranking among them were those who congratulated M. de Charlus most fervently on the success of an evening whose secret motive was known at least to some of them and did not embarrass them at all, for this society – in memory, perhaps, of certain earlier historical periods when their family was already fully conscious of its destiny – carried its contempt for scruples almost as far as its reverence for etiquette. Several booked Charlie on the spot to come and play Vinteuil's septet for them, but none of them dreamed of inviting Mme Verdurin to hear him. She was consumed with rage, when M. de Charlus, floating on a cloud and unable to register her fury, magnanimously chose to invite the Patronne to share his joy. And this expert in artistic parties was perhaps rather giving way to his literary tastes than to an outrush of pride when he said to Mme Verdurin, 'Well, are you pleased? I think you have cause to be; you can see that when I take the trouble to organize a party, I do the thing properly. I do not know if your grasp of heraldry would allow you to measure exactly the importance of this occasion, to understand the impact I have made, the job I have done for you. The Queen of Naples came, the brother of the King of Bavaria, the holders of the three oldest peerages. If we think of Vinteuil as Mahomet, we can say that we moved the least movable of mountains on his account. Just think that for your party the Queen of Naples came from Neuilly, which she finds much more difficult than leaving the Two Sicilies,' he said with unkind humour, despite his admiration for the Queen. 'It's a historic occasion. Think of it, she had probably never been out since the fall of Gaeta. I expect that in the biographical dictionaries her key dates will be the fall of Gaeta and Mme Verdurin's party. The fan that she put down to applaud Vinteuil will take its place alongside the one that Mme de Metternich broke when she heard them hiss Wagner – Look, she left the fan behind,' said Mme Verdurin, momentarily pacified by the memory of the Queen's kind manner to her, and she showed M. de Charlus where it was lying on a chair. 'Oh, how moving! cried M. de Charlus, approaching the relic with veneration. All the more moving as it's so ugly; the little violet is beyond belief.' Emotion and irony ran through him in alternating spasms. 'I don't know if these things touch you as they do me. Swann would simply have died in convulsions if he had seen that. Now I know that, however high the price goes, I shall have to buy that fan when the Queen's things are sold up. And they will be, he added, for she's as poor as a church mouse,' cruel detraction being always mixed in the Baron's speech with the most genuine veneration, each springing from one of the two opposing natures that were brought together in him.

Each of them could indeed be brought to bear on the same occurrence. For the M. de Charlus who, from his comfortable position as a rich man, could mock the Queen's poverty, was the same one who often praised that poverty to the skies and who, if someone mentioned Princess Murat, queen of the Two Sicilies,

would reply: 'I don't know whom you mean. There is only one Queen of Naples, a sublime woman, who does not have her own carriage. But from her seat in the omnibus she annihilates all the smart carriages and a man would kneel in the dust to watch her go by.'

'I shall leave it to a museum. In the meantime we must send it back to her so that she does not have to send a cab to fetch it. The cleverest thing, given the historic value of such an object, would be to steal the fan. But that would be unkind to her – since she probably doesn't own another,' he added, laughing aloud. 'Anyway, you see that she came for my sake. And that's not the only miracle I worked. I don't think that anyone else at this moment can make as many people turn out for something as I can. But we must give credit where credit is due, Charlie and the other musicians played like angels. And you, dear Patronne, he added condescendingly, you too had your part to play in this festivity. Your name will not be absent from the record. History has preserved the name of the page who armed Joan of Arc for her first encounter: you have been, how shall I say, the vital link, you have brought together Vinteuil's music and its brilliant interpreter, you have been intelligent enough to see the capital importance of a chain of circumstances which would throw behind the performer all the weight of a personality of some standing, if I were not speaking of myself I should say of providential standing, and had the excellent idea of asking that person to ensure the success of the gathering, and to bring together before Morel's violin the ears directly attached to the most influential tongues; no, no, that is not unimportant. Nothing is unimportant in such a complete success. Every little helps. *La* Duras was marvellous. But then everything was; that is why, he concluded, for he loved to lecture, why I was so against your inviting those human divisors I mentioned, who would have acted upon the substantial figures I brought like decimal points in a sum, reducing the others to a tenth part of their value. I have a natural feeling for these things. You understand, we must avoid blunders when we are giving a party that must be worthy of Vinteuil, of his brilliant interpreter, of you and, dare I say it, of myself. Invite *la* Molé and everything would have been ruined. She is the little contrary, neutralizing drop that makes a potion powerless. The lights would have gone out, the *petits fours* would have been late, the orangeade would have given everybody a stomach-ache. At the mere sound of her name, as in a fairy-story, the brass would have fallen silent; the flute and the oboe would suddenly have lost their voices. Morel himself, even if he could have scraped out a few sounds, would not have been up to his task, and instead of Vinteuil's septet, you would have heard Beckmesser's parody[56] of it, finishing in a chorus of boos. I really believe in the influences of certain people, I could feel in one particular *allargando* as it opened right out like a flower, in the overwhelming satisfaction of the finale which was not just *allegro* but genuinely full of matchless *allegria*, that the absence of *la* Molé was inspiring the musicians and dilating the very instruments themselves with joy. Anyway, the day one plays host to one's sovereigns is not the day to invite the concierge.' In calling her *la* Molé (he also said *la* Duras though he was very fond of her) he was doing her justice. For all these women were actresses on the social stage, and it is true that even considered in that light Mme Molé was not equal to the extraordinary reputation for intelligence that she had acquired, and which reminded one of those mediocre actors or novelists who at a certain period come to be thought of as geniuses, either because of the mediocrity of their contemporaries, who do not include any outstanding artist who could show what real talent is, or the poor taste of the public, who, if a really individual genius did come to light, would be incapable of understanding him. The world being the kingdom of vanity, there is so little to choose among the various society hostesses that only the spite or wild imagination of M. de Charlus could make much of a distinction. And certainly, when he talked as he had just been doing, in this language which was a recherché amalgam of artistic and fashionable concerns, it was because his old woman's rages and his drawing-room culture provided his real eloquence with only cut-rate themes. The world of real differences does not exist on the surface of the earth, among all the countries levelled by our perception; how much less, therefore, does it exist among the 'worldly'. Does it in fact exist anywhere? The Vinteuil septet had seemed to tell me that it did. But where?

As M. de Charlus also loved tale-bearing and setting people at odds, following a policy of divide and rule, he added, 'And by not inviting her, you did not give Mme Molé the chance to say, "I can't think why that Mme Verdurin asked me. Who are those people, I don't know them." She was already saying last year that you were trying so hard to attract her it was becoming a bore. She's a fool, don't ask her again. What is she, anyway? Nothing out of the ordinary. She could perfectly well come to your house without making such a fuss; after all, I do. All in all, he concluded, I think you can be grateful to me, for, as it turned out, the evening was perfect. The Duchesse de Guermantes didn't come, but I don't know, perhaps that was for the best. We shan't be angry with her and we shall think of her again for another time, anyway, how could we not remember her, with those blue eyes of hers always saying "forget me not".' (And I thought to myself how powerful the Guermantes spirit – the decision to go here and not there – must be in the Duchesse to have overcome her fear of Palamède.) 'In the face of such a complete success, one is tempted to be like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and see the hand of Providence everywhere. The Duchesse de Duras was delighted with everything. She even asked me to tell you so,' M. de Charlus added, emphasizing each word, as if Mme Verdurin should consider the message honour enough. So great an honour, indeed, as to be hardly believable, for he felt it necessary to convince her by adding, with the folly the gods send to those they wish to destroy, 'Truly.' 'She has engaged Morel to play at her house, the programme will be the same, and I think I can even get an invitation for M. Verdurin.' This courtesy extended to the husband alone was, though M. de Charlus did not realize it, the blackest insult to the wife, who, believing herself to enjoy, in relation to the performer and thanks to a kind of Moscow decree[57] operating within the little set, the right to forbid him to play anywhere else without her express permission, was already determined to cancel his appearance at Mme de Duras's party.

By this mere fluency of speech, M. de Charlus was already irritating Mme Verdurin, who did not appreciate private relationships within the little set. How often, and even at La Raspelière, when she heard the Baron talking uninterruptedly to Charlie rather than taking part in the *concertante* ensemble of the set, she had cried, pointing to the Baron, 'What a gossip! What a gossip! Talk about a gossip, he's a gossip all right!' But this time it was much worse. Drunk on his own words, the Baron did not understand that by recognizing Mme Verdurin's role but fixing strict limits to it, he was unleashing that feeling of hatred which in her was a particular form, a social form, of jealousy. Mme Verdurin truly loved her regulars, the faithful members of the little set, she wanted them to belong wholly to their Patronne. She had to settle for less, like those jealous men who let themselves be deceived, but only under their own roof and even under their eyes, that is, where they are not deceived; she would allow the men to have a mistress, or a lover, provided the relationship had no social ramifications outside her house; it must have begun and had all its existence under the umbrella of her Wednesdays. Every suppressed laugh from Odette as she sat next to Swann had formerly gnawed at her heart, as had, recently, every private conversation between Morel and the Baron; she could find only one consolation for her pain, which was to destroy the happiness of others. She could never have tolerated the Baron's for much longer. But now his own rashness was bringing on the catastrophe by seeming to restrict the power of the Patronne within her own little clan. Already she could see Morel going into society without her, under the protection of the Baron. There was only one solution – to force Morel to choose between the Baron and herself and, using the ascendancy she had established over Morel by displaying, as he thought, an extraordinary insight which was due to reports she commissioned, lies that she invented and served up to him as corroboration of things he already wanted to believe, and, something he was about to experience for himself, traps that she set for the unwary to fall into: using this ascendancy, to make him choose herself in preference to the Baron. As for the society ladies who were there and who had not even asked to be introduced to her, as soon as she had understood their reluctance or simple indifferent rudeness, she had said, 'All right, I've got it, this is a bunch of old slappers that we can do without, they won't see the inside of this house again.' For she would sooner have died than admit they had been less friendly to her than she had hoped.

'Ah! My dear General,' M. de Charlus suddenly exclaimed, dropping Mme Verdurin as he spotted General Deltour, the President's secretary, who might be very helpful in the matter of Charlie's decoration, and who, having consulted Cottard about his health, was quickly slipping away. 'Good-evening, dear and delightful friend. Sneaking off without saying good-bye to me, eh? said the Baron with a smile of happy confidence, for he knew that people were always delighted to spend a moment longer talking to him. And, as in his over-excited state he was both asking questions and supplying the answers, all in a high-pitched voice, 'Well, did you enjoy it? he asked. Wasn't it beautiful? The *andante* especially. It's the most moving thing ever written. I defy anyone to listen to it all through without tears in his eyes. How good of you to have come! I say, Froberville telegraphed me this morning, to say that as far as the Grand Chancellery is concerned there are no more problems, as they say.' M. de Charlus's voice continued to rise, sounding unusually shrill, as different from his normal voice as a

barrister's is when he is making a highly rhetorical speech: a phenomenon of vocal amplification through over-excitement and nervous euphoria similar to that which, at her dinners, raised both Mme de Guermantes's voice and her look to such an unaccustomed pitch. 'I meant to send you a note tomorrow morning to say how glad I was, while I waited for an opportunity to tell you face to face, but you had so many people waiting to talk to you! Froberville's support is certainly worth having, but the minister has promised me his, said the General. – Oh, excellent. Well, you have seen how talented he is, how much he deserves it. Hoyos[58] was delighted, I didn't manage to speak to the ambassador's wife, was she pleased? Of course she was, who would not have been, except for those who have ears and hear not, and what does that matter provided they have tongues and speak?'

Seeing the Baron taken up with the General, Mme Verdurin called over Brichot. He, not knowing what Mme Verdurin was going to say, decided to make her laugh and, without realizing the suffering he was causing me, said to the Patronne, 'The Baron is delighted that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend aren't here. He is thoroughly scandalized by them. He said that their way of life was appalling. You can't imagine how prudish and stern the Baron is on the subject of morals.' Contrary to Brichot's expectation, Mme Verdurin was not amused. 'He is disgusting,' she replied. 'Take him out to smoke a cigarette with you, so that my husband can take his inamorata on one side without old Charlus seeing, and show him the danger he is falling into.' Brichot seemed to be hesitating. 'Let me tell you,' said Mme Verdurin, to remove his last scruples, 'I don't feel safe with that man in my house. I know he's been mixed up in some very dirty business, and the police are watching him.' And, since she had a certain gift of improvisation when inspired by malice, Mme Verdurin did not stop there: 'Apparently he's been in prison. Oh yes, I heard it from some people who ought to know. And someone I know who lives in his street says you can't imagine the characters that go up to his house.' And as Brichot, who often went to the Baron's himself, protested, Mme Verdurin replied even more emphatically, 'It's true, I tell you! You have my word for it,' an expression she generally used to support allegations made more or less at random. 'He'll be murdered one of these days, that's the way they all go. Perhaps he won't get that far because he's in the clutches of that Jupien. He had the nerve to send him here to me, a gaolbird, he is, you know, I know it for certain. He's got a hold on Charlus through some letters, the most dreadful things apparently. Someone I know has seen them, and he told me. "They'd make you sick if you read them," he said. That's how Jupien keeps him under his thumb and makes him cough up all the money he wants. I'd rather a thousand times be dead than living in terror as Charlus does. Anyway, if Morel's family decides to take him to law, I don't want to be charged as an accomplice. Let him go on, but at his own risk: I'll have done my duty. I'm sorry, but doing the right thing isn't always fun.' And already in a pleasant fever of anticipation at the thought of the conversation her husband was going to have with the violinist, Mme Verdurin said to me, 'Ask Brichot what kind of friend I am, and if I can do what it takes to save my friends.' (She was alluding to the way in which she had made him break just in time, first with his laundress and then with Mme de Cambremer; following upon these quarrels Brichot had become first almost completely blind and then, it was said, a morphine addict.) 'A pearl among friends, far-sighted and brave,' replied the old don with genuine if naïve feeling. 'Mme Verdurin kept me from doing something extremely foolish, Brichot continued, when she had moved away. She doesn't hesitate to cut deep, to do heroic surgery, as Cottard would say. I must admit, however, to great sadness at the thought that the poor Baron does not yet know of the blow that is going to fall upon him. He is quite mad about that boy. If Mme Verdurin succeeds, he is going to be a very unhappy man. But in any case it is by no means certain that she will not fail. I fear that she may be able to create certain misunderstandings between them which, in the end, will not separate them but only estrange them from her.' This had often happened between Mme Verdurin and her flock. But one could see that the need to keep their friendship was increasingly dominated in her by the need to ensure that that friendship was never imperilled by any feeling they might have for each other. Homosexuality did not offend her, so long as it did not threaten the faith, but, like the Church, she would have accepted any sacrifice rather than any compromise on orthodoxy. I began to fear that she might be annoyed with me because she had learned that I had prevented Albertine from being there that afternoon, and that she might begin, if she had not already done so, the process of separating her from me, the same work that her husband was about to undertake, in relation to Charlus, with the violinist. 'Come on, go and find Charlus, think of something, now's the time, said Mme Verdurin, and above all, don't let him come back until I send someone to fetch you. What an evening! Mme Verdurin added, revealing the real cause of her rage. Playing those masterpieces in front of those dimwits! I don't mean the Queen of Naples, she is intelligent (meaning: she was friendly to me). But the others! It's enough to drive you mad. I'm sorry, but I'm not a girl any more. When I was young we were told you had to be able to stand boredom, and I tried, but now it's too much, I can't take any more, I'm old enough to do as I please, life is too short, and being bored, spending time with imbeciles and trying to look as if I find them intelligent, no, no, that's all over. Come on, Brichot, there's no time to lose – I'm going, Madame, I'm going,' said Brichot as General Deltour moved away. But first the professor took me on one side. 'Moral duty, he said, is not so categorically imperative as our ethics courses teach. Theosophical cafés and Kantian brasseries can say what they like, we are deplorably ignorant of the nature of the Good. I myself, in all modesty, have expounded for my pupils, to the best of my ability, the teachings of the aforesaid Immanuel Kant, yet I can find no precise guidance on the problem in social casuistry that faces me in that *Critique of Practical Reason* in which the great unfrocked pastor of Protestantism rewrote Plato in Teutonic style for a prehistorically sentimental Germany of princedoms, all for the greater good of a certain Pomeranian mysticism. It is the *Symposium* all over again, but this time in Königsberg, in the local style, healthy and indigestible, with sauerkraut and no rent-boys. It is evident, on the one hand, that I cannot refuse our excellent hostess a small favour that she asks of me, one which conforms fully with traditional Morality. We must above all avoid letting ourselves be deceived by words, for there are few things that lead to greater foolishness. But we must, in the end, admit that if mothers of families could vote, the Baron would run the risk of being deplorably blackballed for the post of professor of morals. Unfortunately it is with the constitution of a roué that he pursues his pedagogical vocation; note that I am not saying anything against the Baron; that charming man, who can carve a roast better than anyone, combines a genius for anathema with a heart of gold. He can be as amusing as the best of clowns, while with a certain colleague, a member of the Academy if you please, I yawn away sixteen drachmas to the dozen, as Xenophon might have said. But I fear he compromises his constitution with Morel a little more than sound morals would prescribe, and without knowing how docilely or otherwise the young penitent submits to the special exercises with which his catechist teaches him to mortify the flesh, one need not be an expert casuist to be certain that we should commit a sin of excessive indulgence, as you might say, towards that occult practitioner who seems to have come from the pages of Petronius via Saint-Simon, if we closed our eyes and gave him an open licence to flirt with Satan. Yet on the other hand, if I keep the man occupied while Mme Verdurin, for the sinner's own good and justly tempted by the thought of such a conversion, speaks plainly to the foolish young man and takes away from him all that he loves, perhaps strikes a fatal blow at him, I cannot say that the thing is indifferent to me, it seems to me that I am luring him into an ambush, as you might say, and I shrink from it as from an act of cowardice.' Having said this, he did not hesitate to commit the act, and taking me by the arm, said, 'Come, Baron, let us go and smoke a cigarette, this young man has not yet seen all the treasures of the house.' I tried to excuse myself, saying that I had to go home. 'Wait a moment, said Brichot, you know you promised to take me home and I shall hold you to your promise. – Wouldn't you really like me to make them get out the silver for you? Nothing would be easier, said M. Charlus to me. Now remember your promise, not a word to Morel on the subject of the decoration. I want to surprise him with it in a moment, when we've left. I know he says it's not important for an artist, but his uncle would like it (I blushed, because the Verdurins knew, through my grandfather, who Morel's uncle was). Now, wouldn't you like me to have the best pieces brought out for you? But of course you know them, you've seen them time and again at La Raspelière.' I dared not tell him that what would have really interested me was not the run-of-the-mill table-silver of a bourgeois household, but some example, even in the form of a fine engraving, of Mme du Barry's. I was much too preoccupied and – even had I not been unsettled by the recent revelation of Mlle Vinteuil's expected presence at the party – too distracted and ill-at-ease whenever I went into society to be able to fix my attention on vaguely pretty objects. It could have been arrested only by the appeal of something which addressed my imagination, as, that evening, a view of Venice might have done, that city on which my thoughts had dwelt for so long in the afternoon, or some general element common to several appearances and more real than any of them, something which always spontaneously aroused in me an inner spirit, normally slumbering, but whose rise to the surface of my consciousness caused me the greatest joy. Now, as I came out of the room they called the theatre, and walked with Brichot and M. de Charlus through the other reception rooms, noticing, placed here and there among other furniture, certain pieces I had seen at La Raspelière without paying any attention

to them, I grasped a certain family resemblance between the layout of the town house and the château, an underlying identity, and I understood Brichot when he said with a smile, 'Look, do you see the far end of this room, that might just give you an idea of what the rue Montalivet house was like twenty-five years ago, *grande mortalis aevi spatium*.'[59] His smile, at the thought of the departed salon which he could see once more, let me understand what it was that Brichot, perhaps unconsciously, preferred about the old room: not its big windows, not the youthful gaiety of the Patrons and their friends, but that unreal part (which I had reconstructed myself from a few similarities between La Raspelière and the Quai Conti) of which, in a drawing-room as in everything, the outer part, present and observable by everyone, is simply an extension: that part which had become purely spiritual, whose colour existed only in the mind of my old companion, who could not show it to me, that part which detaches itself from the outer world to find refuge in our souls, which it enhances, and with whose normal substance it merges, transforming itself there – vanished houses, people of former days, dishes of fruit from remembered suppers – into the translucent alabaster of our memories, whose colour we cannot show to others as only we can see it (so that we can truthfully say to them that they cannot imagine the past, that it was nothing like anything they have seen), and which we cannot contemplate inwardly without being moved, when we think that the existence of our thought is the condition of these things' continued survival, for a little while, the light of lamps that have gone out and the scent of arbours that will flower no more. And it was no doubt for this reason that the rue Montalivet drawing-room outshone, in Brichot's eyes, the Verdurins' present house. But, on the other hand, it added to the new house, for the professor, a beauty which it could never have for a newcomer. Those pieces of the old furniture which had been relocated here, the same groupings sometimes retained, and which I myself recognized from La Raspelière, integrated into the present salon parts of the old one which sometimes recalled it to the point of hallucination and then seemed almost unreal in the way they evoked, in the midst of ambient reality, fragments of a destroyed world which seemed to be existing elsewhere. A dream sofa rising up among new, all-too-real armchairs, the brocade cover of a gaming-table raised to the dignity of a person since, like a person, it had a past, a memory, still scorched by the sun shining through the windows of the rue Montalivet (the hour of whose arrival it knew as well as Mme Verdurin herself) and through the french windows at Douville, where it had been taken and from where it looked out all day over the carefully planted flower garden and across the deep valley of the ***, waiting for the time when Cottard and the violinist would have their game of cards, a bunch of violets and pansies drawn in pastel, the gift of a friend, a great artist now dead, sole surviving fragment of a life vanished without trace, the summing-up of a talent and a long friendship, recalling his gentle, intent gaze, his fine, plump hand with its sad look while he was painting; this charming clutter, this disorderly display of the gifts of the faithful which followed the mistress of the house everywhere she went and finally took on the structure, the fixity of a character trait; a profusion of bouquets, of chocolate boxes which developed systematically, here as there, according to an identical pattern of flowering; a sprinkling of those strange, superfluous objects that look as if they had just emerged from their gift-wrappings and remain throughout their lives what they were to begin with, New Year's presents; all those objects that one could not consider in isolation, but which for Brichot, an old habitué of the Verdurins' parties, had the patina, the velvety touch of those things which acquire a kind of depth from being inhabited by their spiritual doubles; these things, strewn about, all set singing before his eyes as many musical notes which awakened beloved resemblances in his heart, confused reminiscences which marked off and cut out of the present-day salon, which they patterned here and there, as a frame of sunlight does on a fine day, pieces of furniture and carpets, pursuing from a cushion to a flower-stand, from a stool to a waft of perfume, from a lighting effect to a predominance of colours, moulding, calling up, making spiritual, bringing to life a form which, as it were, was the ideal figure, immanent in all their successive dwellings, of the Verdurins' drawing-room.

'Let us try, Brichot murmured in my ear, to get the Baron on to his favourite subject. He is prodigious on it.' On the one hand, I hoped to be able to obtain from M. de Charlus the information I wanted about the coming of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, information in pursuit of which I had decided to leave Albertine. On the other, I did not wish to leave her alone for too long, not that (uncertain when I would return and at an hour, in any case, when anyone calling on her, or any attempt by her to leave the flat, would have been far too noticeable) she could have put my absence to any bad use, but because I did not wish her to find it too protracted. So I said to Brichot and M. de Charlus that I would not come with them for long. 'But do come,' the Baron said, whose social excitement was beginning to wane, but who felt that need to prolong, to draw out conversations that I had already noticed in the Duchesse de Guermantes as well as in him, and which, very strongly marked in that family, is found generally among all those who, giving no play to their intelligence except in conversation, that is, in an imperfect realization, remain unsatisfied even after hours spent together and hang on ever more desperately to their exhausted interlocutor, from whom they mistakenly demand a final satisfaction that social pleasures cannot give. 'Do come, won't you, he continued, this is the best moment of a party, when the guests have gone, Doña Sol's time,[60] though we hope that this party will not end so unhappily. But you are in a hurry, what a pity, probably in a hurry to go and do things you would do better not to do. Everyone is always in a hurry, and people leave when they should just be arriving. Here we are like Couture's philosophers,[61] now would be the time to go over the evening again, to do a post-mortem as we soldiers call it. We could ask Mme Verdurin to order a little supper for us, to which we would carefully not ask her, and have Charlie – *Hernani* again[62] – to play the sublime *adagio* again just for us. How wonderful that *adagio* is! But where is the young violinist? I want to congratulate him, it's hugs and kisses time. Admit it, Brichot, they did play like gods, especially Morel. Did you notice the moment when his forelock came adrift? No? Ah then, my dear chap, you didn't notice anything. We had an F sharp that Enesco, Capet or Thibaud[63] would have died for; I'm not normally emotional, but I admit that at that sound my heart was so full that I could hardly hold back my tears. The whole room was gasping; my dear Brichot, the Baron cried, violently shaking the professor by his arm, it was sublime. Only young Charlie stood as still as a statue, you couldn't even see him breathe, he was like those things in the inanimate world that Théodore Rousseau[64] talks about, which cannot think but inspire us to thought. And then all of a sudden,' cried M. de Charlus dramatically, gesturing as if for a *coup de théâtre*, 'then … the Lock! And at that very moment, the graceful entry, like a little country-dance, of the *allegro vivace*. You know, that lock was the signal for revelation, even to the most slow-witted. The Princess of Taormina, who had been deaf up to that point, for there are none so deaf as those who have ears but hear not, realized that this was music and that there wouldn't be any poker later on. Oh, it was a solemn moment. – Pardon me for interrupting you, sir, I said to M. de Charlus to get him on to the subject that interested me, didn't you say that the composer's daughter was coming. I should have liked to meet her. Are you sure that she was really expected? – I have no idea.' In saying this, M. de Charlus was conforming, perhaps unintentionally, to the universal rule which says that we never give information to the jealous, whether out of an absurd wish to show that we are, out of decency and even if we detest her personally, 'on the side' of the suspected one; or from spite towards her, guessing that jealousy will only redouble his love for her; or out of that need to be unpleasant to others which takes the form of telling the truth to almost everyone but hiding it from the jealous, since not knowing will multiply their sufferings, or so they think; while, in order to hurt people, we head straight for what they themselves, perhaps wrongly, imagine to be the most painful subjects. 'You know the Verdurins, he went on, exaggeration is pretty much their stock-in-trade, they are delightful people, but they do love to promise celebrities of one kind or another. But you don't look well, you'll catch cold in this damp room, he said, pushing a chair towards me. You have been ill, haven't you, you must be careful, let me go and find your warm things. No, don't go yourself, you'll get lost and catch cold. That's how trouble starts, but you're not a baby, you should take more care, what you need is an old nanny like me to look after you. – Please, Baron, let *me* go, said Brichot who immediately disappeared: not quite realizing, perhaps, the real affection that M. de Charlus felt for me, and what charming remissions, full of simplicity and kindness, punctuated his wild delusions of grandeur and persecution, he had been afraid that M. de Charlus, whom Mme Verdurin had placed like a prisoner under his guard, might have simply been trying, with the excuse of finding my greatcoat, to rejoin Morel, and might thus have undone the Patronne's plan.

In the mean time Ski had sat down at the piano without waiting to be asked and, putting together a humorous frown, a far-off look and a slight twist of the mouth to form what he considered an artistic expression, was trying to talk Morel into playing something by Bizet. 'What, don't you like that childlike side of Bizet's music? But, my dear boy, he said, with his distinctive pronunciation, it's enchanting.' Morel, who did not like Bizet, said so in exaggerated terms, and (since, amazingly enough, the little set regarded Morel as a wit) Ski, pretending to take the violinist's diatribes as paradoxes, began to laugh. His laugh was not,

like Mme Verdurin's, a sound like a smoker choking. Ski adopted an intelligent look, then there escaped from him, as if against his will, a single laugh, like the first note of a bell, followed by a silence during which the clever look seemed to be carefully examining the humorousness or otherwise of what was being said, then a second bell rang out, and soon the complete angelus of laughter.

I said to M. de Charlus how sorry I was that M. Brichot had been troubled. 'What? no, he's happy to do it, he's fond of you, we're all very fond of you. The other day someone was saying: where is he, we haven't seen him for ages, he's hiding away! He's a really good soul, is Brichot,' M. de Charlus continued, little suspecting, no doubt, given the frank, affectionate way in which the professor of ethics used to speak to him, that in his absence he did not hesitate to hold him up to ridicule. 'He's a very distinguished man, enormously learned, and his knowledge hasn't dried him up, hasn't turned him into a bookworm like so many of the others, who stink of ink. He has kept a breadth of mind, a tolerance, which is rare in his world. Sometimes when one sees how he understands life, how he gives everyone his due with such discernment, one wonders where a mere Sorbonne professor, an old school usher, can have learned about all that. I wonder at it myself.' I wondered even more to see the conversation of Brichot, which the least discerning of Mme de Guermantes's guests would surely have found laboured and dull, find favour with the most critical of them, M. de Charlus. But this result had been brought about by various influences, in particular two distinct ones, the first of which had led Swann to feel at home for so long in the little set, when he was in love with Odette, and the other, after his marriage, to feel warmly towards Mme Bontemps, who pretended to adore the Swanns, constantly called on the wife, loved to listen to the husband's stories and, elsewhere, spoke of them with disdain. Like the writer who ascribed the highest intelligence, not to the man who was most intelligent, but to the dissipated one who could make daring yet tolerant comments about a man's passion for a woman, comments which made the writer's bluestocking mistress agree with him that of all the people who came to her house the least stupid was indeed this old ladies'-man who knew all about love, in the same way M. de Charlus found Brichot more intelligent than his other friends, for not only was he friendly to Morel, but he could collect from the Greek philosophers, the Latin poets and oriental storytellers texts which furnished the Baron's taste with strange and charming garlands. M. de Charlus had reached the age at which a Victor Hugo will choose to be surrounded by Vacqueries and Meurices.[65] He preferred above all others to be surrounded by people who accepted his point of view on life. 'I see a lot of him,' he added in a fluting, rhythmical voice; no movement but that of his lips disturbed the solemn, white-face mask upon which his clerical eyelids were half lowered. 'I go to his lectures, the Latin Quarter atmosphere is a change for me, the youth there is studious, thoughtful, made up of middle-class boys who are more intelligent and more knowledgeable than my contemporaries were in our very different sphere. It's another world, these are young *bourgeois*,' he said, spitting out the word as if it were preceded by several *b*s, and underlining it by a sort of habit of speech which corresponded to a taste for distinctions in thought that was peculiar to him, but perhaps also because he could not resist the pleasure of showing me a certain insolence. This last in no way reduced the great, affectionate pity that M. de Charlus inspired in me (ever since Mme Verdurin had unveiled her plan before me); it only amused me, and even if the circumstances had been different, if I had not felt so much on his side, it would not have offended me. I had inherited from my grandmother a lack of vanity so extreme that it could easily have made me wanting in self-respect. No doubt I was hardly conscious of this, and having seen at school and later the people I most admired refuse to accept a slight or forgive anyone who had behaved badly to them, I had learned to show in my words and actions a certain pride, as it were by second nature. I was even thought to be extremely proud since, not being at all fearful, I readily fought duels, the moral prestige of which I diminished by laughing at them myself, which soon led others to see them as ridiculous. But the nature we repress nonetheless survives in us. That is why, when we read the new master-work of a genius, we are sometimes delighted to find in it thoughts of our own which we had dismissed as valueless, moments of gaiety or sadness which we suppressed, a whole world of feeling we treated as beneath notice; the book in which we recognize them suddenly teaches us their value. I had learned from experience that it was wrong to smile affectionately when someone made fun of me and not to be angry with him. But this lack of self-esteem and resentment, even if I had stopped giving it expression, to the point that I hardly knew it existed in me, was nevertheless the original medium in which I had grown and still lived. Anger and malice arose in me in quite a different manner, by sudden acute fits. What is more, the sense of justice was absent in me, to the point of complete moral idiocy. In the depths of my heart I was immediately on the side of the underdog, of whoever was unhappy. I had no opinion about the extent to which right and wrong might be involved in the relations between Morel and M. de Charlus, but the idea of the suffering that was being prepared for M. de Charlus revolted me. I wanted to prevent it, but I did not know how. 'The sight of that little world of hard work is most agreeable to an old relic like me. I don't know those boys,' he added, raising his hand in a gesture of caution, so as not to seem to be boasting, to attest his own purity and ensure that the students' virtue was not in doubt, 'but they are very well-mannered; they are often kind enough to keep a place for me, as I am a very old gentleman. Yes, yes, dear boy, don't say no, I shan't see forty again, said the Baron, who was well into his sixties. It's rather hot in the lecture-room where Brichot speaks, but it's always interesting.' Though the Baron preferred standing, and even being jostled, in the crowd of students, sometimes, to save him a long wait, Brichot would take him in with him. Even though Brichot was on his own territory in the Sorbonne, as he walked in behind the bedel in all his chains,[66] the admired teacher among his pupils, he could not control a certain apprehension, and, while wishing to make the most of this moment when he felt sufficiently important to behave graciously to Charlus, he was still slightly at a loss; to get him past the bedel, he would say, in an artificially bustling voice, 'Follow me, Baron, we shall find you a seat,' then, paying no more attention to him and in order to make his entrance, he would advance in sprightly fashion alone down the corridor. On either side, a double row of young teachers would greet him; not wishing to seem overbearing to these young men, for whom he knew he was a great panjandrum, he gave them endless winks and conspiratorial nods, but as he was careful to remain martial and French in his manner, the result was a kind of manly encouragement, the *sursum corda*[67] of an Old Contemptible saying, 'By God, we'll show 'em.' Then the students' clapping would break out. Brichot sometimes used M. de Charlus's attendance at his lectures to please a visitor, even to return a favour. He would say to some relative, or one of his middle-class friends, 'If you think your wife or your daughter might be interested, may I say that the Baron de Charlus, the Prince of Agrigentum, the descendant of the Condés, will be at my lecture. It's something for a child to remember, that she saw one of the last truly characteristic descendants of our aristocracy. If they come, they'll be able to pick him out because he'll be sitting next to me at the lectern. Anyway, he will be the only other person on the platform, a stout, white-haired man with a black moustache, wearing the Military Medal. – Oh, thank you,' the father would say. And even though his wife had other things to do, so as not to offend Brichot he would make her go to the lecture, while his daughter, in spite of the heat and the crowd, would stare in curiosity at the descendant of the great Condé, astonished that he was not wearing a ruff and looked just like people today. He, however, did not spare her a look, but more than one student, not knowing who he was, was astonished by his friendly approaches, became busy and offhand, and the Baron left the room full of dreams and melancholy. 'Excuse me for bringing you back to my concerns,' I said hurriedly to M. de Charlus as I heard Brichot coming back, but would it be possible for you to send me a *pneumatique* if you heard that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend were coming to Paris, and tell me exactly how long they would be staying, without telling anyone that I had asked you?' I did not really think that they would be coming now, but I wanted to take precautions for the future. 'Of course I will. First, because I owe you a great debt. By refusing the suggestion I once made to you, you did me a great favour at some cost to yourself, you left me my freedom. It's true that I've lost it now, in another way, he added in a melancholy tone suggesting a desire to confide in me; but what I always consider the most important aspect of your choice is there was a whole chain of circumstances that could have benefited you, and you ignored them, perhaps because Destiny warned you at that moment not to divert my course. It's the old saying again, "Man proposes and God disposes". Who can tell, perhaps if on that day when we came out of Mme de Villeparisis's together you had accepted my offer, many things that have happened since would never have come about.' Embarrassed, I changed the subject, seizing on the name of Mme de Villeparisis and saying how sad I had been to hear of her death. 'Ah, yes,' M. de Charlus murmured drily, in the most insolent tone, acknowledging my condolences while not seeming for a moment to believe them sincere. Seeing that in any case the subject of Mme de Villeparisis was not painful to him, I tried to find out from him, so well qualified in every way to give me the answer, why Mme de Villeparisis had been kept at such a distance by the aristocratic world. Not only did he not solve this little problem of social behaviour for me, he did not even seem to be aware of it. I understood then that Mme de Villeparisis's social situation, which was to seem impressive to posterity, and even in the Marquise's lifetime to ignorant commoners, had seemed hardly less so at

the other end of social scale, in Mme de Villeparisis's own world, to the Guermantes. She was their aunt, they were chiefly aware of her birth, her connections by marriage, the importance she retained in their world through her influence over this or that sister-in-law. They saw her less from the society than the family point of view. Now Mme de Villeparisis's family position was much better than I had thought. I had been surprised to hear that the name Villeparisis was an assumed one. But there are other examples of great ladies marrying beneath them and managing to keep a strong social position. M. de Charlus began by telling me that Mme de Villeparisis was the niece of the famous Duchesse de ***, the most famous member of the high aristocracy during the July Monarchy, but someone who had refused to know the Citizen King[68] and his family. I had so wanted to hear stories about this Duchesse! And Mme de Villeparisis, good, kind Mme de Villeparisis whose cheeks seemed to me the pattern of *bourgeois* cheeks, Mme de Villeparisis who sent me so many presents and whom I could have seen every day if I liked, Mme de Villeparisis was the Duchesse's niece, brought up by her in her own house, the *hôtel de* ***. 'She asked the Duc de Doudeauville, said M. de Charlus, speaking of the three sisters, "Which of the sisters do you prefer?" Doudeauville said, "Mme de Villeparisis", and the Duchesse de *** answered, "Dirty beast!" For the Duchesse was so *witty*,' said M. de Charlus, giving the word the emphasis and the pronunciation usual among the Guermantes. I was not surprised that he should find the reply so 'witty', for I had often noticed the centrifugal, objective tendency which leads men to set aside, when judging the wit of others, the severe criticism they would apply to their own, and to set down and retain as something valuable sayings that they would disdain to originate themselves.

'But what's wrong with him? That's my overcoat he's got, he said, seeing that Brichot had been gone so long and brought back the wrong garment. I should have gone myself. Anyway, put it round you. You know that that's very compromising, dear boy? It's like drinking out of the same glass, I shall be able to read your thoughts. No, no, not like that, let me,' and as he put his coat round me he squeezed it against my shoulders, drew it up round my neck, turned the collar up and stroked my chin with his hand, apologizing the while. 'At his age he can't even dress himself properly, we'll have to make him cosy, I'm in the wrong job, Brichot, I should have been a children's nurse.' I wanted to leave but, M. de Charlus having expressed the intention of going to find Morel, Brichot held both of us back. Besides, the certain knowledge that when I got home I should find Albertine there, the same certainty that I had had in the afternoon that Albertine would come back from the Trocadéro, made me as little anxious to see her as I had been then, when I was sitting at the piano, after Françoise had telephoned. And it was this inner calm which allowed me to obey Brichot, who feared that if I left Charlus would not wait until the moment when Mme Verdurin came and called us. 'Don't go, he said to the Baron, stay with us for a little while, you can kiss him on both cheeks presently,' Brichot added, turning his almost dead eye on me; the many operations he had undergone had restored a little life to it, but nothing like the mobility required for the expression of mischief. 'Kiss him on both cheeks, really! cried the Baron with shrill delight. I tell you, dear boy, he thinks he's still at a school prize-giving, he's dreaming of his little pupils. I bet he sleeps with them. – You'd like to see Mlle Vinteuil, said Brichot to me, having heard the tail-end of our conversation. I promise to let you know if she comes, I'll hear about it from Mme Verdurin, he added, no doubt foreseeing that the Baron was in imminent danger of exclusion from the little set. 'Oh, do you think I am in less close touch with Mme Verdurin than you are, said M. de Charlus, less likely to hear of the coming of those two highly notorious young women? Everyone knows about them, you know. Mme Verdurin should not invite them, they belong in more dubious circles. They're part of a dreadful crew, they must all get together in the most frightful places.' With every word new suffering was piled upon my suffering, which changed its shape. For suddenly remembering certain movements of impatience in Albertine, which she had, however, immediately suppressed, I was struck by the alarming idea that she had begun to think of leaving me. This suspicion made it all the more vital for me to extend our life together until a time when I should have recovered my peace of mind. And to dispel from Albertine's mind, if it had taken root there, the idea of forestalling my plan of breaking with her, in order to make her chains seem lighter until the moment when I could break them without pain to myself, I thought the best plan (perhaps I had been cross-infected by M. de Charlus's presence and the unconscious memory of the games he loved to play), the best plan would be to make Albertine believe that I myself intended to leave her; as soon as I got home I would pretend to break with her, to be on the point of saying good-bye. 'Indeed not, I do not think I am closer to Mme Verdurin than you are,' Brichot declared, enunciating each word clearly, for he feared he had awakened the Baron's suspicions. And seeing that I wanted to leave and trying to keep me by the promise of amusement, he continued, 'It seems to me that the Baron fails to consider one thing when he speaks of those ladies' reputation, and that is that a reputation can be both dreadful and undeserved. Thus for example, in what I may call parallel history, it is certain that judicial errors have been frequent, and that history has recorded convictions for sodomy against famous men who were quite innocent of it. The recent discovery of Michelangelo's great love for a woman is a piece of new evidence which should give Leo X's friend the benefit of a posthumous judicial review. The Michelangelo Affair seems to me to have all the prerequisites to stir up high society and set the East End on the march, when that other Affair, which made anarchy the fashionable vice among our smartest dilettantes, but whose name one dare not mention for fear of quarrels, is finally forgotten.' From the moment Brichot had begun talking about men's reputations, M. de Charlus's whole face had betrayed the particular kind of impatience that we see in an expert on medical or military matters, when lay people who know nothing about them begin to say foolish things about therapeutics or strategy. 'You haven't the first idea what you're talking about, he finally said to Brichot. Just tell me one undeserved reputation. Give me the names. Yes, I know, he burst out when Brichot timidly attempted a reply, the people who tried it once out of curiosity, or a particular feeling for a dear friend who's dead now, and the one who's afraid he once gave himself away and now, when you say that a man is good-looking, replies that that's all Greek to him, that he can no more tell a handsome man from an ugly one than one motor engine from another, since he hasn't the bump for mechanical things. That's all hogwash. Good Lord, I don't mean to say that a bad reputation (or what people call a bad reputation) can never possibly be unjustified. But it's so rare, so out of the ordinary that for practical purposes it doesn't exist. I'm an expert on the subject, I hunt out examples, and I've found one or two that weren't mythical. Yes, in my whole life I've established the existence (I mean established scientifically, I don't go by what I hear) of two undeserved reputations. They usually occur because of the similarity of two names, or certain outward signs, like wearing too many rings, which people who know nothing about it think are absolutely unfailing signs of what you are talking about, just as they believe a peasant never opens his mouth without saying *Aar*, or an Irishman *Begorrah*. These are just clichés from the middlebrow theatre.'

I was very surprised to hear M. de Charlus mention as an invert the 'actress's friend' whom I had seen at Balbec and who was the leader of the Club of four friends. 'But what about the actress? – She's a blind, and anyway he sleeps with her, more perhaps than he does with men: he's not very active with them. – Does he sleep with the other three? – Never! Absolutely not. They're friends, that's all, they don't do anything like that. Two of them are women-only, the third is one, but isn't sure about his friend, and in any case they hide their affairs from each other. What is really surprising is the way undeserved reputations are the ones that people believe in most strongly. You, Brichot, for example, you'd go to the stake for the virtue of this or that man who comes here, and to those in the know he stands out like a sore thumb. At the same time, you're like everyone else, you believe the stories about such-and-such a famous man who, in the eyes of the public, is the personification of the vice we're speaking of, while he wouldn't practise it for worlds. I say for worlds because that's vague: if we tied it down to a few hundred in cash, then the number of the strictly pure would soon fall to zero. Without any inducement, the proportion of the virtuous, if you call that virtue, would fall somewhere between thirty and forty per cent.' Brichot had transferred our consideration of bad reputations on to the male sex: I, on the other hand, preoccupied with Albertine, had begun once more to apply M. de Charlus's words to women. I was appalled by his statistics, even though I realized that his figures must be inflated by wishful thinking and the reports of gossips, perhaps untruthful and in any case led astray by their own desires which, added to those of M. de Charlus himself, must have thrown out the Baron's calculations. 'Three out of ten virtuous! cried Brichot. Even if the proportions were reversed, I should still have had to multiply the numbers of the wicked by a hundred. If there are as many as you say, Baron, if you are not mistaken, then we must confess that you are one of the few clear-sighted observers of a truth that few can recognize around them. You are like Barrès,[69] who made discoveries about parliamentary corruption that were confirmed later, like the existence of Leverrier's planet.[70] Mme Verdurin could probably mention some men whom I would rather not name, who suspected the existence in the Secret Service, in Army Headquarters, of behaviour prompted, no doubt, by patriotism but of which I could never have

dreamed. Think of freemasonry, German spies, drug-addiction: Lucien Daudet[71] writes about them every day, stories that seem the height of fantasy and then turn out to be true. Three out often!' he repeated in astonishment. And it is true that M. de Charlus ascribed inversion to the great majority of his contemporaries, excepting only those with whom he had himself had relations; their case – provided the relations had been in the smallest degree romantic – he regarded as more complex. In the same way confirmed seducers, usually cynical about women's honour, will give a little credit only to the woman who has been their mistress, protesting, with apparent sincerity and an air of mystery, 'No, no, you're wrong, she's not like that.' This unlikely respect is dictated partly by their self-esteem, for it is naturally more flattering to suppose that such favours have been reserved for them alone, partly by their naïvety, which readily swallows everything their mistress tells them, and partly by the way in which, the closer one becomes to human beings and their existences, the more one is convinced that ready-made labels and classifications are too simple. 'Three out often! But be careful, Baron: unlike those historians whom the future will vindicate, if you were to present to posterity the picture you have just been describing, it might be rejected. Posterity demands evidence, and will want to see your documents. Now, as there will be no documentary evidence to support the existence of such collective phenomena, which the small number of those involved will be only too anxious to leave in obscurity, there would be outrage in the circles of the high-minded, and you would be regarded as a slanderer or, dare I say it, a madman. Having achieved full marks and first place as *arbiter elegantiarum*,[72] you would suffer the misfortune of a posthumous blackballing. That would be a slap in the face, as – God forgive me – our dear Bossuet says somewhere or other. – I am not working for posterity, M. de Charlus replied, I am content with life, it is quite interesting enough, as poor Swann used to say. – What! Did you know Swann, Baron, I didn't know that. Was he one of them? Brichot asked uneasily. – Really! Do you think I only know people like that? No, I don't think so,' said Charlus with lowered eyelids, weighing the pros and cons. And then, thinking that, given Swann's well-known reputation for quite the opposite propensity, a half-hint could not harm the man against which it was aimed, and might flatter the originator of the insinuation, 'Perhaps at school, I don't know, once or twice …' He let the words slip, as if thinking aloud, then took them back with a 'But that was two centuries ago! How do you expect me to remember? How tiresome you are,' he concluded with a laugh. 'He wasn't exactly pretty,' said Brichot who, though hideous, thought himself handsome and was quick to describe others as ugly. 'Don't say that, said the Baron, you don't know what you're talking about, his complexion in those days was peaches and cream and, he added in a measured, sing-song voice, he was a per-fect che-rub. And he stayed attractive all his life. Women were wild about him. – But did you know his wife? – I introduced them! She caught my eye in a semi-breeches part, when she was playing Miss Sacripant; I was with some chaps from the club, each of us took a woman home, and though I only felt like sleeping, some unkind people said – people are so unkind – that I had slept with Odette. But then she kept bothering me afterwards, and I thought I would get rid of her by introducing her to Swann. She wouldn't let go of me after that, she couldn't spell to save her life, I had to write all her letters. And then I had to take her everywhere. See, child, what happens when you have a good reputation. And yet it was only half deserved. She used to force me to organize the most dreadful sessions for her, four, five people at a time.' And Odette's successive lovers (she had been with Such-and-such, then So-and-so – all these men not one of whom poor Swann had known anything about, blinded as he was by jealousy and by love, now calculating probabilities and now accepting protestations of innocence more damning than any contradiction into which his mistress might have fallen, a contradiction harder to pin down and still more telling, on which the jealous lover might more logically rely, than on the information he pretends to have received so as to disturb his mistress), Charlus now began to enumerate them as matter-of-factly as he might have recited the list of the kings of France. And in fact the jealous lover is, like contemporaries, too close to the events, he can know nothing of them, and it is for the uninvolved that a series of adulteries takes on the precision of history, expanding into lists, quite dispassionate in themselves and saddening only for another jealous lover such as I was, who cannot avoid comparing his own case to the one he is hearing about, and wondering whether, for the woman he doubts, there does not exist another equally famous list. But he will never know, it is as if there is a general conspiracy, a joke of which he is the victim, in which everyone cruelly participates and which involves, while the woman he loves flits from one man to another, holding a blindfold over his eyes which he constantly tries to tear off, but without success, for everyone keeps him in the dark, poor soul, kind people out of kindness, unkind out of unkindness, vulgar people from a taste for low jokes, well-brought-up people from politeness and good manners, and everyone in observance of one of those conventions which the world calls principles. 'But did Swann ever know that you had been her lover? – Good heavens, of course not! Tell poor Charles about that! What a dreadful idea! My dear fellow, he would have killed me on the spot, he was as jealous as a tiger. I didn't tell Odette either, not that she would have cared, that I … but let's leave that. And to think it was she who fired a revolver at him, and nearly hit me! Oh, I could tell you a lot about that couple; and of course it was on me he called to be his second against d'Osmond, who has never forgiven me. D'Osmond had gone off with Odette, and to show he didn't care Swann had taken Odette's sister as his mistress, or pretended to. Anyhow, you mustn't ask me to tell you the whole story of Swann, or we'll still be here in ten years' time, but you can see I know more about it than anyone. I used to walk out with Odette when she didn't want to see Charles. It was all the more embarrassing as I have a close relative who has adopted the name of Crécy, though of course he has no right to it, and he didn't like the way Odette used it. For she called herself Odette de Crécy, and quite legitimately as she was only separated from a Crécy who had married her, a perfectly genuine one, a decent chap she had cleaned out, down to his last centime. But you're just keeping me talking, you know him, I saw you with him in the "slowcoach", you used to give him dinner at Balbec. He must need it, poor soul: he used to live on a tiny income that Swann gave him, and now that my friend is dead I should be surprised if any of it is still paid. What I can't understand, said M. de Charlus to me, is that you often visited Charles, and yet you didn't care to be presented to the Queen of Naples. It looks to me as if you have no curiosity about *people*, and that always surprises me in someone who knew Swann, for he was extremely curious in that way, to the point that I'm not sure whether I developed it in him, or he in me. I'm just as surprised as I would be to meet someone who knew Whistler and had no idea of taste. Anyway, the person who really needed to meet her was Morel. He desperately wanted to, for he is really extremely intelligent. It's a pity she's gone. But I shall bring them together one day soon. He must get to know her. The only thing that could stop it would be if she died tomorrow. So let's hope that she doesn't.' Suddenly, having been ruminating on the 'thirty per cent rule' revealed to him by M. de Charlus, Brichot, determined to pursue the subject, broke in with what seemed like the brusque manner of an examining magistrate trying to make a prisoner confess, but was in fact the result of the professor's desire to seem perspicacious and his uneasiness at uttering such a grave accusation. 'Isn't Ski one of them?' he asked M. de Charlus with a sombre look. To show off his imagined powers of intuition he had chosen Ski, saying to himself that since only three men out of ten were innocent, he would not run much risk by choosing someone who appeared to him somewhat bizarre, who slept badly, wore scent, and in a word was out of the ordinary. 'No, *not at all*, cried the Baron, giving his expert decision in a sarcastic, exasperated tone. You're absolutely wrong, quite on the wrong track, it's absurd! Ski is just people's idea of that sort of man, people who don't know anything about it. If he were, he wouldn't look it so much; I don't say that to criticize him, for he is an attractive man, there's something really likeable about him. – Tell us some of their names, then,' Brichot persisted. M. de Charlus drew himself up haughtily: 'My dear man, you know I live in a world of abstraction, these things only interest me from a transcendental point of view,' he replied with the touchiness of his kind and the assumed grandiloquence which marked his conversation. 'I am only interested in general principles, I'm talking to you of these things as I might discuss the law of gravity.' But these moments of annoyed reaction in which the Baron tried to hide his real life were few and fleeting as compared with the hours during which he constantly let it show through, or displayed it with an irritating self-satisfaction, the need to confide being much stronger in him than the fear of self-revelation. 'What I meant to say, he went on, is that for every bad reputation that is undeserved, there are hundreds of good ones that are equally groundless. Obviously the number of those who do not deserve their reputation for virtue varies according to whether you listen to people like them or to the others. And while it is true that the readiness of the latter to believe ill of the virtuous is limited by the excessive difficulty they would have in ascribing a vice as horrible in their eyes as theft or murder to people they know to be sensitive and scrupulous, the first group is over-excited by the wish to believe that people they find attractive are, how shall I put it, attainable, and by information derived from others led astray by a similar desire, and finally by the very distance at which they are generally held by the rest of society. I have heard a man, generally avoided for this reason, say that he thought a certain gentleman had the same tastes. And his only reason for thinking so was that the man had spoken pleasantly to him! These are some of the reasons for *optimism*, said the Baron naïvely, in guessing the number. But the real reason

for the enormous gap between the number as calculated by outsiders and by the initiates, is the mystery with which the insiders surround their doings in order to hide them from the others, who, cut off from any source of information, would be literally astounded if they learned even a quarter of the truth. – So our times are just like those of the Greeks, said Brichot. – What do you mean, like the Greeks? Do you think nothing went on between the Greeks and us? Look at Louis XIV's time, with Monsieur,[73] little Vermandois, Molière, Prince Louis of Baden, Brunswick, Charolais, Boufflers, the great Condé, the Duc de Brissac. – Stop there, I knew about Monsieur, Brissac is in Saint-Simon, Vendôme naturally and lots of others too, but Saint-Simon, that old slanderer, often talks about the great Condé and Prince Louis of Baden and he never says anything about that. – Dear me, to think I have to give history lessons to a teacher at the Sorbonne. But professor, you don't know the first thing. – True, Baron, cruel but true. But wait a moment, I have a story you will like. I've just remembered a song from the period, in macaronic Latin, about the great Condé being caught in a storm as he sailed down the Rhine with his friend the Marquis de la Moussaye. Condé says:

Carus Amicus Mussaeus,
Ah! Deus bonus! Quod tempus!
Landerirette,
Imbre sumus perituri.

And La Moussaye comforts him by saying:

Securae sunt nostrae vitae
Sumus enim Sodomitae
Igne tantum perituri
Landeriri.

– I take it all back, said Charlus in a high, affected voice, you're a mine of information, you'll write that out for me, won't you, I must have it for my family archives, since my great-great-grandmother was the sister of M. le Prince. – Yes, Baron, but I've never read anything about Prince Louis of Baden. Besides, I think that in general the military vocation … – What nonsense! In those days, Vendôme, Villars, Prince Eugène, the Prince de Conti, and if I were to mention all our heroes in Indo-China, in Morocco, and I mean the very noblest ones, pious too, and "modern-minded", you would be astonished. Ah, I could tell some tales to those people who are examining how the new generation has rejected the needless complications of its elders, as M. Bourget says.[74] I have a young friend in the army who is making quite a name for himself, who has done great things; but let me not gossip, let's go back to the seventeenth century, you know what Saint-Simon says about the Maréchal d'Huxelles – among so many others: "pleasure-loving, given to Greek debauchery which he did not trouble to conceal, he drew in young officers and made them his companions, along with handsome young serving-men, all quite openly, when on service and at Strasbourg." You have probably read Madame's letters, the men never called him anything but "Putana." She speaks of it quite openly. – And she knew whereof she spoke, with that husband. – Such an interesting character, Madame, said M. de Charlus. She could serve as the complete model of the "Queen's Woman". Mannish, for a start; the Queen's wife is usually a man, that's why it's so easy for him to get children on her. Then Madame never speaks of her husband's vices, but talks endlessly of the same vice in other people, and obviously knew what she was talking about; it's the same quirk that makes us love to find in other people's families the same weaknesses that we suffer from in our own, so as to prove to ourselves that there is nothing exceptional or shameful about them. As I was saying, it's always been like that. However, our own age stands out particularly from this point of view. And in spite of the examples I took from the seventeenth century, if my great ancestor François de la Rochefoucauld were alive today, he could say with even more truth than when speaking of his own time, come along, Brichot, help me out: "Vices belong to every age; but if certain people whom everyone knows had appeared in the first centuries, should we still speak today of the excesses of Heliogabalus?"[75] *Whom everyone knows*, I like that. I can see that my wise relative could tell when his most famous contemporaries were "spinning a line", just as I can with mine. But it's not just that there are even more people like that today. There's also something particular about them.' I saw that M. de Charlus was going to tell us in what way that mode of life had changed. But not for a moment as he talked, as Brichot talked, was the more or less conscious image of my flat where Albertine was waiting for me, an image associated with the homely, caressing motif of Vinteuil's music, dispelled from my mind. I kept coming back to Albertine, just as I would soon have in reality to go back to her, as if to a kind of ball and chain which prevented me from leaving Paris and which at this moment, as from the Verdurin salon I thought of my own home, made me see it, not as an empty space, exciting to the personality and rather sad, but as filled – just as the hotel at Balbec had been filled on a certain evening – by that unmoving presence, which continued to inhabit it for my sake, and which I could be sure of finding there again whenever I wanted to. The insistence with which M. de Charlus kept returning to his theme – in relation to which his intelligence, always exercised in the same direction, did possess a certain penetration – was distressing in quite a complex way. He was as boring as a scholar who can see nothing beyond his own subject, irritating as an insider who prides himself on the secrets he knows and cannot wait to give away, disagreeable as those who, in the matter of their own faults, let themselves go without realizing what offence they are giving, obsessive as a maniac and fatally rash as one who knows himself guilty. These characteristics, which at some moments became as striking as those which distinguish a madman or a criminal, did however offer me some comfort. For, transposing them into a form which allowed me to draw conclusions from them about Albertine, and remembering her attitude to Saint-Loup and to me, I said to myself that, however painful one of those memories was for me, and however melancholy the other, they seemed to rule out the kind of severe mental warping, the intensely one-sided specialization, which was so strongly evident in the conversation and in the person of M. de Charlus. But the man himself, sadly, now began to destroy these reasons for hope in the same way in which he had provided me with them, that is, unintentionally. 'Yes, he said, I'm not a boy any more and I have already seen many things changing around me, I can no longer understand a society where all barriers are broken down, where a noisy crowd with no elegance or even decency dances the tango even in the houses of my family, nor fashion, nor politics, nor the arts, nor religion, nothing. But I will admit that the thing that has changed most of all is what the Germans call homosexuality. Good heavens, in my day, if one set aside the men who simply hated women, and those who, while actually preferring them, did other things for money or their careers, homosexuals were good family men and really only kept mistresses as a blind. If I had had a daughter to settle I should have gone to them to find her a husband, if I had wished to make sure she would not be unhappy. But now everything is changed, alas. Now they recruit even among men who are the maddest about women. I used to be able to spot them, and when I said to myself "no, not that one" I would never be wrong. But now I give up. One of my friends who is famous for it had a coachman that my sister-in-law Oriane had found for him, a boy from Combray who had been a bit of a jack-of-all-trades but was chiefly known as a ladies' man: I would have sworn no one could have been more averse to that kind of thing. He had a regular girl-friend but tormented her by seeing two other women he was mad about, not to mention all the others – an actress and a barmaid. My cousin the Prince de Guermantes, who is intelligent in the irritating way of people who are too ready to believe everything, said to me one day, "Why doesn't X sleep with his coachman, do you suppose? Théodore (that's the coachman's name) might like it, you never know; perhaps he's even offended that his master hasn't made any advances to him." I couldn't stop myself telling Gilbert to be quiet; I was annoyed by two things: his pretence at understanding, which when it is too general shows a lack of understanding, and the transparent scheming of my cousin, who wanted to see our friend X test the water and then, if he was successful, follow in his footsteps. – Is the Prince de Guermantes that way inclined as well, then? Brichot asked with a mixture of astonishment and unease. – Goodness, replied M. de Charlus delightedly, it's so well known that I don't think I'm being indiscreet in saying yes. Anyway, the next year I went to Balbec and there I learned from a sailor who sometimes took me fishing that the same Théodore, whose sister, by the way, is maid to one of Mme Verdurin's friends, the Baronne Putbus, was now in the habit of coming down to the harbour as bold as brass to pick up one sailor or another and go out with them for a sail "and that's not all, and that's not all". It was now my turn to ask whether the proprietor, in whom I had recognized the gentleman who played cards all day with his mistress, was like the Prince de Guermantes. 'Of course he is, everyone knows that, he doesn't even trouble to hide it. – But his mistress was with him. – And so? How

naïve these children are,' he said in a paternal tone, not guessing the suffering I extracted from his words when I applied them to Albertine. 'His mistress is delightful. – So his three friends are like him? – No, no, no, he cried, stopping his ears as if I had just played a wrong note on a musical instrument. Now he's gone off to the other extreme. Can't a man have friends any more? Youth, youth, they get everything wrong. We shall have to take your education in hand, young man. Now I admit, he continued, that this case, and I know of many others of the same kind, puts me in difficulty, however hard I try to keep an open mind. I may be old-fashioned, but I can't understand, he said, like an old Gallican speaking of certain forms of Ultramontane religion, a liberal Royalist of Action française or a disciple of Claude Monet of the cubists. If they like women so much, why, especially in the working-class world where it's so disapproved of, do they feel they must have what they call a gay boy as well? It must represent something different for them. But what?' 'What is the "something different" that a woman represents for Albertine?' I wondered, and that, indeed, was the painful question for me. 'Really, Baron, said Brichot, if the General Board of the University ever decides to set up a chair in homosexuality, I shall put your name forward at once. No, perhaps a special Institute of Psychopathology would suit you better. Best of all, I could see you with a chair at the Collège de France, able to pursue your own researches and report on them, as the professors of Tamil or Sanskrit do, to the very small number of people who take an interest. You would have an audience of two and the porter, if I may say so without casting aspersions on our caretaking staff, a splendid body of men. – You don't know what you're talking about, said the Baron harshly. Anyway, you are mistaken if you think the subject interests only so very few people. Quite the opposite, in fact,' and, seemingly unaware of the contradiction between the unfailing tendency of his own conversation and the reproaches he was about to address to other people: 'It's dreadful, he said to Brichot with a scandalized, shamefaced look, no one talks of anything else. Shameful, I know, but that's the way it is, my dear fellow. Imagine, if women start talking about it now, what a scandal! The worst of it is, he added with extraordinary force, they get their information from real horrors, shockers like little Châtellerault, against whom there'd be more to say than anyone else, and who tell them stories about other people. I hear he says the most dreadful things about me, but I don't care, I think that any mud thrown by someone who was nearly thrown out of the Jockey Club for cheating at cards can only fall back on himself. But I do know that if I were Jane d'Ayen I should have enough respect for my guests not to allow these subjects to be discussed in their hearing, nor to let my family be dragged through the mud in my own house. But there is no society any more, no rules, no propriety, whether in conversation or dress. Ah, my dear friend, it's the end of the world. Everyone has become so wicked. They compete to see who can say the worst things about each other. Horrible!'

Still cowardly as I had been as a child at Combray, when I fled so as not to see them offering my grandfather brandy and my grandmother vainly trying to persuade him not to drink it, I now had only one wish, to escape from the Verdurins' before the execution of Charlus was carried out. 'I really must go, I said to Brichot. – I'll come with you, he replied, but we can't just walk out like that. Let's go and say good-bye to Mme Verdurin, the professor concluded, walking towards the drawing-room with the look of someone playing a parlour game, going into the room to ask 'May we come in?'

While we were talking, M. Verdurin, at a signal from his wife, had taken Morel off to another room. Even if Mme Verdurin had decided, after reflection, that it would be wiser to postpone the revelations to be made to Morel, it was now too late to turn back. We can allow certain desires, sometimes purely oral in nature, to become so strong that they must be satisfied, whatever the consequences: we simply must plant a kiss on a bare shoulder that we have been looking at for too long, and our lips fall on it like a bird of prey on a snake; we cannot resist the impulse, stronger than hunger, to sink our teeth in a cake, or forgo the astonishment, the alarm, the sorrow or the gaiety which we can unleash in a human soul by saying something unexpected. In this frame of mind, drunk on melodrama, Mme Verdurin had impressed on her husband that he must take the violinist on one side and, at all costs, speak to him. The young man had begun by complaining that the Queen of Naples had left before he could be introduced to her. M. de Charlus had repeated to him so often that she was the sister of the Empress Elizabeth and the Duchesse d'Alençon that the royal lady had taken on extraordinary importance in Morel's eyes. But the Patron had explained to him that they were not there to discuss the Queen of Naples, and had gone straight to the heart of the matter. 'That's how it is, he had said after some time had passed, but look, if you like, we'll ask my wife's advice. I haven't said anything to her about this, I swear. Let's see what she thinks about it. Maybe my idea isn't the right one, but you know how clever she is, and then she's immensely fond of you: let's consult her.' And while Mme Verdurin waited impatiently for the delicious excitement she would feel in talking to the virtuoso, and then, after he was gone, in making her husband go over every word of the scene that had passed between them, and as she waited kept repeating, 'What on earth can they be doing? Auguste is taking so long, I hope at least he'll have got him properly sorted out,' M. Verdurin had come downstairs again with Morel, who seemed to be experiencing strong emotion. 'He would like to ask your advice,' said M. Verdurin to his wife, with the air of someone who does not know if his request will be granted. In the grip of passion, Mme Verdurin spoke not to her husband but directly to Morel: 'I think my husband's absolutely right, you can't put up with this any longer!' she cried violently, forgetting the futile fiction agreed with her husband beforehand, that she was not supposed to know anything of what he had said to the violinist. 'What? Put up with what?' M. Verdurin stammered, trying to feign astonishment and, with understandable clumsiness, to cover up his lie. 'I guessed it, I guessed what you told him,' Mme Verdurin replied, without the least concern for the probability or otherwise of the explanation, and regardless of what, when he thought over this scene again, the violinist might think of the veracity of his Patronne. 'No, Mme Verdurin repeated, I believe that you should no longer accept this shameful familiarity with a disgraced character who is not received anywhere, she added, quite unconcerned that this was a lie and forgetting that she herself received him in her house almost daily. Everyone at the Conservatoire is talking about you, she added, feeling that this would be the most telling argument; one more month of this life and your musical career is finished, whereas without Charlus you should be earning a hundred thousand a year. – But I've never heard a word of this, I'm dumbstruck, I can't thank you enough,' murmured Morel with tears in his eyes. But, obliged to feign astonishment and hide his shame at the same time, he was redder in the face and sweating more freely than if he had played all Beethoven's sonatas in quick succession, and his eyes were filling with tears that the master of Bonn could never have drawn from them. The sculptor, interested by the tears, smiled and pointed out Charlie to me with a sidelong glance. 'If you haven't heard about him you're the only one who hasn't. He's a gentleman with a very nasty reputation who's been mixed up in all sorts of scandals. I know the police are watching him and it's a good thing for him that they are, otherwise he would end up like all the rest of them, murdered by street riff-raff,' she added, for the thought of Charlus had brought back the memory of Mme de Duras and, intoxicated with rage, she was trying to wound the wretched Charlie ever more deeply, in revenge for the insults she had suffered in the course of the evening. 'Anyway, even in practical terms he can't be of any use to you, he is completely ruined since he fell into the clutches of blackmailers; he can't even pay them, so how could he help you, everything is mortgaged to the hilt, his town house, his country estate, etc.' Morel was all the more convinced by this lie as M. de Charlus liked to confide in him about his dealings with apaches, a race which a manservant's son, however squalid his own life, must regard with a horror equal to his attachment to Bonapartist ideas.

Already his crafty mind had formed the idea of a reversal analogous to what was called in the eighteenth century the Diplomatic Revolution. Determined never to speak to M. de Charlus again, he had decided to go back the next evening to see Jupien's niece and patch everything up again. Unfortunately for him, this plan was a failure, M. de Charlus having already made an appointment for the evening of the party with Jupien, an appointment which the former waistcoat-maker, despite the day's events, did not dare break. Other people, as we shall see, having made rash decisions in relation to Morel, when a tearful Jupien recounted his misfortunes to the Baron, that nobleman, no less unhappy, announced that he would adopt the unfortunate girl, that she could take one of the titles in his gift, probably that of Mlle d'Oloron; he would give her an appropriate education and find her a rich husband. These promises caused deep joy to Jupien and did not impress his niece at all, for she still loved Morel, who was foolish or shameless enough to come into the shop when Jupien was out. 'What's the matter, he asked, laughing, you've got rings under your eyes. Unhappy in love? Come along, tomorrow is another day. After all, surely a man has the right to try on a pair of shoes, or a woman, and if they don't fit …' He got angry only once, when she cried; he thought that cowardly, an unworthy manœuvre. It is not always easy to bear the tears that are shed for us.

But we are running on too fast, for all these things happened after the Verdurin soirée; we must pick up our account of it where we left off. 'I'd never have dreamed …, Morel sighed in response to Mme Verdurin. – Of course no one says it to your face, but still everyone in the Conservatoire is talking about you, she repeated spitefully, wishing to show Morel that not only the Baron but he himself was the subject of gossip. I believe you when you say you weren't aware of it, but people do say the most dreadful things. Ask Ski what they were saying the other day at Chevillard's just a few yards away from us, when you came into my box. Everyone's eyes were on you. I must say that for myself I don't care in the least, but I do think it makes a man a complete laughing-stock, and that's something that can last a lifetime. – I don't know how to thank you,' said Charlie in the tone one uses to a dentist who has just been causing one excruciating pain to which one does not want to admit, or to an over-bloodthirsty second who is dragging one into a duel over some harmless remark of which he says, 'You can't swallow that.' 'I think you've got backbone, that you're a man, Mme Verdurin replied, and you'll speak up for yourself even though he tells everyone that you daren't, that he has a hold on you.' Charlie, trying to find a borrowed dignity to cover the tatters of his own, found in his memory a phrase which he had read somewhere or heard someone say, and promptly proclaimed, 'I wasn't brought up to take that sort of thing. I'll break with M. de Charlus this very evening. The Queen of Naples has left, hasn't she? Otherwise, before breaking with him, I'd have asked him … – You don't have to break off with him completely, said Mme Verdurin, not wishing to disrupt the inner circle. You can safely meet him here, in our little group, where people appreciate you, where no one will say anything unkind. But insist on your independence, and don't let him drag you to all those two-faced old trouts' houses; I wish you could have heard what they said behind your back. Don't feel any regret about it, not only will you be getting rid of a cloud that would have hung over you all your life, bu from the professional point of view, it's not just the shame of being introduced by Charlus, I should tell you that getting mixed up in that phoney society would make you look completely unserious, like an amateur, a little drawing-room musician, and that's terrible at your age. I can see that it's a great idea for all those fine ladies to return favours to their friends by getting you to play for them for nothing, but it's your future as a musician you should be thinking of. I don't say you can't go to one or two houses. I think I heard you mention the Queen of Naples, she *has* left by the way, now she was planning a party and she's a good sort, who doesn't think much of Charlus or so I hear. I really do think she came chiefly to see me. In fact I know it's true, she wanted to meet M. Verdurin and myself. Now there is somewhere you could play. And then let me say that if you were introduced by me, someone all the musicians know, you know, someone they're always really decent with, for they see me as one of themselves, their own Patronne, that would be quite different. But don't even think of going to Mme de Duras's. Don't make a blunder like that! Artistes I know have come to tell me about the problems they have had with her. You know, they know they can trust me, she said in the sweet, simple tone she knew how to assume at a moment's notice, giving her features an air of modesty and her eyes the appropriate charm. They come and tell me their little troubles; the ones who are supposed to have the least to say sometimes talk to me for hours, and I can't tell you how interesting they are. Poor Chabrier always said, "Mme Verdurin's the only one who can get them talking." Well, you know, I've seen all of them, every last one, in tears after they had been to play at Mme de Duras's. It's not just the way she encourages her servants to humiliate them, but they found no one else would hire them afterwards. The concert bookers said, "Oh yes, he's the one who plays at Mme de Duras's." And that was that. It's the kind of thing that will really cut short a career. You know, working for society people just doesn't look serious, you can have all the talent in the world, but sadly one Mme de Duras is enough to make you look like an amateur. And the artistes themselves, well, you know I've known them for forty years, taking an interest in them, getting them started, well, you know how it is, once they call somebody an amateur that's that. And they were just starting to say it about you. How many times I've had to stand up for you, to swear that you wouldn't play in this or that ridiculous salon! Do you know what they answered? "But he'll have to, Charlus will fix it without consulting him, he never asks him what he wants to do." Someone tried to please him by saying "We all so admire your friend Morel." Do you know what he answered, with that insolent look of his? "What do you mean, my friend? We come from different classes: he is my protégé, my creature if you will." ' At this moment something was fermenting behind the domed forehead of the music-lover, the only thing that certain persons cannot keep to themselves, a remark to repeat which would be not only contemptible but dangerous. But the need to repeat it is stronger than honour or prudence. It was to this need that, after a few convulsive movements of the spherical, angry forehead, the Patronne gave way. 'Someone even told my husband that he said "my servant", but I can't be sure of that,' she added. It was a similar need that had driven M. de Charlus, shortly after swearing to Morel that he would never reveal his background to anyone, to tell Mme Verdurin, 'His father was a manservant.' It would again be this kind of need that, once the word was out, would make it pass from one person to another, each revealing it under the promise of a strict secrecy which would not be kept, any more than the first person had kept it. As in the ring game, these remarks eventually found their way back to Mme Verdurin, losing her the friendship of the subject, who had finally become aware of them. She knew this, but could not hold on to the word which was burning her tongue. 'Servant' was bound to hurt Morel. However she said it: 'servant', and if she added that she could not be sure of it, it was both in order to suggest that she *was* sure about the other insults, and to show her own impartiality. The thought of this impartiality gave her such a warm feeling that she began to speak to Charlie in tender tones: 'Of course I don't hold it against him that he tried to pull you into the mud beside him, since he is wallowing in it himself, wallowing in it, she repeated a little louder, pleased by the vividness of the image which had escaped her faster than her attention could follow it, and now struck her as deserving more prominence. 'No, what I blame him for, she continued tenderly, with a note of feminine triumph in her voice, is his lack of consideration for you. There are some things we don't repeat to everyone. Just a moment ago he was betting people that he would make you blush with pleasure by getting you (he must have been joking, for his recommendation would be enough to make sure you didn't get it) the cross of the Légion d'honneur. There was no harm in that, though I've never thought it was very nice, she added primly, to make a fool of one's friends, but you know, there are some things he says that do hurt. Like the way he laughed aloud when he said that you really wanted the decoration to please your uncle, and your uncle was a flunkey. – He said that!' cried Charlie, convinced by these carefully remembered last words that everything Mme Verdurin had said was true. Mme Verdurin felt flooding over her the joy of an old mistress who, about to be dropped by her young lover, has found a way to stop his marriage. And perhaps her lies were not deliberately planned, nor even conscious. It was perhaps a logic of feeling, or even something more elementary, a kind of nervous reflex that moved her, when it was a question of enlivening her existence or preserving her happiness, to 'make mischief' inside the little set, that brought to her lips these assertions, devilishly useful if not entirely exact. 'It wouldn't matter if he'd only said it to us, the Patronne continued, we know we have to take what he says with a pinch of salt, and then there is no shame in honest work, each man has his own worth; but to go and make Mme de Portefin giggle over it (Mme Verdurin mentioned Mme de Portefin on purpose, knowing that Charlie liked her), that's the kind of thing we hate. My husband said, when he heard him say it, "I'd rather have had a slap in the face." ' For Gustave likes you just as much as I do (it was thus that we learned M. Verdurin's name was Gustave). He's quite tender-hearted really. – I never told you I liked him, muttered M. Verdurin in the role of kindly curmudgeon. It's Charlus who likes him. – Oh, no, now I can tell the difference; I was being used by someone despicable, but you are kind, Charlie cried with sincere feeling. – No, no, said Mme Verdurin, magnanimous in victory (for she now felt her Wednesdays safe), despicable is too strong: he does damage, lots of damage, without meaning to; you know, that Légion d'honneur business didn't go on for very long. And I'd rather not tell you all the other things he said about your family (she would have been hard put to it to think of any). – I don't care if it only lasted a second, that's enough to show he's a wretch,' cried Morel.

It was at this moment that we came back into the drawing-room. 'Ah!' M. de Charlus cried, seeing Morel there, and, walking towards the musician with the spring in his step of a man who has organized his whole evening perfectly to lead up to a rendezvous with a woman and who, intoxicated with his cleverness, does not realize that he has himself set the trap in which he will be caught and soundly thrashed in front of everyone by the husband's spies. 'Well, there you are at last. Are you happy, young maestro and soon to be young Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur? For soon you'll be able to show off your cross,' said M. de Charlus to Morel with a look of tender triumph, but this very mention of the decoration seemed to confirm Mme Verdurin's lies, which now seemed indisputably true to Morel. 'Leave me alone, don't you dare come near me, cried Morel to the Baron. I bet this isn't your first time, you must have tried to corrupt other people before me.' My only comfort was the belief that I would soon see Morel and the Verdurins pulverized by M. de Charlus. I had had to face his insane rages for a thousand times less than this, no one was safe from them, a king would not have intimidated him. Now the most extraordinary thing happened. We saw M. de Charlus dumbstruck, aghast, realizing the scale of his misfortune but not its cause, not finding a word to say, turning his eyes upon everyone present, one by one, puzzled,

indignant, helpless, as if to ask them not so much what had happened as what he should now do. Perhaps what had struck him dumb was (seeing M. and Mme Verdurin turning away from him and no one else coming to his aid) his present suffering and above all the fear of further sufferings to come; or perhaps it was that, not having used the power of his imagination to work himself up and develop a rage in advance, and having no ready-made fury to draw on (for with his sensitive, nervous, hysterical temperament he was genuinely impulsive but not a natural fighter, nor for that matter, and this made me like him better, truly aggressive, and he lacked the normal reactions of the man wounded in his honour), he had been taken by surprise, attacked when he was unarmed; or perhaps it was that in a milieu not his own he felt less confident and consequently less brave than he would have been if at home in the Faubourg. For whatever reason, in this salon that he despised, this great noble (whose superiority over commoners was no more self-evident than had been that of certain of his tormented ancestors appearing before the Revolutionary courts) found his whole body and tongue seemingly paralysed, and could do nothing but cast frightened glances in all directions, expressing incomprehension, indignation at the attack on him and mute calls for help. And yet M. de Charlus could call on all the resources not only of eloquence but of boldness when, possessed by a rage which had been bubbling up inside him against someone, he would transfix him, reduce him to utter despair by the cruellest words in the hearing of polite people who stood aghast, never having imagined that anyone could go so far. In those situations M. de Charlus was on fire, in the grip of genuine nervous attacks which left everyone trembling. But in those cases he had the initiative, he could go on the attack, say whatever he pleased (just as Bloch could make jokes against Jews, but blushed if anyone mentioned their name to him). When he hated people, it was because he thought those people despised him. If they had been pleasant to him, then instead of becoming intoxicated with rage against them, he would have put his arms round them. In a situation so cruelly unforeseen as this one, the great talker could only stammer, 'What's the meaning of this? What's going on?' He could hardly even be heard. And the gestures expressive of panic terror have changed so little, that the old gentleman to whom something unpleasant was happening in a Paris drawing-room struck again, without knowing it, the small number of stylized attitudes which in archaic Greek sculpture indicated the alarm of nymphs being pursued by the god Pan.

The disgraced ambassador, the civil service chief forced into retirement, the man about town given a chilly reception, the lover shown the door sometimes spend months examining the event which destroyed their hopes; they turn it over and over like a bullet fired they do not know from where nor by whom, almost like a meteorite. They want to know what the strange device is made of that struck them down so suddenly, whose ill-will it embodies. At least chemists can turn to analysis; sufferers from an unknown disease can call in a doctor. And criminal cases are more or less clarified by the examining magistrate. But the disconcerting actions of our fellow-men rarely reveal their motives. Thus M. de Charlus, to move forward for a moment to the days which followed Mme Verdurin's party, to which we shall return, could see only one clear reason for Charlie's attitude. Charlie, who had often threatened to reveal the nature of the Baron's passion for him, must have decided to do it now that he felt 'established' enough to stand on his own feet. And out of sheer ingratitude he must have told Mme Verdurin everything. But how could she have allowed herself to be so deceived (for the Baron, having made up his mind to deny the charge, had already persuaded himself that the feelings he would be accused of were imaginary)? Friends of Mme Verdurin's, perhaps attracted to Charlie themselves, must have prepared the ground. So over the next few days M. de Charlus wrote dreadful letters to several entirely innocent members of the 'faithful', who simply thought he had gone mad; then he went to pour out to Mme Verdurin a long, pitiful tale which did not have at all the effect he intended. For on the one hand Mme Verdurin kept repeating to the Baron: 'Just ignore him, don't have anything more to do with him, he's a baby,' when the Baron desired nothing more than a reconciliation. On the other hand, trying to bring one about by denying Charlie everything he had thought he could rely on, he asked Mme Verdurin to stop inviting him to her house: her refusal earned her some furiously sarcastic letters from M. de Charlus. Alternating between one theory and another, M. de Charlus never hit on the right one, namely that the coup had not originated with Morel at all. It is true that he could have found that out by asking Morel to talk to him for a few minutes. But he thought that would be beneath his dignity and damaging to the interests of his love. He was the offended party, he was owed an explanation. In fact there is almost always, attached to the idea of a conversation which might clear up a misunderstanding, some other idea which for one reason or another makes us reluctant to have that conversation. The man who has backed down and shown weakness in twenty different circumstances, will stand on his pride the twenty-first time, the only time when it would have been useful not to dig his heels in and to dispel a misapprehension that can only grow stronger in his adversary for want of an explanation. As for the 'society' side of the incident, the word went around that M. de Charlus had been thrown out of the Verdurins' when he was discovered trying to rape a young musician. So no one was surprised when he did not reappear at the Verdurins', and when he bumped into one of the 'faithful' whom he had suspected and insulted, as the other man still felt resentment towards the Baron, who himself did not greet him, it was easy for others to assume that no one in the little set was now willing to speak to the Baron.

While M. de Charlus, felled on the spot by Morel's words and the Patronne's attitude, was adopting the pose of the nymph seized by panic terror, M. and Mme Verdurin had retired into the first drawing-room, as if to signal a break in diplomatic relations, leaving M. de Charlus alone, while Morel stood on the dais putting his violin back in its case. 'Tell us how it went, said Mme Verdurin greedily to her husband. – I don't know what you said to him, but he really looked upset, said Ski, he was crying.' Pretending not to understand, 'I don't think what I said made any impression on him,' said Mme Verdurin, making one of those feints which do not, in fact, deceive everyone, in order to make the sculptor repeat that Charlie had been in tears: tears which filled the Patronne with such swelling pride that she wanted to be sure no member of the faithful could possibly have failed to hear about them. 'No, it must have, I saw big tears glistening in his eyes,' said the sculptor in a low voice, smiling conspiratorially and looking out of the corner of his eye to make sure that Morel was still on the dais and could not hear what he was saying. But there was one person who did hear it and whose presence, as soon as it was noticed, restored to Morel one of his lost hopes. It was the Queen of Naples who, having left her fan behind, had thought it would be kinder, on her way back from another party, to call for it herself. She had slipped in as quietly as possible, as if coming to apologize and to make a short visit now that everyone had gone home. But her entrance had passed unnoticed in the excitement of the incident, which she had instantly understood and which filled her with burning indignation. 'Ski says that he was crying, did you see that? I didn't see any tears. Oh yes, I did, now I remember, she added for fear that her denial might be believed. As for old Charlus, he doesn't look so good, he ought to sit down, he's tottering on his feet, he'll fall over if he's not careful,' she said with a pitiless snigger. At that moment Morel ran towards her: 'Isn't that the Queen of Naples, he asked (though he knew it was she), pointing to the royal lady, who was now walking towards Charlus. After what's happened I can't very well ask the Baron to introduce me. – Wait a minute, I'll do it,' said Mme Verdurin, and followed by several faithful, but not by Brichot or myself, for we were hurrying to collect our coats and leave, she advanced towards the Queen, who was talking to M. de Charlus. He had thought that his great wish to see Morel presented to the Queen of Naples could be denied only by the improbable death of the sovereign. But we think of the future as a reflection of the present projected into an empty space, while it is often the immediate result of causes which for the most part escape us. Less than an hour had passed, and M. de Charlus would now have given anything to ensure that Morel was not presented to the Queen. Mme Verdurin curtsied to the Queen. Seeing that she did not seem to recognize her: 'I am Mme Verdurin, she said. Your Majesty does not recognize me. – Quite so,' said the Queen, continuing her conversation with M. de Charlus so naturally and with such an absent-minded manner that Mme Verdurin could not be sure whether the 'quite so', pronounced so distantly, and which drew from M. de Charlus, in the midst of his sufferings as a lover, the grateful, appreciative smile of a connoisseur of insolence, was really meant for her. Morel, seeing from a distance that the preliminaries to his presentation were under way, had come nearer. The Queen held out her arm to M. de Charlus. She was angry with him too, but only because he was not standing up more energetically to those who had dared to insult him. She blushed with shame on his behalf that the Verdurins should feel able to treat him in such a way. The unaffected friendliness she had shown them a few hours before and the insolent pride with which she now held herself erect before them had their source in the same place in her heart. The Queen was a woman of great goodness, but her idea of goodness was, first of all, an unshakeable attachment to people whom she loved, to her relations, to all the princes of her family, one of whom was M. de Charlus, then to all the middle-class or humbler people who showed respect to those she loved, who had the proper feelings towards them. It was as a woman endowed with these good instincts that she had shown

friendliness to Mme Verdurin. And no doubt hers was a narrow, rather reactionary and increasingly outdated conception of goodness. But that does not mean that her goodness was any less sincere or less ardent. In ancient times men did not love the human group to which they devoted themselves with any less fervour because it was restricted to the city, nor do the men of today love their country less than those who will one day love the United States of the Earth. I have an example closer at hand in my mother, whom Mme de Cambremer and Mme de Guermantes were never able to interest in any philanthropic 'good works', in any patriotic sewing-circle or charity bazaar. I do not say that she was right in acting only when her own heart moved her, and in reserving to her own family, her servants, any unfortunates that chance put in her way, the treasures of her love and generosity, but I do know that those treasures, like my grandmother's, were inexhaustible and left far behind anything that Mmes de Cambremer and de Guermantes were ever able to achieve. The case of the Queen of Naples was quite different, but we must admit that she did not choose the objects of her sympathy, as Dostoevsky did in the novels Albertine borrowed from my bookshelves and made her own, among flattering parasites, thieves, drunkards, some of them dull and others insolent, debauchees and even murderers. But the two extremes are closer than we think, since the nobleman, the close friend, the offended relative that the Queen wished to defend was M. de Charlus, that is to say, despite his birth and his various family ties to the Queen, someone whose virtue was set off by numerous vices. 'You don't look well, my dear cousin, she said to M. de Charlus. Lean on my arm. It will always be there to support you. It is strong enough for that. You know how once, at Gaeta, it held the mob at bay. It will be a rampart to you.' Such was the departure, lending her arm to the Baron and without having let Morel be presented to her, of the glorious sister of the Empress Elizabeth.

One might imagine, given the appalling character of M. de Charlus, the way in which he persecuted and terrified even members of his own family, that in the aftermath of this evening he would have unleashed his rage and carried out violent reprisals against the Verdurins. But nothing of the kind took place, and the main reason was certainly that the Baron, having caught a chill a few days later and contracted one of those infectious pneumonias that were so common at the time, was judged by his doctors and judged himself to be at death's door, and then spent several months suspended between death and life. Was there simply a physical metastasis, and did another illness replace the neurosis which up to that point had made him forget himself and give way to veritable orgies of anger? For it would be too simple to think that, never having taken the Verdurins seriously from the social point of view, he could not feel resentment towards them as he would towards his equals; too simple, also, to recall that the highly strung, forever stirred up against imaginary and harmless enemies, become harmless themselves when anyone stands up to them, and that one can calm them down better by throwing cold water over them than by trying to show them the emptiness of their grievances. But the explanation of the Baron's lack of resentment is probably not to be found in a metastasis, but in the malady itself. It exhausted the Baron so completely that it left him little chance to think about the Verdurins. He was half-dead. We were speaking of counter-attacks; even those which can have only posthumous effects require, in order to be 'set up' effectively, the sacrifice of some part of one's forces. M. de Charlus had too little strength left to embark on such a preparation. We often hear about mortal enemies who open their eyes only to see each other on the point of death and die happy. That must be a rare occurrence, except where death has caught us in the midst of life. On the contrary, it is when we have nothing more to lose that we lose the will to face risks which we should have taken quite happily when in health. The desire for revenge is part of life; more often than not – in spite of exceptions which, within a single character, are mere human contradictions – it fades at the approach of death. When he had thought about the Verdurins for a moment. M. de Charlus felt too tired, turned towards the wall and stopped thinking altogether. It was not that he had lost his eloquence, but it now cost him less effort. It still flowed from him spontaneously, but had lost its previous character. Freed from its subjection to the violent feelings it had so often dignified, it was now an almost mystical eloquence adorned with words of gentleness, Gospel parables, seeming resignation to death. He spoke chiefly on the days when he felt he would survive. A relapse reduced him to silence. This Christian sweetness, into which his splendid violence had been transformed (as *Esther* represents a transformation of the very different genius of *Andromaque*), caused wonderment in all who saw it. Even the Verdurins would have been equally admiring; they could not have forborne to adore a man whose faults had made them hate him. Certainly some thoughts floated to the surface that were Christian only in appearance. He begged the Archangel Gabriel to come down and tell him, as he had told the Prophet, when the Messiah would come. And then, with a sweet, sorrowful smile, he would add, 'But the archangel had better not tell me to wait for "seven weeks and yet six times seven", for I shall be dead before then.' The coming he was waiting for was that of Morel. Indeed, he asked the Archangel Raphael to bring him to him, as he had the young Tobias. And, employing more human means (as sick popes go on having Masses said for them but are careful also to call in their doctors) he would hint to his visitors that if Brichot brought his young Tobias to him, then perhaps the Archangel Raphael would restore his sight, as he had done for Tobias's father, or as had happened at the pool of Bethsaida.[76] But despite these recurrences of human weakness, the new-found moral purity of M. de Charlus's conversation was still delightful. Vanity, slander, mad spite and pride had all disappeared. M. de Charlus had risen far above the moral level on which he had formerly lived. But this moral improvement, the reality of which was, it must be said, somewhat exaggerated by his oratorical powers in the minds of his sympathetic hearers, this improvement lasted only as long as the illness which had fostered it. M. de Charlus soon began to slide down the slippery slope again, and with ever-increasing speed, as we shall see. But the Verdurins' attitude to him was to remain a distant memory, which later, more immediate resentments pushed into the background.

To return to the Verdurins' party, that evening when the couple were left alone, M. Verdurin said to his wife: 'Do you know why Cottard didn't come? He's with Saniette, whose stock market gamble didn't come off. When he heard he was down to his last franc and owed more than a million, Saniette had some kind of stroke. – But what was he doing playing the market? How absurd, that isn't his kind of thing at all. Much cleverer people than he is lose their shirts, and he was just cut out to be swindled by everybody. – Of course he's an idiot, we've known that for years, said M. Verdurin. But the damage is done now. Here we have a man whose landlord is going to throw him out tomorrow, who won't have a penny to his name, his family don't like him, you don't imagine Forcheville will do anything for him. So I thought, I don't want to do anything you don't agree with, but perhaps we could arrange a little income for him so that he doesn't realize he's ruined, so that he can be looked after at home. – I quite agree, and you're a dear to have thought of it. But you say "at home"; the idiot has kept on a flat that's much too expensive, he can't go on like this, we must find him a couple of rooms somewhere. I think he's still renting a flat for six or seven thousand francs. – Six and a half. But he's very attached to his home. Well, this is his first attack, he can't live more than another two or three years. Even if we spend ten thousand a year on him for three years, I think we could manage that. Let's say that this year, instead of renting La Raspelière again, we take something more modest. With our income, it shouldn't be impossible to find another ten thousand francs for three years. – All right, but the only problem is that it'll get out, and we'll end up having to do the same for other people. – I thought of that, of course. I'll do it, but only on the strict condition that no one must know. I don't want us having to become the benefactors of the whole human race. No thank you very much! No philanthropy for me. What we could do would be to tell him that Princess Sherbatoff left him the money. – Will he believe it? She consulted Cottard when she was making her will. – We *could* tell Cottard, I suppose, if we really had to. It's his job to keep secrets, he makes a fortune in fees, he'll never be in line for a hand-out. Perhaps he'll even be willing to say that Princess Sherbatoff used him to set up the legacy. Then we wouldn't have to come into it at all. No tiresome scenes of thanks, no fuss, no prepared speeches.' M. Verdurin added here a word which evidently stood for the kind of emotional scene and embarrassing phrase which he wanted to avoid. But my informant could not repeat it to me exactly, for it was not a normal French word, but one of those terms that are used within families to designate certain things, in particular annoying things, no doubt because the family wishes to be able to point them out without the offenders understanding. Such expressions are usually a throwback to an earlier state of the family in question. In a Jewish family, for example, the word will be a ritual term displaced from its original meaning, perhaps the only word of Hebrew that the family, now wholly French in its manners, has retained. In a very strongly provincial family, it will be a term of their provincial dialect, even though the family no longer speaks dialect and can barely understand it any longer. In a South American family which now speaks only French, it will be a word of Spanish. And in the next generation, the word will survive only as a childhood memory. The children will remember that their parents could speak about the servants waiting at table without being understood by them, using a particular word, but they cannot tell exactly what the word meant, whether it was Spanish, Hebrew, German or dialect,

or even whether it had ever belonged to any real language and was not a proper name or simply something invented. The mystery can be solved only if there is a great-uncle, an elderly cousin still living who must have once used the word himself. As I never knew any of the Verdurins' relatives, I was never able to supply the exact word. However, it clearly made Mme Verdurin smile, for the use of this private, personal, secret language instead of the language of every day gives the users of it a self-centred feeling which is always accompanied by a certain satisfaction. When the moment of gaiety had passed, Mme Verdurin objected, 'But what if Cottard talks? – He won't talk.' But he did talk, at least to me, for it was from him that I learnt about the whole thing some years later, at Saniette's funeral in fact. I was sorry not to have known of it sooner. First of all, it would have allowed me to arrive more quickly at the idea that one should never bear grudges against people, never judge them by the memory of one unkind act, for we can never know all the good resolves and effective actions of which their souls may have been capable at other times. And so, even from the simple point of view of foresight, we make mistakes. For no doubt the bad pattern that we observed on that one occasion will recur. But the soul is richer than that, has many other patterns which will also recur in the same man, yet we refuse to take pleasure in them because of one piece of bad behaviour in the past. But from a more personal point of view, such a revelation would not have been without effect on me. For by changing my opinion of M. Verdurin, whom I was coming to think the very worst of men, Cottard's revelation, if he had made it earlier, would have dispelled the suspicions I had about the role the Verdurins might play in my relationship with Albertine. Wrongly dispelled them, perhaps, for if M. Verdurin had some good qualities, he was nevertheless given to teasing to the point of savage persecution, and so jealous of his dominant position in the little set that he did not shrink from the most shocking lies, from stirring up the most unjustified hatreds, so as to break any bonds between the faithful that were not solely directed to the strengthening of the little group. He was a man capable of disinterested kindness, of discreet generosity, but that does not necessarily mean a sensitive man, nor one who was likeable, nor scrupulous, nor truthful, nor even always good. A partial goodness – in which there perhaps survived something of the family who had been my great-aunt's friends – no doubt existed in him long before I came to know of it through this action, just as America and the North Pole existed before Columbus or Peary. Still, at the moment of my discovery, M. Verdurin's nature presented a new, unsuspected face to me; and I concluded from it how difficult it is to present a stable image, whether of a character or of societies and passions. For character changes just as much as these, and if we wish to fix it in its more immutable aspects, we find that it presents a series of different faces (suggesting that it cannot keep still, but is ever-moving) to the baffled camera.

Seeing how late it was and fearing that Albertine would be becoming discontented, I asked Brichot, as we left the Verdurins', whether he would be kind enough to drop me off first. My carriage would take him home afterwards. He congratulated me on going home so directly, not knowing that a girl was waiting for me there, and on finishing the evening so early and so soberly when, in fact, I had merely been delaying its real beginning. Then he began to talk about M. de Charlus, who would doubt have been astonished to hear the professor who was so pleasant to him, the professor who always said 'I never repeat anything', speak of him and his way of life without the slightest restraint. And Brichot's surprised indignation would, I am sure, have been no less sincere if M. de Charlus had said to him, 'I hear you have been talking scandal about me.' Brichot did, in fact, like M. de Charlus, and if he had been obliged to recall a conversation of which he was the subject, he would have found it easier to remember the warm feelings he had had about the Baron, as he said the same things about him that everyone said, than those things themselves. He would not have felt he was lying if he said, 'I always say such nice things about you', since he had experienced a friendly feeling while talking about M. de Charlus. The Baron could offer Brichot above all the charm which the professor chiefly sought in life outside the classroom, namely that it should offer him living specimens of what he had long thought an invention of the poets. Brichot, who had often lectured on Virgil's second eclogue without really knowing whether its fiction was in any way based on reality, now, late in life, found some of the same pleasure in talking to M. de Charlus which he knew his masters M. Mérimée and M. Renan or his colleague M. Maspéro had experienced when travelling in Spain, Palestine or Egypt, as they recognized in the present-day landscapes of Spain, Palestine or Egypt the settings and the unchanging characters of the ancient scenes which they had studied in books. 'I have no wish to disparage that noble scion of a mighty race, Brichot declared as we rode in the carriage, but he is simply miraculous when he expounds his devil's catechism with ever so slightly bedlamite zeal and the stubbornness, I was about to say the candour, of a Spanish reactionary or an aristocrat fleeing the Revolution. I can assure you, if I may borrow a phrase from Mgr d'Hulst,[77] that I have the time of my life when I am visited by that feudal figure who, wishing to defend Adonis in this age of unbelief, has simply followed the instincts of his race and, in all sodomitical innocence, has embarked on a crusade.' I was listening to Brichot and yet I was not alone with him. As indeed had been the case since I left the house, I felt, however obscurely, in contact with the young girl who even now was waiting in her room. Even while I was chatting to one person or another at the Verdurins', I could feel her somehow near me, I had that vague sense of her that one has of one's own limbs, and if I chanced to think of her, it was in the way one thinks, irritated by the sense of being wholly tied, enslaved to it, of one's own body. 'And what a mine of gossip, enough to fill all the appendices to the *Monday Conversations*,[78] in that missionary's conversation! Imagine, I learned from him that the treatise on morals which I have always revered as the most elaborate ethical construction of our times, was inspired in our venerable colleague X by a young telegraph messenger. Let us note that my eminent friend neglected to mention the name of this fair youth in the course of his expositions, thereby showing less moral courage than Phidias, who carved the name of the athlete he loved on the ring of his Olympian Zeus. The Baron did not know that last story, which needless to say charmed his orthodoxy. You can imagine that now when I am arguing with my colleague over a doctoral thesis, I find in his ever-subtle dialectic the same extra piquancy that certain spicy revelations added for Sainte-Beuve to the work of Chateaubriand, which he found insufficiently personal. From our colleague, whose wisdom is beyond price but who is somewhat short of money, the young telegraphist passed into the hands of the Baron ("all quite above board" – you should have heard him say it). And as that Satan is the most obliging of men, he found his protégé an opening in the colonies, from where the grateful youth sometimes sends him excellent fruit. The Baron passes it on to his important friends; some of the young man's pineapples recently appeared on the table at the Quai Conti, which made Mme Verdurin say quite innocently, "You must have an uncle in America, or a nephew, M. de Charlus, to get pineapples like these!" I admit I smiled as I ate them, reciting *in petto* the beginning of an ode of Horace which Diderot liked to recall. In a word, like my colleague Boissier strolling from the Palatine to Tibur, I derive from the Baron's conversation a singularly more vivid and colourful idea of the writers of the Golden Age. Let us not mention the Decadence, nor go back as far as the Greeks, though I once said to the excellent M. de Charlus that when I was with him I felt like Plato in the house of Aspasia.[79] I must say that I had greatly exaggerated the scale of the two characters, and that I should have taken my example from "much smaller creatures", as La Fontaine says. In any case, you must not imagine that the Baron was offended. I never saw him so straightforwardly delighted. A childish pleasure made him forsake his aristocrat's impassivity. "You dons are such flatterers! he cried with delight. To think I should have had to wait until this age to be compared to Aspasia! An old fright like me! O youth, youth!" I wish you could have seen him saying that, covered in powder as usual and, at his age, scented like a fop. But in fact, despite his obsession with genealogy, he's the best fellow alive. For all these reasons I should be sorry if this evening's quarrel were final. What surprised me was the way the young man reacted so violently. Latterly he had been behaving towards the Baron as a kind of henchman, he had a vassal's manner that hardly foreshadowed such a revolt. I hope that in any case, even if (*Dii omen avertant*[80]) the Baron were not to return to the Quai Conti, this aversion would not extend to myself. Each of us would have too much to lose from an interruption to our exchanges, my poor knowledge against his experience. (We shall in fact see that, while M. de Charlus did not express any violent resentment against Brichot, at least his liking for the scholar was reduced to such an extent that he felt able to express very harsh judgments of him.) And I swear that the exchange is such an unequal one that when the Baron lets me share what he has learned from his existence, I cannot agree with Sylvestre Bonnard's saying[81] that a library is still the best place to pursue the dream of life.'

We had arrived at my door. I got out of the carriage to give the coachman Brichot's address. From the pavement I could see the window of Albertine's bedroom, that window which had always been dark in the evening when she did not yet live in the house, and which the electric light from the inside, sectioned by the slats of the shutters, now striped with parallel golden bars. This magic spell-book was as clear to me, presenting to my untroubled mind precise images, close at hand, of whose reality I was shortly to resume possession, as it was obscure to the half-blind Brichot, still seated in the carriage; it would, in any case, have been incomprehensible to him, since the professor was no more aware than were those friends who came to see me before dinner, when Albertine had just got

home from her outing, that I had a young girl waiting just for me in a bedroom close to mine. The carriage moved off. I stood for a moment alone on the pavement. Certainly, the luminous stripes I could see from below, which would have seemed insignificant to anyone else, had for me a consistency, a plenitude, an extreme solidity which came from the meaning with which I endowed them, from the treasure, if you like, a treasure unsuspected by others, which I had hidden there and from which these horizontal rays emanated: a treasure, however, for which I had given my freedom, my solitude, my thoughts. If Albertine had not been up there, or even if I had been concerned only for pleasure, I could have gone and found it with unknown women, in Venice perhaps, or at least in some unknown corner of night-time Paris. But now what I had to do when the time for caresses was at hand, was not to embark on a journey, nor even to leave the house, but to go back there. And not to go home at least to find solitude, not, after leaving the others who provided from outside the matter for one's thoughts, to be forced to find it in oneself, but on the contrary, to be less alone than I had been at the Verdurins', since I was returning to the person to whom I surrendered my personality, handing it over completely to her, without having a moment to think of myself, nor any need to think of her, since she would always be beside me. So that lifting my eyes for the last time to the window of the room where I should shortly be, I seemed to see the cage of light that would presently close upon me, and of which I myself, for my eternal enslavement, had forged the golden bars.

Albertine had never told me that she suspected me of being jealous of her, of spying on everything she did. The only words we had exchanged about jealousy, a long time before, seemed to suggest the opposite. I remembered that, one fine moonlit evening, at the beginning of our time together, one evening when I had seen her home and would have preferred not to do so, wishing instead to leave her and run to other women, I had said to her, 'You know, it's not because I'm jealous that I'm offering to see you home, if you've got other things to do I can take myself off,' and she had answered, 'Oh, I know you're not jealous, you don't care what I do, but I don't want to do anything but be with you.' Another time at La Raspelière, M. de Charlus, while casting sidelong glances at Morel, had been ostentatiously attentive to Albertine, and I had said, 'He certainly kept a close eye on you.' And when I added half ironically, 'I suffered all the pangs of jealousy,' Albertine, using the language of the vulgar background from which she had emerged, or of the even more vulgar one which she now frequented, had replied, 'Stop pulling my leg! I know you're not jealous. For one thing you told me, and then I can see it anyway.' She had never said to me since that she had changed her mind, but she must have formed some new ideas on the subject, which she hid from me but which chance might reveal in spite of her, for that evening, once I had gone in, found her in her bedroom and taken her to mine, I had said (with a certain embarrassment that I could not understand myself, since I had already told Albertine that I was going to visit someone I knew, I did not know whom, perhaps Mme de Guermantes, perhaps Mme de Cambremer – it is true that I did not mention the Verdurins): 'Guess where I've been? To the Verdurins'.' I had no sooner said these words than Albertine, her face contorted with feeling, replied, her words seeming to explode with a force that could not be contained, 'I know it. – I didn't think you'd mind if I went to the Verdurins'.' (It is true she had not said that she did mind, but I could see it in her face. It is true too that I had not thought that she would mind. And still, faced with the explosion of her anger, as at those moments when a kind of retrospective double vision makes us feel we have experienced them before, it seemed to me that I could never have expected anything else.) 'Mind? Why on earth should I mind? I couldn't care less. Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there?' These words infuriated me, and 'You didn't tell me you'd met Mme Verdurin the other day,' I said, to show that I knew more about her doings than she realized. 'Did I meet her?' she asked with a faraway look, addressing both herself, as if she were trying to collect her memories, and me, as if I should be able to tell her; and no doubt too so that I should tell her what I knew, and to give her time to find an answer to a difficult question. But the thought of Mlle Vinteuil worried me much less than another fear which I had briefly felt, but which now took hold of me much more strongly. Even on the way home, I had been imagining that Mme Verdurin had quite simply invented out of vanity the story that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend were coming, so that I arrived home quite happy. Only Albertine's words, 'But wasn't Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there?' had shown me that my first suspicions had been justified. However, I had nothing to fear for the future, as by not going to the Verdurins', Albertine had sacrificed Mlle Vinteuil to me. 'Anyway, I said to her angrily, there are lots of things you don't tell me, quite unimportant things for the most part. I could mention the three days you spent in Balbec, for example.' I had added the words 'I could mention' as a complement to 'quite unimportant things', so that if Albertine then said, 'Well, what was wrong with my trip to Balbec?' I could answer, 'Nothing, I can't remember, I get things mixed up in my head, it really doesn't matter at all.' And if I had mentioned the three-day trip to Balbec with the chauffeur, from which her postcards had reached me with such a long delay, it was really by chance, and I felt sorry to have chosen such a poor example, for indeed, given the time taken up by the journey there and back, it was certainly the one of their excursions on which she would have had the least chance of spending any length of time with anybody. But Albertine concluded from what I had said that this time I knew the real truth, and was only hiding from her the fact that I knew it. She therefore remained convinced of the idea she had recently formed that somehow or other, perhaps by having her followed or something of that kind, I now 'knew more about her', as she had said to Andrée the week before, 'than she knew about herself'. So she interrupted me to make the most unnecessary confession, for certainly I had suspected nothing of what she then told me, and the revelation hurt me terribly, so great can the gulf be between a lying woman's invention and the idea which her lover, relying on her lies, has formed of the truth. No sooner had I said the words, 'your three-day trip to Balbec', than Albertine broke in and said as if it were the most natural thing in the world, 'Are you going to tell me we never went to Balbec? Well of course we didn't! And I always wondered why you kept pretending you believed it! It wasn't a big thing, though. The driver had things to do on his own account for three days. He didn't dare tell you. So to do him a favour (just like me! and then I'm always the one who ends up in trouble), I invented a plan to go to Balbec. He simply dropped me off in Auteuil, at my friend's house in the rue de l'Assomption, where I spent the most boring three days of my life. You see, there was nothing to worry about, there's no harm done. I did begin to think that perhaps you knew all about it when I saw you laugh at the cards arriving a week later. I know that was ridiculous and it would have been better not to send any cards at all. But it wasn't my fault. I bought them in advance and gave them to the driver before he dropped me in Auteuil, and then the idiot left them in his pockets instead of sending them in an envelope to a friend of his who lives near Balbec, who was supposed to post them on to you. The driver didn't remember them until five days later, and instead of telling me the fool sent them straight off to Balbec. When he said he'd done that I really gave him hell, you can imagine! Worrying you for nothing, the great buffoon, that was my reward for shutting myself away for three days to let him go and sort out his bits of family business! I didn't even dare go out in Auteuil for fear someone would see me. I only went out once and then I was dressed as a man, just for a laugh. And with my luck, of course the first person I bumped into was your sheeny friend Bloch. But I don't think he can have been the one who told you that our trip to Balbec only ever existed in my imagination, for I don't think he recognized me.'

I did not know what to say, not wishing to seem surprised as I groaned under the weight of so many lies. A feeling of horror, which did not make me want to throw Albertine out of the house, quite the opposite, was accompanied by an extreme desire to weep. This was caused, not by the lies themselves or by the annihilation of everything which I had believed to be true – so that I felt as if I were in a razed town where not a house is left standing and the naked earth is covered only with rubble – but by the melancholy thought that during all the three days of boredom at her friend's house in Auteuil, Albertine should not have once felt the wish, or perhaps even had the idea, of coming to spend a day secretly with me, or sending me a *petit bleu* to ask me to go and see her there. But I had not the time to give myself up to these thoughts. Above all I did not wish to seem surprised. I smiled like someone who knows much more than he is willing to admit: 'But that's just one thing among so many. Why, this very evening at the Verdurins', someone told me that what you said about Mlle Vinteuil …' Albertine stared at me with a desperate look, trying to read in my eyes how much I knew. Now what I knew and was going to tell her, was the nature of Mlle Vinteuil. It is true that I had not learned this at the Verdurins', but at Montjouvain many years previously. But as I had, by design, never spoken of it to Albertine, I could seem to have learned it only that evening. And I was almost pleased – after having suffered so much in the little tram – to possess that memory of Montjouvain, which I would assign to a later period, but which nonetheless would be the conclusive proof, a dreadful blow to Albertine. This time at least, I did not have to pretend to know, or to 'draw out' Albertine: I knew, I had *seen* the truth through the lighted window at Montjouvain. Albertine might insist that her relations with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend had been entirely proper, how would she be able, once I swore to her (and I would be swearing the truth) that I knew how these two women lived, how could she maintain that having lived in daily intimacy with them, calling them 'my big sisters', she had never been subjected to advances which would have required her to break with them, unless of course they had been welcomed? But I did not have time to speak the truth. Albertine, believing that, as with the fictitious journey to Balbec, I had heard about it, either from Mlle Vinteuil if she had been at the Verdurins', or simply from Mme Verdurin herself, who could have discussed the matter with Mlle Vinteuil, Albertine did not let me speak, but plunged into a confession, the exact opposite of the one I had been expecting, but which, by making it clear that there had never been a time when she had not lied to me, perhaps caused me just as much pain (especially because, as I have just said, I had stopped being jealous of Mlle Vinteuil). So, forestalling me, Albertine spoke in these terms: 'You're going to say you found out this evening that I was lying when I said I was almost brought up by Mlle Vinteuil's friend. Perhaps I did lie a little. But I felt you looked down on me and I saw you getting so passionate about this fellow Vinteuil's music that, seeing one of my friends – this is really true, I swear – had been a friend of Mlle Vinteuil's friend, I had the silly idea of making myself more interesting to you by pretending that I'd known those two girls very well. I could feel that I was boring you, that you thought I was empty-headed; I thought that if I told you I had spent time with those people, that I could give you details about Vinteuil's music, then I'd become a bit more interesting to you and that would bring us together. And it has taken this wretched evening at the Verdurins' for you to learn the truth, which has

probably been twisted anyway. I bet Mlle Vinteuil's friend told you she didn't know me. Well, she's seen me at least twice at my friend's house. But of course I'm not smart enough for people who've become so famous. They'd rather say they've never met me.' Poor Albertine, when she thought that boasting to me of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil's friend would put off the moment she was 'dumped', would bring her closer to me, as so often happens she had arrived at the truth by a different path from the one she meant to take. To have learned that she knew more about music than I had thought would not have deterred me in the least from breaking with her that evening in the little tram; and yet it was this very phrase, which she had pronounced with this aim in mind, which had immediately made it impossible for me to break things off, and much more than that. She had simply made a mistake, not about the likely effect of her statement, but about the cause of that effect: this cause was my learning, not about her knowledge of music, but about her dubious friendships. What had suddenly brought me closer to her, much more, had irrevocably tied me to her, was not a hope of pleasure – even the word pleasure is too strong, a passing fancy – it was the grip of pain.

This time too, I could not stay silent for more than a moment, for fear of letting her guess at my surprise. So, touched by her modesty and the way she had felt insignificant in the Verdurin circle, I said tenderly to her, 'But darling, now I think of it, I'd be happy to give you a few hundred francs to go anywhere you like and play the smart lady, you could give a grand dinner and ask M. and Mme Verdurin.' Alas, Albertine was several people in one. The most mysterious, the most basic, the most dreadful one now appeared as she answered with a look of disgust and, to tell the truth, using words which I did not perfectly understand (even her opening ones, as she did not complete her reply). I was only able to supply them all a little later, once I had guessed her meaning. One can hear retrospectively once one has understood. 'Thanks a lot! Spend money on those old gargoyles, I'd much rather you left me alone for once, let me go out and get …' The moment she had said this she blushed crimson, looked heartbroken, put her hand over her mouth as if she could have pushed back into it the words which I had wholly failed to understand. 'What was that, Albertine? – Nothing, sorry, I'm half asleep. – No you're not, you're wide awake. – I was thinking about the dinner for the Verdurins, it's very sweet of you to think of it. – No, I want to know what you said.' She gave me a whole series of different versions of it, but none of them corresponded, I will not say to her words, which, having been interrupted, remained vague in my mind, but to this very interruption and the furious blushing which had accompanied it. 'No, dearest, think, that can't have been what you wanted to say, otherwise why would you have broken off? – Because I felt I shouldn't be asking you for things. – For what? – To let me give a dinner. – No, it's not that, you don't have to feel ashamed with me. – Yes I should, you shouldn't exploit the people you love. I swear that was what it was.' One the one hand, I still could not doubt anything she actually swore to me; on the other, her explanations did not satisfy my reason. I kept insisting: 'At least be brave enough to finish your sentence, you just got as far as *casser* … – Oh no, please don't! – But why? – Because it's something horribly vulgar, I'd be too ashamed to say it in front of you. I can't think what I was doing using words I don't even know the meaning of, things I'd heard the most terrible people saying in the street, they just came back to me for no reason. They had nothing to do with me or with anyone, I was just rambling.' I could see that I would get nothing more out of Albertine. She had been lying to me a moment ago when she said that what had made her break off was a sense of discretion, and was so now when she blamed her reluctance to use over-vulgar language in my hearing. For when Albertine and I were together there were no ideas too perverse, no words too indecent for us to speak as we caressed each other. However, it was useless to insist at this moment. But the word '*casser*' continued to obsess my memory. Albertine often said '*casser du bois sur quelqu'un, casser du sucre*', meaning to run someone down when his back is turned, or even '*ah! ce que je lui en ai cassé*', 'I really let him have it'. But she regularly said these things in my hearing, and if that was what she had meant to say this time, why had she blushed so violently, put her hands over her mouth, turned her sentence another way, and when she saw that I had clearly heard '*casser*', given me a false explanation? But I was not going to keep on interrogating her, since she was clearly determined not to reply, so I thought it better to seem to have forgotten all about it, and returning in my mind to Albertine's objections to my having gone to the Patronne's, I said very clumsily, as a kind of attempted excuse: 'I really meant to ask you if you wanted to come to Mme Verdurin's party this evening' – a doubly ill-chosen remark, since if I had wanted to ask her, having had every opportunity to talk to her, why had I not done so? Enraged by my lie and emboldened by my half-heartedness: 'You could have asked me a thousand times over, she said, and I still wouldn't have gone. Those people have always been against me, they've done all they could to make things difficult for me. I was really nice to Mme Verdurin at Balbec and this is the thanks I get. She could ask for me on her deathbed and I wouldn't go. Some things you can't forgive. And as for you, this is the first really nasty thing you've done to me. When Françoise told me you'd gone out (and wasn't she pleased to be able to tell me!), I wished she'd split my head down the middle instead. I tried to stop her noticing anything, but I've never felt so insulted in my life.'

But as she talked, my mind was still pursuing, in the waking, creative sleep of the unconscious (a sleep in which things which first passed us by almost unnoticed now take full shape, in which our sleeping hands grasp the key to secrets hitherto sought in vain), the search for the meaning of the interrupted sentence whose intended conclusion I wished to discover. And suddenly two dreadful words, of which I had not even been thinking, burst upon my mind: '*le pot*'. I cannot say that they appeared as a single discovery, as when one has been in long subjection to an incomplete memory, gently, cautiously trying to extend it but always closely applied to it. No, this was unlike my usual way of trying to remember: there were, I think, two parallel lines of enquiry: one took note not only of the words Albertine had spoken, but of her angry look when I offered her a gift of money to give a grand dinner, a look which seemed to say, 'Thanks a lot for giving me money to do boring things, when without any money I could be doing things I like!' And it was perhaps the memory of that look on her face that made me approach the problem of finding the ending in a different way. Up to that point I had focussed obsessively on the last word, '*casser*'. Break what? Wood? No. Sugar? No. *Casser, casser, casser*. And suddenly, the sight of her shrugging her shoulders as I made my offer took me back into the earlier words of her sentence. And I realized that she had not said '*casser*' but '*me faire casser*'. Horrors! That is what she would have preferred.[82] Horror upon horror! For even the lowest prostitute, who lends herself to that activity, or even welcomes it, will not use in speaking to the man who performs it such a revolting expression. She would feel herself too humiliated. Only with another woman, if she prefers women, will she use it, as if to excuse herself for yielding to a man. Albertine had not been lying when she had said that she was dreaming. Absent-minded, impulsive, she had forgotten that she was with me, she had shrugged her shoulders and began to speak as she might have done to one of those women, perhaps to one of my blossoming girls. And then, suddenly brought back to reality, blushing for shame, pushing the words back into her mouth, desperate, she had refused to say anything more. I had not a moment to lose if I wanted to keep my despair from her. But already, after the first surge of fury, tears were coming to my eyes. As at Balbec the night after she had revealed her friendship with the Vinteuils, I had to find an instant explanation for my anguish that should be plausible and at the same time have such a profound effect on Albertine as to win me a few days' respite before I should have to make a decision. So, at the moment when she said that she had never been so insulted as when I went out without her, that she would rather have died than hear the news from Françoise, and just as, irritated by her absurd over-sensitivity, I was about to tell her that what I had done was quite unimportant, that my going out should not have offended her so – and while, at the same time, my unconscious search for what she had been going to say after the word '*casser*' had been reaching a conclusion, and the despair into which it had thrown me could not be completely hidden, instead of defending myself I began to blame myself: 'Albertine, dearest, I said to her in a gentle voice in which my first tears could be heard, I could say that you're making a mistake, that what I did was nothing, but that would be a lie; you *are* right, you've seen how things are, poor baby: six months ago, three months even, when I was so very fond of you, I'd never have done a thing like that. It's a tiny thing, but it's hugely important because it shows how much my feelings have changed. And since you have guessed what I've been trying to keep from you, I think it's time to say this: Darling Albertine, I said gently, with deep sadness, you must see that your life here is depressing for you, we should separate, and as the quickest separations are the best, I will ask you, to make my suffering a little less, to say good-bye this evening and leave tomorrow morning before I wake up, so that I do not have to see you again.' She seemed astonished, still unbelieving and already heartbroken: 'What? Tomorrow? Is that what you really want?' And despite the pain it caused me to speak of our separation as something already accomplished – perhaps, indeed, because of that suffering, I began to give Albertine the most precise instructions about things she would have to do after leaving the house. And as one recommendation followed another, I soon found myself going into the tiniest details. 'You will be kind, won't you, I said with infinite sadness, and send me the Bergotte book that's at your aunt's. There's no hurry, in a few days' time, a week will do, whenever you like, but do remember, so that I don't have to write to you about it, that would be too

painful. We have been so happy, and now we can see that that would make us unhappy.' – 'Don't say it would make us unhappy, Albertine broke in, don't say *us* when it's just your idea! – Yes, well, you or me, it doesn't matter, but for whatever reason – look at the time, you must go to bed – we've decided to end it this evening. – I beg your pardon, *you* decided and I'm accepting it because I don't want to hurt you. – All right, I decided, but it hurts me a lot just the same. I don't say that it will hurt forever, I'm not good at holding on to memories for a long time, but at the beginning I shall miss you so much. So I don't think we should keep it going by writing to each other, let's make a clean break. – You're right, she said with a look of anguish which was intensified by the late-night droop of her features, rather than have my fingers cut off one by one I'd sooner put my head on the block right away. – I can't believe how late I'm keeping you up, this is crazy. But there, since it's our last evening! You'll have the rest of your life to sleep.' And so, by telling her it was time to say good-night, I was trying to put off the moment when she would actually say it. 'Would it help you to get through the first few days if I asked Bloch to send his cousin Esther to stay with you, wherever you are going? He'd do that for me, I'm sure. – I can't think why you're saying that (I was saying it to try to force a confession from Albertine). The only person I want to be with is you,' said Albertine, sending a warm feeling right through me. But this was immediately followed by a stab of pain when she said, 'I do remember giving my photo to that girl Esther because she kept on asking and I saw she would really like to have it, but as for being a friend of hers or wanting to see her now, it's absurd.' And still Albertine was so easy to influence that she added, 'If she wants to see me I don't mind, she's very nice, but really I don't care either way.' So, when I had spoken to her about Bloch sending me Esther's photograph (which I had not yet seen when I mentioned it to Albertine) she had thought I meant that Bloch had shown me a photograph of her, the one she had given to Esther. In my worst imagining I had never supposed that that degree of intimacy had existed between Albertine and Esther. Albertine had made no reply when I talked about the photograph before. Now thinking me, quite wrongly, well informed about it, she had thought it better to confess. I was cast into gloom. 'And then, Albertine, please do just one more thing for me, never try to see me again. If ever, a year from now, two, three years, we find ourselves in the same town, stay away from me.' And seeing that she did not assent, 'Dear Albertine, please don't do that, don't try to see me again in this life. It would hurt me too much. For I really cared for you, you know. I know when I told you the other day that I wanted to see the friend we had talked about at Balbec, you thought that I had it all planned. No, I assure you I didn't care about her at all. You think I had had my mind made up for a long time to leave you, and when I was nice to you it was all put on. – You're crazy, I didn't think that, she said sadly. – Well, you're right, you mustn't think so, I was really fond of you. Perhaps it wasn't love, but I was very, very fond of you, more than you would believe. – But I do believe you. And if you think I don't love you! – I hate leaving you. – And I hate it a hundred times more,' Albertine replied. For a moment now I had been feeling that I would not be able to hold back the tears which were welling up in my eyes. And these tears were not caused by at all the same kind of sadness as I had felt formerly when saying to Gilberte, 'We had better stop seeing each other, life is forcing us apart.' No doubt when I was writing those words to Gilberte, I was saying to myself that when I next loved, not her but some other person, the excess of my love would diminish the love that that person might otherwise feel for me, as if between two people there were inevitably a fixed amount of love, so that where one loved more the other must love less, and from that other, as from Gilberte, I should be forced one day to separate. But this situation was quite different for a variety of reasons, of which the first, which had gone on to produce all the others, was that the weak will that my mother and my grandmother had feared I was developing at Combray, only to capitulate in turn before it later, such is an invalid's power to impose his weakness on others, this already inadequate will-power had been ever more rapidly diminishing. When I had felt that I was becoming tiresome to Gilberte, I still had enough strength of character to give her up; by the time I observed the same feelings in Albertine, my strength had gone and all I could think of was how to keep her by any means necessary. So that while I had written to Gilberte that I was going to stop seeing her, intending to do just that, when I said it to Albertine it was a complete lie, intended to bring about a reconciliation. Thus each of us was presenting to the other an appearance very different from what lay behind. And no doubt that is how it always is when two people face each other, since each of them is unaware of a part of what is inside the other, even what he is aware of he only partly understands, and each of them shows the other only what is least personal in him, whether because they have not understood themselves and think that the rest is unimportant, or because certain attractions which are not truly part of them seem to them more important and more flattering, or because there are other qualities which they think they need in order not to be despised, but do not have, and so they pretend to care nothing for them, and these are the things which they seem to despise above all and even to abominate. But in love this misunderstanding is carried to the highest degree since, except perhaps when we are children, we try to ensure that the impression we give, rather than being an exact reflection of our thoughts, should be what these thoughts conclude will have the best chance of getting us what we want, which in my case, since arriving home that evening, was the assurance of being able to keep Albertine as submissive as she had been in the past, so that her irritation did not lead her to demand the greater freedom which I meant to give her one day, but which at this moment, when I found her desire for independence so threatening, would have made me too jealous. From a certain age onwards vanity and wisdom combine to ensure that the things we desire the most are those that seem not to matter to us. But in love, simple foresight – which is probably not real wisdom – forces us to develop this talent for duplicity early in life. As a child, when I dreamed of love what seemed most delightful in it, the very essence of it, was the idea of being able to give free rein, with the girl I loved, to all my affection, my gratitude for a favour, my desire to spend my whole life with her. But I had soon realized, through my own experience and that of my friends, that the expression of such feelings is anything but contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, seeing nothing in his imagination but a handsome young man, thinks he has become a handsome young man himself, and betrays more and more effeminacy in his laughable affectations of virility, this case is an example of a law which affects not only Charluses, a law so general that even the whole domain of love does not exhaust its application; we cannot see our bodies as others see them, and we 'focus on' our own thoughts, the thing which is in front of us but invisible to others (sometimes made visible by an artist in a painting, hence the frequent disappointment of his admirers when they are admitted to his presence and see this inner beauty so imperfectly reflected in his face). Once one has noticed this, one no longer 'lets oneself go'; I had been careful, that afternoon, not to tell Albertine how grateful I was to her for having left the Trocadéro. And now, in the evening, fearing that she might leave me, I had pretended to want to leave her, a pretence dictated, as we shall see presently, by the lessons I thought I had learned from my previous love affairs and which I was trying to put to use in this one. This fear I had that Albertine might be going to say to me, 'I want to be able to go out on my own at certain times, I want to be able to be away for twenty-four hours,' or some make some other demand for freedom which I did not define to myself, but which frightened me, the thought of it had occurred to me for a moment during the evening at the Verdurins'. But it had quickly faded, contradicted in fact by the memory of Albertine constantly telling me how happy she was in the flat. The intention to leave me, if Albertine were harbouring it, appeared only in a disguised fashion, in certain sad looks, certain moments of impatience, phrases which seemed to mean something else but if one thought them over (and there was really no need for thought since this language of passion is instantly comprehensible, even working-class people understand those phrases which can only be explained by vanity, resentment, jealousy, which they do not express directly but which are immediately decoded by an intuitive faculty in the partner which, like Descartes's 'common sense', is 'the most common gift in the world'), could only be explained by the presence in her of a feeling which she was hiding from me and which might lead her to begin planning another life without me. Just as this intention was not logically expressed in her words, in the same way the premonition of this intention which I had had since the beginning of the evening was still vague in my mind. I was still living on the principle of believing everything Albertine said. But it is possible that a quite different principle, which I did not want to think about, was already taking shape at the back of my mind; that seems all the more likely as otherwise I would have felt no embarrassment at telling Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', and, otherwise, it would have been impossible to understand why I had been so little surprised by her anger. So that what had probably taken root in me was the idea of an Albertine quite the opposite of the one my reason had formed of her, and also of the one depicted by her own words, but still not a wholly invented Albertine, since it appeared to be the inner reflection of some of her emotional reactions, like her ill-temper at my having gone to the Verdurins'. Furthermore, my frequent moments of anguish, my fear of telling Albertine I loved her, had long corresponded to another hypothesis which explained many further things, and also had on its side the fact that, if one adopted the first, the second became more probable, for if I gave way to outpourings of affection with Albertine, she only responded with irritation (an irritation to which she, however, ascribed another cause).

I must say what had struck me as the most serious sign that she was anticipating my accusation was that she had said, 'I think Mlle Vinteuil will be there this evening,' and I had replied in the cruellest way possible, saying, 'You didn't tell me you'd seen Mme Verdurin.' When Albertine seemed to be unkind, instead of admitting my sadness to her, I became aggressive. Analysing my conduct on that principle, the famous rule that my answers had always to express the opposite of what I was feeling, I can be sure that if I told her that night I was going to leave her, it was because – even before I had quite realized it – I was afraid she was going to want more freedom (what this dangerous freedom would exactly be I could not have said, but the kind of freedom that would have allowed her to deceive me, or at least prevented me from being certain that she was not deceiving me) and I wanted to be clever and show her, out of pride, that I did not care, just as, at Balbec, I had wanted her to have a high opinion of me and, later, had wanted her to have so much to do that she could not be bored with me.

Finally, to deal with the possible counter-argument to my second hypothesis – the one not yet formulated – that everything Albertine was always saying to me about the life she preferred, a quiet life under my roof, with reading, time to herself, no contact with lesbians, etc., meant just that, it was not worth consideration. For if on her side Albertine had decided to judge my feelings by what I said to her, she would have learned the exact opposite of the truth, since I only ever showed the desire to leave her when I could not do without her, and at Balbec I had twice told her I loved another woman, once Andrée and once an unnamed person, each time when jealousy had revived my love for Albertine. My words therefore did not reflect my feelings in the least. If the reader has only a faint impression of this, that is because, as narrator, I describe my feelings to him at the same time as repeating my words. But if I were to hide the former from him so that he heard only the latter, my actions, which corresponded so little to my words, would so often give him the impression of strange changes in direction that he would think me almost mad. A method which would not be much more misleading than the one I have adopted, since the images which prompted my actions, so different from those that were depicted in my words, were still at this time very obscure: I had only an imperfect understanding of the nature to which I was bound, whereas today I know the truth about it, at least from a subjective point of view. As for its objective truth, that is, whether these semi-hidden intuitions were any better than my reasoning at capturing Albertine's real intentions, and whether I was right to trust to my nature or whether it did not in fact distort Albertine's intentions instead of clarifying them, is difficult for me now to say.

The vague fear I had felt at the Verdurins' that Albertine might leave me, had originally faded. Arriving home, I had had the feeling of being a prisoner, not at all of returning to a female captive. But the forgotten fear had gripped me much more strongly when, at the moment I told Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', I saw on the surface of her face a look of mysterious irritation, which indeed was not appearing there for the first time. I knew that this look was the crystallization in the flesh of long-considered grievances, of ideas which were clear to the person forming them and keeping them secret, a synthesis become visible but no more rational, which the man who gathers the precious residue on the face of the woman he loves tries in his turn, in order to understand what is going on behind it, to analyse and break down into its intellectual components. The equation corresponding to that unknown thing which was Albertine's thought for me went something like this: 'I knew he was suspicious, I was sure that he would try to check up on me, and so that I wouldn't be able to interfere he went off and did all his snooping on the sly.' But if these ideas, which she had never voiced to me, were what Albertine lived with every day, would not she revolt against, feel unable to lead, would not she sooner or later decide to turn her back on a life where she was always, at least in her desires, guilty but felt that she had been seen through, was being watched and prevented from ever satisfying those desires unless she could circumvent my jealousy; but where, if she were innocent in intention and deed, she had every reason to feel discouraged, seeing that from the days at Balbec, where she had taken such trouble never to be alone with Andrée, until today, when she had given up her plans of going to the Verdurins' and of staying at the Trocadéro, she had never managed to regain my trust? All the more so since I could not say that her behaviour had been anything but perfect. At Balbec, when we talked about girls who were ill-behaved, she had often laughed aloud, twisted her body, imitated their walk in a way that tortured me with the fear of what all that might mean to her friends, but now that she knew my feelings about it, as soon as anyone alluded to that kind of thing she withdrew from the conversation, not only by her silence but by the expression of her face. Whether she wanted to avoid contributing to the unkind gossip about this or that girl, or for some other reason, the only noticeable thing about her highly mobile features was that, from the moment the subject was raised, they had demonstrated their inattention by holding exactly the same expression as the moment before. And this fixity of even an inconsequential expression weighed on the company like a silence. No one could have told whether she disapproved of such conduct, or approved of it, or knew anything about it at all. Each of her features now related only to another of her features. Her nose, her mouth, her eyes formed a perfect harmony, isolated from everything else, she looked like a pastel portrait, as if she had not heard what had just been said any more than if it had been said in front of a La Tour.[83]

My fetters, of which I was still conscious when I was giving the coachman Brichot's address and saw the lighted window, had ceased to weigh on me soon after when I saw how intolerant Albertine seemed to be becoming of hers. And to make hers feel lighter, so that she would not form the idea of breaking them herself, I had thought it best to give her the impression that her slavery would not last for ever, and that I myself wished to bring it to an end. Seeing that my trick had worked, I could have felt happy, first of all because the thing I had so dreaded, the plan to leave me with which I had credited Albertine, had been averted and then because, quite apart from the result I had brought about, the very success of my trick established me in Albertine's eyes as something more than an unwanted lover, jealous, frustrated, slow, all of whose devices are seen through in advance. This gave a kind of new virginity to our love, bringing back the Balbec days when she found it so easy to believe that I was in love with someone else. She probably would not have believed that any longer, but she did believe in my expressed intention to break off with her that same evening.

She seemed to suspect that the cause might lie with the Verdurins. I said that I had met a playwright there, Bloch, who was a close friend of Léa's and that he had heard some very strange things from her (my idea was to suggest to her that I knew more than I had admitted about Bloch's girl-cousins). But in order to calm the agitation into which I had been cast by my threat to break with her, I said, 'Albertine, can you swear that you have never lied to me?' She stared into space, then answered, 'Yes, that's to say no. I shouldn't have said that Andrée was smitten with Bloch, we hadn't met him yet. – But why did you say it then? – I was afraid you might think something else about her. – Is that all?' She looked at me again and said, 'I shouldn't have kept it from you that I'd been away for three weeks with Léa. But I didn't really know you then. – Was it before we were in Balbec? – Before the second time, yes.' And that very morning she had told me she did not know Léa at all! I watched as sudden flames tore through a novel I had spent ten million minutes composing. What was the use? What was the use! I saw quite clearly that Albertine was revealing these two facts to me because she thought I had already learned them indirectly from Léa, and that there was no reason to suppose that there were not a hundred facts in her past of a similar kind. I knew too that Albertine's words when questioned never contained an atom of truth, that she only ever let slip the truth involuntarily, as a sudden collision took place in her between the facts she had previously decided to keep hidden and the belief that they had already been discovered. 'Two things, that's nothing, I said to Albertine, why don't you go to four and leave me something to remember you by? What else can you tell me about?' She went on looking straight in front of her. To what beliefs in an after-life was she adapting her lies, with what gods, less indulgent than she had believed, was she trying to patch things up? The task cannot have been easy, for her silence and her fixed stare lasted for some while. 'Nothing else,' she finally said. And the more I insisted the more she stuck, without difficulty now, to her 'Nothing else'. And that was such an obvious lie, for from the moment she developed these tastes until the day I shut her away in my house, how many times, in how many houses, on how many excursions she must have satisfied them! Lesbians are rare enough but also common enough that wherever they go, in whatever crowd, they cannot fail to spot another of their kind. I remembered with horror an evening which at the time had seemed merely laughable. One of my friends had asked me to a restaurant with his mistress and a friend of his who had also brought his girl. The two girls were not slow to understand each other, but were so impatient to move to physical relations that by the soup course their feet were feeling for each other, often finding mine instead. Soon their legs were intertwining. My two friends had not noticed anything; I was dying of embarrassment. One of the two, who could not wait any longer, got under the table, saying that she had dropped something. Then one developed a migraine and had to go and lie down. The other discovered that it was time to go and meet a friend at the theatre. In the end I was left alone with my two friends,

who still suspected nothing. The migraine sufferer came back downstairs and said she must leave; she would go to her lover's house, take some antipyrine and wait for him there. The two girls became great friends, were seen everywhere together, one dressed as a man and went around picking up little girls and taking them home to the other to initiate them. The other had a little boy and used to pretend to be angry with him so that the other could punish him, with a heavy hand by all accounts. You could safely say that there was no place, no matter how public, where they did not do the most secret things.

'But Léa was perfectly all right with me all through the trip, said Albertine. Actually she was more proper than a lot of respectable ladies. – Are there respectable ladies who have behaved improperly to you, Albertine? – Never. – So what do you mean? – Well, she was more careful in her language. – For example? – She'd never say "get on my nerves" like lots of ladies who go to the best houses, or, "I don't give a damn".' It seemed to me that the unburnt part of the novel was slowly crumbling into ashes. My discouragement might have been lasting. Indeed Albertine's words, when I thought about them, turned it into a wild rage. But that fell back in the face of a kind of hopeless tenderness. After all, since I had come in and begun to speak of wanting to break with her, I too had been lying. And this wish for separation that I persisted in feigning was producing in me something like the sadness I would have felt if I had really wanted to leave Albertine.

Furthermore, even as I returned intermittently, in twinges as we say for other kinds of physical pain, to the thought of the orgiastic life Albertine must have led before she knew me, I wondered all the more at the submissiveness of my captive and I stopped feeling angry with her. Obviously I had never, during our life together, allowed Albertine to think that that life would be anything but temporary, so that she should continue to find some attraction in it. But this evening I had gone further, fearing that vague threats of separation would no longer be effective, since they would no doubt be contradicted in Albertine's mind by her idea of a great, jealous love for her which had sent me, so she hinted, to make inquiries about her at the Verdurins'. That evening I realized that among the other causes which had made me take the sudden decision, without realizing it until the process was under way, to play out this comedy of separation, there was the fact that when, under one of those compulsions which also affected my father, I was threatening the security of another human being, then, lacking, like him, the courage to carry out my threats, and so as not to let the person think that they had just been empty words, I would go a long way towards doing what I threatened and not give way until my adversary, really convinced of my sincerity, had trembled in all seriousness.

Furthermore, we can feel that in these lies there is always a measure of truth, that if life does not bring changes to our love, soon we ourselves will want to do so, or to pretend that they have occurred, and to talk of separation, so evident is it that all loves and all things move rapidly towards farewells. We want to weep the tears that the ending will bring, long before it happens. No doubt this time, in the scene I had just been playing, there was a practical consideration. I suddenly felt I must keep Albertine because I felt her being was dissipated among various other people whom I could not prevent her from joining. But if she had given them all up for me, for ever, I should perhaps have decided even more firmly never to leave her, for while jealousy makes separation difficult, gratitude makes it impossible. In any case I felt that this was the final engagement in which I must be victorious or succumb. I would have offered Albertine in a single hour everything I possessed, for I was saying to myself, 'Everything depends on this battle.' But battles of this kind are not so much like those of former times, which lasted a few hours, as like present-day battles, which are not over in a day, or two days, or a week. Generals commit all their troops, because they always think these are the last they will need. And a year passes and the 'decisive' battle never comes.

Perhaps too an unconscious memory of the lying scenes made by M. de Charlus, with whom I had been when seized by the fear of Albertine's leaving me, had been an additional cause. But afterwards I once heard my mother telling this story, which I had not known at the time and which makes me think that I had found all the elements of this scene within myself, in one of those obscure, hereditary reserves which certain emotions, acting as coffee or alcohol do on our reserves of strength, can make available to us: when Aunt Octave learned from Eulalie that Françoise, convinced that her mistress would never leave the house again, had plotted some outing that my aunt was not to know about, the invalid, the day before, would pretend to have decided to try the fresh air the following day. She made the unbelieving Françoise not only get her things ready, airing those which had been shut away for too long, but even order the carriage, and arrange to the nearest quarter of an hour all the details of the day. It was only when Françoise, finally convinced or at least disconcerted, had been obliged to admit her own plans to my aunt that she would publicly renounce hers so as not, she said, to upset Françoise's. In the same way, so that Albertine would not think I was exaggerating and to keep her for as long as possible in the belief that we were going to separate, I had begun to plan the time which was to begin the following day and last for ever, the time when we should be apart, making all the same recommendations to Albertine as if we were not going to end our quarrel in a moment. Like generals who believe that in order for a feint to deceive the enemy it must be carried out in every detail, I had committed to this one almost as much of my reserves of feeling as if it had been happening in reality. This scene of fictitious separation in the end caused me almost as much unhappiness as if it had been true, perhaps because one of the actors, Albertine, believed that it was, and so added to the illusion for the other. We were living a day at a time, a life which though painful was bearable, kept in contact with everyday things by the ballast of habit and by the certain knowledge that the following day might be cruel, but would at least include the presence of the being we loved. And here I was suddenly, insanely destroying this solid existence. True, I was only pretending to destroy it, but that was enough to make me wretched; perhaps because sad words, when one speaks them, even untruthfully, contain their own sadness and inject it deep into one; perhaps because one knows that a feigned farewell is only anticipating an hour which must finally come; and then one is not quite sure that one has not triggered the mechanism which will make that hour strike. In every bluff there is an element, however small, of uncertainty about the reaction of the person one is deceiving. Suppose this game of separation led to a real separation! We cannot think of the possibility without a pang of anxiety. Indeed we are doubly anxious, for in that case the separation would come about at the very moment when it would be intolerable, for we would have been made to suffer by a woman who would be leaving us without having cured our pain, or at any rate soothed it. Lastly, we can no longer rely even on habit, which normally bears us up even in times of sorrow. We have thrown our habits away, we have made today uniquely important, detaching it from the surrounding days, it is mobile, rootless as a day of departure, our imagination, no longer paralysed by the predictable, has come alive, we have suddenly added to our everyday love sentimental dreams which enormously increase its power, making it impossible to do without someone on whose presence, unfortunately, we can no longer absolutely count. Of course it was precisely in order to retain this necessary presence for the future that we started pretending to be able to do without it. But we got caught up in the game ourselves, we began to suffer because we were doing something new, something unaccustomed, which turned out to be like those medicines that are to cure our sufferings in the long run, but whose first effect is to make them worse.

I had tears in my eyes like those people who, alone in their room, let their thoughts drift on to the death of a person they love, and imagine the sorrow it would cause them in such detail that they end up actually feeling it. In the same way, while making ever more detailed recommendations to Albertine on how she should behave to me once we were no longer together, I felt almost as sad as if we had not been going to make things up soon afterwards. And then, was I so sure that I could make it up, that I could bring Albertine back round to the idea of our living together, and if I managed it for this evening, could I be sure that the frame of mind which this scene had dispelled would not return? I felt, but did not believe, that I controlled the future, because I knew that my feeling came from the fact that the future did not yet exist and that I could not therefore be subject to its inevitability. And then, even as I lied perhaps I was putting more truth into my words than I thought. I had just had an example of this when I had said to Albertine that I should soon forget her. That was what had happened with Gilberte, whom I now avoided going to see, in order to spare myself not suffering but a tiresome chore. And certainly I had suffered when writing to Gilberte that I did not want to see her again. For I used only to go to Gilberte's house now and then. But every one of Albertine's hours belonged to me. And in love it is easier to uproot a feeling than to give up a habit. But if I was able to speak so many painful words concerning our separation, it was because I knew they were false; on the other hand they were sincere in the mouth of Albertine when I heard her cry out, 'Oh, I promise, I'll never see you again! I can't bear to see you cry like that, darling. I don't want to hurt you. If that's what you want, we won't see each other again.' They were sincere in a way they could not have been if I had spoken them, and this was because Albertine was fond of me, no more, and so on the one hand the promised renunciation was easier for her, and on the other hand my tears, which

would have seemed insignificant in the context of a great love, seemed to her extraordinary and upsetting when transferred to that of affection, outside which she had never ventured, an affection greater than mine, if what she had said was true, and she had said it because in a separation it is always the one who is not really in love who says the affectionate things, love not expressing itself directly, and what she had said was perhaps not wholly false, for the thousand kindnesses of love may in the end call forth in the person who is loved without loving a fondness, a gratitude which are less selfish than the feeling which inspired them, and which may, after years of separation, when nothing survives of love in the former lover, live on in the beloved.

For just one moment I did feel a kind of hatred for her which only made me the more desperate to keep her with me. Preoccupied as I was that evening with Mlle Vinteuil alone, when my thoughts drifted to the Trocadéro I remained quite undisturbed, not only because I had sent Albertine there to keep her away from the Verdurins', but even when I pictured Léa there, Léa on account of whom I had summoned Albertine back home, so that she should not be introduced to her. I spoke Léa's name without thinking and Albertine, suspicious and fearing that I had perhaps learned more about the actress, forestalled me and said rapidly, with her face partly turned away, 'I know her very well, I went with some friends last year to see her on stage, after the play we went backstage to her dressing-room, we saw her dressing. It was very interesting.' Then my mind was forced to let go of Mlle Vinteuil and, in a desperate effort, in the impossible race to reconstitute the past, to focus itself on the actress and that evening when Albertine had gone to her dressing-room. On the one hand, after all the oaths she had sworn to me that had sounded so sincere, after the complete sacrifice of her liberty, how could I believe that there was any harm in it? And yet, were not my suspicions like antennae pointed towards the truth, since, while she had given up the Verdurins and gone to the Trocadéro to please me, all the same, Mlle Vinteuil was supposed to have been at the Verdurins', and at the Trocadéro, which she had also given up in order to come out with me, there had been, as a reason to bring her back from there, Léa, that same Léa about whom I seemed to be worrying needlessly but whom, in words that I had not forced out of her, Albertine said she knew, had met in a larger society than the one I particularly feared, but in very dubious circumstances, for who could have persuaded her to go backstage, to that dressing-room? If the thought of Mlle Vinteuil stopped hurting me when I thought of Léa – these two women who between them had destroyed my day – it was either because my wounded spirit was unable to picture too many scenes at once, or because of the confusion of my nervous emotions, of which my jealousy was only the echo. I could conclude that Albertine had not belonged either to Léa or to Mlle Vinteuil, and that I was only imagining her with Léa because I still felt pain from that quarter. But because my jealousies were dying down – only to flare up again from time to time, one after the other – that did not mean that each of them did not correspond to some rightly suspected truth, and that I should say not 'none of these women', but 'all'. I say 'suspected', because I could not occupy all the necessary points of space and time, and then what instinct would have led me to combine the right ones, so as to surprise Albertine here at such-and-such a time with Léa, or with the young girls in Balbec, or with Mme Bontemps's friend who had brushed against her, or the young girl who had nudged her at the tennis match, or with Mlle Vinteuil?

'Dear Albertine, you are sweet to promise me that. Anyway, for the first few years at least I shall stay away from the places you want to go to. Do you know yet if you'll be in Balbec this summer? Because if you were, I'd arrange to be somewhere else.' If I went on in this vein, running ahead in my lying invention, it was not so much to frighten Albertine as to give myself pain. Like a man who at first had only trivial reasons for being annoyed, but, intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, lets himself be carried away by a fury engendered not by his grievances but by his burgeoning anger itself, I was rolling faster and faster down the slope of my sadness towards an ever deeper despair, with the inertia of a man who feels the cold gaining on him, but does not try to fight it and even finds a kind of pleasure in shivering. And if I presently found enough strength, as I was confident of doing, to reassert myself and go into reverse, it was not the unhappiness Albertine had caused me by giving me such an angry reception when I came home, but the pain I had felt while dreaming up, for the sake of pretending to settle them, all the formalities of an imaginary separation and foreseeing all its consequences, that would have to be made better this evening by Albertine's bedtime kiss. In any case, it was important that she did not say good-night of her own accord, for that would have made it difficult for me to change course and suggest we call off our separation. So I kept repeating that it was long past the time to say good-night, which left me the choice of when to say it, and allowed me to put it off a moment longer. And so I kept slipping allusions to the late hour, to our tiredness, into the questions I asked Albertine. 'I don't know where I'll go, she replied to the last one, with a worried look. Perhaps to Touraine, to my aunt's.' This first suggestion made me shiver, as if it really marked the beginning of our final separation. She looked round the room, with its pianola and blue satin armchairs. 'I still can't take in the idea that I won't see all this tomorrow, nor the day after tomorrow, nor ever again. Poor little room! It seems impossible, I can't get it into my head. – We had to do it, you were so unhappy here. – No I wasn't, I wasn't unhappy, I'm going to be unhappy now. – No, believe me, it'll be better for you. – For you, you mean!' I began to look in front of me as if, deeply hesitant, I were wrestling with an idea which had just come into my head. Then suddenly: 'Listen, Albertine, you say you're happier here this elsewhere, that you're going to be unhappy if you leave. – Of course I am. – That makes me wonder; do you think you'd like us to try to go on for a few more weeks after all? You never know, a week at a time, we might manage to go on for a good long time, you know some temporary things can go on for ever. – Oh, that would be lovely! – But in that case it's crazy to have gone on hurting each other like this for hours over nothing, it's like getting ready for a journey and then not leaving. I'm worn out with it.' I sat her on my knees, took the Bergotte manuscript she so wanted to have and wrote on the cover, 'For little Albertine, a souvenir of a lease renewed.' 'Now, darling, I said, go to bed and sleep till tomorrow evening, you must be exhausted. – Happy is what I am. – Do you love me just a little? – A hundred times more now.'

I should have been wrong to feel pleased with this little comedy, were it not that I had managed to push it to the limit, so that it took on the form of a real theatrical performance. If we had simply talked about separating that would already have been serious. One imagines that one can have such conversations without meaning them, which is true, but also without paying a price. But they generally represent, unknown to us, murmured in spite of ourselves, the first rumblings of an unsuspected storm. In fact, what we say at these times is the opposite of what we want (which is to go on living with the woman we love), but it is this very inability to live together which underlies our daily suffering, a suffering which we prefer to the pain of separation, but which will eventually, in spite of ourselves, drive us apart. Not usually in one go, however. What most often happens – though not, as we shall see, in the case of Albertine and myself – is that some time after saying the words in which we did not believe, we set in action an imprecise attempt at a voluntary, painless, temporary separation. We ask the woman, in the hope that she will feel happier with us afterwards, in the hope, also, of a brief escape from our continual sadness and fatigue, to go away without us, or to let us go without her, for a few days' travel, the first days for a very long time that we have spent – it would once have seemed impossible – without her. Very soon she returns home to us. But this separation, short but real, was not decided on in so arbitrary a fashion as we think, nor was it the only one we had in mind. The same sadness begins again, the difficulty of living together becomes more marked, the only change is that separation does not now seem so difficult; we began by talking about it, then we carried it out in a harmless form. But these things are warning symptoms which we have not yet recognized. Soon the smiling, temporary separation is succeeded by the hideous, final parting for which we unwittingly prepared the ground.

'Come to my room in five minutes and let me see you for a little while, sweetheart. You'll be nice, won't you. But I'll go to sleep straight after, for I'm half dead.' And it was a dead woman that I saw when I went into her room a moment later. She had fallen asleep the minute she lay down; her sheets, wrapped round her body like a shroud, had fallen into fine folds with the apparent hardness of stone. You would have said that, as in certain Last Judgments of the Middle Ages, only her head was appearing out of her tomb, as she waited in her sleep for the Last Trump. She had fallen asleep with her head thrown back, her hair dishevelled. And seeing that meaningless body lying there, I wondered what kind of logarithmic table it must constitute for it to be possible that every action in which it had been involved, from a nudge to the brushing of a dress, could, when projected to infinity from all the points it had occupied in space and time or sometimes brought back to life again in my memory, cause me such terrible stabs of pain, which, however, I knew to be triggered by movements, desires of hers which in another woman, or in herself five years sooner or five years later, would have left me completely indifferent. It was a lie, but I dared not look for any solutions to it other than my death. So I stood there, still in the overcoat in which I had returned from the Verdurins', looking at that twisted body, that allegorical

figure of what? Of my death? Of my love? Soon I began to hear her regular breathing. I went and sat on the edge of her bed to calm myself with her breath and the look of her. Then I slipped away so as not to wake her.

It was so late that the next morning I asked Françoise to walk as quietly as she could when passing Albertine's bedroom. And Françoise, convinced that we had spent the night in what she called orgies, duly warned the other servants, in an ironic tone, not to 'wake her Highness'. And this was one of my fears, that one day Françoise would lose her self-control and speak insolently to Albertine, thus facing me with complications in our life together. In former days she used to suffer pangs when she saw Eulalie in favour with my aunt; but now she was too old to bear her jealousy without showing its outward signs. It changed our servant's face, almost paralysing it, to the point where, sometimes, I wondered whether a surge of fury in her, unseen by me, had not caused a slight stroke. Having thus asked for Albertine's sleep to be protected, I could not sleep at all myself. I kept trying to guess at Albertine's true state of mind. Had the deplorable comedy I had just acted out served to defend me from a real danger, and despite her claims to be so happy in my house, had she really been hankering after her freedom, or ought I, on the contrary, to believe what she said? Which of the two hypotheses was the right one? Often at this time I took (and would do so even more often in the future) an occurrence in my past life and projected it on a historic scale so as to try to understand a political event; this morning I did the opposite, and kept identifying, despite the many differences between them, and in order to understand it better, the import of our scene of the night before with a diplomatic incident which had recently taken place.

Perhaps I was right to reason in that way. For it is very likely that I had, without knowing it, been guided by the example of M. de Charlus in that lying scene which I had seen him play so often and with such mastery; and on the other hand was it, in him, anything but an unconscious importing into the sphere of private life, of the profound tendency of his German race, challenging in its deviousness and, if necessary, warlike in its pride?

Various people, including the Prince of Monaco, having suggested to the French government that, if it did not dismiss M. Delcassé, German threats would be succeeded by real war, the Foreign Minister had been asked to resign. The French government had, therefore, accepted the hypothesis of an intention to declare war on us if we did not back down. But others thought that it had been simply a bluff, and that if France had stood its ground Germany would not have drawn the sword. Of course our scenario had been not just different but almost the reverse, since Albertine had never voiced any threat to break with me; but a system of impressions had led me to believe that she was thinking of doing so, just as the French government had believed of the Germans. On the other hand, if Germany wanted peace, leading the French government to think she was planning war was a doubtful and dangerous strategy. Certainly, my conduct had been rather clever, if it was the thought that I would never take the decision to break with her that had been leading Albertine to form sudden desires for independence. And was it not difficult to believe that she had no such desires, to refuse to see a whole secret life in her, directed towards the satisfaction of her vice? Everything showed it, even her anger on learning that I had been to the Verdurins', when she cried, 'I knew it,' and gave away her whole secret by saying, 'They were expecting Mlle Vinteuil.' All that was borne out by the meeting between Albertine and Mme Verdurin of which I had learned from Andrée. But on the other hand, perhaps those sudden desires for independence, so I said to myself when I tried to go against my instinct, were caused – supposing they existed at all – or would in the end be caused by the opposite idea, that is, that I had never intended to marry her, that it was when I alluded, as if involuntarily, to our impending separation that I was telling the truth, that I would in any case leave her one day or another, a belief which my scene of the previous evening could only have confirmed and which might in the end produce in her the resolution: 'If it has to happen some time or other, it might as well happen now.' Preparations for war, which the most false of all proverbs recommends as a way of ensuring peace, in fact create the belief in each of the adversaries that the other wants to break off relations, a belief which brings about that very breakdown, and then, once it has taken place, the further belief on each side that it was the other side who wanted it. Even if the threat was not sincere, its success encourages its repetition. But the exact limits of successful bluffing are difficult to determine; if one party goes too far, the other, which up to that point had been retreating, begins to advance; the first, unable to change its methods, accustomed now to the idea that the best way to avoid a breakdown is to seem not to fear it (as I had done this evening with Albertine), and, in its pride, preferring defeat to surrender, continues its threats up to the point where neither party can any longer retreat. Bluff can also be mixed with sincerity, can alternate with it so that what was a game yesterday can become tomorrow's reality. It can also sometimes be the case that one of the adversaries is really committed to war: Albertine could have intended, sooner or later, to stop living this life, or perhaps the idea of leaving it had never entered her mind, and my imagination had invented the whole thing from start to finish. These were the different hypotheses I turned over in my mind as she slept, on that particular morning. However, as far as the second is concerned, I can say that I never, in the time which followed, threatened to leave Albertine except in response to a mistaken desire for freedom on her part, an idea which she did not put into words, but which seemed to me to be implied by certain mysterious signs of dissatisfaction, by certain words, certain gestures which could be explained only by some such underlying idea and for which she refused to give me any other explanation. I still often noted these signs without saying anything about a possible separation, hoping that they were caused by a bad mood that would be gone by the next day. But the mood sometimes went on for weeks together, it was as if Albertine wanted to pick a quarrel with me, as if she knew of the existence, more or less close at hand, of pleasures of which her enclosed life with me was depriving her, and which exercised an influence upon her for as long as they lasted, like those atmospheric disturbances which reach us at our own firesides and act upon our nerves from as far away as the Balearic islands.

That morning, while Albertine was sleeping and I was trying to guess at her hidden feelings, I received a letter from my mother in which she expressed her uneasiness at knowing nothing of my intentions, using this remark of Mme de Sévigné's: 'I believe that he will not take a wife; but why then trouble this girl whom he will never marry? Why risk prompting her to refuse matches that she will come to look on with disdain? Why disturb the mind of a person whom he could so easily avoid?' My mother's letter brought me back to earth. Why am I searching out a mysterious soul, I thought, interpreting a face, feeling surrounded by forebodings which I dare not pursue? I have been dreaming, things are simple. I am an irresolute young man, this is one of those marriages that may or may not happen, it will take time to decide. Nothing here is peculiar to Albertine. This thought gave me profound relief, but it was short-lived. Soon I said to myself, 'The whole thing could be reduced, if one looks at it from the social point of view, to the most banal, everyday story: if it were happening to someone else, perhaps that is how I should see it. But I know that the truth, at least part of the truth, is everything I have been thinking, everything I have read in Albertine's eyes, the fears that have been torturing me, the questions I have been asking myself about my relation to Albertine.' The story of the hesitant fiancé and the broken engagement may correspond to all that, in the way a theatrical notice written by a commonsensical columnist may set out the subject of an Ibsen play. But there is more to it than the facts of the story. It is true that there may also be more, if one could see it, to the story of every hesitant fiancé and every engagement that drags on, because there is perhaps mystery in everyone's daily life. I could overlook it in the lives of others, but in Albertine's and my own life, I was living it from within.

Albertine did not say to me after that evening, any more than she had done before, 'I know you don't trust me, I'm going to try to dispel your suspicions.' But this idea, which she never expressed, could have explained every one of her actions. Not only did she take care never to be alone for a moment, so that I could not fail to know everything she had been doing, even if I did not believe her own account of it, but even when she had to speak on the telephone to Andrée, or the garage, or the riding-school, or anywhere else, she would say that it was too tiresome telephoning on one's own, the girls were so slow in putting one through, and she would see to it that I was there to hear her, or failing that Françoise, as if she feared that I might imagine reprehensible telephone calls in which she planned mysterious rendezvous. Alas, this did nothing to calm my fears. Aimé had sent me back Esther's photograph, saying that that was not the girl. So there were others? Who? I sent the picture back to Bloch. The one I should have liked to see was the one Albertine had given to Esther. How was she dressed in it? Perhaps with a low neckline; who knows, perhaps they had been photographed together? But I did not dare speak to Albertine about it, for then she would know I had not seen the photograph, nor to Bloch, in whose eyes I did not want to seem to be interested in Albertine. And this life, so cruel for me and for Albertine, as anyone would have recognized who had known of my suspicions and her slavery, from the outside, in Françoise's eyes, appeared to be a life of undeserved treats cleverly

wheedled out of me by the 'crafty one', as Françoise called her, or, using the feminine of the word much more often than the masculine, as she was more envious of women than of men, the '*charlatante*'.[84] She would even say, having expanded her vocabulary by contact with me but always using the new expressions in her own way, that she had never known anyone so 'perfidulous' as Albertine, that she knew how to get money out of me by play-acting (which Françoise, who was as likely to take the particular for the general as the general for the particular, and had only the vaguest idea of the various genres of drama, called 'pantomiming'). Perhaps this misunderstanding about our real life, Albertine's and mine, was partly my fault, since I confirmed it in some measure by the vague hints which I carefully let slip when talking to Françoise, either in order to tease her, or to seem, if not loved, at any rate happy. And yet my jealousy, my watchful surveillance of Albertine, which I was so anxious that Françoise should not suspect, were immediately guessed at by her, as a medium, blindfolded, goes straight to an object, guided by her unfailing sense of what could cause me pain, which could not be diverted by any lies I told to put her off track, and also by the hatred of Albertine which led Françoise – even more than to think her enemies luckier, cleverer actresses than they really were – to hunt out what could damage them and hasten their downfall. Françoise certainly never had an open quarrel with Albertine. I wondered whether Albertine, feeling herself watched, would not herself decide to bring forward the separation with which I had threatened her, for life as it changes turns our fantasies into reality. Every time I heard a door open, I felt myself tremble as my grandmother had trembled in her death-agony every time I rang the bell. I did not really think she had gone out without telling me, but my unconscious mind thought so, as it had been my grandmother's unconscious mind which jumped at the sound of the bell even after she had lost consciousness. One morning, I even had the sudden, anxious feeling that she had not only gone out, but gone for good. I had heard the sound of a door which seemed to me to be the door of her bedroom. I crept along to her room, opened the door and stood on the threshold. In the half-darkness there was a semi-circular mass under the sheets that must be Albertine sleeping with her body in a curve, her head and feet pointing towards the wall. Only her head could be seen above the sheets: its mass of black hair showed me that this was she, that she had not opened her door, had not moved at all, and I felt that this motionless, living semicircle, in which a whole human life was suspended, was the only thing that held any value for me, and that it was there, under my power, in my possession.

But I knew Françoise's powers of insinuation, her ability to set a scene and exploit its significance, and I cannot believe she resisted the temptation to remind Albertine daily of her humiliating position in my household, to distress her by a carefully exaggerated depiction of the confinement to which my friend was subject. I once found Françoise with thick glasses on her nose, poking among my papers and putting back one on which I had noted down a story about Swann and his inability to do without Odette. Had she accidentally left it lying in Albertine's room? In any case, above all Françoise's hints, which had been only a whispered, insidious bass accompaniment to them, no doubt there had sounded out, higher, clearer, more urgent, the voice of the Verdurins, with their accusations and calumnies, since they were angry to see how Albertine unwittingly kept me away, and I her quite deliberately, from the meetings of the little set.

As for the money I spent on Albertine, it was almost impossible for me to hide it from Françoise, since I could not hide any expenditure from her. Françoise had few vices, but these vices had developed in her some true gifts which were often evident only in the service of the said vices. Chief among them was the curiosity she brought to bear on any expenditure of money by us on anyone but herself. If I had a bill to pay, a tip to give, it was useless to go into another room, she would find a plate to put away, a napkin to collect, some pretext to get near me. And however little time I allowed her for observation, chasing her angrily away, this woman who could hardly see any longer, who could barely count, directed by the same instinct which makes a tailor look at you and assess the cloth of your suit and even reach out to finger it, or a painter respond to a colour effect, Françoise would steal a sidelong glance and calculate instantly what I was giving. If, to prevent her telling Albertine I was bribing her chauffeur, I forestalled her and made an excuse for the tip by saying, 'I wanted to be nice to the chauffeur, I gave him ten francs,' the pitiless Françoise, one glance from whose eagle eye – an old, near-blind eagle, but no matter – had been enough, would reply, 'No, sir, you gave him a forty-three franc tip. He said the bill was forty-five francs and you, sir, gave him a hundred and he only gave back twelve.' She had managed to see and count the total of the tip when I did not know it myself.

If Albertine's aim was to pacify me, she succeeded in part, since my reason, in any case, was only too anxious to convince me that I had been mistaken about Albertine's sinister plans, just as I had perhaps been wrong about her vicious instincts. No doubt in my ready acceptance of the arguments my reason put forward there was an element of wishful thinking. But in order to be fair and to have a chance of reaching the truth, unless we admit that it is only ever known by premonition, by some telepathic emanation, was it not necessary to say to myself that if my reason, working towards my cure, let itself be led by what I wished to believe, on the other hand, in the whole matter of Mlle Vinteuil, Albertine's vices, her intention to change her life and her plan to leave me, both of which were corollaries of her vices, my instinct, seeking to make me ill, could have let itself be led astray by my jealousy? In any case Albertine's removal from the world, which she herself took such ingenious pains to make complete, by ending my suffering, slowly reduced my suspicions until I was able, when evening brought back my anxieties, to find Albertine's presence as comforting as it had been at the beginning. Sitting by my bed, she would talk to me about one of the dresses or one of the objects which I was constantly giving her in the hope of making her life more pleasant and her prison more attractive, while sometimes fearing that she might agree with the Mme de la Rochefoucauld who, when she was asked if she were not glad to be living in such a fine house as Liancourt, replied that she knew of no fine prisons. Thus, if I had questioned M. de Charlus about old French silver, it was because, when we had formed the plan of buying a yacht, a plan which seemed impossible to Albertine – and to me whenever I began to believe once more in her virtue, and my jealousy, shrinking in volume, allowed the expansion of other desires, not involving her, which would also require money for their satisfaction – we had chanced, despite her belief that we would never have one, to ask the advice of Elstir. Now, just as in women's dress, the painter had a subtle, demanding taste in the decoration of yachts. On board, he would accept only English furniture and old French silver. Formerly all Albertine's thoughts had been for dress and furnishings. Now she was interested in silver as well, and this had led her, since our return from Balbec, to read books on the art of silverwork and on the marks of the old silversmiths. But since French silver was melted down twice, once at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht, when the king himself, followed by the great nobles, gave up his plate, and then in 1789, old pieces are extremely rare. True, modern silversmiths have reproduced all the lost pieces according to the Pont-aux-Choux drawings,[85] but in vain: Elstir pronounced these new-old designs unfit to enter the home of a woman of taste, even her floating home. I knew that Albertine had read a description of the wonders created by Roettiers for Mme du Barry.[86] She was dying to see some of these pieces, if any survived, and I longed to give them to her. She had even begun a collection of pretty pieces which she arranged charmingly in a glass case, and which I could not look at without feelings of pity and fear, for the art with which she arranged them showed that combination of patience, ingenuity, homesickness and the need to forget which we see in the art of prisoners.

As far as dress was concerned, her taste at that moment was particularly for everything that Fortuny was making. Those Fortuny dresses, one of which I had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing, were the ones whose appearance had been foretold by Elstir, when he spoke of the magnificent garments worn by the women of Carpaccio's and Titian's time; now they were being reborn from their sumptuous ashes, for everything must return, as it is written on the vaults of St Mark's, and as the birds proclaim that we see drinking from the marble and jasper urns of Byzantine capitals, signifying both death and resurrection. As soon as women started wearing them, Albertine had remembered Elstir's promises and had wanted one, and we were to go and choose one for her. Now these dresses, though they were not actually old, of the kind which on women of today always look a little too much like fancy dress and which it is nicer to keep as collector's pieces (I was also looking for some pieces of this kind for Albertine), did not have the cold, pastiche accuracy of reproductions. They were more like the stage designs of Sert, Bakst and Benois, who at this time, for the Ballets Russes, were bringing back to life the best-loved periods of art with the help of works steeped in period feeling, but still original; in the same way Fortuny's dresses, faithful to the antique spirit but powerfully original, called up as a backdrop, but with even more evocative power than a stage setting, since this backdrop had to take shape in our imagination, the Venice laden with Oriental riches in which they would have been worn; even better than a relic in the shrine of St Mark, they evoked the sun and crowding turbans of the east, its fragmented, mysterious and complementary colour. All of this time was lost, but everything was returning, called up, to be bound together in the splendour of the landscape and the swarming of life, by the surviving scraps, rising from oblivion, of the dresses of the Venetian noblewomen.

Once or twice I felt like asking Mme de Guermantes's advice on this subject. But the Duchesse did not like clothes with a fancy-dress look. She herself never looked so well as in black velvet and diamonds. And on dresses of the Fortuny kind her advice would not have been very useful. In any case I was afraid that if I asked her about them I would seem to be going to visit her only when I happened to need something from her, at a time when I was regularly refusing several of her invitations every week. She was not the only person to invite me so persistently. Certainly, she and other women had always been very welcoming to me. But my reclusive life had undoubtedly multiplied their interest tenfold. It seems as if in society life, a trivial reflection of the realm of love, the best way to make oneself sought after is to be hard to find. A man mentions all the points to his credit that he can think of in order to appeal to a woman; he keeps changing his clothes, tries to look his best, and she takes no notice of him, while another, whom he deceives, before whom he appears in disarray and whom he takes no trouble to please, is indissolubly attached to him. In the same way, if a man felt that society took too little notice of him, I should not advise him to pay still more calls, to have a still more splendid turn-out, I should tell him to refuse all invitations, to live shut away in his room, to admit no one, and that he would then see people queuing outside his door. Or rather, I should not give him this advice. For this method of achieving social success works only in the same way as the similar method of making oneself loved, that is if one does not adopt it deliberately, but, say, keeps to one's room because one is seriously ill, or believes oneself so, or has a mistress shut up with one whom one prefers to all the rest of the world (or all of these things); the world, knowing nothing of this woman, and simply because you withhold yourself from it, will see in that a perfect reason to prefer you to all the others who force themselves upon it, and to seek you out.

'Speaking of dresses,' I said to Albertine, 'it's time we thought about ordering your Fortuny dress.' And certainly, given how long she had wanted these dresses, the time she would spend choosing them with me, the space she had already made for them not only in her wardrobe but in her imagination, the way in which, before choosing them from among many others, she would dwell lovingly on every detail, they would mean more to her than to a rich woman who has more dresses than she wants and does not even look at them. Even so, despite the smile with which Albertine thanked me, saying, 'You are sweet,' I noticed how tired, even sad, she looked. Sometimes, as we waited for the dresses she had chosen to be ready, I borrowed some others, sometimes just the fabrics, and dressed Albertine in them, draped them over her, and watched her parade round my room with the majesty of a doge's consort or of a mannequin. The only difficulty was that my enslavement to Paris was made harder to bear by the sight of these robes that made me think of Venice. Certainly, Albertine was much more of a prisoner than I was. And it was strange to think how destiny, which transforms people, had been able to pass through the walls of her prison and change her very essence, turning the young girl of Balbec into a dutiful and tedious captive. No, the prison walls had not been able to stop this influence passing through; indeed, it was perhaps they who had produced it. She was no longer the same Albertine because she was no longer, as she had been in Balbec, constantly in flight on her bicycle, unfindable because of the number of tiny beaches where she might decide to stay with a friend, and where, furthermore, her lies made her even more impossible to reach; because, now imprisoned in my house, she was no longer what she had been at Balbec, on the beach, even when I was able to find her there, no longer the elusive, crafty, careful being whose presence was extended by all the lovers' meetings that she was so clever at concealing, the meetings that made me love her because they made me suffer, because behind her offhand manner to others and her meaningless replies, one could sense yesterday's meeting and the one planned for tomorrow, framed for me in distance and deception. Because the wind no longer billowed in her garments, because, above all, I had cut her wings, she had ceased to be a Victory, she was a heavy slave of whom I wished to be rid.

So, to change the direction of my thoughts, rather than beginning a game of cards or draughts with Albertine, I would ask her to play some music for me. I would stay in bed and she would go to the other end of the room and sit at the pianola, between the uprights of the book-case. She chose either pieces that were entirely new to me, or others that she had played only once or twice, for, as she came to know me better, she realized that I liked to give my attention only to things that were obscure to me and to be able, at successive hearings, to make connections, as they became clearer in the growing but, alas, foreign and denaturing light of my intelligence, between the fragmentary and broken lines of the overall construction, which at first had been almost entirely hidden in mist. She recognized and, I think, understood the mental pleasure which I took, at the first few hearings, in this work of modelling an initially formless nebula. As she played, the only part of the complex structure of Albertine's hair that I could see was a heart-shaped black twist of hair, applied along her ear like the knot of ribbons of a Velázquez infanta. Just as the third dimension of this angel-musician was supplied by the manifold distances between the various points in the past which her memory occupied in me and the various organs of memory, from sight to the most inward sensations of my being, which allowed me to enter into the hidden depths of hers, so the music she was playing also had its depth, produced by the unequal visibility of the different phrases, according to whether I had yet managed to throw light on them and connect up the various lines of a construction which at first had seemed to me almost entirely lost in the fog. Albertine knew that she could please me by presenting to my thought only things which were still obscure and giving me the task of modelling these nebulae. She guessed that on the third or fourth hearing my intelligence would have mastered all the parts of the piece, and consequently placed them at the same distance from me: there would be no more work to be done on them, they would all be laid out, motionless, on a single plane. She did not, however, move at once on to a new piece, for perhaps without quite understanding the work that was going on within me, she knew that at the moment when the action of my intelligence had managed to dispel the mystery of a work, it was very unusual for her not to have gathered, in return for her tedious labour, this or that useful observation. And by the time Albertine said, 'Let's give this roll to Françoise to take and change for another one,' there was often no doubt one less piece of music in the world for me, but one truth more.

I was now so convinced that it would be absurd to be jealous of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, since Albertine was making no efforts to see them again, and among all the holiday plans we had discussed had, of her own accord, rejected Combray, which is so close to Montjouvain, that I often asked Albertine to play for me, without its making me suffer, some of Vinteuil's music. Only once had this music of Vinteuil been an indirect cause of jealousy in me. It was when Albertine, who knew that I had heard it played at Mme Verdurin's by Morel, spoke to me about him one evening, showing a strong desire to go and hear him play, and to be introduced to him. This was just two days after I had heard about the letter, which M. de Charlus had intercepted, from Léa to Morel. I wondered if perhaps Léa had spoken to Albertine about him. I recalled with horror the words 'dirty girl', 'kinky slut'. But, just because in this way Vinteuil's music was painfully linked to Léa – and not to Mlle Vinteuil and her friend – when the suffering caused by Léa was relieved, I was able to listen to the music without pain. In the music I had heard at Mme Verdurin's, certain phrases which I had not noticed at the time, mere formless larvae, now grew into dazzling, complex structures; and some which I had barely distinguished from the others, which at best had seemed to me ugly, became my friends, like those people to whom we do not 'take' at first, and of whom we could never believe that they will turn out as they do when we come to know them well. Between these two states there was a real transmutation. On the other hand, some phrases which had been distinct even the first time, but which I had not recognized in this position, I could now identify with phrases in other works, like the phrase from the *Religious Variations* for organ which at Mme Verdurin's had passed unnoticed in the septet, in which, however, like a saint who had come down the sanctuary steps, she found herself mingling with the fairies more familiar to the musician. On the other hand, the 'bells at midday' phrase which had seemed to me too unmelodic, too mechanically rhythmical in its heavy-footed joy, was now the one I loved most, whether it was that I had become used to its ugliness, or that I had discovered its beauty. This reaction to the initial disappointment caused by masterpieces can, indeed, be attributed either to a weakening of our original impression, or to the effort required to arrive at the truth. Two hypotheses that arise again in relation to all important questions, the questions of the reality of Art, of Reality itself, of the Eternity of the soul: we have to choose between them; and in the case of Vinteuil's music, one was faced with the choice at every moment, in a variety of forms. For example, this music seemed to me something more true than all known books. Sometimes I thought that the reason was that the things we feel in life are not experienced in the form of ideas, and so their translation into literature, an intellectual process, may give an account of them, explain them, analyse them, but cannot recreate them as music does, its sounds seeming to take on the inflections of our being, to reproduce that inner, extreme point of sensation which is the thing that causes us the specific ecstasy we feel from time to time and which, when we say 'What a beautiful day! What beautiful sunshine!', is not conveyed at all to our neighbour, in whom the same sun and the same weather set

off quite different vibrations. In Vinteuil's music there were some of these visions which it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to dwell upon, since, when at the moment of falling asleep we feel the caress of their unreal spell, at that very moment, when reason has already left us, our eyes close and, before we have time to recognize not only the invisible but the ineffable, we fall asleep. It seemed to me, when I gave myself up to the hypothesis that art might be real, that music could convey not just the simple, nervous excitement of a fine day or a night of opium, but a more real, more productive ecstasy, or so I felt. But it is impossible that a sculpture, a piece of music which gives us an emotion that we feel to be higher, purer, truer, should not correspond to a certain spiritual reality, otherwise life would have no meaning. Thus, nothing came closer than a fine phrase of Vinteuil's to the particular pleasure which I had sometimes experienced in my life, before the spires of Martinville, for example, or certain trees on a road at Balbec, or more simply, as at the beginning of this work, when drinking a certain mouthful of tea. As the tea had done, the multiple sensations of light, the airy sounds, the noisy colours which Vinteuil sent us from the world in which he composed, presented to my imagination, forcefully but too rapidly for it to take it in, something which I could compare to the perfumed silk of a geranium. The only thing is, while in a memory the vagueness can be if not eliminated at least made more precise by pinpointing the circumstances which explain why a certain taste recalls sensations of light, since the vague sensations conveyed by Vinteuil came not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville), one would have had to explain the geranium fragrance of his music not by a material resemblance but by its profound equivalent, the unknown, multicoloured festival (of which his works seemed to be disparate fragments, dazzling shards with scarlet fracture lines), the mode according to which he 'heard' and projected the universe. This unknown quality of a unique world, which no other musician had ever shown us before, was perhaps, I said to Albertine, the most authentic proof of genius, much more than the content of the work itself. 'In literature too? Albertine asked. – In literature too.' And, thinking again about the repetitiveness of Vinteuil's work, I explained to Albertine that great writers have only ever written a single work, or rather, refracted through different media a single beauty which each of them has brought to the world. 'If it weren't so late, dear, I would say to her, I should point it out to you in all the writers you read when I am asleep, I could show you the same sameness as in Vinteuil. Those repeated phrases, you're beginning to recognize them, dearest, just as I do, the same ones in the sonata, the septet, in the other works too, well, in Barbey d'Aurevilly[87] it would be the revelation of a hidden reality in a physical trace, the red colouring of the Woman Bewitched, of Aimée de Spens, of La Clotte, the hand in "The Crimson Curtain", the old customs, old habits, old words, the strange, ancient trades that symbolize the Past, the oral history retailed by the shepherds in the mirror episode, the noble Norman cities with their aura of England, but pretty as a Scottish village, the curses put on people which they cannot throw off, La Vellini, the shepherd, a recurring sensation of anxiety in a landscape, whether it is the wife looking for her husband in *An Old Mistress*, or the husband of *The Woman Bewitched* searching the moor, and the Woman Bewitched herself coming out of Mass. And the pattern of the stone-cutters in Thomas Hardy's novels – that's Vinteuil's recurring phrases again.'

Vinteuil's phrases made me think of the little phrase and I told Albertine how it had been, as it were, the national anthem of Swann's and Odette's love, 'Gilberte's parents. You used to know her, didn't you? You said she had a reputation. Didn't she try to have an affair with you? She mentioned you to me. – Yes, her parents used to send the carriage to collect her from school when the weather was too bad, she gave me a lift once, I think, and she kissed me,' she said after a moment's thought, laughing as if the confidence were amusing. 'She suddenly asked me if I liked women.' (But if she only thought she remembered being taken home by Gilberte, how could she recall so precisely that Gilberte had asked her such a strange question?) 'I don't know why, I wanted to play a joke on her, I said yes.' (You would have thought Albertine was afraid I might have heard the story from Gilberte, and did not want me to catch her in a lie.) 'But we didn't do anything.' (Strange, if they had confided in each other in this way, that they should have done nothing, especially as before that, according to Albertine, they had kissed in the carriage.) 'She took me home like that four or five times, maybe a bit more, and that's all.' I had great difficulty in not asking her further questions, but, restraining myself so as not to seem to attach any importance to the matter, I came back to Hardy's stone-cutters. 'You remember them in *Jude the Obscure*, but do you remember how in *The Well-Beloved* the blocks of stone that the father quarries on the island are brought by water and piled up in the son's workshop where they become statues; how in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* there are the parallel graves, and the parallel lines of the ship, and the row of wagons where the lovers are next to the corpse, and the parallelism between *The Well-Beloved*, where the hero loves three women, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, where the woman loves three men, and so on, all those novels that could be superimposed on each other, like the houses piled vertically, one above the other, on the rocky soil of the island? I can't talk to you just now about the greatest writers, but you would find in Stendhal a certain feeling of height allied to spirituality, there is the high place where Julien Sorel is imprisoned, the top of the tower where Fabrice is held, the steeple where the Abbé Blanes studies astrology and from which Fabrice has such a wonderful view. You say you've been looking at some paintings by Vermeer, then you can see that they're all fragments of a single world, that it is always, whatever the genius recreating it, the same table, the same carpet, the same women, the same new and unique beauty, a complete enigma at this period when there is nothing else like it, nothing to explain it, unless one tries to relate him to other painters by his choice of subjects, while recognizing the particular, personal impression made by his colour. Well, we find just such a new beauty, the same in each one of his works, in Dostoevsky: isn't Dostoevsky's woman (just as peculiar to him as Rembrandt's was to him), with her mysterious face whose appealing beauty suddenly changes, as if she had only been playing at goodness, into a terrifying insolence (even though underneath it seems that she is good after all), isn't she always the same, whether it is Nastasya Philippovna writing love letters to Aglae and admitting that she hates her, or in a visit-scene exactly identical to that one – and also to the one where Nastasya Philippovna insults Gania's parents – Grushenka,[88] having been as gentle in Katerina Ivanovna's house as Katerina had expected her to be terrifying, suddenly revealing her aggression, insulting Katerina Ivanovna (even though Grushenka herself is essentially good)? Grushenka, Nastasya, figures as original, as mysterious, not just as Carpaccio's courtesans, but as Rembrandt's Bathsheba. Notice that he did not have a clear understanding of that striking, double face, those sudden explosions of pride which make a woman different from her normal self ("You are not like that," says Myshkin to Nastasya during the visit to Gania's parents, and Alyosha could have said the same to Grushenka during the visit to Katerina Ivanovna). And on the contrary when he tries to have an "idea for a scene", they are always stupid and would produce, at best, one of the pictures in which Munkácsy tries to represent a condemned prisoner at the moment of, etc., the Blessed Virgin at the moment of, etc. But to return to the new beauty which Dostoevsky brought into the world, as with Vermeer there is the creation of something like a soul, of a certain colour of draperies and settings, Dostoevsky does not create only people but their dwellings, and the house of the killing in *Crime and Punishment*, with its *dvornik*, is not so marvellous as that masterpiece of murder settings in Dostoevsky, the dark house, so long, so tall, so vast, where Rogosin kills Nastasya Philippovna. This new, terrible beauty a house can have, the new, hybrid beauty of a woman's face, that is the one great thing Dostoevsky brought into the world, and the comparisons literary critics may make between him and Gogol, or him and Paul de Kock[89] for that matter, are completely without interest, since they have nothing to do with this secret beauty. What is more, I have talked about the same scene recurring in different novels, but within the same novel scenes and characters can be repeated, if the novel is very long. I could easily give you an example from *War and Peace*, there's a particular scene in a carriage … – I don't want to interrupt you, but as I see you're moving on from Dostoevsky, I'm afraid I'll forget what you've been saying. Darling, what did you mean the other day when you said, "That's the Dostoevsky side of Mme de Sévigné"? I admit I didn't understand. The two seem so different. – Come here, little girl, and let me give you a kiss for being so good at remembering what I say. You can go back to the pianola afterwards. I admit that what I said then might have sounded stupid. But I said it for two reasons. One, a particular one. Mme de Sévigné sometimes, like Elstir or Dostoevsky, instead of presenting things in the logical order, that is to say starting with the cause, begins by showing us the effect, the illusion which strikes us. That is how Dostoevsky presents his characters. Their actions have as misleading an appearance as those Elstir paintings where the sea seems to be in the sky. We are astonished to learn afterwards that the man who seemed so sly is admirable underneath. Or the opposite. – Yes, but an example from Mme de Sévigné, please. – Well, this is a pretty far-fetched one, I replied, laughing, but here is a description.[90]

'But did he ever murder anyone, Dostoevsky? All of his novels that I've read could be called *The Story of a Crime*. He's obsessed with the subject, it's not natural always to be talking about it. – I don't think so, Albertine dear, I don't know much about his life. Certainly, like everyone else, he had experience of sin in

one form or another, probably in a form punished by the law. In that sense he must have had a criminal side, like his heroes, and they of course are not wholly criminal, there are always extenuating circumstances. And perhaps he didn't need to be a criminal. I am not a novelist, but it is possible that writers of fiction are attracted by certain modes of life that they have not experienced themselves. If I come to Versailles with you as we planned, I will show you the portrait of the most honourable of men, an excellent husband, Choderlos de Laclos, who wrote the most appallingly perverse book, and facing it that of Mme de Genlis,[91] who wrote moral tales and, not content with deceiving the Duchesse d'Orléans, tortured her by turning her children against her. I do admit that Dostoevsky's preoccupation with murder has something extraordinary about it that makes me feel very remote from him. I'm already astonished to hear Baudelaire say,

> Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie …
>
> C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.[92]

But at least I can believe that Baudelaire is being insincere. But Dostoevsky … I feel as far away as possible from all that, unless there are parts of me that I don't know about, for one realizes oneself only one piece at a time. In Dostoevsky I find impossibly deep abysses, but only at some points of the human soul. But he is a great creator. First, the world that he describes seems genuinely to have been created for him. All those recurring buffoons, Lebedev, Karamazov, Ivolgin, Segrev, that incredible procession of fools, is a humanity more fantastic than the background figures in Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. But perhaps it is fantastic only in the same way, thanks to the costumes and lighting, and in fact is everyday and familiar. In any case it is full of truths, profound and unique, and belongs only to Dostoevsky. It almost seems, that series of buffoons, like a stock stage role which has ceased to exist, like certain characters in ancient comedy, and yet, how well they reveal certain unchanging aspects of the human soul! What I can't bear is the solemn way in which people talk and write about Dostoevsky. Have you noticed the part self-love and pride play in his characters? You would say that for him love and the wildest hatred, kindness and treachery, timidity and insolence, are only two states of the same nature, as self-love and pride prevent Aglae, Nastasya, the captain who has his beard pulled by Mitya, and Krassotkin, Alyosha's friend-cum-enemy, from showing themselves as they "truly are" in reality. But there are many other fine things. I know very little about his books. But can't we call it something simple and sculptural, worthy of the most ancient art, a frieze interrupted and resumed in which Vengeance and Expiation unfold their story, that tale of old Karamazov making the madwoman pregnant and the mysterious, unexplained, animal urge which drives the mother, the unwitting instrument of destiny's revenge, in obedience to her mama's instinct and perhaps also to a kind of resentment combined with physical gratitude to her violator, to go back and give birth at Karamazov's house? This is the first episode, mysterious, grandiose, majestic, like a Creation of Woman among the sculptures of Orvieto. And it is balanced by the second episode, more than twenty years later, the murder of old Karamazov by the madwoman's son, Smerdyakov, followed soon after by an action equally mysterious, sculptural and inexplicable, as obscurely beautiful and natural as the birth in old Karamazov's garden, Smerdyakov hanging himself, having carried out his crime. As for Dostoevsky, I was not leaving him behind as much as you thought when I spoke of Tolstoy, who imitated him a great deal. And in Dostoevsky there is, in a concentrated form, still turned in on itself and cramped, a lot of what will blossom in Tolstoy. Dostoevsky has that early, morose quality of primitives which their followers will open out. – Oh, darling, if only you weren't so lazy! Can't you see how you make literature so much more interesting than it was when we had to study it; oh, those answers we had to write on *Esther*. "My dear Sir", do you remember?' she said, laughing, not so much to make fun of her teachers and herself, as for the pleasure of finding in her memory, in our shared memory, something already quite old.

But as she talked, and as I thought about Vinteuil, the other hypothesis, the materialist one, that of nothingness, came to the fore in its turn. I began to doubt once more, I said to myself that after all it might be that, even though Vinteuil's phrases seemed to me to be the expression of certain states of the soul – analogous to the one I had experienced on tasting the madeleine soaked in tea – nothing proved that the vagueness of these states was a sign of their profundity, rather than of our inability, so far, to analyse them: there would therefore be nothing more real in them than in others. Still that happiness, that feeling of certainty in happiness, while I drank the cup of tea, or as I breathed in a certain scent of old wood in the Champs-Elysées gardens, was not an illusion. In any case, the spirit of doubt said to me, even if those states are more profound than others in our life, and are unanalysable for that very reason, because they bring into play too many forces of which we are not yet aware, the charm of certain of Vinteuil's phrases may make us think of them because it too is unanalysable, but that does not prove that it has the same depth. The beauty of a musical phrase can easily seem to be the image of or at least to be related to a non-intellectual impression we have had, but only because it too is unintellectual. But why, then, do we feel so strongly the particular profundity of those mysterious phrases which haunt certain quartets and the 'concert' of Vinteuil? In any case, it was not only his music that Albertine played for me; the pianola sometimes served us as a kind of educational (historical and geographical) magic lantern, and on the walls of that room in Paris, better equipped than the old one in Combray, I saw spread out, according as Albertine played some Rameau or some Borodin, now an eighteenth-century tapestry dotted with cherubs on a background of roses, and now the Eastern steppes where sounds are lost in the limitless distances and muffled by the snow. And these fleeting decorations were in fact the only ones in my room, for, even though when I came into my inheritance from Aunt Léonie I had promised myself I would be a collector like Swann, buying pictures and statues, in fact all my money went on horses, a motor-car, dresses for Albertine. But then, did not my room contain a work of art more precious than all those others? It was Albertine herself. I kept looking at her. It was strange for me to think that this was she, she whom I had so long thought it impossible even to meet, who now, a wild animal tamed, a rambling rose for which I had provided the support, the trellis, the framework of her life, sat each day, at home, near me, before the pianola, next to my book-case. Her shoulders, which I had seen low-slung and shifty as she brought home her golf-clubs, now leaned against my books. Her fine legs, which I had marked down on the first day, rightly, as having spent their whole adolescence turning the pedals of a bicycle, rose and fell on those of the pianola, where Albertine, who had acquired an elegance that made her seem all the more mine, as it was I who had provided it, now placed her cloth-of-gold slippers. The fingers which once knew the handlebars now rested on the stops like those of a St Cecilia; her neck, whose roundness, seen from my bed, was full and strong, at that distance and by lamplight seemed pinker, but not so pink as her face turned in profile, to which my gaze, coming from the depths of my being, laden with memories and burning with desire, added such brilliance, such intensity of life that its modelling seemed to detach itself and spin in the air with the same almost magic power as that day, in the hotel at Balbec, when my sight was blurred by my too-great desire to kiss her; I projected each surface of it beyond what I could see, and under the surfaces which hid it from me – eyelids half-closing the eyes, hair hiding the upper part of the cheeks – I felt only the more intensely the geometry of these superimposed planes; the eyes, like two polished opal plaques still trapped in their surrounding ore, had become more lucent than metal while remaining harder than light; they shone, amid the blind matter overhanging them, like the mauve silk wings of a butterfly in a case; and the hair, black and curly, showing different patterns of locks as she turned towards me to ask what she should play next, now a splendid wing, pointed at its tip and broad at its base, black, feathery and triangular, now a mass of three-dimensional curls like a mountain range, powerful and varied, full of ridges, watersheds, precipices, whipped up into a richness and multiplicity that seemed to exceed the normal variety of nature, as if a sculptor were accumulating difficulties so as to show off the suppleness, the dash, the freedom and lifelikeness of his execution, brought out more strongly, by covering and breaking it in places, the lively curve and, as it were, the rotation of the smooth, pink face, which had the shiny yet matt quality of painted wood. And by contrast with such varied relief, by the harmony too that brought them together with the girl, who had adapted her position to their shape and function, the pianola which half-hid her like an organ case, the bookshelves, all that end of the room seemed to be nothing but a candle-lit sanctuary, a crib for this angel-musician, this work of art which presently, by its own gentle magic, would step down from its niche and offer its pink, precious substance to my kisses. But no; Albertine was not at all a work of art for me. I knew what it was to admire a woman from an artistic point of view – I had known Swann. But for my own part I was incapable of seeing any woman, whoever she might be, in this way, having no spirit whatsoever of external observation, never knowing what it was I was looking at, and I was full of wonderment when Swann retrospectively bestowed artistic dignity – by comparing her for me, as he liked to do as a compliment to herself, to some portrait by Luini, or finding in her costume the dress or the jewels of a Giorgione – upon a woman who had seemed to me unremarkable. I had no such inclination. Indeed, to tell the truth, when I began to see Albertine as

an angel-musician, a wonderfully patinated statue, a prized possession, I soon became indifferent to her, presently I was bored in her company, but these moments did not last for long. There must be something inaccessible in what we love, something to pursue; we love only what we do not possess, and soon I began once more to realize that I did not possess Albertine. I could see passing through her eyes first hope for, then the memory of, perhaps regret for joys that I could not guess at, joys which she preferred to renounce rather than tell me of them, and of which, seeing only their light reflected in her pupils, I could perceive no more than the late-comer who has not been allowed to enter the theatre and who, his eye glued to the glass panel in the door, can see nothing of what is happening on stage. (I do not know if it was true of her, but it is remarkable, something like a sign in the most irreligious of their continuing belief in good, how all those who deceive us persist in lying to us. We can tell them how their lies hurt us more than the truth would, they can believe us, it is no use: they will still lie to us again a moment later in order to stay consistent with what they originally told us they were, or what they told us we were to them. In the same way, an atheist who wants to go on living will let himself be killed rather than give the lie to his reputation for defiance.) During these hours, I would sometimes see floating around her, in her look, in a passing facial expression, in her smile, the reflection of these inner visions: dwelling on them made her different on those evenings, distant from me as she would not share them with me. 'What are you thinking of, darling? – Nothing.' Sometimes, in response to my complaints that she never told me anything, she would tell me either things that she knew quite well I knew already, things that everyone knew (like those politicians who would not part with the smallest piece of real news, but instead tell you at length about things you read in yesterday's newspaper), or stories lacking in all detail, seeming confidences that were nothing of the kind, about bicycle rides that she went on from Balbec the year before I met her. And it seemed that I had been right originally, when I thought of Albertine as a very loosely brought-up young girl, going on long outings away from home, when I saw, at the mention of these cycle rides, a mysterious smile slowly part Albertine's lips, the same smile that had attracted me to her on those first days, on the promenade at Balbec. She also told me about her cycle rides with girl-friends in the Dutch countryside, of coming back late in the evening to Amsterdam, when a dense crowd of people, all happy, most of whom she knew, filled the streets and the banks of the canals, whose countless, flickering lights I felt I could see reflected in Albertine's gleaming eyes, as if in the uncertain windows of a fast-moving carriage. People speak of aesthetic curiosity: how much more it would deserve the name of indifference, when compared to the painful, tireless curiosity I felt about the places where Albertine had lived, about what she might have been doing on this or that evening, how she had smiled, what she had looked at, the words she had spoken, the kisses she had received! No, the jealousy of Saint-Loup that I had felt one day, even if it had lasted, could never have given me this immense anxiety. This love between women was something too unknown: nothing could allow me to picture with confidence, with precision, its pleasures, its very nature. How many different people, how many places (even places not involving her directly, vague places of entertainment where she might have tasted some pleasure, places where crowds of people go, where they brush against one) Albertine – like someone who, ushering a whole group of people, all her friends, past the ticket-desk in front of her, gets them all into the theatre – had ushered in from the fringes of my imagination and my memory, where I was taking no notice of them, and installed in my heart! Now my knowledge of them was an internal thing, immediate, spasmodic, painful. Love is space and time made apprehensible to the heart.

And yet perhaps had I been entirely faithful, I should not have suffered so from infidelities which I should have been incapable of imagining. But what I could not bear to imagine in Albertine was my own unceasing desire to attract new women, to sketch out new novels in which they would figure; it was the thought of her casting her eye, as I had not been able to restrain myself from doing the other day, even when seated beside her, at the young girl cyclists sitting at the tables in the Bois de Boulogne. Just as one can know only oneself, one could almost say that one can be jealous only of oneself. Observation is of little use. Only from one's own pleasure can one derive both knowledge and pain.

At some moments, in Albertine's eyes, in the sudden flush that lit up her complexion, I felt something like a flash of warmth pass surreptitiously through regions more inaccessible to me than the heavens: the regions where her memories moved, memories unknown to me. Then the beauty which, when I thought of the successive years in which I had known Albertine, either on the beach at Balbec or here in Paris, I now found in her, and which was due to the fact that my friend now existed for me on so many different planes and contained in herself so many out-of-reach days, this beauty now seemed almost unbearably painful. Then behind her rosy, blushing face I felt a great gulf opening up, the inexhaustible space of the evenings when I had not known Albertine. I could take Albertine on my knees, hold her head in my hands, I could stroke her, run my hands all over her, but, just as if I had been handling a stone enclosing the salt of immemorial oceans or the light of a star, I felt that I was touching only the closed outer casing of a being which on the inside was in touch with the infinite. How I suffered from the position in which careless Nature placed us, when it instituted the separation of bodies from each other, and forgot to provide for the interpenetration of souls! And I realized that Albertine was not, even for me (for if her body was in the power of my body, her thought constantly escaped from my thought's grasp), the wonderful captive with whom I had thought to enrich my dwelling, while concealing her presence there, even from those who came to visit me and did not suspect her presence at the end of the corridor in a nearby room, as perfectly as did the character in the story, of whom no one suspected that he had the Princess of China shut up in a bottle;[93] no, by setting me to the pressing, cruel and endless task of unearthing the past she became something more like a great goddess of Time. And though I may have wasted years of my life and much of my fortune on her, provided I can say, though nothing is less certain, alas, that she herself lost nothing by it, then I need have no regrets. Certainly a solitary life would have been better for me, more productive and less painful. But the collector's life which Swann urged on me, which M. de Charlus reproached me with neglecting, when with a mixture of wit, insolence and taste he said, 'How ugly your house is!', what statues, what pictures long pursued and finally possessed, or even, at best, disinterestedly contemplated, could have given me, as did the little wound which was quite quick to heal, but which was soon opened again by the unthinking clumsiness of Albertine, of outsiders, or of my own thoughts, access to that way out of oneself, that private path which however links up with the high road where everything passes that we begin to know only from the day when we have first suffered by it: the life of others?

Sometimes the moonlight was so beautiful that barely an hour after Albertine had gone to bed I would go to her bedside to ask her to look out of the window. I am sure that was what made me go to her bedroom, not any wish to make sure that she was actually in it. How likely was it that she could have escaped, or would have wished to do so? It would have required a most unlikely collusion with Françoise. In the dark room I could see nothing but a frail diadem of black hair on the whiteness of the pillow. But I could hear Albertine's breathing. She was sleeping so deeply that I hesitated to go up to her bed; I sat on the edge of it; her sleep flowed on with the same gentle murmur. What is impossible to describe is the gaiety of her awakening. I would kiss her, shake her. Suddenly she would be awake, but without a moment's transition she would burst out laughing, wind her arms round my neck and say, 'I was just wondering if you would come,' and laugh affectionately all the more. You would have said that her lovely head, as she slept, was full of nothing but gaiety, tenderness and laughter. And waking her had been simply like opening a ripe fruit, sending the thirst-quenching juice spurting into one's mouth.

Meanwhile winter was coming to an end; the fine weather returned, and often, soon after Albertine had said good-night to me, when my room, my curtains, the wall above the curtains were still in pitch darkness, in the nearby convent garden I could hear, rich and precise in the silence as the sound of a church harmonium, the modulations of an unknown bird singing matins in the Lydian mode, and sounding in my darkness the rich, brilliant note of the sun he could already see. Soon the nights shortened, and before what used to be the hours of morning, I could already see encroaching upon my window-curtains the steadily growing whiteness of the day. If I resigned myself to letting Albertine go on living this life in which, despite her denials, I knew she felt herself to be a prisoner, it was only because every day I was sure that the next day I should be able to begin work and at the same time start getting up, going out, preparing for our departure to some country house which we should buy, where Albertine would be more free to live the country or seaside life, sailing or hunting, which she would enjoy.

However, the next day, that past time which I alternately loved and hated in Albertine (just as, when it is the present, each of us out of self-interest, or politeness, or pity, works at spinning a web of lies between it and ourselves, lies which we take for truth) came back: it would happen that, in retrospect, one of the hours which made it up, and even one of those that I had thought I knew all about, was suddenly presented to me in a new aspect which she did nothing to

conceal, and which was quite different from the one under which it had originally appeared. Behind a certain look, instead of the kind thought which I had imagined I saw at the time, a hitherto unsuspected desire was revealed, alienating from me another part of Albertine's heart, which I had thought completely attuned to mine. For example, when Andrée had left Balbec in the month of July, Albertine had never told me that she expected to see her again soon; and I thought that they had met again even sooner than Albertine expected, since, because of my great sadness on the night of the fourteenth of September, she had left Balbec for my sake and come straight back to Paris. When she had arrived, on the fifteenth, I had suggested she go and see Andrée and had asked her, 'Was she pleased to see you again?' Now Mme Bontemps called to bring something or other for Albertine, I spoke to her for a moment and said that Albertine had gone out with Andrée. 'They've gone to the country. – Yes, Mme Bontemps replied, Albertine is easy to please where the country is concerned. Three years ago, nothing would do but she must go every day to the Buttes-Chaumont.' At this mention of the Buttes-Chaumont, where Albertine had told me she had never been, my breathing stopped for a moment. Reality is the cleverest of our enemies. It directs its attacks at those points in our heart where we were not expecting them, and where we had prepared no defence. Had Albertine been lying to her aunt then, when she said every day that she was going to the Buttes-Chaumont, or to me when she said that she had never been there? 'Fortunately, Mme Bontemps continued, poor Andrée will soon be leaving for a healthier part of the countryside, for real country, she needs it, she looks so poorly. It's true that last summer she didn't get all the fresh air she needs. Remember, she left Balbec at the end of July expecting to come back in September, then her brother put his knee out and she couldn't come back.' So Albertine had been expecting her back in Balbec and had not told me! It is true that that made her suggestion of coming back all the kinder. Unless … 'Yes, I remember Albertine telling me about it … (this was untrue). When was it the accident happened? I've got it all a bit mixed up. – Well, in one sense it happened just at the right moment, for one day later their lease on the villa would have started, and Andrée's grandmother would have had to pay a month's rent for nothing. He broke his leg on the fourteenth of September, she managed to wire Albertine on the morning of the fifteenth to say that she wasn't coming, and Albertine sent word to the agency. One more day, and they'd have had to pay up to the fifteenth of October.' In other words, when Albertine changed her mind and said, 'Let's leave this evening,' she had in her mind's eye a place which I had never seen, Andrée's grandmother's flat, where, as soon as we got back, she would be able to meet her friend again, the friend whom, unknown to me, she had been expecting to see again soon at Balbec. I had tried to explain the kind words with which she agreed to come back with me, which so contrasted with her stubborn refusal shortly before, by thinking that her kind heart was reasserting itself. They were simply the reflection of a change in a situation of which we are unaware, which is the whole secret of a change in the conduct of women who do not love us. They obstinately refuse to see us tomorrow, because they are tired, because their grandfather is insisting that they dine with him. 'But come round afterwards,' we insist. 'He always keeps me very late. Perhaps he'll take me home.' It is simple: they have arranged to meet someone they like better. Suddenly he is not available. And they come and tell us how sorry they are to have hurt our feelings, they have put off their grandfather and will spend the evening with us: there is nothing they want to do more. I should have recognized these phrases in Albertine's language to me the day I left Balbec. But perhaps they are not all I should have recognized: to interpret her language correctly, I should have remembered two particular traits of Albertine's character.

Two traits of Albertine's character came back to me at that moment, one to comfort and the other to appal me, for we can find everything in our memory: it is a kind of pharmacy or chemical laboratory, where one's hand may fall at any moment on a sedative drug or a dangerous poison. The first trait, the comforting one, was her habit of using a single action to give pleasure to more than one person: this use of her actions for multiple purposes was characteristic of Albertine. It was very like her to return to Paris (the fact that Andrée would not be coming back to Balbec could have made it inconvenient for her to stay there, without its being necessarily true that she could not live without Andrée), and then to see in this single journey the chance of touching the hearts of two people both of whom she sincerely loved: me, by making me think her purpose was not to leave me alone, to spare me suffering, out of devotion to me, and Andrée, by persuading her that since she would now not be returning to Balbec, Albertine did not want to stay there a moment longer, having stayed on only in the hope of seeing her, and was now rushing back to her side. Now, Albertine's departure with me in fact followed so closely both upon my unhappiness and wish to return to Paris, and on Andrée's telegram, that it was quite natural that both Andrée and I, knowing nothing, she of my sadness and I of her telegram, should have thought that Albertine's decision to leave was caused by the only factor that each of us was aware of, and upon which it followed so immediately and so unexpectedly. If this were true, I could still believe that Albertine's real object had been to come with me, but that she had not wished to lose the opportunity of making Andrée feel grateful to her. But unfortunately I also remembered at almost the same time another trait of Albertine's character, which was the alacrity with which she seized upon any opportunity of pleasure. Now I remembered, when she had made her decision to leave, how impatient she had been to reach the train, how she had hurried past the hotel manager, who by trying to speak to us might have made us miss the bus, the conspiratorial shrugs of her shoulders which had so touched me when, in the 'slowcoach', M. de Cambremer asked if we could not wait and leave a week later. Yes, what she saw in her mind's eye at that moment, what made her so desperate to leave, what she could not wait to see again, was an empty flat which I had once seen, belonging to Andrée's grandmother, a luxurious flat left in the keeping of one old valet, full of light, but so empty, so silent that the sun seemed to be putting dust-covers over the sofa, over the armchairs in the bedrooms where Andrée and Albertine would ask the respectful caretaker, näive or perhaps knowing, to let them lie down. I could see it all the time now, empty, with a bed or a sofa, an easily deceived or complaisant guardian, the place where, every time Albertine looked busy and preoccupied, she was going to meet her friend, who would no doubt have arrived before her since she was less supervised. I had never thought before about this flat, which now took on a hideous beauty for me. The unknown element in the lives of human beings is like that of nature, which every new scientific discovery diminishes but does not eliminate. A jealous man exasperates the woman he loves by denying her countless unimportant pleasures. But the pleasures that mean the most to her she hides in places where, even at the moments when he thinks his intelligence is being the most perspicacious, and when other people are keeping him most effectively informed, he never thinks of looking.

But at least, in any case, Albertine was going to leave. But I did not wish her to be able to despise me for having been so easily deceived by herself and Andrée. One day soon I would tell her I knew. And thus perhaps I would force her to speak to me more frankly, by showing her that I knew even about things that she had kept hidden from me. But I did not want to talk to her about it yet, first of all because, so soon after her aunt's visit, she would have realized where my information came from, would have shut off that source and had no need to fear unknown ones. Then because I did not wish to take the risk, before I was perfectly certain of being able to keep Albertine as long as I wanted, of making her so angry that she would want to leave me. It is true that if I reasoned, sought the truth and foretold the future according to her own words, which always expressed agreement with everything I planned to do, told me how much she loved this life, how little hardship her confinement imposed on her, I could not doubt that she would stay with me for ever. I even found the idea highly tiresome, I felt life and the world which I had never explored slipping away from me, exchanged for a woman in whom I could no longer find anything new. I could not even go to Venice where, while I was in bed, I would be tortured by the thought of the advances the gondolier might be making to her, or the people in the hotel, or the Venetian women. But if I based my reasoning on the other hypothesis, the one which was supported not by Albertine's words, but by silences, looks, blushes, sulks and even fits of anger which I could easily have shown her were groundless but which I preferred to seem not to have noticed, then I said to myself that she found this life intolerable, that at every moment she found herself deprived of what she loved, and that inevitably she would leave me one day. All I wanted, if she was to do so, was to be able to choose the moment, one when it would not cause me too much pain, and at a time of year when she would not be able to go to any of the places where I imagined her misconduct occurring, not to Amsterdam, nor to Andrée's, nor to Mlle Vinteuil's, even though it is true she would be able to see them all again a few months later. But by then I should have regained my self-control and it would all have become a matter of indifference to me. In any case, before thinking of separation I should have to wait for the little relapse to pass which I had suffered on learning why Albertine, at a few hours' interval, had first not wanted to leave Balbec and then to leave it at once; I had to leave time for the disappearance of the symptoms which could only fade from now on, provided I did not learn anything else new, but which were still too acute not to add pain and difficulty to the operation I now saw was inevitable, but which was

not yet urgent and would be much better carried out after a suitable interval. I should be able to choose the moment; for if she wanted to leave before I thought it right, when she told me she had had enough of this life, it would be time enough to think of countering her reasons, to give her more freedom, to promise her some treat in the near future which she herself would want to wait for, or even, if I had to have recourse to her feelings, to admit my own unhappiness. I had nothing to worry about from that point of view, though I was not being very logical in my thinking. For, following a chain of reasoning in which I chose not to pay any attention to the things she was saying and of which she was warning me, I assumed that, when she had decided to leave, she would tell me her reasons for doing so and would allow me to answer and overcome them.

I could feel that my life with Albertine was nothing but, on the one hand, when I was not jealous, boredom, and on the other, when I was, suffering. Even supposing it contained happiness, that could not last. In the same spirit of wisdom which inspired me at Balbec, the night we were so happy after Mme de Cambremer's visit, I wanted to leave her because I knew that in the long run things could never be better. However, even now, I imagined that the memory I should keep of her would be like a kind of vibrating echo, held by a pedal, of the last moment of our separation. So I wanted to choose a gentle moment, so that that would be the one to go on echoing in me. I must not be too difficult, not wait too long. I had to be wise. And yet, having waited so long, it would be crazy not to make myself wait a few days longer, until the acceptable moment came, rather than see her go with that angry feeling that I had had in the past when Mama left my bedside without saying a second good-night, or when she said good-bye to me at the station. I lavished more and more presents on her. Among the Fortuny dresses, we had finally decided on a blue and gold one lined with pink, which they had just finished making. And I had also ordered the other five which she had reluctantly rejected in favour of that one.

Still, at the beginning of spring, when two months had passed since her aunt's revelation, I let myself be carried away by anger one evening. It was the very evening when Albertine had put on the blue and gold Fortuny dress for the first time; calling up images of Venice, it made me even more conscious of everything I was giving up for Albertine, who was not in the least grateful for my sacrifice. I had never seen Venice, but I had been dreaming of it constantly, ever since the Easter holiday I had been supposed to spend there as a child, and even before that, since Swann had given me the engravings of Giorgione and photographs of Giotto at Combray. The Fortuny dress that Albertine was wearing that evening seemed to me like the tempting shadow of that invisible Venice. It was overrun with Arabic ornament like Venice, like the Venetian palazzi hiding like sultanesses behind a pierced veil of stone, like the bindings of the Ambrosiana library, like the columns whose oriental birds, signifying both life and death, were repeated in the shimmering of the fabric, of a dark blue which as I watched turned into malleable gold, by the same transmutations which, ahead of the advancing gondola, turn the azure of the Grand Canal into flaming metal. And the sleeves were lined with a cherry pink which is so characteristically Venetian that it is called Tiepolo pink.

Earlier in the day, Françoise had let slip in my hearing that Albertine was not happy with anything, that when I let her know that I would be going out with her, or that I would not, that the car would be coming to collect her, or that it would not, she almost shrugged her shoulders and her reply was barely polite. That evening, when I felt that she was in a bad mood and the first really hot day had made me edgy, I could not control my anger and reproached her with her ingratitude: 'Yes, you can ask anyone, I cried at the top of my voice, ask Françoise, they all say the same.' But I immediately remembered Albertine saying once how frightening she found me when I was angry, and how she had applied the lines of *Esther* to me:

> Jugez combien ce front irrité contre moi
> Dans mon âme troublée a dû jeter d'émoi …
> Hélas! sans frissonner quel cœur audacieux
> Soutiendrait les éclairs qui partent de vos yeux?[94]

I felt ashamed of my violence. And to reverse the effect of my action, without its seeming a defeat, so that my peace should be an armed peace leaving her something to fear, and because it seemed to me useful to show that I did not fear a separation, and thus to prevent her from thinking of one: 'I'm sorry, Albertine dear, I'm ashamed to be so violent, it really makes me despair. If we cannot get on together any more, if we have to leave each other, it mustn't be like this, this is unworthy of us. We shall separate if we must, but first of all I must humbly ask your forgiveness, with all my heart.' I thought that to put things right, and to make sure that she intended to stay for the next period, at least until Andrée had left, which would be in three weeks' time, it would be a good idea to begin the next day to plan some greater-than-usual treat for her, to happen quite some time in the future; so, since I was going to wipe out the offence I had just given her, maybe this would be the moment to show that I knew more of her life than she realized. Her displeasure would be wiped out the next day by my kindness, but the warning would remain in her mind. 'Yes, dear little Albertine, forgive me if I have been violent. But I am not quite so guilty as you think. There are unkind people who are trying to come between us, I've never wanted to talk to you about it so as not to hurt you, and I was finally too upset by some of their wicked stories.' And, intending to make the most of my ability to show that I knew the story behind her departure from Balbec: 'For example, you did know that Mlle Vinteuil was supposed to be coming to Mme Verdurin's the afternoon you went to the Trocadéro.' She blushed. 'Yes, I did. – But can you swear to me that you weren't meaning to start up your relationship with her again? – Of course I can. And anyway, what do you mean, "start again"? I never had any relationship with her, I swear it.' I hated to hear Albertine lying to me like this, denying the obvious truth which her blushing had only too clearly confirmed. Her deviousness appalled me. And yet, as her words contained a protestation of innocence which I was unconsciously ready to accept, they hurt me less than her sincerity when I asked her, 'Can you at least swear to me that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again had nothing to do with your wish to go to the Verdurins' party?', and she replied, 'No, I can't swear that. I was pleased at the thought of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again.' A second before, I had been angry with her for trying to hide her relationship with Mlle Vinteuil, and now her admission of pleasure at the thought of seeing her was like a hammer-blow. Certainly when Albertine had said to me, as I arrived back from the Verdurins', 'Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there?' she had brought back all my pain by proving to me that she had known of it. But no doubt I had explained the whole thing to myself afterwards, saying, 'She knew she was coming and didn't take any pleasure in the idea, but since she must have worked out afterwards that it was her telling me that she knew someone with such a bad reputation as Mlle Vinteuil that had so upset me at Balbec that I even thought of suicide, she preferred not to mention it to me.' But now I had forced her to admit that she had been pleased at the thought of seeing her. Anyhow, her mysterious determination to go to the Verdurins' should have been proof enough. But I had not given it enough thought at the time. So even though I was now saying to myself, 'Why does she tell me only half the truth? It's not just nasty and sad, it's stupid,' I was so crushed that I had not the strength to insist on this point, where I knew I could not give a good account of myself, having no incriminating document to produce, and to regain the upper hand I quickly moved on to the subject of Andrée, which I knew would allow me to rout Albertine, using the crushing revelation of Andrée's telegram. 'And another thing, I said, people keep on telling me about your affairs with other girls, I can't bear it: this time it's about Andrée. – Andrée? she cried, her face reddening with irritation. Her eyes were wide with astonishment, or the wish to seem astonished. *Charm*ing! And may one know who is telling you these delightful stories? Could I have a word with these kind people? And know where they get their filthy suggestions from? – Albertine, darling, I don't know, they're anonymous letters, but you might be able to guess who they are from (this to show that I did not care if she tried to find out) for they must know you quite well. I will admit that the last one annoyed me (and I'm mentioning that one because it's about something quite trivial and it's not too unpleasant to quote). It said that on the day we left Balbec, the reason why you first wanted to stay and then to leave was that in the intervening time you'd had a letter from Andrée to say that she wasn't coming back. – Of course Andrée wrote to say she wasn't coming back, she even sent me a telegram, I can't show it to you because I didn't keep it, but it wasn't that day, and even if it had been, why should I care whether Andrée was coming to Balbec or not?' 'Why should I care' was a sign of anger, and showed that she did care; but not necessarily a proof that Albertine had come back simply because she wanted to see Andrée. Every time that Albertine saw one of the real or alleged motives of her actions uncovered by a person to whom she had given a different reason, it made her angry, even if the person was the one for whose benefit she had really

carried out the action. Did Albertine believe that this information about her doings was not sent to me by anonymous informants against my will, but eagerly sought out by me? One could not have guessed it from the words she now spoke to me, in which she appeared to accept my story about anonymous letters, but it was apparent from the angry looks she turned upon me, an anger which seemed to be merely the boiling-over of her previous ill-temper, just as the spying in which, if I was right, she thought I had engaged would have been only the logical consequence of a watch I kept over all her actions, of which she could not have failed to be aware for a long time now. Her anger extended even to Andrée, and no doubt realizing that I would no longer trust her to go out even with her friend, she cried, 'Anyhow, I'm fed up with Andrée. She's a complete bore. She's supposed to be coming back tomorrow, but I don't want to go out with her any more. So you can tell that to the people who said I'd come back to Paris just for her. Good Lord, after all the years I've known Andrée I couldn't even tell you what she looks like, I've never taken time to look at her!' Now the first year at Balbec, she had said to me, 'Andrée looks so lovely.' It is true that did not prove she had had sexual relations with her, and also true that I never heard her speak without indignation at the time of girls who did have such relations. But could she not have changed, even without realizing she had changed, not believing that her little games with a friend were the same thing as immoral relations, of which she had only a vague idea when she condemned them in others? Was that not possible, since the same change, and the same unconsciousness of change, had occurred in her relations with me, when at Balbec she had rejected my kisses with such indignation and later had offered me kisses herself every day, the same kisses which, I hoped, she would long continue to give me, which she would be giving me again in a moment? 'But darling, how can I tell them when I don't know who they are?' This answer was so convincing that it should have dissolved the objections and doubts that I saw suspended like crystals in Albertine's eyes. But they did not touch them; I had fallen silent, and still she was looking at me with the continuing attention one gives to someone who has not finished speaking. I asked her forgiveness again, and she answered that she had nothing to forgive me for. She had become very gentle once more. But behind her sad, wan face it seemed to me that a secret had formed. I knew that she could not leave me without warning; she could not wish to (it was only a week till she was to try on the second set of Fortuny dresses), nor could she decently do so, since my mother and her aunt were coming back at the end of the week. Why, since it was impossible for her to leave, did I tell her repeatedly that we would go out together the next day to look at some Venetian glass that I wanted to give her, and why was I relieved to hear her say it was agreed? When she came to say good-night to me and I kissed her, she did not do as she usually did but turned her head away and – this was only moments after I had been thinking how sweet it was that she should give me every night what she had refused me at Balbec – did not return my kiss. It seemed as if, angry with me, she would not give me a sign of affection which I could have later have seen as dishonest, inconsistent with her anger. She seemed to be matching her actions to the quarrel between us, but gently, either so as not to spell it out, or because, despite breaking off carnal relations with me, she wished still to be my friend. So I kissed her again, clasping to my breast the glittering azure and gold of the Grand Canal and the paired birds, symbols of death and resurrection. But once again, instead of returning my kiss, she drew away with the kind of instinctive, sinister stubbornness of animals that feel death upon them. This premonition to which she seemed to be giving expression affected me as well and filled me with such fearful anxiety that when Albertine reached the door I did not dare let her leave and called her back to me. 'Albertine, I said, I'm not tired at all. If you don't feel like sleeping either, you might stay a little longer if you like, but there's no need and I really don't want to tire you.' I felt that if I could have got her to undress and seen her in her white night-gown in which she seemed so much pinker, warmer, more exciting to my senses, our reconciliation would have been more complete. But I hesitated for a moment, for the blue edge of the dress gave her face a beauty, a brightness, a heavenly quality without which she would have seemed to me harsher. She came back slowly and said very gently, still with the same sad, downcast face, 'I can stay as long as you like, I'm not sleepy.' Her answer comforted me for, so long as she was there, I felt that I could take thought for the future, and there was friendliness in it too, and obedience, but of a particular kind, which seemed to me to have limits set to it by the secret I could sense behind her sad look and her new manner, which she had changed half-reluctantly and half, no doubt, in order to bring it into line with something as yet unknown to me. I felt all the same that if only I could see her before me all in white, with her neck bare, as I had seen her in her bed in Balbec, it would give me the courage to make her yield to me. 'Since you're being so nice and staying to keep me company, you should take your dress off, it's too warm, too stiff, I don't dare go near you for fear of crushing that lovely velvet and there are those solemn birds in between us. Do take your clothes off, dear. – No. I can't undo this dress properly here. I'll get undressed in my room in a minute. – Then won't you even sit on my bed? – Yes, of course.' But she stayed at a distance, near my feet. We talked. Suddenly we heard the regular cadence of a plaintive call. It was the pigeons beginning to coo. 'You see, it's daylight already,' said Albertine; and almost frowning, as if living with me deprived her of the pleasures of the new season, 'Spring must be here, if the pigeons have come back.' The resemblance between their cooing and the cock's crow was as profound and as obscure as, in Vinteuil's septet, the likeness between the theme of the *adagio* and the first and last movements, which share the same key phrase, but so transformed by the differences in tone colour, rhythm and so on that the uninitiated reader, if he opens a book on Vinteuil, is astonished to learn that they are all three built on the same four notes, which he can indeed pick out with one finger on the piano without hearing anything resembling the three pieces. In the same way, the melancholy piece executed by the pigeons was a sort of cockcrow in the minor mode, which did not rise towards the heavens, did not soar vertically, but, regular as a donkey's braying, wrapped in gentleness, went from one pigeon to another along the same horizontal line, and never looked upwards, never changed its level complaint into the joyous call that had sounded out so often in the *allegro* of the introduction and the *finale*. I know it was then that I spoke the word 'death', as if Albertine were going to die. It seems that events extend further than the moments in which they happen, and cannot be completely contained within them. Certainly, they spill over into the future through the memories we retain of them, but they also demand space in the time that precedes them. Certainly you will say that at that time we do not see them as they will actually be, but are they not also changed in our memory of them?

When I saw that she made no move to kiss me, I realized that all this was a waste of time and that the true, soothing minutes would begin only when she had, so I said, 'Good-night, it's far too late,' because that would make her kiss me and we could begin from there. But, saying 'Good-night, try to sleep,' exactly as she had done the two previous times, she offered me only a kiss on the cheek. This time I did not dare call her back. But my heart was beating so fast that I could not go back to bed. Like a bird hopping from one end of its cage to the other, I kept coming and going between the fear that Albertine might leave me and a relative calm. This calm was produced by an argument that I ran through several times a minute: 'Anyway, she can't leave without telling me, and she hasn't said anything about leaving,' and I was almost reassured. But I immediately said to myself again, 'But suppose tomorrow I found her gone! If I am so anxious, it must be for a reason; why wouldn't she kiss me?' Then my heart pained me dreadfully. Then it was relieved to some extent by the argument which I began again, but I always ended up with a headache, because this toing and froing of my thoughts was so unending and so repetitive. There are certain psychological states, notably anxiety, which, presenting us in this way with only two alternatives, have something of the appallingly limited character of straightforward physical pain. I kept going over the arguments which justified my anxiety and those which countered it and reassured me, in as constricted a space as the one in which a sufferer continually touches, by an inner movement, the organ which is causing him pain, drawing away for a moment from the tender spot only to return to it a moment later. Suddenly, in the silence of the night, I was struck by an apparently insignificant noise, which none the less filled me with terror: the sound of Albertine's window being violently thrown open. When no other sound followed, I asked myself why the noise had so alarmed me. By itself, there was nothing out of the ordinary in it by itself; but I was probably ascribing two meanings to it, each equally terrifying for me. First, it was one of the conventions of our life together that, as I dreaded draughts, no windows were ever opened at night. This had been explained to Albertine when she came to live in the house, and even though she was convinced that this was an irrational obsession on my part, and an unhealthy one, she had promised me never to infringe the prohibition. And she was so fearful of going against my wishes in anything, even if she did not agree with them, that I knew she would have slept in the fumes of a smoking fire rather than open her window, just as even the most important happening would not have led her to have me wakened in the morning. This was just one of our little agreements, but now that she had broken this one without asking me first, did it not mean that she had thrown caution to the winds, and would be equally ready to break them all? And then the noise had been violent, almost rude, as if she had been flushed with anger as she threw the window open, saying, 'I'm suffocating here, I don't care, I must have some air!' I did not spell all this out to myself, but I kept recalling, like an omen even more mysterious and sinister than an owl's cry, the sound of Albertine opening her window. More agitated than perhaps I had ever been since the night when Swann dined with us at Combray, I walked up and down the

corridor all night hoping that the noise I made would attract Albertine's attention, that she would take pity on me and call out to me, but I heard no sound from her room. At Combray I had begged my mother to come to me. But with my mother I feared only her anger, I knew I could not reduce her affection for me by showing her mine. This thought made me reluctant to call Albertine. Gradually I realized that it really was too late. She must have been asleep for hours. I went back to bed. The next day, as soon as I woke, since no one ever came into my room unless I had called for them, I rang for Françoise. At the same time I thought, 'I'll speak to Albertine about a yacht I want to have built for her.' Taking my letters, I said to Françoise without looking at her, 'I want to talk to Miss Albertine about something presently; is she up? – Yes, she got up early.' I felt something like a wind rising within me, a thousand anxieties which I had not known I kept suspended within my bosom. Their tumult was so great it left me breathless, as if in a storm. 'Ah? But where is she now? – I expect she's in her room. – Ah! well then, I shall see her in a moment.' I breathed again, she was there, my agitation receded, Albertine was here, I hardly cared whether she were here or not. Anyhow, had it not been ridiculous to imagine that she might not be? I went back to sleep, but in spite of my conviction that she would not leave me my sleep was easily disturbed, though only by anything connected with her. As for sounds which might relate to building work going on in the courtyard, I might hear them vaguely as I slept, but I was not moved, while the slightest whisper from her room, or the sounds she made going out or coming back, pressing on the bell so gently, made me jump, ran right through me, left my heart pounding, even though I heard them in a deep slumber, just as my grandmother in the last days before her death, when she was sunk in an immobile state from which nothing could rouse her and which doctors call coma, still began to tremble like a leaf for a moment, so I have been told, when she heard the three rings of the bell with which I used to summon Françoise and which, even though I made them quieter that week so as not to disturb the death-chamber, no one, so Françoise assured me, could have confused, such was the personal way I had, unknown to myself, of touching the bell-push, with anyone else's way of ringing. Was I now too in my death agony? Was I going to die?

That day and the next we went out together, since Albertine did not want to go out with Andrée any more. I did not say anything more about the yacht, these outings were enough to restore me to complete calm. But she was still giving me my bedtime kiss in the new way, which enraged me. All I could see in it was a sign of stand-offishness, which seemed to me absurd given all the things I was doing to please her. So, no longer receiving from her even the physical pleasures that I valued, finding her ugly in her continuing ill-humour, I felt all the more strongly my deprivation of all the women and all the journeys the desire for which was revived in me by the first fine days. Thanks no doubt to scattered memories of meetings with women that I had had while still at school, under the now thickening foliage, this region of spring where our journey through the seasons had now been halted for three days, under a clement sky, this region all of whose paths seemed to lead away towards lunches in the country, boating parties, pleasure excursions, seemed to me the land of women as much as of trees, and one where pleasure, everywhere on offer, could be permitted to my returning strength. Resignation to laziness, resignation to chastity, to knowing pleasure only with a woman I did not love, resignation to staying in my room, to not travelling, all these were possible in the old world where we had been only the day before, in the empty world of winter, but were no longer so in this new, leafy universe where I had awakened like a young Adam faced for the first time with the questions of existence, of happiness, and not weighed down by the accumulation of earlier, negative answers. I found Albertine's presence burdensome, I looked at her, gentle and depressed, and I felt it a mistake that we should not have separated. I wanted to go to Venice, and in the meantime I wanted to go to the Louvre to look at Venetian paintings, and to the Luxembourg to see the two Elstirs which I had just heard that the Princesse de Guermantes had sold to the museum, the ones that I had so admired at the Duchesse de Guermantes's house, the *Pleasures of the Dance* and the *Portrait of the X Family*. But I feared that in the first of these certain lascivious poses might remind Albertine of popular festivities, and set her to longing for them, making her say to herself that a certain life she had never led, a life of firework displays and open-air dance-halls, perhaps had something to recommend it. I was already fearful that on the fourteenth of July she would want to go to a street party and I dreamed of unlikely occurrences that might put paid to this festival. And then again in the Elstirs there were nude female figures in bosky Mediterranean landscapes that might make Albertine's thoughts turn to certain pleasures, even though Elstir – but would she not cheapen his work? – was thinking only of sculptural values when he painted them, the white, monumental beauty that women's bodies take on when seated amid greenery. So I resigned myself to giving up all that, and proposed a visit to Versailles. Albertine, who had refused to go out with Andrée, was sitting in her room reading, wrapped in a Fortuny dressing-gown. I asked her if she wanted to come to Versailles with me. She had the charming characteristic of always being ready to do anything, perhaps because of the way she had formerly spent half her time living in other people's houses, as was shown by the way she had decided in two minutes to come with us to Paris. She said, 'I can come like this provided we don't get out of the carriage.' She hesitated for a moment between two Fortuny cloaks to cover up her dressing-gown – as she might have done between two friends to take with her – took a dark blue one, quite beautiful, pinned on a hat. In a moment she was ready, before I could put my overcoat on, and we went to Versailles. This very speed, this utter docility reassured me, as if, without having any precise reason to be anxious, I had needed reassurance. 'You see, I've nothing to fear. She does everything I ask, despite the noise of the window the other night. As soon as I mentioned going out, she threw that blue cloak over her dressing-gown and she came, now that's not what somebody who was feeling rebellious would have done, somebody who didn't feel happy with me,' I said to myself as we travelled towards Versailles. We spent a long time there; the whole sky was filled with that radiant, palish blue that the walker lying in a field sometimes sees over his head, but so uniform, so deep that one feels that the blue of which it is made was used without any admixture and with such inexhaustible richness that one could delve deeper and deeper into its substance without finding an atom of anything but that same blue. I thought of my grandmother, who loved, both in human art and in nature, greatness, and who loved to see the steeple of Saint-Hilaire rise up against that same blue. Suddenly I felt once more a longing for my lost freedom when I heard a sound which I did not recognize at first and which my grandmother would also have loved. It was like the buzzing of a wasp. 'Look, said Albertine, there's an aeroplane, it's high, high up.' I looked all around me but, like the walker lying in a field, I could see nothing but the intact paleness of the unmixed blue, with not so much as a speck of black in it. I could still hear, however, the buzzing of the wings, which suddenly entered my field of vision. Up there, tiny, gleaming brown wings were puckering the blue expanse of the unchanging sky, I could finally attach the buzzing to its cause, the little insect throbbing up there, no doubt two thousand metres above us, I could see it making its noise. Perhaps, when distances on earth had not been shortened by speed as they have now been for a long time, the whistle of a train passing two kilometres away may have had the beauty which, for a few more years, will move us in the buzzing of an aeroplane at two thousand metres, at the thought that the distances covered in that vertical journey are the same as on the ground, that in this new direction where distances seem different to us because we thought we should never be able to go there, an aeroplane at two thousand metres is no further away than a train at two kilometres, indeed is nearer, since the same distance is to be covered in a more transparent medium, with no separation between the traveller and his point of departure, just as at sea or on an open plain, in calm weather, the wake of a faraway ship or the mere breath of a zephyr can draw lines across the ocean of waves or of corn.

I felt like having tea. We stopped at a large cake-shop almost on the edge of the town, which was quite fashionable at the time. A lady was coming out and asking the proprietress for her things. Albertine looked several times at the cake-shop owner as if to attract her attention as she cleared away plates, cups and little cakes, for it was already late. She would approach me only if I asked for something. And it happened then that, since the owner, who was very tall, was serving standing up and Albertine was sitting next to me, every time Albertine turned a blond gaze upon her to attract her attention she was obliged to turn her pupils upwards all the more sharply as, since the owner was directly opposite us, she could not have recourse to softening the angle of her gaze by its obliquity. She was obliged, without raising her head too much, to raise her eyes to the absurdly high plane on which the tea-shop lady's eyes could meet them. To spare my feelings, Albertine would quickly lower her eyes, and then, when the woman paid no attention to her, start the manoeuvre again. The result was a series of vain, imploring glances raised towards an inaccessible divinity. The woman had only one large table near us left to clear. There, Albertine could simply look sideways. But not once did the tea-shop owner's eyes alight on my friend. I was not surprised, for I knew that the woman, whom I knew very slightly, had lovers, though she was married, and managed to keep her affairs perfectly secret, which greatly surprised me as she was prodigiously stupid. I watched this woman as we finished our tea. Wholly taken up with her tidying, she was almost rude in the way she would not look at Albertine despite my friend's glances at her, which had nothing improper

about them. The other woman kept on tidying, tidying, without raising her eyes for a moment. The putting away of the teaspoons and fruit-knives could have been entrusted, not to this tall, handsome woman but to some labour-saving machine, and one would have seen no greater imperviousness to Albertine's attention, and yet she did not lower her gaze, did not seem abstracted, let her eyes and her attractive physique shine out as usual, attentive only to her work. It is true that if this cake-shop owner had not been an unusually stupid woman (not only was that her reputation, I knew it to be true from my own experience), such detachment could have been a sign of the highest cleverness. And I know that the dullest being, if his desires or his interest are involved, can in this one case, amid the nullity of his stupid life, adapt immediately to the workings of the most complicated social mechanism; all the same, it would have been unduly subtle to imagine such behaviour in a woman as stupid as the cake-shop owner. Her stupidity was making her quite unbelievably rude! She did not once look at Albertine, though she could not have failed to see her. It was not polite to my friend, but in fact I was delighted that Albertine should be taught a lesson in this small way, and see that women would not always pay attention to her. We left the cake-shop, got back into the carriage and were already on the way home, when I suddenly regretted that I had not thought to take the owner on one side and ask her, if the lady who was leaving when we arrived should come back, not to give her my name and address, which the owner must have to hand as I had often ordered cakes from her. I had no wish for the lady to learn Albertine's address by this indirect means. But I thought that going back there would take too long for such a small thing, and would make the matter seem too important in the eyes of the foolish, lying owner. I simply thought that we should have to go for tea there again in a week or so's time to give the message to the owner, and how tiresome it was that one always forgets half of what one means to say, and has to come back several times to do the simplest things.

We came back very late, through the darkness in which, here and there, by the side of the road, the sight of uniform trouser-legs next to a petticoat indicated the presence of loving couples. Our carriage came back through the Porte Maillot. In place of the monuments of Paris we saw a pure, linear two-dimensional drawing of the monuments of Paris, such as might have been made to record the image of a destroyed city; but above them there rose up so sweetly the pale blue border against which they stood out that one's thirsty eyes turned in every direction to try to find out more of that delicious colour that was dispensed to them so grudgingly: the moon was shining. Albertine admired it. I dared not say to her that I would have enjoyed it more if I had been alone, or on my way to find some unknown partner. I repeated lines of poetry to her, or prose phrases about the moonlight, showing how, having once been silvery, it had become blue for Chateaubriand and the Victor Hugo of 'Eviradnus' and 'Theresa's Party', before becoming metallic yellow again for Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle. Then, reminding her of the image of the crescent moon at the end of '*Booz endormi*',[95] I talked to her about the whole poem. I cannot express how much, when I think of it again now, her life was driven by alternating desires, fleeting and often contradictory. No doubt her habit of lying made it even more complicated, for, as she never remembered our conversations exactly, when she said to me, 'Now that was a pretty girl, and a good golfer too,' and I asked her the girl's name, she would reply with that detached, general, superior look which is no doubt always available, since every liar of this type adopts it for a moment every time he does not want to answer a question, and it never fails him: 'Oh, I don't know (seeming to regret not being able to inform me), I never did know it, I used to see her at the golf course but I didn't know what she was called'; if a month later I said to her, 'Albertine, you know that pretty girl you mentioned to me, the one who played golf so well. – Oh, yes, she would answer without thinking, Émilie Daltier, I don't know what became of her.' And the lie, like a mobile fortification, was transferred from defending the name, which had now fallen, to the possibility of tracing the girl. 'Oh, I don't know, I never knew her address. I can't think who might be able to tell you. Oh, no, Andrée didn't know her. She wasn't part of our little gang, and that's broken up now anyway.' At other times the lie was like an ugly admission: 'If only I had three hundred thousand a year …' She bit her lip. 'What, darling? – I'd ask if I could go on living with you, she would say, kissing me. Where else could I be happier?' But even taking her lies into account it was incredible how fragmented her life was, and how transient even her strongest desires. She was mad about someone, and three days later would not even have been at home to her. She could not wait an hour for me to buy her canvases and colours, for she wanted to begin painting again. She fretted for two days, almost weeping soon-to-be-dried tears, like a child who has lost its nurse. And this instability of her feelings in relation to people, to things, to her pursuits, the arts, whole countries, was in truth so universal that, if she did love money, she cannot have loved it more consistently than anything else. When she said 'If only I had three hundred thousand a year', even if she was expressing a mean but transient thought, she could not have held to it any longer than to her desire to go to Les Rochers, of which she had seen a picture in my grandmother's copy of Mme de Sévigné, or to meet an old friend from the golf-course, to go up in an aeroplane, to spend Christmas at her aunt's, or to start painting again.

'You know, neither of us is really hungry, we could have looked in on the Verdurins, she said, it's their at-home day and this is the time. – But I thought you were angry with them. – Oh, people gossip about them but underneath they're not so bad. Mme Verdurin has always been really nice to me. And then, we can't always be quarrelling with everybody. They have their faults, but who hasn't? – You're not dressed, you'd have to go home and dress, we'd be very late. – You're right, let's just go home,' said Albertine with the admirable docility that always astonished me.

The fine weather took another leap forward that night, as a thermometer rises with the heat. When I woke up on those early rising spring mornings, from my bed I could hear the trams moving through the scents in the air, with which the heat would coalesce more and more until it reached the almost solid density of midday. Fresher were the scents of my bedroom, once the smooth air had finished coating and separating the smells of the washbasin, of the wardrobe, of the sofa; the very clarity with which, standing upright, they formed distinct, juxtaposed layers, in a mother-of-pearl semi-darkness which gave a gentler sheen to the gleam of the curtains and the blue satin armchairs, allowed me to see myself, not by a simple quirk of my imagination but because it was really possible, walking through some newly developed part of the suburbs, like the one Bloch lived in at Balbec, following streets blinded with sunlight, and seeing not the dull butchers' shops and white freestone, but the dining-room of a country house where I might presently arrive, and the scents which I should find when I arrived there, the smell of the fruit-bowl of cherries and apricots, of cider, of Gruyère cheese, all suspended in the luminous congelation of shadow which they vein delicately like the depths of an agate, while the cut-glass knife-rests flash rainbows or deposit on the oilcloth table-cover peacock's-feather ocelli.

Like a steadily strengthening wind I heard with joy the sound of a motor-car under my window. I recognized its petrol smell. This smell may seem regrettable to the squeamish (who are always materialists and for whom it spoils the countryside) and to certain thinkers, also materialists in their way, who, believing in the importance of the fact, imagine that man would be happier, capable of a more elevated poetry, if his eyes could see more colours, his nostrils smell more perfumes: a philosophical version of the naïve belief of those who think that life was more beautiful when, instead of dark suits, people wore sumptuous costumes. But for me (just as an aroma, unpleasant in itself, of mothballs and vetiver would have delighted me by restoring to me the pure blue of the sea on the day I arrived at Balbec), this smell of petrol which, with the smoke that was escaping from the machine, had so many times risen into the pale azure sky, on those burning hot days when I went from Saint-Jean-de-la-Haise to Gourville, just as it had followed me on my outings on the afternoons when Albertine was painting, now set to flowering all around me, even though I was in my darkened room, cornflowers, poppies and red clover, it intoxicated me with a scent of the countryside, not circumscribed and precise, like the one which is affixed in front of hawthorns and, held there by its rich, heavy elements, floats without moving much in front of the hedge, but a scent at the appearance of which roads receded in front of me, the look of the ground changed, châteaux appeared from nowhere, the sky turned paler, my strength grew tenfold; this was a scent which seemed to symbolize leaping forward, power, and which renewed the desire I had felt at Balbec to get into the cage of glass and steel, not this time to go and pay visits in familiar houses with a woman I already knew too well, but to go and make love in new places with a woman I did not know at all. A scent which was always accompanied by the sound of passing motor horns, to which I added words as if to a bugle-call: 'Parisian, get up, get up,[96] come and have lunch in the country and go boating on the river, in the shade under the trees, with a pretty girl, get up, get up.' And I enjoyed all these daydreams so much that I congratulated myself on the 'stern decree' which meant that, until I called, no 'timid mortal', whether Françoise or Albertine, would dare to come and disturb me 'in the depths of my palace' where

… une majesté terrible

Affecte à mes sujets de me rendre invisible.[97]

But suddenly the scene changed; it was no longer the memory of old impressions, but of an old longing, recently reawakened in me by the blue and gold Fortuny dress, which spread out before me another spring, not a leafy spring but, on the contrary, one suddenly stripped of all its trees and flowers by the name I had just pronounced to myself: 'Venice', a spring decanted, reduced to its essence, where the lengthening, warming, gradual opening-up of the days is reflected in the progressive fermentation, not of impure earth, but of virgin, blue water, spring-like without blossom, which could respond to the month of May only by its reflections, animated by the month, giving itself perfectly to it in the glittering, fixed nudity of its dark sapphire gleam. And just as the seasons have been unable to change its unflowering channels, modern times have brought no change to the Gothic city; I knew this, I could not imagine it, or rather, when I imagined it that is what I longed for, with the same desire which once, when I was a child, in the very excitement of leaving, had taken from me the strength I needed to make the journey: I wanted to come face to face with my Venetian imaginings, to see how this divided sea held within its coils, like the windings of the river Ocean,[98] an urban, refined civilization which, cut off by azure bands of water, had developed in isolation, had had its own schools of painting and architecture – a fabulous garden of fruits and birds carved in coloured stones, flowering in the middle of the sea which daily refreshed it, lapping with its tides the bases of the columns and casting on the deep-carved capitals watching in the darkness like a sombre blue gaze, patches of ever-moving light. Yes, I had to leave, the time had come. Since Albertine had stopped looking angry with me, possession of her no longer seemed to me one of those goods in exchange for which one is ready to give up all others. Perhaps because doing so would have freed us from a source of unhappiness, an anxiety which now no longer exists. We have managed to break the cloth of the hoop which we thought we should never jump through. We have made the storm clear, brought back smiling serenity. The painful mystery of an unexplained and perhaps unending hatred has been dispelled. Now we find ourselves face to face with the problem we had put on one side, the problem of a happiness we know to be impossible. Now that life with Albertine had become possible again, I could see that it would only ever make me unhappy since she did not love me; better to leave her in the happiness of her acquiescence, which I could prolong in memory. Yes, this was the moment; I should have to find out exactly the date on which Albertine meant to leave Paris, to take decisive steps, working through Mme Bontemps, to make sure that she could not then go to Holland, nor to Montjouvain. If we were better at analysing our love affairs, we might find that often we love the women we do only because of the counterweight of the men against whom we have to compete to win them; remove the counterweight, and the woman's charm will collapse. There is a painful and salutary example of this in some men's predilection for women who, before they knew them, had transgressed, for women whom they feel to be in danger and whom, for as long as their love lasts, they must always be trying to pull back from it; another example, not at all dramatic this time, comes later, when the man, feeling his attraction to the woman he loves waning, applies a new set of rules, and, in order to convince himself that he has not stopped loving her, sets her down in a dangerous milieu where he will have to protect her every day. (The opposite in this of the men who insist that their women give up the stage, when it was only because they were on the stage that they fell in love with them in the first place.)

And now that my departure no longer presented any problems, I must choose a fine spring day like this one – there would be many more – when I should be indifferent to Albertine, and tempted by a thousand other things; I must let her go out without seeing her, then get up, get ready quickly, leave her a note, making the most of the fact that, as she would not at that time be able to go anywhere that would make me uneasy, I might be able, on my journey, not to picture to myself how she might be misbehaving, something which I cared little about at that moment in any case, and, without seeing her again, leave for Venice. I rang for Françoise to ask her to buy me a guide-book and a train time-table, as I had done when I was a child, when I had once before wanted to plan a journey to Venice, in fulfilment of a desire as violent as the one I felt at that moment; I was forgetting that there was another such desire which I had fulfilled without any pleasure at all, the desire for Balbec, and that Venice, being another visible phenomenon, would probably be no more successful than Balbec in realizing an inexpressible dream, the dream of Gothic time made real above a springtime sea, which caressed my mind at every moment with a magical, ungraspable image, mysterious and confused. Françoise, having heard my bell, came in, obviously worried at how I would react to her words and what she had done. She said, 'I wish you hadn't rung so late today, sir. I didn't know what I should do. This morning at eight o'clock Miss Albertine asked me for her boxes, I didn't dare say no, I was afraid you would be angry if I came and woke you. I asked her what she was playing at, I told her to wait another hour because I was sure you would ring, sir, but she wouldn't hear a word, she left me this note for you, sir, and at nine o'clock she was off.' And then – so little does one know what one has inside one, since I was sure I cared nothing for Albertine – my breath stopped, I clutched my heart in both hands, which were wet with a sweat I had not felt since the moment in the little tram when Albertine told me about Mlle Vinteuil's friend, while I could say nothing but 'Very good, Françoise, thank you, you were quite right not to wake me, leave me for a moment, please, I shall ring for you presently.'

BOOK VI
The Fugitive

CHAPTER 1

Grieving and Forgetting

'Miss Albertine has left!' How much more sharply suffering probes the psyche than does psychology! A moment earlier, as I analysed my feelings, I had thought that leaving her, without ever seeing her again, was exactly what I wanted, and comparing the mediocrity of the pleasure which Albertine gave me with the richness of the desires which she prevented me from achieving, I had concluded my subtle heart-searching by finding that I no longer wanted to see her, that I no longer loved her. But these words: 'Mademoiselle Albertine has left' had just caused such pain in my heart that I felt that I could no longer hold out. Thus something which I had thought meant nothing to me, was quite simply my whole life. How little we know ourselves. I must immediately put an end to my suffering; feeling as gentle with myself as my mother had been with my grandmother on her deathbed, I told myself, with all the good will that we lavish on those we love in order to spare them from suffering, 'Be patient just one moment, we'll find a remedy, don't worry, we won't let you suffer like this.' It was in this realm of ideas that my instinct for self-preservation sought the first balm available in order to apply it to the open wound: 'None of this is of any importance, because I shall get her to return straight away. I'll have to think of a way, but in any case she will be here by this evening. Therefore there is no need to worry.' 'None of this is of any importance', I was not content merely to persuade myself of this, but I tried to give Françoise the same impression, by not revealing my torment in her presence, because, even at the moment when I suffered so violently, my love would not let me forget the importance of making it appear to be a mutually happy love affair, above all in the eyes of Françoise, who did not like Albertine and doubted her sincerity. It is true that a moment earlier, before Françoise had appeared, I had thought that I no longer loved Albertine, believing that I had taken everything into account, that I was completely lucid and that I had plumbed the depths of my heart. But however great our intelligence, it cannot conceive all the elements that constitute it and which remain undetected as long as no event capable of isolating them makes them start to solidify out of the volatile state in which they exist for most of the time. I was mistaken when I thought that I saw clearly into my heart. But this knowledge, which the finest insights of my intellect had not given me, had just been brought home to me, as hard, dazzling and strange as crystals of salt, through the sudden stimulus of pain. I had become so accustomed to having Albertine beside me, and now I suddenly saw Habit in a completely new perspective. Until now I had considered it above all as a negative force suppressing the originality and even our awareness of our perceptions; now I saw it as a fearsome goddess, so attached to us, with her inscrutable face so grafted on to our hearts that if she detaches herself and turns away from us, this deity, whose presence we were barely able to discern, inflicts upon us the most terrible suffering, and then she is as cruel as death.

The most urgent thing was to read Albertine's letter, since I needed to consider how to bring her back. I imagined that this was within my grasp, because, since the future exists only in our minds, we think that we are still able to control it by a last-minute act of will-power. But at the same time I remembered that I had seen the future inflected by powers other than mine, against which, even with more time available, I could have done nothing. What does it avail us that the hour has not yet struck, if we can do nothing to prevent what it will bring? As long as Albertine was still living with me, I was determined to maintain the impetus of our separation. But now she had left. I opened Albertine's letter. This is what it said:

'My dear friend, do forgive me for not having dared to say to your face the few words that follow, but I am a coward, I have always been so afraid of facing you that, despite my efforts, I was unable to pluck up the courage to do so. This is what I would have liked to tell you: "Life together has become impossible, besides, you must have realized from your tirade the other evening that something in our relationship had changed. What could have been remedied that evening was to become irreparable over the next few days. It seems better therefore, since we have been fortunate enough to settle our differences, to leave each other on friendly terms"; that is why, my dearest, I am sending you this note, and I beg that you will be kind enough to forgive me for causing you a little grief, when you think of the far greater pain that I shall suffer. My dear old friend, I do not want to become your enemy, I shall already find it difficult enough to see you gradually, but all too swiftly, becoming indifferent towards me; and so since my decision is irrevocable, before asking Françoise to hand you this letter I will already have asked her to bring me my trunk. Farewell, I leave you with the best of me. Albertine.'

All of which means nothing, I told myself, it is even better than I had thought, for since she does not believe a word of all this, she has obviously written it only in order to make a scene, to frighten me, so that I will stop behaving unreasonably towards her. The most urgent thing to do is to make sure that Albertine returns home this evening. How sad to think that the Bontemps are corrupt people, using their niece to extract money from me. But no matter. Were I to offer half of my kingdom to Mme Bontemps in order to have Albertine back here this evening, enough would remain for Albertine and me to live in comfort. And at the same time I was calculating whether I would have time that morning to go out and buy the yacht and the Rolls-Royce that she desired, and, abandoning all hesitation, did not consider for a moment that I had thought it rather unwise to make her this gift. Even if Mme Bontemps's agreement is not sufficient, and Albertine refuses to obey her aunt and stipulates as the condition of her return that she shall henceforth enjoy complete independence, well then, however much sorrow it should cause me, let it be; she may go out unaccompanied, as often as she likes; we have to accept the need to make sacrifices, however painful, in the interest of what we hold most dear, which for me, despite what I believed this morning in the light of my precise and absurd calculations, is that Albertine should live here with me. Should I, however, add that granting her this freedom would have caused me great distress? I would be lying. I had often previously felt that the suffering caused by leaving her free to do wrong far away from me might well be less than the kind of sadness which I sometimes experienced when I sensed her boredom beside me at home. Of course if at any particular moment, when she asked me if she could pay some visit, I would have found the idea of letting her go appalling, imagining a whole programme of orgies. But I had often been tempted to say, 'Take our boat, take the train, go away for a month to some country that I don't know, where I've never been, where I won't know a thing about whatever you do,' because I thought that, once distant from me, she would prefer to be back with me instead, and would be happier when she had returned. Besides, this is surely what she wants: she does not actually demand such freedom, which, I might add, I would easily manage to restrict from day to day by offering her new pleasures every day. No, what Albertine wanted was for me to stop behaving intolerably towards her, and above all – like Odette with Swann in former times – for me to decide to marry her. Once married, she would not worry about her independence; we would be so happy living here together! Of course that would mean giving up any idea of Venice. But how those much-desired cities like Venice – not to mention hostesses like the Duchesse de Guermantes or entertainments like the theatre – tend to pale, fade and die, when we are chained to another heart by a bond so painful that it prevents us from parting! Besides, Albertine is absolutely right on the question of marriage. Even Mama finds all the delay ridiculous. Marrying her was what I should have done ages ago, it's what I must do now, that's what has made her write this letter, not one word of which she believes; it was in order to achieve this that she renounced for a few hours something that she must want as much as I want her to do it: to return home. Yes, that is what she wants, that is her main intention, my reason said compassionately; but I felt, as I argued, that my reason tended to pursue the hypothesis that it had adopted at the outset, while I felt quite clearly that it was the other hypothesis which had constantly been corroborated. Of course, this alternative version would never have made so bold as to overtly formulate the theory that Albertine might have had a relationship with Mlle Vinteuil and her female friend. And yet, when I was overwhelmed with this terrible news just as we were drawing into the station at Incarville, it was the second hypothesis that had been confirmed. This theory had never yet suggested that Albertine might leave me of her own accord, in such a way, without warning and without giving me time to stop her. But even if, after the enormous mental leap that I had been obliged to take, the new reality which I had to face was as surprising as any revealed by a physicist's latest discovery, a prosecutor's fresh enquiry into a crime, or a historian's new insight into some revolution, this new reality went far beyond the half-hearted

premonitions of my alternative hypothesis, and yet helped to prove them right. This alternative hypothesis was not one formulated by the intellect, and the panic which I had experienced on the evening when Albertine had not kissed me, or the night when I had heard her window opening, was not a rational fear. But – as many episodes may already have indicated and what follows will show all the more – the fact that the intellect is not the most subtle, powerful and appropriate instrument for grasping the truth is only one more reason in favour of starting with the intellect rather than with the intuitions of the unconscious or with unquestioning faith in our premonitions. It is life which little by little, case by case, allows us to realize that what is most important for our hearts or our minds is taught us not by reason but by other powers. And then it is the intellect itself, which, recognizing their superiority, uses its reasoning in order to abdicate in their favour and accepts the role of collaborator and servant. It has 'experimental faith'. The unexpected unhappiness which confronted me already felt familiar (as did Albertine's friendship with two lesbians) from having been indicated by so many signs in which (despite my rational arguments using Albertine's own pronouncements in order to prove the opposite) I had detected the tedium and repugnance that she felt at living in this slavish manner, in signs written as it were backwards and in invisible ink, in Albertine's sad and submissive eyes, on those cheeks suddenly inflamed by an unexplained blush, or in the sound of a suddenly opened window! Of course I had never dared analyse them fully enough to formulate the precise image of her sudden departure. My spirits lulled by Albertine's presence, I had envisaged only a departure arranged by me at an indeterminate date, that is, situated in a timeless zone; and consequently had only imagined that I thought of her departure, in the way that many people who think about death when they are in good health imagine that they do not fear it, and in fact do no more than introduce one purely negative notion into the heart of their good health, which would be precisely what the approach of death would alter. Moreover the idea of a parting planned by Albertine herself could have struck my mind a thousand times over, as clearly and unambiguously as you like, without my having any truer realization of what this departure would mean to me, that is, what it would mean in reality – something original, devastating, unknown, an entirely novel evil. Even if I had foreseen this departure, I might have thought of it ceaselessly year after year, without all such thoughts, even if joined together, having the slightest connection either in intensity or in quality with the unimaginable hell that Françoise had allowed me to glimpse when she said, 'Miss Albertine has left.' In order to represent an unknown situation, the imagination borrows elements already known, and for this reason fails to represent it. But our sensibility, even at its most physical, remains scored long afterwards by the original and long-indelible mark of the new event, as the furrow scored by a flash of lightning. And I hardly dared admit to myself that, if I had foreseen this departure, I would perhaps have been incapable of representing it to myself in its true horror, and even if Albertine had announced it to me, and I had threatened and implored her, might have been incapable of preventing her. How far my desire for Venice had now abated! Just as the desire to meet Mme de Guermantes in Combray in days gone by had abated, at those moments when I held but one thing dear, to have Mama in my bedroom. And it was in fact all the worries that I had felt since I was a child that had been solicited by this new source of anxiety and had rushed to reinforce it, amalgamating themselves with it into one homogeneous mass which suffocated me.

Certainly, the physical heartache which such a separation deals and which, through the body's terrible ability to keep records, renders any pain contemporary with all the periods in our lives when we have suffered, – certainly this heartache, perhaps somewhat calculated – so little do we care for the pain of others – by a woman desiring to make us miss her as acutely as possible, whether the woman only pretending to make her departure wishes merely to obtain more favourable conditions, or whether leaving for ever – for ever! – she wants to strike a blow, perhaps from vengeance, perhaps to continue to be loved, or perhaps to preserve the quality of the memory that she will leave, and violently break out of this network of tedium and indifference which she had felt being woven around her, – certainly we had promised each other that we would avoid such heartache, we had said that we would part on good terms. But it is in fact very rare to part on good terms, for if all were well we would not separate. And then again, the woman towards whom we affect the utmost indifference does none the less feel obscurely that, just as we have come to tire of her because of the force of habit, so we have become all the more attached to her, and she guesses that one of the essential requirements for parting on good terms is to warn her partner that she is going to leave. Yet she fears that warning him may prevent her. Every woman feels that, the greater is her power over a man, the more her only way of leaving him is just to take flight. She becomes a fugitive precisely because she was a queen, this is inevitable. Certainly, there is a yawning gap between the tedium which she inspired a moment ago and the furious need, once she has left, to have her back. But there are reasons for this, above and beyond those given in the course of this work and others which will be revealed later. First and foremost, the departure often occurs at a moment when our indifference – real or imagined – is at its greatest, at the farthest extent of the pendulum swing. The woman thinks: 'No, things cannot go on like this,' precisely because the man speaks only, or thinks only, of leaving her. So the pendulum, as it returns to its other extreme, opens the largest gap at this moment. A moment later it will return to its starting-point: once more, despite all the reasons proffered, everything seems so natural! Our heart starts to pound; and besides, the woman who has left is no longer the same as the woman who used to be there. Her life with us, which was too predictable, finds itself suddenly enriched by all those other lives with which she will inevitably become involved, and in order to become involved with which she may have left us. As a result, this new complexity in the life of the woman who has run away has a retrospective impact on the woman who previously lived at our side, and was perhaps premeditating her departure. To the set of psychological facts which we identify as part of our life together, and part of our jealousy too (which imply that men who have been left by several women have nearly all been left each time in the same manner because of their identical and entirely predictable characters and reactions: each has his own manner of being betrayed, as he does of catching cold), although we do not find this set of facts too mysterious, there doubtless corresponds a set of facts that we failed to notice. She must have been corresponding with or contacting some man, or woman, through a messenger, waiting for the signal which we may have given ourselves without realizing it, by saying, 'Monsieur X came to see me yesterday,' if she had agreed with Monsieur X that he would come to see me on the eve of the day when she was due to meet him. How many hypotheses were possible! But only possible. I constructed the truth so well, but only in terms of possibilities, that one day, having opened a letter addressed to one of my mistresses, a letter written in a coded format, 'Awaiting signal to visit Marquis de Saint-Loup, alert tomorrow by telephone,' I reconstituted some kind of planned escape; the name of the Marquis de Saint-Loup was there only to signify something else, for my mistress did not know Saint-Loup but had heard me speak of him, and moreover the signature was a kind of nickname, lacking any recognizable linguistic form. Yet the letter was not addressed to my mistress, but to another person in the building whose name was different but had been mistaken for hers. The letter was written not in a coded format but in poor French, because it had been written by an American lady, who was indeed one of Saint-Loup's friends, as he informed me himself. And the strange way in which this American lady formed some of her letters had given the appearance of a nickname to a perfectly authentic but foreign surname. I had therefore been entirely wrong in my suspicions that day. But the intellectual framework that had linked these facts together in my mind did provide a perfectly correct and unanswerable model for the truth when my mistress (who at the time had been thinking of spending her whole life with me) did leave me three months later, for it happened in a fashion absolutely identical to the way I had imagined on the previous occasion. A letter arrived, with the same characteristics which I had wrongly identified in the earlier letter, but this time having indeed the sense of a signal, and Albertine had thus premeditated her escape for some time. This was the greatest misfortune of my life. And in spite of everything, the suffering which it caused me was perhaps even exceeded by my curiosity to know the causes of this disaster: whom Albertine had desired, for whom she had left me. But the sources of these great events are like those of rivers, we may well travel the whole surface of the globe without being able to find them. Because at the time it seemed simply attention-seeking and bad temper, what in Françoise's case we called 'having the sulks', I did not note that, from the day when she had stopped kissing me, she took on a funereal air, looking stiff and unbending, adopting a sad voice for even the most simple things, moving slowly and never smiling. I cannot say that no evidence proved that she had no contact with the outside world. Françoise did in fact tell me that when she entered her room two days before her departure, she had found nobody there and the curtains drawn, but she had sensed from the atmosphere and the sounds in the room that the window was open. And in fact she had found Albertine on the balcony. But I cannot see with whom she could have communicated from there, and, besides, the open window behind drawn curtains was easy to explain by the fact that she knew how afraid I was of draughts, and that even if the curtains were not much protection for me, they would have prevented Françoise from seeing from the corridor that her shutters were open so early. No, I can think of only one small detail, which proves merely that she had decided the day before that she was going to leave. The day before she had in fact taken from my room without my

noticing a considerable quantity of tissue paper and packing material, which I kept there, and which she used throughout the night to wrap her countless peignoirs and negligees in order to leave in the morning. That was the only detail, that was all. I cannot attribute any importance to the fact that during the evening she almost thrust upon me a thousand francs which she owed me, there was nothing special in that, for she was extremely scrupulous in matters of money.

Yes, she took the tissue paper the day before, but it was not just the day before that she knew that she was going to leave! For it was not sorrow that caused her to leave, but the decision that she had already taken to leave, to renounce the life of which she had dreamed, which gave her that sorrowful air. Sorrowful, almost solemnly cold with me, except the last evening, when, after staying with me longer than she wanted – which astonished me on her part since she usually wanted to stay as long as possible – she stopped at the door and said, 'Farewell, my dear, farewell, my dear.' But I paid no attention at the time. Françoise told me that the following morning, when Albertine told her that she was leaving, she was still so sad, and so much more stiff, so much more unbending than the previous days (but this is however also explicable through fatigue, for she had not undressed and had spent all night packing, except for those possessions that were not in her room or her dressing-room), that Françoise nearly fell over when she heard her say, 'Farewell, Françoise.' When we hear of such things, we understand that the woman who has come to please us so much less than all those who are so easy to meet on the most casual occasion, the woman we resent for making us sacrifice them for her, is on the contrary the one that we would now prefer a thousand times over. For we are no longer asked to choose between a certain pleasure – which custom and perhaps the mediocrity of its object have rendered almost null and void – and other more tempting and seductive pleasures, but between these pleasures and something even stronger, compassion for her suffering.

In promising myself that Albertine would return home by the evening, I had risen to the emergency and applied an emotional sticking plaster to the wound opened up by tearing away my old belief. But however swift my instinct for self-preservation had been, I had, when Françoise spoke, remained helpless for a moment, and even though I now knew that Albertine would be back that very evening, the pain I had felt during the instant when I had not yet convinced myself of this return (the instant that had followed the words, 'Miss Albertine asked for her trunk, Miss Albertine has left'), surged up again spontaneously within me exactly as before, that is, as if I were still unaware of the imminent return of Albertine. In any case, she must return, but of her own accord. Whichever hypothesis was right, if I seemed to plead with her or engineer her return, it would be counter-productive. There was no doubt that I did not have the strength to renounce her that I had had in the case of Gilberte. Even more than to see Albertine again, what I wanted was to put an end to the physical anguish that my heart, in a worse state than usual, could no longer bear. And then again, from the sheer habit of avoiding any effort of will-power, whether for work or for other things, I had become more of a coward. But above all my anguish was incomparably stronger this time, for many reasons, of which the most important was not perhaps that I had never tasted sensual pleasure with Mme de Guermantes or with Gilberte, but that since I did not see them every hour of every day and had no opportunity, and consequently experienced no need, to do so, my love for them lacked the all-powerful element of Habit. Perhaps, now that my heart, unable to exercise its will and unable to withstand suffering willingly, felt that there was only one possible solution, Albertine's return at all costs, or perhaps the contrary remedy (deliberate renunciation, gradual resignation), would have struck me as the ending of a novel, implausible in real life, if I had not already opted for this solution myself in the case of Gilberte. I knew therefore that this other solution could also be accepted, and by one and the same man, for I was still more or less the same person. Yet time had played its part, time which had aged me, time which had also placed Albertine perpetually by my side while we were sharing our lives together. But at least, while not renouncing Albertine, what remained for me of what I had felt for Gilberte was the pride of not wanting Albertine to see me as a pathetic puppet if I asked her to return. I did want her to return, but did not want to be seen to care. I got up, so as to waste no time, but suffering stopped me in my tracks: this was the first time that I had got up since Albertine's departure. And yet I must dress quickly in order to ask her concierge if there was any news.

Suffering, as the aftermath of an unwelcome moral shock, aspires to change form: we hope to dispel it by making plans, by seeking information; we want it to pass through its countless metamorphoses, for this requires less courage than keeping the suffering raw; we lie with our suffering as in a bed too narrow, too hard, and too cold. So I stood up again; I made my way around the room, but with infinite caution, I took up positions where I would not catch sight of Albertine's chair, the pianola whose pedals had felt the pressure of her golden slippers, or any of the objects which she had used, and which all, in the private language that my memory had taught them, seemed to offer me a new translation, another draft, announcing the news of her departure a second time. But even without looking I saw them; my strength drained away, I slumped down into one of those blue satin chairs whose sheen, in the chiaroscuro of the room anaesthetized by a single shaft of daylight, had an hour earlier invoked in me passionately nurtured dreams, which now seemed utterly remote. Alas! Before this moment I had never sat in one except in Albertine's presence. So I could not stay seated, I got back on to my feet; and thus at every moment, I had to meet one of those countless, humble selves that compose us who had not yet learnt of Albertine's departure and inform them of it – this task was all more cruel than if they had been strangers, and had not borrowed my sensitivity in order to suffer – to announce the impending misfortune to all of these people, all of these selves who did not yet know it; each one of them in turn needed to hear these words for the first time 'Albertine asked for her trunk' – that coffin-shaped trunk which I had seen loaded into the carriage at Balbec along with my mother's luggage – 'Albertine has left.' I had to inform every one of them of my sorrow, that sorrow which is not at all a pessimistic conclusion freely drawn from a collection of sinister circumstances, but the intermittent and involuntary revival of a specific impression, externally provoked rather than chosen by us. Some of these selves I had not seen for quite a while. For instance (I had not realized that it was the day for the barber to call) the self that I was when I had my hair cut. I had forgotten that self, his arrival made me burst out sobbing as would the arrival at a funeral of an old, retired servant who knew the lady who has just died. Then all of a sudden I remembered that over the last week I had been seized from time to time by panic attacks, which I had not admitted to myself. At those moments I had however argued with myself, saying, 'Surely there is no point in entertaining the hypothesis that she might suddenly leave. It is absurd. If I had submitted this hypothesis to a sensible and intelligent man (and I would have done, in order to gain peace of mind, if jealousy had not prevented me from taking anyone into my confidence), he would surely have replied: "But you are mad. It's impossible." And indeed during those last days we had not had a single quarrel. People leave for a reason. They tell you what it is. They offer the right of reply. They do not just leave. No, that is childish. That is the only absurd hypothesis.' And yet every day, when I found her still there when I rang for her in the morning, I had breathed an enormous sigh of relief. And when Françoise had handed me Albertine's letter, I had immediately felt sure that it was about the one unthinkable event, a departure somehow sensed several days in advance, despite my logical reasons for being reassured. I had told myself this in my despair with almost self-satisfied perspicacity, like a murderer who knows that he cannot be found out but who is afraid and suddenly sees the name of his victim written at the head of a file on the desk of the examining magistrate who has summoned him to appear. My only hope was that Albertine had gone to see her aunt in Touraine, where she would in fact be quite closely supervised, and could not get up to much harm before I collected her. My worst fear was that she might have stayed in Paris or left for Amsterdam or Montjouvain, that is, that she might have escaped to indulge in some intrigue whose preparations had escaped my attention. But in fact as I thought of Paris, Amsterdam, Montjouvain, that is, a variety of places, I was thinking of places which were no more than possible; so when Albertine's concierge replied that she had left for Touraine, the location which I had thought I preferred seemed to me the most awful of all, because it was real and because for the first time, tortured by the certainty of the present and the uncertainty of the future, I could visualize Albertine starting a life intentionally separate from me, perhaps for some time, perhaps for ever, and a life where she would attain that unknown which had formerly so often disturbed me, even though I was lucky enough to possess and to caress what lay outside, her sweet, captive, impenetrable face. It was this unknown which lay at the heart of my love.

Outside Albertine's door I found a little poor girl who looked at me wide-eyed and who appeared so kind that I asked her if she wouldn't like to come home with me, as I might have invited a dog with a faithful look. She seemed pleased. Once at home, I rocked her for a while on my knees, but soon her presence, which made me feel Albertine's absence too keenly, became intolerable. And I asked her to leave, after giving her a five-hundred-franc note. And yet, soon after, the thought of having some other little girl by my side, of never being alone without the succour of an innocent presence, was the only dream that made me able to bear the idea that Albertine might stay away for some time before she returned. As for Albertine herself, she hardly existed for me as more than a name which,

apart from some rare moments of respite on waking, kept inscribing itself into my brain over and over again. If I had thought aloud, I would have repeated it endlessly, and my verbiage would have been as monotonous and limited as if I had been transformed into a bird, like the one in the legend whose call repeats endlessly the name of the woman that he loved when he was a man. You say it to yourself, but as you do not say it out loud, it seems as if you are writing it inside yourself, and it leaves its trace in the brain, which must finally, like a wall on which someone has enjoyed scribbling, be entirely covered by the name of the beloved, rewritten a thousand times. We write it over and over again in our minds as long as we are happy, even more when we are unhappy. And we feel the constantly renewed need to repeat this name which tells us no more than what we already knew, but, in the long run, we also feel fatigue. At this moment I did not even think of carnal pleasure; I did not even see in my mind's eye the image of that Albertine, although she had been the cause of such a revolution in my being, nor did I perceive her body, and if I had wanted to isolate the idea – for there always is one – that connected it with my suffering, it would have been in alternation, on the one hand, wondering about her state of mind on leaving, whether she hoped to return or not, on the other hand, wondering how to bring her back. Perhaps there is a symbolic truth in the infinitely small place taken up in our anxious feelings by the loved one to whom they relate. For her person itself has little to do with it; it is almost entirely concerned with the sequence of emotions and anxieties which chance made us feel for her at some time or other in the past, and which habit has attached to her. What proves this clearly (even more than the tedium that we find in the midst of happiness) is how indifferent we will feel at seeing or not seeing this same person, being esteemed by her or not, having her at our disposal or not, once we no longer need ask the question only in relation to this person alone (a question so superfluous that we will no longer bother to ask it), – once this sequence of emotions and anxieties is forgotten, at least in so far as they attach to her, for they may have reappeared, but attached to somebody else. Before that, when these emotions and anxieties were still attached to her, we believed that our happiness depended upon her person: but it depended only on ending our anxiety. At that time, therefore, our unconscious was more clear-sighted than we were, reducing the beloved figure to such a small size, a figure which we ourselves had perhaps forgotten, which we might have known imperfectly and believed mediocre, in the terrible drama we enacted where our very lives might have depended on tracking her down in order to cease waiting for her. This scaling-down of the figure of the woman is a logical and necessary effect of the way in which love develops, a clear allegory of the subjective nature of this love.

Albertine's state of mind when she left was no doubt similar in part to that of those peoples who use a display of armed force to prepare the ground for their diplomacy. She must have left me only to obtain from me better terms, greater freedom, more luxury. In that case, I would have emerged victorious, if I had had the strength to hold out, and wait for the moment when, seeing that she had won nothing, she would return of her own accord. But while in cards and in war, where winning alone matters, we can call someone's bluff, the situation created by love and jealousy, not to mention suffering, is not the same. If I were to let Albertine remain far away from me for several hours, perhaps for several weeks, in order to wait, to 'hold out', I would ruin what had been my goal for more than a year, which was never to leave her alone even for an hour. All my precautions became pointless if I gave her the time and the opportunity to deceive me at her leisure; and if in the end she did surrender, I would never be able to forget the time when she had been alone, and even if finally victorious, I would have suffered defeat in the past, that is to say irrevocably.

As for the means of bringing Albertine back, they were all the more likely to succeed if the hypothesis that she had left only in the hope of being recalled on more favourable terms appeared to be the most plausible. And doubtless for those who did not believe in Albertine's sincerity, certainly for Françoise for example, this was the case. But, as far as my reason was concerned, the only explanation for some of her bad moods and attitudes had seemed to be, even before I knew anything, that she was planning her final departure; it was difficult to believe, now that this departure had occurred, that it was only a pretence. I say for my reason, not for my self. I found the hypothesis of a pretence all the more necessary for being improbable and that it gained in strength what it lost in verisimilitude. When we see ourselves on the brink of the precipice and it seems that God has abandoned us, we no longer hesitate to ask him for a miracle. I acknowledge that in all that I was the most lax and yet the most vulnerable of policemen. But Albertine's flight had not restored to me the powers which the habit of having her watched by others had taken away from me. I could think of only one thing: entrusting someone else with the enquiry. This someone else was Saint-Loup, who agreed. Passing on the anxiety that had haunted me for so many days to someone else made me tremble with joy, as I felt certain of success, and my hands turned suddenly dry as they had been before becoming bathed in the sweat provoked by Françoise when she announced: 'Mademoiselle Albertine has left.' We should remember that when I resolved to live with Albertine and even marry her, I had done so in order to hold her, to know what she was doing, to prevent her from returning to her old habits with Mlle Vinteuil. Even while reeling from the savage blow caused by her revelation at Balbec, which she presented as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and even though my grief was greater than any I had ever experienced before, I did manage to find quite natural the one thing that in my worst imaginings I would never have dared suppose. (It is astonishing how jealousy, which spends its time inventing so many petty but false suppositions, lacks imagination when it comes to discovering the truth.) Yet my love, born above all of the need to prevent Albertine from doing wrong, had subsequently retained the mark of its origins. Being with her was not important, as long as I could prevent my 'runaway' from wandering here and there at will. In order to prevent her I had used as witnesses those who accompanied her, and, as long as their evening reports, however short, were safely reassuring, my worries would dissolve into a feeling of good humour.

Once I had convinced myself that, whatever I might need to do, Albertine would be back home that very evening, this eased the suffering that Françoise had unleashed when she told me that Albertine had left (since at the time I was taken unawares and believed for the moment that her departure was irrevocable). But after a while, when the initial pain welled up again spontaneously inside me, throbbing with its own independent life, it was still as terrible as ever, because it preceded the soothing promise that I had made myself to bring Albertine back that very evening. My suffering heart was unaware of this declared intention, which ought to have assuaged it. In order to deploy the means necessary to ensure her return, I was condemned to act once more as if I were not in love with her and were not suffering from her departure, I was condemned to continue lying to her – not that I had ever been very successful with this course of action, but because I had always adopted it since I had been in love with Albertine. I could be all the more energetic in finding ways to get her to return, in so far as I was the one who appeared to have renounced her. I decided to write Albertine a farewell letter in which I would assume her departure to be final, while I would send Saint-Loup to exert the most brutal pressure on Mme Bontemps, as if I were unaware of it, in order to get Albertine back as soon as possible. Doubtless, I had learned with Gilberte the danger of writing letters whose indifference, at first feigned, finally becomes true. And this experience should have prevented me from sending Albertine letters of the same type that I had written to Gilberte. But what we call experience is only the revelation to our own eyes of one of our own character traits, which recurs naturally, and recurs all the more powerfully if we have already on some previous occasion brought it up into the clear light of consciousness, so that the spontaneous reaction which had guided us the first time becomes reinforced by all the suggestions of memory. The kind of plagiarism which it is most difficult for any human individual to avoid (and even for whole nations, who persist in reproducing their faults and aggravate them in so doing) is self-plagiarism.

I had commandeered Saint-Loup immediately, knowing him to be in Paris; he rushed to my side, as swiftly and effectively as previously at Doncières, and agreed to leave straight away for Touraine. I suggested the following stratagem. He would stop at Châtellerault, ask for directions to Mme Bontemps's house, and wait until Albertine had gone out, to avoid meeting her. 'But does this mean that the young lady you mention knows me?' he asked. I told him that I did not think so. The prospect of his action filled me with unbounded joy. And yet it was in total contradiction with what I had promised myself at the outset: which was to find a way to avoid appearing to send anyone to look for Albertine; now this would inevitably seem to be the case; but it had an inestimable advantage over 'what I should have done', in that it allowed me to say to myself that someone sent by me would see Albertine, and doubtless bring her back. And if I had been able to see clearly into my heart at the outset, it would have been this solution, which lay lurking in the shadows, but which I found deplorable, that I might have guessed would take precedence over the prudent course of action which I had decided to adopt, from lack of will power. Since Saint-Loup had already seemed slightly

surprised that I had had a young lady living with me over the winter without telling him anything about it, and since in addition he had often asked after the young lady from Balbec and I had never replied, 'But she lives here', he could have been offended by my lack of confidence in him. It was true that Mme Bontemps might talk to him about Balbec. But I waited too impatiently on his departure and his arrival to be willing or able to consider the possible consequences of his journey. As for whether he would recognize Albertine (whom he had in any case systematically avoided looking at when he had met her at Doncières), everyone agreed that she had changed so much and put on so much weight that it was hardly likely. He asked me whether I might not have a portrait of Albertine. At first I said not, so that my photograph, taken at about the time we had met in Balbec, would not give him the opportunity to recognize Albertine, even though he had barely glimpsed her in the railway carriage. But I reflected that in her most recent photograph she would be as different from the Balbec Albertine as the living Albertine was now and that he would no more recognize her in the photograph than in real life. While I looked it out for him, he smoothed my brow gently with his hand, trying to console me. I was moved by the sorrow that he felt on imagining my suffering. In the first place, although he was separated from Rachel, what he had felt at the time was not so far in the past that he did not feel a particular sympathy and pity for this kind of suffering, as we feel closer to someone who has the same kind of illness as us. And then again, he felt such affection for me that he found the thought of my suffering unbearable. Thus for the woman who caused it he felt a mixture of resentment and admiration. He saw me as such a superior being that for me to be so subservient to another, she must be an absolutely extraordinary creature. I imagined that he would find Albertine's photograph pretty, but even so I did not think that it would have the same impact on him as Helen on the old men of Troy,[1] so while I kept searching for it, I said modestly: 'Oh, you mustn't expect too much, you know, in the first place it's not a good photo, and anyway she's not very striking, she's no great beauty, but she is very sweet.' 'Oh, no, she must be marvellous,' he said with sincere and naïve enthusiasm, while trying to picture the person who could throw me into such a state of agitation and despair. 'I blame her for hurting you, but of course it was very likely to happen to someone like you, artistic to your fingertips, loving beauty in all things, and so passionately, you were bound to suffer more than others when you found it in a woman.' At last I found the photograph. 'She must be marvellous,' Robert continued, without realizing that I was holding out the photograph. Suddenly he noticed it and held it for a moment in his hands. His face registered a surprise that bordered on stupefaction. 'Is this the girl that you love?' he said finally, in a voice whose astonishment was muted by the fear of offending me. He made no comment, but had taken on the judicious, prudent and inevitably slightly condescending air that we adopt in the face of an invalid – even if the patient has previously been a remarkable man, or even your friend – who is no longer recognizable, for he is stricken with raving madness and is talking to you of a celestial being who has appeared to him and whom he continues to see exactly where you, the normal man, see only his eiderdown. I immediately understood Robert's astonishment, which was the same as that which had engulfed me when I had caught sight of his mistress, with the only difference that I had found her to be a woman whom I already knew, whereas he believed that he had never seen Albertine. But doubtless in each case the difference between what each of us saw in the same person was just as great. It had been so long since I had tentatively started at Balbec to add the sensations of taste, smell and touch to the visual experience of watching Albertine. Since then, deeper, sweeter and less definable sensations had been added, and then painful feelings. In short Albertine, like a stone covered in snow, was no more than the core of an immense construction elaborated by my heart. All these layers of sensations were invisible to Robert, who grasped only the residue, which my system on the contrary prevented me from perceiving. What had disturbed Robert when he had seen Albertine's photograph was not the excitement of the old men of Troy saying, as they saw Helen pass:

> Notre mal ne vaut pas un seul de ses regards,[2]

but exactly the opposite reaction, making him feel, 'But is this what has given you so much heartache, so much sorrow, led you into such folly?' We have to admit that this kind of reaction to the sight of the person who has wounded and disturbed the life, and sometimes caused the death, of someone we love is infinitely more common than that of the old men of Troy, and, we must admit, is the norm. This is not only because love is individual, nor because, when we do not feel it, we find it natural to judge it avoidable and comment upon the folly of others. No, it is also because when love has reached the stage when it causes such misery, the network of sensations interwoven between the face of the woman and the eyes of the lover, the fragile cocoon which protects and hides it, much as a layer of snow cloaks a fountain, has already grown so far that the point where the lover's eyes focus, the point where he confronts his pleasure and his pains, are as far from the point where others see them as is the real sun from the point where its condensed light makes us perceive it in the sky. And moreover during this time, beneath the chrysalis of pain and tenderness which renders the worst metamorphoses of the beloved invisible for the lover, her face has had time to age and change. With the result that, if the face which the lover saw for the first time is far removed from the one that he has seen since he has been in love and suffering, so, conversely, it is equally removed from the one that the indifferent spectator is able now to see. (What if, instead of the photograph of a young woman, Robert had seen that of an ageing mistress?) And we do not even have to see the woman who has caused so much distress for the first time in order to experience this astonishment. Often we knew her already, as my great-uncle knew Odette. In this case the difference of perspective affects not only someone's physical appearance but also their character and their individual impact. It is perfectly likely that the woman who makes her lover suffer has always been very friendly to someone who was not interested in her, as Odette, so cruel to Swann, had been the kind-hearted 'lady in pink' for my great-uncle; or likely perhaps that the person whose every move is anxiously anticipated by her lover, with all the awe that would be due to a deity, appears as an inconsequential person, only too pleased to do anything required, in the eyes of a man who does not love her, as did Saint-Loup's mistress for me, since I saw in her no more than 'Rachel, when of the Lord', who had so often been offered up to me. I remembered my stupefaction the first time that I had seen her with Saint-Loup, at the thought that one could feel tormented by not knowing what some woman had done one evening, what she might have said under her breath to someone, why she might have wanted to leave. Now I felt that this familiar story, although now that of Albertine, towards whom every cord of my heart and my life was straining in a frantic and chaotic process of suffering, must appear just as trivial to Saint-Loup, and that one day it must appear so to me; that gradually, in my feelings about the gravity or the insignificance of Albertine's past, I might pass from my state of mind at this moment to that of Saint-Loup, for I had no illusions as to what Saint-Loup must think, as to what anyone apart from the lover himself must think. And I was not too worried. Let us leave pretty women to men with no imagination. I remembered the tragic account of so many lives provided by a brilliant but an unrealistic portrait such as that of Odette by Elstir, which is, however, less the portrait of a woman in love than a portrait of love and how it disfigures. All that was missing was – an attribute present in so many portraits – that he should be not only a great painter but also her lover (and even then there were people who said that Elstir had been Odette's lover). This disparity is proved by the whole life of a lover, a lover like Swann, whose follies nobody understands. But if the lover is also a painter like Elstir, then the answer to the riddle is at hand, we at last have before our eyes the lips which common mortals have never perceived in this woman, the nose which nobody realized she had, that unsuspected allure. The portrait says: 'What I have loved, what has made me suffer, what I have always seen, is this.' By an inverse operation from the one where I had tried to invest Rachel in my mind with everything that Saint-Loup had added to her of himself, I tried to subtract my emotional and intellectual accretions from my composition of Albertine and to picture her just as she must appear to Saint-Loup, as Rachel had appeared to me. And even if we were to notice such differences ourselves, what importance would we ascribe to them? And when in former times at Balbec Albertine waited for me under the arcades of Incarville and leapt into my car, not only had she not yet 'filled out', but as a result of too much exercise she had rather melted away; she was so thin, and disfigured by an unattractive hat, which allowed only a glimpse of an unappealing part of her nose and a sidelong glance at cheeks as white as maggots, I recognized very little of her, yet enough for me to know as she leapt into my car that it was Albertine, that she had kept the appointment on time and had not gone elsewhere; and this was enough; what we love lives too deep in the past, consists too much in the time we wasted together for us to need the whole woman; we want to be sure only that she is the one, not to mistake her identity, which is far more important for the lover than her beauty; her cheeks may shrink, her body wither, even in the eyes of those who seemed to others at first most proud to possess a beauty, and yet her sharp little nose, that feature epitomizing her enduring personality, that algebraic remainder, that

constant factor, is enough to prevent a man who frequents the highest social circles, if he is in love with her, from enjoying a single evening's peace, because he spends hour after hour, until bedtime, combing and uncombing the hair of the woman he loves, or simply staying at her side, to be with her, or to be sure that she is with him, or even simply to prevent her from being with anyone else.

'Are you sure', Robert asked, 'that I can just come right out and offer this woman thirty thousand francs for her husband's electoral committee? Is she so dishonest? If you are right, three thousand francs would be enough.' 'No, I beg of you, don't try to save money on something which I hold so dear. What you must say, and there is some truth to it, is this: "My friend had asked one of his relatives for these thirty thousand francs for a committee run by his fiancée's uncle. It's because of his engagement that they gave him the money. And he asked me to give it to you so that Albertine would know nothing about it. And now Albertine is leaving him. He does not know what to do. He is obliged to return the thirty thousand francs if he does not marry Albertine. And if he does marry her, she ought to return straight away, if only for the sake of appearances, because it would look really bad if she stayed on the run for too long." Does that sound as if I made it up?' 'No, not at all,' Saint-Loup replied, from kindness and from tact, and also because he knew that circumstances are often much more bizarre than we think. After all, there was no reason why there should not be, as I told him, a considerable element of truth in this thirty-thousand-franc story. It was possible, but it was not true, and it was precisely the most truthful element that was the lie. But Robert and I did lie to each other, as happens in any conversation when one friend sincerely wishes to help another who is suffering from despair in his love life. The friend who offers counsel, support and consolation can sympathize with the other's distress, but not feel it, and the more he tries to help, the more he lies. And his friend confesses all that he needs in order to be helped, but, precisely in order to be helped, may keep many things hidden. And it is the helper who is happy, whatever pains he takes, however long his journey, for he accomplishes his mission and feels no inner suffering. At this moment I was in the same position as Robert had been at Doncières when he thought that Rachel had left him. 'Very well, as you wish; if I encounter opposition I'll face it willingly, for your sake. And although I find it rather odd to set up such a blatant deal, I know well enough that even in our own circles there are duchesses, even the most strait-laced, who would do more embarrassing things for thirty thousand francs than tell their nieces not to stay in Touraine. But in any case, it doubles my pleasure to do you this favour, if that is what it takes for you to agree to see me. If I get married,' he added, 'might we not see more of each other, might you not come to feel as much at home in my house as yours?' He stopped suddenly, having thought, I presumed, that if I too were to marry, Albertine could not become a close friend of his wife. And I remembered what the Cambremers had told me about his likely marriage with the daughter of the Prince de Guermantes.

When he had consulted the time-table, he saw that he could not leave Paris before the evening. Françoise asked me: 'Should I remove Miss Albertine's bed from the study?' 'On the contrary,' I replied, 'please make it up.' I was hoping that she would return from one day to the next and I did not want Françoise even to guess that this might be in doubt. I needed Albertine's departure to seem to have been agreed with me, with no implication that she loved me any the less. But Françoise looked at me with an air, if not of incredulity, at least of doubt. She too had her own two hypotheses. Her nostrils flared as she scented trouble, and she must have been scenting it for some time. And if she was not perfectly sure, it was perhaps only because, like me, she was suspicious of believing absolutely in something that would give her too much pleasure. Now the burden of the affair weighed not on my exhausted mind but on Saint-Loup. I was buoyed up by the joyful feeling that I had reached a decision, saying to myself, 'I have returned her shot, on the volley.'

Saint-Loup could barely have caught the train when I bumped into Bloch in my lobby, not having heard him ring the door-bell, so that I had no alternative but to entertain him for a moment. Recently he had met me out walking with Albertine (whom he knew from Balbec) one day when she was in a bad mood. 'I have dined with M. Bontemps,' he told me, 'and as I have some influence on him, I told him that I was distressed to note that his niece was not more kindly disposed towards you, and that he ought to implore her to address this issue.' I seethed with rage: this imploring and complaining would undermine the whole impact of Saint-Loup's enterprise and would implicate me directly as far as Albertine was concerned by making me seem to beseech her. To add insult to injury Françoise had remained in the lobby and heard everything. I protested vigorously to Bloch, telling him that I had never asked him to undertake any such mission and that moreover the facts he mentioned were untrue. From then on Bloch started smiling more and more broadly, less, I believe, from amusement than from embarrassment at having annoyed me. He jokingly expressed his astonishment at having aroused such anger. Perhaps he said this to diminish in my eyes the importance of his indiscreet initiative, perhaps because he was of a cowardly nature and wallowed pleasurably and languidly in a life of lies, like a jelly-fish floating on the surface of the sea, or perhaps because, even had he been of another race of men, other people, since they can never share exactly our point of view, do not understand the extent of the harm that their randomly chosen words can cause. I had only just shown him the door, finding no remedy for what he had done, when the bell rang again and Françoise handed me a summons from a chief inspector of police. The parents of the little girl that I had taken home with me for an hour had decided to lodge a complaint against me for seducing a minor. There are moments in our lives when a kind of beauty is born of the multiplicity of the trials, interwoven like Wagnerian motifs, that assail us, as well as of the simultaneous realization that real events do not fit into the pattern of reflections pictured in the poor little mirror called the future that the intellect holds out before our eyes, but lurk on the threshold ready to pounce on us, like a detective waiting to catch someone *in flagrante delicto*. Already, left to their own devices, events evolve, whether because failure amplifies their importance in our eyes or whether because satisfaction reduces it. But they rarely come singly. The sentiments aroused by each of them contradict each other, and to a certain extent, as I felt while on my way to meet the chief inspector, fear is at least a temporary and fairly potent emetic for emotional troubles. At the police station I was greeted with insults from the parents, who told me that they would not 'swallow that kind of deal' and handed back the five hundred francs, which I refused to accept, and by the chief inspector, who, taking as his model the supreme talent of presiding magistrates for 'repartee', seized on a single word in each sentence I uttered and used it as part of a witty and crushing rejoinder. No one even discussed my innocence in the case, for it was the one hypothesis that no one would entertain for a minute. Nevertheless the difficulty of bringing a charge meant that I was let off with this ferocious grilling, which lasted as long as the parents were there. But as soon as they had left, the chief inspector, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone of voice and reprimanded me as a partner in crime: 'Another time you should take more care. Good Lord, don't pick them up so abruptly, it's bound to fail. Besides, you can find plenty of little girls better than her, and far cheaper. The price you paid was ridiculously steep.' I felt so sure that he would misunderstand me if I tried to explain myself that I took advantage of his invitation to leave, without saying another word. Each stranger I passed on the way home seemed to be a police inspector spying on my every act and gesture. But this leitmotif, like that of my anger against Bloch, faded, leaving room only for that of Albertine's departure. Now this motif started up again, but on an almost joyful note now that Saint-Loup had left. Since he had taken it upon himself to go to see Mme Bontemps, my suffering had become more diffuse. I believed that it was because I had acted, and I believed it in all good faith, for we never know what is hidden in the depths of our own souls. Deep down, what made me happy was not that I had passed the burden of my indecision on to Saint-Loup, as I believed. Actually I was not entirely mistaken; the specific remedy for the cure of an unfortunate event (and three-quarters of all events are unfortunate) is a decision; for deciding has the effect of suddenly reversing our thoughts and stemming the flow of those which derive from the past event and prolong its resonance, blocking it with a contrary flow of thoughts, brought in from outside, from the future. But these new thoughts are beneficial for us chiefly (as with those that invaded me at that moment) when what they bring us from the depths of the future is hope. Deep down what made me so happy was the secret certainty that, since Saint-Loup's mission could not fail, Albertine was bound to return. I understood this when as soon as I had not received a reply from Saint-Loup by the end of the first day, I started to suffer again. It was therefore not my deciding to surrender all powers to him that was the cause of my joy, which otherwise would have been boundless, but my thinking 'Success is certain' while saying 'What will be, will be' And the thought, aroused by his delay, that in fact something other than success could arise was so hateful to me that I had lost my gaiety. It is in fact our prediction, our expectation of happy events that fills us with a joy which we attribute to other causes and which ceases only when it plunges us back into our sorrows, if we are no longer so sure that our wishes will be fulfilled. It is always this invisible belief that sustains the whole structure of our sensibility, which, when deprived of this, crumbles. We have seen how this determines for us the value or the nullity of people, our enthusiasm or boredom on meeting them. Similarly it decides

whether a sorrow seems tolerable and unexceptional, simply because we are convinced that it will come to an end, or whether it suddenly expands until someone's presence becomes as important as our own lives, sometimes more. One extra thing finally made the pain I felt in my heart, which, I have to admit, had diminished, as acute as it had been at the start. This was rereading a phrase from Albertine's letter. However much we love a person, the suffering caused by losing her, when in our solitude we have nothing else on our mind, which can to a certain extent give the suffering whatever form it wants, is bearable and differs from the less human and personal suffering of those more unpredictable and eccentric accidents of our mental or emotional worlds – which are caused less directly by the person herself than by the manner in which we have learned that we will never see her again. As for Albertine, I could think of her and weep quietly, accepting that I would no more see her this evening than I had yesterday, but to reread 'my decision is irrevocable' was something else, it was like taking some drug so dangerous that it could cause a fatal heart attack. There are in the actions, details and letters of a separation, specific dangers which amplify and distort even the pain that people can cause us. But this suffering did not last long. Despite everything, I was so sure of Saint-Loup's skill and success, and Albertine's return seemed to me to be something so certain, that I started to wonder whether I had been right to want it. Unfortunately for me, who had thought the police affair was over and done with, Françoise came to announce that an inspector had called to enquire whether I might not be in the habit of inviting young girls home, and that the concierge, thinking that he meant Albertine, had replied that I was, and that, from then on, the house seemed to be under surveillance. From that moment on it would never again be possible for me to invite a little girl into my home to share my sorrows, without running the risk of being shamed in front of her by an inspector springing up and making her see me as a criminal. And at one and the same time I realized how we live more through certain dreams than we think, for the impossibility of ever cradling a little girl in my arms seemed to drain my life of all value for evermore, but in addition I realized how easy it is to understand that people may easily risk their fortunes and their lives, when we think that self-interest and the fear of death rule the world. For if I had thought that the arrival of the police could cause even a little girl who did not know me to form a shameful idea of me, how much I would rather have killed myself! There was not even any possible comparison between the two kinds of suffering. But in real life people never think that those to whom they offer money, or whom they threaten to kill, might have a mistress or even simply a companion whose esteem they value, even if they do not value their own. But, suddenly, in a moment of unwitting confusion (for in fact I had never imagined that if Albertine had not been over the age of consent, she would have lived with me, let alone been my mistress), I thought that 'the seduction of minors' could also refer to Albertine. Thus my life seemed walled in on all sides. And at the thought that I had not lived a chaste life with her, I found in the punishment inflicted on me for having cradled an unknown little girl in my arms the balance which always occurs in human punishment, suggesting that there is hardly ever either a just condemnation or a judicial error, but a kind of harmony between the false notion of an innocent act entertained by the judge and the culpable actions which he has ignored. But then, thinking that Albertine's return could bring upon me an ignominious charge which would degrade me in her eyes and would perhaps cause her some harm that she would not forgive me, I ceased to wish for her return, which terrified me. I wished I could telegraph her immediately not to return. Then immediately, drowning all else, a passionate desire for her return invaded me. It was because, having envisaged for a moment the possibility of telling her not to return and of living without her, I suddenly felt on the contrary ready to sacrifice all travel, all pleasure, all work, for Albertine to return! Oh, how my love for Albertine, whose outcome I had thought I could predict after what had happened to my love for Gilberte, had developed in exactly the opposite way to the latter! How impossible it was for me to continue not to see her! And with every action accomplished, even the most trivial, as long as it had previously been bathed in the happy atmosphere of Albertine's presence, I found it necessary each time, with further effort and equal suffering, to renew my apprenticeship of separation. Then competition with other forms of life cast this new pain into the shadows, and during those days, which were the first days of spring, I even experienced, while waiting for Saint-Loup to arrange to see Mme Bontemps, a few moments of pleasant calm, imagining Venice and meeting beautiful, unknown women. As soon as I realized this I felt panic within me. The calm which I had just sampled was the first appearance of the great but intermittent force which would struggle within me against pain and against love, and would ultimately overcome them. What I had just had a foretaste and foreboding of, if only for a moment, was that which would later become a permanent state for me, a life where I would no longer suffer because of Albertine, where I would no longer love her. And my love, which had just recognized the only enemy able to vanquish it, the act of forgetting, started to tremble, like a lion enclosed in a cage which has suddenly seen the python that will devour it.

I thought constantly of Albertine, and when Françoise entered my room she could never say, 'There are no letters' soon enough to cut short my anxiety. But from time to time, by letting some current of ideas or other flow through my sorrow, I managed to refresh and ventilate a little the stuffy atmosphere of my heart. But then in the evening, if I managed to get off to sleep, it was as if the memory of Albertine had been the medicine which had induced my sleep, which as its effects wore off, would waken me. I thought of Albertine all the time that I was asleep. It was a very special sleep, which only she could provide me with and, what is more, one where I would not have been free, as I might during my waking hours, to think of anything else. Sleep and her memory were like two substances mingled together to form a sleeping-draught. Moreover during my waking hours my suffering increased day by day instead of diminishing. Not that the work of forgetting was not under way, but it was precisely this process that enhanced my idealization of the missing image and thereby the absorption of my initial suffering into the other analogous sufferings which reinforced it. Even then this image was bearable. But if I suddenly thought of her room, her room with its bed lying empty, of her piano, of her motor-car, I lost all my strength, I closed my eyes, and my head slumped on my shoulder as if I were about to faint. The sound of a door opening hurt me almost as much, because it was not being opened by her.

When there might be a telegram from Saint-Loup I did not dare ask, 'Is there a telegram?' One did finally come, but it only postponed everything by saying, 'The ladies have gone away for three days.' Doubtless, if I had tolerated the four days that had already elapsed since her departure, it was because I said to myself, 'It's only a matter of time, she will be back before the end of the week.' But this argument could not prevent the fact that for my heart and for my body, the actions which I had to perform were the same: to live without her, to go home and find her not there, to walk past the door to her room – the courage to open it still failed me – knowing that she was not there, to go to bed without saying good-night to her, those were actions which my heart had had to perform to the full, for all their terror, and in just the same way as if I were never to see Albertine again. Yet the fact that I had already performed them four times in my heart proved that I was now capable of continuing to do so. And soon perhaps I would no longer need to rely on this argument – the imminent return of Albertine – which was helping me to continue to live (I could say to myself, 'She will never return,' and carry on living regardless, as I had done for the last four days), just as a cripple who has learned how to walk again can throw away his crutches. No doubt in the evening when I came home I still found memories which left me breathless and suffocating with emptiness and loneliness, memories juxtaposed in an interminable series of all the evenings when Albertine was waiting for me; but already I found the memory of the day before, the day before that and the two preceding evenings, that is the memory of the four evenings which had passed since Albertine's departure, during which I had remained on my own without her, yet when I had none the less survived for four evenings already, composing a very thin layer of memories compared to the others, but which might perhaps thicken with every passing day. I need hardly describe the letter of proposal which I received at that period from a niece of Mme de Guermantes, reputedly the prettiest young lady in Paris, nor the advances made to me by the Duc de Guermantes on behalf of her parents, resigned in the interests of their daughter's happiness to such a misalliance and with such an unequal party. Such events, which might otherwise touch our self-esteem, are too painful when we are in love. We would like to reveal their import, were it not tactless to do so, to the other lady, who has formed a less favourable opinion of us, although this opinion would still not be modified if she learned that we might be the object of an entirely different opinion. What the Duc's niece wrote to me could only have irritated Albertine.

From the moment that I awoke and resumed my sorrows at the point where I had left off before falling asleep, like a book closed for an instant but which would haunt me all day until evening, it could only be with thoughts about Albertine that any feelings, whether arising from within or without, might be associated. The door-bell rang: it's a letter from her, perhaps herself in person! If I was feeling well, and neither too unhappy nor too jealous, and had nothing to reproach her with, then I wished I could see her soon, embrace her, and spend the rest of my life in happiness by her side. To telegraph her saying, 'Come quickly'

seemed to me to have become an entirely simple thing to do, as if my new mood had changed not only my inner disposition but the external circumstances of our relationship and had made everything easier. If I was in sombre mood, and all my anger against her returned, then I no longer wanted to embrace her, I felt that it would be impossible ever to attain happiness through her, and I wanted nothing but to harm her and prevent her from belonging to anyone else. But the result of these two contradictory moods was identical, she must return as soon as possible. And yet, however much joy her return might give me when it happened, I felt that the same difficulties would soon arise again and that seeking happiness through satisfying my inner desires was as naïve as undertaking to reach the horizon by simply walking forward in a straight line. The more desire advances, the more true possession recedes. So that if it is possible to obtain happiness, or at least freedom from suffering, what we should seek is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction and final elimination of desire. We try to see those we love, we should try not to see them, for only the process of forgetting leads finally to the extinction of desire. And I imagine that if an author wanted to express this kind of truth, he would seek to approach the woman concerned by dedicating his book to her, saying, 'This is your book.' And thus, in telling the truth in the book he would be lying in the dedication, for he will want the book to be hers only in the same way that he takes possession of the gemstone that she gave him, which he will only consider precious as long as he still loves the woman. The links between another person and ourselves exist only in our minds. Memory weakens them as it fades, and despite the illusions which we hope will deceive us and with which, whether from love, friendship, politeness, human respect or from duty, we hope to deceive others, we exist on our own. Man is a being who cannot move beyond his own boundaries, who knows others only within himself, and if he alleges the contrary, he is lying. And I would have been so afraid that someone might take away my need for her and my love for her, had they been able to do so, that I convinced myself that these were essential for my life. To be able to hear the names of the stations on the railway line to Touraine without feeling pleasure or pain would have seemed to me a diminution of the self (simply because deep down this would have proved that I was becoming indifferent to Albertine). I told myself, while I could not stop wondering what she might be doing, thinking and hoping at every moment, wondering whether she intended to and was going to return, that it was in my interest to keep open the communicating door that love had unlocked within me and feel a different woman's life burst through the floodgates and pour into the reservoir which would otherwise have dried up. Soon, as Saint-Loup's silence continued, a secondary anxiety – waiting for a telegram or a telephone call from Saint-Loup – masked the first anxiety, worrying over the outcome, wondering whether Albertine would return. Listening out for every sound while expecting a telegram became so intolerable for me that the arrival of this telegram, whatever it might say, was the only thing that I could think of now that might put an end to my suffering. But when I did finally receive a telegram from Robert, where he told me that he had seen Mme Bontemps, but had been seen by Albertine despite all his precautions, which had ruined everything, I exploded with fury and despair, for this was what I had wanted to avoid above all. Now that Albertine had found out about it, Saint-Loup's journey would make me appear to hold her dear in a way that could only prevent her from returning, and what is more, my horror of this was the last shred of pride surviving from my love for Gilberte, and now it was lost. I cursed Robert, then told myself that if these means had failed, I would use others. Since man can have an impact on the external world, how could I not manage, by exploiting cunning, intelligence, money and affection, to suppress this atrocious thing: the absence of Albertine? We believe that we may change things around us to suit our desires, we believe this because otherwise we can see no acceptable solution. We do not think of the solution which occurs most frequently and which is also acceptable: when we do not manage to change things to suit our desires, but our desires gradually change. We become indifferent to a situation which we had hoped to change when we found it unbearable. We were not able to overcome the obstacle, although this was our only desire, yet life led us round or beyond it, and afterwards, if we turn back towards the past we can hardly catch sight of it in the distance, so imperceptible has it become. I heard some tunes from *Manon*[3] played by one of our neighbours on the floor above ours. I applied their familiar words to Albertine and myself, and I was filled with such deep feelings that I began to weep. They were:

> Hélas, l'oiseau qui fuit ce qu'il croit l'esclavage,
> Le plus souvent, la nuit d'un vol désespéré revient battre au vitrage[4]

and the death of Manon:

> Manon réponds-moi donc! – Seul amour de mon âme,
> Je n'ai su qu'aujourd'hui la bonté de ton cœur.[5]

Since Manon did return to Des Grieux, it seemed to me that for Albertine I was the only love of her life. Alas, it is likely that if she had been able to listen to the same tune at that moment, it would not have been me that she would have cherished under the name of Des Grieux, and, if she had thought of it for even a moment, her memories of me would have prevented her from weakening as she listened to this music, which was however very much the kind of music that she liked, although better written and more subtle.

As for me, I was not brave enough to yield to the sweetness of thinking that Albertine used to call me her 'soul's only love' and had recognized that she had been mistaken over her 'seeming slavery'. I knew that one cannot read a novel without lending its heroine the features of the woman that one loves. Yet even if the book does have a happy ending, our love has not progressed an inch, and when we have finished it, the woman whom we love and who has finally surrendered to us in the novel, does not in real life love us any more than she did before. I sent Saint-Loup a furious telegram demanding his immediate return to Paris, to avoid at least the appearance of aggravating through added persistence the intervention which I had so wanted to keep secret. But even before he had returned in accordance with my instructions, I had received the following telegram from Albertine herself:

MY DEAR FRIEND, YOU HAVE SENT YOUR FRIEND SAINT-LOUP TO SEE MY AUNT, WHICH WAS RIDICULOUS. IF YOU NEEDED ME, MY DEAR, WHY DID YOU NOT WRITE DIRECTLY TO ME? I WOULD HAVE BEEN ONLY TOO PLEASED TO RETURN: DO NOT TRY ANY SUCH ABSURD APPROACH AGAIN. 'I would have been only too pleased to return!' If she said this, it must mean that she regretted having left, and that she was looking only for an excuse to return. So I only had to do what she said, write and tell her that I needed her, and she would return. So I was going to see her again, my Balbec Albertine (for, since her departure, this is what she had become for me. Like a sea-shell which we no longer notice because it is always placed on top of the same chest of drawers, but which, despite having entirely forgotten it, we call to mind as soon it has disappeared, whether because we lost it or because we gave it away, she recalled for me all the joyous beauty of the blue hills of the sea.) And it was not only because she had become an imaginary, that is, a desirable creature, but because my life with her had become an imaginary life, that is, a life liberated from all problems, that I said to myself, 'How happy we shall be!' But as soon as I was assured of her return, I should not appear to precipitate things, but on the contrary erase the bad impression created by Saint-Loup's intervention, which I might always disclaim later by saying that he had acted on his own initiative because he had always been in favour of our marriage.

However, as I reread her words I was none the less a little disappointed to realize how little of our person remains in our correspondence. Of course the characters we trace express our thoughts, as do our features; it is always a process of thinking that confronts us. But even so, in a person, thought appears to us only after being filtered through the bloom of the face, flowering like a water-lily only on the surface. And this, it has to be said, does modify it considerably. And perhaps one of the causes of our perpetual disappointment in love is this perpetual slippage, which causes every anticipation of the ideal being whom we love to be confronted at each meeting by a flesh-and-blood person who already has little in common with our dream. And then, when we expect something from this person, what we receive from her is a letter where very little of the person herself remains, as in those letters used in algebraic formulae, where there remains none of the qualities characterized by the arithmetical numbers, which themselves already no longer encapsulated the properties of the fruit or the flowers that were being assessed. And yet love itself, the experience of being loved, or reading love letters, are perhaps none the less translations – however unsatisfactory it is to pass from one to the other – of the same reality, since the letter seems insufficient only while we are reading it, and yet we sweat blood and tears as long as we

await its arrival, and it does suffice to calm our anguish, even if its little black marks do not entirely assuage our desire, which feels in spite of everything that these are no more than an approximation to speech, smiles and kisses rather than those things themselves.

I wrote to Albertine:

'My dear friend, I was in fact just about to write to you, and I am grateful to you for telling me that, had I needed you, you would have come with all speed; it is good of you to interpret in such noble fashion your duty to an old friend, and my esteem for you can only be enhanced. But, actually, no, I had not asked you to return and shall not ask you to; perhaps an unemotional young woman like you might not find it painful to meet again, at least in the distant future. But I, whom you have sometimes believed so indifferent, would find it much more so. Life has led us apart. You have taken a decision which seems to me very wise and is one which you have taken at the right moment, with remarkable foresight, for you left me the very day after I had just received my mother's consent to ask for your hand. I would have told you on waking, when I received her letter (at the same time as yours!). Perhaps you would have feared upsetting me if you had left in those circumstances. And perhaps we might have united our lives for what might, who knows, have been our misfortune? If that were to be our fate, bless you for your wise decision. We would lose all the benefit of this were we to meet again. I do not say that I would not find this very tempting. But I have no great merit in resisting. You know how inconstant and forgetful I am. So I am not much to be pitied. You have often said yourself what a creature of habit I am. The habits which I am starting to form in your absence are not yet very strong. Obviously for the moment those which we had acquired together and which your departure has disturbed are still stronger. They will not remain so for much longer. I even thought, for this reason, that I would make the most of these last few days where meeting you would not yet be for me what in a fortnight, or earlier perhaps (excusing my frankness), it will become, that is, a nuisance, – I had thought that I would make the most of it, before we finally forget each other, to settle one or two minor material matters with you, whereby the generous and charming friend that I know you to be might do a favour to the man who for a few moments believed himself to be engaged to you. As I had no reason to doubt my mother's approval, and as, on the other hand, I wished each of us to dispose of that freedom which you have too kindly and abundantly sacrificed on my behalf, which could be envisaged if we intended to spend even only a few weeks of our lives living together, but which would have become as odious to you as to me once we were due to spend the whole of our lives together (in writing this to you I feel almost hurt to think that we were only a few seconds away from bringing this to fruition), I had thought to organize our existence along the most independent lines possible and, to start with, I wanted you to have a yacht on which you might have sailed while I was too ill to do anything but wait for you in port; I had written to Elstir to ask for his advice, since you appreciate his taste. And back on dry land, I would have wished you to have a motor-car all to yourself, which you would use for your own visits and travel at your leisure. The yacht was already almost fitted out, it is called, in accordance with the wish that you expressed at Balbec, le Cygne.[6] *And remembering that you preferred the Rolls to all other cars, I had ordered one for you. Now however that we shall never meet again, since I cannot hope to persuade you to accept either the boat or the car (which are of no use to me) I had thought – since I had asked an agent to order them on my behalf but giving them your name – that you might perhaps, by taking it upon yourself to cancel the order, spare me the embarrassment of owning a useless yacht and a useless car. Yet for this, as for many other things, we would have had to speak together. But I feel that for as long as I might be likely to fall in love with you again, which will not be for much longer, it would be crazy, merely for the sake of a sailing-boat and a Rolls-Royce, to meet again and prejudice your lifelong happiness, since you have decided that this consists in living far from me. So I prefer to keep the Rolls and even the yacht. And as I shall use neither of them, and as they are likely to remain unrigged in the harbour and parked in the stables, I shall have inscribed on the ——— of the yacht (heavens, I dare not use the wrong technical term and commit a solecism which would shock you) these lines from Mallarmé which you used to love:*

Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.[7]

Do you remember, it is from the poem whose first line is: Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui.[8] *Alas, today is no longer either virgin or beautiful. But those who, like me, know that they will soon turn it into a better "tomorrow" for themselves, are themselves difficult to tolerate. As for the Rolls, it would have deserved rather the following lines from the same poet, which you claimed not to understand:*

Dis si je ne suis pas joyeux
Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux
De voir dans l'air que ce feu troue
Avec des royaumes épars
Comme mourir pourpre la roue
Du seul vespéral de mes chars.[9]

Farewell for ever, my sweet Albertine, and thank you once again for the pleasant trip that we enjoyed together the day before we parted. I shall remember it fondly.

PS – I shall not reply to what you tell me of the proposals allegedly made to your aunt by Saint-Loup (whom I do not believe to be anywhere near Touraine). It's pure Sherlock Holmes. What can you think of me?'

No doubt, just as I had said to Albertine in the past 'I do not love you', in order to get her to love me, 'I forget people when I no longer see them', in order to get her to see me as often as possible, 'I have decided to leave you', in order to pre-empt any idea of separation, now it was because I desperately wanted her to return before a week had elapsed that I said 'Farewell' to her, 'for ever'; it was because I wanted to see her again that I told her: 'I would find it dangerous to see you again'; it was because living apart from her seemed worse than death that I wrote to her saying, 'You were right, we would be unhappy together'. Alas, this bogus letter, which I wrote so as to seem detached from her (the last shred of pride left over from my former love for Gilberte that survived in my love for Albertine) and also for the sweetness of saying certain things which could move only me, and not her, I ought to have guessed in advance that this might possibly provoke a negative response, that is, one confirming the truth of my words; that it was even quite probable that it would, for even had Albertine been less intelligent than she was, she would not have doubted for an instant that what I was saying was false. Even without lingering over my declared intentions in writing this letter, the simple fact that I was writing it, even if it had not followed Saint-Loup's intervention, was sufficient to prove to her that I wanted her to return and to imply that she should allow me to swallow the hook even deeper, then, having foreseen the possibility of a negative response, I should always have foreseen that this response would renew my love for Albertine more intensely than ever. And, even before sending my letter, I should have stopped to wonder whether, if Albertine were to answer in the same spirit and did not wish to return, I would be able to master my pain enough to force myself to stay silent, rather than telegraph her to say, 'Return' or send her yet another emissary, which, after writing to say that we would not see each other again, would be to give her detailed proof that I was unable to do without her and might lead her to refuse all the more strenuously to meet, which would then lead me, driven by my inability to contain my anguish, to go out to see her, without her even greeting me, as like as not. And no doubt, following three enormous blunders, this would have been the worst of all, after which my last resort would have been to kill myself on her doorstep. But the disastrous way in which the psychopathological universe is constructed implies that the clumsy act, the act which we should avoid at all costs, is precisely the act which soothes us, the act which, until we discover its outcome, opens up new prospects of hope for us and momentarily relieves us of the intolerable pain that rejection gave birth to within us, thus it is that when the pain is too strong, we fall into the clumsy error of writing to the person whom we love, or begging someone else to do so, or going to see her, and proving that we cannot do without her.

But I predicted none of this. The likely result of my letter seemed to me on the contrary to be to make Albertine return as soon as possible. So, since I was thinking of this outcome I felt greatly soothed as I wrote the letter. But at the same time I had not ceased to weep while I was writing it; at first rather in the same way as the day when I had faked a separation, because the words rendered present to me the idea that they expressed, although they aimed to produce the opposite effect (uttering their lies out of pride in order to avoid admitting that I loved her), they were charged with sadness, but I did also feel that there was some truth in the idea.

Since the effect of this letter seemed certain to me, I regretted having sent it. For in imagining Albertine's return as ultimately so simple, suddenly all the reasons that had made our marriage seem wrong for me returned in full strength. I hoped that she would refuse to return. I was starting to calculate how much my freedom and my whole future life hung on her refusal; how crazy I had been to write; how I should have retrieved my letter (alas, now sent), when Françoise brought it back to me, along with the newspaper which she was bringing upstairs. She was unsure how many stamps my letter required. But I immediately changed my mind; I did not want Albertine to return, however, in order to alleviate my anxiety, I wanted this to be her own decision, and so I decided to give the letter back to Françoise. I opened the newspaper. It announced the death of La Berma. Then I remembered the two different ways in which I had listened to *Phèdre*, but now there was a third way for me to think of the declaration scene. It seemed to me that what I had so often recited to myself and what I had listened to in the theatre, was the expression of laws that I would come to experience in my own life. There are in our soul things which are dearer to us than we realize. Or else, if we do yearn for them, it is because from day to day, for fear of failure or suffering, we delay taking full possession of them. That is what happened to me in the case of Gilberte, when I had thought that I could do without her. If, before the moment when we are entirely detached from these things, which occurs long after the moment when we first believe ourselves detached, if for instance the young lady gets engaged, we become insane and we find that we can no longer

bear our life, which seemed so monotonous and calm. Or if the object of our desire is in our possession, we believe that she is a burden to us, that we would gladly be rid of her; which is what had happened to me in the case of Albertine. But just let the indifferent object be removed by her departure, and we can no longer live. Now did not the 'argument' of *Phèdre* combine the two cases? Hippolyte is about to leave. Phèdre, who until then has taken care to court his hostility, from moral duty, so she says, or rather, as the poet makes her say, because she does not believe that she could succeed, and because she does not feel loved, and can now hold out no longer. She comes to him to admit her love, and this is the scene that I had so often recited to myself:

> On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous.[10]

Doubtless this reason for the departure of Hippolyte is incidental, we might think, compared with that of the death of Theseus. And even when, a few lines later, Phèdre pretends for a moment to have been misunderstood:

> … Aurais-je perdu tout le soin de ma gloire,[11]

we might suppose that it is because Hippolyte has rejected her declaration:

> Madame, oubliez-vous
> Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux?[12]

But even had he not had this indignant reaction, and had Phèdre seen happiness within her grasp, she might still have felt that it was of little worth. But as soon as she sees that it escapes her, that Hippolyte thinks that he has misunderstood her and makes his excuses, then, just as I did the moment after handing my letter to Françoise, she wants the rejection to come from him, she wants to try one last chance:

> Ah cruel, tu m'as trop entendue![13]

And even Swann's harshness towards Odette, of which I had heard tell, or mine towards Albertine, a harshness which substitutes for the former love a new one, composed of pity, tenderness and a need to find expression for emotion, and which is only a variant of the former love, even these can be also be found in this scene:

> Tu me haïssais plus, je ne t'aimais pas moins.
> Tes malheurs te prêtait encor de nouveaux charmes.[14]

The proof that 'care for her good name' is not what Phèdre holds most dear is that she would forgive Hippolyte and would turn her back on Oenone's good counsel, if she did not learn at this moment that Hippolyte was in love with Aricie. For jealousy, which in love is tantamount to the loss of all happiness, touches us so much more than the loss of reputation. Then it is that she lets Oenone (who is only a name for her baser self) slander Hippolyte without taking 'care to defend him' and thus sends the man who refuses to love her to a fate which, however calamitous, still offers her no consolation, since her own, self-inflicted death follows swiftly on from that of Hippolyte. This, minimizing the share of all the 'Jansenist' scruples,[15] as Bergotte would have called them, which Racine has allocated to Phèdre in order to make her seem less guilty, is at any rate how this scene appeared to me, almost as a prophecy of the kind of love-scenes that I would come to enact in my own lifetime. None the less, these reflections had not altered my determination in the slightest, and I held out the letter to Françoise for her to take it finally to the post, so as to have made this approach towards Albertine, which seemed indispensable to me the minute I heard that it had not been accomplished. And we are doubtless wrong to believe that fulfilling our desires is of little account, since as soon as we believe it possible for them not to be fulfilled, we need them once more, and it is only when we are quite certain that they cannot escape us that we feel that they are not worth pursuing. And, in a way, we are not wrong. For if this attainment of our desires and our happiness seem trivial only when they are secure, they none the less contain unstable elements from which nothing but sorrow can emerge. And the more completely our desires have been realized and the longer the happiness has been prolonged, against the laws of nature, and has been consecrated by habit, the stronger the sorrow, the more impossible to bear. In another sense too, the two tendencies, in this case the one which made me want my letter to be sent and, when I thought that it had been, to regret this, are both true in their way. As for the first tendency, it is only too easy to understand that we should pursue our happiness – or our unhappiness – while hoping at the same time, through the consequences of this new action as they start to unfold, to maintain expectations that will not leave us in total despair, in a word, which might manage to transform the misfortune which afflicts us into other forms that we imagine we must find less cruel. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is quite simply a beginning, the anticipated beginning of the disillusionment that we should soon experience if faced with the satisfaction of our desires, our regret at having settled on this form of happiness at the expense of excluding others. I handed the letter back to Françoise, telling her to take it quickly to the post-office. As soon as my letter had left, I again envisaged Albertine's return as imminent. This brought into my mind a constant stream of graceful images, whose sweetness could not help neutralize the dangers that I saw in this return. I was intoxicated by the prospect of recovering the long-lost sweetness of having her by my side.

Time passes, and gradually all the things which we have falsely alleged come true, an experience which had affected me only too strongly with Gilberte; the indifference that I had feigned while I sobbed day and night had come to exist; gradually, as I told Gilberte in a mendacious dictum which had retrospectively come true, life had driven us apart. I remembered this and thought: 'If Albertine waits for a few months, my lies will come true. And now that the worst is over, would it not be in her best interest to allow that moment to pass? If she returns, I shall have to renounce my true life, which I admit that I was not yet able to enjoy, but which could gradually start to become more attractive as the memory of Albertine becomes gradually weaker.' I cannot claim that the process of forgetting was not already at work. But one of the effects of forgetting was precisely to make many of the unpleasant sides to Albertine's character and the hours of boredom that I had endured at her side, no longer figure in my memory and thus cease to be reasons for me to wish that she were no longer there, as I had done while she was still with me, and to give me a summary image of her, embellished with all the love that I had felt for other women. In this particular guise, forgetting, although still working within me to accustom me to our separation, only made me see Albertine as sweeter and more beautiful than ever, and made me desire her return all the more.

On many occasions after Albertine's departure, whenever it seemed to me that I would not look as if I had been crying, I rang for Françoise and said: 'We ought to make sure that Mademoiselle Albertine has not left anything behind. Don't forget to clean her room so that everything is ready for her when she returns.' Or simply: 'Actually, it was only the other day, I suppose it must have been the day before she left, that Mademoiselle Albertine was talking to me about …' I wanted to curtail the odious relish that Françoise took in Albertine's absence, by making her realize that it would be short-lived; I also wanted to show Françoise that I had no qualms about discussing her departure and to present it – as do certain generals who refer to their forced retreats as 'strategic withdrawals executed according to contingency plans' – as intended, as constituting an interlude whose true significance I was momentarily dissimulating, but not at all as the end of my friendship with Albertine. By constantly mentioning her, I hoped ultimately to bring something of her back into the room, like a breath of fresh air, since her departure had emptied the room and made it impossible to breathe. And then again, we try to reduce the scale of our suffering by bringing it into our everyday conversation between ordering a suit and choosing the menu for dinner.

While she was tidying Albertine's room, Françoise's curiosity led her to open the drawer of a little rosewood table where my friend used to place the personal jewellery that she removed when she went to bed. 'Oh, Monsieur! Mademoiselle Albertine has forgotten to take her rings, she has left them in the drawer.' My first reaction was to say: 'We must send them on to her.' But that would look as if I were not sure that she would return. 'Well,' I replied after a moment's silence, 'it's hardly worth the trouble for the short time that she will be away. Give them to me and. I'll take care of it.' Françoise handed them to me with some reluctance. She detested Albertine, but she judged me by her own standards and imagined that no one could hand me a letter written by my friend without fearing that I would open it. I took the rings. 'I hope that Monsieur will be careful not to lose them,' said Françoise, 'just look how beautiful they are! I don't know who gave her them, whether it was Monsieur or somebody else, but I know it must be somebody rich who has good taste!' – It wasn't me, I replied, and besides the two did not come from the same person, one was given her by her aunt and she bought the other herself. – Not from the same person! Françoise cried, Monsieur must be joking, they are identical, except for the ruby that they added to one of them, there is the same eagle on both of them and the same initials inside.' I do not know whether Françoise was aware of the pain that she was causing, but a smile started to creep over her face and remained there. 'What do you mean, the same eagle? You must be mad. On the one without the ruby you're right, there is an eagle, but on the other one there's an engraving of a sort of man's head. – A man's head? Where did Monsieur see that? Even with my reading-glasses I saw straight away that it was one of the eagle's wings; if Monsieur will take his magnifying glass, he will see the other wing on the other side and the head and the beak in the middle. You can see every feather. Oh, what a fine piece of work.' My anxious need to know whether Albertine had lied to me made me forget that I should have stood on my dignity in Françoise's company and denied her the cruel pleasure which she took, if not in tormenting me, at least in denigrating my friend. I gasped as Françoise went to fetch my magnifying glass, then I took it and asked her to show me the eagle on the ruby ring; she had no trouble in helping me to identify the wings, stylized in the same manner as on the other ring, with the head and every feather picked out in relief. She also pointed out similar insignia in the ruby ring, although in this case it is true that they were accompanied by others. And inside both were Albertine's initials. 'But I am amazed that Monsieur needed to take so much trouble to see that they were the same ring,' said Françoise. 'Even if you don't look close up, you can see the same craftsmanship, the same way of working the gold, the same shape. Just by looking at them I would have sworn that they came from the same place. It stands out like a dish by a good cook.' And indeed, the curiosity of the servant, accustomed to noting details with terrifying precision and spurred on by hatred, joined forces, in this expert scrutiny, with her good taste, the same taste in fact that she displayed in her cooking, and which was perhaps whetted, as I had noticed in the style of her dress when we set out for Balbec, by the coquetry of a woman who used to be pretty and who had taken note of the dresses and jewellery of other women. If I had opened the wrong medicine chest and if, instead of taking a few veronal tablets one day when I felt that I had drunk too many cups of tea, I had taken as many cups of coffee, my heart could not have beaten more violently. I asked Françoise to leave the room. I wished that I could have seen Albertine immediately. My revulsion at her falsehood and my jealousy of someone unknown were augmented by my pain at learning that she had accepted presents in this way. It is true that I had given her more, but a woman whom we are keeping does not seem to us to be a kept woman as long as we know that she is not being kept by anyone else. And yet since I had never ceased to spend so much money on her, I kept her despite this moral weakness; this weakness that I had allowed in her, perhaps encouraged, possibly even created. And then, just as we have the ability to tell ourselves stories in order to alleviate our pains, just as we manage when we are dying of hunger to persuade ourselves that some stranger is about to leave us a fortune of a hundred million francs, I imagined Albertine in my arms, explaining to me in a word that she had bought the second ring because of the similar design and that it was she who had had the initials engraved. But this exploration was still tender, it had not yet had time to put its salutary roots down into my mind, and my pain was not to be so easily appeased. And I wondered how many men who say that their mistresses are very kind suffer similar torments and thus lie to others as well as themselves. Yet they do not entirely lie; they do spend genuinely delicious hours with these women; but all the tenderness that these women show their lovers in the presence of their friends, to flatter their pride, and all the tenderness that they reserve for their lovers in private, to allow themselves to be worshipped, mask unknown hours where the lover has suffered, doubted and searched endlessly, but in vain, to discover the truth! Such suffering inevitably accompanies the sweetness of loving a woman and delighting in even her most trivial remarks, while knowing that they are trivial, as long as they are permeated with her scent. At this moment I could no longer delight in breathing Albertine's scent through my memory. I sat downcast, holding the two rings in my hand, looking at that pitiless eagle whose beak was tearing at my heart, whose wings with their chiselled feathers had flown off with the confidence that I still placed in my friend, and under whose claws my lacerated mind could no longer for a moment escape the questions ceaselessly raised about that stranger, whose name the eagle surely symbolized while none the less refusing to allow me to read it, the woman whom she had doubtless loved in the past and whom she had certainly seen again not so long ago, since it was on that unspeakably sweet and intimate day which we had spent walking in the Bois de Boulogne together that I had seen for the first time the second ring, the one where the eagle looked as if it was dipping its beak in the bright, bloody pool of the ruby.

Yet even if from morning to night I continually pined over Albertine's departure, this did not mean that I thought only of her. On the one hand her charm had gradually permeated objects which finally became very distant from her, but were none the less galvanized by the same emotions as those she inspired in me, if something made me think of Incarville, or the Verdurins, or Léa's latest role, a wave of suffering flooded over me. On the other hand, what I myself called 'thinking of Albertine' was in fact thinking of ways of getting her to return, of meeting up with her, of finding out what she was doing. So that if, during these hours of unremitting torture, my suffering could have been displayed in graphic form, it would have shown images of the Orsay railway station,[16] the banknotes offered to Mme Bontemps, Saint-Loup leaning over a post-office counter filling in a form to send me a telegram, but never a picture of Albertine. In the same way that during the course of our lives we, in our egoism, constantly see before our eyes the goals which our selves find valuable, but do not perceive the 'I' itself which never ceases to scrutinize them, so the desire that directs our actions swoops down upon them, but never looks back on itself, either because it is too utilitarian and, spurning knowledge, prefers to rush into action, or because we search out the future in order to compensate for the disappointments of the present, or even because the indolence of the mind tempts it to slide down the slippery slope of the imagination rather than to climb the steep slope of introspection. In fact in the moments of crisis when we are prepared to stake our very life, as the person on whom it depends reveals the increasingly vast place that she takes up for us, leaving nothing in our world undisturbed by her presence, proportionally the image of this person decreases until it is no longer perceptible. We feel the impact of her presence all around us through the emotions that we feel; but the cause, the person herself, is nowhere to be found. During those days I was so unable to call Albertine's image to mind that I might almost have thought that I did not love her, just as my mother, in those moments of despair when she found herself totally incapable of picturing my grandmother (except on one occasion in a random encounter in a dream which made such an impression on her that, although she was asleep, she forced herself, with the little strength left to her in her sleep, to make it last), might have reproached herself and did in fact reproach herself with not missing her mother, whose dream had struck her a mortal blow, but whose features eluded her memory.

Why might I have believed that Albertine was not attracted to women? Because, especially in recent times, she had said that she was not attracted to them; but was not the life we lived together based on a perpetual lie? Never once had she said to me, 'Why am I not free to go out as I wish? Why do you ask other people what I do?' But our life was in fact too singular for her not to have asked if she had not understood the reason. And was it not understandable that my silence over the causes of her sequestration should be countered by an equally inflexible silence over her perpetual desires and countless memories, her countless desires and expectations? Françoise looked as if she knew that I was lying when I referred to Albertine's imminent return. And her belief seemed founded on rather more than the truth which usually guided our servant, that is, the fact that masters do not like to be humiliated in front of their servants and reveal to them only that part of reality which does not deviate too far from a flattering fiction, liable to maintain respect. On this occasion, Françoise's belief seemed to be founded on something else, as if she herself had awakened and fuelled the suspicions in Albertine's mind, and fanned her anger, in short as if she had driven her to an extremity where she could tell that her departure was inevitable. If this was true, my version of a temporary absence, known and approved by me, could have been met only with incredulity by Françoise. But her notion of Albertine's self-interested nature, which, inflamed by her hatred, caused her to magnify the 'profit'

that Albertine was supposedly extracting from me, could to some extent cause her to doubt her convictions. Thus when in her presence I alluded to Albertine's imminent return as something wholly natural, Françoise looked into my eyes (in the same way as, when the butler teased her by reading out a piece of political news that she was reluctant to believe, altering the words so as to say, for example, they were going to close down the churches and banish the clergy,[17] Françoise, even from the depths of her kitchen, and despite not being able to read, instinctively and eagerly looked at the newspaper), as if she were able to see whether it was really written there or whether I had made it up.

But when Françoise saw me write a long letter and then check the right address for Mme Bontemps, her previously rather vague terror that Albertine might return welled up more strongly than ever within her. It reached a point of veritable consternation when she was obliged one morning to hand me among others a letter where she had recognized Albertine's handwriting on the envelope. She wondered whether Albertine's departure had not been purely theatrical, a supposition which she found doubly upsetting, in that it ensured Albertine's presence in the house permanently for the future and in that it constituted for me, that is, in so far as I was Françoise's master, for Françoise herself the humiliation of having been manipulated by Albertine. However impatient I was to read Albertine's letter, I could not help momentarily studying Françoise's eyes, drained of all hope as they read in this augury the imminent return of Albertine, just as a devotee of winter sports concludes joyfully that winter is nigh when he sees the swallows depart. At last Françoise left, and when I had made sure that she had closed the door, I opened her letter silently, so as not to seem anxious, reading as follows:

'*My dear friend, thank you for all your kind remarks, I am at your disposal and shall cancel the order for the Rolls if you think that I may be of assistance, and I do think this likely. You have only to tell me the name of your agent. You would be liable to let yourself be taken in by these people who have only one thing in mind, which is to make a sale; and what would you do with a car, since you never go out? I am very touched that you should have kept such a nice memory of our last outing. Please believe that for my part I shall never forget this excursion and its twofold twilight (since night was falling and we were destined to part) and that it will never be erased from my mind until blackest night finally invades it.*'

I felt confident that this last sentence was purely rhetorical and that Albertine could not have kept until her dying day such a sweet memory of an outing which had certainly given her no pleasure, since she had been impatient to leave me. But I also admired the talent of the cyclist and golfer from Balbec, who before making my acquaintance had read nothing by Racine apart from *Esther*,[18] and I realized how right I had been to feel that she had been enriched during her stay with me by new qualities, which had changed her and made her more complete. And thus, the words which I had uttered in Balbec, 'I think that my friendship would be valuable for you, that I am just the person who could provide you with what you lack' – I had written as a dedication to her on a photograph: *Certain to be providential*, – words which I spoke without believing them, only in order to persuade her that frequenting me would be profitable and to minimize the tedium that this might provoke, these words too turned out to be true; as, in fact, did my admission to her that I did not want to see her for fear of falling in love with her. I had said this because, on the contrary, I knew that with constant meeting my love tended to fade and that separation excited it; but in fact the constant meeting had given birth to a need for her infinitely stronger than that first love in Balbec.

But in the end Albertine's letter was unhelpful. She spoke only of writing to the agent. I must extricate myself from this situation and precipitate matters. I had the following idea. I immediately had a letter sent to Andrée telling her that Albertine was staying with her aunt, that I felt very lonely and that she would do me the greatest favour if she could come and take up residence with me for a few days but that, since I did not want to act behind Albertine's back, I begged her to let Albertine know. And at the same time I wrote to Albertine, as if I had not yet received her letter:

'My dear friend, forgive me for something you will understand very well, which is that I so detest acting behind people's backs that I wanted you to be alerted by me as well as by her. Having had the experience of your sweet presence by my side, I have got into the bad habit of not living alone. Since we have decided that you would not return, I thought that the person who would best take your place, because she would change my life least, and would most remind me of you, was Andrée, and I have asked her to come. So that this should not seem too sudden, I have spoken to her of a period of just a few days, but between you and me I think that this time it is something permanent. Do you not think that I am right? You know that your little group of girls at Balbec has always been the social group that has exerted the most influence over me, the one with which I was most pleased to be associated when allowed. There is no doubt that I still feel its prestige. Since our fatal characters and life's misfortunes have determined that my little Albertine could not be my wife, I believe that I should none the less take a wife – one less charming, but one whose greater compatibility of character ought perhaps to allow her to be happier with me – in Andrée.'

But once I had sent this letter, I was suddenly assailed by the suspicion that, Albertine having written, 'I would have been only too happy to return if you had written to me direct,' she had said this only because I had not written to her direct and that, if I had done so, she still would not have returned, that she would have been pleased to know that Andrée was living with me and was to become my wife, provided that she, Albertine, remained free, because for a week now, foiling all the precautions that I had taken hour by hour for more than six months, she was able to give free rein to her vices and do every minute of the day what I had been preventing her from doing. I thought that she was probably applying her freedom out there to dubious ends, and no doubt this idea as I formulated it made me sad, but it remained vague, since it pictured nothing specific, and through the indefinite number of women that she had led me to imagine might be her lovers, without letting me dwell on any one in particular, it threw my mind into a sort of perpetual motion which did cause me pain, but a pain which, for lack of any concrete image, was bearable. But it ceased to be so and became atrocious when Saint-Loup returned. Before saying why the words that he uttered made me so unhappy, I must relate an incident which occurred immediately before his visit and whose memory so disturbed me that it diluted, if not the painful impression that I gained from my conversation with Saint-Loup, at least the practical impact of this conversation. This incident was the following. Burning with impatience to see Saint-Loup, I was waiting for him on the staircase (which I could not have done if my mother had been in the house, for that, apart from 'talking out of the window', was what she hated most of all), when I heard the following words: 'What do you mean! If there is someone you don't like can't you get him dismissed? It's not so difficult. All you have to do, for instance, is hide the things that they will ask him to fetch; then, just when his masters are in a hurry and call for him, he won't be able to find a thing, he'll lose his grip: my aunt will be furious with him and ask you: "Whatever can he be doing?" When he does arrive, he'll be late, everyone will be furious and he won't have brought what they'd asked for. By the fourth or fifth occasion you can be sure that he will be dismissed, especially if you take care on the sly to make the clean things that he was supposed to fetch dirty, and thousands of tricks like that.' I was struck dumb with stupefaction, for these cruel, Machiavellian words were uttered by the voice of Saint-Loup. Since until then I had always considered him to be someone so fundamentally kind, so sympathetic towards those who suffer, it had the same effect on me as if I had heard him reciting the part of Satan in a play; that is, he could not be speaking in his own name. 'But surely everyone should be allowed to earn his living,' replied the other man, whom I then saw and identified as one of the Duchesse de Guermantes's footmen. 'Why should you care a damn as long as you are all right?' Saint-Loup replied wickedly. 'You'll have the added pleasure of having a scapegoat. You can feel free to spill entire ink-wells over his livery just when he is preparing to serve at an important dinner, in short, never leave him in peace for a second, until he prefers to leave of his own accord. As for me, by the way, I'll put my shoulder to the wheel, I'll tell my aunt that I admire your patience in serving alongside such a clumsy, uncouth individual.' I announced my presence, and Saint-Loup welcomed me, but my confidence in him was shaken since I had heard him sound such a different man from the one I knew. And I wondered if someone who was capable of acting so cruelly towards a hapless wretch might not have acted treacherously towards me in his mission to Mme Bontemps. This reflection served above all, once he had left me, to help me avoid considering his failure as proof that I could not succeed. But while he was by my side, I had thoughts only for the Saint-Loup of old and above all for the friend who had just left Mme Bontemps, as I thought. He said to me straight away: 'You think that I should have telephoned you more often, but they kept telling me you were engaged.' Yet my suffering became unbearable when he said: 'To carry on from where my last despatch left off, I went through a kind of outhouse which led into the house, and they took me down a long corridor into the lounge.' On hearing these words – outhouse, corridor, lounge – and even before he had finished uttering them, my heart was wracked by spasms even more immediately than if it had been connected to an electric current, for the power that can circle the globe the most times per second is not so much electricity as pain. How I repeated these words, outhouse, corridor, lounge, renewing their shock at my leisure, when Saint-Loup had left. In an outhouse, you can hide with a girl-friend. And in that lounge, who knows what Albertine did when her aunt was not there? And yet, had I imagined the house where Albertine was living as able to include neither outhouse nor lounge? No, I had not imagined the house at all, or merely as a vague location. I had

suffered first of all when the place where she was staying had become geographically specified for the first time, when I had learned that instead of being in one of two or three possible places she was in Touraine; the words spoken by her concierge had marked out in my heart as on a map the place where I would finally have to suffer. But even when I had got used to the idea that she was in a house in Touraine, I still had not seen the house; never could I have conceived the frightful idea of a lounge, an outhouse and a corridor, which I now saw staring out at me from Saint-Loup's retina, which had seen them, and appearing in the guise of the rooms which Albertine walked into, passed through and lived in; these specific rooms and not an infinity of other possible rooms which had neutralized one another. In the words outhouse, corridor and lounge, I perceived my folly in having left Albertine for a week in this accursed place, whose existence (rather than its simple possibility) had just been revealed to me. Alas! when Saint-Loup told me in addition that while in this lounge he had heard someone singing at the top of her voice in the next room, and that it was Albertine who was singing, I realized with despair that, once rid of me, she was happy! She had regained her freedom. And all the while I had been thinking that she would come back and take Andrée's place! My pain turned into anger with Saint-Loup. 'Letting her know that you were coming is precisely what I asked you to avoid. – How easy do you think that was! They promised me she wasn't there. Oh, I know you're annoyed with me, I could tell from your telegrams. But you are not being fair, I did what I could.' Set free once more, released once again from the cage where I had kept her for days on end without letting her come into my room, she had assumed in my eyes all her old value, she had become once again the object of everyone's pursuit, the wondrous bird of the earliest days. 'Look, to sum up. As for the money, I don't know what to say, the woman I spoke to seemed so discreet that I was afraid of offending her. But then she didn't even raise an eyebrow when I did mention money. And a little later she even told me that she was touched to see how well we understood each other. Yet everything she said subsequently was so discreet, so refined, that I found it impossible to believe that she could be talking about the money I was offering when she said: "We understand each other so well," for basically I was acting like a cad. – But perhaps she didn't understand; perhaps she didn't hear what you said; you should have repeated it, for it's surely the money that would have made everything work out. – But how can you imagine that she couldn't have heard me? I was talking to her as I'm talking to you now, and she is neither deaf nor mad. – And didn't she pass any remark at all? – Not one. – You could have repeated it, at least once. – How could I have repeated it? As soon as I went in I saw what she looked like, and I thought that you had been mistaken, that you were making me put my foot in it and that it was terribly difficult to just offer her money like that. Yet I still went ahead, in order to follow your orders, but convinced that she would have me thrown out. – But she didn't. Therefore either she hadn't heard what you'd said and you needed to repeat it, or you could have pursued the matter. – It's all very well for you to say: "she hadn't heard what you said" because you are here with me, but, let me say it again, if you had been there and listening to our conversation, there was no interruption, I said it quite bluntly, it was impossible for her not to understand. – But was she at least convinced that I have always wanted to marry her niece? – No, if you want my opinion on that, she didn't believe for one moment that you had the slightest intention of marrying her. She told me that you had told her niece yourself that you wanted to leave her. I don't know if she is convinced even now that you do intend to get married.' This reassured me somewhat, by making me feel that I appeared less humiliated, therefore more liable still to be loved, and freer to take some decisive steps. And yet I felt tormented. 'I'm so sorry, I can see that you are not pleased,' said Saint-Loup. 'Oh no, I am touched by your kindness and I am grateful, but it seems to me that you might have … – I did my best. Nobody else could have done more, or even as much. Try someone else. – But, how can I? If I had known, I wouldn't have sent you, but now that your approach has failed, it prevents me from trying again.' I reproached him again with trying to help me and failing. As he was leaving, Saint-Loup had met some young ladies on their way into the house. I had often previously suspected that she knew other girls in the region, but this was the first time that it tormented me so. We really have to suppose that nature has enabled our minds to secrete a natural antidote which cancels out the suppositions which we ceaselessly formulate and makes them harmless; but nothing could immunize me against the girls whom Saint-Loup had encountered. And yet were not all these details precisely what I had sought to glean from everyone about Albertine? Was it not I myself who, in order to know them more fully, had asked Saint-Loup, when he had been summoned to his Colonel's side, to come to see me at whatever cost? Was it not I who had sought out these details, or rather my ravenous pain, greedy to feed on them to give itself substance? Finally Saint-Loup told me that he had been pleasantly surprised to meet the only person in the vicinity whom he knew, a pretty actress who was on holiday nearby, a former friend of Rachel's, who had revived memories for him. And this actress's name was enough for me to think, 'Perhaps she was the one'; enough to make me see Albertine flushed and smiling with pleasure, held in the arms of a woman whom I did not know. And in fact why should that not have been the case? Had I ever deprived myself of thinking about other women since I knew Albertine? The evening when I had been to the Princesse de Guermantes for the first time, when I had returned home, was I not thinking much less about the latter than about the young lady who, according to Saint-Loup, frequented houses of ill-fame, and about Mme Putbus's chambermaid? Was it not for the latter that I had returned to Balbec? More recently, I had been very tempted to go to Venice, so why should Albertine not have been tempted to go to Touraine? Except that, deep down, as I now realized, I would not have left her, I would not have gone to Venice. And even, just as I was thinking, 'I shall leave her soon,' I knew in the depths of my heart that I would never leave her, just as I knew that I would never get down to work again, nor lead a healthy life, nor any of the things that I promised myself each day I would do the next. Only, whatever I might believe deep down, I had thought that I was behaving more cleverly by letting her live under the threat of perpetual separation. And doubtless my wretched cleverness had been all too convincing. In any case things could not continue in this way, I could not leave her in Touraine with those girls, with that actress; I could not bear the thought of the life that was slipping away from me. I would await her reply to my letter: if she was doing wrong, alas! one day more or less would make no difference (and perhaps I thought this because, having lost the habit of requiring an account of every minute of her life, a single one of which leaving her free would have driven me mad, my jealousy no longer observed the same time-scale). But as soon as I had received her reply, if it said she did not intend to return, I would go to fetch her back; I would tear her away from her girl-friends by consent or by force. Besides, would it not be better for me to go there myself, now that I had discovered Saint-Loup's previously unsuspected malice? Who could tell whether he might not have devised a whole conspiracy to keep me away from Albertine? Was it because I had changed, was it because until then I had not been able to suppose that natural causes would one day lead me into such an extraordinary situation, how I would have lied if I had written to her now what I had said to her in Paris, that I hoped no accident would befall her? Oh, if one might have occurred, my life, instead of being for ever poisoned by this ceaseless jealousy, would immediately have recovered, if not happiness, at least the peace bestowed by the suppression of suffering.

'Suppression of suffering'? Could I really have believed it, believed that death erases only what exists and leaves everything else in the state it was before, that it removes the pain from the heart of the man for whom the existence of his partner is no longer anything but a cause of pain, that it removes the pain and leaves nothing in its place? Suppression of pain! As I browsed through the news items in the papers, I regretted not having been brave enough to formulate the same wish as Swann. If Albertine could have fallen victim to an accident and had lived, I would have had an excuse to rush to her bedside; if she had died, I would have recovered what Swann called the freedom to live. Did I believe this? Swann, who was so refined and thought he knew himself so well, had believed it. How little we know of what lies in our hearts! How well I could have taught him a little later, had be still been alive, that his wish was as absurd as it was criminal and that the death of the woman he loved would have liberated him from nothing!

I abandoned all pride concerning Albertine, I sent her a desperate telegram asking her to return on any terms, saying that she would be able to do whatever she liked, that I would ask only to kiss her for a minute before bedtime three times a week. And had she said 'Only once a week', I would have accepted that 'once'. She never returned. My telegram had barely been sent when another arrived for me. It was from Mme Bontemps. The world is not given to each individual in advance. During the course of a lifetime things that we could never have guessed are added in. Ah! It was not suppression of suffering that the first two lines of the telegram produced in me: 'My poor friend, our little Albertine is no more, forgive me for having to tell you this terrible thing, knowing that you loved her so much. She was thrown against a tree by her horse while out riding. We did everything we could, but could not revive her. Would that I had died in her place!' No, not the suppression of suffering, but a previously unknown kind of suffering, that of learning that she would not return. But had I not told myself several times that she might not return? I had indeed said this to myself, but I now realized that I had never believed it for a moment. As I needed her presence and her kisses

to help to bear the pain caused by my suspicions, I had acquired the habit, ever since Balbec, of being always with her. Even when she was out of the house and I was on my own, I would still be kissing her. I had continued to do so since she had left for Touraine. I needed her fidelity less than her return. And if my intellect could sometimes with impunity doubt this return, my imagination did not cease for one minute to picture it. Instinctively I stroked my neck and my lips, which had imagined themselves being kissed by her since she had left, yet which would never be kissed by her again; I stroked them as Mama had caressed me on my grandmother's death, saying to me, 'My poor child, your grandmother who loved you so much will never kiss you again.' My whole future life had been torn out of my heart. My future life? Had I then never on any occasion thought of living it without Albertine? No, never. Had I not for so long dedicated to her every minute of my life until my dying day? Of course I had! This future inseparable from her was not something that I had been able to perceive, but now that it had been cut loose I felt a gaping hole in the place where it had been in my heart. Françoise, who as yet knew nothing, came into my room; I shouted at her furiously, 'What is it?', then she said to me (and there are sometimes words that place an alternative reality in the same place as the one which we see before our eyes, making us reel with dizziness), 'There's no need for Monsieur to look angry. On the contrary, he is going to be very pleased. It's two letters from Mademoiselle Albertine.' I realized afterwards that I must have had the look of a man taking leave of his senses. I did not feel happy, nor even incredulous. I was like a man who sees the same place in his room taken up by a sofa and a grotto. Since nothing seems real any more, he collapses to the floor. Albertine's two letters must have been written shortly before the ride where she had met her death. The first one said: '*My dear friend, many thanks for showing your confidence in me by telling me of your intention to invite Andrée into your home. I am sure that she will accept with great pleasure and I think that she is very lucky. Gifted as she is, she will make the most of the company of a man like you and of the admirable influence that you are able to exert over a fellow creature. I think that your proposal will bring as much benefit to her as to you. So, should she show the slightest reticence (although I do not think this likely), send me a telegram, and I shall take her in hand*.' The second letter was dated a day later. In fact she must have written them both within a few moments of each other and then pre-dated the first. For all the while I had been absurdly misinterpreting her intentions, which had been merely to return to my side, whereas someone with no stake in the affair, say a man of no imagination, the negotiator of a peace treaty, or a businessman auditing a transaction, would have judged better than I. The letter contained only these words: '*Would it be too late for me to return to you? If you have not yet written to Andrée, would you agree to take me back? I shall be bound by your decision, which I beg you to let me know without delay, since you can imagine how impatiently I await it. If it were favourable, I would take the next train. Yours with all my heart, Albertine.'*

For Albertine's death to have suppressed my suffering, the mortal blow would have had to kill her not only in Touraine, but within me. There, she had never been more alive. To enter inside us, people have been obliged to take on the form and to fit into the framework of time; appearing to us only in successive instants, they have never managed to reveal to us more than one aspect, print more than a single photograph of themselves at a time. This is no doubt a great weakness in human beings, to consist in a simple collection of moments; yet a great strength too; they depend on memory, and our memory of a moment is not informed of everything that has happened since, the moment which it registered still lives on and, with it, the person whose form was sketched within it. And then this fragmentation not only makes the dead person live on, it multiplies her forms. In order to console myself, I would have had to forget not one but innumerable Albertines. When I had succeeded in accepting the grief of having lost one of them, I would have to begin again with another, with a hundred others.

So then my life was entirely changed. What had constituted its sweetness was not Albertine in person, but, in parallel with her, when I was alone, the perpetual rebirth of moments from the past called forth by identical moments. The sound of the rain brought back to me the scent of lilac in Combray; the sun's rays moving over the balcony brought the pigeons from the Champs-Elysées; the sounds muffled by the morning heat brought the coolness of cherries; the yearning for Brittany or Venice was borne by the sound of the wind and the return of Easter. Summer was on its way, the days grew longer. It was the season when pupils and teachers leave before mid-morning to go to the public gardens to prepare for their final examinations under the trees, to catch the last drop of coolness falling from a sky less burning than in the heat of the day, but already arid and bare. From my darkened room, with a force of evocation which equalled that of former times but now brought only suffering, I sensed that the sun hung heavy in the air outside as it set, garishly daubing the verticals of houses and churches. And if Françoise on her return were accidentally to ruffle the folds of the lined curtains, I would smother a cry escaping from the inner wound that had just been reopened by the sliver of antique sunlight which had made the modern façade of Bricqueville l'Orgueilleuse seem beautiful, when Albertine had said, 'It has been restored.' Not knowing how to explain my sighs to Françoise, I said, 'Oh, I am so thirsty.' She went out and then returned, but I had to turn away abruptly, assailed by the painful charge of one of those thousands of invisible memories which erupted in the shadows around me at every moment: I had just noticed that she had brought me cider and cherries, the cider and cherries which a farm lad had brought out to us in the car at Balbec, those substances which in former days would have enabled me to commune in perfect harmony with the rainbow filtering through shady dining-rooms on torrid days. Then for the first time I thought back to the farm at Les Écorres, and I thought that on certain days at Balbec when Albertine told me that she was not free because she had to go out with her aunt, she was perhaps with one or other of her girl-friends on a farm with which she knew that I was not familiar and where, while I was waiting around at the Marie-Antoinette farm[19] on the off-chance of a meeting only to be told, 'We have not seen her today,' she treated her friend to the same words that she had spoken to me when we had been for a drive together: 'He will never think of looking for us here, so we will not be disturbed.' I asked Françoise to draw the curtains to save me from seeing the ray of sunlight. But it continued to infiltrate my memory just as corrosively. 'I don't like it, it has been restored, but tomorrow we will go to Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, and the day after to …' Tomorrow, the day after, it was a future life that we would share together, perhaps for ever, that was starting to take shape; my heart leapt out towards it, but it was no longer there, Albertine was dead.

I asked Françoise what time it was. Six o'clock. At last, thank God, the oppressive heat that Albertine and I used to so complain about, and so enjoy, was going to disappear. The day was drawing to a close. But what benefit did this bring me? The coolness of evening set in, the sun went down; in my memory, at the end of the road along which we were driving home together, I noticed, beyond the last village, something that looked like another resort in the distance, but too far to reach the same evening, so that we would stop in Balbec and stay there together. Together then. But now, alone, I had to pull up short before this same abyss, she was dead. It was no longer enough to draw the curtains, I tried to plug the eyes and ears of my memory, so as not to see this orange-tinted strip of sunset, so as not to hear those invisible birds who called to each other from tree to tree. All around me while I was being so tenderly kissed by the girl who now lay dead, I tried to avoid the sensations invoked by the dampness of leaves at evening, the switchback rise and fall of roads. But already these sensations had taken hold of me again, borne me quite far from the present moment, allowing the idea that Albertine was dead to fall back far enough to gather all the more momentum before it returned to strike me again. Oh, I would never again enter a forest and walk beneath the trees. But would the open plains be any less cruel to me? How often in order to fetch Albertine, or returning with her, had I crossed the open plain of Criqueville, sometimes in misty weather when the waves of fog gave us the impression of being surrounded by a vast lake, sometimes on limpid nights when the moonlight, draining the earth of matter and making it seem celestial just two feet away whereas in daylight it does so only at a distance, subsumed the fields and the woods into the heavens and sealed the whole in a single block of blue chalcedony! Françoise must have been pleased that Albertine was dead, and to be fair I must acknowledge that from a kind of decorum and tact she did not pretend to be sad. But the unwritten rules of her ancient code of law and the tradition of the medieval peasant weeping over tales of chivalry were deeper rooted than her hatred of Albertine or even Eulalie. Thus on one of those late afternoons, when I was too slow to hide my suffering, she noticed my tears, aided by her experience on a farm as a little girl who had been used to capturing animals and making them suffer, experiencing pure joy in strangling chickens and boiling lobsters alive, and when I was ill, in observing my sick complexion, as if I were an owl she had injured, and then commenting on it in lugubrious tones, as if it were a harbinger of doom. But her practice of the 'common law' of Combray would not allow her to take tears and grief lightly; she judged them as sinister as removing one's flannel vest or picking at one's food. 'Oh, no, Monsieur, you mustn't cry like that, you'll make yourself ill!' And in wanting to stop my tears she looked as worried as if they had been streams of blood. Unfortunately for her I adopted a cold expression which cut short her intended, but perhaps none the less

sincere, effusions. She probably felt the same about Albertine as she had about Eulalie, and now that my friend could no longer derive any profit from me, Françoise no longer hated her. She was determined to show me, however, that she was well aware that I was crying and that, simply following my family's morbid habit, I did not want to 'let people see'. 'You mustn't cry, Monsieur,' she said, in calmer tones this time, rather to show me her insight than to display any pity. And she added: 'It was bound to happen, she was too happy, poor thing, she didn't know how happy she was.'

How long it takes the day to die on these never-ending summer evenings! The pale ghost of the house opposite continued for ever painting the sky with its persistent white water-colour. At last night fell inside the apartment, I stumbled into the furniture in the lobby, but, amid what I had taken for total darkness, the glazed panel in the door to the staircase shone translucent and blue, with the blue of a flower or an insect's wing, a blue that would have seemed beautiful to me if I had not felt that with this parting reflection the relentlessly cruel daylight dealt me a final thrust, as sharp as steel.

Complete darkness would, however, finally fall, but then I had only to see a star beside the tree in the courtyard to remember leaving by car after dinner for the woods of Chantepie, carpeted by moonlight. And even in the streets, I might happen to focus and reflect upon the natural purity of a beam of moonlight striking the back of a bench amid the artificial lights of Paris, as it brought the city into the countryside for a moment in my imagination, evoking the eternal silence of quiet pastures and permeating Paris with the painful memory of the rides that I had shared with Albertine. Would the night never end? But at the first cool draught of dawn I shivered, for it had brought back to me the softness of that summer when from Balbec to Incarville, from Incarville to Balbec, we had so often accompanied one another home and back again until the first light dawned. I had one single hope for the future, a hope much more poignant than a fear – which was to forget Albertine. I knew that I would forget her one day, I had after all forgotten Gilberte, Mme de Guermantes, and even my grandmother. And our most just and cruel punishment for the forgetting, as absolute and silent as that of the grave, which detaches us from those whom we no longer love, is that we should sense this same act of forgetting to be inevitable even in respect of those whom we do still love. To tell the truth, we know that it is a painless state, a state of indifference. But not being able to link simultaneously what I was then and what I would become, I thought in despair of this whole integument of kisses, caresses and friendly slumber, which I would soon have to shed for ever. The wave of such tender memories, coming to break over the idea that Albertine was dead, overwhelmed me with the clash of such contrary tides that I could not stay still; I got up, but suddenly I stopped dead in my tracks; the same early light of dawn that I used to see at the time when I had just left Albertine, feeling still warm and radiant from her kisses, had just drawn over my curtains its now funereal blade, whose cold, dense and implacable whiteness entered and struck me like a knife blow.

Soon the sounds of the street would start up, allowing me to read from the qualitative scale of their sonorities the constantly rising degree of heat amid which they resounded. But in this heat, which a few hours later would be saturated with the scent of cherries, what I found (as when replacing just one ingredient of a medicine by another is enough to change it from a tonic and a stimulant into a depressant) was no longer desire for women but anguish at Albertine's departure. Moreover the memory of all my other desires was impregnated as much with her and with suffering as with the memory of pleasure. Even Venice, where I had thought that I would find her presence intrusive (no doubt because I felt confusedly that I would find myself needing it there), no longer tempted me, now that Albertine was no longer alive. Albertine had seemed to me an obstacle placed between me and all other things, because for me she had been their container, and it was from her as from a jar that I was able to take them. Now that this jar was broken, I was no longer able to face grasping them, there was not a single one of them from which I did not turn away, despondent, preferring not to taste of it. So that my separation from her was far from opening up for me the field of all possible pleasures that I had believed to be obstructed by her presence. Moreover the obstacle to travelling and to enjoying life that her presence may well have really been had only, as always, hidden other obstacles, which resurfaced intact, now that this one had disappeared. In similar fashion, previously, when some friendly visit prevented me from working, even if I remained alone the following day, I did not work any harder. If an illness, a duel or a runaway horse bring us face to face with death, we realize how richly we would have enjoyed the life, the sexual pleasure and the unknown lands that we are about to be deprived of. And once the danger is past, what we fall back on is the same monotonous existence where we knew none of all this.

Of course these very short nights cannot last long. In the end winter must return, when I would no longer fear the memory of driving with her all through the night until the all-too-hasty dawn. But would the first frosts not bring back to me, preserved in their ice, the germ of my first desires, when I sent the car for her at midnight, when it seemed to take so long before I heard her ring the door-bell, which I could now wait in vain for all eternity to hear? Would I not gather from them the germ of my earlier anxiety, when twice I believed that she would never return? At that time I saw her but rarely; but even the intervals that there were between Albertine's visits then, making her suddenly emerge from several weeks plunged in the depths of an unknown life which I could not attempt to possess, reassured me and pacified me by constantly interrupting the first inklings of my jealousy and preventing them from fusing into a solid mass in my heart. Just as they had been able to soothe me in those days, so retrospectively those intervals bore the imprint of suffering, now that I was no longer indifferent to the unknown things that she might have done during those periods, and above all, now that no visit from her would ever come again; so that those January evenings when she used to come, and which I had for this reason come to find so sweet, would now fill me not only with their bitter north wind but also with gusts of anxiety which I had not felt at the time, and which would return to me the first seeds of my love, but now grown toxic. And when I thought that I would once again see the start of the cold weather, which had always seemed so sad to me since the days of Gilberte and our games on the Champs-Elysées; and when I thought that evenings would return like that snowy evening when I had waited for Albertine in vain long into the night, then, like an invalid with a weak chest anxious for his body, what concerned me in my soul and what I still feared most at those moments, trying to spare my grief and my heart, was the return of this freezing weather, and I told myself that the hardest period for me to get through would probably be the winter. Since her memory was linked to every season, the only way of forgetting it would have been to forget all of them, even if it meant that I would have to learn to recognize them all over again, like an old man who has suffered from hemiplegia, learning to read again; I would have had to renounce the whole universe. Only a real death of my self, I told myself (were it not impossible), would be capable of consoling me for her death. I did not realize that the death of the self is neither impossible nor extraordinary; it is accomplished without our knowledge and, if necessary, without our consent every day, and I would suffer from the repetition of every sort of day that not only nature but accidental circumstances or more conventional arrangements could introduce into a season. Soon the date when I had gone to Balbec that last summer would return, when my love, which was not yet inseparable from jealousy and which was not concerned with what Albertine might be doing all day long, had so far to go before becoming a love so different and so special in its latter stages, so unique that this last year, when Albertine's destiny had started to change and had come to an end, appeared to me as full, diverse and vast as a century. Then there would be the memory of later days, but from earlier years; Sundays when the weather was bad and yet everyone had gone out, into the bleak emptiness of the afternoon, when the noise of the wind and the rain would in former times have incited me to act as a 'philosopher in the garret',[20] how anxious I would become as I saw the hour approach when Albertine had so unexpectedly come to see me and had caressed me for the first time, breaking off when Françoise had brought the lamp in, at that time, now dead twice over, when it was Albertine who was curious to learn all about me, when my affection for her could legitimately entertain such high hopes! And even, later in the season, those glorious evenings when the sculleries and the girls' boarding schools, like chapels with their doors ajar and bathed in a golden dust, allow their demi-goddesses to garland the streets and bring their private conversations so close to us that we feverishly desire to penetrate their mythical existence, now recalled nothing more than Albertine's affections, whose presence by my side prevented me from approaching them.

Moreover, to the memory of these purely natural hours I would have to add the mental landscape which makes of them something unique. When, later, I was to hear the goatherd's horn in the first days of fine, almost Italian weather, the same sunshine would now mingle with its light the anxiety of knowing that Albertine was at the Trocadéro, perhaps with Léa and the two girls, now the familiar, domestic and almost conjugal sweetness of a spouse, however cloying, whom Françoise was going to bring back home. I had felt that my pride was bolstered by this telephone message from Françoise, transmitting the homage paid by Albertine in returning with her. I had been mistaken. If it had intoxicated me, it was because it had made me feel that the woman whom I loved really belonged to

me, lived only for me, and, even at a distance, without my needing to worry about her, looked on me as her lord and master, returning at a snap of my fingers. And thus this telephone message had been a package of sweetmeats sent to me from the farthest reaches of the Trocadéro region, which happened to contain sources of happiness irradiating me with their pain-killing molecules and healing balm, finally restoring me to such sweet and carefree spirits that all I had to do – yielding unrestricted by the slightest care to Wagner's music – was await Albertine's undoubted return, feeling a coolness and a total lack of impatience in which I ought to have recognized happiness, but failed to do so. And the cause of my happiness in her returning, obeying me, and belonging to me, was to be found, not in pride, but in my love. I would have found it pointless now to be able to snap my fingers and order fifty women to return, even from the Indies, let alone the Trocadéro. But that day, sensing Albertine approaching me submissively, while I was alone in my room playing music, I had breathed in, scattered like dust on a sunbeam, one of those substances which are good for the soul, as others are healthy for the body. Then, half an hour later, there had been Albertine's arrival, then, afterwards, the drive with Albertine, an arrival and a drive which I had considered boring because for me they were guaranteed in advance, but which because of this very guarantee, as soon as Françoise had telephoned me to say that she was bringing her back, had filled the following hours with a golden peace, had turned them as it were into a second day entirely different from the first, because its emotional foundations were entirely different, making the day quite unique, adding its original touch to the variety of those that I had previously known, a day which I could never have imagined – as we are unable to imagine a restful summer's day if such days have not existed in the calendar of days that we have experienced – a day which I could not be absolutely certain to recall, for its tranquillity was now overlaid with the suffering that I had not felt at the time. But much later, when I gradually moved backwards through the times that I had spent on the way towards loving Albertine, when my cauterized heart was able to detach itself from Albertine, long after her death, then, when I was at last able to recall without suffering the day when Albertine had gone shopping with Françoise instead of staying at the Trocadéro, I remembered that day pleasurably as one belonging to a mental season which I had not previously known; I at last remembered it while no longer adding suffering to it, but on the contrary, rather as we remember certain summer days which we found too hot at the time, and where it is only after the event that we extract from their alloys the pure, hallmarked gold and the indelible lapis lazuli.

In this way these few years not only imposed upon the memory of Albertine, which made them so unhappy, the changing colours, varying modalities and dying embers of their seasons and their hours, from their late June afternoons to their winter evenings, from moonlight over the sea to dawn on returning home, from snow in Paris to autumn leaves at Saint-Cloud,[21] but also transformed the particular ideas that I had successively formed of Albertine, of the physical appearance with which I pictured her at each of these moments, and of the greater or lesser frequency with which I saw her in any particular season, making the season itself seem more or less diffuse or concentrated, of the hours of anxious waiting that she had provoked, of the desire that I felt for her at certain moments, of hopes nourished and then lost; all this modified the nature of my retrospective sadness just as much as the impressions of light and scent which were associated with it, and complemented each of the solar years that I had lived through and which even with just their springs, autumns and winters were already so sad because of their memory being inseparable from her, augmenting it with a sort of sentimental year where the hours were not defined by the position of the sun but by time spent waiting for a rendezvous; where the length of the days or the changes in temperature were measured by the rise in my hopes, the progress of our intimacy, the gradual transformation of her face, the places she had visited, the frequency and style of the letters that she had sent me during her absence, her greater or lesser eagerness to meet me when she had returned. And finally if each of these changes of weather and season yielded a different Albertine, it was not only through the evocation of similar moments. But we should not forget that, even before I fell in love, each season had made a different man of me, with different desires because he had different perceptions, a man who, having dreamed of nothing but storms and cliffs the night before, awoke ready to leave for Italy, once the indiscreet light of springtime had let the scent of roses seep through the cracks in the shutters of his uneven slumbers. And even when I was in love, had not my changing mental atmosphere and the varying pressure of my beliefs from one day to the next diminished the visibility of my own love, was it not one day high and rising, another day steady and fair, and another, falling to storm point? For we exist only through what we possess, and we possess only what is actually present, since so many of our memories, moods and ideas leave us and travel to faraway places, where we lose sight of them! Then we can no longer enter them into the accounting system whose sum is our whole being. But they find secret ways of returning within us. And some evenings, having fallen asleep hardly missing Albertine any longer – we can miss only what we remember – I awoke to find that a whole fleet of memories had sailed into my clearest consciousness and had become marvellously distinct. Then I wept for the things which I saw so well and which for me the day before had been utterly absent. Albertine's name and her death had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old significance.

How could she have appeared dead to me, when now in order to think of her I had at my disposal only the same images that I saw alternately when she was alive: bent over the swiftly turning mythological wheel of her bicycle, harnessed on rainy days into the vulcanized warrior's tunic that made her bosom bulge, her turban-helmeted head swarming with serpents, as she spread terror throughout the streets of Balbec; on the evenings when we took our champagne out into the woods of Chantepie, her changed, provocative voice, her face lit by a pale fire reddening only at the cheekbones, which, since I found it difficult to see in the car in the darkness, I drew towards the moonlight and which I tried now in vain to recall or to visualize in the endless darkness. A small statuette in our crossing to the island, or a peaceful figure with her coarse-grained skin as she sat at the pianola, she was by turns swift and stormy, provocative and diaphanous, or an unmoved and smiling angel of music. Each Albertine was attached to a moment, to a date where I was transported when I visualized her again. Then again, past moments do not stay still; they maintain in our memory the momentum which was driving them towards the future – towards a future which itself has already become the past – dragging us in their wake. I had never caressed Albertine in her wet-weather rubber-wear, I wanted to ask her to remove her armour, in order to explore with her the love of life under canvas, the fraternity of travel. But it was no longer possible, she was dead. And then again, for fear of corrupting her, I had pretended never to understand her on those evenings when she seemed to offer me certain pleasures; pleasures however which, had I not adopted this attitude, she might not have sought elsewhere, and which now excited the most frenzied desire in me. I would not have felt them in the same way if they had been provided by someone else, but I could travel the whole world over in search of the girl who might do so without ever meeting her, for Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two facts and decide which was true, so blatantly did the death of Albertine – which arose for me out of a reality which I had not known, her life in Touraine – contradict all the thoughts that linked me to her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage and my jealousy. Such a wealth of memories borrowed from her life's inventory, such a profusion of emotions evoking or involving her life, seemed to make it unbelievable that Albertine could be dead. Such a profusion of feelings, for while my memory preserved my affection it also preserved its whole variety. It was not Albertine alone who was only a succession of moments, it was also myself. My love for her had not been simple: to curiosity about the unknown had been added a sensual desire, and to my feelings of almost domestic sweetness, feelings sometimes of indifference, sometimes of jealous rage. I was not one single man, but the march-past of a composite army manned, depending on the time of day, by passionate, indifferent or jealous men – jealous men who were never jealous of the same woman. And doubtless this would be the source of an eventual cure, which I did not desire. The individuals in a crowd may without our noticing be replaced one by one, and others again may come to suppress or supplement them, so that at the end of the day a change has been accomplished which it would be impossible to imagine in a single, unitary being. The complexity of my love and my identity multiplied and diversified my suffering. And yet they could still be classified under the two heads whose alternation had ruled the whole life of my love for Albertine, ruled in turns by confidence and jealous suspicion.

If (bearing as I did the double yoke of the present and the past) I found it so difficult to accept that Albertine, who was so alive within me, was dead, perhaps it was just as paradoxical that my suspicion of misdeeds committed by Albertine, who today was stripped of the flesh that had enjoyed them and who was no longer capable of them or responsible for them, should excite in me such suffering, which I would happily have blessed if I could have seen in it the proof of the spiritual presence of a materially non-existent person, instead of the inevitably fading reflection of impressions which she had caused me in the past. A woman no longer capable of experiencing pleasure with other women should no longer have excited my jealousy, if only I could have brought my affections up to date. But this was impossible, because they could locate their object, Albertine, only in memories where she still lived on. Since at any moment when I thought of her, I resuscitated her, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman, for the moment when she had committed them became the present moment, not only for Albertine but also for whichever of my selves was suddenly enlisted to contemplate her. So that no anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple where each new guilty woman was immediately matched with a woeful, jealous, but always contemporaneous, lover. During her last few months I had kept her locked up in my house. But now in my imagination Albertine was free; she used this freedom ill, she prostituted herself to all and sundry. Previously I had never stopped thinking about the uncertain future that unfolded before us, and I tried to read it. And now what was cast before me like the shadow of the future – as worrying as the future, because it was as uncertain, as difficult to decipher and as mysterious but even more cruel, because unlike the future, it did not allow me the possibility or the illusion of intervening to change it, and also because it would unfold as far as my life itself, without my companion being there to alleviate the suffering that it caused me – was no longer Albertine's future, but her past. Her past? This is not the right term, since in jealousy there is neither past nor future, for what it imagines is always present.

These changes in atmosphere cause other changes in the inner man, awakening forgotten selves, counteracting the lethargy of habit, reviving the force of memories here, of suffering there. How much more so for me if this new climate recalled days in Balbec when Albertine, despite the threat of rain, for instance, had set out, God knows why, for a long ride, strapped tightly into her rubbers! If she had still been alive today, she would doubtless be setting off, in similar weather, on a similar expedition in Touraine. But since she was no longer able to do so, I should not have suffered from this thought; but the slightest change in the weather renewed my aches and pains, as it would in the missing limb of an amputee.

Suddenly there came a memory which I had not seen for a long time, for it had remained dissolved in the transparent, fluid expanses of my memory, until it formed into crystals. Thus it had happened that several years before, when we were talking about her bath-robe, Albertine had blushed. In those days I was not jealous of her. But afterwards I wished I could ask her if she could remember this conversation and tell me why she had blushed. It had concerned me all the more since I had been told that Léa's two young girl-friends frequented her hotel's bathing establishment and, so people said, not only to take a shower. But for fear of annoying Albertine, or in the hope of better days to come, I had constantly postponed discussing it with her, and then I forgot about it. However, shortly after Albertine's death, I caught a glimpse of this memory, imprinted with the irritating but solemn character of an enigma left eternally insoluble by the death of the only person who could have shed light on it. Could I not at least try to learn whether Albertine might not perhaps have committed some real or even apparent misdemeanour in this bathing establishment? By sending someone to Balbec, I might possibly succeed. As long as she was alive, I am sure that I would not have learned anything. But tongues are strangely loosened and are swift to denounce people's faults when the revenge of the person accused is no longer to be feared. As the constitution of the imagination, which remains rudimentary and simplistic (not having passed through the various transformations which palliate the primitive models of human invention, which we now hardly recognize, whether we think of the barometer, the balloon or the telephone, etc., compared to their later improvements), allows us to see so few things at once, this memory of the bath-house took over the whole field of my inner vision.

Sometimes, in the dark alleyways of sleep, I stumbled over one of those bad dreams which we do not take very seriously, for the main reason that the sadness which they instil in us, like the sickness following an anaesthetic, rarely lasts more than an hour after our awakening, but for another reason too, which is that they occur very rarely, hardly more than once every two or three years. And even then we are not sure whether we have already encountered them – or whether our impression of *déjà vu* might not be either projected on to them by an illusion, or a reduplication (for it is more than a repetition) of our experience.

Of course, since I had my doubts about Albertine's life, and her death, I ought to have started my enquiries much sooner. But the same lethargy and cowardice that had kept me submissive to Albertine while she was there, prevented me from undertaking anything from the time that I no longer saw her. And yet sometimes a flash of energy may emerge from the weakness which has dogged us for years. I decided to make at least one enquiry, however partial. You might have thought that there had been nothing else in Albertine's life. I wondered whom I might send to try to make enquiries on the spot, in Balbec. Aimé seemed to be the right choice. Apart from the fact that he had an excellent knowledge of the location, he belonged to that category of working people who look after their own interests, are faithful to those they serve, are indifferent to all varieties of morality, and who – because if we pay them well they ignore anything that would hinder their devotion to our will, for they reveal themselves to be as incapable of indiscretion, lethargy or impropriety as they are of scruples – pass for 'good men'. These are men in whom we may place complete confidence. When Aimé had left, I thought how much more effective it would have been for me if I could have asked Albertine herself about what he was going to try to discover there. And straight away the thought of this question that I wished I could have put to

Albertine, that I was going to put to her, brought her back to my side, not thanks to an effort of resurrection but through one of those chance encounters which – as happens in the kind of photograph which is a snapshot, rather than a 'posed' portrait – always breathe life into the person; at the same time as I imagined our conversation, I felt how impossible it was; approaching it from a different angle, I had again come up against the idea that Albertine was dead, Albertine, who inspired in me the kind of affection that we have for absent women whose embellished image is uncorrected by any real sighting of them, but also inspired sadness, from the thought that the poor young thing was deprived for ever of the pleasures of life. And immediately I shifted suddenly from being tortured by jealousy to feeling despair at our separation.

What now filled my heart, instead of suspicion and hatred, was the tender memory of hours of affectionate intimacy passed with the sister whom death had really made me lose, since my sorrow was directed not at what Albertine had been for me but at what my heart, desiring to participate in the more general emotions of love, had come to persuade me that she was; then I realized that this life which had so bored me – or at least so I thought – had, on the contrary, been delicious; I felt now that the briefest moments spent talking with her about even the most trivial things had been augmented and suffused with a voluptuousness which, it is true, I had not noticed at the time, but which had already caused me to seek them out so persistently and so exclusively; the slightest details which I recalled, such as the movements that she made when sitting beside me in the car, or sitting opposite me at the table in her room, sent through my soul ripples of sweetness and sadness which gradually spread out to overflow it entirely.

I had never found this room where we dined attractive: I had only told Albertine that I did, so that my friend would be happy to live in it. Now the curtains, the chairs and the books no longer left me unmoved. It is not only art which is able to imbue the most insignificant things with charm and mystery; this same power to bring them into an intimate relationship with ourselves is also granted to suffering. At the time I had paid no attention to the dinner which we had eaten together on our return from the Bois de Boulogne, before I went to the Verdurins', a dinner whose grave sweetness now filled my eyes with tears. The impressions created by love are disproportionate to our other impressions of life, but we do not realize this when they are mingled together. It is not from below, in the tumultuous streets and the close-packed neighbouring houses, it is only as we move away to the slopes of a nearby hill, to a distance where the whole town has disappeared or forms only a confused mass at ground level, that we are able, in the contemplative and welcoming solitude of the evening, to appreciate the unique, pure, and eternal height of a cathedral. I attempted to embrace the image of Albertine through my tears while thinking of all the serious and perceptive remarks that she had made that evening. One morning I thought that I glimpsed the oblong shape of a hill surrounded by mist, and felt the warmth of a cup of chocolate, while my heart was horribly wrung by the memory of the afternoon when Albertine had come to see me and when I had kissed her for the first time: it was because I had just heard the boiler gurgle as it was relit. And in my anger I threw away an invitation to Mme Verdurin's that Françoise had just brought me. How much more strongly the impression, which I had had when I went to dine for the first time at La Raspelière, that death does not strike all its creatures at the same age impressed me now that Albertine was dead so young, while Brichot continued to dine with Mme Verdurin, who was still entertaining guests and would perhaps continue to do so for years to come! Immediately Brichot's name reminded me how he had accompanied me home at the end of that same evening, and I had seen the light at Albertine's window from down below. I had already thought back to this on a number of occasions, but I had never approached this memory from the same angle. For, although our memories are entirely personal, they resemble those estates which have hidden side-gates, which often we ourselves have not discovered and have to have opened by a neighbour, so that we find ourselves arriving home from at least one direction which we had never taken before. Then, thinking of the void which would greet me on my return home and the fact that I would never again see Albertine's room from down below, since its light was for ever extinguished, I understood how mistaken I had been, on leaving Brichot that evening, to believe that I felt disappointment and regret at not being able to walk away and seek love elsewhere; I understood how mistaken I had been, and that it was only because I believed myself to be in absolutely safe possession of the treasure whose reflections poured down on me from above that I had neglected to assess its worth, which inevitably led me to see it as less valuable than other pleasures, however slight, to which I did attribute value because I was reduced to imagining them. I understood what a plenitude of sweetness and life this light, which seemed to emanate from a prison, contained for me, and how it was none other than the materialization of something that had intoxicated me for a moment but had then appeared for ever unattainable the evening when Albertine had slept under the same roof as me at Balbec; I understood that the life which I had led with her in my home in Paris, which was her home, was precisely the attainment of that profound peace of which I had dreamed.

I would never have been able to console myself if the conversation which I had had with Albertine when returning from the Bois de Boulogne before that last soirée at the Verdurins' had never taken place, that conversation which had tended to fuse Albertine with my intellectual life and had in certain areas made us one and the same being. For there is no doubt that if I lingered affectionately over her intelligence and her kindness for me, it was not because they were greater than those of other people whom I had known; had Mme de Cambremer not said to me at Balbec, 'How could you possibly spend whole days with your cousin when you could spend them with Elstir, who is a genius!'? I appreciated Albertine's intelligence because she evoked in me by association what I referred to as her sweetness, as we attribute to the sweetness of a fruit a certain sensation which exists only in our palate. And in fact, when I thought of Albertine's intelligence, my lips moved instinctively forwards to taste a memory whose reality I liked to think of as external and consisting in the objective superiority of a person. I have to say that I had known people whose intelligence was superior. But the infinite extent, or the egoism, of love causes us to love people whose intellectual and moral features are the least objectively defined for us, we readjust them endlessly according to our desires and our fears, we cannot separate them from ourselves, they are no more than a vast and vague terrain where we externalize our affection. Even our own bodies, where we are assailed by so many pains and pleasures, do not display a silhouette as clear as that of a tree or a house or a passing stranger. And perhaps I had been wrong not to try harder to get to know Albertine in her own right. Just as where her charm was concerned I had for some time considered only the different positions in the calendar of the years that she adopted in my memories, and just as I had been surprised to see her spontaneously enriched with transformations which seemed to go beyond any simple difference of perspective, so I ought to have tried to understand her character in the same way as that of any other person, and perhaps this might have explained to me why she hid her secret so persistently from me and might have enabled me to cut short this strangely savage conflict between us, which had led to the death of Albertine. And with my great pity for her at that time I felt great shame in surviving her. Indeed it seemed to me, in the moments when I suffered the least, that I almost benefited from her death, for a woman is all the more useful in our lives if she is an agent of sorrow rather than an element of happiness, and there is not a single woman whose possession is as precious as the truths which she enables us to discover by making us suffer. In such moments, connecting my grandmother's death with that of Albertine, it seemed to me that my life was besmirched by a double murder for which only the cowardice of society could forgive me. I had dreamed of being appreciated by Albertine, of not being misunderstood by her, believing that it was for the greater satisfaction of being appreciated and not misunderstood, whereas so many others could have done it better. We wish to be understood because we wish to be loved, and we wish to be loved because it is we who are in love. Whether others understand us is unimportant, and their love importunate. My joy at having possessed a little of Albertine's intellect and of her heart did not derive from their intrinsic value, but from the fact that this possession was one more step on the way towards the total possession of Albertine, which had been my aim and my fantasy from the first day that I had seen her. When we speak of a woman's 'kindness', we are probably only projecting outside ourselves the pleasure that we feel on seeing her, like children when they say, 'My dear little bed, my dear little pillow, my dear little hawthorn blossom.' Which may also by the way explain why men never say of a woman who is faithful to them, 'She is so kind,' but do so often say it of a woman who is unfaithful. Mme de Cambremer judged, quite rightly, that Elstir had great spiritual charm. But we cannot judge in the same way the charm of someone who, like everyone else external to us, is depicted on the fringes of our consciousness and the charm of someone who, as a result of a series of unintentional but persistent errors of navigation, has become lodged within our own bodies, to such an extent that we ask ourselves retrospectively if having looked at some woman on a certain day in the corridor of a little coastal railway train has not made us experience as much suffering as would be caused by a surgeon trying to remove a bullet from our heart. A simple croissant, as we start to eat it, can make us experience more pleasure than all the bunting, rock partridge and leveret dined on by Louis XV, and

the blade of grass quivering a few inches away from our eyes when we are lying down on the mountainside may mask the towering peak of the mountain top if this is several miles away. In fact our mistake is not that we over-appreciate the intelligence and the kindness of the woman we love, however small they may really be. Our mistake is to remain indifferent to the kindness and the intelligence of others. Falsehood or goodness only start to generate the indignation or gratitude that they should normally always stimulate in us when they come from a woman whom we love, and physical desire has the marvellous power of setting a true value for the intellect as well as providing solid foundations for our moral life. I would never again encounter that divine thing: a person with whom I could discuss everything, in whom I could confide all. Confide? But did not other people show me more confidence than Albertine? Did I not have more wide-ranging conversations with others? Is the point that confiding and conversing are in themselves paltry things, whose imperfections are neither here nor there, until they are blended with love, which alone is divine? I had a vision of Albertine's pink face beneath her black hair as she sat at the pianola; I felt her tongue against my lips as she tried to part them, her maternal, nourishing, holy, inedible tongue, whose hidden fire and secret dew prevented her caresses from being superficial, even when she did no more than slide her tongue along the surface of my neck or my stomach, as if they somehow issued from her inner flesh, turned inside out like a piece of material exposing its lining, endowing even the most external contact with the mysterious sweetness of a penetration.

I cannot even say that what made me feel the loss of all these moments of utter sweetness, which nothing could ever bring back to me, was actually despair. In order to despair of this life, when we see that it will be irremediably unhappy for evermore, we must still desire to cling to it. I had been desperate in Balbec when I saw day dawn and understood that no day would ever again bring me happiness. I had remained just as self-centred since then, but the self to which I had latterly become attached, the self that constituted my inner reserves, those which bring into play the instinct of preservation, this self was no longer alive; when I thought of my vital strengths, of my life force, of what was best in me, I thought of this one treasure which I had possessed (which I alone had possessed since others could not know precisely the hidden feelings that it had inspired in me) and which no one could now take away from me since I no longer possessed it. And to tell the truth, I had only ever possessed it in so far as I had always tried to imagine myself possessing it. I had not only been imprudent enough, while watching Albertine with my lips and lodging her in my heart, to make her live within me, as well as committing that other folly of mingling domestic love with the pleasure of the senses. I had also tried to convince myself that our relationship was one of love, that what we engaged in together was what people call love, because she obediently returned the kisses that I gave her. And from having acquired the habit of believing this, I had lost not only a woman whom I loved, but a woman who loved me, my sister, my child, my tender mistress. And finally I had experienced a happiness and an unhappiness which Swann had not known, precisely because, during all the time that he had loved Odette and had been so jealous of her, there were days when he had hardly seen her at all, since it was virtually impossible for him to go and call on her whenever she called off their appointment at the last moment. But afterwards he had had her to himself, as his wife, until he died. Whereas I, on the other hand, even while I was so jealous of Albertine, was happier than Swann, for I had her at home with me. I had in fact attained what Swann had so often dreamed of and what he had achieved in reality only when he had become indifferent to it. But ultimately I had not kept Albertine as he had kept Odette. She had fled, she had died. For nothing is ever repeated exactly, and the most analogous lives, even those which due to likeness of character and similarity of circumstance one may choose to present as symmetrical, remain in many aspects opposed. In losing my life I would not have lost much; I would have lost only an empty form, the frame for a missing masterpiece. Indifferent to what I might henceforth fill it in with, but happy and proud of what it had contained, I fell back on the memory of such sweet moments, and this moral support gave me a feeling of well-being that even the approach of death would not have disturbed.

How she would hurry to visit me in Balbec whenever I asked to see her, tarrying only a few last moments in order to lace her hair with perfume for my pleasure! These images of Balbec and Paris which I recalled with such pleasure, were the all-too-recent pages of her short life, which had been turned so quickly. Everything that for me was no more than memory had for her been action, the precipitate action of a tragedy, hurtling swiftly towards death. People evolve in one way within us, but also in another way outside us (I had felt this plainly on those evenings when I had noted how Albertine's character had become enriched with new qualities, and not only due to my memory), and each continually interacts with the other. Although, as I struggled first to understand Albertine, then to possess her entirely, I had done no more than obey our need to reduce the mystery of any person through experience to elements pettily similar to those composing our own selves, I had not been able to do so without in my turn influencing Albertine's life. Perhaps my wealth and the prospect of a dazzling marriage had attracted her; my jealousy had retained her; her kindness, her intelligence, her feelings of guilt or her sheer skill and cunning had led her to accept, and led me to render increasingly harsh, a captivity forged simply by the progress of the inner workings of my mind, but which had none the less had repercussions on Albertine's life, destined through their backlash to pose my psyche new and increasingly painful problems, since it was from my prison that she had escaped in order to kill herself riding a horse which without me she would never have owned, leaving me, even after her death, with suspicions whose truth, if confirmed, would perhaps be crueller for me than the discovery at Balbec that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil, since Albertine would no longer be there to soothe me. So much so that this long complaint of the soul which believes that it lives enclosed within itself is only superficially a monologue, since the echoes of reality cause it to change tack and since any single life resembles an improvised experiment in subjective psychology, yet one which at a distance provides the 'plot' of a purely realist novel belonging to a different reality, a different existence, whose reversals of fortune intervene one after the other to inflect the curve and change the direction of the psychological experiment. How taut had been the mechanism of our love, how swift its evolution and, despite some initial delays, interruptions and hesitations, as in some of Balzac's short stories or Schumann's ballads, how swift its resolution! It was within the course of this last year, which had seemed to me to last a century, so much had Albertine's position changed in my thoughts between Balbec and her departure for Paris, sometimes independently of me and often unbeknown to me, that I had to insert this whole life of affection, which had lasted such a short time and which however appeared to me as a plenitude or even an infinity impossible ever to grasp, and yet which I found indispensable. Indispensable without perhaps having ever been in itself or primarily anything necessary, since I would not have met Albertine if I had not read the description of the church at Balbec in an archaeological treatise; if Swann, telling me that this church was almost Persian, had not orientated my desires towards the Norman Byzantine style; if a company, in building a comfortable and hygienic grand hotel in Balbec, had not persuaded my parents to grant my wish and send me to Balbec. Doubtless once in the Balbec which I had so long desired, I had not found the Persian church of which I dreamed, nor the eternal mists. The charming ten-to-two[22] train itself had not matched up to my imaginings. But in exchange for what the imagination leads us to expect and what we take so much trouble to try to discover, life gives us something that we were far from being able to imagine. Who could have thought in Combray, when I awaited my mother's good-night kiss with such sadness, that these anxieties would be cured and would then one day be revived not in connection with my mother, but with a young lady who at first would be no more than a flower seen against the horizon of the sea that my eyes would every day be drawn to watch, albeit a thinking flower, and one in whose thoughts I desired to take an important place in so puerile a fashion that I suffered from the fact that she did not know that I knew Mme de Villeparisis? Yet it was on account of that good-night kiss from such a stranger that, some years later, I was to suffer just as much as I did as a child when my mother did not come to see me. But I would never have known this now so necessary Albertine, of whose love my soul had become almost entirely composed, if Swann had not spoken to me of Balbec. Her life would perhaps have lasted longer, and mine would have been void of what now constituted my martyrdom. And thus it seemed to me that through my totally selfish affection I had let Albertine die, just as previously I had murdered my grandmother. Even later, even after I had already got to know her at Balbec, I could not have loved her as I did after that. For when I renounced Gilberte and knew that I could one day pursue another woman, I hardly dared doubt that, at least in the past, I could not have loved anyone other than Gilberte. And yet in the case of Albertine I no longer even had any doubt, I was sure that she did not have to be the one that I must love, that it could have been someone else. All it would have needed was for Mlle de Stermaria, the evening when I was to dine with her on the island of the Bois de Boulogne, not to have called it off. There was still time then for this feat of the imagination, which enables us to extract from a woman a notion of the individual so special that she appears to us to be unique in herself as well as predestined and necessary for us, to have been focussed on Mlle de Stermaria. At best, viewing things from an almost biological viewpoint, I could say that I might have experienced the same exclusive love for another woman, but not absolutely any other. For although

Albertine, who was plump and dark, did not resemble Gilberte, who was slender and red-haired, both none the less shared the same robust health, the same sensual cheeks and the same enigmatic look. They were the kind of woman who would not have caught the attention of some men who, on the other hand, would have done anything, however crazy, for another kind, who 'left me cold'.[23] A man nearly always has the same manner of catching cold, of falling ill, which is to say that he needs a particular combination of circumstances: it is natural that, when he falls in love, it will be with a certain type of woman, although the type may be loosely defined. The first time that Albertine looked at me and fired my imagination her eyes were not so different from those of Gilberte the first time. I could almost believe that the sombre and sensual personality and the cunning, wilful character of Gilberte had returned to tempt me, incarnate this time in the body of Albertine, which was quite different and yet was in some ways analogous. In Albertine's case, thanks to our totally different kind of life together, where within a block of thoughts into which no fissure of distraction or forgetfulness could insinuate itself, my painful preoccupations maintained a permanently cohesive whole, her living body, unlike Gilberte's, had never for a single day ceased to be the one where I located what I subsequently recognized as what for me was feminine attractiveness (although it would not have been for others). But she was dead. I would forget her. Who knows then whether the same hot-blooded, restless, fantastical qualities might not return again one day to upset me, but incarnate this time in a feminine form which I could not yet foresee. Starting out from Gilberte, I could have as little imagined Albertine, or the fact that I would love her, as the memory of Vinteuil's sonata could have enabled me to imagine his septet. Worse still, even on the first occasions that I had seen Albertine, I had managed to believe that it would be the other girls whom I would love. Moreover, if I had met her a year earlier, she might even have appeared to me as dull as a grey sky before daybreak. But if I had changed my attitude towards her, she herself had also changed, and the girl who had approached my bedside the day when I had written to Mlle de Stermaria was no longer the same as the one whom I had known at Balbec, whether simply because she had burst out into womanhood after appearing to me at the moment of puberty, or whether because there was some other set of circumstances that I had never been able to fathom. At all events, even if the woman I were one day to love should in some respects resemble her, that is, if my choice of a woman were not entirely free, even perhaps necessarily in some way directed, this meant none the less that it was directed towards something vaster than an individual, towards a type of woman, and this removed all necessity from my love for Albertine. We know full well that this unique woman, whose face we see before our eyes more constantly than the daylight itself – since even with our eyes closed, we never for a moment cease to cherish her lovely eyes and her beautiful nose, and will do anything we can to see them again – could have been a different woman, if we had visited a town other than the one where we met her, if we had walked down different streets, if we had been invited to a different salon. Do we believe her to be unique? She is everywhere. And yet she is consistent and indestructible before our loving eyes, irreplaceable for long after by anyone else. The reason is that this woman has done nothing but use all sorts of magic spells to invoke the thousands of elements of affection which exist within us in a fragmentary state, to assemble and unite them, bridging all the gaps between them; it is we ourselves who, in creating her features, have furnished all the solid substance of the beloved. From this it follows that, even if we are only one among thousands for her, and perhaps last in the line, for us she is the only one, and the one at whom our whole life is aimed. Of course I had even felt quite clearly that this love was not necessary, not only because it could have happened with Mlle de Stermaria, but even without that, as I came to know it better, and started to find that it seemed too similar to what it had been for other women, and also to feel that it was vaster than Albertine, enveloping her without taking any heed of her, like a tide engulfing a fragile reef. But gradually, by dint of living with Albertine, I could no longer disentangle myself from the chains that I myself had forged; the habit of associating the person of Albertine with emotions that I had not derived from her directly led me none the less to feel that they were special to her, just as habit, according to a certain school of philosophers, gives to the simple association of ideas between two phenomena the force and the necessity of a causal law. I had believed that my connections and my wealth would enable me to dispense with suffering, but perhaps too expeditiously, because this seemed to enable me to dispense with feeling, loving and imagining; I felt envious of some poor country girl, who, in the absence of connections or even the telegraph, might spend many months musing over a sorrow that she cannot artificially put to sleep. Yet I now realized that, whereas in the case of Mme de Guermantes, who enjoyed so many advantages that helped maintain an infinite distance between her and me, I had seen the gulf abruptly bridged by public opinion and my analysis, which found social privilege to be no more than an inert and changeable matter, by a converse but reciprocal process my connections, my wealth and all the material means from which both my position and the civilization of the day allowed me to benefit had done no more than postpone the moment of the hand-to-hand struggle with the contradictory, inflexible will of Albertine, which had resisted all pressure. Of course I had been able to exchange telegrams and telephone calls with Saint-Loup and remain in constant touch with the telegraph office in Tours, but had these expectations not been vain, their result null? And did a country girl with no social advantages and no connections, or people who lived before these advances of civilization, not suffer less? Because one desires less and misses less what one has always believed inaccessible and which has, for this reason, remained as it were unreal. We desire a person more when she is about to yield, expectation anticipates possession; but regret, too, amplifies desire. Mlle de Stermaria's refusal to come to dinner on the island of the Bois de Boulogne is what prevented her from being the person that I loved. This too could have been enough to enable me to love her, if I had seen her soon enough afterwards. As soon as I had found out that she would not come, entertaining the implausible hypothesis – which did however turn out to be correct – that if someone were jealous of her and kept her away from company, I might possibly never see her again, I had suffered so much that I would have given anything to see her again, and it was one of the greatest anxieties which I had ever known that Saint-Loup's arrival had assuaged. Yet after a certain age our loves and our mistresses are daughters of our anguish: our past, and the physical lesions within whose lines it lies inscribed, determine our future. For Albertine in particular, the fact that it was not necessary for her to be the one whom I loved was, even without these neighbouring loves, inscribed in the history of my love for her, that is for her and her girl-friends. For it was not even a love like that for Gilberte, but one created by its dispersal among several girls. It is possible that it was because of her, and because they appeared to me to be something analogous to her, that I had enjoyed the company of her girl-friends. And yet I must admit that for quite a time a hesitation among all of them was possible, as my choice wandered from one to the other, and when I thought that I preferred one, it was enough for her to keep me waiting or refuse to see me for me to start feeling love for her. On several occasions it could easily have happened, when Andrée was due to come to see me in Balbec, that if Albertine had let me down just before Andrée's visit, my heart would have started pounding, I would have thought that I would never see Albertine again and that she was the one whom I loved. And when Andrée did come, I was being perfectly truthful when I told her (as had I told her in Paris when I had learned that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil), although she might have thought that I was speaking disingenuously and for her benefit, whereas I would in fact have used the same terms if I had been happy the day before with Albertine: 'Alas, if only you had come earlier, now I am in love with someone else.' But even in this case of Andrée replaced by Albertine when I had learned that the latter had known Mlle Vinteuil, my love had alternated between the two of them, and consequently there had in fact been only one love at a time. But there had been cases previously when I had more or less fallen out with two of the girls. Whichever one of them took the first steps to make amends was the one who would soothe my spirits, and it would be the other one whom I would love if she was still sulking, which did not mean that it might not be the first that I would take up with permanently, for she would console me, however imperfectly, for the harshness of the second, whom I would ultimately forget if she never returned. And it did happen that, although I was convinced that one or the other would return to me in the end, neither of them did for quite a time. My anguish was therefore double, like my love, ensuring that I should cease loving whichever one did return, but, until she did, that I should suffer at the hands of both of them. This is a fate which befalls us at a certain age, which may be relatively young, where we may be less attracted by a person than by someone's rejection, where we ultimately know nothing more of the person we have chosen, whose face has grown dim and whose soul has evaporated, than our all too recent but none the less inexplicable choice itself: the fact is that the only thing that could put an end to our suffering would be if we could hear the words, 'Could I come to see you?' My separation from Albertine the day when Françoise had said to me, 'Mademoiselle Albertine has left' was like an allegory for so many other separations. For often in order to discover that we are in love, even perhaps in order to fall in love, the day of separation needs to arrive.

In these cases where it is waiting in vain or hearing a word of rejection that determines our choice, our imagination, spurred on by suffering, which sets to work so swiftly, creates with such speed a love which was until then so inchoate and formless, and destined for months past to remain only sketchy, that our intellect, which has lagged behind our heart, is astonished and cries out: 'You must be mad, what painful new thoughts are you plunging us into? None of this is real life.' And indeed at that moment, if the faithless lady were not to relaunch her pursuit, any distractions pleasant enough to bring physical peace to our heart would be enough to abort this love. At all events, although this life with Albertine was not in its essence necessary, it had become indispensable for me. I had trembled when I was in love with Mme de Guermantes because I thought that, with all the means of seduction at her disposal, drawing not only on beauty but on situation and wealth, she would be far too free to belong to far too many people and that I would have far too little hold over her. Albertine was poor and obscure, and ought to want to marry me. And yet I had not been able to possess her exclusively. Whatever social conditions prevail, however wise the precautions we take, we can never truly control another person's life. Why had she not said to me, 'I am that way inclined'? I would have yielded, I would have allowed her to indulge her inclinations. In a novel which I had read, there was a woman whom no exhortation by the man who loved her could persuade to speak. On reading it I had found this situation absurd; I myself, I thought, would have first forced the woman to speak, and then we would have come to an agreement. For what was the point of such futile misery? But now I saw that we are not free not to create this for ourselves and that, however well we know our own will, other people do not obey it. And yet how many times, without knowing it and without wishing it, have we uttered these painful and unavoidable truths, which dominated us although we were blind to them – the truth of our feelings, the truth of our destiny – in words which we no doubt believed mendacious but which gained prophetic value retrospectively after the event. I remembered many words which one or other of us had uttered without at the time realizing the truth that they conveyed, even words which we had exchanged believing that we were play-acting, but whose falsehood was very flimsy, insubstantial and born of our pathetic insincerity, compared to the implications which we failed to see in them. Lies and misunderstandings which fell short of the profound reality which we failed to see; beyond lay the truth, the truth of our characters, whose essential laws had escaped us, since they need Time to help them reveal themselves, as with the truth of our fate. I had thought that I was lying when at Balbec I said, 'The more I see you, the more I shall love you' (and yet it was this intimacy of every moment, which, through jealousy, had attached me to her), 'I feel that I could help improve your mind'; or in Paris, 'Try to be careful. Just imagine if you had an accident, I would be heartbroken' (and she said, 'But an accident could happen to me'); or in Paris, the evening when I had pretended to want to leave her, saying, 'Let me look at you once more, because soon I shall not see you again, and it will be for ever'; and she had said, when that same evening she had looked around her, 'To think that I shall never again see this room, these books, this pianola, this whole house, I cannot believe it and yet it is true'; in her last letters, finally, when, as she wrote, she probably thought to herself, 'I am faking it': *I leave you the best of myself* (and was it not in fact now to the faithfulness and the power of my memory, however fragile, that her intelligence, her kindness and her beauty were confided?) and: *That moment, with its twofold twilight (since night was falling and since we were destined to part), will never be erased from my mind until utter darkness finally invades it*, that phrase, written the day before the day when indeed her mind had been invaded by utter darkness and when, in those last fleeting glimmerings which anxiety multiplies into infinity, she had perhaps had a vision of our last drive together, and in that moment when everything abandons us and where we construct a faith for ourselves, as atheists become Christians on the battle-field, she had perhaps called for help from the friend whom she had so often cursed but whom she had so respected, who himself – for all religions are similar – had been cruel enough to wish that she herself should also have the time to recognize herself, to give him her last thoughts, to make her confession to him at last, to die within him. But to what avail, since even if then she had had the time to recognize her true self, both of us would have understood where our happiness lay and what we should have done, only when, and only because, this happiness was no longer possible and no longer attainable. As long as things are possible, we defer them, and they can assume their power of attraction and their apparent ease of accomplishment only when, projected into the ideal void of the imagination, they are withdrawn from immersion in the cloying, degrading morass of real life. The idea that we shall die is more cruel than dying itself, but less cruel than the idea that someone else is dead, than the idea that, when the waters of reality close after having engulfed a person's being, they smoothly, without so much as a ripple, cover the spot from which that being is excluded, where neither will nor knowledge exist any longer, and from which it is as difficult to return to the idea of what that person's being had experienced as it is difficult, even while memories of their life are still fresh, to think that this person is assimilable to the insubstantial images and memories left by the characters of a novel that we have read.

At least I was happy that before her death she had written me this letter and, above all, had sent that last telegram, which proved that she would have returned to me if she had lived. It seemed to me that this made things not only sweeter but also more beautiful, for the event would have been incomplete without this telegram and would have been less of a work of art and destiny. Yet, in fact, it would have been these just as much if it had been different; for any event is a kind of mould of a particular shape, and, whatever this may be, it imposes on the series of incidents which it has come to interrupt a design which seems conclusive and which we believe to be the only one possible, because we do not know the alternative which might have taken its place.

Why had she not told me, 'I do have those inclinations'? I would have yielded, I would have let her indulge them, and even then I would still have embraced her. How sad I felt to have to remember the way she had lied to me, three days before she left me, swearing that she had never had such a relationship with Mlle Vinteuil and her girl-friend, while her own blushes confessed the opposite! Poor girl, at least she had been honest enough not to wish to swear that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil and her girl-friend again had nothing to do with her desire to go to the Verdurins' that day. Why did she not follow through with a complete confession rather than make up such an extravagant story? Perhaps, incidentally, it might have been partly my fault if, despite all my entreaties, which were repulsed by her firm denials, she had never been prepared to tell me, 'I do have those inclinations.' Perhaps it was partly my fault because at Balbec, the day when, after Mme de Cambremer's visit, I had had my first argument on this subject with Albertine and when I was so far from believing that she could have had anything but an over-passionate friendship with Andrée, that I had expressed my disgust for this kind of behaviour too violently and condemned it too categorically. I could not remember whether Albertine had blushed when I had naïvely uttered my abhorrence of all that, I could not remember, for often it is only long after the event that we wish we could know what the attitude of some person had been, at a moment when we were paying no attention to it at all, and which later, when we think back over our conversation, would clear up a sensitive problem. But there is a blank in our memory, no trace of it exists. And how often have we not paid sufficient attention at the time to things which could already have seemed important to us, have we not heard a phrase or noticed a gesture correctly, or else have simply forgotten them. And when later, eager to discover the truth, we proceed from deduction to deduction, leafing through our memory like a dossier of eye-witness accounts, we do reach this phrase or that gesture, there is no way we can remember, we keep starting the same journey all over again, but to no avail, for the path leads no further. Did she blush? I don't know if she did, but she could not have failed to have heard my words, and the memory of them had brought her to a halt when she may have been on the point of confessing to me. And now that she was nowhere to be found, I could have roamed the earth from pole to pole without meeting Albertine; reality had swallowed her up, formed a smooth surface and erased every trace of the person who had drowned in its depths. She was no more than a name, like a Mme de Charlus of whom those who had known her said with an indifferent air, 'She was delightful.' But I could not consider for more than a moment the existence of this reality which Albertine no longer knew, for within me, where all my feelings and my thoughts related to her life, my friend was only too alive. Perhaps if she had known this, she might have been touched to see that her friend had not forgotten her, now that her own life was finished, and she would have appreciated things which previously had left her indifferent. But as we would prefer to abstain from infidelity, however secret, as long as we fear that the woman whom we love does not abstain, I was afraid that if the dead live on somewhere, my grandmother would know my forgetfulness as surely as Albertine my memories of her. And when all is said and done, even in the case of this same dead woman, are we sure that the joy we would have of learning that she knew certain things would compensate for the terror of thinking that she knew them *all*? And, however savage the sacrifice, would we not sometimes renounce keeping them on after their death as friends, for fear of having them also as judges?

My jealous curiosity about what Albertine might have done was infinite. I paid who knows how many women, who taught me nothing. If my curiosity was so lively, it is because people do not die immediately for us, they remain bathed in a kind of aura of life which bears no relation to real immortality but which continues to occupy our thoughts in the same way as it did when they were alive. It is as if they had left on a voyage. Theirs is a very pagan survival. Conversely, when we have ceased to be in love, the curiosity aroused by the person we love dies even before the person herself does. Thus I would no longer have taken a single step to discover with whom Gilberte had gone for a walk on the Champs-Elysées on such and such an evening. And yet, even if I felt that such moments of curiosity were exactly similar, valueless in themselves and incapable of lasting, I continued to sacrifice everything to the cruel satisfaction of their passing pangs, despite knowing in advance that my separation from Albertine, enforced by her death, would lead me to the same state of indifference as had my intentional separation from Gilberte. If Albertine had been able to tell what was going to happen, she would have stayed by my side. But that was tantamount to saying that, once she had seen herself dead, she would have preferred to stay alive by my side. Through the very contradiction which it implied, such a supposition was absurd. But that did not make it harmless, for as I imagined how pleased Albertine, if she could know and retrospectively understand, would be to return to me, I saw her by my side, I wanted to embrace her, but alas it was impossible, she would never return, she was dead. My imagination sought her in the skies, on evenings like those when we were still able to gaze up at it together; I tried to wing my affections towards her, beyond the moonlight that she loved, to console her for no longer being alive, and this love for a person who had become so remote was like a religion, my thoughts rose towards her like prayers. Desire is so strong that it engenders belief; I had believed that Albertine would not leave, because it was my desire; because this was my desire, I believed that she was not dead; I started to read books about turning tables, I started to believe in the possible immortality of the soul. But that was not sufficient for me. I needed after her death to be reunited with her body, as if eternity could resemble life. Do I mean 'life'? I was even more demanding. I would have liked not to be deprived by death for ever more of those pleasures which death is not alone in taking from us. For even without death they would finally have withered, they had already started to do so through the action of long-standing habit and new attractions. Then, in real life, Albertine, even physically, would have gradually changed, and day by day I would have adapted to this change. But my memory, evoking only moments from her life, wanted to see her again in a certain guise that would no longer have been hers even if she had still been alive; what it wanted was a miracle to satisfy the natural, arbitrary limits of memory, trapped in the past. And yet I imagined this living creature with all the naïvety of the theologians of antiquity, granting me, not the explanations which she could have offered, but, through a supreme contradiction, those which she had always refused to give me while she was alive. And thus her death was a kind of dream, my love would seem to her an unexpected happiness; of death I retained only the usefulness and optimism of an outcome which simplifies and settles everything.

Sometimes I did not imagine our reunion as far away as in another world. Just as in former times when I knew Gilberte only as a playmate on the Champs-Elysées, in the evenings at home I imagined that I would receive a letter from her where she would admit that she loved me and that she was about to come home, so a similar force of desire, taking no more notice of the laws of physics which might prevent it than in the previous case of Gilberte, when, actually, my desire had not been mistaken because it did have the last word, led me now to believe that I was about to receive a message from Albertine, telling me that she had indeed had a riding accident, but that, like a character in some novel (and as does sometimes happen after all in the case of people long believed dead), she had not wanted me to learn that she had recovered and was asking me contritely, now that she was better, to take her back permanently. And, understanding perfectly well how people who otherwise seem quite rational entertain certain harmless follies, I felt coexist within me the certainty that she was dead, and the ceaseless hope of seeing her walk through the door.

I had not yet received any news from Aimé, although he had surely arrived in Balbec by now. No doubt my enquiry was directed at a peripheral and arbitrarily chosen point. If Albertine's life had really been laden with guilt, it must have been full of far graver events which chance had not let me encounter, as it had when Albertine had blushed over the question of the bath-robe. But these were precisely the things that did not exist in my eyes because I had not seen them. Yet it was quite arbitrarily that I had marked out that particular day as significant and, some years afterwards, was attempting to reconstruct it. If Albertine had loved women, there were thousands of other days in her life whose time-table had escaped me and yet which could be just as interesting for me to know; I could have sent Aimé to many other places in Balbec, to many other towns rather than Balbec. But precisely because I had no knowledge of her time-table on those days, I could not picture them in my imagination, they had no existence within it. People and things started to exist for me only when they took on an individual existence in my imagination. If there were thousands of others of the same sort, they became for me merely typical of the rest. If, concerning my suspicions about Albertine, I had for so long desired to know what had happened in the showers, it was in the same way that, although I knew that there were numerous young ladies or chambermaids who were equally likely candidates and who could equally well have come to my attention, those women whom I desired to meet – since it was those that Saint-Loup had told me about, those who existed individually for me – were the young ladies who frequented houses of ill fame, and Mme Putbus's chambermaid. The obstacles that my health, my indecision, my 'procrastination' as Saint-Loup called it, placed in my way when I tried to accomplish anything had led me to delay from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the clarification of certain suspicions, just as it had the accomplishment of certain desires. But I kept them in my memory, promising not to forget to get to know the reality that lay behind them, because they alone obsessed me (since the others could not take shape before my eyes, and so had no existence) and also because the very chance that had selected them from the real world was a guarantee that it was indeed through them that I would be able to make contact with a little of reality, a little of the real life that I coveted but which eluded me. And again, would not one single little fact, if carefully chosen, enable the experimenter to decide on the general law which will make known the truth about thousands of analogous cases? Although Albertine existed in my memory only in the states in which she had appeared successively during her life, that is, subdivided into a series of temporal fractions, my thoughts, restoring her unity, reconstituted her as a person, and it is on this person that I wanted to form an overall judgement, to know whether she had lied, whether she had loved women, and whether it was in order to be free to frequent them that she had left me. What the bath-house girl had to say might resolve once and for all my doubts over Albertine's morals.

My doubts! Alas, I had thought that I would be indifferent, even pleased, at the prospect of never seeing Albertine again, until her departure revealed my mistake. Similarly, her death had taught me how mistaken I was occasionally to believe that I would welcome her death and to suppose that it would liberate me. It happened the same way when, on receiving Aimé's letter, I understood that, if I had not so far suffered too cruelly from my doubts over Albertine's virtue, it was because in fact they were not really doubts. My happiness and my life needed Albertine to be virtuous, thus they had posited once for all that she was. Armed with this salutary faith, I could safely allow my mind to play sadly with the suppositions which it formulated without believing in them. I thought, 'Perhaps she does love women,' as one thinks, 'I might die during the night'; we say the words to ourselves, but we do not believe them, we make plans for the morrow. This explains how, in mistakenly believing myself to be uncertain as to whether Albertine loved women or not and consequently believing that a guilty act proven against Albertine would add nothing to what I had often envisaged, I came, once faced with the images elicited by Aimé's letter, which others would have found insignificant, to experience an unexpected suffering, the most cruel that I had yet experienced and which, alas, formed with these images, with the image of Albertine herself, into a sort of precipitate, as one says in chemistry, where everything was indivisible and of which the text of Aimé's letter, which I have laid out in a purely conventional fashion, can give no idea, since each of the words that composed it was immediately transformed and coloured for ever by the suffering that it had just induced.

'*Dear Monsieur*,

'*Would Monsieur please forgive me for not having written to Monsieur sooner. The person that Monsieur had requested me to see had taken her leave for two days, and, wishing to respond to the confidence that Monsieur had placed in me, I did not want to return empty-handed. I have just had a chat at last with that person who remembers all quite clearly (Mlle A.)*'

Aimé, who had a certain smattering of education, wanted to place Mlle A. in italics or between inverted commas. But when he wanted to use inverted commas he drew brackets, and when he wanted to put something in brackets he used inverted commas. Similarly, Françoise would say that someone was waiting in the

same street as me when she meant that he was resident there, but that someone could reside, rather than wait, for a minute or two, since the mistakes made by simple people consist most often in exchanging terms – as the French language itself has done – which over the centuries have changed places with each other.

'According to her, what Monsieur had suspected is absolutely certain. Firstly, it was she who looked after (Mlle A.) whenever the latter came to the bath-house. (Mlle A.) very often came to take a shower accompanied by a tall woman older than herself, dressed always in grey, and whom the bath-house girl without knowing her name knew of as a result of often having seen her on the look-out for girls. But she paid no more attention to the others after she had got to know (Mlle A.). She and (Mlle A.) always locked themselves in the cabin, stayed inside a long time, and the lady in grey gave the lady with whom I had this chat a tip of at least ten francs. As the latter person said to me, you can guess that if they had spent their time making daisy chains they wouldn't have given me a ten-franc tip. (Mlle A.) also used to go there sometimes with a very dark-skinned woman, who wore a lorgnette. But most often (Mlle A.) came with girls younger than her, especially a very red-haired one. Except for the lady in grey, the persons that (Mlle A.) habitually brought along with her were not from Balbec and often must have come from quite far away. They never went in together, but (Mlle A.) went in, telling me to leave the cabin door unlocked, that she was expecting a friend, and the person with whom I have spoken knew what that meant. That person was unable to give me further details owing to her not remembering very well, "which is easy to understand after so long". Besides, this person did not attempt to find out, because she is very discreet and because it was in her interest, for (Mlle A.) brought her in lots of money. She was very sincerely moved by the news of her death. It is true that in one so young it is a great mishap both for her and her family. I await Monsieur's orders to know if I may leave Balbec where I am unlikely to learn no more. I wish to thank Monsieur again for the little outing that he has thus procured me and which I have found very pleasant all the more because the weather is more than favourable. The signs are good for this year's season. We hope that Monsieur will put in a brief apparition.

'I can't think of anything else of interest to tell Monsieur, etc.'

To understand how deeply the words struck home, one should remember that the questions I had to put to myself about Albertine were not peripheral, unimportant questions, those questions of detail which are the only kind that we really ask ourselves concerning any person other than ourselves, thereby allowing ourselves, clad in waterproof thought, to wade through suffering, lies, vice and death. No, as regards Albertine, it was a question of essence: who was she deep down, what were her thoughts, whom did she love, had she lied to me, had my life with her been as lamentable as that of Swann with Odette? Thus the target struck by Aimé's reply, although it responded not in general but in specific terms – and precisely for that reason – was indeed the inner self, both Albertine's and my own.

At last, in Albertine walking with the lady in grey down the little street that led to the bath-house, I saw before my eyes a fragment of that past which seemed to me no less mysterious and terrifying than I had feared when I imagined it enclosed within Albertine's eyes and within her memories. Of course anyone other than I might have found those details, which, since Albertine's death, made it impossible for me to have her refute them, thus endowing them with what amounted to a likelihood of probability, quite insignificant. It is even probable that in Albertine's eyes, her own misdeeds, even if they were true, and if she had admitted them – whether in her conscience she found them innocent or blameworthy, whether in her sensual being she found them delightful or bland – would have been divested of that ineffable impression of horror of which I was unable to rid them.

Helped by my own love of women, and notwithstanding the fact that they were unlikely to have meant the same to Albertine, I was able to imagine something of what she had felt. And it was certainly already enough to trigger my suffering to imagine her desiring as I had so often desired, lying to me as I had so often lied to her, preoccupied with this girl or that, and incurring expenses on her behalf, as I had for Mlle de Stermaria and so many other young ladies, or for the village girls whom I met in the country. Of course, all my desires helped me to some extent to understand hers; it already caused me great suffering to have all my desires turned into torments, and the more intense the former, the more cruel the latter, as if in the algebra of the senses they reappeared with the same coefficient, but governed by a minus instead of a plus sign. But in Albertine's eyes, as far as I could judge for myself, however hard she had tried to hide her own misdeeds from me – which led me to believe that she felt that she was guilty or was afraid of hurting me – because she had nurtured them to suit her taste in the spotlight of the imagination where desire takes shape, they seemed to her none the less to be things of the same nature as the rest of life, pleasures for her, which she had felt unable to deny herself, pains for me, but which she had tried to prevent from hurting me by hiding them, yet pains and pleasures which could take their place among life's other pains and pleasures. But in my case it was from outside, without warning, without being able to elaborate the images myself, it was from Aimé's letter that I had received these images of Albertine going into the showers and preparing her tip.

It was obviously because I interpreted Albertine's calculated and silent encounter with the lady in grey as a meeting which they had planned, a convention of going to make love in a shower cabin, which indicated an experience of corruption and the carefully dissimulated organization of a whole double life, it was because these images brought me the terrible news of Albertine's guilt that they had immediately caused me a physical pain which would accompany them for evermore. But these images had immediately been affected by my pain; an objective fact or an image is different according to the state of mind in which one approaches it. And pain is as powerful a modifier of reality as is intoxication. Combining with these images, my suffering had immediately turned them into something absolutely different from what for any other person would be a lady in grey, a tip, a shower, or the street which Albertine and the lady in grey used for their calculated encounter – a glimpse of a life of lies and misdeeds of a kind that I had never envisaged –; my suffering had immediately eaten into their very substance, I no longer saw them in the light which illuminates earthly visions, it was a fragment of another world, an unknown planet of the damned, a vision of Hell. This Hell comprised the whole of Balbec and all its neighbouring villages where, according to Aimé's letter, she often found younger girls to take into the showers. How everything connected with Balbec now became fearfully permeated with that mystery which I had formerly imagined in and around Balbec, but which had dissolved while I was living there, which I had tried to grasp on a later occasion when I got to know Albertine because, as I saw her pass by on the beach, being mad enough to hope that she was not virtuous, I thought that she must be the embodiment of this mystery! The names of those stations, Toutainville, Épreville, Incarville …, which had become so familiar, so reassuring, when I heard them in the evening on my return from the Verdurins', but, now that I thought that Albertine had lived in one, walked to another and ridden her bicycle to a third, aroused an anxiety in me more cruel than the first time, when I had felt so disturbed on seeing them from the small local railway with my grandmother, before we arrived in Balbec, which I had yet to get to know.

One of the effects of jealousy is to make us discover how far the reality of external events and the sentiments of the soul are levied in unknown quantities which lend themselves to thousands of different interpretations. We think that we have an accurate knowledge of what things are in the world outside and what people think within themselves, for the simple reason that we are not directly concerned. But as soon as we acquire the urge to know, as the jealous person does, then they become a vertiginous kaleidoscope where we cannot recognize a thing. Had Albertine deceived me? With whom? In whose house? On which day? The day when she had made such and such a remark, and when I remembered having made some reply or other during the day? I had no idea. I had no better idea of what her feelings were for me, whether they were inspired by self-interest or affection. And suddenly I recalled a trivial incident, for instance that Albertine had wanted to go to Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, saying that she found the name interesting, but perhaps quite simply because she had met up with some girl from the village. But what Aimé had learned from the bath-house girl was of little importance, since Albertine would for evermore be unaware that he had told me about it and since, during the period of my love for Albertine, my need to know was always surpassed by the need to show her that I knew; for this broke down between us the barrier raised by our separate illusions, without ever resulting in making her love me more, on the contrary. Yet now that she was dead, the second of these requirements had in fact become fused with the effects of the first: to imagine the conversation in which I would have tried to let her know what I had learned, as vividly as the conversation in which I would have asked her to tell me what I did not know; that is, I needed to see her by my side and to hear her answering kindly, to see her cheeks fill out, her eyes lose their mischief and fill with sadness, that is, to love her still and forget my jealous rage in the despair of my solitude. The painful mystery of the impossibility of ever letting her know what I had learned and of establishing a new relationship based on the truth which I had only just discovered (and which I might perhaps have been able to discover only because she was dead) substituted its sadness for the more painful mystery of her conduct. How ever could I have wished so much that Albertine should know what I had heard about the shower room, when Albertine no longer existed! This was yet another of the consequences of our finding it impossible, when we have to analyse death, to imagine it in terms other than those of life. Albertine no longer existed; but for me she was the person who had hidden the fact that she had made assignations with women at Balbec, who thought she had managed to prevent me from finding out. When we try to figure out what will happen after our death, are we not mistakenly still projecting the image of our living selves which we have at that moment? And in the end is it much more ridiculous to regret that a woman who no longer exists is unaware that we have found out what she was

doing six years earlier, than to wish that the public should still speak well of us in a century's time, when we ourselves are dead? If there is more real foundation to the latter case than the former, the regrets of my retrospective jealousy proceeded none the less from the very same perspectival error as in other men the desire for posthumous fame. And yet, if this impression of the solemn and definitive side of my separation from Albertine had been substituted momentarily for the notion of her misdeeds, it only aggravated these by conferring an irremediable character on them. I saw myself lost in life as if I were alone, on a boundless shore where, whichever direction I took, I would never meet her. Luckily I came across something extremely apposite in my memory – as there are always all kinds of things, some dangerous, others salutary, in this dark cupboard where memories can only be brought to light one by one – I discovered, like a workman finding the right tool for his job, one of my grandmother's sayings. Commenting on an incredible story that the bath-house girl had told to Mme de Villeparisis, she had said to me, 'That woman must have caught lying sickness.' This memory was a great comfort to me. How much credit could I give to what the bath-house girl had told Aimé? Especially since in fact she had never seen anything. A girl can go to take a shower with her friends without having bad intentions. Perhaps the bath-house girl was exaggerating the amount of her tip in order to show off. After all I had once heard Françoise argue that Aunt Léonie said in her presence that she had 'a million a month to burn', which was quite absurd; another time she had seen my aunt Léonie give Eulalie four thousand-franc notes, when a fifty-franc note folded in four seemed to me already implausible enough. And thus I sought to discard, and gradually succeeded in discarding, the hurtful knowledge that I had taken so much trouble to acquire, buffeted as I was between the desire to know and the fear of suffering. Then my affections were able to revive, but so too, instantly accompanying these affections, was a sadness at being separated from Albertine, which perhaps made me even more unhappy than I had been during those recent hours when it had been jealousy that was torturing me. But this latter feeling itself did suddenly revive when I thought of Balbec, because of an image (which until then had never made me suffer and even seemed to be one of the most innocuous in my memory) which I suddenly revisualized, that of the dining-room in the evening, where, on the other side of the glass, Balbec crowded its whole population into the twilight, as if they were watching strange, glowing creatures moving past the illuminated glass of an aquarium, and (although I had never thought of it in these terms before) brought a whole medley of fisher-girls, working-girls and middle-class girls into close contact with each other, through their envy for this new luxury, a luxury which at least thrift and conservatism, if not wealth, prohibited their parents from enjoying, and among these middle-class girls almost every evening one could surely find Albertine, whom I had not yet met and who would no doubt pick up some little girl there and go to join her a few minutes later in the dark, on the sand or in an empty bathing cabin at the foot of the cliffs. Then my sadness revived, as I had just heard the lift, sounding like a sentence of exile as it continued to rise instead of stopping at my floor. Yet the only person whose visit I could have wished for would never again return, since she was dead. And despite that, when the lift did stop at my floor my heart fluttered, for a moment I thought, 'What if all this were only a dream! Perhaps she is here, she's going to ring, she has come home, Françoise will come in to say, more in fear than in anger, for she is even more superstitious than she is vindictive, and would be less afraid of the living woman than a woman she might perhaps believe to be a ghost, "Monsieur will never guess who is here." ' I tried to think of nothing, to pick up the newspaper. But I found it insufferable to read all those articles written by people who felt no real pain. One said of a trivial song: 'It brings *tears to the eyes*' whereas I myself would have listened to it so joyfully if Albertine had been alive. Another, for all that he was a well-known writer, said that he had received *unforgettable* tokens of esteem, because he had been applauded as he got off a train, whereas I myself, if I had been so applauded, would not have given it a moment's thought. And a third argued that, without its tedious politics, life in Paris would be 'absolutely delicious', whereas I knew that even without politics life could only be odious for me, but would have seemed delicious, even with the politics, if I had Albertine back. The field sports correspondent (it was the month of May) said, 'This season is truly miserable, not to say calamitous, for the real hunter, since there is nothing, absolutely nothing, worth potting' and the Salon critic: 'Faced with this manner of arranging an exhibition one feels seized by deep discouragement, by infinite sadness.' If the strength of my own feelings made the expressions of those who felt neither real happiness nor real misfortunes seem mendacious and bland, on the other hand, the most insignificant lines which could be related however tenuously to Normandy, or Touraine,[24] or hydrotherapy, or la Berma, or the Princesse de Guermantes, or love, or absence, or infidelity, abruptly placed the image of Albertine before my eyes without leaving me time to turn away, and would start me weeping again. Besides, more often than not, I could not even read the newspapers, for the simple act of turning the pages reminded me both that I had performed the same action while Albertine was alive and that she was no longer alive; I dropped them back down again without having the strength to unfold all the pages. Each impression evoked an identical, but damaged, impression, in that Albertine's existence had been torn away from it, so that I never felt brave enough to live to the full these mutilated moments which lay bleeding in my heart. Even when she gradually ceased to be present in my thoughts and all-powerful in my heart, I felt a sudden pang if I had to go into her room, light a lamp and sit down beside the pianola as I used to do when she had been there. Divided into diverse divinities of hearth and home, she long inhabited a candle flame, a doorknob, or the back of a chair, and other less material domains, such as a sleepless night, or the emotions evoked by the first visit of some woman who had attracted me. In spite of this, the few sentences that my eyes read during a day, or that my thoughts remembered having read, often excited cruel jealousy within me. In order to do this, they needed less to provide me with evidence proving the immorality of women than to bring back impressions formerly linked to Albertine's life. As they were then transported into a forgotten moment whose force had not been blunted by the habit of thinking about it, a moment where Albertine still lived on, her misdeeds assumed a more intimate, agonizing and tragic character. Then I started once again to wonder whether I could be sure that the bath-house girl's allegations were false. A good way to find out would be to send Aimé to Touraine, to spend a few days in the neighbourhood of Mme Bontemps's villa. If Albertine liked the kind of pleasures that women enjoy together, the reason that she had left me would have been in order to be deprived of them no longer, and the minute that she was free she must have sought to indulge in them, and succeeded, in a neighbourhood that she knew and where she would not have decided to return if she had not thought that she would find more opportunities there than she would have if she had continued to live here with me. I do not claim that there was anything extraordinary in the fact that Albertine's death had changed so few of my preoccupations. While our mistresses are alive, a large number of the thoughts which go to make up what we call our love come to us at times when they are not by our sides. Thus we get into the habit of focussing our day-dreams on an absent object, and even if she is absent only for a few hours, she is during those hours no more than a memory. Thus death changes very little. When Aimé had returned, I asked him to leave for Châtellerault, and thus it was not only through my thoughts, my sadness and the emotion that I felt on encountering any name linked however tenuously with a certain person, but again through all my actions, through all the enquiries I undertook, through the use that I made of my money, devoting it entirely to learning of Albertine's activities, I can say that during that whole year my life continued to be filled with love, with a real relationship. But the object of this relationship was dead. People sometimes say that something of a person may live on after their death, if that person was an artist and placed something of himself in his work. It is perhaps in this way that a kind of cutting taken from a person and grafted on to another person's heart continues to live on when the person from whom it has been detached has perished.

Aimé went to take lodgings near to Mme Bontemps's villa; he became acquainted with a chambermaid and a man from whom Albertine often hired a car for the day. These two people had noticed nothing. In a second letter, Aimé told me that a young laundry-maid from the town had told him that Albertine had a special way of squeezing her arm when she brought her linen back. 'But', he said, 'this young lady had never done anything more than that with her.' I sent Aimé the money which paid for his trip and which also purchased the ill that his letter had just caused me, although I was struggling to cure this by telling myself that she had merely shown a sign of affection which proved no immoral intent, when I received a telegram from Aimé, saying: 'HAVE LEARNED MOST INTERESTING THINGS. HAVE LOTS OF NEWS FOR MONSIEUR. LETTER FOLLOWS.' The next day I received a letter whose envelope was enough to make me tremble; I knew that it was from Aimé, for everyone, however humble, is a master of those familiar little household creatures whose life lies as it were suspended on the paper, that is, the unique characters of his handwriting which he alone possesses.

'At first the young laundry-maid didn't want to tell me a thing, she assured me that Mlle Albertine had never done more than pinch her arm. But to get her to talk I took her out to dinner and plied her with drink. Then she told me that Mlle Albertine often met her on the banks of the Loire when she went bathing; that Mlle Albertine, who rose early in the morning to bathe, used to meet her on the riverside at a place where the woods are so thick that no one can see you, and besides there's no one about to see you so early in the morning. Then the laundry-maid brought her girl-friends and they went for a dip, and afterwards, as it was already very hot out there and you could feel the

heat beating down even under the trees, they stayed in the grass to dry one another, to tickle and caress one another and play games together. The young laundry-maid confessed that she enjoyed playing games with her girl-friends, and that when she saw that Mlle Albertine kept rubbing up against her in her bath-robe, she got her to take it off and caressed her by running her tongue down her neck and her arms, and even down the soles of her feet when Mlle Albertine stretched them out towards her. The laundry-maid also got undressed, and they played around, pushing one another into the water. That evening she told me nothing more. But dedicated as always to your service and ready to do anything to please you, I took the young laundry-maid home to bed with me. She asked me if I wanted her to do to me what she did to Mlle Albertine when the latter removed her bathing-dress. And she said: (If you could have seen how she quivered, that young lady, she said: (Oh! I'm in heaven) and she got so excited that she could not help biting me.) I could still see the mark on the young laundry-maid's arm. And I understood Mlle Albertine's enjoyment, for the young wench is really very talented.'

I had suffered badly enough in Balbec when Albertine had told me of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. But Albertine had been there to console me. Yet later, after I had managed to drive Albertine away from me by trying to find out too much about her activities, and Françoise had announced that she was no longer at home, and I found myself all alone, I had suffered more. But at least the Albertine whom I had loved remained in my heart. Now what I found in her place – punishing me for having pushed my curiosity too far and contradicting my supposition that death should have put an end to this curiosity – was a different young lady, multiplying lies and deceit in just those cases where she had so gently reassured me by swearing that she had never tasted those pleasures which, intoxicated with regaining the freedom that she had left me in order to savour, she had in fact indulged to the point of swooning, to the extent of biting the young laundry-maid whom she met at sunrise on the banks of the Loire and to whom she declared, 'I'm in heaven.' A different Albertine, and not only in the sense in which we employ the term when referring to other people. When other people turn out to be different from what we had imagined, this difference usually does not affect us deeply, and since the diviner's wand of our intuition is unable to produce surface movements greater than the inner swings which it detects, it is only on the skin of other people's lives that we are able to situate these differences. In former times when I learned that one woman loved other women, this did not seem to me to make her a different woman, a woman of a different essence. But when it comes to concern a woman whom we love ourselves, we need, in order to rid ourselves of the pain caused by the idea that it may be true, to find out not only what she has done, but also what she felt when she did it and what she was thinking about while she was doing it; then wading further out we enter deeper into our pain until we reach that mysterious essence. I suffered in the very depths of my being, in my body as well as my heart, much more than I would have done from the fear of losing my own life, from this curiosity which drew on all the united forces of my intellect and my unconscious mind; and in this way I projected into the very depths of Albertine's own being everything that I now learned about her. And the pain which had thus so deeply driven home the truth about Albertine's vice did much later render me one last service. Like the harm that I had caused my grandmother, the harm that Albertine had caused me was a last link between her and me and one link which survived even her memory, for, following the law of conservation of energy that is the law of all physics, suffering need not even be instructed by memory in order to function: thus a man who has forgotten the enchanted nights he had spent in the woods beneath the moonlight still suffers from the rheumatism which he contracted there.

These tastes which, despite her denials, she had, these tastes which were at last revealed to me, not through cold reasoning but through the searing anguish that I felt on reading the words, 'I'm in heaven,' a suffering which gave them a special quality, these tastes did not merely accrue to my image of Albertine as the hermit crab acquires a new shell that it drags along behind it, but rather as one salt which comes into contact with another changes not only that salt's colour, but even its nature. Whereas the young laundry-maid must have said to her girl-friends, 'Just imagine, who'd have thought it, d'you know that she's one too?', for me it was not merely a vice which they initially failed to suspect, which they then added into Albertine's character, but the discovery that she was a different person, a person like them, speaking the same language, making her the compatriot of strangers, making her even more foreign to me, proving that what I had known of her, what I harboured in my heart, was no more than a tiny fragment of her, and that the remainder, which took on such dimensions not only for already being that so mysterious and important thing, individual desire, but also for her sharing it with others, which she had always hidden from me, keeping me away from it, as a woman might have hidden from me the fact that she was an enemy spy, yet more treacherously than such a spy, who deceives only regarding her nationality, whereas Albertine deceived me regarding the nature of her deepest being, in that she did not belong to the common race of humanity, but to an alien breed that intermingles with it and hides within it, but never entirely fuses with it. As it happened I had seen two paintings by Elstir with naked women in a thickly wooded landscape. In one of them one of the girls raises her foot as Albertine must have done when she stretched it out towards the laundry-maid. With her other foot, she is pushing the other girl, who is raising one leg in the air and playfully protesting, and just skimming the surface of the blue water with her other foot as she falls. Now I remembered that the line of her raised thigh made the same sinuous swan's-neck of a curve against the angle of her knee that Albertine's thigh did when she lay beside me on the bed, and I had often wished that I could tell her that she reminded me of these paintings. But I had not done so, in order to avoid awakening within her visions of naked female figures. Now I saw her, along with the laundry-maid and her friends, recomposing the group that I had so admired when I took my place amid Albertine's girl-friends at Balbec. And if I had been a connoisseur responding to beauty alone, I would have acknowledged that Albertine recomposed this group a thousand times more beautifully now that its elements were statues of nude goddesses like those which great sculptors scattered around Versailles, whether planting them among the groves or leaving them to be washed and polished by the watery caress of the fountains. As I saw her now beside the laundry-maid, I saw her in terms of those girls at the water's edge, whose nude forms were reduplicated in feminine marble amid the bushes and undergrowth and steeped in water like some marine bas-relief. Remembering what she had been like on my bed, I thought that I recognized the line of her thigh. As I visualized it, it became the neck of a swan, seeking the other girl's mouth. Then I no longer saw even a thigh, but the bold neck of a swan, like the one in a sketch I knew where it tremulously seeks out Leda's mouth as she openly yields to the spasms of female desire, and where, because it is only a swan, she seems more alone, just as we discover over the telephone the inflexions of a voice that we do not notice until we are able to detach it from the face which for us gives its expressions their concrete form. In this study, pleasure, instead of being directed at the woman who inspires it but who is absent and replaced by a motionless swan, is focussed within the woman who feels it. There were moments when communications between my heart and my memory were cut. What Albertine had done with the laundry-maid was no longer signified by anything more than an almost algebraic shorthand which meant nothing to me: yet a hundred times an hour the current was restored and my heart was scorched by a hellish and pitiless fire as I saw Albertine brought truly back to life by my jealousy, stretching out beneath the caresses of the young laundry-maid, telling her, 'I'm in heaven.' As she was alive at the moment when she committed her misdeed, that is to say at the moment where I now found myself, I was not content merely to learn of this misdeed, I would have liked her to know that I knew. In this way, although in such moments I felt regret at the thought that I would never see her again, this regret was informed by my jealousy and quite different from the heart-rending regret which I felt in the moments when I loved her; it was the regret that I was not able to say to her: 'You thought that I would never know what you did after you left me, and yet I know everything, the laundry-maid on the banks of the Loire, you told her, "I'm in heaven," I saw the love bite.' Of course I also thought: 'Why torture myself? The girl who took her pleasure with the laundry-maid exists no more and therefore is not a person whose actions have retained any import. She cannot tell herself that I know. But nor can she tell herself that I do not know, since she cannot tell herself anything at all.' But I was less convinced by this argument than by my visions of her pleasure, which brought me back to the moment when she had experienced it. Nothing exists for us but what we feel, and we project this into the past, as into the future, without allowing ourselves to be restrained by the fictitious barrier of death. If at such moments my regret that she was dead was subject to the influence of my jealousy and took this particular form, this influence extended naturally to my dreams of the occult and the immortal, which were no more than an attempt to put my desires into practice. Thus at such moments, if I had been able to invoke her by turning a table, as Bergotte believed was possible, or to meet her in another life, as the Abbé X*** would have it, I would have wished to do so only in order to be able to repeat to her, 'I know about the laundry maid. You said: "I'm in heaven"; I saw the bite.' What I fell back on to help me fight against this image of the laundry-maid, was, admittedly after it had been there for some time, this image itself, because we only really take cognizance of something which is new, something which abruptly introduces a change of tone that strikes our sensibility, something that habit has not yet replaced with its pale replicas. But it was above all this fracturing of Albertine into many parts, into many Albertines, which constituted her sole mode of existence within me. Moments recurred when she had been nothing but kind, or intelligent, or serious, or even a lover of sport above all. And was it not right that this fragmentation should soothe me? For although in itself it was quite unreal, although it depended on the successive forms of the hours when it appeared to me, forms which remained those of my memory, as the curves in the

images projected by the magic lantern depended on the curves of its coloured slides, did it not in its way represent a perfectly objective truth, which is the fact that none of us is a single being, for we are constituted of many people who do not all have the same moral qualities, and the fact that if the immoral Albertine had indeed existed, this did not preclude the existence of others, like the one who liked to chat about Saint-Simon in her room; the one who, on the evening when I had told her that we should part, had said with such sadness, 'To think that I shall never see this pianola and this room, again' and who, when she had seen what an emotional shock my own deceit had finally given me, had cried out in such sincere pity, 'Oh, no, anything rather than upset you, I agree, I shall not try to see you again!'? Then I was no longer alone. Once this kindly Albertine had returned, I had won back the only person whom I could ask for the antidote to the suffering caused by Albertine. Of course I did still want to discuss the affair of the laundry-maid with her, but no longer in the mode of a cruel triumph making a vicious display of the fact that I was in the know. As I would have done while Albertine was alive, I asked her tenderly whether the laundry-maid affair was true. She swore that it was not, that Aimé was not very truthful and that because he wanted to appear worthy of the wages that I paid him, he had not wanted to return empty-handed and had got the laundry-maid to say whatever he wanted. Of course Albertine had told me a string of lies. And yet in the ebb and flow of her contradictory statements, I felt that there had been a certain progress, thanks to my efforts. I could not have sworn that she did not confide in me even at the start (involuntarily, perhaps, in a phrase that slipped out): I could no longer remember. And then, she had such odd ways of referring to certain things that they might be significant, or they might not be. But her sense of my jealousy had led her afterwards to retract in horror what she had at first complaisantly admitted. Actually, Albertine had not even needed to say this to me. For me to be persuaded of her innocence it was enough for me to be able to kiss her, and now I could, now that the wall which had separated us, that invisible but intractable wall which rises between two lovers who have quarrelled and which kisses cannot breach, had fallen. No, she had no need to tell me anything. She might have done whatever she wished, poor girl, there were feelings which could unite us, beyond whatever divided us. If the affair were true, if Albertine had hidden her inclinations from me, it was in order to spare my grief. I had had the sweet pleasure of hearing this Albertine say so herself. Besides, had I ever known a different Albertine? The two main causes of misunderstanding in a relationship with another person are either that we ourselves are kind-hearted, or else that we are in love with the other person. We fall in love with a smile, the look in someone's eyes, a shoulder. That is enough; then during the long hours of hope or sadness, we create a person, we compose a character. And later, when we come to know better the person we love, we can no more, whatever cruel realities confront us, detach this kind disposition, this amorous feminine nature, from the person who has that look, or that shoulder, than we can remove her youth from a woman who has grown older but whom we have known since she was young. I called to mind the beautiful, kind, compassionate eyes of this Albertine, her plump cheeks and her neck with its grainy texture. It was the image of a dead woman, but since this dead woman was still alive, it was easy for me to do immediately what I would not have failed to do during her lifetime if she had still been by my side (and what I would do if I were ever to meet her again in another life), I forgave her.

The moments which I had spent in the company of this Albertine were so precious to me that I wished I had never forgotten a single one of them. Yet sometimes, as one comes across the remnants of a squandered fortune, I retrieved some which I thought I had lost: tying a scarf behind my neck instead of in front, I remembered a drive which I had never since recalled, when Albertine had kissed me and then arranged my scarf in this fashion to prevent the cold air from chilling my throat. So simple a drive, restored to my memory by so humble a gesture, gave me the pleasure afforded by those personal possessions which have belonged to someone we have dearly loved and which are priceless when they are brought to us by her old maidservant; my sorrow was enriched by this, all the more since I had never thought of this scarf again.

Now Albertine, once more set free, resumed her flight; men and women followed in her wake. She was alive within me. I realized that my vast, protracted love for her was as it were the ghost of the feelings that I had felt for her, reproducing their diverse phases and obeying the same laws as the emotional reality which it reflected beyond her death. For I understood plainly that if I had been able to insert some intervals between my thoughts of Albertine, and had these lasted too long, I would have ceased to love her; this interruption would have made me indifferent to her, as I had now become towards my grandmother. Too long a time spent not thinking of her would have broken in my memory the continuity which is the very principle of life, although it may sometimes be reconstituted even after it has lapsed for some time. Had this not been the case with my love for Albertine while she was alive, which had been able to pick up the threads where they had left off after long periods of not thinking of her? At all events my memory must have been subject to the same laws and equally unable to withstand extended intervals, for after Albertine's death it did no more than reflect, like the aurora borealis, the emotions that I had felt for her, as if it were merely the shadow of my love.

On other occasions my sorrow took on so many forms that sometimes I did not recognize it; I wished I could have a great love, or I wanted to find someone to live with me, which seemed to me to be a sign that I was no longer in love with Albertine when it was a sign that I was still in love with her; for this need to experience a great love, just like my desire to kiss Albertine's plump cheeks, was only a part of my regret. Only when I had forgotten her would I be able to realize that I would be wiser and happier living without love. Thus missing Albertine, because that was what gave rise within me to the need for a sister, made that need impossible to assuage. And as I came gradually to feel the lack of Albertine less acutely, this need for a sister, which was only an unconscious expression of my need for her, would make it less imperious. And yet these two remainders of my love did not diminish with equal speed. There were hours when the former suffered such a total eclipse, while the latter on the other hand so maintained its full strength, that I decided to get married. And on the other hand, later on, when my jealous memories had died down, from time to time a surge of affection for Albertine welled up suddenly in my heart, and then, thinking of my loves for other women, I told myself that she would have understood and shared them, and her vice became almost a source of love. Sometimes my jealousy revived in the moments when I no longer remembered Albertine, although she was then the cause of my jealousy. I thought that I was jealous of Andrée because I had just learned of an affair she had had. But Andrée for me was only a accommodation address, a relay, a socket wiring me directly into Albertine. Thus it is in our dreams that we lend a different face or name to someone whose identity we have none the less perfectly well grasped. In short, despite the ebb and flow contradicting this general law in these individual cases, the sentiments left in me by Albertine found it more difficult to die than did the sentiment of their original cause. Not only the sentiments, but the sensations. Differing in this from Swann, who, when he had started falling out of love with Odette, had not even been able to revive within himself the sensation of his love, I felt myself still reliving a past that was no more than another man's story; as if my self were divided into two, while its upper half was already hard and cold, its lower half rekindled every time that a spark passed the old current back through it, even when my mind had long since ceased to think of Albertine. Since no image of her ever came to supplement the cruel palpitations that accompanied this phenomenon, or the tears brought to my eyes by a cold wind like the one which had blown through the prematurely pink apple trees at Balbec, I was led to wonder whether the rebirth of my pain was not due to entirely pathological causes and whether what I took to be the revival of a memory and the last phase of a love affair might not be rather the onset of a cardiac disease.

In certain ailments there are secondary infections which the patient is only too tempted to confuse with the illness itself. When they cease he is astonished to find himself less far from being cured than he had thought. Such was the suffering caused – the 'complication' induced – by Aimé's letters about the bath-house girl and the laundry-maid. But if a spiritual doctor could have visited me, he would have found that in other respects my sorrow itself was on the mend. No doubt, as I was a man, one of those amphibious creatures plunged simultaneously in the past and in present reality, there was still a contradiction inside me between the living memory of Albertine and my knowledge of her death. But this contradiction was in a way the reverse of what it had been before. The thought that Albertine was dead – which at first struggled so furiously against the thought that she was still alive that I was forced to run away from it as children do from an oncoming wave – had finally, precisely because of these incessant assaults, won over the place inside me still occupied until recently by the thought that she was alive. Without my realizing it, it was now this thought of the death of Albertine – and no longer the present memory of her life – that made up the greater part of my unconscious day-dreams, so that if I suddenly interrupted them to reflect on myself, what provoked my astonishment was not, as it had been during the first

few days, that the Albertine so alive within me could no longer exist on this earth and could be dead, but that the Albertine who no longer existed on earth, who was dead, could have stayed so alive within me. The black tunnel shored up by my series of interlocking memories, where my thoughts had been dreaming for so long that they did not even notice it, was abruptly flooded by a sunny spell, bathing it in the light of a distant, smiling blue universe where Albertine was nothing more than a charming memory that left me indifferent. Is that her, I wondered, is she the real one, or is it that person who seemed during my long trek through darkness to be the only reality? A sort of self-multiplication made the character that I had been until so recently, and who lived for nothing but the permanent expectation of the moment when Albertine would come to kiss him good-night, appear to me now as only a small part of myself which I had already almost shed, and I felt the youthful freshness of a bud starting to open and burst through its leaves into flower. It is also possible that these brief flashes of illumination made me become more aware of my love for Albertine, as happens with all ideas which are too fixed and which need to feel resistance in order to affirm themselves. Those who lived through the 1870 war,[25] for instance, say that the idea of the war had gradually come to seem natural to them, not because they did not think enough about the war, but because they thought about it all the time. And to understand what a strange and momentous event a war is, something different was needed to shake them out of their constant obsession, to forget for a moment that war ruled their lives, and to find themselves as they had been when they had been at peace, until suddenly on to this temporarily blank screen the monstrous reality that they had so long ceased to see, since they saw nothing else, would at last be distinctly projected.

If for the time being this retreat within me of different memories of Albertine had at least been executed not in staggered ranks but in this instantaneous rout, along the whole front line of my memory, with the memories of her betrayals moving away at the same time as those of her favours, forgetting would have brought me peace. It was not to be. As on a beach where the tide runs out unevenly, I was already gnawed by the pangs of one or other of my suspicions when the image of her sweet presence had already receded too far away from me to be able to act as a remedy. As for the acts of betrayal, they made me suffer because, however many years previously they had been committed, they were new for me; but I suffered less as they grew old, that is, as I imagined them less vividly, for the remoteness of an object is proportionate rather to the visual power of the memory observing it than to the real distance of the number of days which have passed, as the memory of a dream from the night before may appear to us so faded and imprecise that it seems more remote than an event dating from several years earlier. But although the thought of the death of Albertine was making progress inside me, the ebb tide of the feeling that she was alive, even if it did not arrest that progress, did none the less oppose it and hinder its regular advance. And now I realize that during this period (no doubt because I had forgotten the hours that she had been sequestered by me, which, since they dispelled within me the suffering caused by her misdeeds and left me almost indifferent because I knew that she was no longer committing them, had become so much evidence of her innocence), I suffered the martyrdom of living habitually with an idea just as new as the one that Albertine was dead (until then I had always started out from the idea that she was alive), an idea that I would have thought just as impossible to bear and which, without my realizing it, was gradually forming the basis of my conscious mind and substituting itself for the idea that Albertine was innocent: it was the idea that she was guilty. At times when I thought I doubted her, I did in fact on the contrary believe in her: likewise I took as the starting-point for my other ideas the certainty – often contradicted, as had been the opposite idea – of her guilt, while still imagining that I was still in doubt. I must have suffered greatly during that period, but I realize now that it had to be thus. We may be cured of suffering only on condition that we experience that suffering to the full. By protecting Albertine from all contact, by forging the illusion that she was innocent, just as when later I took as the basis of my reasoning the thought that she was alive, all I was doing was postponing the moment of my cure, because I was postponing the long hours of preparation and the inevitable suffering that it would take. But when habit got to work on this idea of the guilt of Albertine, it would do so according to the same laws as those I had already experienced during the course of my life. Just as the name of Guermantes had lost the charm and significance of a road bordered with water lilies and of Gilbert le Mauvais's stained-glass window, so Albertine's presence had lost those of the blue valleys of the sea, the names of Swann, the liftboy, the Princesse de Guermantes and so many others, a charm and a significance each entrusted to a single word which they judged mature enough to live on its own, as someone who wants to train a servant will show him the ropes for a couple of weeks and then withdraw, so the painful power of Albertine's guilt would be expelled outside me by habit. Besides, by that time, as when an army attacks simultaneously on two flanks, in this action mounted by habit, two allies would take up arms on each other's behalf. It is because my idea of Albertine's guilt would become a more plausible and familiar idea for me as it would become less painful. But at the same time, as it became less painful, the objections raised to the certainty of this guilt and which were suggested to my intellect only by my desire not to suffer too much, would fall away one by one; and each process would facilitate the other, I would move fairly swiftly from the certainty that Albertine was innocent to the certainty that she was guilty. I needed to live with the idea of the death of Albertine, with the idea of her misdeeds, for these ideas to become habitual, that is for me to be able to forget these ideas and finally forget Albertine herself.

I had not yet reached this stage. Sometimes it was my memory, sharpened for instance by the intellectual excitement of reading, which renewed my sorrow; at other times it was, on the contrary, my sorrow, brought on for instance by the anguish induced by stormy weather, which dredged up some memory of our love and raised it nearer to the light. Moreover these revivals of my love for Albertine once she was dead might occur after an interval of indifference interspersed with other attractions, as when, after the long interval which had started with the kiss which had been denied me in Balbec, during which time I had been much more concerned with Mme de Guermantes, Andrée and Mlle de Stermaria, my love had revived once more when I had begun to see her frequently again. Yet even now different preoccupations could lead to a separation – from a dead woman this time – where I would become more indifferent to her. And all for the same reason, that she was still alive for me. And even later, when I loved her less, it nevertheless remained for me one of those desires which rapidly pall, but which rekindle when they have been left to rest for a while. I pursued one live woman, then another, then I returned to my dead one. Often it was in the darkest corners of my self, when I could no longer form a clear idea of Albertine, that a name would come by chance to excite painful reactions that I no longer believed possible, as in certain dying people whose brains have ceased to think but whose limbs may be made to contract when pierced by a needle. And for long periods, these stimuli were activated so rarely that I was led to seek out for myself a moment of sorrow or a fit of jealousy, to try to reconnect with the past and remember her better. For since missing a woman is no more than reviving a love that remains subject to the same laws as all love, the force of my regret was increased by the same causes which, while Albertine was alive, would have augmented my love for her and which had always given pride of place to jealousy and pain. But these occasions – for an illness, or a war, can last far longer than the most careful calculations had predicted – arose most often without my knowledge and caused me such violent shocks that I was much more concerned to protect myself from the suffering which they had caused than to appeal to them to yield me a memory.

Moreover it did not always even need a word like Chaumont[26] (even a syllable common to two different names could enable my memory – as an electrician can use the slightest conducting substance – to re-establish contact between Albertine and my heart) to refer directly to one of my suspicions in order to arouse it and to work as the password, the magic 'open sesame' creating access to a past which we had ceased to notice because, in having tired of looking at it, we literally no longer possessed it; we had been diminished by its loss, thinking that through this subtraction our own personality had changed shape, like a geometrical figure which loses a side if it loses an angle; just as certain phrases, for instance, which included the name of a street or a road where Albertine might have walked, were sufficient to incarnate a non-existent but virtual jealousy in search of a body, a dwelling, any material anchorage or specific concrete form. Often it was quite simply during my sleep that these reprises, these da capos of a dream turning several pages of my memory and of the calendar, returned me, or rather made me regress to, a painful but distant impression, which had long ago given way to others, but which now became present again. Usually it arrived accompanied by a whole theatrical staging, clumsy but striking, which created the illusion of a visible and an audible reality, which I thereafter dated back to that night. Moreover in the story of a love and its struggles against the process of forgetting, does not dreaming hold an even greater place than waking, since dreams take no notice of infinitesimal divisions of time, suppress transitions, reject blatant contradictions, undo in an instant the web of consolation so slowly woven during the day and during the night arrange for us to meet the woman whom we would ultimately have forgotten as long as we never saw her again? For, whatever people may say, it

is perfectly possible during a dream to have the impression that what is happening is real. And this could be judged impossible only by using arguments drawn from our waking experience, but these are hidden from us at the time. As a result, this implausible life seems true to us. Sometimes through a flaw in the internal lighting which treacherously made the room disappear, as my carefully staged memories gave me the illusion of real life, I thought that I had really arranged to meet Albertine and had really met her; but then I found myself unable to walk towards her, to utter the words which I wanted to speak, to relight my extinguished lamp in order to see her: impossibilities in my dream which were simply the immobility, the speechlessness and the blindness of the sleeper, just as we may suddenly see in a magic-lantern show a great shadow, which is that of the lantern itself, or its operator, which were meant to be hidden, blotting out the images of the characters which were meant to be projected. On other occasions Albertine was in my dream and wanted to leave me again, without her decision managing to move me. It was because a warning ray of light from my memory had managed to infiltrate the darkness of my sleep; and what lay hidden within Albertine, and what removed all import from her future actions and her intended departure, was the notion that she was dead. I chatted with her and, while I was talking, my grandmother was walking about at the other end of the room. Part of her chin had crumbled to pieces like fractured marble, but I found nothing extraordinary in that. I told Albertine that I would have questions to put to her concerning the bath-house at Balbec and a certain laundry-maid from Touraine, but that I was leaving it until later because we had plenty of time and there was no longer any hurry. She promised me that she had been doing nothing wrong and that all she had done was kiss Mlle Vinteuil on the lips the day before. 'What? Is she here? – Yes, and what is more, it is time for me to leave, for I have to see her in a moment.' And because since her death I no longer held her prisoner at home as I had during the last phases of her life, her visit to Mlle Vinteuil perturbed me. But I did not want it to show. Albertine told me that she had done no more than kiss her, but she must be starting to lie again as in the days when she used to deny everything. In a moment she would probably no longer be content merely to kiss Mlle Vinteuil. Obviously from one point of view I was wrong to feel so worried, since, so we are led to believe, the dead can neither act nor feel. This is what people say, but it did not prevent my grandmother, who was dead, from living on for quite a few years and from walking around my room at that very moment. And doubtless, once I was awake, this notion of a dead woman living on would have become as impossible for me to comprehend as I find it to explain. But I had formulated it so many times, during these periods of temporary madness that we call dreams, that I had finally become used to it; our memories of dreams can become permanent if they are repeated often enough. And I imagine that even when cured and having recovered his reason, the man who must understand rather better than others what he wanted to say during an earlier period of his mental life, would be the man who had undertaken to explain to visitors to a mental hospital that he was not himself insane despite the doctor's claims, lucidly analysing the monstrous imaginings of each of the patients and concluding, 'Take that man who looks quite normal, you wouldn't think he was mad, and yet he thinks he is Jesus Christ, and that is impossible, because it is I who am Jesus Christ!' And a long time after the end of my dream, I remained tormented by the kiss which Albertine told me she had given, in words which I thought I could still hear. And they must in fact have passed very close to my ears since it was I myself who had uttered them. All day long I continued to converse with Albertine, I asked her questions, I forgave her, I made up for the things that I had always wanted to tell her but had forgotten to do during her lifetime. And suddenly I took fright as I realized that this person evoked by my memory, the person to whom all these remarks were addressed, no longer corresponded to anything in the real world, that her various facial features, given the unity of a person driven only by the continuous will to live, which was now annihilated, were destroyed. On other occasions, without having dreamed, I felt as soon as I awoke that my inner climate had changed, a cold wind was blowing relentlessly from another direction, from the depths of my past, bringing with it the chiming of far-off hours and the whistles of departures which I usually failed to hear. I tried to pick up a book. I opened a novel by Bergotte which I had particularly liked. I was very fond of its charming characters, and as I soon fell under the spell of the book once more, I started to take a personal interest in wanting to have the wicked woman punished; my eyes brimmed with tears when the happiness of the betrothed couple was safe at last. 'But then,' I cried in despair, 'I cannot conclude from the fact that I attach so much importance to what Albertine might have done, that her personality is something real which cannot be abolished, that I shall find her one day unchanged in heaven, if I desire so fervently, await so impatiently and welcome so tearfully the success of someone who has only ever existed in Bergotte's imagination, someone whom I have never seen, whose face I am free to imagine however I wish!' There were moreover in this book attractive girls, amorous correspondence and deserted paths on which to meet, which reminded me that clandestine love affairs could exist, which reawakened my jealousy, as if Albertine had still been capable of going for a walk along a deserted path. It also included the story of a man who meets a woman whom he had loved in her youth, fifty years earlier, but fails to recognize her and is bored by her company. And this reminded me that love does not last for ever, and I felt overwhelmed, as if I were destined to be separated from Albertine and meet her with indifference in my old age. And if I came across a map of France my fearful eyes conspired to avoid encountering Touraine, to save me from being jealous, and, to save me from being unhappy, Normandy, where at least Balbec and Doncières would be marked, between which I could trace all the routes which we had so often travelled together. Amid other names of French towns or villages, even if only read or heard, the name of Tours, for instance, seemed differently composed, not now of immaterial images but of toxic substances which acted instantaneously on my heart, making it beat more rapidly and painfully. And if this power extended to certain names, which she had rendered so different from others, then why, if I moved closer to home and concentrated only on Albertine herself, should I be surprised to find that this irresistible force, which might well have been exerted on me by any other woman, should be the outcome of a tangled confrontation and interplay of dreams, desires, habits and affections, duly disturbed by the intrusion of alternating pains and pleasures? And this process continued after her death, since memory suffices to sustain real life, which is mental. I recalled Albertine alighting from the railway carriage, telling me that she would like to go to Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, and I also saw her before, with her polo cap pulled down over her cheeks; I discovered fresh possibilities of happiness and reached out for them, thinking, 'We could have gone to Infreville, or even Doncières.' There was not one resort near Balbec where I did not recognize her, so that this region, like some still-preserved mythological land, rendered the most ancient and charming legends of my love, however buried beneath later experience, alive and hurtful. Oh, how I would suffer if ever I had to sleep again in Balbec in that bed, around whose copper frame, as around a motionless pivot or fixed bars, my life had moved and evolved, winding around it in succession my cheerful conversations with my grandmother, the shock of her death, Albertine's sweet caresses, the discovery of her vice and now a new life where I knew, as I glimpsed the glass-fronted book-cases which reflected the sea, that Albertine would never again appear! Did not this Balbec hotel resemble the unchanging domestic interior on the stage of some provincial theatre, where year after year the most diverse plays are set, now for a comedy, now for one tragedy and then for a different one, and then again for a purely poetical drama, this hotel which already belonged to quite a remote period of my life? The fact that this single element, with its four walls, its book-case and its mirror, always remained the same during each new period of my life made me feel even more certain that overall it was everything else, that is, I myself, which had changed, thus giving me the impression that the mysteries of life, love and death (from which children optimistically believe themselves excluded) are not privileges reserved for others, but, as we realize later, proudly but painfully, have been part and parcel of our own lives and bodies throughout the passing years.

I tried from time to time to look at the newspapers, but I found reading them not only unpleasant but far from innocuous. In fact so many paths branch out from each idea within us, as from a crossing in a forest, that at the moment when I least expected it I found myself faced with a fresh memory. The title of Fauré's song, 'Le Secret',[27] had led me to *Le Secret du roi* by the Duc de Broglie,[28] the name of de Broglie to that of Chaumont. Or again, the words Good Friday had made me think of Golgotha, and Golgotha of the etymology of the word, which, apparently, is equivalent to *Calvus mons*, Chaumont. But no matter which path I had climbed on my way to Chaumont, when it emerged I was struck with a shock so cruel that from that moment on I thought far more of preventing it from hurting me than searching it for memories. A few moments after the shock, my intellect, lagging behind like thunder after lightning, brought me the explanation. Chaumont had made me think of the Buttes-Chaumont where Mme Bontemps had told me that Andrée often used to go with Albertine, while Albertine had told me that she had never seen the Buttes-Chaumont. After a certain age our memories are so interwoven with each other that the object of our thoughts or the book

which we are reading has practically no importance. We have left traces of ourselves everywhere, everything is fertile, everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries every bit as precious in an advertisement for soap as in Pascal's *Pensées*.

No doubt an incident like that of the Buttes-Chaumont, which had seemed trivial to me at the time, was in itself a much less serious and decisive charge against Albertine than the affair of the bath-house girl or the laundry-maid. But in the first place a memory which we experience fortuitously finds us with our powers of imagination, that is, in this case, with our powers of suffering intact, whereas on the other hand we have already partly blunted these when we have deliberately applied our minds to recreating a memory. And then, I had become accustomed to these memories (of the bath-house girl or the laundry-maid), always present in my memory, however dimly, like furniture placed in a dark corridor, which we somehow avoid bumping into without distinguishing them clearly. But, on the other hand, I had not thought of the Buttes-Chaumont for ages, nor for instance of Albertine looking into the mirror at the casino at Balbec, nor her unexplained expression the evening when I had waited so long for her after the reception at the Guermantes, all those parts of her life which remained outside my heart and which I would have liked to know in order to assimilate them and annex them to it, to add them to gentler memories formed in my heart by an inner Albertine that I really possessed. Raising a corner of the heavy veil of habit (habit which stultifies us and which during the whole course of our existence hides more or less the whole universe from us, and under cover of utter darkness, without changing their labels, substitutes for the most dangerous or intoxicating poisons of life something anodyne which procures no delight), these memories returned to me as on their first appearance, with the same sharp, fresh novelty that each new season brings as it returns, changing our routine time-table and providing us, even in the realm of our pleasures – if we climb into a carriage on the first fine day of spring or leave the house at sunrise – with an exultant awareness of our most insignificant actions, which invests this one intense moment with more value than the totality of the days preceding it. As they recede, passing days gradually cover over those which went before and are themselves buried by those that come after. But each past day remains deposited within us as in some vast library where there are copies even of the oldest books, which probably no one will ever ask to consult. And yet if this past day should pass through the translucent layers of the following eras, rise to the surface and spread out from within us until it covers our whole surface, then for a moment names will resume their former meanings, people their former faces and we our former souls, and we shall feel with a diffuse but newly tolerable and transient sense of suffering, the problems which remained intractable for so long and which caused us so much anguish at the time. Our selves are composed of our successive states, superimposed. But this superimposition is not immutable like the stratification of a mountain. A tremor is liable at any moment to throw older layers back up to the surface. I found myself back at the moment when I left the reception at the Princesse de Guermantes, waiting for Albertine to arrive. What had she been doing that night? Deceiving me? With whom? Aimé's revelations, even if I accepted them, did not in any way diminish my anxious and desperate interest in this unexpected question, as though each different Albertine, each new memory, asked a specific question of jealousy, which the answers to the others could not resolve.

But I would have liked to know not only with which woman she had spent the night, but what particular pleasure it had brought her, what was happenng inside her at that moment. Sometimes at Balbec Françoise had gone to fetch her and had told me that she had found her leaning out of the window, looking anxious and expectant as though she were waiting for someone. Now let us suppose that I learned that the girl she was waiting for was Andrée, what was Albertine's state of mind while she was waiting for her, what state of mind lay hidden behind her anxious, expectant expression? How important for Albertine were these inclinations, how large a place did they hold in her concerns? Alas, remembering my own agitation every time that I came across a girl who attracted me, and sometimes when I had only heard her mentioned and had not even seen her, my breaking into a cold sweat in my concern to appear handsome and interesting, I needed only to imagine the same voluptuous excitement in Albertine in order to torment myself, as if I had discovered the device which my aunt Léonie, after the visit of a certain physician who had seemed unconvinced by the reality of her malady, had hoped someone might invent in order to enable the doctor to feel all the sufferings of his patient, so that he would better understand them. And this was already enough to torment me, to tell me that compared to this she must have found our discussions of Stendhal and Victor Hugo truly insignificant, for her heart to be drawn to others, to fly away from mine and take root elsewhere. But even the importance that she attached to this desire and the reticence with which she protected it could not inform me of its qualities, let alone how she experienced those qualities when she talked to herself about it. When our bodies suffer, at least we cannot choose our pain. Our illness determines and imposes it. But with jealousy we are forced as it were to try out all types and scales of suffering before we settle for the one that seems to suit us. And what greater problem could we face than one which concerns the kind of suffering where our beloved takes her pleasure with people other than ourselves, who give her sensations that we are unable to give her, or at least with people who through their characteristics, their behaviour and the image they project, create an impression on her totally different from ours! Oh! If only Albertine had been in love with Saint-Loup! How much less I would have suffered, or so it seemed to me!

There is no doubt that we are unaware of the nature of each individual's personal sensibility, but generally we do not even know that we are unaware of it, for we are indifferent to other people's sensibilities. As far as Albertine was concerned, my happiness or unhappiness might have hung on what kind of sensibility she had; I was well aware that it was a mystery to me, and the fact that it was a mystery was already a source of pain. I did once have the illusion of seeing, and on another occasion of hearing, the unknown desires and pleasures felt by Albertine. Of seeing them, when Andrée came to see me, some time after Albertine's death. For the first time she seemed beautiful to me, I found that her curly, almost frizzy hair, and her moody eyes with their dark rings, must have been what Albertine had fallen in love with, and I saw materialize before my eyes what had nourished her amorous fantasies, what had fired her eyes with anticipated desire the day when she wanted to return from Balbec so precipitously. As if a dark, unknown flower belonging to someone beyond the grave from whom I had been unable to gather it were now recovered and presented to me, this miraculously exhumed and priceless relic seemed to present me with Albertine's desire incarnate in the form of Andrée as she appeared to me, just as Venus figured Jupiter's desire. Andrée mourned for Albertine, but I felt straight away that she did not really miss her friend. Forcibly deprived of her friend by death, Andrée seemed to have come to terms very easily with a final separation that I would not have dared request while Albertine was alive, for fear that Andrée would withhold her consent. On the contrary she seemed to accept this renunciation with no difficulty, albeit only at the very moment when this was of no further use to me; Andrée handed me Albertine, but only now that she was dead and had lost for me not only her life but, in retrospect, something of her reality, as I saw that she was not unique and indispensable for Andrée, who had been able to replace her with other friends.

While Albertine was alive, I would never have dared ask Andrée to confide in me the nature of the friendship between themselves and with Mlle Vinteuil's girl-friend, not being at all sure in latter days that Andrée would not tell Albertine everything that I had told her. Now this investigation, even if it delivered no results, would at least hold no danger. I spoke to Andrée, not as if I were questioning her but as if I had always been kept informed, perhaps by Albertine, of Andrée's own inclinations for women and her own relationship with Mlle Vinteuil. She admitted everything with no inhibition, and with a smile. From this admission I could draw the most hurtful conclusions; first and foremost, since Andrée, who had behaved so affectionately and seductively towards so many young men at Balbec, would never have given anyone to suppose that she indulged in those practices which she now made no attempt to deny, so that by analogy, on discovering this new Andrée, I was led to think that Albertine might just as easily have made a similar confession to anyone other than me, whom she guessed to be jealous. But furthermore, now that Andrée, who had been Albertine's best friend and the one for whom she had probably returned to Balbec on purpose, had admitted her inclinations, the conclusion which I was bound to draw was that Albertine and Andrée had always had a relationship together. Of course, just as we do not always dare take a look at gifts offered by strangers in their presence, preferring to wait until the donor has left before we undo the wrapping, so, as long as Andrée was there, I could not withdraw within myself to examine the pain that she caused, which I already felt greatly upsetting my bodily dependants, my nerves and my heart, although from politeness I pretended not to notice; on the contrary, I deployed all my reserves of charm in conversing with my young guest, without diverting my gaze towards these inner events. I found it particularly painful to hear Andrée say of Albertine, 'Ah, yes, she did like driving out with me in the Chevreuse valley.' The vague, non-existent universe where Albertine and Andrée drove out together seemed to be joined retrospectively by this new and satanic

creation, adding to the work of God a valley of the damned. I sensed that Andrée was going to tell me everything that she used to do with Albertine, and, although I did everything I could, from politeness, cunning, self-esteem and perhaps even from gratitude, to appear more and more affectionate, while the space that I was still able to concede to Albertine's innocence shrank smaller and smaller, I had the impression that despite my efforts I appeared frozen, like an animal trapped but transfixed by the progressively narrowing circles described by a bird of prey taking its own sweet time, knowing that it can choose the moment to strike, since its prey can no longer escape. I looked at her however and summoning the last reserves of good humour, naturalness and self-confidence that remain in a person not wishing to seem to fear being hypnotized by someone's gaze, I dropped the following casual remark: 'I had never spoken to you about it before for fear of upsetting you, but now that it is a comfort to speak of her, I can tell you that for some time I had been aware of the kind of relationship that you enjoyed with Albertine; besides, you will be pleased to know, although you knew it already, that Albertine adored you.' I told Andrée that I would very much like her to let me watch her indulge in this kind of practice (even if she restricted her caresses to those which she would not be too embarrassed to perform in my presence) with those of Albertine's girl-friends who shared the same tastes, and I mentioned Rosemonde, Berthe and all of Albertine's friends, to see her reaction. 'Apart from the fact that in your presence I would not do what you mention for anything in the world,' replied Andrée, 'I do not believe that any of the girls you mention were that way inclined.' Moving closer, despite myself, to the monster that fascinated me, I replied, 'Come, now, you cannot expect me to believe that Albertine was the only person in your group that you did these things with! – But I never did do things like that with Albertine. – Listen, my dear Andrée, why deny something that I've known about for at least three years? I see nothing wrong in it, quite the opposite. I was just thinking of the evening when she was so keen to go with you to Mme Verdurin's the next day, perhaps you remember …' Before I had come to the end of my sentence, I saw an anxious look, like the face of someone allowed backstage before a play commences who peeps through the curtain then withdraws immediately to avoid being noticed, flash across Andrée's eyes, making them as narrow and piercing as certain gemstones which are so sharp that jewellers find them almost impossible to use. The anxious look disappeared, everything returned to normal, but I sensed that everything I saw from then on would be artificially arranged for my benefit. At that moment I caught sight of myself in the mirror; I was struck by a certain resemblance between myself and Andrée. If I had not long ceased to shave my upper lip, and if I had still had only the faintest shadow of a moustache, the resemblance would have been complete. Perhaps it was at Balbec, when she had observed my moustache as it was just starting to grow again, that Albertine had suddenly had that impatient, furious urge to return to Paris. 'But I can't tell you something that is not true just because you don't disapprove of it. I swear that I never did anything with Albertine and I am convinced that she detested that sort of thing. The people who told you that were lying, perhaps from self-interest,' she said, with a suspicious, questioning air. 'Well, so be it, since you don't want to tell me,' I replied, preferring to seem as if I did not want to reveal my evidence, rather than failing to have any. Yet I did refer in an offhand manner to the Buttes-Chaumont, just in case. 'I might have gone to the Buttes-Chaumont with Albertine, but is there anything particularly wrong with the place?' I asked her if she might not ask Gisèle about it, since she had at one time been very close to Albertine. But Andrée declared that Gisèle had recently stabbed her in the back, and asking her a favour was the one and only thing that she could never agree to do for me. 'If you see her,' she added, 'don't tell her what I've told you about her, there's no need to make an enemy of her. She knows what I think of her, but I have always preferred to avoid getting involved in violent rows with her and then having to patch things up. And then again, she is dangerous, but anyone who had read the letter she sent me last week, where she told such treacherous lies, would understand that nothing, not even the noblest actions in the world, could efface its memory.' In short, if, despite the fact that Andrée followed her inclinations to the point of not trying to hide them and despite the great affection which Albertine had certainly felt for her, Andrée had never had carnal relations with Albertine and had always been ignorant of the fact that Albertine shared her inclinations, then surely it must be because Albertine had not had such inclinations and had never had such relationships, which she would have sought to enjoy with Andrée in preference to anyone else. Thus as soon as Andrée had left, I realized that her trenchant affirmation had calmed me down. But perhaps Andrée had felt obliged by the sense of duty that she felt towards her dead friend, whose memory still lived on within her, not to let anyone believe what Albertine had most likely asked her during her lifetime to deny.

After that one moment when, looking at Andrée, I thought I caught a glimpse of the pleasures in which I had so often tried to imagine Albertine indulging, there was another occasion when I thought that I surprised their presence, but this time through my ears, not my eyes. I had asked for two laundry-maids from a neighbourhood which Albertine often used to frequent to be invited to a house of ill-fame. As one caressed the other, her partner started suddenly to make a noise which at first I was unable to interpret, for we never perfectly understand the significance of a strange sound which expresses a sensation that we do not ourselves feel. If we are listening in an adjoining room, without being able to see, we may take for a fit of giggles the screams of a patient operated on without anaesthetic; and as for the sounds made by a mother who has just learned of the death of her child, it could seem to us, if we did not know the cause, as difficult to ascribe to the human tongue as the sounds emitted by an animal or a harp. It takes us a while to understand that both kinds of sound express by analogy something we call suffering, however different from our own experience, and similarly it took me a while to understand that this particular sound expressed by analogy something, however different, which I had experienced, what I called pleasure; and this pleasure must have been very powerful to shake the person who felt it to such an extent that it drew from her this unknown language, which seemed to designate and comment on all the stages of dramatic delight experienced by the young woman hidden from my eyes by the curtain permanently drawn against anyone but themselves over what happens in the mysterious private depths of every human creature. At all events these two young things were unable to tell me anything, they had never even heard of Albertine.

Novelists often claim in their introductions that somewhere on their travels abroad they have met someone who has told them of another person's life. They then let this travelling companion tell the tale, and their novel is precisely the story they hear. Thus Stendhal heard about Fabrice del Dongo's life[29] from a canon in Padua. When we are in love, that is, when some other person's life seems to be a great mystery to us, how we would like to come across such a well-informed narrator! For he surely exists. Do we ourselves not quite dispassionately tell the life story of some woman or other to one of our friends or to a stranger who knew nothing of her love affairs but who listens to us out of sheer curiosity? The man I was at the time when I told Bloch about the Princesse de Guermantes or Mme Swann, the man who could have spoken to me of Albertine, there always is such a person … but we will never meet him. It seemed to me that if I could have met women who had known her, I would have found out everything that I needed to know. And yet to a stranger it must have seemed as if nobody could know her life better than me. Did I not even know her best friend, Andrée? Thus it is that we believe that a minister's friend must know the truth about certain affairs or he would not be caught up in his trial. But the friend knows from personal experience that each time he has discussed politics with the minister, the latter spoke in general terms and told him no more than he might read in the newspapers, or if he had a request, his repeated appeals for the minister's help were met each time by the phrase 'I can do nothing about it', which the friend himself can do nothing about. I thought 'If only I had been able to meet such and such a witness!' from whom, if I had met them, I would have been able to obtain no more than I had from Andrée, who was herself the guardian of a secret which she refused to deliver. I was different again in this from Swann, who, when he was no longer jealous, ceased to be curious about what Odette might have done with Forcheville; even when my jealousy had subsided, the only thing that held any charm for me was to get to know Albertine's laundry-maid and other girls from her neighbourhood, in order to reconstruct her life and relationships there. And since desire always arises from something we have already found impressive, as I had found happened with Gilberte, or with the Duchesse de Guermantes, it was in the neighbourhoods where Albertine had formerly lived that I sought out women of her milieu, who were the only women whose presence I desired. Even if they could tell me nothing, the only women to whom I felt attracted were those that Albertine had known or whom she might have known, women of her milieu or of the circles which she frequented, in short women who for me possessed the attraction of resembling her or of being those who would have attracted her. Recalling in this way either Albertine herself or the kind of woman that appealed to her, these women awakened in me painful feelings, whether of jealousy or regret, which later, as my grief subsided, changed into a curiosity which was not without charm. And these women were mostly working-class girls, since their lives were so different from my experience. Of course, it is only in our minds that we ever possess anything, and we do not possess a painting because we have it in our dining-room, if we do not understand it, nor a country because we merely

reside in it without ever looking at it. But I have to say that in former times I did have the illusion that I possessed Balbec once more, when Albertine came to see me in Paris and I held her in my arms; just as I made a rather glancing not to say furtive contact with Albertine's life when I tasted the atmosphere of a workshop, shop-counter gossip, or life in the slums, in the arms of a working-girl. Always related to Albertine – as Albertine herself had been related to Balbec – Andrée and these other women were those kinds of substitutes for pleasure which replace each other in diminishing order and allow us to relinquish the pleasures that we are unable to attain, like staying in Balbec or loving Albertine, those kinds of pleasure which (just as going to the Louvre to see a Titian that used to be in Venice consoles us for being unable to go to Venice), as they fan out into a series of infinite nuances, arrange our lives into a set of concentric, continuous, harmonious but gradually fading circles, around an initial desire that has set the tone, eliminated everything that does not blend with it and has imposed its dominant tone (as happened to me for instance with the Duchesse de Guermantes and with Gilberte). Andrée and these other women acted the same part in my desire to have Albertine close at hand, which I knew I could no longer gratify, as had one evening, in the days when I knew Albertine only by sight, the fresh, sinuous, sunlit form of a bunch of grapes.

Now that they were associated with the memory of my love, the physical and social attributes of Albertine, whom I had loved in spite of them, had the opposite effect, that of orientating my desire towards what previously it would have least naturally chosen, dark-haired girls from the lower-middle classes. Of course what was starting partially to revive within me was the immense desire that my love for Albertine had been unable to assuage, that immense desire to know life which I used to feel on the roads near Balbec or the streets of Paris, the desire which had so made me suffer when, supposing that it also existed in Albertine's heart, I had attempted to deprive her of the means of satisfying that desire with anyone other than myself. Now that I was able to bear the thought of her desires, and since this thought was immediately aroused by the upsurge of my own desires, bringing our two boundless appetites into union, I would have liked us to have been able to indulge them together, and I thought, 'She would have liked that girl,' but as this oblique reference suddenly made me think of her and her death, I felt too sad to follow my desires any further. Just as in former times the Méséglise and the Guermantes ways had established the foundations of my taste for the countryside and would have prevented me from finding deep charm in a neighbourhood with no old church or cornflowers or buttercups, so in the same way it was by linking them within me to the charms of the past that my love for Albertine made me seek certain types of women to the exclusion of others; as in the days before I had fallen in love, I started to feel the need for harmonics emanating from her which could become interchangeable with my memory as it became gradually less exclusive. I could not now have found pleasure in the company of a proud, blonde duchess, because she would not have evoked in me any of the emotions which derived from Albertine, from my desire for her, from the jealousy I had felt for her loves, or from my suffering over her death. For in order to gain strength, our sensations need to trigger within us something other than themselves, a sentiment which cannot find its satisfaction in pleasure but which becomes added to desire, swells it and makes it cling desperately to pleasure. The more the love that Albertine might have felt for certain women gradually ceased to make me suffer, the more it attached these women to my past, making them into something real; just as the memory of Combray gave greater reality to its old buttercups and hawthorn than to the new flowers of spring. Even when I thought of Andrée, I no longer said furiously, 'Albertine loved her,' but, on the contrary, in order to explain my own desire to myself, I said tenderly, 'Albertine was fond of her.' I now understood those widowers whom one believes to be consoled and who prove on the contrary that they are inconsolable because they have married again, this time with their wife's sister.

Thus my dying love seemed to make new loves possible for me, and Albertine, like those women long loved for their own sake who later, feeling their lover's ardour waning, preserve their power by settling for the role of go-between, as La Pompadour did for Louis XV,[30] served up a whole series of new young girls for me. Previously my time had been divided into periods when I desired first one woman, then another. When the violent pleasures offered by the one had been appeased, I fancied the other, who offered an almost pure tenderness, until the need for more artful caresses brought back the desire for the first. Now this oscillation had come to an end, or rather, one of its phases had become indefinitely protracted. What I would have preferred was that the new arrival should come and live with me, and before leaving me in the evening, give me a friendly, sisterly kiss. So that I might have come to believe – had I not had the experience of the intolerable presence of the other person – that I missed the kiss more than any particular lips, the pleasure more than love, the habit more than the person. I would have also liked the newcomer to play Vinteuil for me as Albertine had, to discuss Elstir with me as she had. All of this was impossible. Their love was not worthy of hers, I thought; whether because a love which could include all those episodes, the visits to museums, the evenings at concerts, the whole complicated life which generates correspondence, conversation, the flirtation preceding the relationship itself and the solemn friendship that follows, draws on deeper resources than love for a woman who knows only how to yield, as an orchestra has more resources than a piano; or whether because at a deeper level my need for the same sort of affection that Albertine used to give me, the affection of a reasonably well-educated girl who acted at the same time as a sister, was only – like my need for girls from the same milieu as Albertine – a revival of my memory of Albertine, of my memory of my love for her. And once more I felt above all that memory is not creative, that it is incapable of desiring anything different or even anything better than what we have already possessed; and then that it is mental, so that reality cannot provide it with the state to which it aspires; and finally that the rebirth which it incarnates, since it emanates from a dead person, is less the rebirth of the need for love, as it would have us believe, than that of the need for the missing person. So that even the resemblance to Albertine of the woman whom I had chosen, and the resemblance of her affections, if I managed to obtain them, to those of Albertine, only made me feel all the more the absence of what I had been looking for without realizing it, of what was indispensable for the rebirth of my love, that is Albertine herself, the period that we had lived together, the past which I was seeking without realizing it. Of course on sunny days Paris appeared to me endlessly blooming with young girls whom I did not desire but who sprang from the dark roots of my desire for Albertine and the unknown nights that she had spent far from home. These were the sort of girl of whom when we first met, when she was not wary of me, she had said, 'What a ravishing little girl, look at her lovely hair!' All my former curiosity about her life when I knew her only by sight, and on the other hand all my desires to live life to the full, became fused in that one curious urge, to know the manner in which Albertine felt pleasure, to see her with other women, perhaps because thus, once they had left, I would remain alone with her, her last and only master. And if I could have seen her hesitate as to whether it was worth spending the evening with one girl or another, and noted her satiety or perhaps her disappointment when the girl had gone, I could have clarified and reduced to more sensible proportions the jealousy inspired in me by Albertine, because in seeing how she experienced her pleasures I would have taken the measure of them and discovered their limits.

How much pleasure and sweetness had been lost to us both, I thought, because of her fierce determination to deny her inclinations! And as I once again tried to find what had been the reason for this obstinacy, suddenly there came to me the memory of a remark that I had made one day in Balbec when she had offered me a pencil. In reproaching her with not letting me embrace her, I had told her that I found the thought of our kissing as natural as I found the thought of a woman having relations with another woman repellent. Alas, perhaps Albertine had remembered.

I took home with me the girls who should have appealed to me least. I stroked their sleek, prim tresses, I admired their finely chiselled little noses or their pale Spanish complexions. Of course even in former times, even with women whom I happened to glimpse on the roads around Balbec or on the streets of Paris, I had felt how singular was my desire and how false it would be to try to assuage it with a different object. But life, gradually revealing to me the permanence of our needs, had taught me that if a person is unobtainable we have to settle for someone else, and I felt that what I had asked of Albertine could have been supplied by another, like Mlle de Stermaria. But it had been Albertine; and between the satisfaction of my need for affection and the specific features of her body the cross-stitch of memories had become so intertwined that I could no longer tear my urge for affection away from the body of Albertine, which had become embroidered into my memory. Only she could bring me happiness. The idea of her uniqueness was no longer a metaphysical *a priori* deriving from Albertine's individual qualities, as formerly for various passing women, but an *a posteriori* constituted by my contingent but inseparably entangled memories. I could no longer yearn for any affection without needing her and suffering from her absence. In this way the very similarity of the woman I chose, and of the affection I sought, to the happiness that I had known, only made me all the more aware of everything they lacked in order to revive it. I felt the same emptiness in them that I had felt in

my room since Albertine had left, the emptiness which I had hoped to fill by holding these women in my arms. For they had never spoken to me of Vinteuil's music or Saint-Simon's *Memoirs*,[31] had never put on too much perfume before coming to see me, never playfully brushed their eyelashes against mine, the kind of things which take on importance because they seem to allow us to cradle the sexual act itself within our dreams and create an illusion of love, but in fact because they were part and parcel of my memory of Albertine and because she was the person whom I was hoping to find. The qualities that these women shared with Albertine made me feel more keenly what they lacked, which was everything, but an everything which could never exist again, since Albertine was dead. And thus my love for Albertine, which had drawn me towards these women, made me feel indifferent towards them, and my regret for Albertine and the persistence of my jealousy, which had already outlasted my most pessimistic forecasts, would doubtless not have changed very much if their existence, isolated from the rest of my life, had been subject only to the play of my memories, to the actions and reactions of a psychology applicable to motionless states, and had not been sucked into a vaster system where souls move through time as bodies through space. As there is a spatial geometry, so there is a temporal psychology, where the calculations of a two-dimensional psychology would no longer be accurate because they would not account for Time and one of the forms that it assumes, that is, forgetting; the process of forgetting, whose force I was starting to feel and which is such a powerful tool of adaptation to reality because it gradually destroys in us the remnants of the past which constantly contradict it. And of course I might have guessed much sooner that one day I would no longer love Albertine. When I had understood the difference that there was between the importance of her person and her actions for me as opposed to for others, implying that my love was less a love for her than a love within me, I could have drawn diverse conclusions from this subjective character of my love, including the fact that, since it was a state of mind, it could clearly survive longer than the person concerned, but also that having no real link with this person, having no material support outside her, it must, like all states of mind, even the most long-lasting, one day find itself worn out and have to be 'replaced', and that on that day everything that seemed to me to be so sweetly and indissolubly linked to Albertine would no longer exist for me. The problem with people is that for us they are no more than prints in our mental museum, which fade on exposure. And it is precisely because of this that they form the basis of projects illuminated by our thoughts, but thoughts tire and memories collapse: the day would come when I would happily give Albertine's room to the first girl who wanted it, as I had given Albertine the agate marble or other gifts of Gilberte's.

CHAPTER 2

Mademoiselle de Forcheville

This is not to say that I did not still love Albertine, but it was already not the same kind of love as I had felt in recent times; rather, it was more like that love of former times when everything connected with her, both places and people, inspired in me a curiosity containing more charm than suffering. And in fact I now realized that before I could forget her completely, and regain my initial indifference, I would need, like some traveller returning down the same route to his point of departure, to experience in reverse order all the emotions which I had felt on the way out towards my great love. But these stages, these moments of the past are not inert, they have retained the terrible force and blissful ignorance of a hope which reached out then towards a time that has now become the past, but which, in moments of hallucination, we retrospectively take for the future. As I was reading one of Albertine's letters announcing her arrival for that very evening, I felt for a second the joy of expectation. In these journeys which return along the same track to a place where in reality we will never return, journeys where we recognize the names and the features of all the stations we stopped at on the outward journey, it sometimes happens that while we have halted at one or other of these stations, we experience for a moment the illusion that we have moved off, but in the direction of the place we have just left, as we did on the way out. The illusion swiftly dies, but for a second we felt ourselves driven forward once more: such is the cruelty of memory.

And yet if, in order to regain the point of indifference from which we started out, we cannot dispense with the need to cover in reverse order the same stages that we had covered on our way to attaining love, the itinerary or tracks which we follow are not necessarily the same itinerary or tracks as the first time. They are equally indirect, since forgetting proceeds no more regularly than love, but they do not necessarily follow the same routes. And on my return journey, there were, when I had nearly arrived, four stages which I particularly remember, doubtless because I now saw in them things that had no part in my love for Albertine, or at least which were connected with it only in so far as everything which our souls contained before our great love affair becomes associated with it, whether by nourishing it, by resisting it, or by setting up contrasts and images for our intellect as it analyses that love.

The first of these stages set in at the beginning of winter, one fine All Saints' Day when I had gone out. As I approached the Bois de Boulogne, I recalled with sadness Albertine's return, when she had come to meet me at the Trocadéro, for it was the same day of the year, but without Albertine. With sadness, yet not without pleasure, for the repetition in the minor key, in a melancholy tone, of the same motif that had punctuated my day the first time, and the very absence of Françoise's telephone call and of Albertine's arrival, were not something negative but, as my memories failed to materialize in reality, their suppression gave the day a poignant note and made of it something more beautiful than a single, uniform day, for what was lost, what had been torn from it, remained imprinted there as if etched between the lines. As I walked through the Bois I hummed phrases from Vinteuil's sonata. The thought that Albertine had played it for me so often no longer hurt me too much, for nearly all my memories of her had entered that second phase of their chemical reaction, where instead of oppressing the heart with anxiety, they soothe it. From time to time, as I reached the passages which she most frequently played and during which she would tend to reminisce, or pass some familiar remark that I found charming at the time, I thought, 'Poor little girl,' yet I thereby infused the musical passage not with sadness but with more value, the value of history and curiosity, just as Van Dyck's portrait of Charles I, already beautiful enough in its own right, gains even more in value from the fact that it entered the national collections through Mme du Barry's desire to impress the king.[1] When the little phrase, before entirely disappearing, disintegrates, and floats around for a moment as it dissolves into its various elements, it was not, as it had been for Swann, a messenger informing me of the disappearance of Albertine. The little phrase did not awaken quite the same association of ideas in me as it had in Swann. I had been particularly moved by the variations, experiments, repetitions and 'promise' of the phrase, which played in the sonata a role like that played in the course of my life by my love. And now, as I came to realize how far, day by day, another element of my love was drifting away, my jealousy or other aspects of my love gradually returning in a vague memory as the piece quietly started, I thought I saw my love dispersed or even dissolved in the little phrase.

As I followed the paths which ran through the shrubbery, veiled in a hazy foliage which became flimsier every day, I felt the memory of a drive beside Albertine in the car, when she was coming home with me and I had felt my whole life wrapped up in hers, swim up again around me amid the vague mist of darkening branches within which the setting sun lit up irregular horizontal layers of golden foliage, as if they were suspended in mid-air. Meanwhile I trembled at every moment, as does any man whose obsession turns any woman standing at the corner of a path into the possible likeness or identity of the woman he is thinking of. 'It might be her!' We look round, but the carriage moves on, and we do not turn back. I was not content to contemplate this foliage merely with the eyes of memory. It interested and moved me as do those purely descriptive pages in whose midst an artist, in order to make them more complete, introduces something fictional or a whole novel; and thus this natural scene took on the only melancholy charm which could touch my heart. The reason for this charm seemed to me to be the fact that I was still just as much in love with Albertine, while the true reason was on the contrary that inside me the work of forgetting was continuing to evolve and that the memory of Albertine was becoming less painful, that is, that it had changed; but however clearly we identify our own impressions, as I then believed I saw clearly into my melancholia, we are unable to plumb their deeper meaning: as with those attacks of sickness that a doctor hears his patient describing, but which lead him to detect a deeper cause, unknown to the patient, so our impressions and ideas count only as symptoms. While my jealousy was held back by the impressions of charm and sweet sadness that I felt, my senses were reawakened. Once more, as when I had stopped seeing Gilberte, a love for women surged up within me, freed of any exclusive association with a particular woman once loved, and wafted like those essences liberated by death and decay and which float suspended in the spring breeze, asking only to be united with some new entity. Nowhere do flowers, even those called 'forget-me-nots', bloom more readily than in a cemetery. I watched the girls who so profusely decorated this fine new day, as I would have in former times from Mme de Villeparisis's carriage or a carriage I had taken with Albertine on such a Sunday. As soon as I cast my eyes on one or other of them, they were given their focus by the curious, furtive, inviting looks, reflecting her elusive thoughts, which Albertine would have surreptitiously cast, and which, lending their mysteriously swift and blue-tinged wings to my own gaze, breathed into these hitherto entirely natural paths a shiver of the unknown, which my own desire, if left to its own devices, would not have been able to elicit, for my own desire held no secrets for me. And sometimes reading a rather sad novel carried me suddenly backwards, for some novels are like a period of great mourning which abolishes habit and puts us once more in touch with the reality of life, but for a few hours only, as does a nightmare, for the force of habit, the oblivion that it procures and the gaiety that it restores as the brain is unable to resist them and re-establish the truth, are infinitely stronger than even the most hypnotic suggestions of a beautiful book, which, like all suggestions, have a very fleeting effect. Moreover in Balbec, when I had wanted to meet Albertine for the first time, was it not because she had seemed to me to stand for all the girls whose sight had so often rooted me to the spot in the street or on the road, and because she could provide me with the quintessence of their lives? And was it not natural now that the waning star of my love in which they were condensed should be once again dispersed into this scattered stardust of the galaxies? They all looked to me like Albertine, the image which I bore within me made me see her everywhere, and even as I turned a corner in the road, the one I saw climbing back into a motor-car reminded me so much of her, and her figure was so similarly shaped, that I wondered for a moment if it wasn't Albertine herself that I had seen and if I hadn't been misled by the story of her death. I recalled her at just such a bend in the road, perhaps in Balbec, climbing back into the car in the same way, at a time when she had so much confidence in life. And as she climbed back into the car, the girl's movements not only struck my eyes as do those superficial visions that we glimpse so fleetingly

during a drive: it became a more durable kind of action and seemed to me also to reach backwards into the past, through this newly acquired perspective which pressed so voluptuously and sadly upon my heart.

But the girl had already vanished. A little further on I saw a group of three slightly older girls, whose smart and athletic demeanour so perfectly echoed what had seduced me on the first day that I had seen Albertine and her friends that I followed in the footsteps of these three new girls, and when they took a carriage, I looked desperately around me to find one myself, but when I did find one, it was too late. I was unable to catch up with them. Yet a few days later, as I was going home, I saw emerging from under the archway of our house the three girls whom I had followed in the Bois de Boulogne. Although they were just a little older, they corresponded exactly, especially as far as the two brunettes were concerned, to those young society ladies whom I had so often seen from my window or walked past in the street, causing me to make a thousand plans and fall in love with life, but whom I had never managed to meet. The blonde one looked more fragile, perhaps sickly even, and attracted me less. Yet she was the one who made me dissatisfied with a momentary glance, as I stopped in my tracks and my eyes took on a fixed stare, as impossible to distract as if they were concentrating on one of those problems where we knowingly strain to reach far beyond surface appearances. I would no doubt have let them disappear like so many others, but just as they passed by, the blonde girl – was it because I was studying her so attentively? – cast me a first, furtive look, then, when she had gone past, turned her head back towards me and cast a second that finally set me alight. However, since she then lost interest in me and started chatting with her friends again, my ardour would have finally dampened, had it not been multiplied a hundredfold by the following fact. When I asked the concierge who they were, he replied: 'They asked for Mme la Duchesse. I think only one of them knows her and that the others only accompanied her to the door. Here is her name, I don't know whether I have spelled it right.' And I read: Mlle Déporcheville, which I easily corrected to: d'Éporcheville, that is, more or less, as far as I could recall, the name of the very well-connected young lady, loosely related to the Guermantes, whom Robert had mentioned after meeting her in a house of ill-fame and having been intimate with her. I now understood the significance of the look in her eyes, why she had turned round and hidden from her companions. How often I had thought of her, picturing her in terms of the name mentioned by Robert! And now I had just seen her, no different from her friends, except for that furtive glance which opened up for me a secret path to parts of her life which were evidently hidden from her friends, and which made her seem more accessible to me – already almost half mine – and more pliant than the usual run of aristocratic young ladies. In her mind, she already anticipated the hours that we might have shared together, if she had been free to make an assignation. Was that not what her eyes had tried to express with an eloquence that only I could read? My heart beat furiously, I would have been incapable of saying exactly what Mlle d'Éporcheville looked like, I vaguely recalled a blonde head seen from the side, but I was madly in love with her. Suddenly I realized that I was reasoning as if of the three girls Mlle d'Éporcheville was definitely the blonde one who had turned her head and looked at me twice. Yet this was not what the concierge had said. I returned to his lodge to question him again, but he said that he was unable to answer my question because today was the first time they had called and it had been while he was out. But he would ask his wife, who had seen them once before. She was cleaning the servants' staircase. Who has not had such delicious doubts during his life, more or less similar to these? A charitable friend to whom one describes a girl seen at a ball has deduced that she must be one of his friends and invites you to meet her. But among so many, and on the basis of a merely verbal portrait, will there not have been some mistake? Will the girl that you are about to see be different from the one whom you desire? Or will you on the contrary see the smiles and the outstretched hand of the girl that you wanted her to turn out to be? The latter good fortune is not infrequent and, without always being justified by arguments as decisive as mine concerning Mlle d'Éporcheville, results from a kind of intuition and also from the fair wind of fortune that may sometimes favour us, so that on seeing her we say, 'She is the one'. I recalled that I had correctly guessed which one of the little gang of girls walking along the sea front was called Albertine Simonet. This memory provoked a sharp but brief pain, and while the concierge went to fetch his wife, my main thought – thinking of Mlle d'Éporcheville and, as in one of those moments of waiting where a name or a fact, which you have for some reason fitted to a face, finds itself momentarily free to float between several, and ready, if it adheres to a new one, to render retrospectively the original face which it had brought to your attention alien, innocent and elusive – was that the concierge was likely to reveal that Mlle d'Éporcheville was one of the two brunettes. In which case the being in whose existence I believed would disappear, the being whom I already loved, who filled me with the desire to possess her, the blonde and sultry Mlle d'Éporcheville, whom the dread wrong answer would fatally dissociate into two separate entities, which I had arbitrarily united as does a novelist who merges diverse entities borrowed from real life in order to create an imaginary character, but which taken separately – if the name fails to confirm what the eyes had intended – would lose all significance, would be dissociated into two separate elements by the fatal reply. In this case my arguments would come to naught, but no, on the contrary, how much more strongly they were vindicated, as the concierge returned to tell me that Mlle d'Éporcheville was indeed the blonde!

From that moment on I could no longer believe that she was merely her namesake. The odds were too long against one of these three girls being called Mlle d'Éporcheville, and, in a first, limited corroboration of my supposition, being precisely the one who had looked at me in that almost smiling way and yet not being the one who frequented houses of ill-fame.

Then started a day of wild excitement. Even before going out to buy every garment that would help me dress up to create the best impression the day after next, when I would be visiting Mme de Guermantes, in whose company I would find a young lady of easy virtue and would make an assignation with her (for I would certainly find a moment to speak with her in a corner of the drawing-room), in order to make doubly sure I went out to send a telegram to Robert asking him for the name and the exact description of the young lady, hoping to have his reply before the day after next when, according to the concierge, she would return to see Mme de Guermantes; and when (without thinking for a moment of anything else, even of Albertine), whatever might happen to me in the meantime, even if I was ill and had to be taken there in a wheelchair, I would visit the Duchesse at the same time. If I went to send a telegram to Saint-Loup, it was not that I had any remaining doubts as to the identity of the person or that I made any distinction between the girl I had seen and the one he had described. I had no doubt that they were one and the same. But in my impatience at waiting for two days, it was a pleasure for me, it was almost already for me a secret hold over her, to receive a telegram full of details concerning her. At the telegraph office, while drafting my telegram with all the excitement of a man burning with hope, I noted how much less helpless I was now than in my childhood and in relation to Mlle d'Éporcheville than to Gilberte. I need do no more than take the simple trouble to write my telegram, and the clerk had only to accept it, for the swiftest of electric communications networks to transmit it across the length and breadth of France, right down to the Mediterranean coast. Robert would bring his whole libertine past to bear on identifying the person whom I had just encountered, would place it at the disposal of the fiction that I was starting to sketch and which I need not even worry about any more, for the reply would be bound to bring my romance to a conclusion in one way or another before twenty-four hours had elapsed. Whereas formerly, brought back from the Champs-Elysées by Françoise and left to foment my impotent desires alone at home, unable to exploit the technology of modern civilization, I loved like a savage, or even like a flower, since I had no right to come and go. From this moment on I spent all my time in a state of fever; a forty-eight-hour trip that my father asked me to take with him and which would have made me miss my visit to the Duchesse sent me into such a state of rage and despair that my mother intervened and persuaded my father to leave me in Paris. But it took several hours for my anger to abate, while my desire for Mlle d'Éporcheville had increased a hundredfold because of the obstacle placed between us, and my momentary fear that these hours at Mme de Guermantes', which I greeted as a well-deserved prize of which no one could deprive me, might not occur. Some philosophers argue that the external world does not exist and that it is only within ourselves that our lives evolve. Be that as it may, love, even in its humblest beginnings, is a striking example of how little reality means for us. If I had had to draw, describe or inventory the details of Mlle d'Éporcheville's features from memory, or even to recognize her in the street, I would have found it impossible. I had caught sight of her in profile as she passed, she had seemed pretty, unaffected, tall and blonde, and I could not have said more. But all my reactions of desire, anxiety, of mortal shock inspired by the fear of not seeing her if my father took me with him, all these, associated with an image which I had in fact invented but which I needed only to believe

attractive, already constituted love. At last the next morning, after a night of blissful insomnia, I received Saint-Loup's telegram: 'De l'Orgeville, *de* noble particle, *orge* barleycorn, as in rye, *ville* as in town, short, dark and dumpy, is presently in Switzerland.' It was not her!

My mother had brought my mail to my room and placed it casually on the bed, as if thinking of something else. And as she withdrew immediately to leave me on my own, she smiled. And knowing my dear mother's stratagems and knowing that one could always decipher her expression with no fear of mistake if one took as its key her desire to please others, I too smiled, thinking: 'There is something interesting for me in the mail, and Mama has adopted her indifferent and absent-minded air to allow me to enjoy the surprise to the full, so as to avoid being like those people who ruin half of your pleasure by announcing it in advance. And she did not stay, because she feared that from pride I would hide the pleasure I felt, and thus feel it less keenly.' Meanwhile, as she was nearing the door, she had met Françoise, who was about to enter my room with my telegram in her hand. As soon as she had given it to me my mother forced her to beat a retreat and dragged her outside, flustered, offended and surprised. For Françoise considered that her duties included the privilege of entering my room at any time and staying there, if she wanted to. But already on her face astonishment and anger had disappeared beneath her sticky black smile of transcendental pity and philosophical irony, a viscous ointment secreted by her wounded pride to heal its scar. To avoid feeling despised, she despised us. For she knew full well that we were masters, that is, capricious creatures who are not noted for their intellectual brilliance and who enjoy using fear in order to show plainly that they are the masters, to impose on those more thinking creatures, their domestic servants, absurd obligations such as boiling water in times of epidemic, mopping my room with a wet cloth, and having to leave the room precisely when they had wanted to enter. Mama had placed my mail right by my side, so that I could not miss it. But I sensed that there was nothing but newspapers. No doubt there was some article by an author whom I liked but, because he wrote infrequently, it would be a surprise for me. I went over to the window and drew back the curtains. Above the pale misty daylight the sky, which was as pink as the stoves that are lit in the kitchens at this time of day, filled me with hope and the urge to spend the night and wake up in the morning at the little mountain resort where I had seen the pink-cheeked milkmaid. I opened the *Figaro*. How tedious! The leading article bore precisely the same title as the one which I had submitted but which had not been published.[2] But not only the same title, here and there were one or two identical words. That was too much. I would write in to complain. And I heard Françoise, who was indignant at having been expelled from my room where she considered that she was free to come and go as she pleased, grumbling: 'The very idea! A child that I saw born. Of course I didn't see him when his mother bore him, but let me tell you that when I first met him he hadn't been born for more than five years!' But there were not just those few words, there was everything, even my signature … It was my article, which had at last appeared! But my mind, which already in those days had started to age and to tire a little, continued for a moment to reason as if it had not understood that it was my own article, like those old men who are obliged to continue with a movement once they have started, even if it has become pointless, even if an unforeseen obstacle which they should immediately avoid has rendered it dangerous. Then I considered the spiritual bread that a newspaper constitutes, still warm and moist as it emerges from the press and the morning mist in which it has been delivered at crack of dawn to the housemaids who take it to their masters with a bowl of milk, this miraculous loaf, multiplied ten-thousandfold and yet unique, which stays unchanged for everyone while proliferating across every threshold.

What I was holding in my hand was not one particular copy of the newspaper, it was any one out of ten thousand; it was not only something written by me, it was something written by me and read by everyone. To appreciate the exact phenomenon as it occurs in each household, I must read this article not as an author but as one of the other readers of the newspaper; what I was holding in my hand was not just what I had written, it was the symbol of its incarnation in so many minds. Thus in order to read it I must for a moment stop being its author and become an ordinary reader of the newspaper. But now I feel a first pang of anxiety. Will the unsuspecting reader see this article? I open the newspaper absent-mindedly as would this unsuspecting reader, even wearing on my face my usual expression of not knowing what there is in the newspaper this morning and being impatient to look at the social or political news. But my article is so long that my eyes, which are trying to avoid it (to respect the truth and not load the dice in my favour, just as someone who is waiting deliberately counts too slowly), cannot help chancing on an extract in passing. Yet many of those who notice the leading article, and even of those who read it, do not look at the signature. Even I would have been unable to say who had written the leading article the day before. And now I promise myself always to read them and their author's name; but like a jealous lover, who avoids deceiving his mistress in order to make himself believe in her fidelity, I think sadly that my future attentions will not compel, as they have not compelled, the reciprocal attentions of others. And then there are the people who have gone out hunting and those who have left for work too early. And yet, some people will still read it. I follow their example. I make a start. As I read the article, even though I know that many of the people who read it will detest it, what I see behind each word seems to be printed there in black and white, I cannot believe that anyone who casts his eyes upon it will not see exactly the same images as those I see, for I assume, with all the naïvety of those who believe that it is the actual words we utter which travel down the telephone wires, that the author's thoughts are directly perceived by the reader, whereas it is other thoughts which are constructed in his mind; at the very moment when I am trying to be the ordinary reader, my mind, as I read, is rewriting the article. If M. de Guermantes did not understand such and such a phrase that Bloch would appreciate, he was able on the other hand to smile at some remark that Bloch would treat with disdain. Thus each passage that a previous reader seemed to cast aside would attract a new admirer, the whole of the article would be praised to the skies by the masses and would overcome my own self-doubt so that I would no longer need to defend it myself. For in truth the quality of an article, however remarkable, is similar to that of those sentences in Parliamentary reports where the words 'We shall have to see' uttered by the minister only take on their full import in the following context: 'THE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER FOR HOME AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS: We shall have to see. (*Loud exclamations on the far left. "Hear, hear!" on some of the left and centre benches*)' (an ending which is finer than the middle of the passage, worthy of its beginning): for part of its beauty – and this is the original sin in this kind of literature, from which even the famous *Lundis*[3] are not exempt – lies in the impression which it produces on its readers. It is a collective Venus, of which we grasp only a severed limb if we merely take account of the author's thought, for this is completely realized only in the minds of its readers. That is where all is accomplished. And as a crowd, however select, is not an artist, its ultimate seal of approval always retains something of the common touch. Thus Sainte-Beuve, on Mondays, could imagine Mme de Boigne[4] in her four-poster bed reading his article in the *Constitutionnel*, appreciating some elegant phrase which he had lovingly crafted and which would perhaps never have materialized had he not seen fit to pack it into his weekly column in order to broaden its appeal. No doubt the chancellor, reading it himself, elsewhere, would mention it to his old companion when he visited her later. And taking him back that evening in his carriage, the Duc de Noailles in his grey suit would tell Sainte-Beuve what society had thought of it, if a comment by Mme d'Arbouville had not already informed him. And countering my own self-doubt with the ten thousand voices of approval that supported me, I drew as great a feeling of strength and of belief in my talent from the reading which I was undertaking at this moment as I had drawn self-doubt when what I had written was addressed only to me. I saw my thoughts or even, failing my thoughts, for those who were unable to understand them, the repetition of my name and a kind of glorified echo of my person radiate over so many people at that very moment, colouring their thoughts with a dawning light which filled me with more strength and triumphal joy than the rosy fingers of dawn which pressed simultaneously at countless window panes. I saw Bloch, the Guermantes, Legrandin and Andrée drawing from each sentence the images contained in the article; and now, at the very moment when I am trying to be an ordinary reader, I am reading as an author, albeit not only as an author. So as to help the impossible creature that I am trying to become to reconcile all the contradictions in the way most favourable to me, although I am reading as an author, I am judging as a reader, making none of the demands that a piece of writing faces from the person who expects it to match up to the ideal which he wanted it to express. When I wrote them, the sentences of my article were so weak compared to my thought, so complicated and opaque compared to my harmonious and transparent vision, so full of gaps which I had not managed to fill, that reading them caused me to suffer, they had only accentuated my feelings of impotence and an incurable lack of talent. But now in forcing myself to become a reader, if I delegated to others the painful duty of judging me, I was at least able to wipe the slate clean of what I had intended to do, by reading what I had done. I read the article, struggling to convince myself that it had been written by someone else. Then all my images, all my reflections and all my epithets, taken in themselves and with no memory of the failure of my aims that they represented, charmed me with their brilliance, their novelty and their profundity. And when I

sensed too great a failure, I took refuge in the soul of your average admiring reader, and said: 'Well, how could a reader notice that? There may be something lacking there, I admit. But heavens above, they ought to count themselves lucky! It's full enough of good things as it is, far more than they usually get.'

Thus, hardly had I finished this reassuring reading than, despite not having dared reread my own manuscript, I wanted to start rereading it immediately, there being nothing better suited to the dictum 'if you can read it once you can read it twice' than an old article by oneself. I promised myself that I would ask Françoise to buy more copies, I would tell her they were to give to my friends, but in fact it would be to hold in my hands the miracle of my self-multiplying thought and read the same pages in a different copy, as if each time I were a different gentleman opening the *Figaro*. This turned out to be the same day when I intended to go to the Guermantes', whom I had not seen for ages, in order to meet Mlle d'Éporcheville, and during my visit I would find out from them what opinion people had formed of my article.

I imagined one such female reader in her bedroom, which I would have so liked to enter, to whom the newspaper would bring, if not my thoughts, which she would not be able to understand, at least my name as if in homage to me. But homage paid to something we do not care for is no more able to sway our hearts than the thoughts of a mind which we cannot understand are able to move our minds. As for other friends, I argued that, if the state of my health continued to deteriorate and if I could no longer see them, it would be pleasant to continue to write, to retain access to them in this way, to speak to them between the lines, to get them to follow my own trains of thought, to please them and be welcomed into their hearts. This is what I told myself, for social relations had until then figured as part of my daily life, so I was frightened by a future that might hold no place for them, and I found solace in this expedient which would enable me to retain my friends' interest, perhaps elicit their admiration, until the day when I would be well enough to start to visit them again; this is what I thought, but still I realized that it was not true, that although I liked to imagine their attention as the object of my pleasure, this pleasure was profoundly internal and spiritual, a supreme pleasure which they could not provide and which I could find not through conversing with them, but through writing at a distance; and I felt that, if I started to write, in order to meet them indirectly, to give them the best impression of me, to prepare a better social situation for me, perhaps writing might alleviate the desire to meet them and with it the social situation that literature might perhaps have procured me, and I would no longer want to enjoy it, for my pleasure would no longer be in society but in literature.

So after luncheon, when I went to visit Mme de Guermantes it was less on account of Mlle d'Éporcheville, who because of Saint-Loup's telegram had lost the better part of her character, than to see in the Duchesse herself one of those ladies who might have read my article and who might enable me to imagine what the public who subscribed to or bought the *Figaro* would have thought of it. Apart from which, it was not without pleasure that I went to visit her. It was all very well in my eyes to tell myself that what marked out her salon from the others for me was the long period it had spent waiting in my imagination, yet knowing the reason for this difference did not eliminate it. Moreover, there were for me several versions of the name of Guermantes. If the one which my memory had inscribed merely as in an address book was accompanied by no poetry, older versions, those which went back to the time when I did not know Mme de Guermantes, were liable to take shape again within me, especially when I had not seen her for some time and the crude light of the person with her human face did not extinguish the mysterious radiance of the name. Then once again I would start to think of Mme de Guermantes's dwelling as something beyond the real, in the same way as I used to start thinking of Balbec through the mist of my earliest day-dreams and as though I had not since then made the journey there, as though I had never taken the ten-to-two train. I would forget for a moment my knowledge that none of this existed, as we sometimes think of someone we love, forgetting for a moment that they are dead. Then notions of reality returned as I entered the Duchesse's hall. But I consoled myself with the thought that she was none the less for me the true point of intersection between dream and reality.

As I entered the drawing-room, I saw the young blonde lady whom I had believed for twenty-four hours to be the one referred to by Saint-Loup. She herself asked the Duchesse to 'reintroduce' me to her. And in fact from the moment I arrived I had the feeling that I knew her rather well, but this feeling was dispelled by the Duchesse, who said to me, 'Oh, you have already met Mlle de Forcheville.' Whereas on the contrary I was quite sure that I had never been introduced to any young lady of that name, which would certainly have struck me, as it was so familiar to my memory since I had heard the retrospective account of Odette's love affairs and Swann's jealousy. In itself my twofold misunderstanding of the name, recalling 'de l'Orgeville' as being 'd'Éporcheville' and having reconstrued as 'Éporcheville' what was really 'Forcheville', was far from extraordinary. Our error stems from believing that things habitually appear to us as they are in reality, names as they are written, people as the static concepts presented by photography and psychology. But in fact reality is not at all what we usually perceive. We see, hear and conceive the world inside out and back to front. We repeat a name as we first heard it, until experience rectifies the error – but this does not always happen. Everyone in Combray spoke to Françoise of Mme Sazerat, and yet Françoise continued to call her Mme Sazerin, not through that wilful and proud persistance in error that was her habit, a habit which was only confirmed by our disagreement and which was the only concession to the egalitarian principles of 1789 which she allowed to modify the traditional French values of Saint-André-des-Champs (she claimed only one of her citizen's rights, that of pronouncing differently from us and maintaining that 'hôtel', 'été' and 'air' were of feminine gender), but because in fact she still continued to hear it as 'Sazerin'. This perpetual error, which is nothing but 'life' itself, does not invest with its thousand forms the visible and audible universes alone but also the social, sentimental, historical and other universes, too. As far as the wife of the High Court judge is concerned, the Princess of Luxembourg is little more than a tart and is, moreover, of little interest; what does take on more interest, where Swann is concerned, is the fact that Odette is a morally fastidious lady, and he constructs a whole fiction on the subject, which becomes all the more painful when he understands his error; what is even more significant is that in the eyes of the Germans the French dream only of revenge. We have only formless, fragmented visions of the world, which we fill out with arbitrary associations of ideas, creating dangerous suggestions. I should not therefore have been very surprised to hear the name Forcheville (and already I was wondering whether she was related to the Forcheville whom I had heard so much about) if the blonde girl, doubtless hoping tactfully to forestall questions which she might have found unpleasant, had not straight away said to me: 'Don't you remember that you used to know me very well, you used to visit my house, I am your friend Gilberte. I realized that you did not recognize me. But I recognized you straight away.' (She said this as if she had recognized me the moment I entered the drawing-room but the truth is that she had recognized me in the street and had greeted me, for later Mme de Guermantes told me that she had told her, as if it were most amusing and quite extraordinary, that I had followed her and brushed up against her as if I had mistaken her for a tart.) It was only after she had left that I learned why she was called Mlle de Forcheville. After Swann's death, Odette, who surprised everyone with her profound, prolonged and sincere suffering, found that she had become a very rich widow. Forcheville married her, after undertaking a long round of châteaux and reassuring himself that his family would accept his wife. (The family protested mildly but yielded to the overwhelming argument of no longer having to subsidize the expenses of a needy relative once he proposed to move from imminent poverty to sudden opulence.) Soon afterwards one of Swann's uncles, into whose hands an enormous fortune had fallen after the successive demise of a number of relatives, died, leaving this whole fortune to Gilberte, who thus became one of the richest heiresses in France. But this was the time when the aftermath of the Dreyfus case gave rise to an anti-Semitic movement, in conjunction with a movement towards a greater infiltration of society by the children of Israel. The politicians were not wrong to think that the discovery of the judicial error would strike a blow against anti-Semitism. But, at least in the short term, anti-Semitism in high society was on the contrary augmented and exacerbated. Forcheville, who like any self-respecting nobleman had drawn from family discussions the certainty that his name was more ancient than that of La Rochefoucauld, considered that in marrying the widow of a Jew he had acted with the same charitable spirit as a millionaire who picks up a prostitute in the street and saves her from poverty and the gutter. He was ready to extend his generous principles to include the very person of Gilberte, whose countless millions could hardly fail to help, but whose absurd name, Swann, made the marriage embarrassing. He declared that he would adopt her. As we know, Mme de Guermantes, to the astonishment of her social circle – which she was accustomed and delighted to provoke – had refused to talk to Swann's wife or his daughter after his marriage. This refusal had appeared all the more cruel in as much as what had for so long made his marriage with Odette appear viable was the likely introduction of his daughter to Mme de Guermantes. And no doubt, with all his

experience of life, he should have known that these scenes which we picture never come true, for various reasons but among them one which made him think of this lost introduction with little regret. This reason is that – whatever the picture, from eating a trout at sunset, which inspires a stay-at-home man to take the train, to the desire to dazzle a high-minded cashier one evening by drawing up at her front door in a splendid carriage, which decides an unscrupulous man either to commit a murder or to yearn for the death and legacy of his family and, according to whether he is brave or lazy, either to rush to put his ideals into practice or to stay musing over the first step to take – the action which is destined to enable us to complete the picture, whether this action be a journey, a marriage, a crime, or whatever, changes us so profoundly that we attach no further importance to the reason which drove us to perform it in the first place. It may even happen that we never again see in our mind's eye the picture formulated by us when we were not yet the man who was to become the traveller, the husband, the criminal, or the recluse (the man who set to work in search of fame but has, through this very effort, become detached from the desire for fame), etc. Moreover, even if we did try obstinately to avoid acting in vain, it is probable that the effect of the sunset would not be repeated, that when the moment arrived we would feel cold and prefer hot soup by the fireside rather than trout alfresco, that our carriage would fail to impress the cashier, who might have had considerable esteem for us for entirely different reasons but who might feel suspicious of this sudden display of wealth. In short, we saw Swann, once married, attach importance above all to the relations of his wife and his daughter with Mme Bontemps and the like.

To all the reasons, arising from the Guermantes' manner of interpreting social affairs, which had decided the Duchesse never to have Mme and Mlle Swann introduced to her, we may also add the untroubled confidence with which people who are not in love keep their distance from anything they blame in lovers, explain it away by the fact that they are in love. 'Oh I don't have anything to do with all that; if it amuses poor Swann to play the fool and ruin his life that's his business, but you never know with that kind of thing, it could all turn out for the worst, I let them get on with it.' This was the *suave mari magno*[5] that Swann himself advised me to adopt towards the Verdurins when he had long since ceased to be Odette's lover and was no longer interested in the little set. It is what allows third parties to render such wise verdicts on passions which they do not themselves feel and on the complicated behaviour which these passions involve. Mme de Guermantes had in fact applied herself to ostracizing Mme and Mlle Swann with a tenacity that astonished people. When Mme Molé and Mme de Marsantes had started to frequent Mme Swann and to bring a great number of society ladies round to visit her, not only did Mme de Guermantes remain intractable but she managed to cut all their ties and to persuade her cousin the Princesse de Guermantes to follow suit. On one of the most serious days of crisis under Rouvier's[6] government, when it looked as if there would be war between France and Germany, I happened to be dining alone with M. de Bréauté at Mme de Guermantes's, and found the Duchesse looking worried. I had imagined, since she tended to be preoccupied with politics, that she wished thereby to show her fear of a war, as one day when she had sat down to dinner with such a careworn expression and had responded in such terse monosyllables to someone who enquired timidly as to the source of her concern, she had answered with gravity, 'I fret for China.' But now a little later Mme de Guermantes herself explained the preoccupied air which I had attributed to the fear of a declaration of war, saying to M. de Bréauté: 'I hear that Marie-Aynard wants to offer the Swanns a place in society. I absolutely must go to see Marie-Gilberte tomorrow to ask her to help put a stop to that. Otherwise there will be no society left. The Dreyfus case is all very well. But then the grocer's wife down the road only has to say she's a nationalist and ask to be invited by us.' And hearing such a frivolous remark instead of the one that I expected, I felt the astonishment of a reader who looks in the usual place in the *Figaro* for the latest news of the Russo-Japanese war and finds himself faced instead with the list of people who contributed gifts to Mlle de Mortemart's wedding list,[7] the importance of an aristocratic marriage having pushed battles both on land and on sea to the back of the newspaper. Moreover, from her pride in this extravagantly protracted persistence, the Duchesse ultimately acquired feelings of satisfaction which she lost no opportunity to express. 'Babal', she said, 'claims that we are the two most elegant people in Paris because only he and I refuse to be greeted by Mme and Mlle Swann. You see he is convinced that elegance consists in not knowing Mme Swann.' And the Duchesse laughed heartily.

However, after Swann's death, it happened that her insistence on not inviting his daughter had provided Mme de Guermantes with all the satisfactions of pride, independence, 'self-government' and persecution that she was able to enjoy, and that these satisfactions were terminated by the disappearance of the person who gave her the delicious sensation that she was resisting him and that he was unable to get her to annul her decrees. So the Duchesse had passed on to the promulgation of other decrees, which, applied to living persons, were able to make her feel that she was sole mistress of all her actions. She had not given a thought to the Swann girl, but when people mentioned her the Duchesse felt a curiosity, as for a place never visited, which was no longer obscured by her desire to resist Swann's claims for attention. Besides, so many different feelings can come together to form one single feeling that it would be impossible to say whether one might not detect some affection for Swann in this concern. Doubtless – for at every level of society a frivolous social life paralyses sensitivities and incapacitates our power to resuscitate the dead – the Duchesse was one of those people who need someone's presence – that presence which as a true Guermantes she excelled at cultivating – if she were truly to love them, but also, more unusually, if she were to feel a little genuine hatred. So that often her kind feelings for people, interrupted during their lifetime by the irritation that one or other of their acts had occasioned, were revived by their death. She then experienced something approaching a desire for reparation, because she imagined them, however vaguely, with only their good qualities and free from the petty smugness and pretensions that had annoyed her during their lifetime. Despite Mme de Guermantes's frivolity, this sometimes lent a rather noble quality – however mingled with baseness – to her behaviour. For whereas three-quarters of the human race flatter the living and take no notice of the dead, she often put on a performance for those she had mistreated during their lifetime once they were dead.

As for Gilberte, no one who loved her and valued her self-respect could have failed to rejoice in the change in the Duchesse's dispositions towards her, in so far as they hoped that Gilberte, by contemptuously repulsing advances coming after twenty-five years of offence, could be finally avenged. But unfortunately our moral reflexes are not always identical with the promptings of common sense. A person who thinks that some ill-judged insult has spoiled his chances with a person he holds dear, may find on the contrary that it has salvaged them. Gilberte, who was fairly indifferent towards people who were pleasant to her, could not stop thinking with admiration of the insolent Mme de Guermantes and, pondering the reasons for this insolence, even wanted to write to the Duchesse on one occasion, although this would have caused those who felt the least friendship for her to die of shame, to ask her what she had against a girl who had done her no wrong. The Guermantes had taken on in her eyes proportions that their nobility alone could not have given them. She placed them not only above all the nobility but even above all royalty.

A few ladies who had previously been friends of Swann looked after Gilberte very carefully. Her most recent inheritance became known in aristocratic circles, people noted her exquisite manners and her potential as a charming wife. People said that a cousin of Mme de Guermantes, the Princesse de Nièvre, was thinking of Gilberte for her son. Mme de Guermantes loathed Mme de Nièvre. She announced to all and sundry that such a marriage would be a scandal. Mme de Nièvre took fright and protested that she had never even thought of it. One day after luncheon, since it was fine and M. de Guermantes was due to go out with his wife, Mme de Guermantes was adjusting her hat in the mirror, gazing at her own blue eyes and her still blonde hair, while the chambermaid held out various parasols for her mistress to choose from. The window was bathed in sunlight and they had decided to make the most of the fine day by paying a visit to Saint-Cloud. M. de Guermantes, who was ready to leave, having donned his topper and his pearl-grey gloves, said to himself, 'Oriane is still truly astonishing. I find her delicious.' And seeing that his wife seemed in good humour, he said: 'By the way, I had a message for you from Mme de Virelef. She wanted to ask you to come to the opera on Monday. But, as she is taking the Swann girl, she dared not ask and begged me to test the water. I have no opinion, I am simply transmitting the message. Good heavens, I wonder if we might not …' he added evasively, for since their attitude towards any person was a collective attitude and arose identically in each of them, he knew within himself that his wife's hostility towards Mlle Swann had abated and that she was curious to meet her. Mme de Guermantes finished adjusting her veil and chose a parasol. 'But as you wish, what should it matter to me? I see no objection to our meeting the girl. You know perfectly well that I have never had anything *against* her. It was simply that I did not want us to appear to be making advances to my friends' irregular connections. That's all.'

'And you were perfectly right,' replied the Duc. 'You are the soul of wisdom, Madam, and what is more, you look ravishing in that hat.' 'How very kind of you,' said Mme de Guermantes, smiling at her husband and moving towards the door. But before entering the carriage, she felt obliged to offer supplementary information: 'There are so many people now who invite her mother, besides which she has the good sense to be ill for three-quarters of the year. They say the little girl is quite charming. Everyone knows that we were great friends of Swann. Everyone will find it perfectly natural.' And they left together for Saint-Cloud.

A month later Swann's young daughter, who was not yet called Forcheville, was at luncheon with the Guermantes. They talked about all sorts of things; at the end of the luncheon, Gilberte said shyly, 'I believe that you knew my father very well.' 'But of course we did,' said Mme de Guermantes, with a melancholy air which proved that she understood the grief of a daughter and with an intentional overemphasis which made her appear to dissimulate the fact that she was not sure she could recall the father very precisely. 'We knew him very well, I remember him very well indeed.' (And well she might have remembered him, indeed, since he had called on her every day for twenty-five years.) 'I know perfectly well who he was, let me tell you,' she added, as if she were seeking to explain to the daughter who her father had been and to offer the girl new information about him, 'he was a great friend of my mother-in-law and also well known to my brother-in-law Palamède.' 'He used to visit us, too, and even came to luncheon,' added M de Guermantes, displaying both his modesty and his concern for detail. 'I'm sure you remember, Oriane. What a good man your father was! How clear it was that he must spring from a worthy family! In fact I did once catch sight of his father and mother. What fine people they all were!' One felt that if the parents and their son had still been alive the Duc de Guermantes would have felt no hesitation in recommending them for employment as gardeners. But this is how the Faubourg Saint-Germain speaks to the bourgeoisie about anyone from the bourgeoisie, whether to flatter their listeners with the exception made in their favour for as long as the conversation lasts, or whether, preferably, to humiliate them at one and the same time. So it is when an anti-Semite tells a Jew of the faults of Jews in general while smothering him with affable remarks, thus enjoying being hurtful without seeming to be rude.

But since, when she saw you, she knew to perfection how to make you feel wanted and found it difficult to decide to allow you to leave, Mme de Guermantes was also a slave to this need for people's presence. On occasion, in the heat of an animated conversation, Swann might have deluded the Duchesse into feeling that she felt friendship for him, but now he was no longer able. 'He was charming,' said the Duchesse with a sad smile, casting an extremely tender gaze in Gilberte's direction just in case the girl should happen to be a sensitive soul, to show her that she was understood and that if she had been alone with her and if circumstances had permitted, Mme de Guermantes would have loved to reveal to her the full extent of her sensitivity. But M. de Guermantes, whether because he felt that these were precisely the circumstances which failed to warrant such effusion or because he considered that any exaggerated expression of sentiment was a woman's affair and that men had no more to do with this than with any other feminine concern except for menus and wine lists, which he had appropriated since he was better informed in these matters than the Duchesse, judged it wise not to encourage with any personal contribution a conversation that he listened to with visible impatience. Moreover, once her outburst of sensitivity had abated, Mme de Guermantes added a note of social frivolity by telling Gilberte: 'Just fancy, let me tell you that he was a *g-g-great* friend of my brother-in-law Charlus and also very much at home at Voisenon (the Prince de Guermantes's château),' not only as though Swann had happened to come to know M. de Charlus and the Prince quite by chance, as if the Duchesse's brother-in-law and her cousin had been two men whom Swann had encountered on some random occasion, whereas Swann was on familiar terms with everyone in that same social circle, but also as though Mme de Guermantes had wanted Gilberte to understand what sort of a man her father was, to 'place' him for her, through one of those typical reactions whereby, when we want to explain how we have met someone we are not supposed to know or want to make the account more striking, we invoke the patronage of someone else. As for Gilberte, she was all the happier to see the conversation falter since she wanted nothing better than to change tack, having inherited from Swann an exquisite tact and a charming intelligence which the Duc and the Duchesse recognized and appreciated, asking Gilberte to call again soon. Moreover, with that attention to detail typical of people whose lives have no aim, they sometimes descried in the people whom they frequented the most simple qualities, crying out in admiration with the naïve wonder of the town-dweller who discovers a blade of grass in the countryside or, on the contrary, magnifying their tiniest faults, as if under a microscope, with hair-splitting analyses and visceral objections, and often alternately in the same person. In Gilberte's case it was at first her attractions which excited the idle perspicacity of M. and Mme de Guermantes: 'Have you noticed the way she pronounces certain words,' the Duchesse asked her husband when she had left, 'a typical Swann, it sounded like the man himself. – I was about to make the same remark as you, Oriane. – She has wit, she has exactly her father's turn of phrase. – I find even that she is far superior. Just remember how well she told that story about the seaside, she has a brio that Swann did not have. – Oh but he was very witty, after all. – But I don't mean that he wasn't witty, I only said that he did not have such brio,' said M de Guermantes with a plaintive air, for his gout made him over-sensitive and, when there was nobody else to bear witness to his irritation, he displayed it to the Duchesse. But since he was unable to understand the deeper reasons, he preferred to affect a misunderstood air.

The favourable stance adopted by the Duc and the Duchesse meant that people might henceforth have dropped the words 'your poor father' to Gilberte when the occasion arose, had they not become pointless, since this was precisely the period when Forcheville adopted the young lady. She called Forcheville 'father', she charmed dowagers with her politeness and elegant manners, and people admitted that, while Forcheville had behaved admirably towards her, the little girl was very kind-hearted and had shown due gratitude. Doubtless because she sometimes wanted and felt able to show how much she felt at her ease in society, she had sought my approbation and had spoken of her real father in my hearing. But this was an exception, for no one dared pronounce Swann's name in her presence. It so happened that on entering the salon, I had just recognized two drawings by Elstir which had previously been relegated to an upstairs display cabinet where I had only come across them by chance. Elstir was now in fashion. Mme de Guermantes could not console herself for having given so many of his pictures to her cousin, not because they had become fashionable but because now she appreciated them. In fact fashion is composed of the enthusiasm of a group of people of whom the Guermantes are typical. But she would not dream of buying more pictures by him, since in recent times they had been attaining ridiculously high prices. She wanted to have something at least by Elstir in her drawing-room and had had the two drawings brought down, declaring that she 'preferred them to his paintings'. Gilberte recognized his style. 'They look like Elstirs,' she said. 'But they are,' replied the Duchesse, 'it was precisely your … some friends of ours who advised us to buy them. They are admirable. In my opinion they are better than his paintings.' I had not heard this dialogue when I went to look at the drawings, and said, 'Oh look, it's the Elstir that …' I saw Mme de Guermantes's frantic signals. 'Oh yes, it's the Elstir that I admired upstairs. It looks much better here than on the landing. On the subject of Elstir, I mentioned him in an article in the *Figaro* yesterday. Did you read it? – You wrote an article in the *Figaro?*' exclaimed M. de Guermantes as violently as he would have exclaimed, 'But she's my cousin. – Yes, yesterday. – In the *Figaro*, are you sure? That would be surprising, for we each have our own copy, and if one of us missed it the other would have noticed it. Don't you agree, Oriane, there was no article.' The Duc sent someone to fetch the *Figaro* and only accepted the truth when faced with the evidence, as if until that moment it was most likely that I had mistaken the newspaper for which I had written. 'What? I don't understand, do you mean you have written an article for the *Figaro*?' the Duchesse asked me, making an effort to speak of something of no interest to her. 'Well, Basin, look here, you must read it later on.' 'Oh no, the Duc is fine as he is with his great beard all over the newspaper,' said Gilberte, and I shall read it myself as soon as I get home. – Yes, he's taken to wearing a beard now that everyone is clean shaven, said the Duchesse, he never does what other people do. When we married he shaved off not just his beard but his moustache. The country folk who saw him thought that he was not French. At that time he was called the Prince des Laumes. – Is there still a Prince des Laumes?' asked Gilberte, who was interested in anything that concerned the people who had for so long refused to give her the time of day. 'Oh no,' replied the Duchesse, with a melancholy, amorous air. 'Such a lovely title! One of the finest titles in France!' said Gilberte, in one of those lapses into banality which inevitably escape the mouths of certain intelligent young women, as surely as the sun rises. 'But it's true, and I regret it as much as you. Basin would like his sister's son to take it on, but it's not the same thing; actually it would be possible, because it doesn't have to be the elder son, it can pass from the elder to the younger. As I was saying, Basin was absolutely clean shaven; one day on a pilgrimage, do you remember, my dear,' she said to her husband, 'that pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial? My brother-in-law Charlus, who rather likes to talk to the country folk, said to someone or

other: “Where are you from, my friend?”, and as he is very generous, he gave them a tip or offered to stand them a drink. For there’s nobody more grand but simple with it than Mémé. You could find him snubbing a duchess if she’s not enough of a duchess for him, and turn all his attention to a master of hounds. So I said to Basin: “Look, Basin, why don’t you talk to them a bit too.” My husband, who rather lacks imagination … – Thank you, Oriane,’ said the Duc without interrupting his reading of my article, in which he was immersed – ‘got hold of a local and repeated verbatim the words of his brother: “And you, where are you from? – I’m from les Laumes. – You are from les Laumes? Well then, I am your Prince.” Then the countryman looked at Basin’s whiskerless features and replied: “Not true, you are an English.” ’ Thus in the Duchesse’s anecdotes one saw these great titles, like that of the Prince des Laumes, emerge in their true place, in their former state and their local colour, as in certain books of hours one recognizes, amidst the medieval crowd, the steeple of Bourges. Some visiting cards left by a footman were brought in to her. ‘I don’t know what has possessed her, I do not know the woman. This is your doing, Basin. And yet you have scarcely made a success of this kind of relationship, my poor dear,’ and then turning to Gilberte, she said: ‘I couldn’t begin to explain who she is, you certainly don’t know her, she’s called Lady Rufus Israel.’ Gilberte blushed furiously: ‘I don’t know her,’ she said (which was all the more false since Lady Israel, two years before Swann’s death, had made her peace with him and since then called Gilberte by her first name), ‘but I do know who she is from what people say, I know who you mean.’ The fact is that Gilberte had become quite snobbish. Thus it happened one day, when a young lady who, whether from malice or from tactlessness, had asked her the name of her true rather than of her adoptive father, that Gilberte, in her confusion and in an attempt to disguise what she was forced to say, had pronounced the name as ‘Svann’ instead of ‘Souann’, a change which some time later she realized was pejorative, since it turned an originally English name into a German name. And she had even added, abasing herself morally in order to enhance her social status: ‘I have heard so many different things about my birth that I prefer to know nothing.’

However ashamed of herself Gilberte must have been at certain moments when she thought of her parents (for even Mme Swann had seemed a good mother to her and had been one) at having adopted such an attitude to life, we must unfortunately suppose that its elements had doubtless been borrowed from her parents, for we do not create ourselves single-handed. But to the quantity of egoism given in the mother, a different portion of egoism, inherent in the father’s family, comes to accrue, which does not always imply an addition or even a simple multiplication, but which creates a new breed of egoism, infinitely more powerful and fearsome. And ever since the beginning of the world, since families where such a flaw exists in one form have become allied with families where the same flaw exists in another form, creating a particularly complete and detestable form in the child, the accumulated egoisms (to talk here only of egoism) would take on such force that the whole of humanity would be destroyed, if from the same ill there did not arise, capable of reducing it to its just proportions, natural restrictions analogous to those which prevent an infinite proliferation of protozoa from annihilating our planet or the monosexual fertilization of plants from leading to the asphyxiation of the rest of the vegetable kingdom, and so on. From time to time a virtue emerges to compose with this egoism a new and disinterested force. The combinations by means of which moral chemistry thus fixes and renders inoffensive down the generations elements which were becoming too dangerous are infinite and would be capable of giving an exciting variety to our family histories. What is more, the different kinds of egoism of the sort which Gilberte must have accumulated coexist with the most charming virtues, also inherited from the parents, which come for a moment to play their own individual, touching and entirely sincere part during the intervals. Doubtless Gilberte did not always go so far as she did on this occasion when she insinuated that she was perhaps the natural daughter of some great personage; but she did most often dissimulate her origins. Perhaps it was simply too unpleasant to confess them, and she preferred them to be related by others. Perhaps she really believed that she was hiding them, with that faltering belief which is still not doubt, as it reserves a possibility for what one desires and of which Musset gives an example when he speaks of ‘hoping in God’.[8]

‘I do not know her personally,’ continued Gilberte. Had she, however, in calling herself Mlle de Forcheville hoped that no one would know that she was Swann’s daughter? Perhaps hoping, where certain people were concerned, that this might in due course come to include almost everyone? She could not have harboured many illusions as to their present number and she must have known that many people would be whispering, ‘She’s Swann’s daughter.’ But she knew it only with the kind of knowledge that tells us of people yielding to despair and letting themselves die of starvation while we go off to a ball, that is with a vague and distant knowledge, for which we have no desire to substitute a more precise knowledge based on first-hand experience. As distance makes things appear smaller, less precise and less dangerous, Gilberte thought it pointless that the discovery that she had been born a Swann should be made in her presence. Gilberte belonged, or at least had belonged during those years, to the most frequently encountered species of human ostrich, those who bury their heads in the hope, not of not being seen, which they believe to be implausible, but of not seeing themselves being seen, which seems important enough to them and allows them to leave the rest to chance. Gilberte preferred not to be present when people discovered that she had been born a Swann. And as we are present to people whom we can picture, and since we can picture people reading their newspapers, Gilberte preferred the newspapers to call her Mlle de Forcheville. It is true that for those writings over which she did have some control, that is, her letters, she negotiated the transition for a while by signing G. S. Forcheville. The veritable hypocrisy of this signature was revealed far less by the suppression of the other letters of Swann’s name than by those of Gilberte’s name. Indeed, by reducing her innocent first name to a simple G., Mlle de Forcheville seemed to insinuate to her friends that the same amputation applied to the name of Swann was itself due only to the same desire for brevity. She even bestowed a particular importance on the S, giving it a kind of long tail that cut across the G, but one felt this to be as provisional and doomed to disappear as the one which, despite its length in the monkey, is absent in man.

Despite this, her snobbery retained an element of Swann’s intellectual curiosity. I remember that on the same afternoon she asked Mme de Guermantes if she might not have known M. du Lau, and when the Duchesse replied that he was unwell and unable to go out, Gilberte asked what he was like, for, she added, blushing slightly, she had heard so much about him. (The Marquis du Lau had in fact been one of Swann’s closest friends before the latter’s marriage and perhaps even Gilberte herself might have caught a glimpse of him, but at a time when she was not interested in those social circles.) ‘Might M. de Bréauté or the Prince d’Agrigente give me an idea?’ she asked. ‘Oh not at all!’ cried Mme de Guermantes, who had a fine sense of these provincial distinctions and was able to offer a sober portrait, albeit coloured with the hoarse, gilded timbre of her voice and bathed in the warm light of her violet eyes. ‘No, not at all. Du Lau was a charming nobleman from the Périgord, with all the refinements but casual manners of the provinces. At Guermantes, when the King of England, who was a good friend of du Lau, was there, they had tea after the hunt; this was the time of day when du Lau used to take off his boots. Well, the presence of King Edward[9] and all the grand dukes failed to impress him at all, he came back downstairs into the great salon of the Guermantes, wearing his thick woollen slippers. He felt that he was the Marquis du Lau d’Allemans who had no reason to feel inhibited by the King of England. It was he and the charming Quasimodo de Breteuil that I liked most of all. Besides, they were great friends of …’ (she was about to say ‘your father’ and stopped short). ‘No, that has no connection with Gri-Gri or Bréauté. He is an authentic Périgord nobleman. By the way, Mémé quotes a page from Saint-Simon about a Marquis d’Allemans, that’s absolutely him.’ I quoted the first words of the portrait: ‘M. d’Allemans, who was one of the most distinguished members of the Périgord nobility, through his noble descent and through his own merit, was treated by everyone who lived there as judge and jury to whom everyone tended to appeal because of his honesty, his competence and his politeness, as well as being the cock of the walk in his province. – Yes, that sounds just like him,’ said Mme de Guermantes, ‘especially as he was always as red as a coxcomb. – Yes, I remember having heard that description,’ said Gilberte, without adding that she had heard it from her father, who was in fact a great admirer of Saint-Simon.

She also liked talking about the Prince d’Agrigente and M de Bréauté for another reason. The Prince d’Agrigente was of the house of Aragon by descent but their estate is held in the Poitou. As for his château, at least the one where he resided, it was not one of his family’s châteaux but came from the family of his mother’s former husband and was situated at roughly equal distance from Martinville and Guermantes. So Gilberte spoke of him and M. de Bréauté as country neighbours who reminded her of her former province. Objectively speaking, there was an element of deceit in these words, since it was only in Paris that she had come to know M. de Bréauté, through the Comtesse Molé, who was, it should be said, an old friend of her father. As for the pleasure of speaking of the countryside near Tansonville, it may have been sincere. Snobbery for some people is analogous to those sweet-tasting cordials which we lace with more active

ingredients. Gilberte took an interest in some elegant lady because she owned some superb books and some Nattiers,[10] which my former friend would certainly not have gone to see at the Bibliothèque Nationale or the Louvre, and I imagine that the attractions of Tansonville for Gilberte would have exerted their influence less through Mme Sazerat or Mme Goupil, despite their even greater proximity, than through M. d'Agrigente. 'Oh poor Babal and Gri-Gri,' said Mme de Guermantes, 'they are far more ill than du Lau, I'm afraid they won't last long, either of them.'

When M. de Guermantes had finished reading my article he addressed me some rather muted compliments. He regretted the somewhat hackneyed form of my style, which was 'as inflated and metaphorical as Chateaubriand's outmoded prose'; on the other hand he congratulated me wholeheartedly for having found an 'occupation': 'I like people to do something with their fingers and thumbs. I don't like layabouts who always take themselves too seriously or get over-excited. Foolish breed!' Gilberte, who had lost no time in adopting society manners, declared how proud she was to be able to say that she was the friend of an author. 'Just imagine how I shall tell everyone that I have the pleasure and the *honour* of knowing you.' 'Wouldn't you like to accompany us tomorrow to the Opéra Comique?' the Duchesse asked me, and I thought that this must be an invitation to the very bar where I had seen her for the first time and which had then seemed as inaccessible to me as the underwater realm of the Nereids.[11] But I replied sadly: 'No, I cannot go to the theatre, I have lost a friend. She was very dear to me.' The tears nearly came to my eyes as I said it and yet for the first time I felt something akin to pleasure in talking about it. It was from that moment that I started to write to everyone to tell them of my great sorrow and to cease to feel it.

When Gilberte had left, Mme de Guermantes said to me: 'You didn't understand my signals, it was to stop you talking about Swann.' And as I excused myself, she said to her husband: 'But I understand very well; I nearly mentioned him myself, I only just had time to cover up, it was awful, luckily I stopped in time. You know how embarrassing it is,' in order to diminish my fault a little by pretending to believe that I had complied with a propensity which was common to all and which was difficult to resist. 'What am I supposed to do about it?' replied the Duc. 'All you have to do is have the drawings taken back upstairs again, since they make you think of Swann. If you don't think about Swann, you won't talk about him.'

The following day I received two letters of congratulation which astonished me considerably, one from Mme Goupil, a lady from Combray whom I had not seen for many years and to whom even in Combray I had hardly spoken more than two or three times. She had had a copy of the *Figaro* sent by a lending library. Thus when something of any note happens to us in life, we hear the news from people situated so far from our present acquaintances and so far back in our memory that they seem to be situated at a great distance, especially in terms of depth. A forgotten school-friend, who might have remembered himself to you on a dozen occasions, shows up but this does turn out to have its compensations. Thus it was that Bloch, whose opinion on my article I would have so liked to know, did not write to me. It is true that he had read the article and was to admit this to me later but only in a delayed reaction. The fact is that a few years later he himself wrote an article for the *Figaro* and wanted to inform me of the event immediately. As he too had benefited from what seemed to him to be a privilege, his need to pretend to be ignorant of my article having suddenly ceased, as if a compress had been released, he mentioned it to me, very differently from the way in which he wanted me to talk about his own: 'I heard that you too had an article published,' he said. 'But I didn't think I should mention it to you, for fear of displeasing you, for one should not speak to one's friends of the humiliating things that happen to them. And obviously it is humiliating to write for the newspaper of the sword and the cross, of "five o'clock" tea parties, and other kinds of holy water.' His character had not changed, but his language had become less precious, as happens to certain writers who drop their mannerist style when they stop writing symbolist poems and start producing serialized novels.

In order to console myself for Bloch's silence, I reread Mme Goupil's letter; but it lacked warmth, for if the aristocracy has certain formulae which erect fences, between the opening 'Dear Sir' and the closing 'Yours faithfully' exclamations of joy and admiration can spring up like flowers and let their sweet-scented sprays spill over the boundary fence. But bourgeois conventions enclose even the heart of the letter itself within a network of 'your legitimate success' or at best 'your fine success'. Sisters-in-law, mindful of their upbringing and restrained by the stays of decency, believe that they have overstepped the bounds of pathos or enthusiasm, if they have written 'with kind regards'. 'Mother joins me in sending her best wishes' is a superlative which is rarely lavished. I received another letter apart from Mme Goupil's, but I did not recognize the name, Sautton. The writing was simple, the tone charming. I was very disappointed not be be able to discover who had written it.

Two days later I was delighted to think that Bergotte must have greatly admired my article, which he could not have read without jealousy. Yet after a while my joy subsided. In fact Bergotte had not written me a word. I had simply wondered whether he would have liked the article, fearing that he had not. The question that I had asked myself was answered by Mme de Forcheville, who had replied that he admired it greatly, finding it worthy of a great writer. But she told me this while I was asleep: it was a dream. Almost all our dreams answer the questions that we have asked ourselves with complex affirmations and scenarios involving several characters, but they fade with the dawn.

As for Mlle de Forcheville, I could not help feeling sorrowful when I thought of her. For all that she was Swann's daughter, whom he would have so loved to see at the Guermantes', they had refused to invite her, despite their great friendship for him, but then they had spontaneously sought her company after the passing of time, which, depending on what others have told you about them, renews the personality of those people whom we have not seen for a long time or invests them with another, since we too have shed our skins and acquired new tastes. But when on occasion Swann, holding his daughter in his arms and embracing her, said, 'It's nice, my love, to have a daughter like you; one day when I'm no longer here, if people still speak of your poor Papa, it will be to you alone and only because of you,' Swann, thus placing his timid and anxious hopes of survival after his death in his daughter, was as mistaken as some ageing banker who, having made his will in favour of a very respectful little dancer who is kept by him, thinks that, although he is no more than an old friend to her, she will remain faithful to his memory. She was very respectful but under the table she played footsy with those of the old banker's male friends whom she fancied, albeit with total discretion, preserving excellent appearances. She will wear mourning for the distinguished gentleman, will be greatly relieved, will benefit not only from the ready cash but from the properties and motor-cars that he has left her, but will everywhere erase the hallmarks of their previous owner, which cause her mild embarrassment, and she will never add to her enjoyment of the gift any regret for its donor. The illusions of paternal love are perhaps no less than those of the other kind; many daughters consider their father no more than the old man who will leave them his fortune. Gilberte's presence in a drawing-room, instead of being an occasion for people still to speak sometimes of her father, was an obstacle preventing them from seizing those increasingly rare occasions when they might still have been able to do so. Even on the subject of the words he had spoken and the gifts he had offered, people acquired the habit of no longer mentioning his name, and she who should have renewed, if not perpetuated, his memory turned out to be precisely the one who hastened and consummated the process of dying and forgetting.

And it was not only where Swann was concerned that Gilberte gradually consummated the process of forgetting: she had hastened this process within me in relation to Albertine. Under the impact of the desire, and consequently the desire for happiness, which Gilberte had aroused within me during those few hours when I had believed her to be somebody else, a certain number of painful sufferings and preoccupations, which until so recently had continued to obsess my thoughts, fell away from me, dragging away with them a whole block of memories, probably long since crumbling and precarious, connected with Albertine. For if many of the memories which were linked to her had at first helped to maintain within me a regret for her death, the regret itself had, in its turn, fixed the memories. So that the change in my emotional state, doubtless prepared obscurely day by day through the continual erosion caused by forgetting, but suddenly realized as a whole, gave me that impression of the void which I remember having experienced that day for the first time, that suppression within me of a whole section of the association of my ideas, as in a man whose worn-out cerebral artery ruptures and who finds a whole part of his memory erased or paralysed. I no longer loved Albertine. At most there were occasional days which brought the kind of weather that, modifying and stimulating our sensitivity, restores our contact

with reality, making me feel bitterly sad when I thought of her. I suffered from a love that no longer existed. Thus when the weather changes do amputees feel pain in the leg they have lost.

The disappearance of my suffering and of everything that accompanied it left me diminished, as often does the cure of an illness which took up a great place in our lives. No doubt it is because memories do not remain true for ever, and because life is made up of the endless renewal of cells, that love is not eternal. But this renewal of memories is none the less delayed by our attention, which stops and fixes for a moment what is bound to change. And since sorrow, like desire for a woman, is magnified when we think of it, if we had more things to keep us busy, this would render forgetting, as it does chastity, all the easier.

While it remains the case that it is time which progressively causes forgetting, it is forgetting in its turn which, through a different reaction (although for me it was a distraction – the desire for Mlle d'Éporcheville – which suddenly rendered forgetting effective and palpable), contributes to profoundly disturbing our notion of time. There are optical illusions in time as well as space. The persistence within me of traces of my old urge to work, to make up for lost time, to change my way of life, or rather to start to live, gave me the illusion that I was still as young as ever; yet the memory of all the events which had succeeded one another during my life – and also those which had succeeded in my heart, for, when we have changed a great deal, we are led to suppose that we have lived for longer – during those last months of Albertine's existence, had made them seem to last much longer than a year, and this forgetting of so many things, separating me by empty spaces from quite recent events, which they made seem long gone because I had had what we call the 'time' to forget them, with its fragmented and irregular interpolation in the midst of my memory – like a thick ocean mist which blots out all the objects that aid navigation – was what had upset and dislocated my sense of temporal distances, shrinking them here, stretching them there, and making me believe that I was sometimes much further from, sometimes much nearer to things than I really was. And since in the new, as yet undiscovered, spaces which lay before me, there would no more be traces of my love for Albertine than there had been in my recent experience of traversing periods of loss of love for my grandmother, offering a succession of periods during which, after a certain interval, nothing that had sustained the preceding period remained in the following one, my life appeared to me to be something as much lacking the support of an individual, identical and permanent self, something as useless in the future as protracted in the past, something as easy for death to terminate here or there without any kind of conclusion, as those school courses in French History which stop arbitrarily, depending on the whim of the syllabus or the teacher, at the 1830 or the 1848 Revolution or the end of the Second Empire.[12]

Perhaps then the fatigue and sadness that I felt came less from having loved in vain than from the fact that I was already forgetting, that I was starting to take pleasure in the company of new, living people, simple society acquaintances, mere friends of the Guermantes, almost entirely uninteresting in their own right. I consoled myself perhaps more easily for the fact that the girl I had loved was after a certain lapse of time no more than a faded memory than for the fact that I found myself once more pervaded by that vain activity which makes us waste time in brightening our lives with a lively but parasitical human flora, which will also return to the void when it dies, which is already alien to everything that we have experienced, but towards which in our melancholia we none the less direct all our reserves of verbiage and flattery, in a senile attempt at seduction. The new person who would be quite able to live without Albertine had appeared within me, since I had managed to mention her to Mme de Guermantes as if I were afflicted, but without actually suffering much. The possible arrival of these new selves, which should bear a name different from that of their predecessor because of their indifference to what I loved, had always terrified me: on a former occasion in the case of Gilberte, when her father told me that if I went to live in the South Seas I would never want to return, and on a more recent occasion when I had read with such a heavy heart the memoirs of a mediocre writer who, separated by life from a woman whom he had adored when he was young, met her again as an old man, but felt neither pleasure nor any desire to see her again. Yet, on the other hand, this much-feared but beneficial person brought me, at the same time as forgetfulness, an almost complete suppression of suffering and the prospect of recovery, for he was none other than one of those alternative selves which fate holds in reserve for us, and which in spite of ourselves – paying no more attention to our prayers than a clear-sighted and all the more authoritarian doctor – it substitutes for our sorely wounded self, in a carefully timed operation. Moreover, it effects this renewal as the need arises, as happens with the wear and repair of bodily cells, but we take no notice unless our old self was nursing some great wound, some painful foreign body, which we are astonished no longer to find, in our marvelling at having become someone else, someone else for whom his predecessor's suffering is no more than the suffering of a third party, a suffering which we can discuss compassionately because we do not feel it. And we are even quite unmoved at having passed through so much suffering, for we remember only vaguely having suffered. In the same way it may happen that we are terrified by a nightmare. But when we awake we are another person, who little cares that the person he replaces had to flee from murderers in his sleep.

Doubtless this self still kept in touch with the old one, as someone unmoved by the bereavement of a friend nevertheless speaks to his guests with suitable sadness and returns from time to time to the room where his friend, the widower, who has asked him to greet the mourners on his behalf, continues to sob out loud. I was still sobbing when I became once more, if only for a moment, the person who used to be Albertine's friend. But I was tending to move into an entirely new character. It is not because others have died that our affection for them weakens, it is because we ourselves are dying. Albertine had no reason to reproach her friend. He who usurped that name had merely inherited it. We can be faithful only to what we remember, we can remember only what we have known. My new self, while growing in the shadow of the old one, had often heard him speak; through him, through the stories he told of Albertine; he thought he knew her, he sympathized with her, he liked her: but his affection was only second-hand.

Another person in whom the process of forgetting where Albertine was concerned probably evolved more rapidly at this time, and whose reaction allowed me to realize a little later how far this process had advanced within me (I now remember this as a second stage, before my final forgetting), was Andrée. Indeed I can hardly deny that forgetting Albertine was, if not the single or even the principal cause, at least the sufficient and necessary cause, of a conversation which Andrée held with me about six months after the one I have already recorded and where her words were so different from what she had told me that first time. I remember that it took place in my room because this was the period when I enjoyed a semi-carnal relationship with her, on account of the collective aspect that my love for the girls of the little gang had at first assumed, and had now resumed, long undifferentiated amongst them, and only briefly associated exclusively with the person of Albertine during the last months that had preceded and followed her death.

We were in my room for another reason again which allows me to place this conversation quite precisely. This is because I was banned from the rest of the apartment since it was Mama's at-home day. It was a day when Mama had gone to take luncheon with Mme Sazerat. As it was my mother's open day, she had hesitated before accepting Mme Sazerat's invitation. But since, as they do in Combray, Mme Sazerat always managed to invite you in company with boring people, Mama was sure not to enjoy herself and guessed that she would not miss out on any pleasures by leaving early. And in fact she had returned on time and with no regrets, since Mme Sazerat had invited nobody who was not deadly dull even before being frozen numb by her special society voice, which Mama called her Wednesday voice. Otherwise my mother liked her well enough and felt sorry for her lack of wealth – as a result of her father's ruinous cavortings with the Duchesse de *** – a lack of wealth which compelled her to live almost the whole year round in Combray, apart from a few weeks with a female relative in Paris and a long 'leisure excursion' once every ten years. I remember that my mother, after I had entreated her repeatedly for months, and because the Princess kept on requesting her to call, had gone the day before to call on the Princess of Parma, who never made visits herself and at whose house one usually simply left one's card but who had insisted that my mother should pay her a visit, since protocol forbade her to visit us. My mother returned very discontented: 'You made me put my foot in it,' she said, 'the Princess of Parma hardly said good morning to me, she turned away to continue talking to the ladies with whom she had been conversing, taking no notice of me, and ten minutes later, since she hadn't spoken a word to me, I left, and she didn't even shake my hand. I was very embarrassed; and yet when I left her house I met the Duchesse de Guermantes, who was very pleasant and who talked of you a lot. What a strange idea you had in telling her about Albertine! She told me that you said that her death had caused you such sorrow.' (I had indeed said so to the Duchesse, but had not given it

much emphasis and had forgotten it myself. Yet the most absent-minded people often pay singular attention to words that we let slip, which seem quite natural to us but which excite their curiosity.) 'I shall never return to see the Princess of Parma. You made me put my foot in it.'

Now the following day, my mother's at-home day, Andrée came to see me. She did not have much time, for she had to go and fetch Gisèle, with whom she wanted to go out to dinner. 'I know her faults, but she's still my best friend and the person for whom I feel the most affection,' she said. And she even seemed rather terrified that I might ask to come out to dinner with them. She had a thirst for people, so that a third party who knew her too well, as I did, by preventing her from letting herself go, would prevent her from fully enjoying their company.

It is true that when she arrived I had not appeared; she waited for me to come, and I was on my way through my little sitting-room to go to meet her when I realized, from hearing a voice, that I had another visitor. I was in a hurry to see Andrée, who was waiting in my room, and since I did not know who the other person was, and he obviously did not know Andrée, since he had been asked to wait in a different room, I listened for a moment at the sitting-room door; for my visitor was speaking, he was not alone; he was talking to a woman: '*Oh! ma chérie, c'est dans mon cœur!*',[13] he crooned, quoting the lines written by Armand Sylvestre. 'Yes, you will always be my darling, whatever you have done to me':

> 'Les morts dorment en paix dans le sein de la terre.
> Ainsi doivent dormir nos sentiments éteints.
> Ces reliques du cœur ont aussi leur poussière;
> Sur leurs restes sacrés ne portons pas les mains.[14]

'It's rather old-fashioned, but isn't it lovely! And also what I could have said to you on the very first day:

> 'Tu les feras pleurer, enfant belle et chérie …

'Goodness, don't you know that?

> '… Tous ces bambins, hommes futurs,
> Qui suspendent déjà leur jeune rêverie
> Aux cils câlins de tes yeux purs.[15]

'Oh, I almost thought for a moment that I could say:

> 'Le premier soir qu'il vint ici
> De fierté je n'eus plus souci.
> Je lui disais: "Tu m'aimeras
> Aussi longtemps que tu pourras."
> Je ne dormais bien qu'en ses bras.'[16]

Even if it meant delaying my urgent visit to Andrée for a moment, I was curious to know to which woman this deluge of poems was addressed. I opened the door. They were being recited by M. de Charlus to a soldier whom I soon recognized as Morel and who was about to leave for his thirteen days' training in the reserves. He was no longer on intimate terms with M. de Charlus but saw him from time to time to ask him a favour. M. de Charlus, who usually expressed his love in more virile terms, also had his sentimental moods. Moreover in his youth, in order to understand and feel poetic language, he had been obliged to imagine it addressed not to a beautiful and wayward lady but to a young man. I left them as swiftly as I could, although I felt that to call on friends with Morel gave M. de Charlus great satisfaction, giving him the momentary illusion of being married again. And what is more he combined within himself the snobbery of royalty with that of a domestic servant.

The memory of Albertine had become so fragmented within me that it no longer caused me sadness and was no more than a transition towards new desires, like a chord that announces a change of key. And even while discounting any idea of indulging fleeting sexual fancies, since I still remained faithful to the memory of Albertine, I was happier to have Andrée by my side than I would have been to have Albertine miraculously restored. For Andrée would be able to tell me more about Albertine than Albertine herself had ever told me. Now my problems concerning Albertine were still present in my mind, although my affections for her, whether physical or emotional, had already vanished. But my desire to know her life, which had diminished less, was now comparatively greater than my need for her presence. Besides, the idea that a woman might have had a relationship with her only provoked in me the desire to have this woman too. I told Andrée this while I caressed her. Then without making the slightest effort to reconcile her words with those which she had uttered a few months previously, Andrée told me with a half-smile: 'Oh, yes, but you are a man. So we can't do quite the same things together that I used to do with Albertine.' And whether she thought she would increase my desire (hoping to tempt her into confidential revelations, I had told her previously that I would like to have relations with a woman who had had them with Albertine) or my sorrow, or perhaps destroy a feeling of superiority over her that she might think I felt from having been the only person to have had a relationship with Albertine, she added: 'Oh we both had some good times together, she was so tender, so passionate. Besides, I wasn't the only one that she liked to take her pleasure with. She had met a handsome lad at Mme Verdurin's called Morel. They understood each other immediately. He took it upon himself – with her permission to take his own pleasure too, for he liked inexperienced young things and, as soon as he had set them off down the slippery slope, would cast them loose – he took it upon himself to lure young laundry-maids and young fisher-girls from farther along the coast, who could fall in love with a boy but would not have responded to the advances of a girl. As soon as the girl was well and truly under his thumb, he took her to a secluded spot and gave her over to Albertine. Fearing that they might lose Morel, who of course joined in the act, the girls always did what they were told but they lost him all the same, for, from fear of the consequences and also because once or twice was enough for him, he would disappear leaving a false address. He was once bold enough to take one of these girls along with Albertine to a house of ill-fame in Couliville, where four or five women took her together or in succession. But afterwards Albertine felt terrible remorse. I think that with you she had overcome her passions and kept postponing the day when she would yield again. And then her friendship with you was so great that her conscience was pricked. But it was inevitable that if ever she left you she would start again. She hoped that you would save her, that you would marry her. Deep down, she felt that it was a kind of criminal folly, and I often wondered if it wasn't after some such affair, causing some family suicide, that she killed herself. I have to admit that right at the beginning of her stay with you, she had not entirely renounced her games with me. There were days when she seemed to need them, so much so that once, when it would have been so easy elsewhere, she could not bring herself to say good-bye to me before she had taken me to lie down beside her, in your home. Our luck was running out, we nearly got caught. She made the most of the fact that Françoise had gone out on an errand and that you had not yet come home. Then she put out all the lights so that after you had turned the key in the lock you would waste some time searching for the switch, but she had not locked the door to her bedroom. We heard you coming up the stairs, I only just had time to adjust my dress and go downstairs. It was a waste of time, because by an incredible coincidence you had forgotten your key and had to ring. But we had none the less lost our heads so much that, without having time to confer, we both suddenly thought of the same way to hide our embarrassment, by pretending to detest the scent of syringa whereas on the contrary we both adored it. You had brought back with you a long branch of that shrub, which allowed me to turn my head away and hide my confusion. That did not prevent me from making the absurdly clumsy suggestion that Françoise had probably returned and could perhaps open the door for you, although only a second earlier I had lied to you, saying that we had just returned from an excursion and that on our arrival Françoise had not yet left (which was true). But our

misfortune – thinking that you had your key – was to have put out the lights, for we were afraid that on your way up you would see them come back on; or at least we hesitated too long. And for three nights Albertine did not sleep a wink because she was constantly afraid that you would be suspicious and would ask Françoise why she had not lit the lamps before she left. For Albertine was very afraid of you, and sometimes was sure that you were deceitful and wicked and basically hated her. After three days she gathered, given your calmness, that you hadn't even thought of asking Françoise at all and she managed to sleep quietly once more, but she never took up her relationship with me again, whether from fear or remorse, for she claimed that she was very much in love with you, or perhaps she was in love with someone else. At all events, after that it was impossible to mention syringa in her presence without her turning bright red and hiding her face in her hands to try to cover her blushes.'

Like certain moments of good fortune, there are moments of misfortune which come too late, they fail to take on within us the significance that they would have assumed earlier. Andrée's terrible revelation was that kind of misfortune for me. Doubtless, even when a piece of bad news should make us sad, it may happen that some distraction or the intricate interplay of conversation makes it pass by unheeded, so that, having a thousand things to try to respond to, transformed into another person by the desire to please the present company and protected for a few moments, as we enter this new cycle, from the emotions and the suffering which we discarded on entry and which we will regain when the short period of enchantment is over, we have no time to take it in. Yet if these emotions and suffering are too predominant, we enter only half-heartedly into the ambit of a new and ephemeral world in which, too tied to our suffering, we are unable to become another; then the words strike home to our heart, which we have been unable to disengage. But for some time now, words relating to Albertine, like a poison which has evaporated, no longer retained their toxic powers. The distance was already too great; as a man out walking during the afternoon who sees a faint crescent in the sky and thinks 'Is that all there is to the great globe of the moon?', I thought: 'Goodness! That truth which I have sought and feared so much, is it only a few words spoken during a conversation and which one cannot fully take in because one is not alone!' Then again, the truth caught me totally unprepared, for Andrée had really exhausted me. Truly I would have preferred to have had more strength to devote to such a revelation; it remained external, for I had not yet found a place for it in my heart. We expect the truth to be revealed to us through new signs, not through a mere sentence, especially one so similar to those phrases that we have so often rehearsed in our minds. The habit of thinking sometimes prevents us from experiencing reality, inoculates us against it and makes it seem no more than yet another thought. There is no idea that does not carry within it its own possible refutation, no word that does not negate the word that negates it.

At all events, this was the sort of useless truth about the life of a dead mistress, if indeed it was true, which suddenly surfaces from the depths just when we no longer have any use for it. Then (doubtless thinking of another woman whom we love now and with whom the same process might occur, for we are no longer interested in the person we have forgotten) we are upset. We think, 'If only she were still alive,' we think, 'If only the woman who is alive understood all this and could realize that when she dies I shall discover everything she is hiding from me!' But it is a vicious circle. If I had been able to bring Albertine back to life, by the same token I would not have been able to make Andrée reveal anything. It is somewhat akin to the eternal 'You'll see, when I no longer love you', which is so true and yet so absurd, since we might find out much more if we were no longer in love, but then we would no longer be interested in learning it. In fact, the case is exactly the same. For the woman whom one sees when one no longer loves her, if she tells you everything, it is in fact because she is no longer the same person or because you are no longer the same self: the person who was in love no longer exists. There too death has intervened, has made everything easy and pointless. Such were my reflections, as I adopted the hypothesis that Andrée was telling the truth – which was possible – and inclined to be sincere with me precisely because she now had a relationship with me, showing the same Saint-André-des-Champs qualities as Albertine originally had done with me. She was helped in this matter by the fact that she no longer feared Albertine, for our grasp of people's reality does not long survive their death and after a few years they are like those gods of discredited religions that one may happily offend because one no longer believes in their existence. But the fact that Andrée no longer believed in the existence of Albertine might result in her feeling fewer moral scruples, not merely over betraying a truth which she had promised not to reveal, but even over devising a lie which retrospectively slandered her alleged accomplice. Was it this lack of fear which enabled her to reveal at last what I took to be the truth or, alternatively, to fabricate a lie, if, for whatever reason, she found me too full of happiness and pride and wanted to deflate them? Perhaps she was annoyed with me (with an annoyance that had been held in abeyance as long as she had seen me miserable and disconsolate) because I had had a relationship with Albertine and because perhaps she envied me – thinking that for this reason I felt myself more favoured than she – an advantage that she had perhaps neither obtained nor even sought. Thus it was that I had often heard her tell people that they looked very ill, when it was their healthy complexion and above all their awareness of their healthy complexion that exasperated her, so that, hoping to annoy them, she would tell them that she herself was very well and continued to declare this even when she was quite ill, until the day when the approach of death finally loosened her interest in whether the happy were well or whether they knew that she was dying. But, at the time, this day was still a long way off. Perhaps I had irritated her for some reason unknown to me, as once she had been furious with the young man who was so well-informed about sport but so ignorant about everything else, the man whom we had met at Balbec and who since then had been living with Rachel, and about whom Andrée still spread libellous rumours, hoping to be sued for libel in order to be able to publish dishonourable facts about his father, the falsehood of which he would have been unable to prove. Now perhaps this fury against me, which had abated as soon as she saw how sad I was, was only a relapse. Indeed, even those people whom, her eyes sparkling with rage, she had threatened with disgrace, death and imprisonment, using false witness if need be, as soon as she thought they were unhappy and humiliated, she wished them no ill and was ready to shower them with favours. For she was not basically wicked and if, below the surface, her slightly deeper, rather surprising nature did not confirm the kindness that her first delicate attentions had led people to suppose but rather envy and pride, yet, at an even deeper level, her third-degree, that is, her true nature, even if never quite fully realized, tended towards goodness and love of her neighbour. Only, like all people who live in a state which they wish were better, but know no more of this than their desire for it and do not understand that the first condition is to break with their present state – like neurasthenics or morphine addicts who would like to be cured but only as long as no one deprives them of their tics or their morphine, like certain rather worldly religious souls or artistic minds, aspiring to solitude yet prepared to imagine it only in so far as it does not imply absolutely renouncing their former life – Andrée was ready to love all God's creatures but only as long as she had first managed to see them failing to triumph and, in order to do so, had humiliated them in advance. She did not understand that one should love even the proud and conquer their pride through love rather than more overweening pride. But the fact is that she was like those invalids who want to be cured by the same much-loved means as sustain their illness and which they would immediately cease to love if they abandoned these means. But one may learn to swim and still prefer to keep one's feet dry.

As regards the athletic young man, who was a nephew of the Verdurins and whom I had met during my two stays in Balbec, I have to say in passing, and by way of anticipation, that a short while after Andrée's visit, the account of which I shall resume in a moment, there occurred certain events which created a great impression on me. First of all, this young man (perhaps in memory of Albertine, although I did not know at the time that he had been in love with her) became engaged to Andrée and married her, despite Rachel's despair, which left him totally unmoved. At that time (that is to say a few months after the visit which I have mentioned) Andrée no longer said that he was a ne'er-do-well, and it was only later that I realized that she had said so purely because she was crazy about him but thought that he was not interested in her. But another fact was even more striking. This young man produced a series of short sketches, using stage-sets and costumes that he had designed himself and which introduced into contemporary art a revolution at least equal to that accomplished by the Ballets Russes.[17] In short, those in the know considered his works to be of crucial importance, almost works of genius, and I must say that I share their opinion, thus ratifying to my astonishment Rachel's earlier views. People who had seen him at Balbec attending only to whether the clothes of the people he had to frequent were well cut or not and spending all his time at baccarat or the races or playing golf or polo, who knew that he had always been the dunce of the class and had even got himself expelled from school (to annoy his parents, he had spent two months living in the notorious house of ill-fame where M. de Charlus believed he had seen Morel), thought that his works had perhaps been composed by Andrée, who, from love for him, wished him to take the credit, or that more probably he used his great

personal fortune, only slightly reduced by his follies, to pay some brilliant but needy professional to write them (this kind of wealthy society – not having the gloss which is acquired by frequenting the aristocracy and having no idea of what an artist is like, since for them he is only either an actor whom they invite to recite monologues at their daughters' engagement parties, where, as soon as he has finished, his fee is discreetly handed him in an another room, or perhaps a painter for whom they will have the daughter pose once she is married, before she has had children and while she still has her looks – tending to believe that everyone in society who writes, composes or paints,[18] has his works created for him by someone else and pays to establish his reputation as an author as others do to have a seat in parliament). But none of this was true; for this young man was indeed the author of those admirable works. When I found out, I could not help wavering between different explanations. Either he had indeed spent long years as the 'thick-headed brute' that he had seemed and some physiological cataclysm had awoken the Genie slumbering within him, like a Sleeping Beauty; or else during his last turbulent years at school, failing his baccalaureate, running up large gambling debts at Balbec, avoiding riding in the 'tram' with his aunt Verdurin's acquaintances because of their dreadful clothes, there was already a man of genius, perhaps unaware of his genius, having lost the key to the door in the turmoil of his juvenile passions; or even, a man of genius and already aware of it, yet bottom of the class, because while his teacher was mouthing clichés about Cicero, he himself was reading Rimbaud or Goethe. Certainly nothing would have justified this hypothesis when I met him in Balbec, where his preoccupations seemed to me to resolve entirely around the form of horses and the preparation of cocktails. But this is not an irrefutable objection. Perhaps he was very vain, which may be allied to genius, and tried to shine in the way he knew would dazzle the society he lived in and which he could not achieve by showing a profound knowledge of *Elective Affinities*,[19] but rather by knowing how to drive a four-in-hand. Besides I am not sure even that when he had become the author of these fine and original works, he would have much wanted, in the theatres where he was known, to greet anyone who was not wearing a dinner-jacket, since people stay true to their former tastes, yet this would prove in him not stupidity but vanity and even a certain practical sense, a certain insight in adapting his vanity to the mentality of fools whose esteem he needed and for whom the dinner-jacket may well shine more brightly than the eyes of a thinker. Who knows, if seen from an external viewpoint, how many a man of talent or even without talent but with a fondness for things intellectual, like myself for instance, might not have struck someone meeting him at Rivebelle, at the Hôtel de Balbec, or on the promenade at Balbec, of the most utter and pretentious imbecile? Not to mention that for Octave the realm of art must have been something so intimate, lodged so deeply in his most hidden depths, that he would doubtless never have thought of talking about it, as would, for example, Saint-Loup, for whom the arts had the same prestige as teams of horses for Octave. Then he might have had a passion for gambling, and people would say that he never lost it. Even so if the piety which brought to light the unknown works of Vinteuil could emerge from the very dubious world of Montjouvain, I was no less struck to think that perhaps the most striking masterpieces of our times have been nurtured not by taking the *Concours Général*,[20] and following the classic academic route, like the Broglie family,[21] but by frequenting the paddock and fashionable cocktail bars. At all events during this period at Balbec the reasons which made me want to meet him and those which made Albertine and her friends anxious to prevent me from meeting him, fell equally wide of the mark, and their only value might have been to highlight the eternal misunderstanding by the 'intellectual' (represented in this case by myself) and society (represented by the little gang) of the character of a social figure (the young golfer). I detected no signs of his talent, and his prestige in my eyes – of the same type as that of Mme Blatin formerly – was to be, whatever they claimed, a friend of my young female friends, and more closely linked to their gang than I was. What is more, Albertine and Andrée, symbolizing thereby the inability of society people to exercise a valid judgment on things of the mind and their tendency in such matters to believe in deceptive appearances, were not only not far from finding me stupid because I was curious to find out about such a fool, but were astonished above all that, if I had to choose a golfer, I should go for the most insignificant. If at worst I had wanted to take up with the young Gilbert de Bellœuvre, he was at least a lad who had conversational as well as golfing talents, who had been runner-up in the *Concours Général* and wrote pleasant verses (and yet who was in fact as thick as they come). Or else, if my aim was to 'make a study', 'for a book', Guy Saumoy, who was completely mad and who had twice abducted a minor, was at least a curious figure who could 'interest' me. I would have been 'allowed' these two but whatever did I see in the other one? He was clearly a major specimen of the species known as the 'thick-headed brute'.

To return to Andrée's visit, after what she had just revealed to me about her relationship with Albertine, she added that Albertine's main reason for leaving me was what the girls of the little gang, and others, might have thought if they saw her living with a young man to whom she was not married: 'I know it was at your mother's house. But that makes no difference. You can't imagine what it's like, this society of young women, what they hide from each other, how afraid they are of other people's opinions. I have seen some who were terribly strict with their young men, simply because they knew their girl-friends and they were afraid that certain things might be repeated, and yet I have by chance seen the very same girls, much to their annoyance, on occasions when they were behaving very diferently.' A few months earlier Andrée's apparent knowledge of the motives that drove the girls of the little gang would have seemed priceless to me. Perhaps what she said was sufficient to explain the fact that Albertine, who was to yield to me later in Paris, had rejected me in Balbec, where I was constantly in touch with her friends, something which I had absurdly seen as a great advantage allowing me to be on better terms with her. Perhaps it was even the sight of some sign of my confiding in Andrée or the fact that I had rashly told Andrée that Albertine was coming round to sleep at the Grand Hotel which caused the latter, who an hour earlier might have been ready to grant me certain pleasures as the most natural thing in the world, to change her mind and threaten to ring for help. But in this case, she must have been more complaisant with many others. This idea revived my jealousy and I told Andrée that there was one thing I wanted to ask her. 'Did you do that in your grandmother's empty apartment? – Oh, no, never, someone might have disturbed us – And yet, I thought, it seemed to me … – Besides, Albertine used to prefer to do it when we were in the country – Whereabouts? – At first, when we did not have time to go very far, we used to go to the Buttes-Chaumont, there was a house she knew there, or even under the trees, there is never anyone there; or in the grotto at the Petit Trianon, too. – There you are, how do you expect me to believe you? You swore to me, less than a year ago, that you had never done anything at the Buttes-Chaumont. – I was afraid of hurting you.' As I have already mentioned, it was only much later that I thought that it was on the contrary with the second version of her confession that Andrée had tried to hurt me. And I would have guessed this immediately, while she was speaking, because I would have felt the need to do so, if I had still been as much in love with Albertine. But Andrée's words did not hurt me enough for me to feel it indispensable to judge them immediately to be false. In short, if what Andrée said was true, and at first I did not doubt it, the real Albertine that I now discovered, after knowing so many and various apparent Albertines, was not very different from the orgiastic girl that I had sensed when she had loomed up, walking along the promenade at Balbec, and who had afterwards offered me so many changing aspects, as when in approaching a town we see its buildings progressively modify their disposition until they smother and erase its principal monument, which was the only thing visible from a distance, but where finally, as we get to know it better and judge it more accurately, its true proportions turn out to be those indicated by the perspective of our first appraisal, the remainder of the buildings which we had passed being no more than the successive series of lines of defence that any person raises to block our vision and which must be crossed one after the other, whatever suffering it might cost, before reaching their heart. Moreover, just as I had not needed to believe absolutely in Albertine's innocence because my suffering had diminished, I should admit that the converse was true, that if I did not suffer overmuch from this revelation it was because, for some time past, the belief in Albertine's innocence that I had forged had been gradually and unwittingly replaced by a belief that had always been present within me, the belief in Albertine's guilt. Now if I no longer believed in the innocence of Albertine, it was because I no longer felt the need or the passionate desire to do so. It is desire that engenders belief, and if we are not usually aware of this, it is because most of the desires which engender belief – unlike the one which had made me believe that Albertine was innocent – die only when we do. Rather than accept all the evidence which corroborated my original version, I had stupidly preferred to believe Albertine's bald affirmations. Why had I believed her? Lying is essential to humanity. It plays perhaps as great a part as the search for pleasure and is in fact driven by this search. We lie to protect our pleasure or our honour, if to divulge this pleasure would be contrary to our honour. We lie all our lives, above all, or perhaps even only, to those who love us. For in fact they alone make us fear for our pleasure and desire their esteem. At first I had thought Albertine guilty and only my desire, enlisting all the forces of my intelligence in its enterprise of doubt, had led me astray. Perhaps we live surrounded by electric or seismic signals, which we have to interpret in good faith in order to know the truth about people's

characters. But I have to admit that, however sad Andrée's words had made me, in spite of everything I found it more satisfying that reality should at last conform to what my instincts had first intuitively felt, rather than confirm the wretched and cowardly optimism to which I had later yielded. I preferred life to live up to my intuitions; intuitions, moreover, which I had had the first day on the beach, when I had thought that these girls were the incarnation of vice and frenzied pleasure, and also on the evening when I had seen Albertine's governess take this passionate girl back into the little villa, as one pushes back into its cage a wild beast that nothing later, despite appearances, will be able to tame; did they not match what Bloch had told me when he made the world seem so beautiful, by showing me something which sent shivers down my spine every time I went out for a ride, every time I met a woman, that is, the universal nature of desire? Perhaps in spite of everything it had been for the best that I should only now encounter these first intuitions a second time, with the corroborating evidence. As long as my love for Albertine was still entirely intact, they would have hurt me too much, and it was better that only a trace of them should remain, my perpetual suspicion of things which I could not see and which, however, were continually occurring so close to me, and perhaps yet another, earlier, vaster trace, which was *my love itself*. For indeed, did not my choosing and falling in love with Albertine, despite all the denials of my reason, entail knowing Albertine in all her vileness? And even in the moments when our mistrust recedes, is love not its prolongation and its transformation? Is love not a proof of clear-sightedness (a proof unintelligible to the lover himself) since desire, always seeking what is most opposite to us, forces us to love what makes us suffer? The charm of a person, of her eyes, her mouth and her figure, certainly also contains just those elements which, unbeknown to ourselves, are most likely to make us unhappy, so that to feel ourselves drawn towards this person, to start to love her, is, however innocent we claim her to be, already to start reading between the lines all her misdeeds, all her betrayals.

And did those charms which, in order to attract me, were thus embodied in the noxious,[22] dangerous, fatal parts of the person, have a causal relationship with these secret poisons more direct than that which the luxuriant attractions of some venomous flowers have with their poisonous secretions? Perhaps, I thought, it was Albertine's vice itself, the cause of my later suffering, which had produced in Albertine her frank and generous manner, creating the illusion that one enjoyed with her the same loyal and unrestrained camaraderie as with a man, just as a parallel vice had produced in M. de Charlus a feminine subtlety of wit and sensibility. In the midst of the most utter blindness, our perspicacity subsists in the very guise of predilection and tenderness, so that it is wrong in love to talk of a bad choice, since, as soon as there is a choice, it can be only a bad one. 'Did these walks in the Buttes-Chaumont take place when you came here to call for her?' I asked Andrée. 'Oh, no, from the day when Albertine went home with you from Balbec, except for what I've told you about, she never did anything with me again. She would not even allow me to mention such things to her any more. – But my dear Andrée, why keep on lying? Quite by chance, for I try never to pry, I learned in the minutest detail that Albertine did that kind of thing, and to be more precise, at the seaside, with a laundry-maid, only a few days before her death. – Ah, perhaps, after she had left you, I don't know. She sensed that she had not been able to win back your confidence and never would be able to again.' These last words overwhelmed me. Then I thought again about the evening with the syringa and remembered that a fortnight or so later, as my jealousy kept switching from one object to another, I had asked Albertine if she had ever had a relationship with Andrée and that she had replied: 'Oh, never! Of course I adore Andrée; I feel great affection for her, but as for a sister, and even if I had the inclinations that you seem to imagine, she's the last person that I would think of for that. I can swear on anything you like, on my aunt, on my poor mother's grave.' I had believed her. And yet even if I had not been put on my guard by the contradiction between her former partial confessions to things which she had later denied as soon as she realized that I was not indifferent to them, I ought to have remembered Swann, convinced that M. de Charlus's friendships were platonic and affirming this to me on the evening of the very day that I had seen the tailor and the Baron in the courtyard; I ought to have realized that there are two worlds, one overlapping the other, one constituted by the things that the best and sincerest people say, and behind it the world composed by the series of these same people's actions; so that when a married woman says of a young man, 'Oh, it's perfectly true that I am terribly fond of him, but it's something very innocent, very pure, I can swear to you on my parents' memory,' we ought, instead of harbouring any doubts, to swear to ourselves that she has probably just emerged from the bathroom where she hurriedly retires after each tryst with the young man, in order to avoid having children. The spray of syringa made me feel mortally sad and also the fact that Albertine could have thought, could have told people, that I was deceitful and hated her; and, more than anything perhaps, her lies, which were so unexpected that I found it difficult to reconcile them with my way of thinking. One day she had told me that she had been to an airfield, where the pilot was a friend of hers (doubtless to divert my suspicions away from women, thinking that I would be less jealous of men), that she had been amused to see how entranced Andrée had been by the pilot and how he had flattered Albertine, so much so that Andrée had wanted to take a flight in the aeroplane with him. But this had been entirely invented, Andrée had never been to this airfield, etc.

By the time Andrée had left it was time for dinner. 'You'll never guess who came to visit me for at least three hours,' said my mother. I say three hours, it could have been longer, she arrived almost at the same time as my first guest, who was Mme Cottard, and sat there motionless while all my callers – more than thirty of them – were coming and going, and left me only a quarter of an hour ago. If you hadn't been with your friend Andrée I would have had someone fetch you. – Well, then, who was it? – Someone who never pays calls. – The Princess of Parma? – I do declare that my son is more intelligent than I would have thought. You spoil the pleasure of making you guess a name, you get it first time. – Did she apologize for being so cold yesterday? – No, that would have been stupid. The visit itself was her apology; your poor grandmother would have really appreciated it. It appears that she asked her footman at about two o'clock to find out if I had an at-home day. They told her that today was the day and up she came.' My first reaction, which I did not dare reveal to my mother, was that the Princess of Parma, who the day before had been immersed in the company of some of her closest and most illustrious lady-friends, those with whom she best loved to converse, had felt no need to hide the irritation she had felt on seeing my mother walk in. And this coldness, which moreover all the Guermantes had generally adopted, was absolutely in the tradition of great German ladies and they thought to make amends for it with scrupulous politeness. But my mother thought, and later I came to share her opinion, that the Princess of Parma had quite simply failed to recognize her and thought she need take no notice of her, but that after my mother had left she had learned who she was, whether from the Duchesse de Guermantes, whom my mother had met downstairs, or from the list of names which the footmen had requested of the lady visitors at the door before inscribing them in their register and allowing them to enter. She had thought it would be impolite to say to my mother or ask someone else to, 'I did not recognize you,' but, in a fashion no less suited to the rules of etiquette of the German principalities and the manners of the Guermantes than my first version, she had thought that a visit, an exceptional gesture by her Highness, and especially a visit lasting several hours, would transmit a similar message to my mother in indirect but equally expressive terms, which was in fact the result. But I did not want to waste time asking my mother for an account of the Princess's visit, since I had just remembered several queries concerning Albertine which I had wanted to put to Andrée but had forgotten. How little I knew, would ever know, may I say, on the subject of Albertine, the only subject whose details could really have interested me or were at least starting to interest me again from time to time! For man is a creature of no fixed age, a creature who has the ability to become years younger in only a few seconds and who, surrounded by walls formed by the periods of time that he has lived through, floats around in their midst but as in a pool whose level keeps constantly changing, thus putting him within reach now of one time period, now of another. I wrote to Andrée asking her to come back. She was not free until a week later. Almost as soon as she had arrived I asked her: 'Look, since you claim that Albertine no longer did that kind of thing when she was living here, you must think that she left me so as to be freer to indulge, but who was the girl-friend? – No, absolutely not, that was not the reason at all. – So was it because I was too unpleasant? – No, I don't think so. I think she was forced to leave you by her aunt, who had ideas for her with a "rascal" you know about, that man you called "the Also-ran", the young man who loved Albertine and had asked for her hand. Seeing that you were not going to marry her, they were afraid that her scandalously protracted stay with you might prevent that young man from marrying her. Mme Bontemps, who was constantly harried by the young man's friends and relations, called Albertine back to her side. Deep down Albertine needed her uncle and aunt and, when she realized that they were presenting her with a *fait accompli*, she left you.' In my jealousy I had never thought of this explanation but only of Albertine's desires for women and of ways of keeping her under surveillance; I had forgotten that Mme Bontemps also existed and that she might have eventually found strange something that my mother had found shocking from the outset. At least Mme Bontemps feared that it might shock the potential fiancé that she was holding in reserve for her like a pear to slake her thirst, in case I did not marry

her. For Albertine, despite what Andrée's mother had previously thought, had in fact found a fine bourgeois match. And on those occasions when Albertine had wanted to visit Mme Verdurin, had spoken to her in secret, or had been so annoyed that I had been to one of Mme Verdurin's receptions without telling her, the intrigue between her and Mme Verdurin had been devised in order to allow her to meet, not Mme Vinteuil, but the nephew who was in love with Albertine and on whose behalf Mme Verdurin did not aspire to a rich marriage, taking her satisfaction in working to arrange one of those marriages which are surprising on the part of certain families if one does not entirely understand their mentality. Now, I had never given a second thought to this nephew, who had perhaps been the pioneer thanks to whom I had been kissed by her on the first occasion. And in place of all the layers of anxiety about Albertine that I had constructed I had to substitute a different one or overlay it, since it did not necessarily exclude them, just as a taste for women does not prevent women from marrying. Was this marriage the real reason for Albertine's departure and had she from self-respect so as not to seem to depend on her aunt or seem to be forcing me to marry her, preferred not to say so? I started to realize that the systematic explanation of a single action by multiple causes, which Albertine skilfully deployed in her relationships with her girl-friends when she led each of them to believe that it was for her alone that she had called, was no more than a rather artificial and self-conscious symbol of the different aspects that any act takes on according to the point of view from which we consider it. This was neither the first nor the last time that I felt astonishment and a kind of shame at never once having thought that Albertine was living with me in a false situation which could embarrass her aunt. How often has it happened to me, after trying to understand a relationship between two people and the problems that it entails, that I have suddenly heard a third party reveal his own attitude, since he had had even closer links than I with one of the couple, an attitude which might even have been at the heart of their problems! And if their actions are always so indeterminate, how could people themselves not be so? Listening to those who claimed that Albertine was a schemer who had tried to get herself married off first to one man then to another, it is not difficult to suppose how they would have qualified her life with me. And yet in my opinion she had been a victim, perhaps not an entirely innocent victim, but in that case guilty for different reasons, in respect of vices which nobody mentioned.

But the most important thing to admit is this: although, on the one hand, lying is often a trait of character, it is, on the other hand, in women who would not otherwise be liars, a natural defence, at first spontaneous and then gradually more organized, against that sudden danger which is capable of destroying anyone's life: love. Then again, it is not entirely due to chance if intellectual and sensitive men always offer themselves to insensitive and inferior women and yet still hold them dear, nor if the proof that they are unloved does not cure them of being prepared to sacrifice all in order to keep such a creature by their side. In saying that such men need to suffer, I am telling the truth, while passing over the preliminary truths which would explain this – in a sense involuntary – need to suffer as their perfectly comprehensible consequence. Not to mention the fact that, since entirely consistent characters are rare, a highly intellectual and sensitive man will generally have little will-power, will be the plaything of habit and of that fear of suffering in the immediate future which dooms him to perpetual suffering and that in these conditions he will never wish to repudiate the woman who does not love him. We may be astonished that he is satisfied with so little love, but we should rather imagine the pain that is caused by the love which he himself feels. A pain which we must not pity too much, for the terrible turmoil caused by an unhappy love affair or the departure or death of a lover is like an attack of paralysis which at first lays us low, but after which the muscles tend gradually to recover their vital energy and elasticity. And yet this pain is not without its compensations. These intellectual and sensitive people are generally little inclined towards lying. Lies catch them all the more unawares in that, for all their great intelligence, they have to live in the real world, but rather than reacting vigorously, they continue to live in thrall to the pain that a woman has just inflicted on them rather than in the clear awareness of what she wanted, of what she did, of whom she loved, an awareness mostly the preserve of strong-willed characters, who require it so that they may face the future rather than lament the past. So these intellectual and sensitive people feel betrayed, without quite knowing why. Thus it is that the mediocre woman, whom we were astonished to see them love, enriches their universe far more than an intelligent woman would have done. Behind each of her words they suspect a lie; behind each house she says she has visited, another house, behind each action and person, another action, another person. Doubtless they do not know exactly which ones and have neither the energy nor perhaps even the opportunity to find out. A deceitful woman can use a very simple trick, without bothering to vary it, to delude a great number of people and even use it to delude the same person more than once, when he ought to have been able to see through it. All of which confronts the sensitive intellectual with a universe whose complex depths his jealousy would like to plumb and which are not without their fascination for his intellect.

Without quite counting myself among their number, I might perhaps, now that Albertine was dead, learn the secret of her life. But do these revelations, which occur only after a person's terrestrial life is over, not prove that nobody, deep down, believes in an after-life? If these revelations are true, we should fear the resentment of the person whose actions are uncovered as much on the day we will meet her in heaven as we feared it during her lifetime, when we felt bound to honour her secret. And if these revelations are false, made up because she is no longer here to give the lie to them, we should fear the wrath of the dead woman even more if we believed in heaven. But nobody does believe in it. Thus it was possible that a long debate between staying and leaving was staged in Albertine's heart, but that her decision turned on her aunt or on that young man, rather than on women, whom she may not even have taken into account. The most weighty consideration which I faced was that Andrée, who however no longer had anything to hide from me about Albertine's morals, swore to me that there was nothing of this kind between Albertine on the one hand and Mlle de Vinteuil and her girl-friend on the other (Albertine was unaware of her own inclinations when she first met them and they, for fear of mistaking the object of their desire – a fear that leads us into as many errors as does desire itself – considered her to be very hostile to that sort of thing. Perhaps much later they might have learned the conformity of her inclinations with theirs, but by then they knew Albertine too well and Albertine knew them too well even to think about indulging in such things together.) In short, I was still no closer to understanding why Albertine had left me. If a woman's face is difficult to capture with the eyes, which cannot take in the whole of its mobile surface, or with the lips and even less with the memory, if her social position in relation to our own social level clouds our appreciation, how much thicker a curtain is drawn between those of her actions which we do perceive and her motives! People's motives lie at a deeper level, which we cannot perceive, and moreover engender other actions, which we fail to recognize and which are often in absolute contradiction with those that we do recognize. Was there any period in history when there was some public figure, believed saintly by his friends, who has not been exposed for committing forgery, robbing the state or betraying his country? How often every year is some great nobleman robbed by the steward whom he has raised on his estate, whom he would have sworn was an honest man and who perhaps was one! And yet how much more impenetrable does this curtain which veils others' motives become if we feel love for that person! For it confuses our judgment and also the actions of the woman, who, feeling herself loved, ceases suddenly to attach any value to things that otherwise she would have treasured, such as wealth, for instance. It may also tempt her partly to feign this disdain for wealth in the hope of obtaining more by causing us to suffer. Striking a bargain may be another factor, along with others, as may even material events in her life, an intrigue that she has confided to no one for fear that someone might reveal it to us, an intrigue which, despite this precaution, many people might well have discovered if they had had the same passionate desire to find out as we did, while exercising greater independence of mind and arousing less suspicion in the person concerned, an intrigue that was perhaps not unknown to certain persons – but persons whom we neither know nor know how to identify. And among all the reasons for her attitude towards us being inexplicable, one must include those individual traits of character, whether deriving from self-neglect, from hatred, from love of freedom, from sudden attacks of anger, or from fear of what certain people might think, which may drive a person to do the opposite of what we would have expected. And then there are the differences in background and education, which we prefer not to credit because, when we talk to each other, our language effaces them, but which, when each one of us is alone again, return to guide our several actions from such opposed viewpoints that no real encounter is possible.

'But my dear Andrée, you are lying again. Just remember – you admitted it to me yourself, I telephoned you the day before, don't you remember? – how badly Albertine had wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's reception on the day that Mlle Vinteuil was due to appear but hid it from me as something that I was not supposed to know. – Yes, but Albertine had no way of knowing that Mlle Vinteuil would be there.' 'Really? You told me yourself that she had met Mme Verdurin a few

days earlier. Besides, Andrée, there is no point in our deceiving each other. I found a note this morning in Albertine's room, a message from Mme Verdurin urging her to come to her reception.' And I showed her this note, which Françoise had managed to bring to my attention a few days before Albertine's departure by placing it right on top of her affairs so that I would see it, and leaving it there, I fear, in order to make Albertine think that I had been rifling through her possessions or at least to let her know that I had seen this note. And I often wondered if this stratagem, devised by Françoise, had not strongly contributed to Albertine's departure, making her see that she could keep nothing private from me and feel discouraged and beaten. I showed her the note: *I am unrepentant, my perfectly normal family feelings are ample excuse*. 'You know, Andrée, don't you, that Albertine always used to say that Mlle Vinteuil's girl-friend was in fact a mother or a sister for her. – But you have misunderstood this note. The person that Mme Verdurin wanted Albertine to meet was not her girl-friend at all but the fiancé, "the also-ran", and the family feelings were those felt by Mme Verdurin for this scoundrel, who is in fact her nephew. And yet I think that Albertine did find out later that Mlle Vinteuil was due to attend, Mme Verdurin might have told her in passing. Of course she was pleased by the idea that she would see her friend, and it recalled past happiness but only in the way that you would be pleased, if you were going somewhere, to know that Elstir would be there at the same time, but no more, not even as much. No, if Albertine did not want to tell you why she wanted to go to see Mme Verdurin, it was because there was a rehearsal to which Mme Verdurin had invited just a very few people, including this nephew whom you had met at Balbec, whom Mme Bontemps wanted Albertine to marry and whom Albertine wanted to talk to. He was quite a rascal. And then there is no need to look for so many explanations,' added Andrée, 'God knows how I loved Albertine and how good-natured she was but, especially since she had had typhoid fever (a year before you met us all), she was a real tearaway. She suddenly became disgusted with what she had been doing, she wanted to change, and at a moment's notice, although doubtless she didn't even know why herself. Do you remember the first year you came to Balbec, the year when you met us all? One fine day she got someone to send her a telegram calling her back to Paris, with hardly any time for us to help her pack. But she had no reason to leave. All the excuses that she gave out were false. Paris would be desperately dull for her at that time of year. We were all still in Balbec. The golfing season was not over and even the trials for the championship cup which she had so set her heart on had not finished. She would surely have won it. There was only a week to go. But there you are, off she went, at a gallop. I've often asked her about it since. She said herself that she didn't know why she left, that she missed her little home (Paris as her "little home", can you believe it?), that she did not like Balbec, that she thought there were people there who were making fun of her.' And I thought that the element of truth in what Andrée was saying was that, if differences between minds explain the different impressions produced on one person and another by the same work of art and differences in feeling explain the impossibility of persuading someone to love you if they don't, there are also differences of character and even differing character traits within a single individual which may motivate an action. Then I stopped musing over this analysis and I reminded myself how difficult it is in life to know the truth. I had of course noticed Albertine's desire to go to Mme Verdurin's, and her dissimulation of it, and I had not been mistaken. But just as we grasp one fact, other facts – the underside of a tapestry, the secret behind an act or an intrigue or indeed the intelligence of the heart – of which we never see more than appearances, escape us, and we see only flat shadows pass, of which we say: this is it, that is what it is; it is because of her or some other person. The revelation that Mlle Vinteuil was due to come had seemed to me to be the explanation, especially since Albertine had made the first move in mentioning it to me. And later had she not refused to swear to me that she took no pleasure in Mlle Vinteuil's presence? And here on the subject of the young man in question I recalled what I had forgotten. A short time previously, while Albertine was living with me, I had met him and, in contrast with his attitude in Balbec, he had been extremely friendly, even affectionate, with me and had begged me to allow him to call on me, although I had refused for a number of reasons. Now, however, I realized that since he quite clearly knew that Albertine was living in my house, he wanted to be in my good books in order to have a free hand to come to see her and take her away from me and I concluded that he was a wretch. Yet when some time later I had this young man's first works performed for me, I am sure that I continued to think that, if he had been so keen to call on me, it was on account of Albertine and although I blamed him for that, I remembered that if formerly I had set out for Doncières to see Saint-Loup, it was in fact because I was enamoured of Mme de Guermantes. It is true that the two cases were not the same: since Saint-Loup was not in love with Mme de Guermantes, there may well have been an element of duplicity in my affections but no treachery. But afterwards I thought that we also feel affection for the person who owns the object of our desire, even if he himself also loves that same object. In this case of course we should struggle to resist a friendship that must lead directly to betrayal. And I believe that this is what I have always done. But in the case of those who are not strong enough to do so, we cannot say that the friendship which they display for the owner of the object of their desire is purely tactical, for they sincerely feel it and because of this they show it with such ardour that, once the treacherous deed has been perpetrated, it causes the deceived husband or lover to declare with indignation and stupor: 'If only you could have heard the protestations of affection that the wretch lavished on me! That someone should rob a man of his wealth, I can understand. But that he should feel the diabolical need first to assure him of his friendship shows a degree of ignominy and perversity that beggars the imagination.' And yet, there is no perverse pleasure involved nor even any entirely lucid untruth. The affection of this sort that Albertine's pseudo-fiancé had shown me that day had yet another excuse, for it was more complex than a simple offshoot of his love for Albertine. It was only very recently that he realized, and admitted to himself, that he wanted to be acknowledged as an intellectual. For the first time pleasures other than those of sport or debauchery existed for him. The fact that I was held in esteem by Elstir and Bergotte, that Albertine had perhaps spoken to him of my opinions of writers, which led her to believe that I could have been a writer myself, made me suddenly seem to him (to the new man that he at last perceived himself to be) someone interesting whom it would be pleasant to get to know better, someone in whom he would have liked to confide his plans and perhaps whom he might ask to introduce him to Elstir. As a result, he was sincere when he asked if he might call on me, expressing a personal sympathy, to which intellectual interest mingled with reflections of Albertine gave added sincerity. Of course it was not for that reason alone that he was so keen to call on me and would have dropped everything in order to be able to do so. But this last reason, which did hardly more than raise the first two to a level of paroxysmal passion, was perhaps unknown to him and the two others did really exist, as Albertine, when she wanted to go to see Mme Verdurin on the afternoon of the rehearsal, may well have really felt a perfectly honourable pleasure in seeing her childhood friends again, who were no more immoral in her eyes than she was in theirs, chatting with them, showing them by her very presence at the Verdurins' that the poor little girl whom they had known was now invited to a noted salon, as well as the pleasure that she may well have felt in listening to Vinteuil's music. If all that was true, the blush that had come to Albertine's cheeks when I had mentioned Mlle Vinteuil came from the fact that I had done so on the subject of the very reception which she had hoped to conceal from me because of the marriage proposal, of which I was supposed to know nothing. Albertine's refusal to swear to me that she had felt no pleasure at seeing Mlle Vinteuil that afternoon had at the time increased my torment and strengthened my suspicions, but proved to me retrospectively that she had wanted to be sincere and even in an innocent matter, perhaps precisely because it was innocent. There remained, however, what Andrée had told me about her relationship with Albertine. Perhaps, however, even without going so far as to believe that Andrée was making it all up solely in order to prevent me from feeling happy and from believing myself superior to her, yet I could still suppose that she had somewhat exaggerated what she used to do with Albertine and that Albertine, narrowing her analytic criteria and making casuistic use of certain definitions that I had foolishly formulated on the subject, also rather understated what she had done with Andrée, finding that her relationship with Andrée did not fall into the category of what she needed to confess and that she could deny it without telling a lie. But why should I believe that it was she rather than Andrée who had been lying? Truth and life are indeed an uphill path, and, without ever really getting to know them, I felt that the final impression which they left me was one where sadness was perhaps still overshadowed by fatigue.[24]

CHAPTER 3

Staying in Venice

My mother had taken me with her to spend a few weeks in Venice, and – since we can find beauty not only in the humblest but also in the most precious things – I sampled there impressions analogous to those that I had so often felt previously in Combray, but transposed into an entirely different, richer mode. When someone came to open my shutters at ten o'clock in the morning, I saw the glow, not of the slates of St Hilaire splendidly transfigured into black marble, but of the gold of the angel on the bell-tower of St Mark's. With outstretched arms, and so gleaming with sunlight that it was almost impossible to behold him directly, he promised me joy half an hour later on the Piazzetta, a promise more reliable than his previous mission to bring tidings of Great Joy to men of good will. He was all that I could glimpse, as long as I lay in bed, but since the world is little more than a vast sundial where a single sunlit segment allows us to tell the time, from the very first morning I thought of the shops in the church square in Combray which were always about to close when I arrived for Mass on Sundays, while the smell of the straw in the market rankled under the burgeoning heat of the sun. But by the second day, what I saw when I awoke, and my reason for rising (because it had come to take the place of memories of Combray in my memory and my desires), were the impressions of my first day in Venice, Venice whose everyday life was no less real than that of Combray and where it was a pleasure, as in Combray, to go down into the festive street on Sunday mornings, but a street which was a whole stretch of liquid sapphire, cooled by soft breezes and so deep-dyed that my tired eyes could relax and look steadily at it with no fear that it might fade. Just as in Combray's rue de l'Oiseau the good citizens emerged from houses aligned side by side in a row along the main street, so too did the inhabitants of this new city; but the Combray houses' habit of casting a little shadow at their foot was entrusted to palaces of porphyry and jasper, over whose arched doorways heads of bearded gods jutted out of alignment, like the door knockers in Combray, and their reflections darkened the tones, not of brown earth, but of splendid blue waters. The shadow that would have flowed from the awning of the dress shop or the hairdresser's sign in Combray became, on the Piazza, the little blue flowers that the relief of a Renaissance façade cast at its foot over the desert of the sunlit paving stones, although it is true that, in Venice as in Combray, when the sun beat down more strongly, they were forced to lower their shutters on the banks of their canal. But these shutters were deployed between the quatrefoils and the tendrils of Gothic windows. You could say the same of our own hotel window, at whose balustrade my mother waited for me, gazing at the canal with a patience that she would never have shown before, in Combray, in the days when she invested in me hopes that had never been rewarded and wanted to hide from me the extent of her love for me. Now she clearly felt that a show of coldness would change nothing, and the affection which she lavished on me resembled the food that is no longer forbidden to a sick person when we realize that they have no chance of recovery. To be sure, the modest features that gave my aunt Léonie's window overlooking the rue de l'Oiseau its individual character – its asymmetry caused by the unequal distance between the two neighbouring windows, the excessive height of the wooden window-ledge, the bent handle that opened the shutters and the two swathes of shiny blue satin that were separated and held apart by tiebacks – could all find their echo in our hotel in Venice. There too I heard that special, eloquent language which helps us recognize from afar the dwelling where we come home to dine and which later remains in our memory like a testimony declaring that for a period of time this dwelling was ours; but in Venice the task of saying so devolved, not as in Combray and almost everywhere else, upon the simplest or even the ugliest things, but upon an ogive still half recalling its Arabic origins, on a façade that is reproduced in every illustrated book on art and cast in plaster in every museum, as one of the masterpieces of medieval domestic architecture; I glimpsed this ogive from far away, when I had only just passed by San Giorgio Maggiore, and as it caught sight of me, its soaring lancet arches supplemented its welcoming smile with a distinguished, superior, almost impenetrable gaze. And, because, behind its multicoloured marble balustrade, Mama waited for me, her face, while she read, surrounded by a light veil of tulle (as heart-rendingly white for me as her hair) which I sensed that my mother, on drying her eyes, had pinned to her straw hat partly in order to seem 'properly dressed' in the eyes of the hotel residents, but above all to seem to me to be less in mourning, less sad, almost consoled for the death of my grandmother; because, having not recognized me straight away, as soon as I called out to her from my gondola, she sent her love winging its way towards me, from the depths of her heart, a love that would cease only when it had no object left to sustain it, on the surface of the passionate gaze which she cast intensely in my direction, which she sought to enhance by forming her lips into a smile which seemed, within the frame and beneath the canopy of the more discreet smile of the ogive illuminated by the midday sun, to lean forward to embrace me, – because of that, this window has taken on in my memory the sweetness of things that played their part beside us just as a particular hour chimed, the same for us and them; and, however replete with admirable form its mullions may be, this illustrious window bears for me the familiar features of a man of genius frequented by chance for a month at a holiday resort and led to strike up a friendship with us, and if thereafter, each time I see a cast of this window in a museum, I have to fight back my tears, it is because it tells me quite simply the thing that I find most moving of all, 'I remember your mother very well.'

Then as I went to meet Mama, who had left the window, I felt the same sense of coolness on leaving the midday heat that I had experienced at Combray when I went up to my bedroom; but in Venice it was wafted by a sea breeze, and not up a small, narrow wooden staircase but up the noble surfaces of marble steps, constantly splashed with flashes of glaucous sunlight, adding the lesson of Veronese to the useful lesson of Chardin, which I had learned on a previous occasion. And since in Venice it is works of art and magnificent monuments that are entrusted with conveying the impressions of everyday life, it would distort the nature of the city, if, on the pretext that the most famous examples of the Venice of certain painters are coldly aesthetic (except for some superb studies by Maxime Dethomas[1]), we were to represent only its impoverished aspects, at the points where its habitual splendour fades, and if, in trying to make Venice more familiar and true, we were to make it look like Aubervilliers. Reacting quite naturally to the artificial Venice produced by bad painters, we could reproach the greatest artists with studying only the Venice that they found more realistic, with its humble campi and deserted side canals. This was the Venice that I explored in the afternoons, if I did not go out with my mother. For this was where I found it easier to meet women of the people, match-sellers and bead-stringers, glass- or lace-workers, young working-girls whose long black, fringed shawls were no barrier to my love, since I had nearly forgotten Albertine, yet some were more attractive than others, for I did still remember her a little. I wonder if anyone could have told me exactly how far, in this passionate perusal of Venetian women, what was due to them, and what to Albertine, or my former desire to travel to Venice. Our slightest desire, although striking its own, unique chord, contains within it the fundamental notes on which our whole lives are based. And if perchance we suppressed one or other of these notes, even unheard, even unconscious, a note bearing absolutely no relation to the object of our pursuit, we would none the less feel our whole desire for this object fade away. There was much that I did not attempt to elucidate in the midst of my excited pursuit of Venetian girls. My gondola followed the side canals, as if the mysterious hand of a genie were guiding me through the byways of this oriental city, the more I advanced along the canals the more they seemed to show me the way, slicing through a neighbourhood that they divided, as their narrow and arbitrarily traced furrows barely perturbed the tall houses and their small Moorish windows; and like a magical guide holding a candle between his fingers to light my passage, they cast ahead of them a ray of sunlight and opened a pathway for it. You could sense that between the humble dwellings that the little canal had just divided, and which otherwise would have formed a compact whole, there was so little space available that a church bell-tower or a garden trellis would directly overhang the *rio*, as in a flooded city. But for the churches, as for the gardens which underwent the same process of transposition as occurred in the Grand Canal, the sea was so willing to act as a means of communication, like a side or main street, that on either side of the Canaletto, churches rose out of the water in this old, crowded and poor neighbourhood. They had become busy, humble parishes, openly displaying the evidence of their run-down state and their frequentation by numerous people of the lower classes; thus the gardens traversed by the trough of the canal trailed their startled leaves and fruit down to the water's edge, and thus on the corner of a house whose rough-hewn sandstone was still as raw as if freshly cut, little boys, caught off-

guard but maintaining their balance, dangled their seaworthy legs like those of sailors sitting on a swinging bridge whose two halves had just parted, letting the sea flow between them. Sometimes a more beautiful monument appeared, popping up like a present in a lucky dip, a small ivory temple with its Corinthian columns and its pediment adorned with an allegorical statue, somewhat out of place in the midst of the everyday things with which it was entangled, for although we made way for it to pass, the peristyle that the canal had allotted to it still looked more like a quay for unloading fruit and vegetables. I had the impression, further enhanced by my desire, that I was not out of doors, but rather that I was entering some increasingly secret place, for on every occasion I found something new moving into place to one side of me or the other, a small monument or an unsuspected *campo* still endowed with that air of surprise affected by beautiful things which we see for the first time but whose aims and functions we do not yet understand. I returned on foot by the narrow calli, stopping to talk to working-girls, as Albertine might have done before me, and I wished that she were with me. Yet they could not be the same girls; at the time when Albertine was in Venice they would still have been children. But whereas previously I had been unfaithful through cowardice in one way or another to each of the desires that I had at first believed unique, since I had sought an analogous object rather than the original which I no longer hoped to find, now I quite deliberately sought out women that Albertine had not known in person, and even avoided those women that I had previously desired. It is true that I often recalled, with the violence of unassuaged desire, some girl from Méséglise or Paris, like the milkmaid seen at the foot of a hill one morning on my first trip to Balbec. Alas, however, I remembered them as they were then, that is, such as they certainly were no longer. In this way, where formerly I would have been led to inflect my impression of the constancy of desire by seeking to replace a convent schoolgirl that I had lost sight of by a similar schoolgirl, now when I sought out the adolescent girls that had disturbed me or Albertine, I had to allow yet another exception to the rule of the uniqueness of desire; those I now must chase were not the girls who were sixteen at the time, but those who were sixteen now, for what I now loved, despite the specific qualities of the person, and what escaped me, was youth itself. I realized that the youth of the girls whom I had known existed only in the fires of my memory, and that it was not the girls themselves, however desirous of obtaining them I was when my memory presented them to me, that I should pluck, if I truly wanted to harvest the season's youth in full flower.

The sun was still high in the sky when I went to meet my mother on the Piazzetta. We hailed a gondola. 'How your poor grandmother would have loved such simple elegance!' Mama said to me, pointing out the Doges' Palace as it contemplated the sea, imbued with the ideas that the architect had entrusted it with and which it faithfully conserved, as it mounted a silent watch for its absent Doges. 'She would even have liked the delicacy of those shades of pink, because there is nothing mawkish about them. How your grandmother would have loved Venice, and how familiar, how close to nature, she would have found all this beauty, so full of things that it needs no arrangement, offering itself in its own guise, the Doges' Palace with its cubic forms, the columns that you say come from Herod's Palace, in the middle of the Piazzetta and, even less calculated, placed as if space were lacking elsewhere, the pillars of St John of Acre and the horses on the balcony of St Mark's! Your grandmother would have been as delighted to see the sun set on the Doges' Palace as over a mountain-top.' And there was indeed some truth in what my mother said, for, while the gondola brought us back up the Grand Canal, we watched the line of palaces as we passed between them reflecting the changing light and the passing day on their pink flanks, changing with them, less after the fashion of private dwellings and famous monuments than that of a chain of marble cliffs beneath which we travel by boat in the evening to watch the sun set. Thus the dwellings disposed on either side of the canal reminded us of natural sites, but inspired by a nature using the human imagination to create its works. Yet at the same time (because of the constantly urban nature of the impressions offered by Venice, despite being set almost out at sea, on its waves where the ebb and flow of the tide are perceptible twice a day and which first at high tide flood over, and then at low tide uncover the magnificent external staircases of the palaces), as we would have done in Paris on the boulevards, on the Champs-Élysées or in the Bois or any wide, fashionable avenue, we passed in the misty evening light the most beautiful women, nearly all foreign, leaning languidly on the cushions of their floating equipage, waiting in line, stopping at a palace, asking if the friend that they wanted to call on was at home and, while awaiting the reply, they prepared their card just in case, in order to leave it as they would have done at the door of the Hôtel de Guermantes, consulting their guide-book to check the period and the style of the palace, even as they were rocked all the while by the eddies of these sparkling, spirited waters, as if on the crest of a blue wave which reared in panic to feel itself caught between the dancing gondola and the resounding marble. And thus even an outing to call on a friend or to do some shopping was not only three things in one but still unique, in this Venice where the slightest social call takes on at once both the form and the charm of a visit to a museum and that of a naval manoeuvre.

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal had been converted into hotels, and, whether because we fancied a change or from politeness towards Mme Sazerat, whom we had chanced to encounter – as one always meets some unforeseen, inopportune acquaintance on any journey – and whom Mama had invited out, we wished to try dinner in a different hotel from our own, one where they claimed that the cuisine was better. While my mother was paying the gondolier and escorting Mme Sazerat into the private room that she had booked, I preferred to take a look at the main dining-hall of the restaurant, with its fine marble pillars, once entirely covered with frescoes, which had since been badly restored. Two waiters were conversing in Italian, which I translate as follows:

'Are the old couple going to eat in their room? They never give notice. What a nuisance, I don't know whether to reserve their table (*non so se bisogna conservar loro la tavola*). Oh well, who cares if they do come down and find that it's taken! I can't understand why we invite *forestieri* like them to stay in such a chic hotel. They are not our kind of people.'

Despite his disdain, the waiter would have preferred to know what decision to take about the table, and he was on the point of sending the liftboy up to their floor to find out, when, before he had time to ask, the answer was given: he had just spotted the old lady entering the room. Despite the sad and tired air that the weight of passing years bestows, and despite a sort of red, leprous eczema covering her face, I had no difficulty in recognizing beneath her bonnet, in her black tunic, created by W***,[2] but looking to the uninitiated as if it belonged to an old concierge, the Marquise de Villeparisis. As chance would have it, the place where I stood studying the remains of a fresco on the fine marble wall was behind the very table where Mme de Villeparisis had just sat down.

'So M. de Villeparisis will soon be down. During the month that they've spent here they have only once eaten separately,' said the waiter.

I was wondering with which of her relatives it was she was travelling and whom they were calling M. de Villeparisis, when, a few moments later, I saw him approach her table and sit down beside her. It was her former lover, M. de Norpois.

His advanced age had affected the timbre of his voice, but on the other hand had made his language, formerly so reserved, truly intemperate. Perhaps the cause should be sought in the ambitions that he felt he no longer had time to achieve and which filled him with all the more vehemence and excitement; perhaps in the fact that, abandoned by the political life which he had longed to engage in, he believed, with the naïvety born of desire, that his withering criticism of those he aspired to replace would drive them into retirement. Thus we see politicians convinced that the cabinet to which they have not been appointed cannot last out the week. It would in any case be excessive to claim that M. de Norpois had entirely forgotten the traditional usage of diplomatic language. As soon as conversation turned to 'affairs of state', he became once more, as we shall see, the man whom we previously knew, but for the rest of the time he held forth about one rival or another with the senile violence that drives some octogenarians to run after women, despite being in no position to cause them harm.

For a few moments Mme de Villeparisis remained silent as if an old woman's fatigue made it difficult for her to return to the present from reminiscence of the past. Then, with the sort of quite practical question that bears the hallmark of the aftermath of reciprocal love, she asked:

'Did you go to Salviati's?'[3]

'Yes.'

'Will they send it tomorrow?'

'I brought the bowl home myself. I'll show you it after dinner. Let's look at the menu.'

'Have you instructed the brokers to deal with my Suez shares?'

'No, the stock market has no time for the moment to invest in anything but oil. But there is no cause for concern, given the excellent state of the economy. Here's the menu. There's mullet for the first course. Shall we have some?

'I'll have it myself, but you know that you mustn't. Ask for a risotto instead. Except that they don't know how to cook it.'

'That doesn't matter. Waiter, bring some mullet for Madam to start with and a risotto for me.'

They fell silent again for a while.

'By the way, I've brought you some newspapers, the *Corriere della Sera,* the *Gazzetta del Popolo*,[4] etcetera. Did you know that a diplomatic reshuffle is confidently predicted and that the prime scapegoat is rumoured to be Paléologue,[5] who is notoriously inadequate in Serbia? They say he'll be replaced by Lozé,[6] which would leave a vacancy in Constantinople. But', M. de Norpois hastened to add bitterly, 'for an embassy of this scope, where it is quite evident that come what may Great Britain will always have to be seated at the head of the negotiating table, it would be advisable to seek out men of experience better equipped to detect the snares laid by the enemies of our British ally than the diplomats of the new school, who are bound to fall headlong into the traps.' The irritable loquacity with which M. de Norpois uttered these last words was inspired above all by the fact that the newspapers, instead of mentioning his name as he had advised them, gave as 'leading candidate' a youthful minister of foreign affairs. 'God knows what kind of tortuous manœuvres they use to prevent men of maturity from placing themselves *in loco* and *situ* of more or less incapable new recruits! I have known quite enough of all these so-called diplomats of the empirical school, who placed all their hopes in a trial run that soon ran out of steam. There is no doubt at all, if the government so lacks wisdom as to place the reins of state in unsteady hands, that there will always be a conscript ready to answer the call of duty with the cry of "present!". But, who knows' (and M. de Norpois appeared to know all too well of whom he was talking) 'whether the same reaction might not be obtained if peradventure one were to seek out some veteran replete with knowledge and skill. As I see it, and everyone will have his own interpretation, the Constantinople posting should be accepted only on settlement of our outstanding problems with Germany. We owe nothing to anyone, and it is unacceptable that every six months we should be inveigled over our dead bodies into fraudulent procedures in order to pronounce some spurious acquittal, advocated as usual by a venal press. This must cease, and it is natural that a man of great value, who has proved his worth, a man who, dare I say, has the ear of the Emperor, should enjoy more authority than any to bring the conflict to its ultimate conclusion.'

A gentleman who had finished dining greeted M. de Norpois.

'Why, if it isn't Prince Foggi!' said the Marquis.

'I'm afraid that I'm not sure who you mean,' sighed Mme de Villeparisis.

'But of course you do, it's Prince Odon. He's the actual brother-in-law of your cousin Mme Doudeauville. Surely you remember that I hunted with him at Bonnétable?'

'Oh, Odon! Is he the one that went in for painting?'

'Not in the least, he's the one who married the sister of the Grand Duke of N***.'

M. de Norpois held Mme de Villeparisis steadily in his gaze while he said all this, with the rather disagreeable tone of a teacher displeased with his pupil.

When the Prince had finished his coffee and left his table, M. de Norpois rose and walked meaningfully towards him, then, moving to one side with a lordly gesture, introduced him to Mme de Villeparisis. And during the few minutes that the Prince stood talking to them, M. de Norpois's blue eyes subjected Mme de Villeparisis to the relentless surveillance borne of the indulgence or sanctions of a former lover, and above all of fear that she might indulge in one of the lapses in linguistic propriety which he appreciated but dreaded. Whenever she said something inaccurate to the Prince, he corrected her remarks and looked straight into the obedient eyes of the subjugated Marquise with the sustained intensity of a hypnotist.

A waiter came to tell me that my mother was waiting for me. I went over to her and apologized to Mme Sazerat, explaining that I had been amused to see Mme de Villeparisis. On hearing this name, Mme Sazerat turned pale and seemed about to faint. She struggled to keep her composure:

'Mme de Villeparisis, Mlle de Bouillon?' she enquired.

'Yes.'

'Couldn't I look at her for a moment? I have dreamed of this all my life.'

'Yes, but don't take too long, Madam, for she will soon have finished dining. But why should she interest you so?'

'Because it was Mme de Villeparisis, the Duchesse d'Havré by her first marriage, as beautiful as an angel but as wicked as a witch, who drove my father mad, ruined him, then left him forthwith. And yet! Although she acted like a common whore and caused me and my family to live in straitened circumstances in Combray, now that my father is dead, I console myself with the thought that he loved the most beautiful woman of his day, and since I have never seen her, despite everything it will be a relief …'

I led Mme Sazerat, who was trembling with emotion, to the restaurant and pointed out Mme de Villeparisis.

But, like the blind, who direct their eyes everywhere but where they should, Mme Sazerat failed to focus her gaze on Mme de Villeparisis's dinner-table, and sought out another corner of the room.

'Well, she must have left, I can't see her where you say.'

And she continued to hunt for the detestable, adorable vision that had haunted her imagination for so long.

'No she hasn't, she's at the second table.'

'We must be starting our count from different ends. At what I call the second table there's only an old gentleman sitting beside a horrid little old lady with a red face and a hunchback.'

'That's her!'

Meanwhile, Mme de Villeparisis had asked M. de Norpois to invite Prince Foggi to be seated, and the three of them had struck up an amiable conversation. Politics were mentioned. The Prince declared that he was unconcerned by the fate of the cabinet and that he intended to stay in Venice for at least a week. He hoped that by then any ministerial crisis would have been averted.

At first Prince Foggi thought that these political issues were of no interest to M. de Norpois, for the latter, who had until then expressed himself so vehemently, had suddenly adopted an almost angelic silence, which seemed only likely to flower, if his voice were restored, into some melodious, innocent song by Mendelssohn or César Franck. The Prince also thought that this silence was due to the inhibitions of a Frenchman unwilling to discuss Italian affairs in the presence of an Italian. Here the Prince was entirely mistaken. In M. de Norpois's case, silence and an air of indifference had always been the sign not of inhibition but the customary prelude to his involvement in an important affair. As we have seen, the Marquis's goal was no less than Constantinople, and a prior settlement of the German question, in which matter he hoped to put pressure on the cabinet in Rome. Indeed the Marquis judged that his accomplishing an act bearing international repercussions might form a noble climax to his career, and perhaps even open the way to new honours, or tasks of a difficulty that he had not yet eschewed. For old age removes the ability to act, but not to desire. It is only in a third phase that those who live to a great age renounce desire, after being obliged

to abandon action. They no longer stand for such petty elections as that of President of the Republic, where they so often formerly strove to succeed. They are content merely to go out, to eat, and to read the newspapers. They have outlived themselves.

In order to put the Marquis at ease and show him that he considered him a compatriot, the Prince started to speak of possible successors to the present Prime Minister, who would have a difficult task ahead of them. Only when Prince Foggi had cited more than twenty names of politicians whom he considered of ministerial capacity, which the former ambassador listened to without moving, half-closing the lids of his blue eyes, did M. de Norpois finally break his silence to utter the words which were to fuel conversation in ambassadorial circles for twenty years to come and which later, when they had been forgotten, would be exhumed by some personality signing themselves 'an insider', or 'Testis'[7] or 'Machiavelli' in a newspaper where the very oblivion into which they had sunk provided the impetus to generate a new sensation. So, Prince Foggi having cited these twenty-odd names for the benefit of a diplomat who remained as silent and motionless as a deaf man, M de Norpois raised his head slightly and, using the formula that had inspired his most influential diplomatic interventions, albeit this time with exceptional boldness and less brevity, finally asked, 'And has nobody mentioned the name of M. Giolitti?'[8] On hearing these words, the scales fell away from Prince Foggi's eyes; he heard the murmuring of celestial voices. Then suddenly M. de Norpois started to talk of this and that, with no concern for the noise he was making, as when, after the last note of a sublime Beethoven aria has sounded, nobody minds speaking out loud or going to collect his coat from the cloakroom. He made the transition even more brutal by begging the Prince to transmit his respects to their Majesties the King and the Queen when next he might see them, a parting shot matching the effect of someone shouting at the end of a concert, 'Coachman Auguste, from the rue de Belloy!' We cannot say what were Prince Foggi's precise impressions. He was certainly delighted to have heard this masterpiece: 'And has nobody mentioned the name of M. Giolitti?' For M. de Norpois, whose finest qualities had been extinguished or disrupted by age, had none the less perfected as he grew older his 'air of bravado', as certain musicians, with most of their faculties in decline, acquire towards the end of their days a perfect virtuosity in chamber music which they had not previously possessed.

At all events, Prince Foggi, who had intended to spend two weeks in Venice, returned to Rome that very same day and was received a few days later in audience by the King to discuss some properties, which I believe we have mentioned, that the Prince possessed in Sicily. The cabinet hung on for longer than anyone had predicted. When it fell, the King took advice from various statesmen as to who should lead the new cabinet. Then he sent for M. Giolitti, who accepted. Three months later a newspaper related Prince Foggi's interview with M. de Norpois. The conversation was reported in the terms that we have given, with the difference that instead of saying, 'M. de Norpois asked subtly', the article read: 'said with his notoriously subtle and charming smile'. M. de Norpois judged that 'subtly' already had explosive force enough for a diplomat and that this addendum was intemperate, to say the least. He had in fact asked the Quai d'Orsay to issue an official denial, but the Quai d'Orsay was out of its depth. For indeed, as soon as the interview had been revealed, M. Barrère[9] telephoned Paris several times a day to complain that there was an unofficial ambassador at the Quirinal and to report the displeasure that this fact had caused all over Europe. This displeasure was non-existent, but the various ambassadors were too polite to contradict M. Barrère when he assured them that everyone was outraged. M. Barrère, who brooked no counsel but his own, took their courteous silence for consent. He telegraphed Paris immediately to say: 'HAVE HAD AN HOUR-LONG CONVERSATION WITH THE MARQUIS VISCONTI-VENOSTA',[10] etc. His secretaries were at their wits' end.

Yet M. de Norpois benefited from the devoted services of a most ancient French newspaper,[11] which had even, in 1870 when he was French ambassador in a German country, done him a great favour. This newspaper, and especially its anonymous leading article, was admirably written. But, paradoxically, it aroused infinitely more interest when this leader (dubbed the 'Paris première' in those far-off days, and called now, we know not why, an 'editorial') was badly phrased, with endless repetitions of words. Then everyone felt moved, realizing that the article had been 'inspired', perhaps by M. de Norpois, perhaps by some other fashionable grand master. Anticipating later events in Italy, we might show how M. de Norpois used this newspaper in 1870, to no avail, one might feel, since the war none the less took place; but very effectively, in the opinion of M. de Norpois, whose axiom was that above all one should prepare public opinion. His articles, where every word was carefully weighed, resembled those optimistic medical bulletins published immediately after the death of the patient. For instance, in 1870, when mobilization was almost complete, M. de Norpois, still in the wings, of course, had judged it necessary to send this famous newspaper the following editorial:

'The prevailing opinion in official circles would appear to be that, since yesterday, towards the middle of the afternoon, the situation, without of course assuming an alarming aspect, might well be considered serious and even, from certain angles, susceptible of being judged critical. M. de Norpois is believed to have held several discussions with the King of Prussia, in order to examine in a spirit of firmness and reconciliation, and in the most concrete terms, the various causes of tension, if one may call them such. As we go to press we have unfortunately received no news as to whether their Excellencies have been able to come to an agreement which might serve as the basis of a diplomatic settlement.

'Latest news: it has been learned with satisfaction in well-informed circles that Franco-Prussian relations have apparently experienced a slight improvement. The most important factor would seem to be a meeting of twenty minutes' duration *unter den Linden* between M. de Norpois and the English ambassador. This news is considered by those with access to inside information to be satisfactory.' (The German word *befriedigend* had been added in brackets after its equivalent, 'satisfactory'). And the following day the editorial read: 'Despite all the subtlety of M. de Norpois, who is praised by all for the skilful efforts which he has managed to deploy in the defence of the imprescriptible interests of France, a breakdown in relations appears to be virtually impossible to avoid, if one may say so.'

The newspaper could not forgo the opportunity of following such an editorial with several commentaries, sent of course by M. de Norpois. The reader may perhaps have noticed how in the passages quoted the 'passive' mood was one of the ambassador's favourite grammatical forms for diplomatic writing. ('Considerable importance appears to be attached', rather than 'it seems that people attach considerable importance'). But the present indicative, taken not in its habitual sense but in that of the old 'optative', was no less close to M. de Norpois's heart. The commentaries that followed the editorial were these:

'Never has the public demonstrated a more admirable calm.' (M. de Norpois would have preferred this to be true, but feared that the opposite was the case). 'The people are tired of sterile agitation and have been satisfied to learn that His Majesty's government would accept its responsibilities in the case of whatever eventuality should materialize. The people ask (optative mood) for no more. To their admirably steady nerve, which already bodes well for success, we would yet add a piece of news sure to reassure public opinion, if need there were. We have been assured that M. de Norpois, who for reasons of health has long been expected to travel to Paris to undertake a brief cure, has left Berlin, where he felt that his presence was no longer necessary. Latest news: His Majesty the Emperor left Compiègne for Paris this morning in order to confer with the Marquis de Norpois, the Minister for War and Field-Marshal Bazaine, in whom the public places especial confidence. H M the Emperor has called off the dinner that he was to host in honour of his sister-in-law the Duchess of Alba. This measure has produced on everyone who has been informed of it a particularly favourable impression. The Emperor has reviewed his troops, whose enthusiasm beggars description. Several armed units, which were mobilized the moment that the royal family reached Paris, are standing ready to depart for the Rhine in case the eventuality should arise.'

Sometimes at dusk on my return to the hotel I felt that the Albertine of former times, although invisible, was none the less locked deep inside me, as if in the lead-lined cells of some inner Venice,[12] where from time to time an incident would shake the heavy lid enough to give me a glimpse into the past.

Thus for instance one evening a letter from my broker reopened for an instant the gates of the prison where Albertine lay living within me, but so far and so deep that she remained inaccessible to me. Since her death I was no longer engaged in the speculations that I had undertaken in order to have more money to

spend on her. But time had passed; the received wisdom of the previous era was nullified by the present one, as had happened in former times to M. Thiers,[13] who declared that the railway could never succeed, thus the shares of which M. de Norpois had said, 'Doubtless their yield is hardly substantial, but at least the capital will never depreciate,' were often those that had lost the most value. If only for the English Consols and the Say Refineries, I had to pay the brokers such considerable differentials, not to mention the interest and the sums carried forward, that I suddenly took it into my head to sell everything, and found myself forthwith the owner of barely one-fifth of the wealth that I had inherited from my grandmother and had still possessed while Albertine was alive. This was known to those of our family and acquaintances who still lived in Combray, and because they knew that I frequented the Marquis de Saint-Loup and the Guermantes, people said, 'That's where delusions of grandeur lead you.' They would have been quite astonished to learn that it was for a young woman of such modest extraction as Albertine, more or less a protégée of my grandmother's old piano teacher, Vinteuil, that I had been speculating. Moreover in this world of Combray, where everyone is classified once and for all time, as in the Hindu caste system, according to his known income, they were unable to conceive of the great liberty that reigned in the world of the Guermantes, where wealth was considered of no importance, where poverty could be regarded as unpleasant but as in no way more undignified, and having no more impact on one's social status, than an upset stomach. No doubt, on the other hand, people in Combray imagined that Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes were ruined noblemen with mortgaged châteaux to whom I lent money, whereas, if I had been ruined, they would have been the first to offer me assistance, albeit to no avail. As for my present, relative ruin, I was all the more embarrassed since my Venetian pursuits had just recently focused on a girl selling glassware, whose blooming complexion offered my ravished eyes a whole scale of amber tones, inspiring in me such a desire to see her every day that, realizing that my mother and I would soon be leaving Venice, I had resolved to try to find her some situation in Paris which would enable me not to be separated from her. The beauty of her seventeen years was so noble and radiant that she became a virtual Titian painting to be acquired before leaving. Yet would the reduced income available to me be sufficient to tempt her to leave her country and come to live in Paris at my entire disposal? But as I finished reading my broker's letter, a phrase where he said: '*I will take care of any sums to be carried forward*' brought to mind an almost equally hypocritical and professional expression, that the bath-house girl at Balbec had used when speaking of Albertine: '*I took care of her personally*,' she had said. And these words, which I had never before recalled, had the effect of crying 'Open, Sesame', making the hinges of the dungeon spring open. But a moment later they swung back again to reincarcerate the prisoner – whom I was not guilty of not wanting to visit, since I could no longer see her or remember her, and since people exist for us only in the idea that we have of them – who for an instant had been rendered more touching by my neglect, although she could not know of this: for one brief flash I had felt nostalgia for that already distant time when I suffered night and day from the company of her memory. On another occasion, at San Giorgio dei Schiavoni,[14] an eagle beside one of the apostles, and worked in the same style, revived the memory, and a great deal of the suffering caused by the two rings whose similarity Françoise had discovered, although I had never discovered who had given them to Albertine. One evening however it appeared that events were going to rekindle my love. Just as our gondola stopped at the steps of the hotel, the porter handed me a despatch that the telegraph boy had tried three times to bring round to me, for, because of the inexactitude of the name of the addressee (which I understood, however, despite the distortions wrought by the Italian operators, to be my own), I was required to sign a receipt certifying that the telegram was indeed intended for me. I opened it as soon as I was in my room, and running my eye down a text full of mistranscribed words, I managed to read the following: 'DEAR FRIEND YOU BELIEVE ME DEAD, MY APOLOGIES, NEVER MORE ALIVE, WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU TO DISCUSS MARRIAGE, WHEN DO YOU RETURN? AFFECTIONATELY, ALBERTINE.' Then occurred, but in inverse order, what had happened with my grandmother; when I learned *the fact* that my grandmother was dead, I at first felt no sorrow. And I had really suffered from her death only when involuntary memories had rendered her living again for me. Now that Albertine was no longer alive in my thoughts, the news that she was alive did not bring me the joy that I would have expected. Albertine had been for me but a bundle of thoughts, she had survived her material death as long as these thoughts remained alive within me; on the contrary now that these thoughts were dead, Albertine did not come back to life for me along with the resuscitation of her body. And on realizing that I felt no joy at finding her still alive, that I no longer loved her, I should have been more overwhelmed than someone who, looking at himself in a mirror, after months of travel or illness, realizes that he has white hair or an expression altered by age. This upsets him because it means: the man that I was, that fair-haired young man, no longer exists, I am someone else. And is it not just as profound a change, just as total a death of the self that one was, with its complete substitution of this new self for the old, to see a wrinkled face coiffed with a white wig? But we no more lament having become someone else with the passing of the years and the fullness of time than we lament being during the same period a sequence of contradictory beings, the wicked, the sensitive, the fragile, the crass, the disinterested or the ambitious that we are in turn day after day. And the reason for which we do not lament is the same, it is because the self who is in eclipse – momentarily in the latter examples, which affect our character, permanently in the case I have mentioned and whenever the passions are concerned – is no longer there to deplore the other self, the one who at that moment, or henceforth, is entirely you; the crass man laughs at his crassness because we are now that crass man, and the absent-minded man feels no sorrow at losing his memory, precisely because he has forgotten all about it.

I would have been incapable of reviving Albertine because I was incapable of reviving myself, of reviving my former self. Life, with its habit of changing the face of the world through incessant but infinitely small adjustments, had not told me the day after the death of Albertine to 'Become someone else', but, through changes too imperceptible to allow me even to notice the fact that I was changing, had renewed almost everything about me, in such a way that my thoughts were already accustomed to their new master – my new self – by the time they noticed that he had changed; and that it was he who mattered. My affection for Albertine and my jealousy depended, as we have seen, on the irradiation by association of ideas of certain kernels of sweet or painful impressions, on the memory of Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvain, on the gentle good-night kisses that Albertine bestowed on my neck. But as these impressions grew weaker, the vast field of impressions that they dyed with their anxious or soothing tints had recovered their neutral tones. Once oblivion had captured one or two high peaks of suffering and pleasure, the resistance of my love was vanquished, I no longer loved Albertine. I tried to call her to mind. When two days after Albertine's departure I was horrified to find that I had survived forty-eight hours without her, that was an accurate foreboding. The same thing had happened when on a previous occasion I had written to Gilberte, thinking: if this goes on for another two years, I shall love her no longer. And if when Swann had asked me to see Gilberte again, I had felt as uncomfortable as if I were asked to welcome her back from the dead, in Albertine's case death – or what I had believed to be death – had functioned to the same effect as the prolonged separation in the case of Gilberte. Death functions only as absence. The monster whose appearance had made my love tremble, oblivion, had indeed finally, or so I believed, devoured it. Not only did the news that she was alive not reawaken my love, not only did it allow me to note how far I had travelled down the road to indifference, but it instantaneously accelerated the process so abruptly that I wondered retrospectively if formerly, the opposite news, that of Albertine's death, had not acted inversely, by completing the process of her departure, exciting my love and delaying its decline. And indeed, as soon as knowing that she was alive and that I could reach her had made her suddenly worthless to me, I wondered whether Françoise's insinuations, the separation itself, and even her death (imagined but believed to be real) had not prolonged my love, in so far as the efforts of third parties or even fate to separate us from a woman do no more than attach us more closely to her. Now it was the opposite that happened. Actually I did try to recall her, and perhaps because I had only to say the word to have her all to myself, the memory that recurred was that of a girl already quite stout and mannish, in whose faded features there sprouted like a seed the profile of Mme Bontemps. What she might have done with Andrée or other girls was no longer of interest to me. I no longer suffered from the malady that I had so long believed to be incurable, and in fact I might have guessed as much. Of course missing a mistress, and the jealousy that lingers on afterwards, are physical illnesses just as much as tuberculosis or leukaemia. Yet we need to distinguish among the physical maladies between those that are caused by a purely physical agency and those that act on the body only through the medium of the intellect. Above all, if the part of our intellect that serves as the means of transmission is memory – that is if the cause is annulled or removed – however cruel our suffering is, however deep seems the disturbance wrought on our organism, it is extremely rare, given the power of thought to renew itself or rather its inability to remain unchanged, unlike bodily tissues, for the prognosis to be unfavourable. After a period of time within which a patient suffering from cancer would have died, it is very rare for a widow or an unconsolable father not to

have recovered. I recovered. Should I for the sake of that girl, who now appeared to me so bloated and who certainly must have aged as all the girls that she had loved had aged, should I for her sake renounce the dazzling girl who was my memory of yesterday, my hope for tomorrow (and to whom I would be unable to offer anything if married to Albertine), should renounce this 'new Albertine', '*non point telle que l'ont vue les Enfers' 'mais fidèle, mais fière et même un peu farouche*'?[15] It was she who now was what Albertine had formerly been: my love for Albertine had been only a passing form of my devotion to youth. We think we love a girl, and in her we love no more, alas, than that dawn which their face momentarily reflects. The night passed. In the morning I returned the despatch to the hotel porter saying that it had been handed to me by mistake and that it wasn't addressed to me. He told me that the fact that it had been opened would cause him problems, that I would do better to keep it; I put it back in my pocket but promised myself that I would act as if I had never received it. I had definitively stopped loving Albertine. In such fashion this love, after diverging so much from what I had foreseen, in the light of my love for Gilberte; after causing me to make such a long and painful detour, finally in its turn, after claiming exemption, surrendered, as had my love for Gilberte, to the universal rule of oblivion.

But then I wondered: I used to value Albertine more than myself; I no longer value her now because for a period of time I have ceased to see her. But my desire not to be separated from myself by death, to revive after death, was a desire unlike the desire never to be separated from Albertine, it continued to last. Was that because I believed I was more precious than she, because when I loved her, I loved myself more? No, it was because in ceasing to see her, I had ceased to love her, and because I had not ceased to love myself since my daily relationship with myself had not been interrupted as had that with Albertine. But what if the relationship with my body, and with myself, had also been interrupted? Surely the result would be the same. Our love of life is no more than an old affair that we do not know how to discontinue. Its strength lies in its permanence. But death, which interrupts it, will cure us of our desire for immortality.

After lunch, whenever I did not set out to wander around Venice alone, I got ready to go out with my mother, and I went up to my bedroom to fetch the exercise books in which I would take notes for the study of Ruskin that I was engaged in.[16] From the abrupt angles of the wall whose pressure distorted the corners of the room, I could sense the restrictions imposed by the sea and the scant provision of land. And as I went down to meet my mother, who was waiting for me, at this time of day when in Combray it was such a pleasure to sample the imminent sun in the darkness preserved by the closed shutters, here from top to bottom of the marble staircase, where one had no more idea than one would in a Renaissance painting whether it was built inside a palace or raised on a galley, the same coolness and the same feeling of external radiance were achieved thanks to the canvas blinds wafting before the ever-open windows, through which in a constant draught the warm air and the greenish sunlight slid as if on a floating surface, evoking the movements, the brightness and the instability of the neighbouring waves. Most often it was St Mark's that I set out for, and with all the more pleasure because the church, which required a gondola to reach it, did not represent for me a mere monument, but as it were the terminus of a marine journey over springtime waters, with which St Mark's formed an indivisible, living whole. My mother and I entered the baptistery, both of us treading underfoot the marble and glass mosaics which paved it, and seeing before us the wide arches, whose waisted, pink surfaces have been slightly inflected by the passage of time, which, where time has respected the freshness of its colouring, lends the church an air of having been constructed from a soft and malleable material like the wax of giant honeycomb cells; but where, on the contrary, time has hardened the material and where artists have enhanced it with openwork and gold, it takes on the guise of some precious binding in Cordoban leather of the colossal gospel formed by Venice. My mother, seeing that I needed to spend a long time studying the mosaics representing the baptism of Christ and feeling the ice-cold air that fell around us in the baptistery, threw a shawl over my shoulders. When I was in Balbec with Albertine, I thought that she illustrated one of those misguided illusions that cloud the minds of so many people unable to think clearly, when she told me of the pleasure – which I judged entirely unfounded – that she would derive from seeing a picture in my company. Today I am sure that this pleasure, if not of seeing, then at least of having seen something beautiful in the company of certain persons, does exist. The time has now come for me when, on remembering the baptistery, facing the waters of the Jordan where St John immersed Christ while the gondola awaited us by the Piazzetta, I cannot remain indifferent to the fact that there was by my side in this cool twilight a woman clothed in mourning, whose respectful but enthusiastic fervour matched that of the elderly woman who can be seen in Venice in Carpaccio's *St Ursula*,[17] and that nothing can ever again remove this red-cheeked, sad-eyed woman, in her black veils, from the softly lit sanctuary of St Mark's where I am certain to find her, because I have reserved a place there in perpetuity, alongside the mosaics, for her, for my mother. Carpaccio, whom I have just cited, and who was the painter that we preferred to visit when I was not working at St Mark's, on one occasion almost revived my love for Albertine. It was the first time that I had seen *The Patriarch of Grado exorcizing one possessed*.[18] I was looking at the admirable carmine and violet sky against which stand those tall, inlaid chimneys, whose waisted forms and red, tulip-like blooms call to mind so many paintings of Venice by Whistler. Then my eyes travelled from the old wooden Rialto bridge to the fifteenth-century Ponte Vecchio and its marble palaces decorated with gilded capitals, and returned to the Canal where the boats are steered by youths wearing pink doublets and caps topped with osprey feathers, almost identical to those which faithfully recalled Carpaccio in the dazzling ballet *The Legend of St Joseph*[19] by Sert, Strauss and Kessler. And finally, before leaving the painting, my eyes returned to the quay, which was teeming with scenes from the Venetian life of the time. I saw the barber wiping his razor, the negro carrying his barrel, the Muslims in conversation, Venetian noblemen dressed in ample brocade or damask robes and cherry-coloured velvet caps, when suddenly I felt a slight tug at my heart. On the back of one of the Companions of la Calza,[20] recognizable from the gold and pearl embroidery which inscribed on their collar or their sleeve the proud guild of which they were members, I had just recognized the coat that Albertine had worn to accompany me to Versailles in an open carriage, that evening when I was far from suspecting that hardly fifteen hours were to separate me from the moment of her departure. As she was always ready for anything, when I had asked her to leave, on the sad day that in her last letter she was to name: *twice twilit, since night was soon to fall and we would part*, she had slung over her shoulders a Fortuny coat that she was to take away with her the following morning and that I had never since recalled to mind. Now it was in this painting by Carpaccio that this brilliant scion of Venice had found it, it was from the shoulders of this Companion of la Calza that he had unclasped it, in order to drape it over the shoulders of so many Parisian ladies, who were doubtless as ignorant as I had been of the fact that the original could be found among a group of aristocrats in the foreground of the *Patriarch of Grado* in one of the rooms of the Accademia in Venice. I had recognized it all, and the forgotten coat having restored to me, as I looked at it, the eyes and the heart of the man who that night was to leave for Versailles with Albertine, for a few seconds I was invaded with indistinct, impermanent feelings of desire and melancholy.

And finally there were days when my mother and I were not content to stay in the museums and the churches of Venice, and so one day when the weather was particularly fine, wanting to see those Vices and Virtues whose reproductions M. Swann had given me, and which were probably still pinned upon the wall of the study in our house at Combray, we travelled out to Padua; after crossing the gardens of the Arena Chapel under the midday sun, I entered the chapel with its Giottos[21] where the whole ceiling vault and the background of the frescoes are so blue that it seems as if the radiant daylight had crossed the threshold at the same time as the visitor and had come for a moment to seek out shade and fresh air for its limpid sky; whose purity, once cleansed of the gilding applied by the sunlight, took on only a very slightly darker tone, as happens during those brief moments of respite which interrupt the finest days, when, without a cloud in sight, the sun averts its gaze for a moment and the azure sky, growing still softer, darkens. In the sky thus transposed onto a blue-toned stone heaven, I caught my first glimpse of angels in flight, for M. Swann had given me reproductions only of the Virtues and Vices and not of the frescoes that retrace the story of Christ and the Virgin Mary. And now I detected in the flight of these angels the same effect of concrete and literally real action as I had in the postures of Charity or Envy. With all the celestial fervour, or at least, the well-behaved, childish concentration, that joins their little hands in prayer, the angels in the Arena Chapel are represented rather as if they were a distinct species of flighted fowl that had actually existed and had been portrayed in Old and New Testament times. These small creatures can always be relied on to flutter in escort ahead of any passing saint; there are always one or two in the air in readiness, and, since they are real creatures, actually able to fly, you can see them taking off, climbing and banking, looping the loop with the greatest of ease, diving head-first towards the ground with a great flurry of wings designed to keep them in the air against the laws of gravity, and they call to mind much more some extinct variety of bird, or the young pupils of Roland

Garros[22] learning to glide, than angels of the art of the Renaissance or later periods, whose wings are purely emblematic and whose deportment is usually no different from that of flightless celestial beings.

On returning to the hotel, I met some young women, mostly from Austria, who had come to Venice to enjoy the first fine days of its flowerless spring. One of them had features that, without reminding me of Albertine, appealed to me through the same freshness of complexion and the same cheerful, humorous eyes. Soon I felt that I was starting to say the same things to her as I had said to Albertine at first, and that I was hiding the same pain when she told me that she would not see me the next day, for she was going to Verona, and immediately I too felt the desire to go to Verona. It was not to last, she was due to return to Austria and I would never see her again, but I was already vaguely jealous, as one is on starting to fall in love, and, while watching her charming, enigmatic face, I wondered if she too loved women, if what she shared with Albertine, the luminous complexion and bright eyes, the friendly, open airs that seduced everyone around her, and which arose as much from her total lack of interest in the actions of others as from the exaggeratedly childish lies with which she attempted to disguise her own actions, was not part of the morphological constitution of women who love other women. Was this the part of her that escaped my rational analysis, attracted me and caused me anxiety (perhaps the deeper cause of my attraction through its drive towards potential suffering), that gave me when I saw her so much pleasure and sadness, like those invisible magnetic elements in the air of certain countries that cause us to feel so ill at ease? Alas, I was never to know. When I tried to read her expression I would have liked to say, 'You should tell me, I would be interested to learn one of the laws of human natural history,' but she would never tell me; she professed a particular repulsion for this vice and maintained a studied coldness with her female friends. This might even have been evidence that she had something to hide, perhaps she had been teased or ashamed because of it, and the airs she adopted in order to prevent people believing it were like the eloquent distance kept by animals from men who have beaten them. As for finding out about her life, this was impossible; even in Albertine's case I had taken so long to discover the slightest thing! It had taken her death to loosen people's tongues, so prudent and circumspect had Albertine been in her behaviour, just like this young woman! And was I sure of knowing anything even about Albertine? And then just as the conditions of life that we desire the most become of no interest to us if we cease to love the person who unknown to us made us desire them because she allowed us to live by her side and, as far as we were able, to give her pleasure, so it is with certain kinds of intellectual curiosity. The scientific importance that I placed in knowing what kind of desire was hidden beneath the pale pink petals of her cheek, in the sunless light of her pale eyes glowing like early dawn, in the days that she never discussed, would doubtless disappear when I no longer felt the slightest love for Albertine or when I no longer felt the slightest love for this young woman. In the evenings I went out alone, surrounded by this enchanted city where I found myself in the middle of unknown neighbourhoods like a character from the *Arabian Nights*. It was most unusual for me not to chance upon some spacious, unknown square of which no guide or traveller had informed me. I had plunged into a network of alleyways, the *calli*. In the evening, with their tall, waisted chimneys turning the brightest of pinks as they were caught in the sunlight, there was a whole garden in flower on the roof-tops, with such a variety of shades that it looked as if a connoisseur of tulips from Haarlem or Delft had planted a garden on top of the city. And moreover the sheer proximity of the houses made each window the frame which a kitchen-girl looked dreamily through, a girl sitting having her hair combed by an old woman, whose face, half-hidden in shadow, seemed that of a witch – creating from the poor, silent individual houses, huddled together because of the extreme narrowness of the *calli*, a virtual exhibition bringing a hundred Dutch paintings together. Squeezed up against each other, these *calli* divided each part of Venice, sectioning it between a canal and the lagoon into a branching lattice of cracks, as if it had crystallized into this myriad of fragile, intricate forms. Suddenly, at the end of one of these little streets, the crystalline matter seemed to have produced a swelling. A vast, sumptuous *campo* of a size that I certainly could not have guessed, let alone found room for in this network of little streets, stretched out before my eyes, surrounded by enchanting palaces, in the pale light of the moon. It was one of those architectural ensembles towards which in other towns you are guided by streets that lead there, pointing the way. Here it seemed deliberately hidden in a criss-cross of alleyways, like those palaces in Oriental tales where a character who was led there by night and taken back home before morning is unable to find the magical dwelling and finally believes that he saw it only in his dreams. The next day I set off in search of my beautiful nocturnal palace, I followed *calli* which all looked the same and refused to give me the slightest indication, except to lead me further astray. Occasionally a vague allusion that I thought I recognized led me to believe that I would then see appear, in all the solitude of its silent and solitary confinement, the beautiful, exiled square. At which moment the evil genie, having taken on the appearance of a new *calle*, caused me to retrace my steps against my better intentions, and I suddenly found myself led back to the Grand Canal. And since between the memory of a dream and the memory of something real there is no great difference, I finally started wondering whether the strange drift into this sombre fragment of Venetian crystallization, revealing to my moonlit meditations a great square surrounded by Romantic palaces, had not occurred while I was asleep.

But it was the desire not to lose for ever certain women, rather than certain squares, that kept me, for as long as I was in Venice, in a state of agitation which turned feverish the day my mother had fixed for our departure, when at the end of the day, our trunks having already left for the station by gondola, I read in the hotel register of guests due to arrive at the hotel the name of the *Baroness Putbus and her entourage*. Immediately the impression of all the hours of carnal pleasure that our departure would cause me to miss raised this desire, lying endemic within me, to the status of an emotion, in a flood of vagueness and melancholia; I asked my mother to postpone our departure for a few days; but the expression on her face, showing that she did not for a moment entertain my plea, or even take it seriously, aroused in my nerves, already exacerbated by the Venetian springtime, my old desire to resist a fictitious plot hatched against me by my parents, who imagined that I would be forced to obey, awakened that urge to struggle which formerly drove me brutally to impose my will on those whom I most loved, even if it meant that I would hasten to obey their wishes as soon as I had obtained their submission. I told my mother that I would not leave, but she, believing it more subtle to look as if she thought that I was not speaking in earnest, did not even deign to reply. I insisted that she would soon see whether I was in earnest or not. The porter came to deliver three letters, two for her, and one for me, which I put in my wallet with all the others without even looking at the envelope, and when the time came for her to leave for the station, followed by all my effects, I asked for a drink to be served me on the balcony overlooking the Canal and settled down to watch the sunset, while a musician, on a boat moored opposite the hotel, sang '*O sole mio*'.[23] The sun sank lower in the sky. My mother would have nearly arrived at the station. Soon she would be gone, and I would be alone in Venice, alone with the sad knowledge that I had upset her and without her presence to console me. It was nearly time for the train to leave. My irrevocable solitude loomed so large that it seemed to me to have already started, and to be absolute. For I felt alone in the world, alienated from all things, and I was not calm enough to detach myself from my palpitating heart and impose some stability on the world around me. The city I saw before me was still Venice. Its personality and its name appeared to me as mendacious fictions that I no longer had the heart to relate to its stones. The palaces appeared reduced to their congruent parts and their portions of indifferent marble, and the waters to a combination of nitrogen and hydrogen, eternal and blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, ignorant of Turner and the Doges. And yet this unexceptional place was as alien as a place where you have just arrived, which does not yet know you, or a place that you have left and that has already forgotten you. There was nothing now that I could tell it about me, nothing of mine that I could invest it with, it forced me to withdraw within myself, I was no more than a beating heart and a mind anxiously following the words of '*O sole mio*'. However much I tried to anchor my thoughts to the familiar and beautiful curve of the Rialto, it appeared to me both proven and banal that the bridge was not only inferior, but as alien to the idea that I had gained of it as would be an actor whose blond wig and black doublet failed to persuade me that essentially he was Hamlet. Like the palaces, the Canal and the Rialto were bereft of the ideas that made them original and were dissolved into their crudely material elements. But at the same time this mediocre place seemed far distant from me. In the dock of the Arsenal, for a perfectly scientific reason, its latitude, things took on a peculiar aspect, as they do, even when they seem similar to those of our own country, once they are exiled to foreign climes, revealing their otherness; I felt that this horizon, however close, barely an hour away, was a far-flung curve of the Earth's surface which the vagaries of travel had moored close beside me; so that the Arsenal dock, however trivial and distant, filled me with the same mixture of fear and disgust that I had experienced when as a child I accompanied my mother to the Deligny baths;[24] for in that fantastical site composed of dark waters, delimited neither by the sun

nor by the heavens and yet whose cabin-bound surrounds made us feel in communion with invisible depths lurking beneath human bodies clad in bathing-costumes, I had wondered whether these depths, hidden from ordinary mortals by a series of sheds that prevented them from being seen from the street, did not provide a direct entrance to the neighbouring ice floes of the polar seas which already flowed through them, and if this narrow space were not precisely the open seas of the poles; this unsympathetic Venice, where I was to stay alone, seemed to me no less isolated and unreal, and it was my distress that the song '*O sole mio*', rising like a lament for the Venice I had known, seemed to call to witness. Doubtless, if I had wanted to catch up with my mother and take the train with her, I should have stopped listening to it, I would have had to make up my mind to leave without an instant's hesitation, but that was precisely what I could not do; I stayed motionless, incapable not only of rising to my feet but even of deciding that I wanted to stand up. My thoughts, most likely to avoid taking any decision, were entirely taken up in following the progress of the successive verses of '*O sole mio*', mentally singing along with the singer, anticipating the moments when his voice would soar in flight, and letting myself rise and then fall back with him. Doubtless I was not in the slightest bit interested in this trivial song, which I had heard a hundred times before. Listening to it religiously all the way through brought pleasure neither to myself nor to anyone else. And, finally, none of the motifs of this vulgar romance, all of which I knew in advance, could help me with the decision that I needed to take; although each of the verses which went by in turn became an obstacle to effectively taking that decision or rather obliged me to take the contrary decision not to leave, for it kept me waiting. In this way the intrinsically pleasureless business of listening to '*O sole mio*' became imbued with a profound, almost desperate sadness. I knew well enough that, in sitting there without moving, I was really taking the decision not to leave; but admitting to myself, 'I am not leaving', which I was unable to do in such direct terms, became possible for me in these other terms: 'I want to listen to one more verse of "*O sole mio*" '; but the practical significance of this figurative language did not escape me, and while I was telling myself 'All I am doing, actually, is listening to one more verse', I knew that this meant: 'I am going to stay in Venice on my own.' And it was perhaps this sadness, resembling a kind of cold numbness, which constituted the desperate but fascinating charm of the song. Each note that the singer launched, with a voice almost muscular in its strength and ostentation, struck me to the very heart; when the phrase with its low notes was consummated and the piece seemed to be over, the singer was not satisfied, and repeated it on a high note as if he felt bound to proclaim once again my solitude and despair. My mother must have arrived at the station. Soon she would be gone. I was choking with the anguish caused by this banal Rialto that was no longer the Rialto, with its view over the Canal that had shrunk now that the soul of Venice had drained away from it, by this song of despair that '*O sole mio*' had become, and which, thus declaimed before the inconstant palaces, finally made them crumble and reduced Venice to ruin; I was watching over the gradual realization of my misfortune, constructed artistically, unhurriedly, note by note by the singer, watched by the astonished sun, which had stopped still behind San Giorgio Maggiore, so that this crepuscular light was for ever to forge my trembling emotions and the singer's voice of bronze into an equivocal, unchangeable and poignant alloy in my memory.

In this way I remained motionless with my will-power dissolved, taking no apparent decision; doubtless at such moments the decision has already been taken: even our friends can often predict it. But we ourselves cannot, otherwise we would be saved much suffering.

But at last, from caverns darker than those from which more predictable comets are launched – thanks to the unsuspected defensive powers of inveterate habit, and the hidden reserves that it can suddenly mobilize and throw into the ring at the very last moment – my action suddenly materialized: I ran for dear life and reached the train after the doors had closed, but still in time to get on board and find my mother, flushed with emotion, holding back her tears, believing that I was not going to come. Then the train left and we saw Padua then Verona move up to the window, coming nearly into the station to wave us good-bye, and, since they were not leaving, they let us move away and went back to their usual occupations, one in her fields, the other on her hillside.

The hours passed. My mother was in no hurry to read the two letters which she had merely opened, and she tried to prevent me from getting out my wallet straight away to take out the letter that the hotel concierge had given me. She was always worried that I would find a journey too long and too tiring, and she put off until as late as possible, so as to give me something to do during the last hours, the moment when she would unpack the hard-boiled eggs, pass me the newspapers and unwrap the packet of books that she had bought to surprise me. First I watched my mother reading her letter with astonishment, then she raised her head, and her eyes seemed to struggle with a whole series of separate, incompatible memories that she could not manage to reconcile. Meanwhile I had recognized Gilberte's handwriting on my envelope. I opened it. Gilberte announced her marriage to Robert de Saint-Loup. She said that she had sent a telegram to me in Venice on this subject but had received no reply. I remembered how unreliable the Venetian telegraph service was reputed to be. I had never received her despatch. Suddenly my brain felt a fact that had lodged there in the guise of a memory leave its place to make room for another. The despatch that I had recently received and that I had thought came from Albertine was from Gilberte. Since the rather factitious originality of Gilberte's handwriting consisted principally in placing, in the line above the line she was writing, the crosses on her *t*'s, making them look as if they were underlining the words higher up, or making the dots on her *i*'s look as if they were breaks in the sentences of the line above, and on the other hand to insert in the lines below the tails and the curlicues of the words that were written above, it was natural enough that a telegraph clerk should have read the scrolls of the *s*'s or the *y*'s of the upper line as a final '*ine*' closing the name of Gilberte. The dot on the *i* of Gilberte had ridden up to make a dash. As for her *G*, it had the appearance of an *A* in Gothic script. The fact that in addition to this, two or three words had been misread, entangled as they were (besides, I myself had found some incomprehensible), was enough to explain the details of my error, and it was not even necessary. How many characters in each word does a person read when his mind is on other things and when he is already sure that he knows who the letter is from? How many words in each sentence? We guess as we read, we invent; everything stems from one initial error; those that follow (and this not only in reading letters and telegrams, not even only in all acts of reading), however extraordinary they may seem to someone who does not share the same starting-point, are natural enough. Thus it is that a great deal of what we believe to be true, not to mention the ultimate conclusions that, with equal perseverance and good faith, we draw from it, results from an initial misconception of the premiss.

CHAPTER 4

A New Side to Robert de Saint-Loup

'Oh, how incredible! said my mother. Listen, I know that at my age one should no longer be surprised by anything, but I assure you that nothing could surprise me more than the news in this letter. – Yes, but listen to me, I replied, I don't know what it says, but whatever the news, it cannot be more amazing than what I have just learned from my letter. It's a marriage. Robert de Saint-Loup is going to marry Gilberte Swann. – Ah!' my mother replied, then that must be what I shall find in the other letter, the one that I haven't opened yet, for I recognized your friend's writing.' And my mother smiled at me with the tenderly concerned air that every event, however trivial, evoked in her if it affected human beings capable of suffering, remembering, and sharing others' mourning. Thus my mother smiled and spoke to me with a gentle voice as if she feared that, if she treated the marriage lightly, this might disparage the melancholy feelings it was likely to evoke in Swann's widow and his daughter, as well as Robert's mother, preparing to be separated from her son, on to whom my mother, out of kindness and out of sympathy inspired by their kindness to me, projected her own sensitivity, at once filial, conjugal and maternal. 'Wasn't I right to tell you that you would find nothing more amazing? I asked her. – Well, actually, no, she replied gently, it is I who have the most extraordinary news, if not 'la plus grande, la plus petite', for that quotation from Mme de Sévigné made by people who knew nothing else of her work exasperated your grandmother as much as 'La jolie chose que c'est de faner'.[1] We do not stoop to glean such common-or-garden Sévigné. This letter announces the marriage of the young Cambremer. – Oh, yes, I said, with no interest, to whom? But in any case the nature of the bridegroom has already removed from this marriage any element of excitement. – Unless the nature of the bride were to restore it? – And who is this bride? – Ah, if I tell you straight away you won't have deserved it, come on, try a little harder,' said my mother, seeing that we had not yet reached Turin and wanting to leave me something substantial to get my teeth into, and something to wash it down with. 'But how am I supposed to know? Is it someone brilliant? If Legrandin and his sister are pleased, we can be sure that it is a brilliant marriage. – I don't know about Legrandin, but the person who has told me of the marriage says that Mme de Cambremer is delighted. I don't know whether you will call it a brilliant marriage. For me it calls to mind those marriages from the days when a king could marry a shepherdess, except that the shepherdess is even less than a shepherdess, although very charming. Your grandmother would have been stupefied, if not displeased. – But whoever is this bride? – It is Mlle d'Oloron. – She sounds imposing, and most un-shepherdess-like, but I just don't see who you mean. It's a title that used to run in the Guermantes family. – Precisely, and it was granted by M. de Charlus to Jupien's niece when he adopted her. She it is who is due to marry the young Cambremer. – Jupien's niece! That's impossible! – It is virtue rewarded. It's a marriage from the end of a novel by George Sand,' said my mother. 'It's the wages of sin, it's a marriage from the end of a novel by Balzac,' I thought. 'After all, I said to my mother, when you come to think about it it is natural enough. It allows the Cambremers to drop anchor at the Guermantes', where they never dared hope pitch their tent; what is more, the child, since she was adopted by M. de Charlus, will have plenty of money, which was indispensable for the Cambremers since they had lost their own; and finally she is the adopted and, according to the Cambremers, probably the real – that is, the natural – daughter of someone whom they consider to be a prince of the blood. A bastard of an almost royal house has always been considered a flattering match by nobility, French or foreign. There is no need even to go back so far as the Lucinges,[2] for only six months ago you will recall the marriage of one of Robert's friends with that young lady whose sole claim to a place in society was that she was supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be the natural daughter of a sovereign prince.' My mother, while maintaining the caste distinctions of Combray according to which my grandmother would have been bound to be scandalized by this marriage, wanted above all to prove her mother's good judgment, and added: 'In fact the girl is perfection itself and your dear grandmother would not even have needed her enormous kindness and infinite indulgence to avoid severity in judging young Cambremer's choice. Do you remember how distinguished she found the girl one day long ago when she called in to have her skirt mended. She was only a child then. And although now so to speak an old maid left ripening on the shelf, she is quite another woman, a thousand times more perfect. But your grandmother had taken that all in at a glance. She had found the great-niece of a waistcoat-maker more "noble" than the Duc de Guermantes.' But even more than praise my grandmother, my mother needed to find that it was 'better' for her not to be able to witness these events. This was the supreme aim of her affection, as if she were sparing her one last sorrow. 'And yet,' my mother asked me, 'would you believe that old father Swann, although it is true that you never knew him, could have thought that one day he would have a great-grandson or a great-granddaughter in whose veins would mingle the blood of old mother Moser, who used to say "Goot mornink, Chentlemen", and the blood of the Duc de Guise![3] – Actually, Mama, it is even more extraordinary than you say. For the Swanns were very fine people, and given their son's position, if only he had made a good marriage, then his daughter could have made an even finer one. But everything had to start from scratch again because he married a tart. – Oh, a tart, now really. We must have been cruel. I never believed everything people said about her. – Oh yes, she was a tart, and I'll let you into some of the 'family' secrets one of these days.' Plunged in her day-dreams, my mother said: 'The daughter of a man your father would never have allowed me to greet, and she's marrying the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis, whom your father refused to allow me to call on at first, because he found her socially too grand for us!' She continued: 'Mme de Cambremer's son, to whom Legrandin so feared to recommend us because he didn't find us classy enough, marrying the niece of a man who would never have dared come to see us without using the servants' staircase! … After all, your poor grandmother was right, you remember, when she said that great aristocrats did things which would shock the petty bourgeoisie, and that Queen Marie-Amélie was spoiled for her by the advances which she had made to the Prince de Condé's mistress to get her to persuade him to make a will in favour of the Duc d'Aumale.[4] Do you remember how shocked she was to learn that for centuries the maidservants of the house of Gramont, who were veritable saints, bore the name of Corisande in memory of the liaison of a progenetrix of theirs with Henri IV?[5] These things may also happen in the bourgeoisie, but they are more carefully hidden. Imagine how it would have amused your grandmother!' my mother said sadly – for the pleasures we were sad for my grandmother to miss were the simplest of life's pleasures, a piece of news, a play, or even a mere 'skit' that would have amused her. 'Don't you think that she would have been amazed? Yet I'm sure that these marriages would have shocked your grandmother, that she would have suffered, I think it's better for her to have known nothing about them,' my mother continued, as she liked to think that, given my grandmother's marvellously singular nature, she would have been most peculiarly struck by them and that her impressions would have been extraordinarily important. Formerly, faced with any sad and unpredictable event, the disgrace or ruin of one of our old friends, some public calamity like an epidemic, a war, or a revolution, my mother believed that it was probably better that my grandmother should never have known about it, for she would have been too upset and might not have been able to survive it. And when the subject was an event as shocking as these, my mother, from an emotional reaction opposite to that of the ill-willed, who prefer to hope that those whom they dislike have suffered more than people think, did not, in her affection for my grandmother, want to admit that anything sad or belittling might have happened to her. She continued to imagine my grandmother beyond the reach of all ills, even the most unpredictable, thinking that the death of my grandmother had perhaps on balance been a blessing in sparing this so noble nature the all too ugly sight of modern times, which she would not have been able to accept. For optimism is the philosophy of the past. Since the events which actually happened, among all those which might have, are the only ones that we know, the harm that they have done us seems inevitable, and we credit them with being responsible for the little good which they have been unable to avoid bringing with them, imagining that without them it would never have come to pass. At the same time she tried to guess what my grandmother would have felt on learning the news, and simultaneously wanted to believe that our minds, being of a lower order than hers, were unable to guess it. 'Just imagine', my mother started to say, 'how astonished your poor grandmother would have been!' And I felt that my mother suffered from not being able to pass on the news, sad that my grandmother would never know it, and found

something unjust in the way life could bring to light facts which my grandmother would have found unbelievable, thus rendering false and incomplete after the event the knowledge of people and society that she had taken to her grave, the marriage of the young Jupien girl with Legrandin's nephew having been of a nature to modify my grandmother's general philosophy just as much as the news – if my mother had been able to convey it to her – that the problems of aerial navigation and wireless telegraphy, which my grandmother had believed insoluble, had been resolved. But we shall see that this desire to enable my grandmother to share in the benefits of our knowledge seemed to my mother yet too selfish. What I learned – for I had not been able to witness it all while in Venice – was that Mlle de Forcheville had been solicited by the Duc de Châtellerault and the Prince de Silistrie, while Saint-Loup had been trying to marry Mlle d'Entragues, daughter of the Duke of Luxembourg. This is what had happened. Mlle de Forcheville, with her hundred million francs, seemed to Mme de Marsantes an excellent match for her son. Her mistake was to say that she was a charming girl, that she had no idea whether she was rich or poor, and preferred not to know, but that even without a dowry it would be a boon for even the most discriminating young man to have such a wife. This was going rather far for a woman tempted only by the hundred million and indifferent to the rest. Everyone immediately realized that she had her own son in mind. The Princesse de Silestrie uttered shrieks of protest, expatiated on the grandeur of Saint-Loup, and proclaimed that if Saint-Loup married the daughter of Odette and a Jew, that would be the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. No matter how sure of herself she felt, Mme de Marsantes did not dare pursue her claim further, and withdrew in the face of these protestations by the Princesse de Silestrie, who immediately forwarded a proposal from her own son. Mme de Marsantes had cried out in protest only in order to reserve Gilberte for herself. However, unwilling to settle for failure, Mme de Marsantes had immediately turned to Mlle d'Entragues, the daughter of the Duke of Luxembourg. The latter party, with a mere twenty million francs to her name, was less suitable, but Mme de Marsantes made it publicly known that a Saint-Loup could not marry a Mlle Swann (the name of Forcheville was not even mentioned). Some time afterwards, when someone tactlessly said that the Duc de Châtellerault was considering marriage with Mlle d'Entragues, Mme de Marsantes, who was unrivalled for her susceptibility, took umbrage, readjusted her fire, switched to Gilberte, had a proposal made on behalf of Saint-Loup and concluded the engagement forthwith.

The engagement elicited animated commentaries in the most diverse milieux. Several lady-friends of my mother's, who had seen Saint-Loup in our house, called on her during her 'visiting hours' to ascertain whether the fiancé was indeed the same person as my friend. Some people went so far as to claim that it was not the Cambremer-Legrandins who were involved in the other marriage. They had this on good authority, since the Marquise, née Legrandin, had denied it on the eve of the very day that the engagement was announced. I for my part wondered why M. de Charlus on the one hand and Saint-Loup on the other, who had both had occasion to write to me shortly beforehand and had spoken so amiably of their travel plans, whose execution would have prevented all possibility of such ceremonies, had made no mention of it. I concluded, without considering how people keep such matters secret until the last moment, that I was less their friend than I had thought, which, in the case of Saint-Loup, distressed me. And why indeed, having remarked that the friendliness and openness of the aristocracy, 'peers and fellows on an equal footing', was a charade, should I expect to be an exception? In the house of pleasure – in which men rather than women were increasingly procured for one's pleasure – where M. de Charlus had surprised Morel and where the 'vice-Madam', a fervent reader of the *Gaulois*, who commented on events in high society, declared, when speaking to a stout gentleman who came to drink endless bottles of champagne in her establishment in the company of young men, because he wanted to develop his already considerable girth into an obesity certain to ensure that he would never be 'caught up' in any war that might break out: 'It appears that young Saint-Loup is "that way inclined" and young Cambremer too! Pity their wives! In any case, if you know the betrothed pair, do please send them along, they will find their heart's desire here, and help us earn a lot of money.' Upon which, the stout gentleman, although himself being 'that way inclined', protested, replying, on slightly snobbish grounds, that he often met Cambremer and Saint-Loup at his cousins', the d'Ardonvilliers, and that they were great connoisseurs of women and very far from such 'inclinations'. 'Ah!' concluded the vice-Madam with a sceptical air, but possessing no proof, and remaining convinced that in our century the perversity of morals was second only to the libellous absurdities spread by gossip. Some people whom I hardly knew to speak to wrote to me and asked 'what I thought' of these two marriages, absolutely as if they were conducting an inquiry into the height of the hats which women wore to the theatre, or into the psychological novel. I was unable to face replying to these letters. Confronted with these two marriages, I did not think anything at all, but felt an immense sadness, as you do when two parts of your past existence, previously moored alongside you and in which perhaps from one day to the next you may have been harbouring some half-hearted, secret investment, leave for ever, with all flags proudly flying, like two ships sailing for foreign parts. As for the parties themselves, they considered their marriages perfectly natural, since they themselves and not others were concerned. They had always had endless scorn for these 'great marriages', founded on some hidden flaw. And even the Cambremers, of such ancient but unpretentious lineage, would have been the first to forget Jupien and remember only the forgotten splendours of the house of d'Oloron, if an exception had not occurred in the shape of the person who should be most charmed by the marriage, the Marquise de Cambremer-Legrandin. For her spiteful character led her to prefer to humiliate her relatives rather than seek to bask in her own glory. Thus, since she did not love her son and had taken a premature dislike to her intended daughter-in-law, she declared that it would be a misfortune for a Cambremer to marry a person whose origins were more or less unknown, and whose teeth were exceptionally irregular. As for the propensity of the young Cambremer to frequent men of letters like Bergotte for example or even Bloch, it is easy to imagine why such a brilliant alliance should not have aggravated his snobbery, since seeing himself as the successor of the Ducs d'Oléron, 'sovereign princes', in the words of the press, made him sure enough of his grandeur to feel able to frequent anyone. And, on days when he did not worship some Highness or another, he left the lower nobility to join the ranks of the lower bourgeoisie. These notes in the press, especially concerning Robert de Saint-Loup, gave my friend a new grandeur, as they enumerated his royal ancestors, but one whose only effect was to sadden me further, as if he had become somebody else, the descendant of Robert le Fort[6] rather than the friend who had so recently sat on the folding seat in the car so that I could have the more comfortable seat in the back; the fact that I had been taken by surprise by his marriage to Gilberte, which suddenly surfaced in the letter which I had received, as unsuspected as a chemical precipitate, making them seem so different from how I had imagined them the day before, made me suffer, whereas I should have realized that he had been very busy and that society marriages often come to pass in this sudden fashion, and often in order to replace a previous, unsuccessful arrangement. And the sadness which I felt, as depressing as moving house and as bitter as jealousy, resulting from the abrupt and accidental clash caused by these two marriages, cut so deep that people would remind me of it later, as if, absurdly, I should be proud of it, as if it were quite the opposite of what I had felt at the time, a double, triple or even quadruple foreboding.

Those in society who had never taken any notice of Gilberte told me with an air of profound concern, 'Ah! So she's the one who is to marry Saint-Loup,' and cast on her the attentive eyes of people who not only avidly follow the events of Parisian life, but also seek instruction and believe in the profundity of their insight. On the other hand, those who had met only Gilberte observed Saint-Loup with extreme attentiveness and, despite often being people who hardly knew me, asked me to introduce them and returned from their introduction to the bridegroom brimming with festive joy, saying, 'He is such a fine figure of a man.' Gilberte was convinced that the name of the Marquis de Saint-Loup was a thousand times greater than that of the Duc d'Orléans,[7] but, as she belonged above all to a generation of (rather egalitarian) wits, she did not want to appear any less witty and took pleasure in calling herself *mater semita*, to which she added, in order to consummate her wit, 'whereas for me he is my *pater*'.

'I hear that it was the Princess of Parma who arranged the marriage of the young Cambremer,' said my mother, and it was true. For some time the Princess of Parma had known, on the one hand Legrandin through his works, and on the other hand, Mme de Cambremer, who changed the subject whenever the Princess asked her if she was really Legrandin's sister. The Princess knew how disappointed Mme de Cambremer was at remaining on the fringes of high aristocratic society, without being invited inside. When the Princess of Parma, who had taken it upon herself to make a match for Mlle d'Oloron, asked M. de Charlus if he knew the identity of the pleasant, cultivated man who went under the name of Legrandin de Méséglise (for this was how Legrandin now styled himself), the Baron at first replied that he did not, then was suddenly struck by the memory of a man whom he had met one night in a train and who had left him his card. He

smiled vaguely. 'Perhaps it's the same man,' he thought. When he learned that he was the son of Legrandin's sister, he said: 'Well, that would be quite extraordinary! If he took after his uncle, after all, that shouldn't put me off, I have always said that they make the best husbands. – They? Who do you mean? asked the Princess. – Oh, Madam, I would willingly explain if we were better acquainted. You are someone it's easy to talk to. Your Highness is so intelligent,' said Charlus, seized with a need to confide, but which he did not take further. He liked, if not the parents, at least the name of Cambremer, while knowing that it was one of the four baronies of Brittany and by far the best he could expect for his adoptive daughter; it was an ancient and honourable name, with good connections in the region. A prince would have been impossible, and actually not desirable. This was what was needed. Then the Princess summoned Legrandin. He had changed physically quite a bit in recent years, and rather to his advantage. Like those women who resolutely sacrifice their faces for the sake of a slim waistline and spend all their time at Marienbad, Legrandin had taken on the casual swagger of a cavalry officer. While M. de Charlus had become stouter and slower, Legrandin had become slimmer and quicker, the contrary effect of the same cause. Besides, his swiftness had its psychological reasons. He had become a regular client of certain houses of ill-fame. Since he did not wish to be seen entering or leaving them, he dashed in and out, and vanished. When the Princess of Parma spoke to him of the Guermantes or Saint-Loup, he declared that he had always known them, creating as it were an amalgam of the fact that he had always known the *name* of the Lords of Guermantes and the fact that he had made the acquaintance in *person*, at my aunt's, of Swann, the father of the future Mme de Saint-Loup, that same Swann, one might add, whose wife and daughter Legrandin refused to frequent in Combray. 'I even travelled recently in the company of M. de Charlus, the brother of the Duc de Guermantes. He spontaneously struck up a conversation with me, which is always a good sign, for it proves that he is neither a starched-shirt nor a pretentious fool. Oh! I am well aware of what they say about him. But I never believe that kind of thing. In any case other people's private lives are none of my concern. He struck me as a sensitive man, with a truly cultivated soul.' Then the Princess of Parma mentioned Mlle d'Oloron. In Guermantes circles people were most affected by the noble heart of M. de Charlus, who, with his proverbial generosity, had secured the happiness of a poor but charming young lady. And the Duc de Guermantes, who suffered from his brother's reputation, let it be understood that, however fine the action might seem, it was only natural. 'I am not sure if you catch my meaning, but everything about this affair is natural,' he said, with an awkwardness exaggerated by his attempt to be subtle. But his aim was to suggest that the young lady was a daughter of his brother, who wished thus to acknowledge her. At a stroke, this accounted for Jupien too. The Princess of Parma favoured this version in order to show Legrandin that Mlle de Cambremer, all things considered, would be marrying someone of the ilk of Mlle de Nantes, one of the bastard daughters of Louis XIV who were snubbed neither by the Duc d'Orléans nor the Prince de Conti.[8]

These two marriages, which my mother and I discussed in the train back to Paris, had fairly remarkable effects on some of the people who have so far figured in this story. First, on Legrandin; needless to say he dashed headlong into M. de Charlus's mansion, for all the world as if he were entering a house of ill-fame where he did not wish to be recognized, but also simultaneously to display his bravado and dissimulate his age, for our habits persist even in situations where they are no longer of any use to us, and hardly anyone noticed that in greeting him M. de Charlus addressed him with a smile even more difficult to interpret than to detect; this smile was apparently the same – although actually exactly the opposite – as that exchanged by two men who habitually frequent high society if by chance they meet in dubious circumstances (for example at the Elysée Palace, where Général de Froberville, when in former times he used to meet Swann there, affected on noticing Swann that air of ironic and mysterious complicity appropriate to two familiars of the Princesse des Laumes compromised by meeting at M. Grévy's[9]). But what was rather remarkable was the real improvement in his character. Legrandin – ever since the days when as a child I went to spend my holidays in Combray – had long been cultivating aristocratic relations which at best yielded no more than the odd invitation to an unproductive stay in a resort. Suddenly, the marriage of his nephew having intervened to join these long-separated branches, Legrandin enjoyed a social situation to which in retrospect his former relations with people who had frequented him, however closely, only in private, gave a certain substance. Ladies to whom people wanted to introduce him made out that he had spent two weeks in the country with them every year for the last twenty years, and that it was he who had given them the charming antique barometer in the small drawing-room. He had by chance been involved in 'circles' which included dukes who now became related to him. Yet as soon as he acquired his social position, he ceased to take advantage of it. It was not merely because once he was an official guest he no longer experienced any pleasure at being invited, but also, because of the two vices which had competed so long within him, the least natural, snobbery, gave way to the other, more natural one, since it marked a return, however devious, to nature. No doubt these two vices are not incompatible, and the back-streets of the suburbs may well be explored on the way home from a duchess's shindig. But, cooling with age, Legrandin turned away from the accumulation of too many pleasures, from sallying forth without taking all due precaution, thus rendering his natural pleasures, consisting above all in friendship and time-consuming chatter, increasingly platonic, making him spend most of his time with the lower classes and leaving him little time for life in high society. Mme de Cambremer herself became relatively indifferent to the friendly advances of the Princesse de Guermantes. The latter, obliged to frequent the Marquise, had realized, as always happens when we spend more time with any fellow-beings, with their inevitable mixture of qualities which we finally discover and defects which we eventually accept, that Mme de Cambremer was a woman gifted with an intelligence and endowed with a culture which I for my part appreciated little, but which seemed remarkable to the Duchesse. Thus often towards nightfall she called on Mme Cambremer to pay her a lengthy visit. But the magical charm that Mme de Cambremer had imagined the Duchesse de Guermantes to possess evaporated as soon as she found herself solicited by the latter. And she invited her from politeness rather than pleasure. A more striking change, at once symmetrical with and different from that which had occurred in Swann after his marriage, became apparent in Gilberte. Certainly during the first few months Gilberte had taken pleasure in inviting the most select society. Doubtless it was only because of the inheritance that she invited the close friends who mattered to her mother, albeit on certain days only, when they came on their own, cloistered apart from people of fashion, as if the contact of people like Mme Bontemps or Mme Cottard with the Princesse de Guermantes or the Princess of Parma might, like that of two unstable compounds, have produced some irreparable catastrophe. None the less, the Bontemps, Cottards and company, however disappointed at having to dine alone, were proud to be able to say, 'We dined with the Marquise de Saint-Loup,' all the more so because Gilberte occasionally made so bold as to invite them at the same time as Mme de Marsantes, who, in the interests of the inheritance, cut a truly distinguished figure with her tortoiseshell and feather fan. She merely took care from time to time to sing the praises of those people discreet enough not to call unless invited, which announcement was intended as a gracious but haughty salutation for those who had ears to hear, such as Cottard, Bontemps and company. Perhaps because of my 'young friend from Balbec', whose aunt I would have liked to see me in these surroundings, I would have preferred to be invited to those evenings. But Gilberte, for whom I was now above all a friend of her husband and of the Guermantes (and who – perhaps way back in Combray, in the days when my parents would not speak to her mother – at an age when we not only attribute some particular quality to each and every thing but also classify them by species, had invested me with the sort of prestige which we never lose afterwards), considered those evenings unworthy of me and would say to me as I was leaving: 'I was very pleased to see you, but why don't you come back tomorrow, you will meet my aunt Guermantes and Mme de Poix, today it was Mama's friends, to keep Mama happy.' But this lasted only a few months, and soon everything was totally changed. Was this because Gilberte's social life was bound to display the same contrasts as that of Swann? Be that as it may, Gilberte had not long been Marquise de Saint-Loup (and soon after, as we shall see, Duchesse de Guermantes) before, having achieved what was most spectacular and most difficult, thinking that the name of Guermantes was now incorporated within her like a gilded enamel and that whomsoever she frequented, she would remain the Duchesse de Guermantes for all and sundry (which was a mistake, for the value of an aristocratic title, like that of a share quoted on the stock exchange, rises when in demand and falls when on offer. Everything we believe imperishable tends towards destruction; a social position, like everything else, is not given once and for all but, just like the power of an empire, is reconstituted from moment to moment through a sort of endless renewed process of creation, which explains the apparent anomalies of social or political history over half a century. The creation of the world did not happen 'in the beginning', it happens from day to day. The Marquise de Saint-Loup thought, 'I am the Marquise de Saint-Loup,' in the knowledge that the night before she had turned down three invitations to dine with duchesses. But if to a certain extent her name enhanced the distinctly un-aristocratic circles which she entertained, by an inverse movement the circles which invited the Marquise

devalued the name that she bore. Nothing resists such movements, the greatest names finally succumb. Had Swann not known a princess of the royal house of France whose salon, because anyone at all could be invited, had fallen to the lowest rung? One day when the Princesse des Laumes had felt duty-bound to spend a moment with her Highness, but had found nothing but the lowest sort of company, she had afterwards visited Mme Leroi and had said to Swann and the Marquis de Modène: 'At last I am out of enemy territory. I have just escaped from Mme la Comtesse de X., where there were no more than two or three friendly faces'.) Sharing in a word the opinion of the comic-opera character[10] who declares, 'My name excuses me, I think, from further explanation,' Gilberte started to show her contempt for what she had so desired, to declare that the inhabitants of the Faubourg Saint-Germain were fools unfit for company, and, matching words with deeds, did indeed cease to seek their company. People who first made her acquaintance only after this period, and, when they first met her, heard this Duchesse de Guermantes make fun of the society which she could so easily have frequented, or yawn openly in the face of any one of them, even the most brilliant, who ventured to call on her, blush retrospectively at having themselves found some prestige in high society, and would never dare confide the humiliating secret of their past weaknesses to a woman whom they believe, through the essential grandeur of her nature, to have always been incapable of understanding such weakness. They hear her mock dukes with such brio, and see her, even more significantly, acting in such close accord with her mockery! Doubtless they would not think of investigating the causes of the accident which turned Mlle Swann into Mlle de Forcheville, and Mlle de Forcheville into the Marquise de Saint-Loup and then the Duchesse de Guermantes. Nor perhaps would they guess that the effects of this accident would help no less than its causes to explain the later attitude of Gilberte, since she no longer regarded the frequentation of commoners in quite the same way as she would have when Mlle Swann, a lady addressed by everyone as 'Mme la Duchesse', but addressed by the duchesses whom she found tedious as 'my dear cousin'. We are easily tempted to disdain an ambition which we have failed to fulfil or which we have satisfied and outgrown. And we suppose such disdain inherent even in people whom we did not know at the time. Perhaps if we could go back down the years, we would find these people ravaged, more furiously than anyone, by those same faults which they have managed so completely to hide or overcome that we consider them incapable not only of ever having been affected themselves but even of ever excusing them in others, since we assume that they are unable to imagine them. Meanwhile the salon of the new Marquise de Saint-Loup soon took on its definitive aspect (at least from a social viewpoint, for, as we shall see, all sorts of disturbances of a different nature would erupt there later). Yet this aspect was surprising for the following reason: people still remembered that the most sumptuous and refined receptions in Paris, as brilliant as those of the Princesse de Guermantes, were those of Mme de Marsantes, Saint-Loup's mother. What is more, in recent times, Odette's salon, although held in infinitely less esteem, had none the less been resplendent with luxury and elegance. Whereas Saint-Loup, who thanks to his wife's fortune enjoyed all the comfort that he could wish, dreamed of nothing more than the tranquillity of finishing a fine dinner in the company of artists playing him good music. And this young man, who had once appeared so proud and ambitious, invited to share these luxuries friends to whom his mother would never have spoken. Gilberte for her part put into practice Swann's words, 'I care little for quality, but I fear quantity.' And Saint-Loup, who was completely at his wife's feet, both because he loved her and because it was precisely to her that he owed this supreme luxury, took care not to interfere with her tastes, which so closely resembled his own. In this way Mme de Marsantes's and Mme de Forcheville's great receptions, given for years in order above all to set up their children as brilliantly as possible, did not generate any great receptions by M. and Mme de Saint-Loup. They had the finest horses for riding together, the finest yacht for their cruises – but they never invited more than two guests at a time. When in Paris they never had more than two or three friends to dinner; with the result that, by a process of unforeseen and yet natural regression, their two mothers' great aviaries had been replaced by a silent nest.

The person who benefited least from these two unions was the young Mlle d'Oloron, who, already infected with typhoid fever on the day of her religious nuptials, dragged herself painfully to church and died a few weeks later. The obituary notice which followed shortly after her death mingled names like that of Jupien with almost all the great names of Europe, such as those of the Vicomte and the Vicomtesse de Montmorency, HRH the Comtesse de Bourbon-Soissons, the Prince of Modena-d'Este, the Vicomtesse d'Edumea, Lady Essex, and so on. Doubtless, even for those who knew that the departed was Jupien's niece, this quantity of grand alliances was no surprise. The main thing above all is to have such grand relations. Then the *casus foederis* comes into play and the death of a petty commoner throws all of the princely families of Europe into mourning. But many of the young people of the new generations, not knowing how things really stood, apart from being liable to take Marie-Antoinette d'Oloron, Marquise de Cambremer, for a lady of the noblest birth, might have been liable to commit many another error on reading the obituary notice. Thus if their excursions through France had led them into the countryside near Combray, they might not have been astonished to see that Mme L. de Méséglise and the Comte de Méséglise were among the first of the mourners, alongside the Duc de Guermantes: the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way lie side by side. 'Traditional aristocracy from the same region, perhaps intermarried for generations,' they might have thought. 'Who knows, perhaps it's a branch of the Guermantes which bears the name of the Comtes de Méséglise.' Yet the Comte de Méséglise bore no relation to the Guermantes at all and did not even belong to the world of the Guermantes, but rather to the world of the Cambremers, for the Comte de Méséglise, whose rapid social ascent had seen him spend only two years as Legrandin de Méséglise, was our old friend Legrandin. And no doubt of all false titles, no false title could have been more disagreeable to the Guermantes than this. They had been related in former times to the genuine Comtes de Méséglise, of whose line there remained only one woman, the daughter of obscure folk fallen on hard times, herself married to one of my aunt's tenant farmers, who had become prosperous and bought Mirougrain from her. He had transformed his original name of Ménager into the appellation Ménager de Mirougrain, so that when people said that his wife's maiden name was de Méséglise, they thought this meant that she had been born and bred at Méséglise just as her husband had been at Mirougrain.

Any other false title would have caused the Guermantes fewer problems. But the aristocracy knows how to accommodate such problems, and worse, as long as a marriage judged useful, from whatever point of view, is at stake. Legrandin, backed by the Duc de Guermantes, was the true Comte de Méséglise for some people of that generation and for everyone in the next.

Another error that any uninitiated young reader might have been tempted to commit would have been to believe that the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville signed the obituary notice in their capacity as parents and parents-in-law of the Marquis de Saint-Loup, that is, as the Guermantes connection. Yet they had no call to figure on their list since it was Robert rather than Gilberte who was related to the Guermantes. Yet if, despite such false inferences, the Baron and the Baronne de Forcheville did figure on the bride's list and not on that of the Cambremers, the truth is that it was not through the Guermantes but through Jupien, whom our more knowledgeable reader will recognize as a first cousin of Odette.

After the marriage of his adopted daughter, M. de Charlus brought all his favours to bear on the young Marquis de Cambremer; the latter's tastes resembled those of the Baron, who, since he had found them no obstacle to the marriage with Mlle d'Oloron, could only find him all the more estimable once he became a widower. This is not to say that the Marquis did not have other qualities, which made him a charming companion for M. de Charlus. But even in the case of a man of great value, it is a quality not to be despised by someone who seeks his personal friendship, and one which comes in very handy if he also plays whist. The young Marquis's intelligence was remarkable and, as people said even in Féterne when he was still only a child, he really 'took after his grandmother', being just as enthusiastic and musical as she. Certain other family characteristics recurred in him, but more through imitation, as happened with the whole family, than through atavism. Thus it was that, a little while after the death of his wife, having received a letter signed 'Léonor', which I did not recollect as one of his baptismal names, I understood who my correspondent was only when I read the final flourish: 'Please accept my true sympathy.' This *true*, when 'placed in context', added to the first name Léonor the surname Cambremer.

As the train entered the station in Paris, my mother and I were still discussing these two reports, which, in order to make the journey seem less protracted, she had tried to save for the second stage and had managed to keep from me until we had passed Milan. My mother had very quickly reverted to what was for her the only true opinion, that of my grandmother. My mother had at first thought that my grandmother would have been surprised, and then that she would have been saddened, which was simply a way of saying that my grandmother would have enjoyed such a surprising event and that my mother, unable to tolerate depriving

my grandmother of a pleasure, preferred to think that all was for the best, since such news was of a kind that could not have failed to upset her. But hardly had we arrived home than my mother already felt that she had been too selfish in wishing that she could have made my grandmother share all the surprises that life reserves for us. She still preferred to suppose that these would not have surprised my grandmother, whose predictions they merely ratified. And in these surprising events she was determined to see confirmation of my grandmother's prophetic visions, and proof that she had had a mind that was even profounder and more far-sighted than we had thought. Thus my mother, in her quest to adopt a position of perfect admiration, lost no time in adding: 'And yet, who knows whether your poor grandmother might not have approved? She was so understanding. And you know, don't you, that she counted social connection as opposed to natural distinction for nothing. Well, don't you remember, surely you remember, however strange they were, both of these girls caught her fancy. Think back to the first time she went to meet Mme de Villeparisis, then when she returned to tell us how vulgar she had found M. de Guermantes, and yet how lyrically she praised Jupien. Poor mother, do you remember? She said of the father: "If I had another daughter, I would give her to him, and his daughter is even better than he." And Swann's little girl! She said: "I must say that she is charming, just wait and see what a fine marriage she will make." Poor mother, would that she could see how well she had judged! Right to the end, even after her departure, she will give us lessons in foresight, kindness and good judgment.' And since the pleasures that we saw my grandmother deprived of were all the simplest and humblest of life's pleasures: enjoying an actor's tone of voice, appreciating a favourite menu or the latest novel by a favourite author, Mama said: 'Wouldn't she have been surprised! Wouldn't she have been amused! What a lovely letter she would have written in reply!' And my mother continued: 'Just imagine how pleased our poor Swann would have been, since he was so anxious for his daughter to be invited to the Guermantes', if he could have seen his daughter become one of the Guermantes! – Under a name not his own, led to the altar as Mlle de Forcheville? Do you think that he would have been as happy as all that? – Ah, that is true, I hadn't thought of that. – That's what makes me unable to rejoice for the little "hussy"; it's the thought that she could find it in her heart to drop the name of her father, who was so good to her. – Yes, you are right, after all, perhaps it is better that he never knew of it.' It is as difficult to know whether something would be more likely to cause pleasure or pain to the dead as it is to the living! 'I hear that the Saint-Loups are going to live at Tansonville. I wonder if Swann's father, who so wanted to show off his pond to your poor father, could ever have imagined that the Duc de Guermantes would often see it, especially if he had come to know of his son's dishonourable marriage. But since you yourself have talked so often to Saint-Loup of the pink hawthorn, the lilac and the irises at Tansonville, he will understand you better. Now they will belong to him.' Thus under the dining-room lamp which encourages them, there unfolded one of those conversations where the wisdom, if not of nations at least of families, seizes on some event – a death, an engagement, an inheritance or a ruin – and places it under the magnifying glass of memory, throwing it into high relief, dissociating, distancing and placing in perspective at different points in time and space things which, for those who have not experienced them, seem to run together on a single plane – the roll of the deceased, changes of address, sources of and changes in wealth, transfers of property. Is this wisdom not inspired by the Muse, whom we should fail to recognize for as long as possible if we want to preserve the freshness of our impressions and some creative power, but whom precisely those of us who have avoided her shall meet in the evening of our lives in the nave of some old village church, at a moment when all of a sudden they feel less touched by the eternal beauty expressed in the carvings on the altar than by the diverse fates which they have suffered, as they moved into a distinguished private collection or a chapel, then into a museum, or by the feeling that we are treading on an almost sentient flagstone, composed of the last remains of Arnauld or Pascal, or quite simply by deciphering the names of the daughters of the nobleman or the commoner inscribed on the copper plate of a wooden prie-dieu, imagining perchance the fresh young faces of these village maidens, the Muse who has assumed everything rejected by the higher Muses of philosophy and art, everything unfounded in truth, everything which is merely contingent but which also reveals other laws: the Muse of history!

Some old friends of my mother's, from Combray or nearby, came to see her to talk about Gilberte's marriage, which did not overawe them at all. 'You know who Mlle de Forcheville is, she's quite simply Mlle Swann. And her best man, Charlus, who passes himself off as a "Baron", is the old man who used to keep her mother in full sight of Swann, who found it advantageous. – Why, whatever do you mean?' my mother protested. 'In the first place, Swann was extremely rich. – Not rich enough, it would seem, not to need other people's money. But how does the woman do it, how does she manage to hang on to her old lovers like that? She managed to persuade the first one to marry her, then the third, and then she hauls the second one back from the brink of the grave to get him to act as best man for the daughter she had with the first, or someone else, since the sheer number is confusing! Even she has lost count! I said the third, but the three-hundredth would be more like it. Besides, you know that she's no more a Forcheville than you or I, which makes her a good match for the husband, who obviously isn't noble either. You can be sure that only a fortune-hunter would marry such a creature. They say he's some M. Dupont or M. Durand or other. If we didn't have a radical mayor in Combray now, who won't even talk to the curé, I would have got to the bottom of it. Because you know, of course, that when they published the banns they must have had to give the real name. It's all very well for the newspapers and the stationers who print the invitations to call you the Marquis de Saint-Loup. It doesn't harm a soul, and if it suits these good people, I'm the last to want to spoil their fun, what's it got to do with me? Since I'll never visit the daughter of a woman with a reputation, she can be a marchioness for her servants till the cows come home. But for the registrar it's another matter. Ah, if my cousin Sazerat was still deputy mayor, I would have written to him, and he would have told me what name he had used for the banns!'

This was, moreover, a period when I saw quite a lot of Gilberte, with whom I had resumed my friendship: for in the long term the rhythm of our lives does not scan with the timescale of our friendships. Once a sufficient period of time has elapsed, we see (just as we see the revival of former ministries in politics or of forgotten plays in the theatre) friendly relations resumed, after long years of interruption, between the same people as before, and revived with pleasure. After ten years of reasons for one person to be too much in love, and reasons for the other not to tolerate such despotic demands, the reasons cease to exist. Only affinities matter, and everything that Gilberte would have refused me previously, she easily granted me, no doubt because I no longer desired it. Doing something that had always seemed intolerable or impossible to her, she now, without our ever discussing the reason for the change, was always ready to come to me and never in a hurry to leave; this was because the obstacle had vanished, that is, my love.

A little later I was in fact due to spend a few days at Tansonville. I was rather embarrassed by the trip, for in Paris I kept a girl-friend who slept overnight in the *pied-à-terre* which I had rented for myself. As some need the scent of a forest or the sound of the lapping waters of a lake, I needed to feel her sleeping beside me at night and, during the day, to have her always beside me in the car. For even if we forget a love affair, it may determine the form of the love affair that follows. Already in the very heart of the earlier love affair daily habits existed whose origins we ourselves had forgotten; it was the anguish we first felt one day which made us desperately desire, then systematically repeat like rituals whose original meaning is forgotten, our beloved all the way back to her door, to move her into our home, to attend in person or through the presence of a trusted friend all her comings and goings – all these habits are smooth highways where every day our love follows paths which in former times were scored out by the molten lava of our ardent emotions. But these habits survive the disappearance of the woman concerned, even her memory. They shape, if not all our love affairs, at least certain of our loves, as they recur in turn. And thus in memory of the forgotten Albertine, my home had demanded the presence of my current mistress, who was hidden from visitors while filling my life in the same way as Albertine. And in order to go to Tansonville, I had to get her to agree to be looked after for a few days by one of my friends who was not attracted to women. I was going because I had learned that Gilberte was unhappy, since Robert was deceiving her, but not in the manner which everyone believed and which perhaps even she still believed, or at any rate declared. But self-respect, the urge to deceive others and deceive oneself, and the inevitably imperfect knowledge of one's betrayal which is the lot of all deceived people, were aided and abetted by the fact that Robert, a true nephew of M. de Charlus, showed himself off in public with women whom he compromised and whom everyone, no doubt even Gilberte, believed to be his mistresses … Society even felt that he did not take enough care, refusing to leave the side of the woman he had brought to a soirée and even escorting her home, leaving Mme de Saint-Loup to make her own way home. Anyone who thought to say that the other woman whom he compromised in this way was not his mistress would have seemed naïve, given the blinding obviousness of the evidence. But unfortunately I had been put on the track of the truth, a truth which caused me no end of suffering, by a few words that Jupien let slip. What was my stupefaction

when, a few months before my visit to Tansonville, having gone to take news of M. de Charlus, who had been suffering from cardiac irregularities which gave rise to considerable concern, and finding Jupien on his own, I mentioned some love letters addressed to Robert and signed Bobette, which had been intercepted by Mme de Saint-Loup. I had then learned from the Baron's former factotum that the person signing himself as Bobette was none other than the violinist and critic whom we have mentioned and who had played a considerable part in the life of M. de Charlus! Jupien was unable to speak without indignation: 'The lad was free to do whatever he liked. But if there was one direction he should not have strayed in, it was that of the Baron's nephew. All the more because the Baron loved his nephew like a son; he tried to upset the marriage, it's a disgrace. And he had to employ the most fiendish stratagems, for nobody was more opposed by nature to such things than the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Just think of his extravagant behaviour with his mistresses! No, the fact that this wretched musician left the Baron in the underhand way that he did, you can say that that's his business. But to take up with the nephew! There are things that one just does not do.' Jupien's indignation was sincere; those people we call immoral have a moral indignation just as strong as others', except only that the object of their indignation is slightly different. Moreover, people whose own hearts are not directly concerned and who constantly judge which relationships are inadvisable and which marriages bad, as if one were free to choose whom one loves, take no account of the delicious mirage which love projects and which so entirely and uniquely enfolds the person whom one loves that the 'folly' committed by a man who marries a kitchenmaid or his best friend's mistress is in general the only poetical act that he will accomplish in the course of his whole existence. I understood that there had very nearly been a separation between Robert and his wife (without Gilberte being aware yet of what the problem was) and that it was Mme de Marsantes, a loving, ambitious and philosophical mother, who had arranged, or rather imposed, the reconciliation. She belonged to that milieu where the endless mingling and recycling of blood, and the dilapidation of inheritances, may at any moment reawaken hereditary vices and compromises, either in the realm of the passions or in that of financial interest. It was with just such energy that she had formerly sponsored Mme Swann or Jupien's daughter's marriage, and arranged the marriage of her own son with Gilberte, employing on her own account, with painful resignation, the same atavistic wisdom that she had lavished on the whole Faubourg. And perhaps the only reason why she had suddenly rather clumsily precipitated the marriage between Robert and Gilberte, which certainly gave her less trouble and caused fewer tears to be shed than making him break up with Rachel, was the fear that he might take up again with another tart – or even with the same one, for Robert took a long time to forget Rachel – and perhaps find salvation without her. Now I understood what Robert had tried to tell me at the Princesse de Guermantes': 'It's a shame that your girlfriend from Balbec does not have the fortune required by my mother, I think that the two of us would have got on well together.' He had meant to imply that she was from Gomorrah as he was from Sodom, or perhaps, if he had not yet arrived there, he enjoyed the company of only those women whom he could love after a certain fashion and in the presence of other women. If I had not thus, apart from some rare flashes of recollection, lost all curiosity to find out anything about my young friend, I could have questioned not only Gilberte but also her husband on her account. In the end it was the same factor that had inspired both in Robert and in me the desire to marry Albertine (that is, her love for women). But the causes of our desire, like its ends, were opposite. I had been driven to it by the despair I had felt at the discovery, Robert by his satisfaction; I in order to prevent her though constant surveillance from yielding to her inclination; Robert in order to cultivate it and to enjoy the freedom that he would allow her to offer him her girl-friends. Whereas Jupien situated so recently the new orientation that Robert's carnal tastes had taken, so different from the original, a conversation which I held with Aimé and which made me very unhappy, showed me that the former *maître d'hôtel* from Balbec dated this divergence or inversion much earlier. This conversation took place during a two- or three-day stay that I made in Balbec, where Saint-Loup himself, during a long period of leave, had come with his wife, whose side, in this first phase, he never left. I had admired how Rachel's influence on Robert could still be felt. Only a newly-wed who has lived for a long time with a mistress knows how to remove his wife's coat on entering a restaurant and show her proper respect. During his affair he has received the education that a good husband should have. Not far away, at a table near mine, Bloch, surrounded by pretentious young university dons, exuded an air of bogus relaxation, shouting aloud to one of his friends, 'No, no, my dear friend, you give the order. I have never in my life been able to choose a menu. I've never been able to give orders!' he repeated with suspect pride and, mingling literature with gourmandise gave his instant opinion on the bottle of champagne that he liked to see enhance a conversation 'in totally symbolic fashion'. Whereas Saint-Loup knew how to give orders. He was seated beside Gilberte, who was already pregnant (later he ceaselessly got her with child), just as he slept with her in their double bed at the hotel. He spoke only to his wife, the rest of the hotel seemed not to exist for him, but as soon as a waiter took an order or came near, he raised his limpid eyes and looked straight at him for no more than two seconds, while his clear-sighted gaze seemed to display a series of interests and requests entirely different from those which any other client might have inspired, however long they spent eyeing a page or a waiter in order to make remarks about him, witty or otherwise, that he could retail to his friends. This brief, discreet, indifferent glance, showing that he was interested in the waiter in his own right, would reveal to anyone who observed it that this excellent husband, the previously passionate lover of Rachel, had another dimension to his life, and one which seemed to him to be infinitely more interesting than the one to which his duty assigned him. But this was the only visible sign of it. His eyes had already returned to Gilberte, who had noticed nothing, he introduced her to a friend of his who was passing through, and he left to take her for a walk. Now on this occasion Aimé told me of a much earlier time, the time when I had made the acquaintance of Saint-Loup, also in Balbec, through Mme de Villeparisis.

'But, my dear Sir, yes, of course, it's common knowledge, I've known it for ages. The first year that your good self was in Balbec, M. le Marquis took my liftboy upstairs, on the pretext of developing some photos of your own lady grandmother. The lad tried to complain, we had to go to an awful lot of trouble to keep things quiet. And then, Sir, I'm sure Sir will remember the day when he came to dine with the Marquis de Saint-Loup and his mistress, who served as a screen for M. le Marquis. I am sure Sir will remember that M. le Marquis left on the pretext of a fit of temper. Of course you know that I am not saying that Madam was right. She really made him suffer. But you can't stop me believing that on that occasion M. le Marquis's anger was faked, and he needed to get away from Sir and Madam.' At least as far as that day was concerned, I am sure that, even if Aimé was not deliberately lying, he was entirely mistaken. I remembered only too well the state that Robert was in and the slap that he had administered to the journalist. And indeed it was the same for Balbec, either the liftboy had lied, or it was Aimé who was lying. At least that was what I believed; absolute certainty eluded me; we never see more than one side of things, and had it not made me suffer, I would have found a certain beauty in the fact that, while for me the errand of the 'lift' to Saint-Loup had been an easy way to deliver him a letter and receive a reply, for Saint-Loup it had served to get him acquainted with someone who had attracted him. There are at least two sides to every question. Starting from the most insignificant action that one man accomplishes, another would launch into an entirely different series of actions. There is no doubt that I was no more likely to guess the repercussions of the episode involving Saint-Loup and the liftboy, if it ever took place, that would follow the banal despatch of my letter than someone with no knowledge of Wagner other than the duet from *Lohengrin* could foresee the prelude to *Tristan*.[11] Doubtless, objects present man with no more than a limited number of their innumerable attributes, because of the poverty of our senses. Things are coloured because we have eyes; how many other epithets might they not deserve if we had hundreds of senses? But this different aspect that they could have had is made easier for us to understand by what in life is a minimal incident of which we know only a part, believing it to be the whole, and which someone else perceives as if through a window on the other side of the house giving a different view. Supposing that Aimé was not mistaken, Saint-Loup's blush when Bloch had mentioned the 'lift' to him did not perhaps spring only from the fact that he pronounced the word as 'lifed'. But I was convinced that Saint-Loup's physiological evolution had not started at this time and that then he still loved only women. I was able to deduce this retrospectively more from the friendship that Saint-Loup had shown me at Balbec than from any other evidence. It was only as long as he still loved women that he was really capable of friendship. Afterwards, at least for a period of time, the men who did not interest him directly were subject to a display of indifference, which was, I believe, partly sincere, since he had become very cold, but which was also partly an act, designed to make people believe that he was interested only in women. None the less I remember that one day at Doncières as I was setting out to dine with the Verdurins and as he had just been looking rather lingeringly at Charlie, he had said to me: 'It's strange how this lad reminds me of Rachel. Doesn't it strike you too? I find that they have some identical features. Not that it is of any interest to me.' And yet meanwhile his gaze remained afterwards trained for some time

on the horizon, as when, before returning to a round of cards or leaving to dine on the town, we are thinking of one of those long journeys which we suspect we will never undertake but for which we have felt a sudden pang of yearning. But if Robert saw something of Rachel in Charlie, Gilberte, for her part, tried to take on something of Rachel in order to please her husband, tying her hair with yellow, pink or poppy-red silk ribbons and adopting the same hair-style, for she was jealous because she thought that her husband was still in love with Rachel. It may well be possible that Robert's love hovered on the boundary between that of a man in love with a woman and that of a man in love with another man. At all events the memory of Rachel played no more than an aesthetic role, and it is even improbable that it could have acted otherwise. One day Robert went so far as to ask her to dress as a man and to let her forelock hang loose, and yet he was content merely to look at her, feeling no satisfaction. He remained none the less attached to her and paid her scrupulously, if coldly, the enormous allowance which he had promised her and which did not prevent her later from dealing with him in the most despicable manner. Gilberte would not have suffered from this generosity towards Rachel if she had known that it was simply the dutiful discharge of a promise which no longer corresponded to any real love. But love was precisely what he feigned to feel for Rachel. Homosexuals would be the best husbands in the world if they did not pretend that they loved women. Actually, Gilberte did not complain. It was the fact that she had thought that Robert had been loved by Rachel, over such a long period of time, that had made her desire him, and had made her renounce on his behalf the most attractive matches; she felt in some way that he was making a concession by marrying her. And indeed at first he made comparisons between the two women (who were yet so different in charm and in beauty) which were unfavourable to the delicious Gilberte. But afterwards the latter grew in her husband's esteem while Rachel diminished visibly. Another person who had to eat her words was Mme Swann. If, in Gilberte's eyes, Robert was already surrounded before the marriage by the double halo generated, on the one hand by his life with Rachel, constantly impugned in Mme de Marsantes's lamentations and, on the other hand, by the prestige which the Guermantes had always had for her father and which she had inherited from him, Mme de Forcheville, however, would have preferred a more dazzling marriage, perhaps with a prince (there were impoverished royal families who would have been glad of the money – which it should be said turned out to be considerably less than the eighty million francs that had been mentioned – once rendered odourless by the attribution of the name of Forcheville) and a son-in-law less devalued by a life spent outside society. She had been unable to vanquish Gilberte's will, complained bitterly to everyone and poured scorn on her son-in-law. But one fine day everything had changed, the son-in-law had become an angel and he was mocked only in private asides. This was because age had not deprived Mme Swann (now Mme de Forcheville) of her habitual tastes as a kept woman, but, since her admirers had deserted her, it had deprived her of the means to gratify them. She desired a new necklace every day, a new dress sewn with diamonds, a more luxurious car, but she did not have a large fortune, since Forcheville had spent nearly everything, and – what Jewish ancestry had thus informed Gilberte? – she had an adorable but dreadfully mean daughter, who calculated every penny of her husband's budget and, naturally, that of her mother even more so. Now, suddenly she had caught scent of and found a protector in Robert. The fact that she was no longer in her prime was of little importance in the eyes of a son-in-law who did not love women. All that he asked of his mother-in-law was that she smooth over the occasional difficulty that might arise between him and Gilberte and consent to a trip which he planned to make with Morel. As soon as Odette had got to work, she was rewarded with a magnificent ruby. Which meant that Gilberte needed to be even more generous to her husband. Odette persuaded her all the more fervently since she herself would be the beneficiary. Thus, thanks to Robert, she was able, on the threshold of her fiftieth (some said her sixtieth) year to dazzle with extraordinary luxury at any dinner-table and every soirée to which she was invited, without needing as she had done before to have a 'friend', who now would no longer have forked out, or even acted his part. Thus she embarked upon a final period of chastity, which seemed definitive, and she had never been more elegant.

It was not only the ill-will and resentment of the former pauper for the master who has made him rich, while none the less making him feel the difference in their conditions (which was in Charlus's character, and showed even more in his vocabulary), that had driven Charlie towards Saint-Loup in order to inflict more suffering on the Baron. It was also perhaps self-interest. I gained the impression that Robert must be giving him considerable sums of money. At one reception where I had met Robert before leaving for Combray and where his manner of exhibiting himself with an elegant woman who passed for his mistress, clinging to her sides and publicly entangled in her skirts as if they were one and the same being, made me think of a sort of ancestral gesture, albeit in this case more nervous and excited, that I had noticed in M. de Charlus, as it were billowing in the drapery of Mme Molé or her like, bearing the standard of a *gynophile* cause which was not his own but which he liked, however undeservedly, to flaunt in this fashion, whether because he found it afforded protection, or whether aesthetic pleasure, I was struck on my return by how economical this young man, who was so generous when he was far less rich, had become. That people care only for their possessions, and that he who was profligate with his occasional windfalls should then start saving when he comes into his fortune, is no doubt a fairly common phenomenon, but one which none the less seems in this case to take on a different aspect. Saint-Loup refused to hire a cab, and I noticed that he had kept a tramway transfer-ticket. Doubtless in this way Saint-Loup exploited, to different ends, talents which he had acquired during his long liaison with Rachel. A young man who has spent a long time living with a woman is very different from the virgin whose bride is his first woman. It was sufficient, on the rare occasions when Robert took his wife out to a restaurant, to observe his skill and respect in removing her hat and coat, his art in ordering dinner and having it served, his care in smoothing Gilberte's sleeves before she put her jacket back on, to realize that he had spent a long time as another woman's lover before becoming this one's husband. Similarly, having been obliged to intervene in the minutest details of Rachel's housekeeping, partly because she herself had no idea how to manage it, then later because his jealousy drove him to supervise her servants with a firm hand, he managed in administrating his wife's property and her household to sustain this skilfully learned role which Gilberte might possibly not have been able to play and which she willingly left to him. But no doubt he did it above all to enable Charlie to benefit from the slightest cheese-paring savings, ultimately keeping him in style without Gilberte noticing or suffering. Perhaps even because he believed the violinist to be a spendthrift 'like all artists' (Charlie used the title in this way with no pride and little conviction in order to provide an excuse for not replying to letters, etc., and for a host of other faults that he thought were universally agreed to be part and parcel of an artist's psychology). Personally I found that it made no difference from a moral point of view whether one took one's pleasure with a man or a woman, and only too natural and human to take it wherever one could find it. So that if Robert had not been married, his liaison with Charlie ought not to have caused me the slightest pain. And yet I did feel that the pain I experienced would have been just as sharp if Robert had still been a bachelor. Coming from anyone else, what he was doing would have left me indifferent. But I wept to think that I had in times gone by felt so great an affection for a different Saint-Loup, and that I felt clearly from his newly cold and evasive manner that this was no longer reciprocated, for, since he had found that men could arouse his desire, they no longer inspired his friendship. How could that have occurred in a young man who had so loved women that I had seen him in despair when 'Rachel, when of the Lord' had tried to leave him? Had the resemblance between Charlie and Rachel – which was lost on me – been the springboard for Robert to pass from the tastes of his father to those of his uncle, thus accomplishing the evolution that even in the latter had happened rather late in life? And yet on occasion Aimé's words returned to disturb me; I remembered Robert that year in Balbec; he had a way of not looking at the liftboy when he was talking to him in a way that much recalled M. Charlus's manner of speaking to certain men. But Robert could very well have inherited this from M. de Charlus and a certain hauteur and physical deportment of the Guermantes, and not at all from the Baron's special tastes. Thus it was that the Duc de Guermantes, who had absolutely no such tastes, had the same nervous manner of twisting his wrist, as if he were fastening a lace cuff around it, and also some shrill and affected tones in his voice, all mannerisms which in M. de Charlus would have invited a different interpretation and to which he himself gave another, as the individual expresses his particularities through impersonal, atavistic traits which are perhaps merely personal characteristics from former times which have become crystallized in terms of voice and gesture. In the light of this latter hypothesis, which borders on natural history, one would not call M. de Charlus a Guermantes affected by a flaw and expressing it partly through the characteristics of the Guermantes race, rather, it would be the Duc de Guermantes who would be the odd one out in a perverted family, an individual whom the hereditary malady has so well spared that the external stigmata which it has marked him with have lost all their meaning. I remembered that the first day at Balbec when I had seen Saint-Loup, with his fair complexion and refined physique, seemingly wrought from some precious substance and looking so mannered as he waved his monocle in front of him, I had found that he had an effeminate air, which was certainly not the result of what I was now learning about him, but a grace specific to the

Guermantes, that fineness of Dresden porcelain in which the Duchesse too was modelled. I also remembered his affection for me, and his tender and sentimental way of showing it, and thought that this too, which might have misled someone else, meant something entirely different at the time, even quite the opposite, from what I was now discovering. But when had it started? If it was the year when I had returned to Balbec, how was it that he had not returned even once to see the 'lift', and had never mentioned him to me? And as for the first year, how could he have noticed him, being as passionately enamoured of Rachel as he was at the time? That first year, I had found Saint-Loup eccentric, like a true Guermantes. But he was even more peculiar than I had thought. Yet when we have had no direct intuition of something but have learned it only from others, it is too late, we are unable to transmit it to our soul, for its lines of communication with reality are closed; so we cannot enjoy the discovery, it comes too late. Besides, in any case, this discovery hurt me too much for me to take any intellectual pleasure in it. Of course, after what M. de Charlus had told me at Mme Verdurin's in Paris, I no longer doubted that Robert's case was common to a host of honourable citizens, even the best and the most intelligent among them. Learning it of anyone but Robert would have left me indifferent. The doubts which Aimé inspired in me tarnished our whole friendship in Balbec and Doncières, and, although I believed neither in friendship nor that I had ever really felt it for Robert, when I thought back over these stories about the 'lift' and the restaurant where I had dined with Saint-Loup and Rachel, I had to make an effort not to weep.

However, I should not have to dwell on this visit to the country near Combray, and at the time in my life when perhaps I thought least of Combray, if it had not provided, precisely because of this, at least temporary confirmation of certain ideas which had first struck me on the way to Guermantes, and of other ideas that had struck me on the way to Méséglise. Every evening I retraced, albeit in the opposite direction, the steps of the walk which we used to take in the afternoon in Combray when we went out towards Méséglise. Now at Tansonville we dined long after the hour when in Combray in days gone by we would have been asleep. And because of the hot weather, and because Gilberte spent the afternoons painting in the château chapel, we did not set out for our walk until about two hours before dinner. Our former pleasure, of observing on our way home how the crimson sky framed the wayside calvary or dipped into the Vivonne, was replaced by that of leaving at nightfall and finding the village deserted except for the shifting blue tones and irregular triangular forms of the sheep coming home. Over one half of the fields the sun was setting; over the other the moon was already lit and preparing to bathe them entirely in its light. Sometimes Gilberte let me go on my own, and I walked onward leaving my shadow in my wake, like a boat sailing forth through enchanted waters; but usually she came with me. The walks we took then were most often the same as those we had taken in earlier days when we were children: now on my way to Guermantes, how could I have avoided experiencing even more strongly than ever the feeling that I would never be capable of writing, added to the realization that my imagination and my sensitivity had weakened, when I saw how little curiosity Combray inspired in me? I was sad to see how little I relived my past years. I found the Vivonne narrow and ugly beside the tow-path. Not that I discovered any major material discrepancy with what I recalled. But, since I had been separated by my totally divergent life from the places which I now happened to rediscover, there was not between them and me that contiguity which, even before one is aware of it, gives birth to the sudden, delicious, all-enveloping irruption of memory. Doubtless because I did not understand their nature, I felt sad to think that my faculties of feeling and imagining must have diminished if I was experiencing no pleasure on these walks with Gilberte. Gilberte herself, who understood me even less well than I did myself, increased my sadness by sharing my astonishment. 'However can you not be moved,' she asked, 'when you take the same steep little track that you used to climb in the past?' And she herself was so changed that I no longer found her beautiful, and in fact, she was no longer beautiful at all. While we walked, I saw the landscape change, as we first climbed steep slopes, but then walked downhill. I chatted with Gilberte, which I found very pleasant. And yet it was not all that easy. In so many individuals there are different, dissimilar layers, the character of the father, the character of the mother; we traverse first one, then the other. But the next day the order of the layering is reversed. And ultimately we no longer knows who could separate the parts and who could be trusted to sit in judgment. Gilberte was like one of those countries with which we dare not conclude an alliance because they change government too often. Yet basically we are wrong. However discontinuous the life of an individual, memory establishes within him a sort of identity, with the result that he does not want to break promises that he remembers, even if he did not sign them himself. As for intelligence, Gilberte's was very shrewd, give or take a few eccentricities inherited from her mother. But independently of her intrinsic qualities, I remember how greatly she astonished me on several occasions, during the conversations which we held while out walking. Once, the first time, by telling me that, 'If you weren't too hungry and it weren't so late, if we took the path on the left and then turned to the right it would take us less than a quarter of an hour to reach the Guermantes.' It was as if she had said, 'Turn left, then turn right, and you will grasp the intangible, you will reach the distant and unattainable goals of which on earth we know only the direction, and only' – something I had always previously thought of as all I could ever know of the Guermantes, and perhaps in a sense I was not entirely wrong – 'the "way" towards them'. One of my other moments of astonishment was to see the 'source of the Vivonne', which I had imagined to be something as extra-terrestrial as the entrance to Hell, and which was no more than a kind of square wash-tub full of bubbles. And the third time was when Gilberte said: 'If you like, we could still go out one afternoon to walk towards Guermantes, but we could walk past Méséglise, it's the prettiest route,' a sentence which overturned all the ideas of my childhood by revealing that the two ways were not as irreconcilable as I had thought. But what struck me the most was how little, during this stay, I relived my former years, how little I wanted to revisit Combray, and how narrow and ugly I found the Vivonne. Yet it was during one of those quasi-nocturnal albeit pre-prandial walks – since she dined so late! – that she did authenticate for me the fantasies which I had formed around the way to Méséglise. Just as we were about to enter a mysteriously smooth and deep valley bathed in moonlight, we stopped for a moment, like two insects about to dive into the depths of a blue-tinted calyx. Then Gilberte, perhaps merely acting the well-mannered hostess, reluctant to let you leave so early and wishing she could have given you a deeper appreciation of the countryside that you seemed to like, spoke to me with all the skill of a sophisticated woman adept at mingling silence, simplicity and sobriety with the expression of feeling, leading you to believe that you have a place in her life which no one else could replace. Gushing suddenly with an affection inspired by the sweetness and warmth of the evening breeze, I replied, 'You mentioned the steep little track the other day. How I loved you then!' She answered, 'Why didn't you tell me? I had no idea. I loved you too. And I even once threw myself at your feet. – Whenever was that? – The first time, at Tansonville, you were out walking with your family, I was on my way home, and had never seen such a handsome little boy. I used', she added with an absent and modest air, 'to go to play with my young friends in the ruins of the dungeon at Roussainville. And you can guess how naughty it was, for it was a group of boys and girls of all sorts, and we took full advantage of the darkness. The choir-boy from Combray, Théodore, who, I have to admit, was very nice (my God, he was handsome!) but who has become extremely ugly (now he's the chemist at Méséglise), had fun with all the little village girls for miles around. Since they let me out on my own, as soon as I could get away, I rushed off to join them. I can't tell you how much I would have loved to see you there; I remember only too well, since I had only a moment to tell you, given the danger of being seen by your parents and mine, how I showed you so crudely what I wanted that I'm ashamed of it now. But you looked at me so fiercely that I realized that you didn't want to.' And suddenly I thought that the real Gilberte and the real Albertine were perhaps those who offered themselves up in a single glance, one by a hedgerow of pink hawthorn, the other on the beach. And it was I, unable to understand something which I was to retrieve only later in my memory, after a delay during which the whole emotional undercurrent of my conversation had made them fear to be as frank as they had been in the first instance, who had spoiled everything with my clumsiness. I had 'bungled' things more completely with them than Saint-Loup had with Rachel, and for the same reasons, although I have to say that my relative failure with them was less absurd. 'And the second time', continued Gilberte, 'was years later when I saw you in your doorway, the day before I met you at my aunt Oriane's; I didn't recognize you straight away, or rather I recognized you without realizing it, since I felt the same urges that I had at Tansonville. – But in between, there was the Champs-Elysées. – Yes, but then you were too much in love with me, I felt that you were spying on my every move.' I did not think to ask her the identity of the young man with whom I saw her walking down the Champs-Elysées the day that I had set out to meet her again, when I might have been reconciled with her while there was still time, on a day which would perhaps have changed my life if I had not met two shadowy figures coming towards me side by side in the twilight. If I had asked her, she might have told me the truth, as might Albertine, if she had come back to life. And indeed, does death not come between us and women whom we no longer love but meet again years later, just as if they were no longer of this world, since the fact that our love no longer exists makes of the women that they used to be, or the men that we were, dead people? Perhaps also she might not have remembered, or she might have lied. In

any case I no longer saw any interest in finding out, since my heart had already changed more than Gilberte's face. It no longer appealed to me, but the main thing was that I was no longer unhappy, and I could not have imagined, if I had thought of it again, that I could have been so unhappy to see Gilberte walking slowly side by side with another young man that I could have thought, 'It's all over, I refuse ever to see her again.' Of the state of mind which, for the whole of that far-off year, had been nothing but endless torture to me, nothing remained. For in this world where everything wears out, where everything perishes, there is one thing that collapses and is more completely destroyed than anything else, and leaves fewer traces than beauty itself: and that is grief.

If, however, I am not surprised not to have asked with whom she was walking down the Champs-Elysées, for I had already seen too many examples of how Time dulls our curiosity, I am a little surprised not to have told Gilberte that before meeting her that day I had sold an antique Chinese vase in order to buy her some flowers. My only consolation during those very sad times that followed was in fact that one day I might be able without embarrassment to tell her of this so tender intention. More than a year afterwards, if I saw that a car was in danger of striking mine, my only reason for not wanting to die was to be able to tell this to Gilberte. I consoled myself with the thought, 'Let's not rush things, I've all my life ahead of me for that.' And because of that I did not want to lose my life. Now it would have seemed to me unpleasant to recount, almost ridiculous and 'compromising'. 'Besides,' Gilberte went on, 'even on the day that I met you on your doorstep, you were still so like you were at Combray, if only you knew how little you had changed!' I pictured Gilberte again in my memory. I could have drawn the rectangle of light shed by the sun beneath the hawthorns, the spade that the little girl held in her hand, the lingering look that she cast in my direction. Except that, given the crude gesture which accompanied it, I had seen it as a look of contempt, because what I wanted seemed to me to be something of which little girls knew nothing and complied with only in my imagination, during my hours of solitary desire. Even less could I have imagined that, so easily and so swiftly, almost under my grandfather's nose, one of them might have been so bold as to spell it out.

Thus after so many years I had to touch up the image that I recalled so well, an operation which made me relatively happy by showing me that the uncrossable abyss which I had at that time believed to exist between me and a certain kind of little girl with golden hair was as imaginary as the abyss described by Pascal, and which I found poetical because of the long series of years I needed to cross in order to perform this operation. I felt a renewed pang of desire and regret on thinking of the dungeons of Roussainville. And yet I was pleased, as I realized that the happiness which I had striven with all my might to achieve in those days, and which nothing could ever now restore, had existed elsewhere than in my thoughts, and indeed so near to me in the Roussainville which I talked of so often and which I glimpsed from the toilet scented with iris. And I had had no idea! In short, she had subsumed everything that I had desired on my walks, when I reached the point where I could not bear to go home, as I felt that the trees were on the point of becoming human and parting their limbs. What I had then so feverishly desired, she had almost, if only I had been able to understand and accept it, made me taste while still an adolescent. Even more than I had thought, Gilberte was already at this time fully engaged in the Méséglise way.

And even on the day when I had met her in a doorway, although she was not the Mlle de l'Orgeville whom Robert had met in a house of ill-fame (and how extraordinary it was that the person whom I had asked to enlighten me on this subject was none other than her future husband!), I had not been entirely mistaken as to the significance of her glance, nor as to the kind of woman that she was and now admitted to me that she had been. 'All that is so long ago,' she said, 'I've never thought of anyone but Robert since the day we were engaged. And, you know, those childish pranks are still not what I regret the most.'

Bois of Boulogne

That complexity of the Bois de Boulogne which makes it an artificial place and, in the zoological or mythological sense of the word, a Garden, I discovered again this year as I was crossing it to go to Trianon, on one of the first mornings of this month of November when, in Paris, inside the houses, we are so close to the autumn spectacle, and yet denied it, as it rapidly comes to an end without our witnessing it, that we are filled with a yearning, a veritable fever for the dead leaves that may go so far as to stop us from sleeping. In my closed room, they had been coming for a month now, summoned by my desire to see them, between my thoughts and any object to which I applied myself, and they eddied like those yellow spots that sometimes, whatever we may be looking at, dance in front of our eyes. And that morning, no longer hearing the rain fall as on the days before, seeing the fine weather smile at the corners of the drawn curtains as at the corners of a closed mouth that betrays the secret of its happiness, I had felt that I might be able to look at those yellow leaves as the light passed through them, in their supreme beauty; and being no more able to keep myself from going to see the trees than in earlier days, when the wind blew too hard in my chimney, from departing for the seaside, I had left to go to Trianon, by way of the Bois de Boulogne. It was the hour and it was the season when the Bois seems perhaps most multiform, not only because it is more subdivided, but also because it is subdivided in a different way. Even in the open parts where one embraces a great space, here and there, in front of the dark distant masses of the trees that had no leaves or still had their summer leaves, a double row of orange chestnut trees seemed, as in a picture just begun, to be the only thing painted so far by the scene painter, who had not put any color on the rest, and it offered its avenue in full light for the episodic walk of figures that would be added later on.

Farther off, at a place where the trees were still covered in all their green leaves, one alone, small, squat, lopped, obstinate, shook in the wind a homely head of red hair. Elsewhere, again, there was a first awakening of this May of the leaves, and those of an ampelopsis as marvelous and smiling as a pink winter hawthorn had since that same morning been all in flower. And the Bois had the temporary and artificial look of a tree nursery or a park, where for botanical purposes or in preparation for a festival, they have just placed among the trees of a common sort that have not yet been transplanted, two or three precious species with fantastic foliage which seem to be reserving an empty space around themselves, giving air, creating light. Thus it was the season when the Bois de Boulogne reveals the most numerous different varieties and juxtaposes the most numerous distinct parts in a composite aggregation. And it was the hour, as well. In the places where the trees still kept their leaves, they seemed to be undergoing a change in substance starting from the point where they were touched by the light of the sun, almost horizontal in the morning as it would be again a few hours later at the moment when in the early twilight it flames up like a lamp, projects over a distance onto the foliage a warm and artificial glow, and sets ablaze the topmost leaves of a tree that remains the dull and incombustible candelabrum of its burning tip. Here, it thickened the leaves of the chestnut trees like bricks and, like a piece of yellow Persian masonry patterned in blue, crudely cemented them against the sky, there on the contrary detached them from it as they clutched at it with their fingers of gold. Halfway up a tree clothed in Japanese ivy, it had grafted and brought into bloom, too dazzling to discern clearly, an immense bouquet as though of red flowers, perhaps a variety of carnation. The different parts of the Bois, merging more completely in summer in the thickness and monotony of their green, were now separated. Open spaces made visible the entrance to almost every one of them, or a sumptuous bit of foliage marked it like a banner. One could distinguish, as on a colored map, Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, Madrid, the Race Course, the shores of the lake. From time to time there would appear some useless construction, a fake grotto, a mill for which the trees parted to make room or which a lawn carried forward on its soft platform. One sensed that the Bois was not merely a wood, that it fulfilled a purpose foreign to the life of its trees, the exhilaration I was experiencing was not caused merely by an admiration for autumn, but by some desire. The great source of a joy which the soul feels at first without recognizing its cause, without understanding that it is motivated by nothing outside. And so I looked at the trees with an unsatisfied tenderness that passed beyond them and went on without my knowing it toward that masterpiece of lovely strolling women which they enclose each day for several hours. I went toward the allée des Acacias. I passed through old groves where the morning light imposed new divisions, pruning the trees, joining together the different stems, and composing bouquets. Deftly it drew toward itself a pair of trees; using the powerful scissors of a ray of light and a shadow, it cut off from each of them half its trunk and branches and, weaving together the two halves that remained, made of them either a single pillar of shadow, delimited by the sunshine around it, or a single phantom of brightness whose tremulous artificial contour was ringed by a net of black shadow. When a ray of sun gilded the highest branches, they seemed, steeped in a sparkling dampness, to emerge alone from the liquid emerald-colored atmosphere in which the entire forest was plunged as though under the sea. For the trees continued to live their own life and, when they had no more leaves, that life shone more brightly on the sheath of green velvet that wrapped their trunks or in the white enamel of the spheres of mistletoe that spangled the tops of the poplars, as round as the sun and the moon in Michelangelo's *Creation*. But forced as they have been for so many years by a sort of grafting to live a life shared with women, they conjured up for me the wood nymph, the lovely quick and colorful worldly beauty whom they cover with their branches as she passes beneath them, obliging her to feel as they do the power of the season; they recalled to me the happy time of my believing youth, when I would avidly come to the places where masterpieces of feminine elegance were created for a few moments among the unconscious and complicitous leaves. But the beauty which the pines and acacias of the Bois de Boulogne made me desire, trees more disturbing because of this than the chestnuts and lilacs of Trianon that I was going to see, was not fixed outside me in the mementos of some historic period, in works of art, in a little temple to the god of Love whose base is piled with golden palmate leaves. I reached the shores of the lake, I went on as far as the Tir aux Pigeons. The idea of perfection which I carried inside me I had conferred at that time upon the height of a victoria, upon the slenderness of those horses, as furious and light as wasps, their eyes bloodshot like the cruel steeds of Diomedes, which now, filled as I was with a desire to see again what I had once loved, as ardent as the desire that had driven me down these same paths many years before, I wanted to see before my eyes again at the moment when Mme. Swann's enormous coachman, watched over by a little groom as fat as a fist and as childlike as Saint George, tried to control those wings of steel as they thrashed about quivering with fear. Alas, now there were only automobiles driven by mustached mechanics with tall footmen by their sides. I wanted to hold in front of my bodily eyes, so as to know if they were as charming as they appeared in the eyes of my memory, women's little hats so low they seemed to be simple crowns. All the hats were now immense, covered with fruits and flowers and varieties of birds. In place of the lovely dresses in which Mme. Swann looked like a queen, I now saw Greco-Saxon tunics with Tanagra folds, and sometimes in the style of the Directoire, made of liberty-silk chiffons sprinkled with flowers like wallpaper. On the heads of the gentlemen who could have walked with Mme. Swann in the allée de la Reine-Marguerite, I did not find the gray hats of earlier times, nor any others. They went out bare-headed. And I no longer had any belief to infuse into all these newelements of the spectacle, to give them substance, unity, life; they went past scattered before me, randomly, without reality, containing in themselves no beauty that my eyes might have tried as they had in earlier times to form into a composition. These were ordinary women, in whose elegance I had no faith and whose dress seemed to me unimportant. But when a belief disappears, there survives it—more and more vigorous so as to mask the absence of the power we have lost to give reality to new things—a fetishistic attachment to the old things which our belief once animated, as if it were in them and not in us that the divine resided and as if our present lack of belief had a contingent cause, the death of the Gods.

How awful! I said to myself: can anyone think these automobiles are as elegant as the old carriages and pairs? I'm probably too old now—but I'm not meant for a world in which women hobble themselves in dresses that aren't even made of cloth. What's the use of walking among these trees, if nothing is left of what used to gather under the delicate reddening leaves, if vulgarity and idiocy have taken the place of the exquisite thing they once framed? How awful! My consolation is to think about the women I once knew, now that there is no more elegance. But how could anyone contemplating these horrible creatures under their hats topped with a birdcage or a vegetable patch even perceive what was so charming about the sight of Mme. Swann in a simple mauve hood or a little hat with a single stiff, straight iris poking up from it? Could I even have made them understand the emotion I felt on winter mornings when I met Mme. Swann on foot, in a sealskin coat, wearing a simple beret with two blades of partridge feathers sticking up from it, but enveloped also by the artificial warmth of her apartment, which was conjured by nothing more than the bouquet of violets crushed at her breast whose live blue flowering against the gray sky, the icy air, the bare-branched trees, had the same charming manner of accepting the season and the weather merely as a setting, and of living in a human atmosphere, in the atmosphere of this woman, as had, in the vases and flower stands of her drawing room, close to the lit fire, before the silk sofa, the flowers that looked out through the closed window at the falling snow? But it would not have been enough for me anyway for the clothes to be the same as in those earlier times. Because of the dependence which the different parts of a recollection have on one another, parts which our memory keeps balanced in an aggregate from which we are not permitted to abstract anything, or reject anything, I would have wanted to be able to go spend the last part of the day in the home of one of these women, over a cup of tea, in an apartment with walls painted in dark colors, as Mme. Swann's still was (in the year after the one in which the first part of this story ends) and in which the orange flares, the red combustion, the pink and white flame of the chrysanthemums would gleam in the November twilight, during moments like those in which (as we will see later) I was not able to discover the pleasures I desired. But now, even though they had led to nothing, those moments seemed to me to have had enough charm in themselves. I wanted to find them again as I remembered them. Alas, there was no longer anything but Louis XVI apartments all white

and dotted with blue hydrangeas. Moreover, people no longer returned to Paris until very late. Mme. Swann would have answered me from a country house that she would not be back until February, well after the time of the chrysanthemums, had I asked her to reconstruct for me the elements of that memory which I felt belonged to a distant year, to a vintage to which I was not allowed to go back, the elements of that desire which had itself become as inaccessible as the pleasure it had once vainly pursued. And I would also have needed them to be the same women, those whose dress interested me because, at the time when I still believed, my imagination had individualized them and given them each a legend. Alas, in the avenue des Acacias—the Alley of the Myrtles—I did see a few of them again, old, now no more than terrible shadows of what they had been, wandering, desperately searching for who knows what in the Virgilian groves. They had fled long since as I still vainly questioned the deserted paths. The sun had hidden itself. Nature was resuming its rule over the Bois, from which the idea that it was the Elysian Garden of Woman had vanished; above the artificial mill the real sky was gray; the wind wrinkled the Grand Lac with little wavelets, like a real lake; large birds swiftly crossed the Bois, like a real wood, and uttering sharp cries alighted one after another in the tall oaks which under their druidical crowns and with a Dodonean majesty seemed to proclaim the inhuman emptiness of the disused forest, and helped me better understand what a contradiction it is to search in reality for memory's pictures, which would never have the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from not being perceived by the senses. The reality I had known no longer existed. That Mme. Swann did not arrive exactly the same at the same moment was enough to make the Avenue different. The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years.

BOOK VII
Finding Time Again
1. Tansonville

All day long, in that slightly too bucolic residence, which looked like no more than a place for resting between walks or sheltering from a downpour, one of those houses where every sitting-room looks like a conservatory and where, in the bedroom wall-paper, either the garden roses or the birds in the trees are brought vividly before you and keep you company, in a rather isolated way – it being of the old-fashioned sort in which each rose was so clearly delineated that if it were alive one could have picked it, each bird so perfect that it might have been caged and tamed, without any of the exaggerated modern décor in which, against a background of silver, all the apple trees of Normandy are arrayed in profile, Japanese-style, to turn the hours you spend in bed into a hallucinatory experience; all day long I stayed in my room, which looked out over the fine greenery of the park and the lilacs by the gateway, over the green leaves of the great trees shimmering in the sunlight beside the water, and over the forest of Méséglise. But really the only reason I was enjoying the sight of it was because I was thinking: 'It is nice to see so much green from my bedroom window,' until the moment when, within the vast verdant scene, I suddenly recognized, coloured a contrasting deep blue simply by virtue of being further away, the steeple of the church at Combray. Not a representation of the steeple but the steeple itself, which, setting thus before my eyes the full extent of miles and of years, had appeared in the middle of that brilliant green, a completely different colour, so dark that it looked almost as if it were only a sketch, and inscribed itself within the rectangle of my window. And if I went out of my room for a moment, at the end of the passage I saw, since it faced in another direction, like a band of scarlet, the wall-hangings of a small sitting-room which were only a simple chiffon, but red, and liable to blaze into colour if a beam of sunlight should fall on them.

In the course of our walks Gilberte spoke to me of Robert as turning away from her, but in order to be with other women. And it is true that his life was somewhat cluttered with them and, as with some kinds of male friendships for men who love women, they had that sense of unavailing defensiveness and of space taken up to no purpose which in most houses characterizes useless objects. He came to Tansonville several times while I was there. He was very different from the man I had known. His life had not thickened him or slowed him down, like M. de Charlus, but, quite the reverse, by working the opposite change in him had given him the confident ease of a cavalry officer, to a far greater degree – despite his having resigned his commission upon his marriage – than he had ever attained before. And just as M. de Charlus had grown heavier, Robert (and he was of course infinitely younger but one felt that he could only approach even closer to this ideal state as he got older, like those women who determinedly sacrifice their face to their figure and after a certain point never leave Marienbad,[1] deciding that, as they are not capable of retaining a plurality of youthful features, their shape is the one best able to represent the rest) had become slenderer and swifter, a contrary effect of the same vice. The swiftness of his movements, moreover, had a number of psychological causes: a fear of being seen, the desire not to appear to have that fear and a febrility created by dissatisfaction with himself and by boredom. He was given to visiting various unsavoury places, into which, as he did not like to be observed entering or leaving them, he would suddenly dive in order to provide the ill-disposed glances of potential passers-by with the least possible visible surface, as if launching a military attack. And this habit of conducting himself like a gust of wind had stuck. It may also perhaps have represented the superficial intrepidity of someone who wants to show that he is not afraid and does not want to give himself any time to think. A full description would also have to take account of his desire, the older he grew, to appear young, as well as of the impatience characteristic of men who are always bored and blasé, being too intelligent for the relatively idle life they lead, in which their faculties are never fully stretched. In many cases this idleness may appear as listlessness. But, especially since physical exercise has come to enjoy such a vogue, idleness these days has taken on an athletic form, even outside the confines of sport, and has come to be expressed in a feverish vivacity that seeks to deny boredom the time or space to develop, rather than in listlessness or indifference.

My memory, even my involuntary memory, had lost all recollection of the love of Albertine. But it seems that there is also an involuntary memory of the limbs, a pale and fruitless imitation of the other kind, which lives on longer, rather as some non-intelligent animals or vegetables live longer than man. One's legs and arms are full of torpid memories. Once, when I had left Gilberte rather early, I woke up in the middle of the night in my room at Tansonville and, still half asleep, called out: 'Albertine!' It was not that I had been thinking about her or dreaming of her, nor that I had mistaken her for Gilberte: but a recollection suddenly burgeoning within my arm had made me reach behind my back for the bell, as if I had been in my bedroom in Paris. And, not finding it, I had called out: 'Albertine!', thinking my dead lover was lying beside me as she often used to in the evenings, and that we were falling asleep together, I relying, when I woke up, on the time it would take Françoise to get to my room, so that Albertine might without risk pull the bell which I could not find.

Becoming – during this troublesome phase at least – much less sympathetic, Robert no longer displayed to his friends, to myself for example, any real evidence of sensitivity. On the other hand, he affected a sentimentality towards Gilberte that bordered on the theatrical, which was quite distasteful. Not that Gilberte was really unimportant to him. No, Robert loved her. But he lied to her all the time; his duplicitous nature, if not the root cause of his lying, was permanently exposed. And he therefore thought that the only way to redeem the situation was by exaggerating, on a ridiculous scale, the real sadness he felt at upsetting her. He used to arrive at Tansonville obliged, he would say, to leave again the next morning in order to attend to some business with a country neighbour who was meant to be waiting for him in Paris and who, encountered by chance that evening near Combray, would unintentionally expose the lie which Robert had neglected to tell him about, by saying that he had come down to the country for a month's rest and would not be returning to Paris during that time. Robert would redden, see Gilberte's sad, disdainful smile, extricate himself with some harsh words to the blunderer, return ahead of his wife and send her a despairing note in which he would claim to have lied in order not to upset her, so that when she saw him leave for reasons he was unable to explain to her, she would not think he did not love her (all of which, despite being written as a lie, was actually true), and would then send to ask if he could come to her room, where, partly in real distress, partly out of exhaustion at his life, and partly in a pretence that grew daily more outrageous, he would sob, drench his face in cold water, speak of his imminent death and sometimes throw himself on to the floorboards as if suddenly taken ill. Gilberte never knew how far she ought to believe him, imagined that he was lying about each individual instance, but that in some general way she was loved, and worried about these forebodings of imminent death, thinking that he did perhaps suffer from some illness she was unaware of and therefore did not dare to oppose him or to ask him to forgo his trips.

I was even more at a loss to understand why it was that Morel had to be treated as the son of the house, like Bergotte, wherever the Saint-Loups happened to be, in Paris or at Tansonville. Morel could mimic Bergotte perfectly. In fact after a while there was no need to ask him to do his imitation. Like those hysterics who do not have to be put into a trance in order for them to become some other person, he would of his own accord suddenly take on all his characteristics.

Françoise, who had seen everything that M. de Charlus had done for Jupien and everything that Robert de Saint-Loup was doing for Morel, did not thereby infer that this was a trait that resurfaced in different generations of Guermantes, but rather – as Legrandin too did so much to help Théodore – she concluded, moralistic and set in her ideas as she was, that this was a custom rendered respectable by its universality. She would always say of a young man, whether it were Morel or Théodore: 'He's found a gentleman who's interested in him and has done ever so much to help him.' And since in such cases it is the protectors who love, suffer and forgive, Françoise did not hesitate, between them and the minors they seduced, to accord them the better part, to find them 'good-hearted'. She had no hesitation in blaming Théodore, who had played so many tricks on Legrandin, and yet it seemed almost impossible that she could have any doubt about the nature of their relationship, for she would add: 'The boy realized he had to do his bit too, and said, "Take me with you, I'll love you, I'll be nice to you," and, my goodness, the gentleman is so good-natured that Théodore is bound to be treated better than he deserves, because he's a bit wild, but the gentleman is so good that I've often said to Jeanette (Théodores fiancée), "My dear, if you're ever in trouble, go and see the gentleman. He'd sleep on the floor and give you his own bed. He's been too fond of the boy (Théodore) to turn him out. Of course he won't ever abandon him." '

Théodore was now living somewhere in the Midi, and out of politeness I asked his sister what his surname was. 'But that must be the person who wrote to me about my *Figaro* article!' I exclaimed when I heard that he was called Sautton.

In the same way she thought more highly of Saint-Loup than of Morel and reckoned that, despite all the things the boy (Morel) had done, the Marquis would always get him out of trouble, because he was such a good-hearted man, or else something terrible would have to have happened to prevent him.

Saint-Loup was insistent that I should remain at Tansonville, and on one occasion let slip, although he gave no other visible indication of wanting to please me, that my arrival had caused his wife such joy that she was transported by it, so she had told him, for the entire evening, an evening on which she had been feeling so wretched that by arriving unexpectedly I had miraculously saved her from despair, 'or perhaps even worse', he had added. He asked me to try to persuade her that he loved her, saying that the other woman he loved, he loved less than her, and that he would soon break with her. 'And yet,' he added with such complacency and such a need to confide in me that I thought that at any moment the name 'Charlie', despite himself, was going to 'pop out' like the winning number in a lottery, 'I did have something to be proud of. This woman, who has shown her affection for me in so many ways, and whom I'm going to sacrifice for Gilberte, had never been attracted to a man, she thought she was incapable of being in love. I am the first. I was so deeply conscious of her having rejected everybody that, when I received the adorable letter telling me she could never be happy except with me, I couldn't get over it. Obviously I could have lost my head completely, except that I couldn't bear the thought of my poor little Gilberte in tears. Don't you think she's rather like Rachel?' he went on. And in fact I had been struck by a vague resemblance that one could, at a stretch, now see between them. Perhaps this lay in the real similarity of some features (due possibly to their Jewish origins, though these were not very evident in Gilberte) which had caused Robert, when his family pressed him to marry, to feel more attracted to Gilberte than to other women of comparable fortune. It may also have had something to do with the fact that Gilberte, having come across some photographs of Rachel, who had previously not even been a name to her, attempted to please Robert by imitating some of the actress's habits of dress, like always having red bows in her hair and a black velvet ribbon on her arm, and by dyeing her hair to make herself look darker. Then, realizing that her distress was making her look ill, she tried to remedy things. Sometimes she took this to extremes. One evening, when Robert was due to be spending twenty-four hours at Tansonville, I was astounded to see her take her seat at the dining-table looking so curiously different, not only from her former self but even from her habitual appearance, that I sat there in amazement, as if I were watching an actress, a sort of Théodora.[2] I sensed that, despite myself, I was staring at her in my curiosity to discover what it was about her that was so changed. This curiosity was, however, soon satisfied when she wiped her nose, despite all the precautions she employed. From all the colours which remained on the handkerchief, turning it into a rich palette, I saw that she was entirely made-up. It was this that gave her the blood-red mouth which she tried to keep curved in a permanent smile, in the belief that it suited her, while the approaching arrival time of the train, with Gilberte still not knowing whether her husband would actually be on it or whether he would send one of those telegrams which M. de Guermantes had wittily characterized as: UNABLE TO COME: LIE FOLLOWS, made her cheeks grow pale beneath the violet perspiration of the rouge and etched dark shadows around her eyes.

'Ah, you know,' he would say to me, with a consciously affectionate manner which contrasted powerfully with the spontaneous affection of earlier times, in the voice of an alcoholic and with the modulations of an actor, 'I'd give anything to see Gilberte happy! She's done so much for me. You simply can't know.' And the most disagreeable aspect of all this was, again, his vanity, as he was flattered at being loved by Gilberte and yet, without daring to say that it was Charlie he loved, still provided details of the love the violinist was supposed to have for him, details which Saint-Loup knew were heavily exaggerated, if not entirely invented, given that Charlie was daily demanding larger and larger sums of money from him. And thus, entrusting Gilberte to my care, he would leave once again for Paris.

I did once have an opportunity (to anticipate a little, as I am still at Tansonville) to observe him in Paris society, from a distance, and on that occasion his conversation, lively and charming despite everything, enabled me to recapture the past; yet I was struck by how much he was changing. He was looking more and more like his mother: the haughty, elegant manner he had inherited from her and which she, after the most thorough education, had brought to perfection in him, was now becoming exaggerated and rigidified; the piercing gaze characteristic of all the Guermantes made it seem as if he were inspecting all the places in which he found himself, but in an almost unconscious way, out of a sort of habit or animal trait. Even when he was standing still, the colouring, which was more pronounced in him than in any of the other Guermantes, as if he were nothing but a day of golden sunlight given solid form, gave him as it seemed such a strange plumage, turned him into a species so rare and precious, as to make him a desirable acquisition for any ornithological collection; but when, in addition, this light become bird started to move, to act, when for example I was at a party and saw Robert de Saint-Loup enter the room, the way he held his head, so silkily and proudly crested beneath the gold plumes of his somewhat thinning hair, and moved his neck with so much more suppleness, pride and daintiness than humans display, inspired in one a curiosity and admiration half-social, half-zoological, such that one began to wonder whether one were in the Faubourg Saint-Germain or the Jardin des Plantes,[3] whether one were watching an aristocrat crossing a drawing-room or a bird walking round its cage. Furthermore, this whole regression to the birdlike elegance of the Guermantes, with pointed beak and sharpened eyes, was now being employed by his new vice, which was using it to maintain his dignity. And the more he used it, the more of a queen, as Balzac would say,[4] he looked. It required only a slender act of imagination to see that his warblings lent themselves no less well to this interpretation than his plumage. He was beginning to speak in sentences which he believed sounded seventeenth-century, and in that was merely imitating the style of the Guermantes. But at the same time some indefinable inflection was causing them to develop into the manners of M. de Charlus. 'I must leave you for a moment,' he said to me during the course of the evening, when M. de Marsantes was standing a little way off from us. 'I have to pay my court to my mother.'

As for his love, about which he spoke interminably, it was not, it must be said, only love for Charlie, even though that was the only affair that meant anything to him. Whatever the nature of a man's love affairs, one is always wrong about the number of people with whom he is having liaisons, partly because one mistakenly interprets friendships as affairs, and gets the addition wrong, but also because one tends to believe that one proven affair precludes another, which is an error of quite a different kind. Two people may say: 'X——'s mistress, yes, I know her', utter two different names, and both be right. A woman whom we love seldom satisfies all our needs, and we deceive her with a woman we do not love. As for the type of love affairs that Saint-Loup had inherited from M. de Charlus, a husband who is that way inclined usually makes his wife very happy. This is a general rule to which the Guermantes managed to be an exception, since those who had this taste wanted it to be thought that, on the contrary, they desired women. They were seen everywhere with some woman or other and drove their wives to despair. The Courvoisiers behaved more sensibly. The young Vicomte de Courvoisier thought he was the only man on earth, since the beginning of the world, to be tempted by somebody of his own sex. Believing his inclination to come from the devil, he fought against it, married a very beautiful wife and gave her children. Then one of his cousins taught him that this inclination is really quite common, and was kind enough to take him to places where he could satisfy it. M. de Courvoisier's love for his wife only intensified, he redoubled his prolific zeal, and he and she were cited as the happiest couple in Paris. Nothing of the sort was ever said of Saint-Loup's household, because Robert, instead of being content with his inversion, caused his wife agonies of jealousy by keeping mistresses from whom he derived no pleasure.

It may be that Morel, being very dark-complexioned, was necessary to Saint-Loup in the same way as shadow is necessary to a beam of sunlight. It is very easy to imagine, somewhere within that ancient family, a golden-haired aristocrat, intelligent, endowed with every distinction, concealing deep down, unknown to everybody, a secret taste for negroes.

Furthermore, Robert never permitted his type of love to come up in conversation. If I mentioned it: 'Oh, I don't know,' he would reply, with such complete detachment that he would let his monocle drop, 'I don't have the least idea about that sort of thing. If you want information about that, my dear fellow, I advise you to enquire elsewhere. I'm a soldier, full stop. I'm as uninterested in all that as I am passionate about following the Balkan war. That was something that interested you once, the etymology of battles. I told you then that we would see the typical battles again, under very different conditions, like that great exercise in strategic encirclement, the Battle of Ulm. Well now, even with all the special features of the Balkan wars, Lülebürgaz is Ulm all over again: strategic encirclement. These are subjects you can talk to me about. But the kind of things you were hinting at, I know as much about them as I do about Sanskrit.'

Although Robert thus affected disdain for the subject, Gilberte on the other hand, after he had left, was very willing to broach it in conversation with me. Not of course in connection with her husband, as she was not aware, or pretended not to be, of anything. But she would happily expatiate on it where others were concerned, either because she saw it as an indirect excuse for Robert, or because he, torn like his uncle between a stern silence on such matters and a need to unburden himself and run others down, had alerted her to many instances of it. M. de Charlus, in particular, was not spared, probably because Robert, without speaking to Gilberte about Charlie, could not refrain, when he was with her, from repeating, in one form or another, what the violinist had told him. And he constantly harried his former benefactor with his detestation. These conversations, for which Gilberte had a predilection, enabled me to ask her whether, in a similar way, Albertine, whose name I had first heard spoken by her, when they were classmates, had any such tastes. Gilberte was unable to give me any information about this. And anyway it had long since ceased to be of any interest to me. But I continued to enquire mechanically, like an old man who has lost his memory periodically requesting news of the son he has lost.

What is odd, which I cannot go into here, is the extent to which, around that time, all the people whom Albertine loved, and who might have been able to make her do what they wanted, asked for, implored, I may even say begged for, if not my friendship, then at least some sort of acquaintance with me. I should no longer have needed to offer Mme Bontemps money to send Albertine back to me. This unexpected turn in my affairs, occurring when it no longer served any purpose, saddened me deeply, not on account of Albertine, whom I would have received with no pleasure had she been brought back, not now from Touraine but from the other world, but because of a young woman with whom I was in love and whom I could not arrange to see. I told myself that if she died, or if I no longer loved her, everybody who might have been able to bring us together would be throwing themselves at my feet. In the meantime I tried in vain to influence them, not having been cured by experience, which ought to have taught me – if it had taught me anything – that love is an evil spell, like the ones in fairy-tales, against which one is powerless until the enchantment be broken.

'Actually, the book I'm reading at the moment is about that sort of thing', she said to me. (I had mentioned that mysterious 'We would have got on very well together' to Robert. He claimed not to remember saying it, and added that, in any case, he had not meant anything out of the ordinary by it.)

'It's an old Balzac I've been mugging up on, so as to know as much as my uncles, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*. But it's absurd and unrealistic, a complete fantasy. I mean, a woman might be kept under surveillance like that by another woman, but never by a man. – You're wrong, I once knew a woman who ended up completely shut away by the man who loved her; she was never allowed to see anyone, and could only go out accompanied by trusty servants. – But someone as good as you must have been horrified by that. In fact Robert and I were saying that you ought to get married. A wife would make you healthy again, and you would make her very happy. – No, I'm not a good enough person. – What an absurd idea! – No, I mean it. Besides, I was engaged once, but I couldn't make up my mind to marry her (and then she broke it off herself, because of my fussiness and indecision).' It was, indeed, in this over-simplified form that I regarded my adventure with Albertine, now that I could see it only from the outside.

As I went back up to my room, I reflected sadly that I had not even once been to revisit the church at Combray, which looked, amidst all the greenery, in that violet-tinted window, as if it were expecting me. I said to myself: 'Never mind, it'll have to wait for another year, if I don't die in the meantime,' seeing no obstacle to this other than my death, never envisaging that of the church, which seemed bound to endure long after my death, as it had endured for so long before my birth.

Nevertheless I did mention Albertine to Gilberte one day, and asked her whether Albertine had loved women. 'Oh! Not in the least. – But you said once that she behaved badly. – I said that? I'm sure you must be wrong. Anyway, if I did, but I'm sure I didn't, I must have been talking about involvements with young men. Besides, at her age, they probably didn't amount to anything.' Was Gilberte telling me this in order to hide the fact that, according to what Albertine had told me, she loved women too and had made suggestions to Albertine? Or did she know (for others are often better informed about our lives than we think) that I had loved and been jealous of Albertine, and (others being able to know more of the truth about us than we think, but also to take it too far and fall into the error of assuming too much, where we had hoped that they might have made the mistake of not assuming anything at all) did she imagine that I still was, and was she, out of kindness, placing a blindfold over my eyes, as one is always prepared to do for those who are jealous? At all events, everything Gilberte said, from the original 'behaved badly' to the present certificate of good conduct, followed an inverse sequence to the assertions of Albertine, who had finally all but admitted a certain intimacy of relations with Gilberte. Albertine had astonished me by this, as I had been astonished by what Andrée had told me, because, before I came to know them, I had believed all of that little gang to be involved in perversion; I later realized that my assumption was wrong, as so often happens when one finds a decent girl, practically ignorant of the realities of love, in circles one had wrongly believed to be completely depraved. Later I had followed the same path in the opposite direction, ending with a renewed belief in the truth of my original supposition. But perhaps Albertine had wanted to tell me that so that she would appear more experienced than she really was, and to dazzle me in Paris with the glamour of her perversity, as she had done, that first time at Balbec, with the prestige of her virtue. And quite simply, when I had spoken to her about women who loved women, so as not to seem not to understand what I meant, as in the course of conversation one adopts an air of comprehension if Fourier[5] or Tobolsk[6] are mentioned, even though one has no idea what is meant by them. She had spent her time, perhaps, close to Mlle Vinteuil's woman friend and to Andrée, separated by a watertight partition from them because of their belief that she 'wasn't one', and had only informed herself about the topic later – in the same way as a woman who marries a man of letters seeks to improve her mind – in order to please me by becoming capable of replying to my questions, until the day when she realized that they were inspired by jealousy, after which she had backtracked. Unless it were Gilberte who was lying to me. It even occurred to me that it was because of having learned from her, in the course of a flirtation he would have conducted with his own ends in view, that she was not averse to women, that Robert had married her, hoping for pleasures which, since he took them elsewhere, he must never have found with her. None of these hypotheses was absurd, for with women like Odette's daughter, or the girls of the little gang, there is so much diversity, such an accumulation of alternating, if not indeed simultaneous tastes, that they pass easily from a liaison with a woman to a passionate affair with a man, so that determining their real and dominant taste remains difficult. I did not want to borrow Gilberte's copy of *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, as she was still reading it. But she lent me, to read before going to sleep that last evening I spent with her, a book which made a powerful but uneven impression on me, although it proved not to be a lasting one. This was a recently published volume of the Goncourts' journal.[7]

And when, before snuffing out my candle, I read the passage I transcribe below, my lack of an aptitude for literature, sensed long ago on the Guermantes way, and confirmed during the stay whose last evening this was – one of those evenings just before a departure when, with the imminent loss of the cocoon of regularity, one attempts to take stock of oneself – seemed to me something less regrettable, as if literature did not reveal any profound truth; and at the same time it seemed to me sad that literature was not what I had believed it to be. On the other hand, the state of ill-health which was about to confine me to a sanatorium also seemed less regrettable, if the fine things spoken of in books were no finer than those I had seen myself. Yet, by a curious contradiction, now that this book was talking about them, I had a longing to see them. Here are the pages that I read before tiredness closed my eyes:

'The day before yesterday Verdurin drops in here to take me off to dine with him; he used to be a critic for *La Revue*, wrote that book about Whistler in which truly the technique, the painterly handling of colour, of the eccentric American is frequently conveyed with considerable refinement by that *amateur* of all the subtleties, all the *delicacies*, of the painted surface that Verdurin is. And while I am dressing to go out with him he starts telling me a long story, parts of it in a timorous whisper almost like a confession, about his renunciation of writing immediately after his marriage to Fromentin's "Madeleine", a renunciation due, he tells me, to his morphine habit, and which resulted, by his account, in most of the habitués of his wife's drawing-room having not the least idea that her husband had ever written anything, and talking to him about Charles Blanc, Saint-Victor, Sainte-Beuve, and Burty[8] as figures to whom they thought him utterly inferior.

"But of course you Goncourts know – and so did Gautier – that my *Salons* were something altogether different from those woeful *Maîtres d' autrefois*[9] which my wife's family take to be such a masterpiece." Then, through a dusk in which the last flickering rays of light on the towers of the Trocadéro turn them into towers exactly like the ones glazed with redcurrant jelly that confectioners used to create, the conversation continues in the carriage that is taking us to the Quai Conti and their *hôtel*,[10] which its present owner claims was once the residence of the Venetian ambassadors, and where there is apparently a smoking-room which Verdurin talks about as having been transported, *Arabian Nights*-fashion, from a famous *palazzo*, the name of which I forget, but a *palazzo* with a well-head depicting a coronation of the Virgin which he maintains to be absolutely one of Sansovino's finest works, and which their guests use as somewhere to drop their cigar ash. And, by Jove, when we arrive, in a greenish, diffused, watery moonlight very reminiscent of that in which the Classical paintings shroud Venice, and above which the silhouetted cupola of the Institut recalls the Salute in Guardi's pictures, I do have a momentary illusion of being beside the Grand Canal. An illusion further fostered by the *hôtel*'s construction, as you cannot see the Quai from the first floor, and by the evocative remark of the master of the house as he asserts that the Rue du Bac takes its name – dashed if it had ever occurred to me before – from the "bac", or ferry, on which an order of nuns, the Miramiones, once used to travel across to services at Notre-Dame. The whole quarter is one I used to wander around as a child when my aunt de Courmont lived there, and I began to *re-love* it when, practically next door to the Verdurins' house, I discovered the sign-board of "Le Petit Dunkerque", one of the very few shops to have survived, other than as vignettes in the scumbled shadow of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin's pencil drawings, where eighteenth-century collectors came to spend their idle moments haggling over French and foreign trinkets and "all the last creations of the arts", as an old bill of sale from "Le Petit Dunkerque" puts it, bills which Verdurin and I are, I believe, the only ones to possess copies of, and which are among the ephemeral masterpieces of those embellished documents on which the world of Louis XV made out their accounts, with a letter-head depicting a wave-tossed sea laden with ships, a wavy sea that could easily have been an illustration to "The Oyster and the Plaintiffs" in the Fermiers Généraux edition of La Fontaine.[11] The mistress of the house, next to whom I am to sit at dinner, tells me charmingly that she has decorated her table with nothing but Japanese chrysanthemums, but chrysanthemums arranged in vases which turn out to be exceedingly rare masterpieces, one of them in particular being made of bronze overlaid with reddish copper petals so lifelike they would seem to have fallen there from the flower itself. Cottard, the doctor, is there with his wife, and the Polish sculptor Viradobetski, Swann the collector, an aristocratic Russian lady, a princess with a name ending in '-ov' which I don't quite catch, and Cottard whispers in my ear that it is she who shot at the Archduke Rudolph at point-blank range, and that according to her I have an extraordinarily exalted reputation in Galicia and the whole of northern Poland, no young woman ever agreeing to an offer of marriage without first determining whether her fiancé is an admirer of *La Faustin*.[12] "This is not something you Westerners can under stand," is the princess's concluding challenge, who strikes me, I must say, as possessed of an altogether superior intelligence, "this insight by a writer into a woman's most private feelings." A man with clean-shaven chin and lips and a butler's side-whiskers, holding forth in the condescending tone of a fifth-form master joking with his favoured pupils during the Charlemagne Day celebrations, turns out to be Brichot, from the University. Upon my being presented by Verdurin, he has nothing to say that suggests any acquaintance with our books, arousing in me an irascible despondency at the conspiracy organized against us by the Sorbonne, importing even into the gracious home where I am so warmly entertained the discrepant unfriendliness of a deliberate silence. We go in to dinner and there follows an extraordinary procession of plates which are quite simply masterpieces of the porcelain-maker's art, an art which, in the course of an elegant meal, flatters the attentive ear of a connoisseur with the most agreeably artistic tinkle of its conversation, – Yung-chêng plates, with their nasturtium-coloured borders and the blue of their irises, tumid and leafless, and a wonderfully ornamented flight of kingfishers and cranes across a dawn sky, the dawn rendered with precisely those matutinal tones which greet my daily awakening in the Boulevard Montmorency – Dresden plates, more delicate in the grace of their technique, with the drowsy anaemia of their roses washed to violet, with the wine-dark laciniation of a tulip, with the rococo of a pink or a forget-me-not – Sèvres plates latticed with the fine guilloche of their white fluting, verticillated with gold, or knotted, on the creamy surface of the paste, with a gold ribbon raised in elegant relief – finally an entire service of silver chased with those myrtles of Luciennes that the Du Barry[13] would have recognized. And what is perhaps equally rare is the really quite remarkable quality of the things served on them, a meal exquisitely planned, a veritable feast, such as the Parisians, it must most emphatically be said, never have at their grandest dinners, and which reminds me of some of the great dishes at Jean d'Heurs.[14] Even the *foie gras* bears no relation to the insipid mousse normally served under that name, and I do not know many places where a simple potato salad is made, like this, out of potatoes with the firmness of Japanese ivory buttons and the patina of those little ivory spoons with which Chinese women sprinkle water over their freshly caught fish. In the Venetian glass I have before me, a rich profusion of jewelled reds glows from an extraordinary Léoville, bought at M. Montalivet's sale, and it is a delight for the eye's imagination, and also, I do not scruple to say it, for the imagination of what one used to call the chops, to see carried in a brill which has nothing in common with the far from fresh brill that are served at the most luxurious tables and which have had, in the slow course of their journey to the kitchen, the pattern of their bones impressed on to their back, a brill served not with the floury paste so many chefs in great houses prepare under the name of white sauce, but with a real white sauce made with butter costing five francs a pound – to see this brill brought in on a wonderful Yung-chêng dish striated by the crimson rays of a sunset above a sea wittily navigated by a band of lobsters, their gritty stippling so extraordinarily rendered that they seem to have been moulded from the live carapace, a dish whose border depicts a little Chinese boy catching with rod and line a fish, the azured silvering of whose belly is an enchantment of nacreous colour. When I observe to Verdurin what an exquisite pleasure it must be for him to eat this superb provender off a collection such as no prince currently possesses in his glass cabinets, "It is clear to see you don't know him," interjects sadly the mistress of the house. And she speaks to me of her husband as a cranky eccentric, indifferent to all these sophistications, "Cranky," she repeats, "there's no other word for it," a crank who would prefer a bottle of cider, drunk in the rather plebeian cool of a Normandy farm. And this charming woman, whose eloquence reveals her complete love of its regional colour, speaks with brimming enthusiasm of that part of Normandy where they once lived, a Normandy that seems to have been like a great English park, fragrant with stands of mature trees, as in a painting by Lawrence, fringed with the cryptomerian velvet of their natural lawns, porcelained with pink hydrangeas, with masses of crumpled sulphur roses tumbling above a rural gateway, against which the overlay of two interlaced pear trees seems to imitate some purely ornamental sign-board, calling to mind the free-flowing lines of a flowering branch in the bronze of a Gouthière sconce, a Normandy completely undreamed of by holidaying Parisians, each *clos* protected by its gates, all of which gates the Verdurins confess to me they had no qualms about opening. At the day's end, amid a soporific fading of all the colours, when the only source of light was an almost curdled sea, tinged with the milky-blue of whey ("No, not like any sea you've seen," protests frantically my neighbour, in response to my saying that Flaubert had taken us, my brother and myself, to Trouville, "absolutely nothing like, you'll have to come with me, else you'll never know"), they would return home, through the veritable forests of pink tulle formed by the rhododendrons, utterly befuddled with the smell of the sardine fisheries, which gave her husband terrible attacks of asthma – "yes, she insists, I mean it, they were real asthma attacks." And there, the following summer, they returned, accommodating an entire colony of artists in a marvellous medieval building, part of an ancient monastery, which they rented for practically nothing. And, by Jove, listening to this woman who, moving among so many circles of truly distinguished people, has yet retained in her speech something of the vitality of language of a woman of the people, language which shows you things with the colour that your imagination sees in them, my mouth waters at the life she confesses to me that they led down there, each person working in his cell and, in the drawing-room so vast that it had two fireplaces, everybody gathering before luncheon for altogether elevated conversation, interspersed with parlour games, making me think of the kind of life described in Diderot's masterpiece, the *Lettres à Mademoiselle Volland*. Then after lunch everybody would go out, even on squally days, in a burst of sunshine, or the effulgence of a shower, of a shower outlining with its gleaming trickles the nodes of a magnificent sweep of centenarian beeches, which set before the entrance gate that vegetable idea of *the beautiful* so dear to the eighteenth century, and the arborescent shrubs which, in place of burgeoning buds, had, hanging from their branches, drops of water. They would stop to listen to the delicate dabbling of a bullfinch, entranced by the coolness, bathing in the dainty, minuscule Nymphenburg bath formed by the petals of a white rose. And when I mention to Mme Verdurin the landscapes and flowers of the region in Elstir's delicate pastels: "But I'm the one who introduced him to all that," she interjects with an angry toss of

her head, “everything, do you realize, everything, the hidden nooks, every one of his subjects, I threw it in his face when he left, didn’t I, Auguste, all the scenes he painted. To be fair, he was always aware of objects, I have to admit that. But he’d never seen the flowers, he couldn’t tell a hollyhock from an althea. You won’t believe this, but I even had to show him how to recognize jasmine.” And one must admit that it is a curious thought that the artist held up by connoisseurs today as the leading flower-painter, superior even to Fantin-Latour, would perhaps never, without this woman sitting beside me, have been able to paint a jasmine. “Yes, honestly, jasmine. And all the roses he has done were painted at my house, or else brought to him by me. When he was with us, we never called him anything but Monsieur Tiche: ask Cottard or Brichot, or any of the others, whether we treated him as a great man here. He would have laughed if we had. I taught him how to arrange his flowers; he couldn’t manage it at all, to begin with. He never learned how to make a bouquet. He had no natural sense of what to choose, I always had to say, ‘No, don’t paint that one, it’s not worth it, paint this one.’ Ah, if only he’d listened to what we said about arranging his life as attentively as he did about arranging his flowers, and hadn’t made that rotten marriage!” And abruptly, her eyes fevered by absorption in a reverie of the past, and nervously plucking, as she distractedly flexes her fingers, at the floss of the sleeves of her blouse, she presents, in the anguish of her averted pose, a wonderful picture that has never, I think, been painted, one in which would be displayed all the contained revolt, all the enraged sensibilities of a female friend outraged in the refinement, in the modesty of womanhood. Thereupon she talks about the wonderful portrait Elstir did for her, the portrait of the Cottard family, which she gave to the Luxembourg at the time of her quarrel with the painter, confessing that it was she who gave the painter the idea of having the man in full evening dress in order to achieve all that lovely frothing swell of linen, and who chose the woman’s velvet dress, a dress that provides a solid resting-place amidst all the flitter of bright colours in the carpets, the flowers, the fruit, the little girls’ muslin dresses that look like dancers’ tutus. It was she too, I gather, who gave him the idea of the woman brushing her hair, an idea for which the artist was subsequently much praised, and which simply consisted of painting the woman not as it were on display but surprised in a moment of everyday intimacy. “I used to say to him, ‘In a woman doing her hair, drying her face, warming her feet, when she is unaware of being observed, there is a wealth of interesting movements, movements of a quite Leonardo-esque gracefulness!’ ”

‘But at a sign from Verdurin, indicating that the re-arousal of this indignation was not good for the health of his wife, who is very highly strung, Swann invites me to admire the necklace of black pearls worn by the mistress of the house, and bought by her, in their original whiteness, at the sale of a descendant of Mme de La Fayette, to whom they were given by Henrietta of England, pearls which had become black after a fire which destroyed part of the house in which the Verdurins lived, in a street whose name I no longer remember, a fire from which the casket containing the pearls was recovered, but with the pearls now entirely black. “And I know the portrait of them, of these pearls, on the very shoulders of Mme de La Fayette, yes, I know their portrait very well,” insists Swann, forestalling the somewhat amazed exclamations of the other guests, “the authentic portrait of them, in the collection of the Duc de Guermantes.” A collection without equal anywhere in the world, declares Swann, and which I ought to go and see, a collection inherited by the famous Duc, who was her favourite nephew, from his aunt, Mme de Beausergent, afterwards Mme d’Hatzfeldt, sister of the Marquise de Villeparisis and of the Princess of Hanover, in whose house my brother and I had at one time grown so fond of him in the person of the charming little child called Basin, which as a matter of fact is indeed the Duc’s forename. Thereupon Dr Cottard, with the subtlety which reveals him to be a man of genuine eminence, turns back to the story of the pearls, and informs us that catastrophes of this nature produce alterations in the human brain quite comparable to those observable in inanimate matter, and cites, in a manner considerably more philosophical than most doctors could command, the instance of Mme de Verdurin’s own manservant, who, from the horror of that fire, in which he very nearly perished, had become a changed man, with a handwriting so altered that when his master and mistress, then in Normandy, received his first letter informing them of the occurrence, they imagined it to be the work of a practical joker. And not only an altered handwriting, according to Cottard, who maintains that from being abstemious this man had become such an abominable drunk that Mme Verdurin had been obliged to dismiss him. And this thought-provoking discourse adjourns, at a gracious signal from the mistress of the house, from the dining-room to the Venetian smoking-room, where Cottard tells us that he has witnessed veritable instances of dual personality, citing the case of one of his patients, whom he very kindly offers to bring to my house, and whose temples he has, apparently, only to touch to awaken him to a second life, a life during which he remembers nothing of the first, to such a degree that, although entirely honest in the one, he has several times been arrested for thefts committed in the other, in which he is quite simply a complete scoundrel. Upon which Mme Verdurin shrewdly remarks that medicine might furnish the modern theatre with a more truthful set of subjects, in which the convolutions of the imbroglio would be founded upon misapprehensions of a pathological nature, which, by a natural progression, leads Mme Cottard to relate that a very similar idea has been used by a story-teller who is the bedtime favourite of her children, the Scotsman Stevenson, a name which prompts Swann to the peremptory assertion, “But he’s altogether a great writer, Stevenson, I assure you, M. de Goncourt, very great, equal to the greatest.” And when, after having marvelled at the ceiling, with its escutcheoned coffers, taken from the old Palazzo Barberini, of the room in which we are smoking, I hint at my regret at the gradual darkening of a certain stone basin by the ash of our Havanas, and Swann having recounted how similar stains on books once belonging to Napoleon I, books which are now, despite his anti-Bonapartist opinions, in the possession of the Duc de Guermantes, testify to the Emperor’s having chewed tobacco, Cottard, who shows himself to be interested to a quite profound degree in everything, declares that the stains do not come from that at all – “No, no, not at all,” he insists with authority – but from the habit he had of always having in his hand, even on the battlefield, liquorice tablets, to allay his liver pains. “Because he had a disease of the liver and that is what he finally died of,” concludes the doctor.’

I stopped there, because I was leaving in the morning; and besides it was the hour at which I was customarily claimed by the master, in whose service we spend, each day, a large part of our time. The work to which he compels us, we accomplish with our eyes shut. Each morning he returns us to our other master, knowing that if he does not, we will be reluctant to surrender ourselves again to his service. Inquisitive, when our intelligence has reopened its eyes, to know what we may have done in the house of this master, who has his slaves lie down before putting them so rapidly to work, the shrewdest of them, their task scarcely finished, try to steal a clandestine glimpse of it. But sleep races against them to dispel the traces of what they would like to see. And after so many centuries we still do not know very much about it.

So I closed the Goncourts’ journal. The magic of literature! I would have liked to see the Cottards again, asked them so many details about Elstir, gone to look at that shop, ‘Le Petit Dunkerque’, if it still existed, asked permission to visit the Verdurin *hôtel* where I had been to dinner. But I felt a vague sense of unease. Certainly I had never concealed from myself the fact that I did not know how to listen, nor, as soon as I was not alone, how to observe. My eyes would not notice what kind of pearl necklace an old woman might be wearing, and anything that might be said about it would not penetrate my ears. Yet I had known these individuals in my daily life, I had often dined with them, whether they were the Verdurins, the Duc de Guermantes, the Cottards, and each of them had seemed to me as ordinary as that Basin had appeared to my grandmother, who little suspected that he was the cherished nephew, the charming young hero, of Mme de Beausergent, to me they had all seemed insipid; I could recall the numberless vulgarities of which each of them was compounded…

Et que tout cela fasse un astre dans la nuit![15]

I resolved provisionally to set aside the objections to literature aroused in me by the pages of Goncourt read on the eve of my departure from Tansonville. Even discounting the evidence of personal naïvety so conspicuous in the work of this memoirist, I could set my mind at rest on a number of other points. First, so far as my own personality was concerned, my incapacity to look attentively and to listen, which the quotation from the journal had so painfully illustrated to me, was yet not total. There was in me a character who knew more or less how to look, but this was an intermittent character, coming to life only when some general essence was revealed, something common to several things, in which it found its nourishment and its delight. Then the character looked and listened, but only to a certain depth, so that my observation did not benefit from it. Just as a geometrician, stripping things of their physical qualities, sees only their linear substratum, so what

people said escaped me, because what interested me was not what they wanted to say, but the manner in which they said it, in so far as this revealed their character or their absurdities; or, rather, the object that had always been the aim of my researches, because it gave me a specific pleasure, was the point that was common to one being and another. It was only when I glimpsed this that my intelligence – thitherto sleeping, even behind the apparent alertness of my conversation, the animation of which masked from the others a complete intellectual torpor – set out joyously in pursuit, but what it was then pursuing – for example, the identity of the Verdurin salon in different places and at different times – was situated at a somewhat deeper point, beyond appearances themselves, in a zone set slightly further back. Thus the visible, reproducible, charm of individuals escaped me, because I did not have the ability to dwell on it, like a surgeon who will see, beneath the sleek surface of a woman's belly, the internal disease which is gnawing at it. How ever often I dined out, I did not see the other guests, because when I thought I was looking at them, I was in fact radiographing them.

It followed from this that, by combining all the observations I had been able to make of the guests at a dinner, the pattern of the lines I had traced formed a cluster of psychological laws in which a guest's personal stake in the conversation had almost no place. But did that remove all merit from my portraits, since I was not offering them as such? If, in the realm of painting, one portrait demonstrates certain truths relative to volume, to light, to movement, does this make it necessarily inferior to some other portrait, with no points of similarity, of the same person, in which a thousand details omitted in the first are minutely stated – a second portrait from which one would conclude that the model was ravishingly beautiful, while one would have thought him or her ugly in the first, something which may possess a documentary, and even historical, importance, but is not necessarily a truth of art.

Moreover my frivolousness, as soon as I was not alone, made me eager to please, more eager to amuse by chattering than to learn by listening, unless it were that I had gone out into society to enquire about some aspect of art, or some jealous suspicion which had earlier been occupying my thoughts. I was really incapable of seeing anything for which the desire had not been awakened in me by something I had read, anything of which I had not first outlined for myself a sketch which I then wanted to compare with reality. How many times, as I was well aware even without the Goncourt pages reminding me of it, have I remained incapable of bestowing my attention on things or people that subsequently, once their image had been presented to me in solitude by an artist, I would have travelled miles, risked death, to encounter again! Only then had my imagination started to work, begun to paint. And of something which a year before had made me yawn, I would say to myself anxiously, contemplating it in advance, desiring it: 'Will it really be impossible to see it? What I wouldn't give to be able to!'

When one reads articles about people, even just society people, described as 'the last representatives of a world to which no witness any longer exists', one may of course exclaim: 'To think that they should speak so generously and so fulsomely about such an insignificant person! That is what I should so have regretted not having known, if I had only read the newspapers and magazines and not met the man!' But I was tempted instead, reading such pages in the newspapers, to think: 'What a pity that – when I was solely preoccupied with my next meeting with Gilberte or Albertine – I did not pay more attention to this gentleman! I took him for a society bore, a stuffed shirt, but he was a *major figure*!'

The pages of Goncourt that I read made me regret this tendency. For it may be that I might have inferred from them that life teaches us to diminish the value of what we read, and shows us that the things which the writer commends to us were never worth very much; yet I might equally well have come to the opposite conclusion, that reading teaches us to place a higher value on life, a value which we did not know how to appreciate, and the true extent of which we come to realize only through the book. If need be, we may console ourselves for finding scant pleasure in the company of a Vinteuil, or a Bergotte. The middle-class prudishness of the one, the insufferable deficiencies of the other, even the pretentious vulgarity of an Elstir in his early days (for the Goncourts' journal had made me realize that he was none other than the 'M. Tiche' who had once held forth so exasperatingly to Swann, at the Verdurins' house), prove nothing against them, since their genius is manifested by their work. In their case, whether it is the memoirs or ourselves that are at fault when they make their society, which we disliked, seem attractive, is not an important problem, since, even if it were the writer of the memoir who was wrong, that would prove nothing against the value of the life that produced such genius. (After all, what man of genius has not adopted the irritating conversational mannerisms of the artists of his set, before achieving, as did Elstir, and as happens all too rarely, a higher level of taste? Are not Balzac's letters, for instance, strewn with vulgar turns of phrase which Swann would have died a thousand deaths rather than employ? And yet in all probability Swann, discriminating as he was, so free of every dislikeable absurdity, would have been incapable of writing *La Cousine Bette* or *Le Curé de Tours*.)

At the other extreme of experience, when I considered how the most revealing anecdotes, which make up the inexhaustible substance of the Goncourts' journal, providing entertainment for the reader's solitary evenings, had been recounted to him by these dinner-guests whom we might, through his pages, have felt a desire to meet, and who had yet left me no impression of any interesting recollection, that also was not too hard to explain. Despite the naïvety of Goncourt, who inferred from the interest of these anecdotes the probable eminence of the men who recounted them, it could very well be that undistinguished people might have encountered during their lives, or heard related, noteworthy things, which they themselves retold in their turn. Goncourt knew how to listen, as he knew how to see: I did not.

Moreover, all these facts would have had to be judged one at a time. M. de Guermantes had certainly not impressed me as that adorable model of youthful graces whom my grandmother had so much wanted to know, and which she set before me as a standard I could never match up to, as described in the memoirs of Mme de Beausergent. But it must be remembered that Basin was then seven years old, that the writer was his aunt, and that even husbands who in a few months will be obtaining a divorce will endlessly eulogize their wives to you. One of Sainte-Beuve's prettiest poems[16] is devoted to the apparition before a fountain of a little girl crowned with every gift and every grace, the young Mlle de Champlâtreux, who could not then have been more than ten years old. Despite all the affectionate reverence which that poet of genius, the Comtesse de Noailles, bore for her mother-in-law the Duchesse de Noailles née Champlâtreux, it is possible that, if she had been obliged to portray her, the result might have contrasted quite sharply with the portrait that Sainte-Beuve drew of her fifty years earlier.

What was perhaps more unsettling were the cases in between, were those people of whom what is said implies that there was more to them than simply a memory that could retain a revealing anecdote, yet without allowing one, as one has with the Vinteuils, the Bergottes, the recourse of judging them on their work, as they have not created any: they have merely – to the great astonishment of us, who found them so ordinary – inspired it. It may chance that the salon which, in the museums, will give the greatest impression of elegance since the great paintings of the Renaissance might be that of the absurd middle-class woman whom, if I had not known her, I would have imagined, as I looked at the picture, approaching in reality, hoping to learn from her the most precious secrets of the painter's art, which his canvas would not yield me, and how her ceremonial train of velvet and lace could have become a piece of painting comparable to the finest works of Titian. Having long understood that it is not the man who is the wittiest, the best educated, or the best connected, but the one who can become a mirror and thereby reflect his life, however commonplace, who becomes a Bergotte (for all that his contemporaries may have thought him less witty than Swann and less erudite than Bréauté), might one not say as much, and with greater justification, of an artist's models? When the love of beauty stirs in the breast of an artist who could paint anything, the model for the elegance in which he will be able to find a fittingly lovely subject will be furnished him by people somewhat richer than he is, in whose surroundings he will find what is generally missing from the studio of an unknown man of genius who sells his pictures for fifty francs: a drawing-room with furniture covered in old silk, plenty of lamps, beautiful flowers, beautiful fruit, beautiful dresses – relatively unpretentious people, or so they would seem to really glittering society (which is unaware that they even exist), but people, consequently, who are more likely to make an obscure artist's acquaintance, to appreciate him, to invite him, to buy his canvases, than members of the aristocracy who have themselves painted, like the Pope or Heads of State, by academicians. Will not posterity find the poetry of an elegant home and the beautiful dresses of our time better represented in Renoir's painting of the publisher Charpentier's drawing-room, than in the portraits of the Princesse de Sagan or the Comtesse de La Rochefoucauld by Cot or Chaplin?[17] The artists who give us the greatest visions of elegance have gleaned the elements of them from the homes of people who were seldom the leaders of fashion of their epoch, for those

seldom had themselves painted by an unknown carrier of a kind of beauty which they are unable to perceive in his canvases, concealed as it is by the interposition of a stereotype of outmoded charm, which floats before the eyes of the public like those subjective visions which a sick person believes are actually present in front of him. But that these commonplace models whom I had known should also have inspired and advised certain arrangements which had enchanted me, that the presence of one or other of them in the pictures might be not merely that of a model, but that of a friend whom a painter might want to put into his canvases, made me wonder whether all the people we regret not having known because Balzac depicted them in his books or dedicated his books to them in admiring homage, about whom Sainte-Beuve or Baudelaire composed their finest verses, still more whether all the Récamiers, all the Pompadours, might not have seemed insignificant to me in person, either as a result of a weakness in my nature, which made me angry at my being ill and unable to go back and see all the people whom I had failed to appreciate, or else because they owed their prestige only to the illusory magic of literature, which forced me to change my reading habits, and consoled me for having, at any moment, because of the progress my illness was making, to break with society, give up travelling and visiting museums, in order to enter a sanatorium and undergo treatment. Yet perhaps this deceptive aspect, this artificial light, exists only in memoirs when they are too recent, when reputations are evaporating so quickly, intellectual ones as much as fashionable ones (for however much erudition then tries to react against this entombment, does it ever succeed in destroying even once in a thousand times the oblivion which piles up so relentlessly?).

The Madeleine Cake

For many years, already, everything about Combray that was not the theater and drama of my bedtime had ceased to exist for me, when one day in winter, as I returned home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, suggested that, contrary to my habit, I have a little tea. I refused at first and then, I do not know why, changed my mind. She sent for one of those squat, plump cakes called *petites madeleines* that look as though they have been molded in the grooved valve of a scallop shell. And soon, mechanically, oppressed by the gloomy day and the prospect of another sad day to follow, I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a bit of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. It had immediately rendered the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather this essence was not merely inside me, it was me. I had ceased to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Where could it have come to me from—this powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected to the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it went infinitely far beyond it, could not be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I grasp it? I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third that gives me a little less than the second. It is time for me to stop, the virtue of the drink seems to be diminishing. Clearly, the truth I am seeking is not in the drink, but in me. The drink has awoken it in me, but does not know this truth, and can do no more than repeat indefinitely, with less and less force, this same testimony which I do not know how to interpret and which I want at least to be able to ask of it again and find again, intact, available to me, soon, for a decisive clarification. I put down the cup and turn to my mind. It is up to my mind to find the truth. But how? Such grave uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is also the obscure country where it must seek and where all its baggage will be nothing to it. Seek? Not only that: create. It is face-to-face with something that does not yet exist and that only it can accomplish, then bring into its light.

And I begin asking myself again what it could be, this unknown state which brought with it no logical proof, but only the evidence of its felicity, its reality, and in whose presence the other states of consciousness faded away. I want to try to make it reappear. I return in my thoughts to the moment when I took the first spoonful of tea. I find the same state again, without any new clarity. I ask my mind to make another effort, to bring back once more the sensation that is slipping away. And, so that nothing may interrupt the thrust with which it will try to grasp it again, I clear away every obstacle, every foreign idea, I protect my ears and my attention from the noises in the next room. But feeling my mind grow tired without succeeding, I now compel it to accept the very distraction I was denying it, to think of something else, to recover its strength before a supreme attempt. Then for a second time I create an empty space before it, I confront it again with the still recent taste of that first mouthful, and I feel something quiver in me, shift, try to rise, something that seems to have been unanchored at a great depth; I do not know what it is, but it comes up slowly; I feel the resistance and I hear the murmur of the distances traversed.

Undoubtedly what is palpitating thus, deep inside me, must be the image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste and is trying to follow it to me. But it is struggling too far away, too confusedly; I can just barely perceive the neutral glimmer in which the elusive eddying of stirred-up colors is blended; but I cannot distinguish the form, cannot ask it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate for me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable companion, the taste, ask it to tell me what particular circumstance is involved, what period of the past.

Will it reach the clear surface of my consciousness—this memory, this old moment which the attraction of an identical moment has come from so far to invite, to move, to raise up from the deepest part of me? I don't know. Now I no longer feel anything, it has stopped, gone back down perhaps; who knows if it will ever rise up from its darkness again? Ten times I must begin again, lean down toward it. And each time, the laziness that deters us from every difficult task, every work of importance, has counseled me to leave it, to drink my tea and think only about my worries of today, my desires for tomorrow, upon which I may ruminate effortlessly.

And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom. The sight of the little madeleine had not reminded me of anything before I tasted it; perhaps because I had often seen them since, without eating them, on the shelves of the pastry shops, and their image had therefore left those days of Combray and attached itself to others more recent; perhaps because of these recollections abandoned so long outside my memory, nothing survived, everything had come apart; the forms and the form, too, of the little shell made of cake, so fatly sensual within its severe and pious pleating—had been destroyed, or, still half asleep, had lost the force of expansion that would have allowed them to rejoin my consciousness. But, when nothing subsists of an old past, after the death of people, after the destruction of things, alone, frailer but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, smell and taste still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, upon the ruins of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.

And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me (though I did not yet know and had to put off to much later discovering why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old gray house on the street, where her bedroom was, came like a stage set to attach itself to the little wing opening onto the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. And as in that game enjoyed by the Japanese in which they fill a porcelain bowl with water and steep in it little pieces of paper until then indistinct which, the moment they are immersed, stretch and twist, assume colors and distinctive shapes, become flowers, houses, human figures, firm and recognizable, so now all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies of the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

2. Mr. Charlus during the war - his opinions & pleasures

Thoughts like these, tending in some cases to diminish, in others to increase my regret at not having a talent for literature, never crossed my mind throughout the long years, during which I had anyway completely renounced the project of writing, which I spent being treated far away from Paris in a sanatorium, until the time, at the beginning of 1916, when it became impossible any longer to obtain medical staff.

I then came back to a Paris very different from the one to which I had already returned on an earlier occasion, as we shall see shortly, in August 1914, to undergo a medical examination, after which I had re-entered my sanatorium. On one of the first evenings after my return in 1916, wanting to hear people's views on the only matter that interested me at that time, the war, I went out after dinner to visit Mme Verdurin, for she was, with Mme Bontemps, one of the queens of that wartime Paris so reminiscent of the Directory.[18] Rather as if they had been sprinkled with a small quantity of yeast, apparently of spontaneous generation, young women went about all day with tall cylindrical turbans on their heads as a contemporary of Mme Tallien[19] might have done, and, out of civic responsibility, wearing straight, dark-coloured Egyptian tunics, very 'wartime', over very short skirts; on their feet they wore thong-laced boots, reminiscent of Talma's[20] buskins, or long gaiters, recalling those of our dear boys at the front; it was, they said, because they never forgot that they had to gladden the eyes of those boys at the front, that they still adorned themselves not only in (loose) dresses, but also with jewellery which by its decorative subjects suggested the army, if indeed its raw material did not come from, and had not been worked by the army; but instead of Egyptian ornaments commemorating the campaign in Egypt, they wore rings or bracelets made out of shell fragments or the bands from seventy-five-millimetre ammunition, or carried cigarette-lighters made out of two English pennies to which a soldier in his dug-out had managed to impart a patina so fine that their profiles of Queen Victoria might have been traced by Pisanello. It was also because they never stopped thinking about them, they said, that, when somebody close to them fell, they hardly ever wore mourning, on the pretext that their grief was 'mingled with pride', which permitted them to wear a bonnet of white English crêpe (to most graceful effect and 'justifying every hope' in the invincible certainty of final victory), to replace the traditional cashmere with satin and chiffon, and even to retain their pearls, 'while continuing to observe the tact and correctness of which Frenchwomen have no need to be reminded'.

The Louvre and all the other museums were closed, and when one read, above a newspaper article, 'A sensational exhibition', one could be sure this referred to an exhibition not of paintings but of dresses, and dresses moreover designed as 'those delicate artistic joys of which Parisian women had for too long been deprived'. It was in this form that elegance and pleasure had returned; elegance, in the absence of the arts, seeking to excuse itself in the same way as happened in 1793, the year when the artists exhibiting at the revolutionary Salon proclaimed that it would be wrong for it to seem 'strange to austere Republicans that we should concern ourselves with the arts when the coalition of European powers is laying siege to the land of liberty'. This is just what the couturiers did in 1916, in addition asserting, with a proud consciousness of themselves as artists, that 'seeking the new, eschewing the ordinary, emphasizing individuality, preparing for victory, and defining a new pattern of beauty for the post-war generations, was the ambition that drove them forward, the chimera they pursued, as would be appreciated by anybody visiting their delightfully appointed salons in the rue de la –, where the watchword seems to be, by striking a bright and cheerful note, to wipe away the heavy sorrows of the time, all the while observing, of course, the discretion that circumstances impose.'

'The sorrows of the time', it is true, 'might have overborne feminine energies had we not so many lofty examples of courage and endurance to contemplate. Therefore, as we think of our fighting boys in their trenches, dreaming of better comforts and finer dresses for the girl they left at home, let us not cease to be ever more inventive in our creation of dresses responsive to the needs of the moment. The vogue', understandably enough, 'is for the English fashion-houses, thus for our allies, and this year the barrel-dress is all the rage, the pleasant unconstraint of which gives us all an entertaining air of uncommon distinction. One of the happier consequences of this sorry war, added the charming chronicler, may even be' (and one expected 'the repossession of our lost provinces, the re-awakening of national sentiment') 'one of the happier consequences of this sorry war may even be that we have achieved some pleasing results in the way of fashion, without mindless and inappropriate extravagance, from the slenderest resources, that we have created stylish dresses out of almost nothing. Instead of a dress from a grand designer, produced in a number of copies, women at this time prefer dresses made at home, as asserting the intelligence, taste and personal preference of each individual.'

As for charity, given all the miseries caused by the invasion, and the numbers of wounded and disabled, it was quite natural that it should be obliged to become 'more ingenious than ever', which obliged the women with tall turbans to spend the late afternoons having 'tea' round a bridge-table, commenting on the news from the 'front', while outside the door their cars waited for them, with a handsome soldier on the seat who chatted to the footman. Nor was it only the headdresses crowning the faces with their unfamiliar cylinders which were new. The faces themselves were also new. These women in the latest hats were young ladies, one did not know quite from where, who had been the flower of fashion, some for six months, some for two years, some for four. These differences, moreover, had for them as much importance as had, at the time I first entered society, between two families like the Guermantes and the La Rochefoucaulds, three or four centuries of proven antiquity. The lady who had known the Guermantes since 1914 regarded the one who was introduced to them in 1916 as a parvenue, acknowledged her with the distant air of a dowager, stared at her through her lorgnette and, pursing her lips, declared that nobody really even knew whether or not the lady was married. 'It is all rather sickening,' concluded the lady of 1914, who could have wished the cycle of new admissions to have ended with her own. These new ladies, whom the young men found rather ancient, and whom, moreover, certain older men, who had not moved exclusively in the best circles, were sure that they recognized as being not so new as all that, did not provide society merely with the pleasures of political conversation and music in suitably intimate surroundings: it was also that they had to be the ones who provided them, because for things to seem new, even if they are old, indeed even if they are actually new, there must in art, as in medicine, as in fashionable society, be new names. (They were, in fact, new in some matters. Thus Mme Verdurin had visited Venice during the war, but, like those people who try to avoid talking about distressing or emotional matters, when she said that it was wonderful, what she was admiring was not Venice, nor St Mark's, nor the palaces, all of which had delighted me so much and for which she had cared very little, but the effect of the searchlights in the sky, searchlights about which she provided information supported by figures. Thus from age to age is reborn a certain realism as a reaction against the art previously admired.)

The reputation of the Saint-Euverte salon had faded, and the presence at it of the greatest artists, the most influential ministers, would have attracted nobody. On the other hand, people would rush to listen to the utterances of a secretary of the former, or an under-secretary in the office of the latter, in the homes of the new turbaned ladies whose winged and chattering invasion was filling Paris. The ladies of the first Directory had a queen who was young and fair called Mme Tallien. Those of the second had two, who were old and ugly and called Mme Verdurin and Mme Bontemps. Who could have continued to hold it against Mme Bontemps that her husband had played a role in the Dreyfus Affair which had been harshly criticized by the *Écho de Paris?* The whole Chamber having at a certain point become revisionist, it was necessarily from among the former revisionists, as from among the former socialists, that the party of social order, religious toleration and military preparedness had been obliged to draw its recruits. At one time M. Bontemps would have been reviled, because then the anti-patriots went under the name of Dreyfusards. But that name had been quickly forgotten and replaced by that of 'opponent of the Three Years Law'.[21] M. Bontemps, however, was one of the architects of this law, and consequently he was a patriot.

In society (and this social phenomenon is merely one application of a much more general psychological law), novelties, blameworthy or not, arouse horror only if they have not been assimilated and surrounded by reassuring elements. This was as true of Dreyfusism as it was of Saint-Loup's marriage to Odette's daughter, which initially produced such an outcry. Now that one met everybody 'one knew' at the Saint-Loups', Gilberte might have had the morals of Odette herself, and people would still have gone there and endorsed Gilberte's dowager-like condemnation of as yet unassimilated moral changes. Dreyfusism was now integrated into a range of respectable and normal things. As for wondering what intrinsic merit it had, nobody gave it any greater consideration now, in accepting it, than formerly, when they had condemned it. It was no longer *shocking*. That was all that mattered. People scarcely remembered that it ever had been, just as they no longer know, after a lapse of time, whether a girl's father was a thief or not. At a pinch one can say: 'No, you're thinking of the brother-in-law, or someone with the same name. Nobody has ever had anything to say against the father.' In the same way, there had unquestionably been Dreyfusism and Dreyfusism, and somebody who was received at the Duchesse de Montmorency's and was helping to pass the Three Years Law could not be bad. In any case, no sin but should find mercy. The forgiveness granted to Dreyfusism was extended, *a fortiori*, to Dreyfusards. Besides, there were no longer any Dreyfusards left in politics, since at one time everybody who wanted to be in the government had been one, even those who represented the opposite of all that Dreyfusism, in its shocking novelty, had incarnated (at the time when Saint-Loup had been on the slippery slope): anti-patriotism, irreligion, anarchy, etc. Thus the Dreyfusism of M. Bontemps, invisible and constitutive like that of all politicians, was no more evident than the bones beneath his skin. Nobody even remembered that he had been a Dreyfusard, partly because people in society are inattentive and forgetful, also because it had all been a very long time ago, a time which people affected to believe was even longer ago, as one of the most fashionable ideas was the claim that the pre-war period was separated from the war by something as deep, something seemingly as long-lasting, as a geological period, and Brichot himself, the great nationalist, whenever he made allusion to the Dreyfus case, would say: 'In those prehistoric times'.

(Truth to tell, this profound change brought about by the war was in inverse ratio to the quality of the minds affected by it, at least above a certain level. Right at the bottom of the scale the utterly foolish, the pure pleasure-seekers, took no notice of the fact that there was a war on. But at the top end, too, those who have made for themselves an environing interior life have little regard for the importance of events. What profoundly modifies the pattern of their thoughts is much more likely to be something that seems quite unimportant in itself but which reverses their experience of the order of time by making them contemporaneous with another period of their life. One may appreciate this in practice from the beauty of the writing this inspires: the song of a bird in the park at Montboissier, or a breeze heavy with the scent of mignonette, are obviously events of less consequence than the epoch-making dates of the Revolution and the Empire. They none the less inspired Chateaubriand to write pages of infinitely greater value in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.[22]) The words Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard no longer had any meaning, yet the very people who maintained this would have been dumbfounded and outraged if one had told them that probably in a few centuries, perhaps even sooner, the term Boche would have merely the same curiosity value as words like *sans-culotte* or *chouan* or *bleu*.[23]

M. Bontemps was unwilling to hear any talk of peace before Germany had been reduced to the same fragmented state as in the Middle Ages, the fall of the House of Hohenzollern pronounced, and Kaiser Wilhelm put up before a firing squad. In a word, he was what Brichot called a 'diehard', the highest warrant of good-citizenship that could be conferred upon him. For the first three days Mme Bontemps must have felt a little bewildered at being surrounded by people who had asked Mme Verdurin to introduce them to her, and it was with a note of mild asperity that Mme Verdurin replied: 'No, my dear, the Comte' to Mme Bontemps's comment 'That was the Duc d'Haussonville you just introduced to me, wasn't it?', whether out of complete ignorance and failure to associate the name Haussonville with any title at all, or, on the contrary, as a result of having been given too much information and associating it in her head with the 'Ducs' Party' in the Academy, of which she had heard that M. de Haussonville was a member.[24]

But by the fourth day she had begun to be firmly established in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Occasionally one still saw around her the unrecognized fragments of an unfamiliar social world, but to those who knew the egg from which Mme Bontemps had hatched this was no more surprising than the debris of shell around a chick. After a fortnight, however, she had shaken them off, and before the end of the first month, when she said 'I'm going to the Lévis',' everybody understood, without her needing to be more specific, that she meant the Lévi-Mirepoix, and there was not a duchess who would have gone to bed without having learned from Mme Bontemps or Mme Verdurin, at least by telephone, the contents of the evening communiqué, what had been left out, how matters stood with Greece, what offensive was being prepared, in a word all the news that the public would know only the next day or later, and of which she thus had, as it were, a sort of dress rehearsal. In conversation, Mme Verdurin, when imparting news, would say 'we' when speaking of France. 'Now listen: we demand of the King of Greece that he withdraw from the Peloponnese, etc., we send him, etc.' And in all these stories the GHQ cropped up constantly ('I telephoned the GHQ'), an abbreviation which she uttered with the same pleasure that, a little while before, women who did not know the Prince d'Agrigente took in asking with a smile, when people were talking about him, to show they were in the swim: 'Grigri?', a pleasure which in less agitated times is known only to fashionable society, but which in great crises becomes available to all classes. Our butler, for example, if someone mentioned the King of Greece, was able, thanks to the newspapers, to say 'Tino?' like Kaiser Wilhelm; whereas his familiarity with kings had hitherto remained at the more vulgar level of his own invention, as when he once referred to the King of Spain as 'Fonfonse'. It was also noticeable that, as the number of socially glittering people making advances to Mme Verdurin increased, so the number of those she called 'bores' diminished. By a sort of magical transformation, every 'bore' who came to pay a visit and solicited an invitation instantly became somebody charming and intelligent. In short, by the end of a year the number of bores was proportionately so far reduced that 'the fear of being unbearably bored', which had occupied such a considerable place in Mme Verdurin's conversation and played such a large part in her life, had almost entirely disappeared. It seemed that, late in life, this intolerance of boredom (which anyway she claimed never to have suffered from in her first youth) afflicted her less, just as some kinds of headache or nervous asthma lose their power as one becomes older. And the terror of being bored would probably have deserted Mme Verdurin completely, in the absence of any bores, had she not, to some slight extent, replaced those who were no longer boring with others drawn from the ranks of the former faithful.

For the rest, to conclude the topic of the duchesses who now frequented Mme Verdurin's, they came there, though this never occurred to them, in search of exactly the same thing as the Dreyfusards had once done, that is to say a social pleasure constituted in such a way that its enjoyment both assuaged political curiosity and satisfied the need to discuss among themselves the incidents they read about in the newspapers. Mme Verdurin would say: 'Do come in at five o'clock to talk about the war,' just as she would once have said 'to talk about the Affair', or more recently: 'Do come and listen to Morel.'

Not that Morel ought to have been there, for the reason that he had not been rejected for active service. He had simply never joined up, and so was a deserter, but nobody knew this.

Things were so extremely similar that people quite naturally found themselves using the old terms: 'right-thinking, wrong-headed'. And because they appeared different, just as the former Communards had been anti-revisionists, the greatest Dreyfusards wanted to have everybody shot and had the support of the generals, as those at the time of the Affair had been against Gallifet.[25] To these gatherings Mme Verdurin would invite a few recently arrived ladies, renowned for their good works, who came the first few times in striking outfits, with great necklaces of pearls which Odette, who had one equally fine, the display of which she had formerly over-indulged, looked at, now that she was in 'war dress' in imitation of the ladies of the Faubourg, with a degree of severity. But women are very adaptable. After three or four times they realized that the outfits they had believed chic were precisely the ones proscribed by those who actually were, and they put their golden dresses aside and resigned themselves to simplicity.

One of the stars of the salon was the 'also-ran'[26] who, despite his sporting tastes, had managed to obtain a medical discharge. So completely had he become for me the author of a series of admirable works which were constantly in my thoughts, that it was only by chance, when I established a cross-current between two sets of memories, that it came into my head that he was the same person as had brought about Albertine's departure from my house. But again this cross-current led, as far as these residual memories of Albertine were concerned, to a train of thought that stopped in the middle of nowhere, several years away. Because I simply never thought about her. It was a train of memories, a line that I never went down any more. Whereas the works of the 'also-ran' were recent, and that line of memories in permanent and active use by my mind.

I have to say that the acquaintance of Andrée's husband was neither very easy nor very pleasant to make, and that any attempted friendship was destined to have a number of disappointments. He was, in fact, at this point already very ill and avoided tiring himself unless perhaps there was a prospect of pleasure to be had. But only meetings with people he did not yet know, and whom his ardent imagination probably thought of as having a chance of being different from the rest, fell into this category. So far as those he already knew were concerned, he knew too well what they were like and what they would be like, and they no longer seemed worth the bother of his becoming dangerously, perhaps even fatally tired. In short, he was a very poor friend. And perhaps his taste for new people retained something of the mad recklessness that he had shown in the old days at Balbec, at sport, gambling and all the excesses of the table.

Mme Verdurin, for her part, insisted, every time I went, on trying to introduce me to Andrée, being unable to accept that I already knew her. But Andrée rarely came with her husband. To me she was an admirable and sincere friend and, faithful to the aesthetic ideas of her husband, who had taken against the Russian Ballet, she would say of the Marquis de Polignac: 'He's had his house decorated by Bakst. How anyone can sleep in the middle of all that! I'd much rather have Dubufe.'[27] The Verdurins, too, as part of the inevitable fate of aestheticism which ends up eating its own tail, began to say they could not bear Art Nouveau (there was also the fact that it came from Munich) or white rooms; all they liked now was old French furniture set against dark colours.

I saw a lot of Andrée at that period. We did not know what to say to each other, and on one occasion the name of Juliette came to me, which had risen from the depths of the memory of Albertine like a mysterious flower. Mysterious then, but today it would no longer arouse any feeling in me: while I spoke of many subjects to which I was indifferent, on that one I was silent, not because it was less important than anything else, but there is a sort of supersaturation of matters one has thought too much about. Perhaps the period when I saw so much mystery in it was the true one. But as these periods do not last for ever, one cannot sacrifice health and fortune to the revelation of mysteries which one day will cease to be interesting.

People were very surprised at that period, too, when Mme Verdurin could have anybody she wanted to the house, to see her making indirect advances to a person she had completely lost touch with, Odette. It was generally thought that she could add nothing to the glittering circle that the little group had become. But an extended separation, at the same time as diminishing bitterness, sometimes reawakens friendship. And then the phenomenon which not only leads dying men to utter only the names they knew long ago, but old men to take delight in their childhood memories, also has its social equivalent. In order to succeed in her attempt to get Odette to return to her, Mme Verdurin did not of course make use of the 'ultras', but the less faithful members of her circle, who had kept one foot in each salon. She would say: 'I don't know why we don't see her here any more. She may feel that we've quarrelled, but I don't: after all, what wrong have I done her? It was in my house that she met both her husbands. If she ever wants to come back, let her know that my door is always open.' These words, which might have made the Patronne swallow her pride if they hadn't been dictated by her imagination, were relayed, but without success. Mme Verdurin waited in vain for Odette to appear, until the events we shall see later brought about for quite different reasons what the representations, zealous though they were, of the deserters had failed to achieve. So seldom do we meet either with easy success or with final failure.

Mme Verdurin would say: 'It's simply too bad, I must telephone Bontemps to get him to do the needful for tomorrow. They've *blue-pencilled* the whole of the end of Norpois's article, simply because he hinted that Percin had been *bowler-hatted*.' For the currently voguish silliness meant that everyone gloried in using currently voguish expressions, believing this showed them to be fashionable, like a middle-class woman hearing people talk about de Bréauté, d'Agrigente or de Charlus and saying: 'Who? Babal de Bréauté? Grigri? Mémé de Charlus?' And this is exactly what the duchesses did, really, taking the same pleasure in saying 'bowler-hatted': for with duchesses – in the eyes of commoners with a little poetry in their hearts – it is only the name that sets them apart; they actually express themselves in ways that are typical of the category of minds to which they belong, the membership of which is overwhelmingly middle-class. Classes of the mind have nothing at all to do with birth.

All this telephoning of Mme Verdurin's, however, was not without its difficulties. Although we have forgotten to say so, the Verdurin 'salon', while it continued in spirit and in its essential nature, had been moved temporarily to one of the largest hotels in Paris, the shortage of coal and light making it increasingly difficult for the Verdurins to entertain in the very damp former home of the Venetian ambassadors. But the new salon did have its attractions. Just as, in Venice, a site delimited by water dictates the plan of a *palazzo*, or a scrap of garden in Paris gives more pleasure than parkland in the country, the narrow dining-room that Mme Verdurin had in the hotel, an unevenly shaped rhombus with dazzlingly white walls, became a sort of screen against which were sharply outlined every Wednesday, and almost every other day, a diversity of the most interesting men and the most elegant women in Paris, all more than happy to take advantage of the luxury of the Verdurins, which continued to increase with their wealth at a time when even the richest people, unable to draw their dividends, were economizing. The form of these receptions was thus modified, but Brichot's enchantment with them continued undiminished, and the more extended the Verdurins' web of acquaintances grew, the more new pleasures he found packed into a small space, like surprises in a Christmas stocking. In the end the diners were sometimes so numerous that the dining-room in the private suite was too small and the dinner was given in the huge dining-room downstairs, where the faithful, while hypocritically pretending to lament the loss of the intimacy of upstairs, as long ago the need to invite the Cambremers had led them to tell Mme Verdurin that they would be too crowded, were at heart delighted – while continuing to keep their group separate from the others, as they once had on the little railway – to be a focus and an object of envy for the neighbouring tables. Under normal peacetime conditions a note would probably have been sent to the social pages of the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois* to inform a more numerous society than the dining-room of the Majestic Hotel could hold that Brichot had dined with the Duchesse de Duras. But since the outbreak of war, the society columnists having cut out that sort of news (although they made up for it with funerals, mentions in dispatches and Franco-American banquets), self-advertisement could exist only in an undeveloped and restricted form, appropriate to an earlier age, before the coming of Gutenberg's invention: being seen at Mme Verdurin's table. After dinner people went upstairs to the Patronne's reception rooms, and the telephoning began. But many of the grand hotels at that period were full of spies, who noted down the news telephoned through by Bontemps with an indiscretion that was, fortunately, only matched by the unreliability of his information, which was always proved wrong by subsequent events.

Before the hour at which the afternoon teas came to an end, as dusk came on but while the sky was still light, one would see in the distance little brown dots that might have been taken, in the blue evening, for gnats or birds. Similarly, a mountain seen from far away can be taken for a cloud. At the same time, it is

emotionally unsettling because one knows that the cloud is vast, solid and resistant. Thus I was moved by the knowledge that each brown dot in the summer sky was neither a gnat nor a bird, but an aeroplane crewed by men who were watching over Paris. (The memory of the aeroplanes which I had seen with Albertine on our last drive near Versailles did not play any part in this emotion, for the memory of that drive had become indifferent to me.)

By dinner-time the restaurants were full; and if passing in the street I saw a poor soldier, home on leave, having had six days' escape from the constant risk of death, and now ready to set off back to the trenches, allow his eyes to rest for a moment on the lighted windows, I suffered as I had in the hotel at Balbec when fishermen had watched us eating, yet this time the pain was greater because I knew that the misery of the soldier is worse than that of the poor, as it combines every variety of misery, and even more touching because it is more resigned and nobler, and because it was with a philosophical shake of the head, without hatred, that, ready to set off back to the war, he would say, as he saw the shirkers rushing to grab their tables: 'You'd never know there was a war on here.' Then at half past nine, even though nobody had yet had time to finish eating, all the lights were abruptly turned off because of the police regulations, and the new rush of shirkers snatching their overcoats from the attendants, in that restaurant where I had dined with Saint-Loup one evening when he was on leave, took place at 9.35 in a mysterious semi-darkness, as of a room during a magic-lantern show, or of the film-projection hall of one of the cinemas to which the men and women diners would soon be hurrying. But after that time, for those who, like me, on the evening I am talking about, had stayed at home to dine and were then going out to see friends, Paris was, at least in certain quarters, even darker than the Combray of my childhood; when people went to call on each other, it felt like a visit to a neighbour in the country.

Ah, if Albertine had been alive, how lovely it would have been, on evenings when I had dined out, to arrange to meet her out of doors, beneath the arcades! At first I would not have seen anything, I would have had the pang of thinking that she had failed to come, then suddenly I would have seen one of her cherished grey dresses take shape against the black wall, seen her smiling eyes which had already noticed me, and we would have been able to walk along with our arms round each other without anybody recognizing us or disturbing us, and then go back home. But alas, I was alone and I felt as if I were going to pay a visit to a neighbour in the country, like the visits Swann used to pay us after dinner, encountering no more people in the darkness of Tansonville, along the narrow tow-path as far as the rue du Saint-Esprit, than I now met in the streets, which had become like winding country lanes, between Saint-Clotilde and the rue Bonaparte. Moreover, since those remembered fragments of landscape borne to me by the changing weather were no longer thwarted by my surroundings, which had become invisible, on evenings when the wind was chasing a glacial squall, I had a much more powerful sense of being beside that angry sea I had once dreamed so much about than ever I had felt at Balbec; and other features of nature, too, previously non-existent in Paris, could make one imagine that, climbing down from the train, one had just arrived for a holiday deep in the countryside: for instance, the contrast of light and shadow that lay all around one on moonlit evenings. The moonlight created effects that are normally unknown in the city, even in the middle of winter; its beams spreading across the snow on the boulevard Haussmann that there was nobody now to shovel away, just as they might have done on a glacier in the Alps. The outlines of the trees were revealed, sharp and pure against the golden-blue snow, with all the delicacy of a Japanese painting or a Raphael background; as shadows, they stretched out over the ground from the very foot of each tree, as one often sees them in the country when the rays of the setting sun flood the meadows, creating reflections of their evenly spaced trees. But by a wonderfully delicate subtlety, the meadow over which these tree shadows, weightless as souls, extended was a paradisal meadow, not green but of a white so dazzling, by virtue of the moonlight which shone on to the jade snow, that it might have been woven entirely from the petals of flowering pear trees. And in the squares, the divinities of the public fountains holding jets of ice in their hands looked like statues made of some twofold material, for whose creation the artist had set out to make a pure marriage of bronze and crystal. On rare days such as these the houses were all completely dark. But in the spring, on the other hand, every now and then, in defiance of police regulations, a private town house, or just one floor of a house, or even just one room of one floor, not having closed its shutters, appeared, as if independently supported by the impalpable darkness, like a projection of pure light, like an apparition without substance. And the woman whom, lifting up one's eyes, one could make out in that gilded shadow, took on, in this night in which one was lost and in which she too seemed cloistered, the veiled and mysterious charm of an oriental vision. Then one walked on, and nothing else interrupted the monotonous tramp of one's constitutional in the rustic darkness.

It occurred to me that it was a long time since I had seen any of the people who have been mentioned in this work. Only in 1914, during the two months I had spent in Paris, did I catch a glimpse of M. de Charlus and meet Bloch and Saint-Loup, and the latter only twice. The second time was undoubtedly the one when he had seemed most himself, effacing all the disagreeable impressions of insincerity he had created during the stay at Tansonville which I have just recounted, so that I again saw in him all the fine qualities he had once displayed. The first time I had seen him after the declaration of war, which was at the beginning of the following week, while Bloch was parading the most chauvinistic opinions, Saint-Loup, once Bloch had left us, could not be sufficiently ironical about the fact that he himself had not re-enlisted, and I had been almost shocked by the violence of his tone.

Saint-Loup had recently returned from Balbec. Later, I learned indirectly that he had made unsuccessful advances towards the manager of the restaurant. The latter owed his position to his inheritance from M. Nissim Bernard. In fact he was none other than the young waiter whom Bloch's uncle had once 'taken under his wing'. But with wealth had come virtue. With the result that Saint-Loup attempted in vain to seduce him. Thus by some compensatory process, while virtuous young men abandon themselves, as they grow older, to the passions of which they have finally become conscious, promiscuous youths become men of principle, from whom the Charluses of this world, turning up on the strength of the old stories, but too late, receive a disagreeable refusal. It is all a matter of chronology.

'No, he exclaimed with blithe emphasis, if anyone doesn't fight, whatever reason they give, it's really because they don't want to be killed, because they're *afraid*.' And with an even more energetic reiteration of the gesture with which he had underlined the fear of others, he added: 'And that goes for me too. If I don't re-enlist it's quite frankly because I'm *afraid, so there*!' I had already noticed in several other people that the affectation of laudable opinions is not the only way of cloaking bad ones, and that an alternative is the open display of these disreputable sentiments, so that at least one does not appear to be concealing them from oneself. This tendency was further intensified in Saint-Loup by his habit, when he had committed some indiscretion or made a gaffe for which he was likely to be blamed, of broadcasting it and saying that he had done it deliberately. A habit which, I rather think, he must have picked up from one of the instructors at the École de Guerre whom he had been quite close to, and for whom he professed great admiration. So I had no hesitation in interpreting this sally as the verbal confirmation of an attitude which, as it had dictated Saint-Loup's conduct and his non-participation in the war that was just beginning, he preferred to make publicly known.

'Have you heard anything, he asked as he was leaving, about my aunt Oriane getting a divorce? I know absolutely nothing about it myself. People talk about it from time to time, and I've heard it predicted so often that I'll wait till it happens before I believe it. Mind you, it would be quite understandable; my uncle is a charming man, not just socially but to his friends and his family. He's even, in a way, got more heart than my aunt, who is a saint but who does make him very much aware of the fact. Only he is a terrible husband, who has constantly deceived his wife, and insulted her, ill-treated her, and kept her short of money. It would be so natural for her to leave him that it would provide a reason for its being true, but it might equally well not be, because it's one of those ideas which people talk about as soon as it occurs to them. And given that she's put up with him for so long! But of course I know perfectly well that there are plenty of things that are mistakenly announced, then denied, but which go on to become true later.' That reminded me to ask him if there had ever been any talk of his marrying Mlle de Guermantes. He started and assured me that there had not, that it had merely been one of those society rumours that appear from time to time for no good reason, and vanish in the same way, without their falsity making the people who believed them any more cautious, the next time a new rumour of an engagement or a divorce, or a political rumour appears, about giving it their credence and passing it on.

Forty-eight hours had not gone by before certain facts which I learned showed that I had been completely mistaken in my interpretation of Robert's words: 'If anyone isn't at the front, it's because they're afraid.' Saint-Loup had said that only in order to sparkle in conversation, to be psychologically original, so long as he

was not certain that his enlistment had been accepted. But all the time he was working as hard as he could to ensure that it would be, being in this less original, in the sense in which he believed the word ought to be taken, but more profoundly a Frenchman of Saint-André-des-Champs,[28] more in conformity with all that at this moment was best in the Frenchmen of Saint-André-des-Champs, lords, burghers and serfs whether respectful of their lords or in revolt against them, two equally French divisions of the same family, the Françoise sub-branch and the Morel sub-branch, from which two arrows pointed, to join forces once again, in a single direction, towards the frontier. Bloch had been delighted to hear the admission of cowardice of a 'nationalist' (who in point of fact was hardly nationalist at all) and when Saint-Loup had asked him whether he was having to go, he adopted a high-priestly expression and replied: 'Short-sighted.'

But Bloch had completely changed his mind about the war a few days later when he came to see me, panic-stricken. Although 'short-sighted' he had been passed fit for service. I was taking him back home when we met Saint-Loup, who had an appointment at the Ministry of War to be introduced to a colonel, with a former officer, 'M. de Cambremer,' he told me. 'Oh, but of course, I'm talking about an old acquaintance of yours. You know Cancan as well as I do.' I replied that I did indeed know him, and his wife, and that I did not think terribly highly of them. However I had grown so used, since I had met them for the first time, to thinking of the wife, none the less, as a remarkable person, with a deep understanding of Schopenhauer and, generally speaking, as having access to intellectual circles that were closed to her uncouth husband, that I was at first astonished to hear Saint-Loup reply: 'His wife is an idiot, I give up on her. But he himself is an excellent man, who had great gifts and is still very good company.' By the wife's 'idiocy' Saint-Loup must have meant her desperate desire to move in high society, something about which high society is most severely judgmental. By the husband's qualities, he probably meant something of those that his mother recognized in him when she said that he was the best of the family. He at least had no interest in duchesses, but this, to be honest, indicates a kind of 'intelligence' which differs as much from that which characterizes thinkers as does the 'intelligence' attributed by the public to some rich man for 'having been clever enough to make his fortune'. Saint-Loup's words did not, however, displease me, in so far as they reminded me that pretention is very close to stupidity and that simplicity has a less visible but still gratifying aspect. I had not, it was true, had an opportunity to savour that of M. de Cambremer. But it is precisely this sort of thing that means that a person is a number of different people, depending on who is judging him, quite apart from differences of judgment themselves. All I had ever known of M. de Cambremer was the outer shell. And his flavour, to which others attested, was unknown to me.

Bloch left us outside his front door, brimming with resentment against Saint-Loup, telling him that the 'favoured sons' in their braided uniforms, strutting around at headquarters, were running no risks, and that he, a private second-class, had no wish to 'get himself perforated because of William'. 'I gather that the Emperor William is gravely ill,' replied Saint-Loup. Bloch, who, like everyone who keeps a close eye on the Stock Exchange, was particularly prone to accept sensational news, said: 'A lot of people are even saying he's dead.' On the Stock Exchange any ill sovereign, whether Edward VII or William II, is already dead, every town on the point of being besieged already captured. 'They're only concealing it, Bloch added, so as not to lower Boche morale. But he died the night before last. My father has it from an impeccable source.' Impeccable sources were the only ones which M. Bloch senior took any notice of when, by the good fortune he had, thanks to his 'important connections', to be in contact with them, he came by the still secret news that Foreign Bonds were about to rise or that de Beers[29] were about to fall. Moreover, if at that precise moment there was a rise in de Beers or there was an 'offer' of Foreign Bonds, if the market for the first was 'firm' and 'active', that for the second 'cautious', 'weak', one in which nobody was 'committing themselves', the impeccable source did not thereby become any the less impeccable. Thus Bloch informed us of the Kaiser's death with an air of mystery and self-importance, but also angrily. He was particularly exasperated at the way Robert said: 'the Emperor William'. But I believe that even under the blade of the guillotine Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes would have been incapable of saying anything else. Two men who moved in society, finding themselves the sole survivors on a desert island, where there was no need to demonstrate their good manners to anyone, would recognize each other by these marks of their upbringing, just as two Latinists would quote Virgil correctly. Saint-Loup could never, even under German torture, have said anything except 'the Emperor William'. And these social graces, whatever else they signify, are an indication of significant mental shackles. Anyone unable to cast them off will always remain merely a society man. Yet even this elegant mediocrity was exquisite – especially with all the hidden generosity and unexpressed heroism that accompanied it – beside the vulgarity, simultaneously cowardly and arrogant, displayed by Bloch, who shouted at Saint-Loup: 'Couldn't you just call him William and be done with it? The truth is you're scared, even here you're crawling belly-down at his feet! Oh, what fine soldiers we're going to have at the frontier, they'll be licking the Boches's boots. All you know how to do, in all your fancy braid, is to strut about the parade-ground, and that's that.'

'Poor old Bloch quite wants me to do nothing but strut about on parade,' said Saint-Loup to me with a smile when we had left our friend. And I sensed that parading about was not at all what Robert wanted to do, even though I was not so fully aware of his intentions then as I later became when, the cavalry continuing inactive, he obtained permission to serve as an officer with the infantry, and then with the light infantry, or when finally occurred the sequel which the reader will discover later. But of Robert's patriotism Bloch remained completely unaware, simply because Robert gave absolutely no expression to it. Although Bloch had given us some extreme anti-militarist declarations of faith once he had been passed 'fit', he had earlier, when he thought he would be rejected because of his shortsight, made the most chauvinistic declarations. Saint-Loup would have been incapable of making any statement of that sort, principally because of a kind of moral delicacy that prevents the expression of sentiments which are so deeply rooted that they seem a part of one's nature. There was a time when my mother would not only not have hesitated for a moment to die for my grandmother but would have suffered terribly if anybody had prevented her from doing so. Nevertheless it is impossible for me retrospectively to imagine her uttering a sentence like: 'I would lay down my life for my mother.' Equally unspoken was Robert's love of France; at this moment he seemed to me much more a Saint-Loup (to the extent that I could imagine his father) than a Guermantes. He may also have been protected from expressing sentiments of that sort by, as it were, the moral quality of his intelligence. Among really serious and intelligent workers, there is a certain aversion towards those who advertise what they do by turning it into fine words. We had not been at the Lycée or at the Sorbonne together, but we did separately follow courses given by some of the same lecturers (and I remember Saint-Loup's smile) who, when they gave a particularly noteworthy course, as some of them did, tried to make themselves look like men of genius by giving an ambitious name to their theories. Whenever we talked about this Robert would laugh out loud. Naturally, our instinctive predilection was not for the Cottards or the Brichots, but we did have a certain respect for the men who had a thorough knowledge of Greek or medicine but did not believe themselves thereby entitled to behave like charlatans. I have said that while all Mama's actions rested at one time on the feeling that she would have given her life for her mother, she had never formulated this sentiment for herself and would anyway have found it not only pointless and ridiculous, but shocking and shameful to express it to others; similarly, it was impossible for me to imagine Saint-Loup uttering, in the course of talking about his equipment, the things he had to get, our chances of victory, the shortage of bravery in the Russian Army, what England would do – it was impossible for me to imagine him uttering even the most eloquent phrase spoken by even the most popular minister to an audience of Deputies standing and cheering with enthusiasm. Yet I cannot say that in this negative side, which prevented him from expressing the fine sentiments he felt, there was not an element of the 'Guermantes wit', of which we have seen so many instances in Swann. For although I took him to be more of a Saint-Loup than anything else, he was still a Guermantes too, which meant that, among the numerous motives which inspired his courage, there were some which were different from those of his Doncières friends, those young men so smitten with their profession with whom I had dined every evening and so many of whom went to their deaths at the battle of the Marne or elsewhere, leading their men into action.

Any young socialists who may have been at Doncières when I was there, but whose acquaintance I did not make because they were not part of Saint-Loup's set, were able now to see that the officers in that set were not in the least 'toffs', with the connotations of haughty pride and low hedonism that the 'plebs', the officers promoted from the ranks, or the freemasons gave to the term. And by the same token, moreover, the aristocratic officers discovered fully the same degree of patriotism among the socialists whom I had heard them accuse, while I was at Doncières at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, of being 'men without a country'. The patriotism of the career soldiers, profound and deep-seated as it was, had taken a distinct form which they believed to be inviolable and which they were

outraged to see made an object of opprobrium, whereas the relatively unthinking, independent patriots, with no distinct set of patriotic beliefs, that the radical-socialists were, had been incapable of understanding the profound reality that existed behind what they took to be empty and hate-inspired phrases.

No doubt Saint-Loup, like them, had grown used to developing in his mind, as the truest part of himself, the search for and the elaboration of the best manoeuvres by which to achieve the greatest tactical and strategic successes, so that for him as for them the life of the body was something relatively unimportant which could be easily sacrificed to this inward part, this truly vital core within them, around which individual existence was valuable only as a protective skin. But in Saint-Loup's courage there were also more individual elements, in which it would have been easy to recognize the generosity which had constituted the initial charm of our friendship, as well as the hereditary vice which had surfaced in him later, and which, together with a certain intellectual level which he had not transcended, caused him not only to admire courage, but to carry his horror of effeminacy so far as to find any contact with virility intoxicating. He discovered, no doubt chastely, from living in the open with Senegalese troops who were sacrificing their lives at every moment, an intense cerebral pleasure into which was infused a great deal of scorn for the 'little musk-scented gentlemen', and which, contradictory though it might seem, was not so different from the pleasure derived from the cocaine he had taken too much of at Tansonville and of which heroism – as one remedy replaces another – was curing him. But the principal aspect of his courage was that twofold habit of courtesy which, on the one hand, led him to praise others but for himself made him content to do the right thing and say nothing about it, unlike a Bloch, who had said to him in the course of our meeting: 'Obviously you'd turn tail and run,' but who was doing nothing himself; and, on the other, drove him to disregard everything he possessed, his fortune, his rank, even his life, and be ready to give them away. In a word, the true nobility of his nature. But so many different sources come together in heroism that the changed preference that had manifested itself in him, and also the intellectual mediocrity he had never been able to overcome, had their part to play in it. By adopting the habits of M. de Charlus, Robert found that he had also taken on, albeit in a very different form, his ideal of masculinity.

'Do you think we're in for a long haul?' I said to Saint-Loup. 'No, I think it will be a very short war,' he replied. But here, as always, his arguments were bookish. 'Bearing in mind Moltke's prophecies, reread', he said to me, as if I had already read them, 'the decree of the 28th of October 1913 on the command of large units, and you will see that the replacement of the peacetime reserves has not been organized, or even foreseen, something they would not have failed to do if the war was going to be a long one.' It seemed to me that the decree in question could be interpreted not as proof that the war would be short, but rather as a lack of foresight about its length, and about its nature, on the part of those who had drafted it, and who had not the slightest idea of the appalling waste of every sort of raw material that would occur in a war of consolidation, nor of the interdependence of the different theatres of operations.

Outside the homosexual world, among the people most constitutionally opposed to homosexuality, there exists a certain conventional ideal of masculinity, which, unless the homosexual is quite exceptional, is at his disposal, but not without his distorting it. This ideal – represented by certain soldiers, certain diplomats – is particularly exasperating. In its lowest form it is simply the unsophistication of the man with a heart of gold who does not want to betray any emotion, and who, at the moment of parting from a friend who is perhaps going to his death, feels a deep desire to cry which nobody suspects because he overlays it with a rising anger, ending in an outburst at the actual moment of leaving: 'Come on, damn it! Embrace me, you bloody idiot, and you'd better take this purse, I've got no use for it, don't be such a damn fool.' The diplomat, the officer, the man who feels that the only thing that matters is the great task of national importance, but who none the less felt a fondness for the 'kid' in the legation or the battalion who died from fever or a bullet, presents the same taste for masculinity in a form that is more adept and more skilful, but fundamentally just as obnoxious. He does not want to weep for the 'kid', he knows that soon nobody will be thinking about him, any more than the kind-hearted surgeon does, who yet, despite everything, on the evening when some little girl has died in an epidemic, feels a sadness he does not express. Even should the diplomat be a writer and describe the death, he will not say that he felt any grief: no; first out of 'manly decency', and second by virtue of the artistic skill which arouses emotion by concealing it. He and one of his colleagues will watch by the dying man's bedside. Not for a moment will they say that they feel grief. They will talk about legation or battalion business, perhaps even in greater detail than usual:

'B—— said to me: "Don't forget that we've got the general's inspection tomorrow, so make sure your men are properly turned out." He is normally so softly spoken, but his tone was sharper than usual, and I noticed that he avoided meeting my eyes. Mind you, I felt rather on edge as well.'

And the reader understands that this sharpness is just grief as it appears in men who do not want to appear to feel grief, a fact which would be simply ridiculous if it were not also ugly and terribly sad, because it is the way that people who think that grief does not matter, who think that there are more important things in life than partings, etc., experience grief, so that when somebody dies they give the same impression of dishonesty, of pointlessness, as the gentleman on New Year's Day who brings you some *marrons glacés* and says: 'With my very best wishes for your health and happiness,' giggling, but saying it all the same. But to finish the account of the officer or the diplomat watching beside the deathbed, his head covered because the wounded or dying man has been taken out of doors, a moment suddenly comes when it is all over.

'I was thinking I must go back and get my things ready for cleaning; when, I don't know why, just as the doctor let go of the pulse, it happened that B—— and I, quite independently of each other, the sun was beating down on us, maybe we were hot, standing there beside the bed, both took off our *képis*.'

And the reader knows perfectly well that it is not because of the heat of the sun but out of emotion in the presence of the majesty of death that these two masculine men, who never allow the words affection or grief to pass their lips, removed their caps.

The ideal of masculinity found in homosexuals like Saint-Loup is not the same, but it is equally conventional and equally dishonest. For them, the dishonesty lies in the fact of their unwillingness to admit to themselves that physical desire is at the root of feelings to which they attribute some other origin. M. de Charlus detested effeminacy. Saint-Loup admires the courage of young men, the intoxication of a cavalry charge, the moral and intellectual nobility of those friendships between men, entirely pure, in which one sacrifices his life for another. War, which renders capital cities, where only women remain, the despair of homosexuals, is at the same time a story of intense romance for homosexuals, so long as they are intelligent enough to invent chimeras to pursue, but not intelligent enough to be able to see through them, recognize their origin and pass judgment on themselves. So that at a time when some young men were joining up simply out of a sporting spirit of imitation, just as one year everybody seems to be playing 'diabolo', for Saint-Loup war was rather the very ideal he imagined himself pursuing in his much more concrete desires, clouded in ideology though they were, an ideal he served alongside the kind of people he liked best, in a purely masculine order of chivalry, far removed from women, where he could risk his life to save his batman, and die inspiring a fanatical love in his men. And thus, while there might be a number of other elements in his courage, the fact that he was a nobleman was part of it, as was, in an unrecognizable and idealized form, M. de Charlus's idea that it was of the essence of manhood to display no trace of effeminacy. Moreover, in the same way as in philosophy or in art two analogous ideas only acquire value from the ways in which they are developed, and may be quite different depending whether they are expounded by Xenophon or by Plato, so, while fully acknowledging how much they share in this regard, I admire Saint-Loup's asking to be sent to the positions where there was greatest danger infinitely more than M. de Charlus's avoiding wearing brightly coloured cravats.

I spoke to Saint-Loup about my friend the manager of the Grand Hotel in Balbec, who, it appeared, had claimed that at the beginning of the war, in some French regiments, there had been defections, which he called 'defectations', and had accused what he called the 'Prussian militarist' of having provoked them; he had even believed, at one point, that there had been simultaneous landing of Japanese, Germans and Cossacks at Rivebelle, threatening Balbec, and had said that there was nothing left to do but 'evaculate'. He thought that the departure of the authorities for Bordeaux was somewhat precipitate, and declared that they were wrong to 'evaculate' so quickly. This hater of Germans would laughingly say, of his brother: 'He's in the trenches, just twenty-five metres from the Boche!' until, having discovered that he was one himself, they put him in a concentration camp.

‘Talking of Balbec, do you remember that lift-boy they used to have in the hotel?’ asked Saint-Loup as he was about to go, in a tone of voice that suggested that he did not quite know who it was and was relying on me to clarify matters. ‘He’s joining up and has written to ask me to get him into the flying corps.’ The lift-boy was doubtless tired of going up in the captive cage of the lift, and the heights of the staircase in the Grand Hotel were no longer enough for him. He was going to ‘win his stripes’ in some other way than as a porter, for our destiny is not always what we thought it would be. ‘Obviously, I’ll support his application, Saint-Loup said. I was saying to Gilberte only this morning that we’ll never have enough aeroplanes. With them we’ll be able to see what the enemy is preparing. They’ll take away the greatest advantage of an attack, which is surprise, and the best army will perhaps be the one that has the best eyes.’

I had met the lift-boy airman a few days earlier. He had talked to me about Balbec and, curious to know what he would have to say about Saint-Loup, I led the conversation round to the subject by asking him if it was true, as I had been told, that where young men were concerned M. de Charlus had etc. The lift-boy seemed astonished, he knew absolutely nothing about it. But he did make an accusation against the rich young man who lived with his mistress and three male friends. As he seemed to be tarring them all with the same brush, and as I knew from M. de Charlus, who had told me, it will be remembered, in front of Brichot, that it was not at all like that, I told the lift-boy that he must be mistaken. He responded to my doubts with the most confident assertions. It was the girl-friend of the rich young man who was responsible for picking up young men, and they all took their pleasure together. So M. de Charlus, the most competent of men in these matters, was completely mistaken, the truth being so partial, secret and unpredictable. For fear of seeming to think in a bourgeois way, or of seeing Charlusism where there was none, he had completely missed the fact that the woman was making the pick-ups. ‘She came to look for me quite often, the lift-boy told me. But she realized straightaway who she was dealing with, I refused categorically, I don’t get involved in that kind of stuff; I told her I really hated it. It just takes one person to be indiscreet, word gets around, and then you can never find another job anywhere.’ These last reasons rather weakened the virtuous declarations with which he had begun, since they seemed to imply that the lift-boy would have acceded if he had been assured of discretion. That had doubtless been the case for Saint-Loup. It is quite probable that even the rich man, his mistress and his friends had not been less favourably treated, because the lift-boy cited numerous conversations he had had with them at various times, which rarely happens after such a categorical refusal. For instance, the rich man’s mistress had come to him to make the acquaintance of a bellboy he was very friendly with. ‘I don’t think you know him, you weren’t here then. Victor, they called him. Naturally,’ added the lift-boy as if with reference to some vaguely secret and inviolable law, ‘one can’t say no to a pal who’s short of money.’ I remembered the invitation which the rich man’s noble friend had extended to me a few days before my departure from Balbec. But in all probability that had nothing to do with it, and was prompted simply by friendliness.

'Well, now, what about poor Françoise, has she managed to get her nephew exempted?' But Françoise, who had for some time been doing everything she could to get her nephew exempted and who, when someone had suggested a recommendation, through the Guermantes, to General Saint-Joseph, had replied in a voice of despair: 'Oh no, that wouldn't help at all, there's nothing to be had from that old bloke, he's worse than the rest of them, he's patriotic'; Françoise, as soon as there had been any question of war, however much it pained her to think it, decided that we could not abandon the 'poor Russians' as we were 'allianced' to them. The butler, who was anyway convinced that the war would only last ten days and would end in a stunning victory for France, would not have dared, for fear of being contradicted by events, and also did not even have enough imagination, to predict a long and indecisive war. But he tried at least to extract in advance from this total and immediate victory anything likely to cause suffering to Françoise. 'It could easily get very nasty, because it seems that lots of them don't want to go, lads of sixteen in tears.' And his telling her unpleasant things in order to 'vex' her, was what he called 'giving her the pip, telling her a thing or two, having a laugh'. 'Sixteen, Mother of God!' Françoise would say, then suspicious for a minute: 'But they said they were only taking people over twenty, they're still children. – Naturally the newspapers are under orders not to say anything about it. Anyway, all the young men will be up at the front, and not many of them will be coming back. In one way that will be a good thing, after all, a good blood-letting is useful from time to time, it's good for trade. Oh yes, if there are any soft-hearted kids who hang back, they'll be shot straight away, a dozen bullets in them, bang! It's the only way, really. After all, the officers, what does it matter to them? They get their screw, that's all they ask.' Françoise would turn so pale during each of these conversations that one was afraid the butler would give her a fatal heart attack.

For all that, she didn't lose her old faults. Whenever a young lady came to see me, however badly the old servant's legs were troubling her, if I happened to leave my room for a moment, I would see her up a ladder in the dressing-room, in the process, she would say, of looking out some jacket of mine to check that the moths had not got at it, though she was actually there to listen to us. Despite my criticisms, she retained her insidious way of asking questions indirectly, to do which she had for some time now had a way of using 'because probably'. Not daring to say to me: 'Does this lady own a town house?' she would say, her eyes timidly raised like those of a faithful dog: 'Because probably the lady has a town house…', avoiding blatant interrogation less out of politeness than in order not to appear curious.

In the end, just as the servants whom we love best – especially if they have almost abandoned giving us the service or the respect that go with their job – remain, alas, servants and show most clearly the limits of their class (which we would wish to remove) when they think they have most penetrated into our own, Françoise when she was with me often ('to needle me', the butler might have said) made strange comments, which someone of my own class would not have done: with a joy disguised, but as deeply felt as if a grave illness were involved, if I were hot and sweat – if I had not noticed – beaded my forehead: 'Oh, but you're dripping,' she'd say, as if in wonder at some strange phenomenon, smiling a little with the sort of scorn provoked by some impropriety ('you seem to be going out but you've forgotten to put a tie on'), but adopting that preoccupied tone of voice which is designed to make someone worried about their state of health. It was as if I were the only person in the universe who had ever sweated. Finally she quite lost the pleasant manner of speaking she used to have. For in her humility, in her kind-hearted admiration for people who were infinitely inferior to her, she adopted their ugly turns of phrase. Her daughter having complained to me about her and saying (I don't know who she got it from): 'She's always going on at me, saying I shut doors the wrong way, and so on and so forth ad infinitum,' Françoise must have thought that only her incomplete education had thitherto deprived her of that elegant usage. And from the lips where I had once seen blossom the purest French, I now heard several times a day: 'And so on and so forth ad infinitum.' It is a curious thing how little not only a person's expressions but also their thoughts vary. The butler having got into the habit of declaring that M. Poincaré's intentions were bad, not for monetary gain but because he had been absolutely in favour of war, he would repeat this seven or eight times a day in front of the same familiar and always equally attentive audience. He never altered a word, a gesture or an intonation. Although it only lasted two minutes, the performance was unvarying. His errors of French corrupted Françoise's language quite as much as those of her daughter. He thought that what M. de Rambuteau had been so hurt one day to hear the Duc de Guermantes refer to as 'Rambuteau conveniences' were called urals. In his childhood he must have failed to hear the *in*, and it had stuck. He therefore pronounced the word wrongly, although he used it all the time. Françoise, initially embarrassed, ended up using it too, so that she could complain that women, unlike men, had no such things. But her humility and her admiration for the butler meant that she never said urinals, but – with a slight concession to custom – urials.

She no longer slept, no longer ate, and had the communiqués, of which she understood nothing, read to her by the butler, who, scarcely understanding them any better and in whom the desire to torment Françoise was often overridden by patriotic enthusiasm, would say with a sympathetic laugh, speaking of the Germans: 'They're going to get a rocket under them soon, good old Joffre's preparing a big new plan.' Françoise had no idea what rocket he was talking about, but sensing only that the phrase was one of those pleasant and original eccentricities to which politeness requires a well-brought-up person to respond with good humour, with a gay shrug of her shoulders, as if to say: 'Isn't he always the same?' she would temper her tears with a smile. At least she was glad that her new butcher's boy, who despite his job was rather timorous (even though he had started in the abattoirs), was not old enough to be sent to fight. If he had been, she would have been quite capable of going to see the Minister of War to have him exempted.

The butler was unable to imagine that the communiqués were not wonderful, and that the army was not close to Berlin, whenever he read: 'We have repulsed, with heavy enemy losses, etc.', engagements which he celebrated as further victories. I, however, was alarmed at the speed with which the theatre of these victories was approaching Paris, and I was equally astonished that the butler, having seen in one communiqué that a battle had taken place near Lens, had shown no anxiety when he read in the next day's paper that the subsequent fighting had turned in our favour at Jouy-la-Vicomte, and that we were firmly in command of its approaches. Yet the butler was familiar with the name of Jouy-le-Vicomte, which was not all that far away from Combray. But we read the newspapers in the same way as we love, blindfold. We do not attempt to understand the facts. We listen to the editor's soothing words as we listen to the words of our mistress. We are beaten and happy because we think we are victorious, not beaten.

At all events I did not stay long in Paris and fairly quickly returned to my sanatorium. Although in theory the doctor's treatment involved complete isolation, I was handed letters on two separate occasions, one from Gilberte and one from Robert. Gilberte wrote (it was some time around September 1914) that, despite her desire to stay in Paris in order more easily to get news of Robert, the perpetual air-raids of the *taubes*[30] over Paris had caused her such terror, especially for her little daughter, that she had fled from Paris by the last train to leave for Combray, that the train had not even got as far as Combray, and that it was only thanks to a farm-worker's cart, on which she had had a ghastly ten-hour journey, that she had been able to reach Tansonville! 'And what do you think your old friend found when she got there, Gilberte wrote in conclusion. I had left Paris to get away from the German aeroplanes, supposing that at Tansonville I would be safe from all that. I had only been there two days when you can't imagine what happened: the Germans were invading the whole district after beating our troops near La Fère, and the German commanding officers, followed by a regiment, appeared at the door of Tansonville, and I had to put them up, and there was no way of escaping, no train, nothing.' The German commanding officers did, in fact, behave well, or else one had to imagine from Gilberte's letter some contagious effect of the spirit of the Guermantes, who came from Bavarian stock, and were related to the highest levels of the German aristocracy, but Gilberte went on at length about the perfect manners of the commanding officers, and even of the soldiers who had merely asked for 'permission to pick some forget-me-nots that were growing beside the pond', good manners which she contrasted with the disorderly violence of the French deserters, who had devastated everything as they passed through the property, before the German generals arrived. At all events, if Gilberte's letter was in some respects impregnated with the spirit of the Guermantes – some would say, of Jewish internationalism, which would probably not be fair, as we shall see – the letter I received a few months later from Robert was, by contrast, much more Saint-Loup than Guermantes, and displayed in addition all the liberal culture he had acquired: in short, it was entirely delightful. Sadly, he no longer talked about strategy, as he had done in our conversations at Doncières, and did not say how far he thought the war confirmed or invalidated the principles he had expounded to me then.

The furthest he went was to say that since 1914 there had in reality been a succession of wars, the lessons of each influencing the conduct of the next. So that, for example, the theory of the 'breakthrough' had been supplemented by the proposition that, before breaking through, it was necessary for the artillery completely to disrupt the ground occupied by the enemy. But then the opposite had been argued, that such disruption made it impossible for the infantry and artillery to advance across ground where thousands of shell-holes created as many obstacles. 'War, he said, is no exception to good old Hegel's laws. It is in a state of perpetual becoming.'

This was scant answer to all the things I would have liked to know. But what annoyed me even more was that he was no longer allowed to mention the names of the generals. All the more so as, from the little I was able to glean from the newspapers, it was not those whose likely valour in the event of a war I had been so preoccupied with discovering at Doncières who were now in command of this one. Geslin de Bourgogne, Gallifet, Négrier, were dead. Pau had retired from active service shortly after the outbreak of war. Of Joffre, of Foch, of Castelnau and Pétain we had never spoken. *My dear boy*, wrote Robert, *I do realize that phrases such as 'shall not pass' or 'we'll get them' are not very pleasant; they have stuck in my throat as much as poilu*[31] *and the rest, and of course it is tedious to be making an epic out of terms that are worse than faults of grammar or failures of taste, that are in fact that dreadful, contradictory thing, vernacular affectation or pretentiousness of the sort we detest so much, like for example the people who think it is clever to say 'coke' instead of 'cocaine'. But if you saw everyone, especially the ordinary people, the workers, the small shop-keepers, who never dreamed of possessing the kind of heroism they have been displaying and would have died peacefully in their beds without ever having imagined it, running through the bullets to rescue a comrade, or to fetch a wounded officer and, when they are hit themselves, smiling just before they die because the medical officer has told them that the trench has been recaptured from the Germans, then I assure you, my dear boy, that it gives you a marvellous idea of the French and makes you begin to understand those periods of history which used to seem a bit implausible when we studied them at school.*

The epic is so marvellous that you would discover, as I have, that words no longer matter. Rodin or Maillol[32] *could make a masterpiece from some hideous raw material, transforming it out of all recognition. At the touch of this sort of greatness, a word like 'poilu' for me has become one where I no longer have any more sense of its originally having contained an allusion or a joke than we have when we read words like 'chouans'. I feel 'poilu' is ripe for great poets, like the words Flood, or Christ, or Barbarians, which were already steeped in grandeur before they were used by Hugo, de Vigny or the others.*

Ordinary people, workers, as I say, are the best of all, but everyone is good. Poor young Vaugoubert, the ambassador's son, was wounded seven times before he was killed, and every time he came back from a sortie without having copped it, he seemed to be apologizing and saying it was not his fault. He was a delightful soul. We were very close; his poor parents were given permission to attend the burial on condition they did not wear mourning, and did not stay longer than five minutes because of the shelling. His mother, a bovine woman whom you have probably met, may have been deeply upset, but she showed no sign of it. But his poor father was in such a state that I tell you I, who have now become totally impervious to feeling, having got used to seeing the head of a comrade suddenly smashed by a shell, or even torn from its body, while he was in the middle of talking to me, I could not contain myself when I saw the collapse of poor Vaugoubert, who was nothing but a poor shadow of himself. The general tried to tell him how his son's heroic conduct had all been in the service of France, but that merely intensified the sobs of the poor man, who was unable to drag himself away from his son's body. But in the end, and this is why one has to get used to 'shall not pass', all of these men, like my poor valet and like Vaugoubert, have prevented the Germans from passing. Maybe you think we have not advanced very far, but it is no good just being rational about it, there is some deep inner feeling that gives an army the sense of winning, just as a dying man knows when he has had it. We know that we shall win, and we want victory so that we can impose a just peace, and I don't only mean just to our side, but truly just, just to the French and just to the Germans.

Of course, the 'scourge' had not raised Saint-Loup's intelligence to a higher level. Just as heroes with ordinary, commonplace minds, writing poems during their convalescence, placed themselves, in order to describe the war, at the level not of events, which in themselves are nothing, but of the commonplace aesthetic whose rules they had followed thitherto, talking as they might have done ten years earlier about the 'blood-red dawn' and the 'trembling wing of victory' etc., so Saint-Loup, whose nature was much more intelligent and much more artistic, remained intelligent and artistic, and, while halted at the edge of some marshy forest, with characteristic good taste would note down descriptions of the landscape for me, in the same way as he would have done if he had been out duck-shooting. To help me understand how certain contrasts of light and shade had created 'the magic of the morning', he would make reference to paintings we both liked, and was not afraid to make allusion to a passage by Romain Rolland,[33] or even Nietzsche, with the independent-mindedness typical of men at the front, who did not suffer the same fear of uttering a German name as did the civilian population, and even with that touch of vanity in quoting one of the enemy which led Colonel du Paty de Clam in the courtroom during the Dreyfus Affair to recite in front of Pierre Quillard, a Dreyfusard poet of extremely powerful convictions whom he had never previously met, some lines from his Symbolist drama, *La Fille aux mains coupées*.[34] If Saint-Loup happened to mention a melody by Schumann, he would only give its title in German, nor did he have recourse to circumlocution to tell me that, when he had heard the first twitterings of the dawn chorus at the edge of the forest, he had been as intoxicated as if he had just been spoken to by the bird in that 'sublime *Siegfried*', which he very much hoped to hear performed after the war.

And now, returning to Paris for the second time, I had received, the day after my arrival, another letter from Gilberte, who must have forgotten the one, or at least the gist of the one I cited, because her departure from Paris at the end of 1914 is described retrospectively in it in a rather different manner. *You may not know perhaps, my dear friend*, she told me, *that I have been at Tansonville for two years now. I arrived at the same time as the Germans; everyone had tried to stop me leaving. They thought I was mad. 'Why on earth, they would say, are you leaving the safety of Paris for the occupied regions, at the very moment when everyone else is trying to escape from there?' I did recognize how much good sense there was in all this. But what could I do, I only possess one good quality, I'm not a coward, or if you prefer I'm loyal, and when I learned that my beloved Tansonville was under threat, I couldn't leave our old steward to defend it by himself. It seemed to me that my place was by his side. And it was because of that decision that I was able to do something at least to save the house, when all the other chateaux in the neighbourhood, abandoned by their panic-stricken owners, have almost all been destroyed from top to bottom, and not only to save the house but to save those precious collections my dear father set so much store by*. In short, Gilberte was now persuaded that she had not gone to Tansonville, as she had told me in her letter in 1914, to escape from the Germans to a place of safety, but on the contrary to find them and defend her house against them. They had not, in fact, stayed at Tansonville, but from then on her house had seen a constant coming and going of soldiers which exceeded by far that which drew tears from Françoise in the street at Combray, and she had not ceased, as she put it quite truthfully this time, to live life on the front line. So the newspapers spoke in the most laudatory terms of her admirable conduct, and there was talk of giving her a decoration. The conclusion of the letter was entirely accurate. *You have no idea what this war is like, my dear friend, and the importance that a road, a bridge or a hill can assume. How often I have thought of you, and the walks, which you made so delightful, that we took together through this now devastated countryside, where vast battles were fought just to win possession of one of the paths or slopes you used to love, where we so often walked together! You probably did not imagine, any more than I did, that humble Roussainville and boring Méséglise, where they used to bring our letters from, and where they went to find the doctor when you were ill, would ever be famous places. Well, my dear friend, they now share the same immortal fame as Austerlitz or Valmy. The battle of Méséglise lasted for more than eight months, in the course of which the Germans lost over six hundred thousand men and destroyed Méséglise, but they did not take it. The little path you used to like so much, the one we called the hawthorn climb, where you claimed you fell in love with me when you were a child, though I can assure you quite truthfully that it was I who was in love with you, I can't tell you how important it has become. The huge cornfield it led into is the famous Hill 307, whose name you must have seen crop up time and again in the communiqués. The French blew up the little bridge over the Vivonne which you told me did not remind you of your childhood as much as you would have wished, the Germans put up some new ones, and for the last year and a half they have held one half of Combray and the French have held the other.*

The day after I received this letter, that is two days before that evening when I was walking along in the darkness, listening to the echoing sound of my footsteps, chewing over all these memories, Saint-Loup, back from the front and about to return there, had paid me just a few moments' visit, the mere announcement of which had powerfully affected me. Françoise had wanted to pounce on him at once, in the hope that he might be able to get an exemption for the timid butcher's boy, whose class was to be called up in a year's time. But she was stopped by her own realization that there was no point in such a step, as the timid animal slaughterer had long since moved to another butcher's shop. And whether our butcher's wife was afraid of losing our custom, or whether she was telling the truth, she told Françoise that she did not know where the boy, who anyway would never make a good butcher, was now employed. Françoise had searched high and low for him. But Paris is large, butchers' shops are numerous, and despite visiting a great number of them, she had never been able to find the timid, blood-stained young man again.

When Saint-Loup entered my room, I had gone up to him with that feeling of shyness, that sense of eeriness which in fact all soldiers on leave made one feel, and which one experiences when one comes into the presence of someone suffering from a fatal illness, who none the less still gets up, gets dressed and goes for walks. It seemed (it had seemed most strongly to begin with, because for anyone who had not, as I had, lived away from Paris, habit had taken hold, which takes away from things we have seen a number of times the radically profound impression and thought which gives them their real meaning), it seemed almost as if there was something cruel in the leave granted to combatants. When the first of them came, people said to themselves: 'They won't want to go back, they'll desert.' And indeed it was not that they came simply from places that seemed unreal to us because we had only heard of them through the newspapers, and therefore could not imagine how these men could have taken part in those titanic battles and returned with nothing more than a bruised shoulder; it was from the shores of death, whither they were about to return, that they came to spend a moment among us, incomprehensible to us, filling us with tenderness, dread and a sense of mystery, like the dead whom we evoke, and who appear to us for a second, whom we dare not question and who could anyway only reply: 'You could not even imagine.' For it is extraordinary how, both in those who have survived combat, which is what soldiers on leave are, and in the living or the dead hypnotized or invoked by a medium, the sole effect of contact with mystery is to increase, if that be possible, our sense of the insignificance of what is said. It was with this in mind that I approached Robert, who still had a scar on his forehead, more noble and more mysterious to me than the imprint left in earth by the foot of a giant. And I had not dared ask him a single question and he had addressed only a few simple words to me. Even these differed hardly at all from those he might have spoken before the war, as if people, in spite of it, continued to be what they were; the tone of the discussion was the same, only the subject matter was different, if that!

My sense was that he had found resources in the army which had allowed him gradually to forget that Morel had behaved as badly to him as to his uncle. Yet he still had a great fondness for him and would suddenly be overcome with a desire to see him again, which he always put off doing. I thought it kinder to Gilberte not to point out to Robert that if he wanted to find Morel he had only to go to Mme Verdurin's.

I told Robert apologetically how little the war impinged on us in Paris. He said that even in Paris it was sometimes 'pretty unbelievable'. He was alluding to a Zeppelin raid that had taken place the previous evening and he asked me whether I had had a good view of it, but in the same terms as he might once have talked about some spectacle of great aesthetic beauty. At the front, as one knows, there is a sort of affectation in saying: 'It's wonderful, look at that pink! and that pale green!' when at any moment they might be killed, but in Paris Saint-Loup showed no trace of that, as he talked about a raid which was insignificant, but which from our balcony, in the silence of a night which suddenly contained a *real* display with rockets that were both useful and protective, bugle calls that were not just sounding for parade, etc. I talked about the beauty of the aeroplanes as they climbed into the night. 'And perhaps they are even more so as they are coming down, he said. I agree that the moment after they take off is very beautiful, when they join together in star-like formation, and in doing so obey laws as precise as the ones that govern the constellations, for the thing that strikes you as a marvellous sight is the rallying of squadrons, the orders they are given, their setting off in pursuit, etc. But don't you prefer the moment when having finally come to seem like stars, they peel off individually in pursuit of something or return home after the all-clear, the moment of apocalypse, when even the stars no longer keep their places? And those sirens, weren't they Wagnerian? Though I suppose that is quite an appropriate way to salute the arrival of the Germans, it was just like the national anthem, with the Crown Prince and the Princesses in the imperial box, the *Wacht am Rhein*; one wondered whether they really were airmen and not Valkyries who were climbing into the night.' He seemed rather pleased with this comparison between airmen and Valkyries, and went on to explain it in purely musical terms: 'Yes, by Jove, the music of the sirens was a *Ride of the Valkyries*! Obviously the Germans have to come before we can hear Wagner in Paris.'

And in some ways the comparison was not a false one. From our balcony the city, which had seemed merely a place of formless, shifting blackness, suddenly passed from the depths of night into the glowing sky, where at the shattering sound of the sirens the airmen soared up one by one, while with a slower but more insidious and alarming movement, as their questing gaze suggested the still invisible object, perhaps already close at hand, which they were seeking, the searchlights moved ceaselessly across the sky, sniffing out the enemy, surrounding him with their beams until the moment when the aeroplanes were ready to shoot off in pursuit to strike him down. And, squadron after squadron, each airman was thus soaring up above the city, transported now into the sky, like a Valkyrie. But here and there on the ground, at the level of the houses, lights went on, and I told Saint-Loup that if he had been at home the previous evening he might, while contemplating the apocalypse in the sky, have been able to see on the ground (as in El Greco's *Burial of Count Orgaz*, where these different levels are parallel) a genuine farce played out by characters in their nightshirts, all of them celebrities whose names would have been worth sending to a successor of Ferrari,[35] whose Society Notes had so often entertained Saint-Loup and myself that we used to amuse ourselves by making up imaginary ones. And that is what we did again that day, as if there were no war on, even though the subject, the fear of Zeppelins, was very 'wartime': 'I spotted the Duchesse de Guermantes looking superb in a nightgown, the Duc de Guermantes simply priceless in pink pyjamas and bathrobe, etc., etc.'

– 'I am sure, he said to me, that in all the big hotels you would have seen American Jewish ladies in their night-dresses, clutching to their withered bosoms the pearl necklaces that would enable them to marry a penniless duke. On nights like that the Ritz Hotel must look like the *Hôtel du libre échange* of Feydeau's farce.'[36]

It must be said, however, that although the war had not increased Saint-Loup's intelligence, this intelligence, developing according to laws in which heredity played a major part, had taken on a polish that I had never before seen in him. What a difference there was between the fair-haired young man who was once courted by women of fashion, or women who aspired to be fashionable, and the talker, the theorist, who played with words all the time! In another generation, in another branch of the family, like an actor taking on one of the roles that Bressant or Delaunay[37] used to play, he was like a successor – pink, fair-haired and golden, where the other had been half very black and half pure white – to M. de Charlus. He would hardly have agreed with his uncle about the war, having aligned himself with that section of the aristocracy which put France above everything else, while M. de Charlus was a defeatist at heart, but he could still show anyone who had not seen the 'creator of the role' how it was possible to excel in dexterous argumentation. 'Hindenburg seems to be a revelation, I said to him. – An old revelation, he parried, or a future revolution. Instead of being soft on the enemy, we ought to have let Mangin get on with it, smashed Austria and Germany and Europeanized Turkey, instead of Balkanizing France. – But we'll have the help of the United States, I said. – In the meantime, all I can see here is the spectacle of disunited states. Why does the fear of dechristianizing France prevent us making broader concessions to Italy? – If your uncle Charlus could hear you now! I said. You really wouldn't mind going for the Pope a bit more, while he is in despair at the thought of the harm that may come to the throne of Franz-Josef. And he claims that when he says that, he's just following in the footsteps of Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna. – The age of the Congress of Vienna is over, he replied; secret diplomacy must be replaced by concrete diplomacy. My uncle is basically an unrepentant monarchist who will swallow a silly carp like Mme Molé or an unprincipled carper like Arthur Meyer, so long as they are both cooked à la Chambord.[38] He hates the *tricolore* so much that I think he would

rather line up behind a rag like the *Bonnet rouge*,[39] which he'd take in good faith for the white flag.' Of course, this was all just word-play, and Saint-Loup was far from having the sometimes profound originality of his uncle. But he was by nature as affable and charming as the other was suspicious and jealous. And he had remained charming and pink, as he had been at Balbec, beneath all his golden hair. The only aspect in which his uncle could not have surpassed him was that state of mind characteristic of the Faubourg Saint-Germain which leaves its mark on those men who think they are most detached from it and which gives them a respect for intelligent men of no pedigree (something which really flourishes only in the nobility, and which makes revolutions so unjust) mingled with an inane self-satisfaction. As a result of this mixture of pride and humility, of acquired intellectual curiosity and innate authority, M. de Charlus and Saint-Loup, by different paths, and with opposite opinions, had become, a generation apart, intellectuals interested in every new idea and talkers whom no interruption could silence. The result of which was that people with more commonplace minds tended to find them both, depending on the situation, either dazzling or a complete bore.

'You remember our conversations at Doncières, I said to him. – Ah! those were good times. What a gulf there is between then and now! Will those happy days ever surface again

> du gouffre interdit à nos sondes.
> Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
> Après s'être lavés au fond des mers profondes?[40]

– Don't let's think about those conversations merely in order to recall how enjoyable they were, I said. I was trying, through them, to reach a certain sort of truth. So has this war, which has upset everything, especially, as you say, the idea of war, rendered obsolete what you used to tell me then about battles, for instance the battles of Napoleon which were to provide a pattern for wars in the future? – Not at all! he replied. The Napoleonic battle is still with us, especially in this war, since Hindenburg is imbued with the Napoleonic spirit. His rapid troop movements, his feints, whether in just leaving a thin cordon of troops in front of one of his enemies in order to fall with all his forces on the other (Napoleon, 1814), or in launching such a sustained diversionary attack that the enemy is forced to keep its forces committed to a front which is not its principal one (as for example Hindenburg's feint before Warsaw, as a result of which the Russians were misled into concentrating their resistance at that point, and were beaten at the Mazurian Lakes), or tactical withdrawals analogous to those with which Austerlitz, Arcole, Eckmühl all began, everything he does is Napoleonic, and it is not over yet. Let me also say, though, that if, when I am at the front again, you want to try to interpret the events of this war as it progresses, don't trust too exclusively in this particular side of Hindenburg to discover either the meaning of what he is doing, or the key to what he will do next. A general is like a writer who wants to write a play, or a book, but whom the book itself, with the unexpected options that it reveals at one point, the impasse it presents at another, causes to deviate extensively from his preconceived plan. Remember that a diversion, for example, should be made only at a point of sufficient importance, and imagine a diversion that is successful beyond all expectation, while the main operation ends in failure; then the diversion may become the principal operation. I am waiting for Hindenburg to try one typical Napoleonic battle strategy, though, and that's the one that consists in driving apart two of his opponents, the English and us.'

All the time I was recollecting Saint-Loup's visit, I had been walking and had come far out of my way; I was almost at the Pont des Invalides. The lamps, of which there were only a few (because of the Gothas[41]), had been lighted, slightly too early because the 'time change'[42] had been made slightly too early, when the night still came fairly quickly, but had been fixed then for the whole of the summer (just as heating-stoves are lit or turned off from a certain date) and, above the nocturnally illuminated city, in a whole section of the sky – the sky which was unaware of summer-time and winter-time, and which did not deign to know that half past eight had become half past nine – in a whole section of the bluish sky the day still lingered. Across all that part of the city dominated by the towers of the Trocadéro, the sky looked like a vast turquoise-coloured sea on the ebb, disclosing a whole slender line of black rocks, which might even perhaps have been a row of simple fishing nets, but which were really small clouds. Sea for that moment coloured turquoise, and carrying all mankind, unawares, away with it, swept up by the immense revolution of the earth, that earth on which they are mad enough to continue their own revolutions, and their pointless wars, like the one that was at that moment steeping France in blood. Then as I continued to gaze at the lazy and impossibly beautiful sky, which regarded it as beneath its dignity to change its time-table and above the illuminated city gently prolonged, in these shades of blue, the last moments of its day, vertigo seized me, it was no longer a level sea but a vertical progression of blue glaciers. And the towers of the Trocadéro which seemed so close to the turquoise steps must, in fact, be very far away from them, like the twin towers in some Swiss towns which, seen from a distance, seem almost adjacent to the sloping peaks. I started to retrace my steps, but by the time I had left the Pont des Invalides the daylight had vanished from the sky, there were scarcely any lights in the city, and stumbling here and there against rubbish bins, mistaking one way for another, I unexpectedly found that by having mechanically followed a maze of dark streets, I was out on the boulevards. There the impression of the Orient which I had felt earlier came back to me, though this time my vision of the Paris of the Directory was replaced by one of the Paris of 1815. Just as in 1815, there was a stream of disparate Allied uniforms; and among them some Africans in red skirts and Hindus in white turbans were enough for me to create out of the Paris through which I was walking an entire, exotic, imaginary city, in an Orient both minutely precise as to costumes and the colour of faces, and arbitrarily chimerical as to setting, in the same way as Carpaccio turned the town where he lived into a Jerusalem or a Constantinople by assembling a crowd whose marvellous pattern of colour was no more varied than this one of mine. Walking close behind two Zouaves[43] who appeared to be taking almost no notice of him, I noticed a tall, stout man, in a soft felt hat and a long greatcoat, to whose florid features I hesitated whether I should put the name of an actor or a painter, each of whom was well known for numberless sodomitic scandals. I was quite sure, at all events, that I did not know the walking figure, so I was very surprised, when his gaze met mine, to see that he looked embarrassed and deliberately stopped and came towards me like a man who wants to show you that you have not surprised him in an occupation he would prefer to have kept secret. For a moment I wondered who was greeting me: it was M. de Charlus. One might say that in his case the development of his illness or the revolution of his vice had reached that extreme point at which the earliest character of the individual, his ancestral qualities, had been entirely eclipsed by the transit across them of the generic weakness or illness that comes with them. M. de Charlus had reached the most distant possible point from himself, or rather he himself was so perfectly disguised by what he had become and which did not belong to himself alone but to many other inverts, that at first I had taken him to be just another one of them, strolling after those Zouaves down the open boulevard, just another one of them who was not M. de Charlus, not a great aristocrat, not a man of imagination and intellect, and whose only resemblance to the Baron was that expression common to all of them, which now in his case, at least until one had looked more closely, cloaked him completely.

So it was that having set out to visit Mme Verdurin, I had run into M. de Charlus. I would certainly not have met him, as once I might have, at her house; their quarrel had only grown worse and Mme Verdurin even turned current events to her advantage in order to discredit him further. Having long said that she thought he was worn out, finished, more dated in his supposed audacity than the most boring traditionalist, she had now summed up her condemnation, and alienated everybody from him, by pronouncing him 'pre-war'. Between him and the present, according to the little set, the war had created a gulf which left him stuck in a completely moribund past.

Moreover – and this was addressed more to the world of politics, which was less well-informed – she made him out to be just as 'bogus', just as 'out of touch' socially as he was intellectually. 'He sees nobody, nobody receives him,' she said to M. Bontemps, who was easily persuaded by her. And there was some truth in her words. M. de Charlus's situation had changed. Caring less and less for society, having fallen out with people because of his touchy nature, and having, out of a sense of his own social worth, disdained to be reconciled with most of the people who were the flower of society, he lived in a relative isolation which, unlike that in which Mme de Villeparisis had died, was not caused by the ostracism of the aristocracy, but which in the eyes of the public appeared for two reasons to be worse. The bad reputation of M. de Charlus, which was now widely known, made the ill-informed think that this was the reason why people did not associate

with him, when in fact it was he himself who declined to associate with them. So that something which was the result of his atrabilious temper seemed to be contempt on the part of those people against whom it was exercised. And secondly, Mme de Villeparisis had had one great bulwark: the family. But M. de Charlus had multiplied the quarrels between his family and himself. In addition to this, it had seemed – especially on the old Faubourg side, the Courvoisier side – of no interest to him. And he who, out of opposition to the Courvoisiers, had made such bold overtures towards art, had not the least idea that what would have made somebody like Bergotte most interested in him was his kinship with the whole of the old Faubourg, and his capacity to describe to him the almost provincial life led by his female cousins, from the rue de la Chaise to the place du Palais-Bourbon and the rue Garancière.

Then taking up a position which was less transcendent but more practical, Mme Verdurin affected to believe that he was not French. 'What nationality is he, exactly, isn't he Austrian?' M. Verdurin asked innocently. 'No, absolutely not,' replied the Comtesse Molé, whose first reaction was always one of common sense rather than bitterness. 'No of course not, he's Prussian, said the Patronne. I know perfectly well what I'm talking about, he's told us often enough himself that he was a hereditary member of the Prussian House of Lords and a *Durchlaucht*. – But the Queen of Naples told me… – But you know she's a dreadful spy,' cried Mme Verdurin, who had not forgotten the way that deposed sovereign had behaved at her house one evening. 'I know, and I have it on very good authority, that it has been her only source of income. If we had a more energetic government, people like that would all be in concentration camps. Goodness me! Whatever else, you would be well advised not to receive people like that, because I know that the Minister of the Interior has his eye on them, and your house would be watched. Nothing will persuade me that Charlus did not spend two years spying on my house.' And thinking probably that some people might have doubts about how far detailed reports on the organization of the little set would interest the German government, Mme Verdurin pronounced, with an air of quiet perceptivity, like someone who knows that what she has to say will seem only the more valuable for her not raising her voice to say it: 'Let me tell you, on the very first day I said to my husband: "I don't like the way that man has inveigled his way in here. There's something fishy about him." We used to have a house that was situated high up above a bay. I'm convinced the Germans told him to set up a base there for their submarines. There were things about him which surprised me then, and which now I understand. For instance, at first he did not want to travel by train with the rest of my guests. Then, in the nicest way, I offered him a room in the house. But oh no! he preferred to live in Doncières where there were all those troops. It all smelled very strongly of espionage to me.'

About the first of the accusations levelled against the Baron de Charlus, that he was out of date, society people were only too willing to agree with Mme Verdurin. Actually in this they were ungrateful, for M. de Charlus was in a sense their poet, the man who had been able to extract from the social world a sort of poetry, in which there were elements of history, of beauty, of the picturesque, of the comic and of frivolous elegance. But the people in society, incapable of understanding this poetry, could see none of it in their own lives, so sought for it elsewhere, and set far above M. de Charlus in their estimation men who were infinitely his inferior, but who pretended to despise fashionable society and instead professed theories of sociology and political economy. M. de Charlus used to delight in recounting the involuntarily characteristic remarks, and in describing the skilfully graceful outfits, of the Duchesse de Montmorency, making her out to be the sublime of womanhood, which resulted in his being regarded as little short of an imbecile by those fashionable women who thought the Duchesse de Montmorency a silly woman of no interest, and that dresses were made to be worn while looking as if no attention had been given to them, whereas they, being more intelligent, were always rushing to the Sorbonne, or going to hear Deschanel speak in the Chamber.

In short, fashionable society had become disenchanted with M. de Charlus, not because it had seen through, but because it had never begun to penetrate his uncommon intellectual worth. People thought him 'pre-war', old-fashioned, because the very people who are least capable of assessing merit are the ones who, in order to classify people, are quickest to follow the dictates of fashion. They have not exhausted, not even skimmed the surface of the men of merit in one generation, and suddenly they have to condemn them all *en bloc*, because now there is a new generation, with its new label, which they will not understand any better than the last.

As for the second accusation, that of pro-Germanism, the tendency of people in society to eschew extremes led them to reject it, but it had found a tireless and particularly cruel spokesman in Morel, who, having been able to retain, in the newspaper world and even in society, the position which M. de Charlus, both times at a great deal of trouble to himself, had managed to obtain for him, but not thereafter to have rescinded, harried the Baron with a hatred all the more blameworthy for the fact that, whatever his relations may have been with the Baron, Morel had known a side of him that he concealed from so many people, namely his profound kindness. M. de Charlus had shown the violinist such generosity, such delicacy, had been so scrupulous in keeping his word to him, that when he left him, the impression that Charlie took with him was not at all that of a man of vice (and anyway he regarded the Baron's vice as a sickness), but of a man with the most lofty principles he had ever encountered, a man of extraordinary sensitivity, a kind of saint. He was so far from repudiating him, even after their quarrel, that he would say to parents in all sincerity: 'You can entrust your son to him, he can have nothing but the best influence on him.' So when he tried to cause him pain by the articles he wrote, in his mind it was not his vice but his virtue that he despised.

Shortly before the war, certain pieces in the gossip columns, transparent to the so-called initiated, had begun to do serious harm to the reputation of M. de Charlus. Of one called 'The Misfortunes of a Dowager ending in -us, or The Last Days of the Baroness', Mme Verdurin had bought fifty copies to lend to her acquaintances, and M. Verdurin, declaring that Voltaire himself had not written better, used to read it aloud. But since the war, their tone had changed. Not only was the Baron's inversion denounced, but also his alleged German nationality. Frau Bosch, Frau van den Bosch, were the habitual nicknames of M. de Charlus. One rather poetic piece took its title from some of Beethoven's dance tunes: 'An Allemande'. And two short stories, 'American Uncle and Frankfurt Queen' and 'The Poop Deck, or The Strapping Young Man Behind', which the little set read in proof, delighted Brichot himself, who exclaimed: 'I do hope the most-high and all-powerful Anastasia[44] doesn't blue-pencil us!'

The articles themselves were better than their ridiculous titles. Their style derived from Bergotte but, as I shall explain, in a way which I was perhaps the only person to understand. Morel had not been influenced at all by Bergotte's writings. The fertilization happened in a most peculiar way, so rare that it is on that account alone that I record it here. I have indicated at an earlier point the special way Bergotte had, when he spoke, of choosing and pronouncing his words. Morel, who for a long time used to see him at the Saint-Loups', used to do 'imitations' of him, in which he mimicked his voice perfectly, and used exactly the same words as he would have done. And now, when he wrote, Morel would transcribe conversations in the manner of Bergotte, but without subjecting them to the kind of transposition that would have turned them into written Bergotte. Few people having spoken with Bergotte, nobody recognized the tone of his voice, which was different from his written style. This oral fertilization is so uncommon that I wanted to mention it here. It never produces anything, however, except sterile flowers.

Morel, who was in the Press Office, then discovered, the French blood boiling in his veins like the juice of Combray grapes, that working in an office during wartime was not very satisfactory, and in the end he enlisted, despite Mme Verdurin's doing everything she could to persuade him to stay in Paris. She was certainly indignant that M. Cambremer, at his age, should be on the General Staff, and was wont to say of any man who did not accept her invitations: 'Where on earth has he managed to hide himself away?' and if someone asserted that the man in question had been in the front line from the beginning, she would reply with no scruples about lying, or perhaps because she was so used to being wrong: 'No, no, he's never been out of Paris, he does something about as dangerous as taking a minister for walks, take my word for it, I'm telling you, I heard it from someone who saw him'; but for the faithful it was quite a different matter, she did not want to let them go, regarding the war as a great 'bore' which made them abandon her. Thus she did everything she could to get them to stay, which gave her the double pleasure of having them to dine and, before they arrived, or after their departure, castigating their inactivity. But the faithful also had to acquiesce in being found cushy jobs, and she was most upset to see Morel behave so recalcitrantly in this regard; it was to no avail that she kept on telling him: 'But you *are* serving your country in the office, more than you would be at the front. The important thing is to be useful, to be really part of the war, to be involved. Some

people are involved and some people manage to wangle their way out of it. Now you, you're involved, and don't worry, everybody knows that, nobody's going to cast stones at you.' In the same way, in different circumstances, when men were not yet so scarce and she was not obliged as she now was to make do chiefly with women, if a man lost his mother she had not hesitated to persuade him that there could be no objection to his continuing to attend her receptions. 'We bear our grief in our hearts. If you were thinking of going to a dance' (she didn't give dances) 'I should be the first to advise you against it, but here at my little Wednesdays or in a box at the theatre, nobody will raise an eyebrow. We all know that you are grieving.' Men were scarcer now, and mourning more frequent, and not even needed to prevent men going to parties, the war being enough to do that. Mme Verdurin clung on to those who remained. She tried to persuade them that they were more use to France if they stayed in Paris, as she might formerly have assured them that the deceased would have been happier to see them enjoying themselves. Yet despite everything she had very few men; perhaps she sometimes regretted having set such an irrevocable seal upon her break with M. de Charlus.

But although M. de Charlus and Mme Verdurin no longer met one another socially, they nevertheless continued, Mme Verdurin to hold receptions, M. de Charlus to go about his pleasures, as if nothing had changed – apart from a few unimportant minor differences: Cottard, for example, came to Mme Verdurin's receptions in a colonel's uniform straight out of *L'Île du rêve*,[45] looking just like a Haitian admiral, with a broad sky-blue ribbon on his jacket reminiscent of those worn by the Enfants de Marie; and M. de Charlus, finding himself in a city where the grown men, who had hitherto been where his tastes lay, had disappeared, had done the same as some Frenchmen, who in France had loved women, but who now lived in the colonies: he had, out of necessity, developed first the habit of, and then a taste for, little boys.

Yet the first of these characteristic traits disappeared quickly enough, for Cottard soon died 'facing the enemy' as the newspapers said, although he had not left Paris and had in fact just worked too hard for someone of his age, followed soon afterwards by M. Verdurin, whose death upset only one person, that, oddly enough, being Elstir. I had been able to study Elstir's work from a point of view that was, in a way, untrammelled. But he, especially as he grew older, linked it more and more superstitiously with the society which had provided his models; and society, after having thus been transformed in his studio, by the alchemy of impressions, into a work of art, had given him his public, his spectators. Inclining increasingly to the materialist belief that a substantial part of beauty resides in objects themselves, as at the outset he had adored in Mme Elstir the type of the rather heavy beauty he had pursued and caressed in his paintings and tapestries, he saw vanish with M. Verdurin one of the last vestiges of the social framework, the ephemeral framework – as rapidly obsolete as the sartorial fashions which partly constituted it – which underpins an art, and certifies its authenticity, just as the Revolution, by destroying the elegance of the eighteenth century, might have desolated a painter of *fêtes galantes*,[46] or as the disappearance of Montmartre and the Moulin de la Galette distressed Renoir; but more than anything else, with M. Verdurin he saw vanish the eyes and the brain which had best been able to see his paintings, and in which his painting, as a cherished memory, had always in some sense continued to exist. Of course young people had come along who also loved painting, but another kind of painting, and they had not, as Swann or M. Verdurin had, received the lessons in taste from Whistler, or the lessons in truth from Monet, which would enable them to make a just assessment of Elstir. Thus he felt himself more alone after the death of M. Verdurin, even though he had fallen out with him so many years earlier; for him, it was as if a little of the beauty of his work had been eclipsed along with a little of what awareness there was in the universe of that beauty.

As for the change that had overtaken the pleasures of M. de Charlus, this remained intermittent: keeping up a plentiful correspondence with men at the front, he was not short of sufficiently mature soldiers when they came on leave.

At the time when I believed what people said, I would have been tempted, hearing first Germany, then Bulgaria and Greece protesting their peaceable intentions, to have given them credence. But since life with Albertine and Françoise had accustomed me to suspecting them of thoughts and plans to which they gave no expression, I allowed none of the fair-seeming words of William II, Ferdinand of Bulgaria or Constantine of Greece to deceive my instinct, which sensed what each of them was up to. My quarrels with Françoise and with Albertine, of course, had been merely private quarrels, of interest only to the life of that little intelligent cell that is a human being. But just like animal and human bodies, that is to say like collections of cells each of which in relation to a single cell is as big as Mont Blanc, there are huge organized agglomerations of individuals which we call nations; their life merely repeats on a larger scale the lives of its component cells; and anybody who is incapable of understanding the mystery, the reactions, the laws of such entities will utter nothing but empty words when he talks about the struggle between nations. But if he has mastered individual psychology, then these colossal masses of conglomerated individuals confronting one another will take on a beauty in his eyes more powerful than that of a struggle arising merely from the conflict of two characters; and he will see them in the same scale as the body of a tall man would appear to infusoria, more than ten thousand of which are required to fill one cubic millimetre. Thus for some time the great figure of France, filled to its perimeter with millions of little irregular polygons, and the figure, filled with even more polygons, of Germany, had both been engaged in such a quarrel. Seen from this point of view, the body Germany and the body France, and the other Allied and enemy bodies, were behaving to a certain extent like individuals. But the blows they were exchanging were governed by the multifarious rules of boxing, whose principles Saint-Loup had explained to me; and since, even if one thought of them as individuals, they were also giant agglomerations of individuals, the quarrel took on immense and magnificent forms, like an ocean rising up in millions of waves in an attempt to batter down an ancient line of cliffs, or like gigantic glaciers which by their slow, destructive fluctuations attempt to break down the mountain ranges that circumscribe them.

For all this, life continued almost unchanged for plenty of the characters who have figured in this narrative, not least for M. de Charlus and the Verdurins, just as if the Germans were not in fact so close to them, the permanent presence of a threat of danger, even if temporarily checked, leaving us completely indifferent as long as we do not think about it. People generally go about their pleasures without ever thinking that, if the moderating and etiolating influences should ever stop, the proliferation of infusoria would reach its maximum, that is, in the space of a few days would make a leap of many millions of miles, would change from occupying a cubic millimetre to become a mass a million times bigger than the sun, at the same time destroying all the oxygen and the other substances by which we live, and that there would no longer be any humanity, or animals or earth; and also without imagining that an irremediable and entirely probable catastrophe may be induced in the ether by the incessant and frenetic activity normally hidden by the apparent immutability of the sun: they carry on with their own affairs without giving a thought to those two worlds, the one too small, the other too big for them to perceive the cosmic dangers that hover all around us.

So the Verdurins continued to give dinners (then after a little while, Mme Verdurin gave them on her own, for M. Verdurin died shortly afterwards) and M. de Charlus went about his pleasures, never dreaming that the Germans – albeit immobilized by a bloody yet constantly replenished barrier – were an hour by car from Paris. The Verdurins must have thought about it, one would have imagined, as they held a political salon at which people every evening discussed the situation not only of the army but of the fleet as well. And they did, it is true, think about the hecatombs of regiments annihilated and passengers swallowed by the sea; but a reciprocal process both so far multiplies whatever concerns our own well-being, and divides by such a formidable number whatever does not concern us, that the death of millions of unknown people hardly troubles us, and we find it scarcely as disagreeable as a cold draught. Mme Verdurin, suffering from migraines again now that there were no more croissants to dip in her coffee, had finally obtained an order from Cottard allowing her to have them made for her at a certain restaurant we have spoken about. This had been almost as hard to obtain from the authorities as the appointment of a general. She received the first of these croissants on the morning when the newspapers reported the wreck of the *Lusitania*. As she dipped it in her coffee, and flicked her newspaper with one hand so that it would stay open without her having to remove her other hand from the croissant she was soaking, she said: 'How awful! It's worse than the most horrific tragedy.' But the loss of all those people at sea must have been a thousand million times reduced before it struck her, because even while she uttered, through a mouthful of croissant, these distressing thoughts, the look which lingered on her face, probably induced by the taste of the croissant, so valuable in preventing migraine, was more like one of quiet satisfaction.

As for M. de Charlus, his position was but slightly different, but even worse, because not only did he not hope passionately for a French victory, he hoped rather, without admitting it, that Germany should, if not triumph, then at least not be crushed in the way that everybody wanted. The reason for this was that in these quarrels the great gatherings of individuals called nations behave to some extent as if they were individuals. The logic they follow is completely internal, and perpetually recast by passion, just like that of people confronting one another in a domestic or amorous quarrel, like a son's quarrel with his father, or a cook's with her mistress, or a wife's with her husband. The one in the wrong thinks he is in the right – as was the case with Germany – and the one who is right sometimes offers, quite justifiably, arguments which seem irrefutable to him only because they correspond to his passion. In these quarrels between individuals, the best way to be convinced of the rightness of either party is actually to be that party, a spectator will never agree quite so completely. Within a nation an individual, if he is really part of the nation, is no more than one cell within the nation-individual. Brain-washing is a term that makes no sense. If the French had been told that they were going to be beaten, no one Frenchman would have been in despair any more than if he had been told he was going to be killed by a Big Bertha. The real brain-washing is what we tell ourselves because of hope, which is one form of the instinct of national self-preservation, if we are really a living member of the nation. The best way to remain blind to what was unjust in the cause of the Germany-individual and to be aware at every moment of what was just in the cause of the France-individual was not for a German to have no judgment and for a Frenchman to possess it, the best way for both was to be patriotic. M. de Charlus, who did have unusual moral qualities, who was susceptible to pity, generous, capable of affection and devotion, also, for a whole variety of reasons – among which having a mother who was a Duchess of Bavaria may have played a part – did not have a sense of patriotism. In consequence he was no more part of the France-body than of the Germany-body. If I had been devoid of patriotism, instead of feeling myself to be one of the cells of the France-body, I do not think that I could have judged the quarrel in the same way as I might have done in the past. In my adolescence, when I believed exactly what I was told, I would, I am sure, hearing the German government protesting its good faith, have been tempted not to doubt it; but for a long time now I had known that our thoughts and our actions are not always in accord; not only had I, one day, from the staircase window, discovered a Charlus I had never suspected, but more than anything else with Françoise, and then, alas, with Albertine, I had seen decisions and plans take shape which were so contrary to what they said that, even as a simple spectator, I could never have allowed any of the apparently honest pronouncements of the German emperor, or the king of Bulgaria, to deceive my instinct, which would have sensed, as with Albertine, what they were secretly plotting. But in the end I can only imagine what I would have done if I had not been a participant, if I had not been part of the France-participant, just as in my quarrels with Albertine my sad expression or the feeling of breathlessness in my chest were a part of my individual being that was passionately involved in my cause, so that I could never feel completely detached. The detachment of M. de Charlus was total. And, seeing that he was merely a spectator, everything was bound to make him pro-German from the moment when, although not truly French, he started living in France. He was very intelligent, and in all countries most of the people are silly; no doubt if he had been living in Germany he would have been equally irritated by the way the German fools defended, passionately and foolishly, an unjust cause; but living in France, he was no less irritated by the passionate and foolish defence of a cause that was just. The logic of passion, even if it is in the service of the right, is never irrefutable for somebody who is not passionately committed to it. M. de Charlus's keen mind seized on each instance of false reasoning on the part of the patriots. The satisfaction an imbecile derives from having right on his side and being certain of success is especially irritating. M. de Charlus was particularly irritated by the triumphal optimism of people who did not know, as he did, Germany's strength, and who each month believed that she would be crushed within the month, and a year later were making equally confident new predictions, as if they had never made wrong ones with such assurance, which anyway they had forgotten, saying, if they were reminded of them, that it was not the same thing. M. de Charlus, profound though in some ways his mind was, would perhaps not have understood that in art 'it is not the same thing' is what the detractors of Manet retort to those who tell them 'they said the same thing about Delacroix'.

Ultimately M. de Charlus's position was a compassionate one, the idea of a loser made him feel ill, he always took the side of the weak, he never read the judicial reports in the newspapers so as not to have to suffer in his own body the pain of the condemned man and the impossibility of assassinating the judge, the executioner and the crowd cheering the fact that 'justice had been done'. He was convinced in any case that France could not now be beaten, and he also knew that the Germans were suffering from famine, and would be obliged, at some time or other, to surrender. This idea was made the more disagreeable to him by the fact that he was living in France. Also, his recollections of Germany were very distant, while the French people who annoyed him by talking so gleefully about crushing Germany were the people whose weaknesses he knew, whose faces he disliked. In such situations we feel sorry for the people we do not know, those whom we imagine, rather than those who are close to us in the vulgarity of everyday life, unless we are completely the same as them and form one flesh with them; that is the miracle of patriotism, which makes one take the side of one's country just as one takes one's own side in a quarrel between lovers.

So for M. de Charlus the war provided an unusually fertile ground for the growth of those hatreds of his which blossomed in an instant and, while lasting only a short time, took the most violent hold of him. Whenever he read the newspapers, the triumphal tone of the editorials, presenting a daily picture of Germany brought low, 'the Beast at bay, reduced to powerlessness', when the opposite was all too true, would intoxicate him with rage by their flippant and ferocious stupidity. The newspapers were partly written at that point by well-known figures for whom that was a way of 'continuing to be of service', by men such as Brichot, Norpois, Morel himself, and Legrandin. M. de Charlus longed to encounter them and devastate them with the most withering sarcasm. Always particularly well informed about sexual irregularities, he was aware of those of several people who, thinking that nobody knew about them, took pleasure in denouncing them in the rulers of the 'predatory empires', in Wagner, etc. He had a burning desire to come face to face with them, to rub their noses in their own vice in front of the whole world and to leave those who insulted a beaten opponent dishonoured and gasping for breath.

M. de Charlus also had more private reasons for his pro-Germanism. One was that as a man of society he had passed a great deal of his time among the people of society, among honourable people, men of honour, people who would not shake hands with a scoundrel, and he understood their sensitivity and their severity; he knew that they were impervious to the tears of a man they have had expelled from a club or with whom they refuse to fight a duel, even though their act of 'moral scrupulousness' might lead to the death of the black sheep's mother. Despite himself, whatever admiration he may have had for England, and for the admirable way she had entered the war, this impeccable England, incapable of lying, by preventing wheat and milk from entering Germany, smacked too much of the man of honour among nations, of the dueller's official second, of the arbiter in affairs of honour; whereas he knew that men of uncertain reputation, scoundrels, like some of Dostoyevsky's characters, may be better human beings, although I could never understand why he identified the Germans with them, lying and trickery not being adequate evidence of a good heart, which the Germans do not seem to have displayed.

There was one last trait in M. de Charlus's pro-Germanism, which he owed, by a bizarre reaction, to his 'Charlusism'. The Germans, to his eyes, were very ugly, perhaps because they were too close to his own blood; he was mad about Moroccans, but most of all about Anglo-Saxons, whom he viewed as living statues by Phidias. But pleasure for him was never without a certain tendency to cruelty, though at that point I was still unaware of the full extent of it; any man he loved became a delicious torturer. He may have believed that taking sides against the Germans would be acting as he acted only during his periods of sexual pleasure, that is, in opposition to his compassionate nature, burning with desire for seductive evil, and crushing virtuous ugliness. It was like that, too, when Rasputin was murdered, a murder which surprised people by its decidedly Russian stamp, at a Dostoyevskian dinner (an impression which might have been a great deal stronger if the public had not been unaware of what M. de Charlus knew perfectly well), because life disappoints us so often that we end up by believing that literature has no connection with it, and so we are amazed to see the precious ideas which we have found in books on display, without fear of getting spoiled, gratuitously, naturally, in the midst of everyday life, amazed, for instance, to find that a dinner and a murder occurring in Russia should have anything Russian about them.

The war seemed to be continuing indefinitely, and those who had already announced several years earlier, from a reliable source, that peace negotiations had started, and even specified the clauses of the treaty, no longer bothered when they talked to you to apologize for their false reports. They had forgotten them

completely, and were ready to spread new stories with equal sincerity, which they would forget with the same rapidity. This was the time when there were constant Gotha raids, the air crackled all the time with the sonorous and vigilant vibration of French aeroplanes. But sometimes the siren rang out like a heart-rending Valkyrie call – the only German music anyone had heard since the outbreak of war – until the moment the fire engines announced that the alert was over, while beside them the all-clear, like an invisible street-urchin, commented at regular intervals on the good news and let loose its cry of joy on the air.

M. de Charlus was astonished to see that even people like Brichot, who had been militarists before the war, and had criticized France in particular for not being sufficiently so, were not content to blame Germany for the excesses of her militarism, but even criticized her admiration of the army. In all likelihood, they changed their attitude as soon as there was any question of slowing down the war against Germany, and continued, quite rightly, to denounce the pacifists. Yet Brichot, for instance, having agreed, despite his failing eyesight, to give an account in his lectures of some books which had recently been published in neutral countries, praised a novel by a Swiss writer in which two children who evince symbolic admiration at the sight of a dragoon are ridiculed as embryonic militarists.[47] This ridicule may also have annoyed M. de Charlus for other reasons, as he considered a dragoon capable of being an object of great beauty. But principally he failed to understand Brichot's admiration, if not for the novel, which the Baron had not read, then at least for its attitude, which was so far removed from that which Brichot had professed before the war. Then, everything to do with soldiers was good, even the irregularities of General de Boisdeffre, the disguises and schemings of Colonel du Paty de Clam, or Colonel Henry's forgery.[48] What extraordinary volte-face (which in reality was simply another side of the same noble passion, the patriotic passion, obliged to turn from the militarism he displayed when he was fighting against Dreyfusism, the tendency of which was anti-militarist, to a position almost of anti-militarism, as he was now fighting against super-militaristic Germany) led Brichot to declare: 'Oh, fabulous spectacle, and most worthy to entice the youth of an age of brutality, which knows only the worship of force: a dragoon! We may readily judge what will be the vile soldiery of a generation raised in the worship of these manifestations of brute force. Therefore Spitteler, wanting to set him against the hideous concept of the all-mighty sword, has symbolically exiled to the depths of the forest, ridiculed, slandered and alone, the visionary character he calls the Student Fool, in whom the author has so delightfully incarnated all the sweetness, so sadly unfashionable and likely soon to be forgotten if the dread reign of their ancient god is not broken, all the adorable sweetness of times of peace.' 'Tell me now, M. de Charlus said to me, you know Cottard and Cambremer. Every time I see them they tell me about Germany's extraordinary lack of psychology. Between you and me, do you think they concerned themselves about psychology before, or even that they are capable of showing any competence in it now? I am not exaggerating, believe me. Even if he is talking about one of the greatest Germans, about Nietzsche or Goethe, you will hear Cottard say: "with the habitual lack of psychology that characterizes the Teutonic race". There are things about the war that give me greater pain, obviously, but you must admit it is irritating. Norpois is more intelligent, I know, although he has been wrong about everything since the beginning of the war. But what is one to say about those articles that arouse such universal enthusiasm? My dear sir, you know Brichot's worth as well as I do, I like him a great deal, even after the schism which has separated me from his little church, which means that I see a great deal less of him. I do have a certain regard for this schoolmaster, he is a good talker and he is highly educated, and I grant you it is very touching that at his age, and enfeebled as he is, for he has been quite noticeably so for some years, he should have come back, as he puts it, to "serve". But in the end good intentions are one thing and talent is another, and Brichot has never had any talent. I admit that I share his admiration for certain examples of greatness in the current war. Yet it is strange, to say the least, that a blind partisan of antiquity like Brichot, who could never be sarcastic enough about Zola's finding more poetry in a working-class household, or down a mine, than in historic palaces, or about Goncourt's setting Diderot above Homer and Watteau above Raphael, should tell us endlessly that Thermopylae, even Austerlitz, are nothing compared with Vauquois.[49] Besides, this time, the public which rejected the modernists of literature and art accepts the modernists of war, because it has become fashionable to think in that way, and small minds, too, are overwhelmed not by beauty but by the enormity of action. Kolossal may be spelled only with a *k* nowadays, but it is still in essence the colossal that people kowtow to. Speaking of Brichot, have you seen Morel? I am told he wants to see me again. He has only to make the first move, I am the older, it is not up to me to initiate it.'

Unfortunately, the very next day, to anticipate for a moment, M. de Charlus found himself face to face with Morel in the street; in order to arouse his jealousy, the latter took him by the arm and told him some more-or-less true stories, but when M. de Charlus, driven to distraction, felt a need for Morel to stay with him that evening and not to go anywhere else, Morel caught sight of a friend across the street and bade M. de Charlus farewell, at which he, hoping that this threat, which of course he would never have put into practice, would make Morel stay where he was, said: 'Watch out, I shall have my revenge,' but Morel, laughing, left him, patting his astonished friend on the neck, and putting his arm around his waist.

No doubt the things that M. de Charlus had said to me about Morel were testimony to the extent that love – and the Baron's must indeed have been very persistent – makes us (as well as more imaginative and more touchy) more credulous and less proud. But when M. de Charlus added: 'The boy is mad about women, and never thinks about anything else,' he spoke more truly than he knew. He said it out of pride, and out of love, in order that other people should think that Morel's fondness for him had not been followed by other attachments of the same sort. I, of course, did not believe this at all, having with my own eyes seen Morel agree to spend a night with the Prince de Guermantes for fifty francs, something of which M. de Charlus was still unaware. And if, seeing M. de Charlus pass by, Morel (except on those days when, feeling the need to confess, he would bump into him in order to have the opportunity to say 'Oh, I'm sorry, I know I've been horrible to you'), sitting at a pavement café with some friends, joined in their jeers, pointed his finger at the Baron, and made the clucking noises with which people make fun of old inverts, I was convinced he did it to conceal his hand, and that if they were taken aside by the Baron, each of his public denouncers would do everything he asked of them. I was wrong. While a remarkable impulse had led people like Saint-Loup, who were at the furthest remove from it, to inversion – something that happens in every class – a contrary impulse had weaned away from those practices those in whom they had been most habitual. In some, the change was brought about by belated religious scruples, or by the agitation they felt when certain scandals broke, or by a fear of non-existent diseases in which they had been made to believe, in all sincerity, by relatives who were often concierges or valets, or quite without sincerity by jealous lovers who thought thereby to keep for themselves a young man on whom in fact their words had a quite contrary effect, alienating him from them as effectively as from others. Thus it was that the former lift-boy at Balbec would no longer have accepted, for love or money, propositions which now seemed to him as dangerous as approaches from the enemy. For Morel, his refusal of everybody, without exception, about which M. de Charlus had unwittingly uttered a truth which simultaneously justified his illusions and destroyed his hopes, stemmed from the fact that two years after leaving M. de Charlus he had fallen in love with a woman with whom he was still living and who, being more strong-willed than he was, had been able to demand absolute fidelity from him. With the result that Morel who, at the time when M. de Charlus was giving him so much money, had spent a night with the Prince de Guermantes for fifty francs, would not have agreed to do so with him or anybody else, even if they offered him fifty thousand francs. In the absence of honour and disinterestedness, his 'wife' had inculcated in him a certain fear of what other people might say, so that he was not averse to maintaining, with ostentatious bravado, that all the money in the world meant nothing to him when it was offered with certain strings attached. Thus the interplay of different psychological laws contrives to compensate, in the flowering of the human species, for everything which, in one way or another, would lead by superabundance or scarcity to its annihilation. As Darwin has shown, a comparable wisdom is to be found among the flowers, governing the methods of fertilization by opposing them successively one to another.

'It's a funny thing,' added M. de Charlus in the shrill little voice he sometimes adopted. 'I hear people who look quite happy all the time, and drink the best cocktails, declaring that they won't last until the end of the war, that their hearts are not strong enough, that they can think of nothing else, that one day they will just drop dead. And the most extraordinary thing is that this does actually happen. It is very odd! Is it a question of nutrition, because none of the food they eat is properly prepared any more, or is it because they have to demonstrate their zeal by buckling down to some futile job which only destroys the habits of life that kept them going? What ever it is, I've noticed an astonishing number of these strange, premature deaths, premature at least from the standpoint of the deceased. I can't remember what I was saying to you about Norpois's admiration for the war. But what a peculiar way he has of writing about it! To begin with, have you

noticed the proliferation of new expressions which, when they have finally become threadbare from being used day in and day out – for Norpois is truly indefatigable, I think the death of my aunt Villeparisis must have given him a new lease of life – are immediately replaced by further commonplaces? I remember in the old days you used to amuse yourself by noting down the fashionable phrases as they appeared, stayed in circulation and then disappeared: "who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind"; "the dogs bark, the caravan moves on"; "show me sound politics and I'll show you sound finances, as Baron Louis used to say"; "these are symptoms which it would be excessive to regard as tragic but wise to take seriously"; "to labour and to seek for no reward" (that one has been resuscitated, as it was bound to be). Alas, how many phrases since have come and gone into the dark! We have had "the scrap of paper", "the predatory empires", "the infamous Kultur that consists in murdering defenceless women and children", "victory belongs, as the Japanese say, to the side that can hold out a quarter of an hour longer than the other", "the Germano-Touranians", "scientific barbarism", "if we want to win the war, in Lloyd George's potent phrase", though that is out of date now, and "the fighting-spirit of the troops" and "the pluck of the troops". The war has even wrought as profound a change in the excellent Norpois's syntax as in the baking of bread or the rapidity of transport. Have you noticed how the good fellow, although he insists on proclaiming his wishes as truths on the point of realization, does not quite dare use the future tense, pure and simple, which would run the risk of being contradicted by events, but indicates it instead by his adoption of the verb "to be able to"?' I confessed to M. de Charlus that I did not entirely understand what he meant.

I should mention here that the Duc de Guermantes shared none of his brother's pessimism. Also, he was as anglophile as M. de Charlus was anglophobe. And he regarded M. Caillaux[50] as a traitor who infinitely deserved to be shot. When his brother demanded proof of his treachery, M. de Guermantes replied that if people were only to be convicted if they had signed a document saying 'I am a traitor,' then the crime of treason would never be punished. But in case I do not have an opportunity to return to this matter, I should also say that two years later the Duc de Guermantes, his anti-Caillautism undiluted, met an English military attaché and his wife, a remarkably cultivated couple with whom he made friends, as he had with the three charming ladies at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, and was astounded at their first meeting, when he talked about Caillaux, whose crime he regarded as undeniable and whose conviction he thought a foregone conclusion, to hear the cultivated and charming couple say: 'But he will probably be acquitted, there is absolutely no evidence against him.' M. de Guermantes tried to argue that M. de Norpois, when he had given evidence, had looked straight at the appalled Caillaux and said: 'You are the Giolitti[51] of France, yes, M. Caillaux, you are the Giolitti of France.' But the cultivated and charming couple had smiled, made fun of M. de Norpois, cited examples of his senility, and concluded by saying that although the *Figaro* had claimed that he had spoken those words in front of 'the appalled M. Caillaux', it was more likely to have been a cynically amused M. Caillaux. The Duc de Guermantes was not slow to change his opinions. Attributing this change to the influence of an Englishwoman is not so extraordinary as it would have seemed if it had been predicted even as late as 1919, when the English still referred to the Germans only as the Huns and called for savage penalties against the guilty parties. Now English public opinion had also changed, and they approved every decision which might discomfit France and be of benefit to Germany.

To go back to M. de Charlus: 'Ah, yes,' he responded to my confession that I did not entirely understand, 'ah, yes: "to be able to", in Norpois's articles, indicates the future, that is, it indicates what Norpois wishes for, and what we all wish for, come to that,' he added, perhaps not completely sincerely. 'You realize of course that if "to be able" had not become simply an indication of the future tense, one might just about understand that the subject of the verb might be a country. For instance, every time Norpois says: "America would not be able to remain indifferent to these repeated violations of 'law' "; "the Dual Monarchy would not be able to fail to see the evil of its ways", it is clear that such phrases express his wishes (which are also mine, and yours), but in those cases, in spite of everything, the verb can still retain something of its original meaning, because a country can "be able", America can "be able", the Dual Monarchy itself can "be able" (despite its eternal "lack of psychology"). But that ambiguity is no longer possible when Norpois writes: "These systematic devastations would not be able to persuade the neutrals", "the region of the Lakes would not be able to fail to fall very quickly into the hands of the Allies", "the results of these neutralist elections would not be able to reflect the opinion of the great majority of countries". It is undeniable that these devastations, these regions and the results of these votes are inanimate things which cannot "be able". By using this formulation Norpois is simply addressing to the neutrals the injunction (which I regret to say they seem not to have obeyed) to abandon neutrality, or to the lake regions no longer to belong to the "Boches" ' (it cost M. de Charlus the same kind of effort to pronounce the word 'Boche' as it had long ago in the tram at Balbec to speak about men whose taste was not for women). 'Also, have you noticed the crafty way Norpois, since 1914, has begun all his articles addressed to the neutrals? He starts by declaring that of course France has no desire to meddle in the politics of Italy (or Romania or Bulgaria, etc.). It is the business of those powers alone to decide, completely independently, taking into account nothing but the national interest, whether or not they should abandon neutrality. But while these preliminary statements of the article (what might once have been called the exordium) are so notably disinterested, what follows is generally much less so. "Nevertheless", Norpois in substance continues, "it is quite clear that the only nations to derive any material benefit from the struggle will be those who have ranged themselves on the side of law and justice. It cannot be expected that the Allies will reward, by allocating them the territories from which for centuries has risen the cry of their oppressed brothers, those peoples who, adopting the line of least resistance, have not taken up arms in the Allied cause." Having once taken this first step towards advising intervention, nothing can stop Norpois, and he goes on to offer less and less guarded advice not only about the principle of intervention, but about its timing. "Of course, he says, 'playing the saint' as he would put it, it is for Italy and Romania alone to decide on the time and manner at which it is most appropriate for them to intervene. Yet they must be aware that by equivocating too long they risk letting the moment slip past. Already the hoofs of the Russian cavalry are sending shivers through a Germany that faces an unspeakable horror. It is very clear that those peoples who have done no more than rush to help in a victory whose resplendent dawn is already in sight will have no entitlement at all to the reward that they may yet if they hasten, etc.' It is like those notices you see at the theatre: "Only a few seats left. Book now to avoid disappointment!" A line of argument which is all the more stupid as Norpois has to revise it every six months, periodically telling Romania: "The moment has come for Romania to decide whether or not she wants to realize her national aspirations. If she delays any longer, it may be too late." He has been saying that for three years now, and not only has the "too late" not yet come, but Romania continues to be offered greater and greater incitements. Similarly, he invites France, etc., to intervene in Greece as protective power, on the grounds that the treaty allying Greece with Serbia has not been observed. But do you honestly think that if France were not at war and did not want the support or the benevolent neutrality of Greece it would occur to her to intervene in the role of protective power, or that the moral feelings which impel her to express outrage at Greece's failure to honour her commitments to Serbia do not fall silent the moment it is a question of an equally flagrant violation on the part of Romania and Italy, who, quite rightly I believe, and this applies to Greece too, have not fulfilled their duties, albeit less imperative and extensive than people say, as allies of Germany? The truth is that people see everything through the eyes of their newspapers, and how could they do otherwise given that they are not personally acquainted with the people or the events concerned? During the Dreyfus Affair, which you were so curiously worked up about, at a time conventionally regarded as separated from us by centuries now that the war-philosophers have added their weight to the idea that all links with the past have been broken, I was shocked to see members of my family express the highest esteem for anticlerical former Communards whom their newspaper represented as anti-Dreyfusards, and revile a Catholic general of good family who was in favour of a retrial. I am no less shocked now to see all Frenchmen execrate the Emperor Franz-Josef whom they used to venerate, quite rightly I may say, I having known him well, and whom he is kind enough to treat as a cousin. Ah! I have not written to him since the war,' he added as if bravely confessing to a fault for which he knew he could not be blamed. 'No, I did, just once, in the first year. What else can one do? None of this alters my respect for him, but I have plenty of young relatives here fighting in our lines who would, I know, think it very wrong of me to maintain a regular correspondence with the leader of a nation that is at war with us. What can I do? Censure me if you like,' he added as if bravely inviting my criticism, 'but I have had no wish, at this time, for a letter signed Charlus to arrive in Vienna. The only serious criticism I would level at the old sovereign is that a nobleman of his rank, head of one of the oldest and most illustrious houses in Europe, should allow himself to be led by a petty country squire, very intelligent I grant you, but basically just a parvenu, like William of Hohenzollern. It is not the least of the many shocking anomalies of this war.'

And as, from the moment he returned to thinking about things in terms of the Peerage, which for him fundamentally dominated everything, M. de Charlus became extraordinarily childish, he told me, in the same tone of voice with which he might have spoken of the Marne or Verdun, that there were significant and very curious matters which ought not to be passed over by anyone who came to write the history of this war. 'For example, he said, everybody is so ignorant that no one has pointed out this remarkable fact: the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, who is a pure Boche, continues none the less to live in Rome, where, as Grand Master of our order, he enjoys the privilege of extraterritoriality. Rather interesting,' he added, as if to say: 'You see that you have not had a wasted evening, meeting me.' I thanked him, and he assumed the modest expression of someone requiring no payment. 'But what was I saying to you just now? Oh, yes, that people nowadays hate Franz-Josef because their newspaper tells them to. As for King Constantine of Greece and the Tsar of Bulgaria, the public has repeatedly oscillated between loathing and sympathy, depending on whether they were said to be about to take the side of the Entente or the side that Brichot calls the Central Empires. It is like Brichot telling us all the time that "Venizelos's hour is about to come". I do not doubt that M. Venizelos is a very capable statesman, but how do we know that the Greeks want him as much as all that? We are told that he wanted Greece to honour her commitments to Serbia. Yet we still ought to know what these commitments were and whether they were more extensive than those that Italy and Romania believed that they could violate. We exhibit a concern for the way in which Greece implements its treaties and respects its constitution which we would certainly not feel if it were not in our own interest. If the war had not happened, do you think that the "guarantor" powers would even have noticed the dissolution of the Chambers? All I can see is that one by one all the supports of the King of Greece are being removed so that he can be thrown out or locked up as soon as he no longer has an army to defend him. I was saying that the public's judgment of the King of Greece or the King of the Bulgars is informed solely by what they read in the newspapers. But how could they think about them in any other way but through the newspapers, since they do not know them personally? Whereas I myself have seen a great deal of them, I knew Constantine of Greece very well when he was the Diadoch,[52] and he is quite wonderful. I always thought the Emperor Nicholas had a very great fondness for him. It was all entirely honourable, naturally. Princess Christian used to talk openly about it, but she is a poisonous woman. As for the Tsar of the Bulgars, he is a complete nancy, a raving queer, but very intelligent, a remarkable man. He likes me very much.' M. de Charlus, who could be so agreeable, became obnoxious when he started on topics like these. He brought to them a self-satisfaction as annoying as that which we feel in the presence of an invalid who is always pointing out how good his health is. I have often thought that in the Balbec train we used to call the Slow-coach, the faithful, who so longed for the admissions he always evaded, might perhaps not have been able to accept such an overt display of his compulsion and, ill at ease, breathing awkwardly as in a sickroom or when faced with a dope fiend who takes out his syringe in front of you, it might have been they who put a stop to the confidences they thought they wanted to hear. And one was indeed annoyed to hear everyone accused, often probably without any sort of evidence, by somebody who excepted himself from the special category to which one none the less knew that he belonged and to which he was so ready to consign others. For all his intelligence, he had in this area fashioned a narrow little philosophy for himself (at the bottom of which there was perhaps a touch of that sense of curiosity which 'life' aroused in Swann), explaining everything in terms of these special causes, and in which, as when anybody lapses into their characteristic weakness, he was not only unworthy of himself but also exceptionally self-satisfied. Thus it was that he, who was capable of such gravity and nobility, adopted the most inane grin as he completed this pronouncement: 'As there are strong presumptions of the same kind as for Ferdinand of Coburg[53] in the case of Emperor William, that might be the reason why Tsar Ferdinand has aligned himself with the "predatory empires". Well, really, it is quite understandable, one is indulgent towards a *sister*, one cannot refuse her anything. I think that would be very neat as an explanation of Bulgaria's alliance with Germany.' And at this stupid explanation M. de Charlus laughed at length, as thought he really thought that it was very ingenious, and which, even if it had rested on true facts, was as puerile as the reflections M. de Charlus offered on the war when he judged it from the standpoint of a feudal lord or a Knight of St John of Jerusalem. He ended with a more sensible remark: 'The astonishing thing, he said, is that the public that thus judges the men and the events of the war solely on the basis of newspaper reports is convinced that it is forming its own judgments.'

In that M. de Charlus was right. I have been told that one really had to see the moments of silence and hesitation that Mme de Forcheville used to have, just like those that are necessary not simply to the expression but to the very formation of a personal opinion, before saying, in the tone of voice appropriate to a deeply private feeling: 'No, I don't think they will take Warsaw'; 'I don't feel they can last a second winter'; 'what I don't want is a botched-up peace'; 'the thing that scares me, if you want to know, is the Chamber'; 'yes, I still believe we'll be able to break through.' And to say these things, Odette adopted a simpering expression which she exaggerated even further when she said: 'I'm not saying the German armies don't fight well, but they lack what we call pluck.' As she pronounced the word 'pluck' (and even when she merely said 'fighting spirit'), she made a moulding gesture with her hand and half-closed her eyes as if she were a student artist using a technical studio term. Her own way of speaking, though, even more than before, indicated her admiration for the English, whom she was no longer obliged to content herself with calling, as previously she did, 'our neighbours across the Channel' or at most 'our friends the English', but now could call 'our loyal allies'. Needless to say, she never missed a single opportunity to cite the expression *fair play* in order to show how the English thought that the Germans were unfair players, and 'the main thing is to win the war, as our brave allies say'. She used even rather clumsily to link the name of her son-in-law to anything involving English soldiers and the pleasure he derived from living in close contact with Australians and Scots, New Zealanders and Canadians. 'My son-in-law Saint-Loup now knows the slang of all the brave *tommies*, he can make himself understood by the ones from the furthest *dominions* and fraternizes with the humblest *private* as easily as with the general commanding the base.'

Let this parenthesis on Mme de Forcheville, while I walk down the boulevards side by side with M. de Charlus, serve as my excuse for another, even longer but useful for describing this period, on the relations between Mme Verdurin and Brichot. The fact is that, although poor Brichot was judged with severity by M. de Charlus (because the latter was both very intelligent and more or less unconsciously pro-German), he was treated still more badly by the Verdurins. They were chauvinistic, of course, which ought to have made them like Brichot's articles, especially since they were no worse than plenty of the writings which Mme Verdurin thoroughly enjoyed. But, first, it will perhaps be remembered that even at La Raspelière Brichot had become, instead of the great man he had seemed to them in the past, if not a whipping boy like Saniette, at least the object of their scarcely disguised mockery. But at least he still remained, at that point, one of the most faithful of the faithful, which ensured him a share of the benefits tacitly envisaged by the statutes for all the founding or associate members of the little group. But as, thanks to the war perhaps, or to the sudden crystallization of a long-delayed elegance, all the necessary elements of which, albeit invisibly, had long saturated it, the Verdurin salon had been opening itself to a new social world, and the faithful, at first the lures to attract this new world, had ended by being invited less and less, so a parallel phenomenon had been occurring in Brichot's life. Despite the Sorbonne, despite the Institut, his renown had not, before the war, extended beyond the limits of the Verdurin salon. But when he started writing almost daily articles adorned with the shallow brilliance which one has so often seen him dispense so munificently to the faithful, yet also rich with a quite genuine erudition which, as a true member of the Sorbonne, he never tried to conceal however exaggerated the form in which he couched it, 'high society' was literally dazzled. For once, it bestowed its favour on somebody who was far from being a nonentity, somebody who could retain its attention by the fertility of his intelligence and the resources of his memory. And while three duchesses would go to spend the evening with Mme Verdurin, three more would compete for the honour of having the great man to dine with them, one of which invitations he would accept, feeling the freer to do so since Mme Verdurin, exasperated by the success that his articles were achieving in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, now took care never to have Brichot to her house when he was likely to meet there some glittering woman whom he did not yet know and who would hasten to entice him away. Thus it was that journalism (in which Brichot was really doing nothing more in the end than belatedly providing, to general praise and in return for magnificent fees, what all his life he had squandered gratis and incognito in the Verdurin drawing-room, since his articles, so eloquent and knowledgeable was he, cost him no more effort than his conversation) might have led Brichot, even at one point seemed to be leading him, to undisputed fame… if it had not been for Mme Verdurin. Brichot's articles, of course, were far from being as remarkable as people in society thought them. The vulgarity of the man was constantly visible

beneath the pedantry of the literary scholar. And alongside images which meant nothing at all ('the Germans will no longer be able to look Beethoven's statue in the face'; 'Schiller must have been turning in his grave'; 'the ink which had initialled Belgium's neutrality was hardly dry'; 'Lenin speaks, but his words are all gone with the wind of the steppes'), there were trivialities such as: 'Twenty thousand prisoners, that is quite a number; our command will know to keep an extra eye open; we want to win, and that's that.' But mixed in with all this, how much knowledge, how much intelligence, what telling arguments! Mme Verdurin, however, never started an article by Brichot without the prior satisfaction of thinking that she was going to find ridiculous things in it, and she would read it with the closest attention in order to be certain of not letting them escape her. And unfortunately there were bound to be some. They did not even wait until they had found them. The most felicitous quotation from an author who was genuinely little known, at least for the work Brichot was referring to, was taken as proof of the most unbearable pedantry, and Mme Verdurin would wait impatiently for dinner-time when she would be able to unleash peals of laughter from her guests. 'Well, what do you think of Brichot this evening? I thought of you when I read the quotation from Cuvier. Upon my word, I think he's going mad. – I haven't read it yet, Cottard would say. – What, you haven't read it yet? But you don't know what a treat you're missing. Honestly, you'll die laughing.' And secretly pleased that someone had not yet read the latest Brichot as it meant that she herself had an opportunity to point out its absurdities, Mme Verdurin would tell the butler to bring *Le Temps* and herself would read it aloud, giving to the simplest sentences a ring of grandiloquence. After dinner, for the rest of the evening, the anti-Brichot campaign would continue, but with a pretence of reserve. 'I shan't say it too loud because I'm afraid that over there', she would say, indicating the Comtesse Molé, 'they rather admire this stuff. Society people are more gullible than we think.' Mme Molé, whom they tried, by speaking fairly loudly, to ensure was aware that they were talking about her, at the same time as they did their best to show her, by now and then lowering their voices, that they did not want her to hear what they were saying, was cowardly enough to disown Brichot, whom in reality she thought the equal of Michelet. She agreed with Mme Verdurin and then, in order nevertheless to conclude on a note that seemed to her to be unquestionable, said: 'The one thing nobody can take away from him is that it is well written. – You really call that well written? said Mme Verdurin, personally I think it reads as if it was written by a pig,' a piece of daring which made her fashionable guests laugh all the more as Mme Verdurin, as if horrified by the word 'pig', had uttered it in a whisper, her hand clapped to her lips. Her rage against Brichot was increased even more by the way he naïvely paraded his pleasure at his success, in spite of the fits of bad temper aroused in him by the censors every time that they, as he put it with his habit of using new words to show that he was not too academic, 'blue-pencilled' a part of his article. In his presence, Mme Verdurin did not let it be too clearly seen, save by a peevishness that might have put a more perspicacious man on his guard, how little store she set by what Chochotte wrote. All she did was to tell him once that he was wrong to use 'I' as often as he did. And indeed he got into the habit of using it continually, first of all because out of pedagogic habit he constantly employed phrases such as 'I grant that' and even, when he meant 'I am happy to admit that', 'I am happy that', as in: 'I am happy that the enormous expansion of the fronts necessitates, etc.', but principally because, as a former militant anti-Dreyfusard who had scented the German preparations long before the war, he had very often had occasion to write: 'Since 1897, I have denounced'; 'I pointed out in 1901'; 'I warned in my little pamphlet, now extremely hard to come by (*habent sua fata libelli*[54])', and thereafter the habit had stayed with him. He blushed deeply at Mme Verdurin's comment, a comment which had been delivered with a note of asperity. 'You are right, madam. A man who was as little fond of the Jesuits as M. Combes, albeit he never had a preface from our gentle master of exquisite scepticism, Anatole France, who was, if I mistake not, my adversary… before the deluge, said that the self is always hateful.'[55] From then on, Brichot replaced *I* with *one*, but *one* did not prevent the reader from seeing that the author was speaking about himself, and indeed allowed the author never to stop speaking about himself, or commenting on the most insignificant of his sentences, or fabricating an article on the basis of a single negative statement, always shielding himself behind *one*. For example, if Brichot said, perhaps in another article, that the German armies had lost some of their power, he would begin like this: 'One will not here conceal the true state of things. One has said that the German armies have lost some of their power. One has not said that they do not still possess great power. Still less will one write that they have no power. Nor will one say that the ground won, if it is not, etc.' In short, simply by pronouncing all he would not say, by recalling everything that he had said some years before, and that Clausewitz, Jomini, Ovid, Apollonius of Tyre, etc., had said at various times over the centuries, Brichot could easily have gathered the material for a substantial volume. It is to be regretted that he did not publish one, as those well-directed articles of his are difficult to find now. The Faubourg Saint-Germain, admonished by Mme Verdurin, began by laughing at Brichot when they were under her roof, but continued, once they had come away from the little set, to admire him. Then, after a while, making fun of him became as much the fashion as admiring him had been, and even those whom he continued to dazzle in secret, for as long as they were reading his articles, checked their adulation and laughed as soon as they were no longer alone, in order not to seem less intelligent than the others. Brichot had never been so much talked about by the little set as he was at this period, but only with derision. It became the criterion of any newcomer's intelligence to ask what he thought of Brichot's articles; if he gave the wrong answer the first time, people were quick to instruct him in how it was that people's intelligence was recognized.

'Well, my poor friend, all that is terrible, and we have more than boring articles to lament. People talk of vandalism and of statues being destroyed. But isn't the destruction of so many marvellous young men, once incomparable polychrome statues themselves, also vandalism? Isn't a town which will no longer have any beautiful men in it like a town with all its statues smashed? What kind of pleasure will I be able to get from dining in a restaurant if I am to be waited on by moss-covered old buffoons who look like Père Didon, if not by women in mob-caps who make me think I've wandered into a Duval Restaurant?[56] That's how things are, my dear chap, and I think I have a right to speak like this because beauty is no less beauty when it is living matter. What a pleasure it is to be served by rachitic creatures wearing glasses, with the grounds of their exemption writ large on their faces! Contrary to what always used to happen in the past, if you want to rest your eyes on someone nice-looking in a restaurant, you have to look at the customers eating and drinking, not at the waiters who are serving. And then one could always see a waiter again, even though they often changed, but how is one to find out who this English lieutenant is, and when he will come back, when it is perhaps the first time he has been there and when he may be killed tomorrow? When, as we are told by the charming Morand, the enchanting author of *Clarisse*,[57] Augustus of Poland exchanged one of his regiments for a collection of Chinese vases, he made, in my opinion, a bad bargain. Just think, all those great footmen, six feet tall, who used to adorn the monumental staircases of our loveliest female friends, have all been killed, and most of them only joined up because they kept on being told that the war would last for two months. Ah! they didn't know, as I did, the strength of Germany, and the courage of the Prussian race,' he said, forgetting himself.

And then, noticing that he had revealed too much of his point of view: 'It is not so much Germany that I fear for France, as the war itself. Here behind the lines people imagine that the war is merely a gigantic boxing match, which they can watch from a distance, thanks to the newspapers. But it is not like that at all. It is an illness which, whenever it seems to have been warded off at one point, reappears somewhere else. Today Noyon will be recaptured, tomorrow there will be no more bread or chocolate, the next day the man who thought he was content, and who was ready, if necessary, to accept the idea of a bullet because he could not imagine it, will panic when he reads in the newspaper that his age-group is being called up. As for monuments, the disappearance of a masterpiece like Rheims, unique in its quality, does not appal me so much as the sight of the annihilation of so many of the groups of buildings which once made the smallest village in France both charming and edifying.'

I thought at once of Combray, but in the past I had thought I would lower myself in the eyes of Mme de Guermantes if I confessed the modest position which my family occupied in the village. I wondered whether it had ever been disclosed to the Guermantes and M. de Charlus, either by Legrandin, or by Swann, or Saint-Loup, or Morel. But even preterition of that sort was less painful to me than the prospect of retrospective explanation. I only hoped that M. de Charlus would not say anything about Combray.

'I do not wish to speak ill of the Americans, Monsieur, he continued, it seems that they are inexhaustibly generous and, as there has not been a conductor in this war, and each performer has joined in long after the last, and the Americans have come in when we are almost finished, they may have an enthusiasm which four years of war have somewhat dulled in us. Even before the war they exhibited a love for our country and our art, and paid high prices for our masterpieces. Many of them are now in their country. But this deracinated art, as M. Barrès would call it,[58] is precisely the opposite of what used to make up the exquisite charm of France. The chateau explained the church, which itself, because it had been a site of pilgrimage, explained the *chanson de geste*. I do not want to make too much of the illustriousness of my family origins and my connections, which in any case is not to the point here. But recently, in order to settle a financial matter, and despite there being a certain coolness between that couple and myself, I had to pay a visit to my niece Saint-Loup, who lives at Combray. Combray was just a small town, like so many others. But our ancestors were depicted as benefactors in some of the church windows, while others bore our coat of arms. We had our chapel there, and our tombs. The church was destroyed by the French and the English because it was being used as an observation-post by the Germans. The whole of that mixture of living history and art that was France is being destroyed, and the process is not over yet. Of course I am not so absurd as to compare, for reasons of family, the destruction of the church at Combray with that of Rheims cathedral, in which by some miracle the gothic cathedral seemed to have rediscovered, quite naturally, the purity of classical statuary, or with that of the cathedral at Amiens. I don't know whether the uplifted arm of St Firmin is now broken. But if it is, the highest affirmation of faith and energy has vanished from this world. – The symbol of it, Monsieur, I responded. I adore certain symbols as much as you do. But it would be absurd to sacrifice to the symbol the reality which it symbolizes. Cathedrals should be adored until such time as their preservation becomes dependent on our denying the truths that they teach. The arm of St Firmin, uplifted in an almost military gesture of command, said: Let us be broken, if honour demands it. Do not sacrifice men for the sake of stones, the beauty of which derives precisely from their having for a moment embodied human truths. – I understand what you mean, replied M. de Charlus, and M. Barrès, who has sent us, alas, on too many pilgrimages to the statue of Strasbourg and to the tomb of M. Déroulède,[59] was moving and generous when he wrote that Rheims cathedral itself was less dear to us than the lives of our infantrymen. An assertion which renders rather absurd the anger of our newspapers against the German general in command there, who said that Rheims cathedral was less precious than the life of one German soldier. In the end, what is so exasperating and distressing is that each country says the same thing. The grounds on which the associated industrialists of Germany declare the possession of Belfort indispensable for protecting their nation against our ideas of revenge are the same as those of Barrès when he demands Mainz in order to protect us against the recurrent wish of the Boche to invade us. Why should the return of Alsace-Lorraine have seemed to France an insufficient motive for waging a war, yet a sufficient motive to continue one, and to declare it anew each year? You seem to think that victory is now guaranteed to France, and with all my heart I hope that it is, don't doubt that. But now that, rightly or wrongly, the Allies believe themselves certain to win (for my part I should naturally be delighted by that outcome, but what I see mostly are numerous paper victories, Pyrrhic victories, at a cost that is never vouchsafed to us) and that the Boches no longer believe themselves certain to win, we see Germany trying to hasten peace and France trying to prolong the war, France which prides itself on justice, and is right to pronounce words of justice, but which is also gentle France, and ought to pronounce words of mercy, even if only for her own children, and so that the flowers when they bloom again may light up other things than tombs. Be honest, my friend, you yourself have propounded to me a theory about things existing only by virtue of a creation which is perpetually renewed. The creation of the world did not happen once and for all, you told me, it has to take place, necessarily, every day. Well, if you are sincere, you cannot make war an exception to this theory. Never mind that the excellent Norpois has written (wheeling out one of those rhetorical flourishes that he is so fond of, like "the dawn of victory" and "General Winter"): "Now that Germany has determined upon war, the die has been cast", the truth is that every morning war is declared anew. Thus those who wish to continue it are as guilty as those who started it, perhaps more so, for the latter may not perhaps have foreseen the full horror of it.

'There is, besides, nothing to say that such a prolonged war, even if it must have a victorious outcome, is not without its own dangers. It is difficult to talk about things that have no precedent, and about the repercussions on an organism of an operation being attempted for the first time. It is true, generally speaking, that innovations, alarming though people may find them, go off very well. The most sensible Republicans thought that it was mad to separate Church and State. It went through as easily as posting a letter. Dreyfus was rehabilitated, Picquart became Minister of War, both without a murmur from anyone.[60] Yet what may we not fear from the stress and fatigue of a war that has continued uninterrupted for several years? What will the men do when they come back from it? Will they have been broken or driven mad by exhaustion? The whole thing may turn out very badly, if not for France, then at least for the government, even perhaps for our form of government. You once made me read Maurras's admirable essay on the memoirs of Aimée de Coigny. I would be very surprised if some modern Aimée de Coigny was not expecting, as a consequence of the Republic's war, what the 1812 Aimée de Coigny expected from the war waged by the Empire.[61] If the modern Aimée exists, will her hopes be realized? That is not something I want to see.

'But to return to the war itself, was it really the Emperor William who first started it? I am very dubious about that. And if it was, what has he done that Napoleon, for example, did not do, something that I myself find abominable, but which I am astonished to see also inspiring such horror in worshippers of Napoleon, and in those people who on the day war was declared exclaimed like General Pau: "I have been waiting for this day for forty years. It is the best day of my life." God knows, nobody protested more forcefully than I did when society afforded such a disproportionate place to nationalists and military men, and when every friend of the arts was accused of being involved in things that would be fatal to the country, all civilization that was not bellicose being regarded as pernicious! A genuine member of the best society barely counted compared with a general. Some madwoman even once almost presented me to M. Syveton.[62] You will tell me that the rules I was endeavouring to maintain were only those of society. But despite their apparent frivolity they might perhaps have prevented many excesses. I have always respected those who defend grammar or logic. We realize, fifty years later, that they averted serious dangers. Now our nationalists are the most anti-German, the most die-hard, of men. But over the last fifteen years their philosophy has completely altered. It is true that they are pressing hard for a continuation of the war. But this is only in order to exterminate a war-mongering race, and out of a love of peace. Because a warlike civilization, which they thought so fine fifteen years ago, now fills them with horror. Not only do they criticize Prussia for allowing the military element to become predominant in their state, they think that in every age military civilizations have been destructive of everything they now hold precious, not only of the arts but even of courtesy towards women. If any one of their critics is converted to nationalism, that is sufficient for him to become by the same token a friend of peace. He becomes convinced that in all warlike civilizations women have been humiliated and have occupied an inferior position. One does not dare respond that the "ladies" of knights in the Middle Ages, and Dante's Beatrice, were perhaps placed on a throne as elevated as the heroines of M. Becque.[63] One of these days I fully expect to find myself seated at table below a Russian revolutionary, or simply below one of those generals of ours who wage war out of a horror of war and in order to punish a people for cultivating an ideal which they themselves, fifteen years ago, judged the only one capable of reinvigorating us. The unfortunate Tsar was still honoured only a few months ago because he had called the peace conference at The Hague. But now that people are hailing the free Russia, they forget that he ever had that claim to glory. So turns the wheel of the world.

'And yet Germany uses such similar expressions to France that one might think she was quoting her, she never tires of saying that she "is fighting for her existence". When I read: "We shall fight against an implacable and cruel enemy until we have obtained a peace which will guarantee us a future free from all aggression, so that the blood of our brave soldiers shall not have flowed in vain," or: "He who is not for us is against us," I do not know whether the sentence

comes from the Emperor William or from M. Poincaré, because they have both, give or take a few variations, pronounced each one twenty times, although to be honest I must confess that the Emperor, in this instance, is echoing the President of the Republic. France might perhaps not have been so enthusiastic about prolonging the war if she had remained weak, but above all Germany would probably not have been in such a hurry to end it if she had not ceased to be strong. To be as strong as she was, for strong you will see she still is.'

He had developed the habit of almost shouting some of the things he said, out of excitability, out of his attempt to find outlets for impressions of which he needed – never having cultivated any of the arts – to unburden himself, as an aviator looses his bombs, if necessary in open country, in places where his words affected nobody, especially in society, where they fell equally randomly and where he was listened to out of snobbery or dependence, and, so much did he tyrannize his audience, one may say under obligation and even out of fear. On the boulevards this harangue was also a mark of his contempt for passers-by, for whom he no more lowered his voice than he would have moved out of their way. But it was out of place there, caused surprise, and above all rendered audible to the people who turned round remarks which might have had us taken for defeatists. I commented on this to M. de Charlus but succeeded only in arousing his mirth. 'That would be very funny, you must admit, he said. After all, he added, one never knows, we all run the risk every evening of being an item in the next day's news. Is there really any reason why I should not end up shot in the moat at Vincennes? After all, that is what happened to my great-uncle, the Duc d'Enghien.[64] The thirst for noble blood maddens a certain kind of rabble, and in that they are more discriminating than lions are. You know that for those animals it would take no more than a scratch on her nose for them to leap on to Mme Verdurin. A scratch on what in my youth we would have called her conk!' And he began to roar with laughter as if we had been alone in a drawing-room.

From time to time, seeing some rather shifty-looking individuals emerge from the shadows as M. de Charlus went by and cluster together a short distance away from him, I wondered whether he would prefer me to leave him alone or to remain with him. In the same way, somebody who meets an old man subject to frequent epileptic fits, and who sees from his inconsistent movements that an attack is probably imminent, wonders whether his company is more desired as a support or dreaded as a witness from whom he would wish to conceal the fit, and whose mere presence, when absolute calm might perhaps succeed in averting it, would be enough to hasten its onset. But the possibility of the event from which one does not know whether or not one should remove oneself is revealed, in the case of the sick man, by his meandering progress, like that of a drunk. Whereas with M. de Charlus these variously divaricating positions, the indication of a possible incident in relation to which I was not sure whether he desired or feared that my presence should prevent its occurrence, were occupied, as if by ingenious stage-management, not by the Baron himself, who was walking straight ahead, but by a whole circle of extras. All the same, I believe he wanted to avoid the encounter, because he dragged me into a side-street, darker than the boulevard, yet into which it was constantly disgorging, except for those who were flocking towards it, soldiers from every branch of the service and from every nation, a youthful influx which compensated and consoled M. de Charlus for the ebbing of all the men towards the frontier which had, as if pneumatically, created a vacuum in Paris during the early days of mobilization. M. de Charlus made constant admiring comments about the brilliant uniforms which passed about us, turning Paris into a town as cosmopolitan as a port and as unreal as the scenery in a painter's studio, where a few bits of architecture have been assembled simply as a pretext for him to gather together the most varied and glittering costumes.

He still retained all his respect and all his affection for some great ladies who were accused of defeatism, as he had once for those who had been accused of Dreyfusism. He regretted only that by stooping to the level of politics they might have laid themselves open 'to being talked about by journalists'. As far as he was concerned, nothing about them had changed. For his frivolity was so much second nature to him, that birth, combined with beauty and other forms of prestige, was the thing that endured – and the war, like the Dreyfus Affair, was merely a vulgar and passing fashion. If the Duchesse de Guermantes had been shot for trying to reach a separate peace with Austria, he would still have considered her as noble as ever, and no more demeaned by it than Marie-Antoinette seems to us today for having been condemned to decapitation. As he spoke then, M. de Charlus, with the noble guise of a Saint-Vallier or a Saint-Megrin, was upright, stiff and solemn, his voice was serious, and for a brief moment he displayed none of the mannerisms by which men of his sort reveal themselves. And yet, why is it that none of them can ever have a voice that sounds absolutely right? Even at this moment, when it was approaching its most serious, his still sounded slightly wrong, as if it needed tuning.

M. de Charlus literally did not know which way to look, and often he glanced upward, regretting that he did not have a pair of binoculars, although they would not have been a great deal of use, since, because of the Zeppelin raid of two days earlier which had made the authorities extend their vigilance, there were soldiers in larger numbers than usual, even in the sky. The aeroplanes which I had seen some hours earlier looking like insects, brown spots against the blue sky, now passed through the night, the darkness of which was further intensified by the partial extinction of the street-lights, like gleaming fire-ships. The greatest impression of beauty that these human shooting stars made us experience was perhaps to make us look at the sky, towards which normally we hardly ever raise our eyes. In this Paris, whose almost defenceless beauty, in 1914, I had seen awaiting the threat of the approaching enemy, there was, certainly, now as then, the ancient, unchanged splendour of a moon cruelly and mysteriously serene which poured over the still intact monuments the useless beauty of its light, but as in 1914, and to a greater extent than in 1914, there was also something else, different lights, intermittent beams which, whether they came from aeroplanes or from the searchlights on the Eiffel Tower, one knew to be directed by an intelligent will, by a friendly vigilance which gave one the same kind of feeling, inspired the same sort of thankfulness and calm as I had experienced in Saint-Loup's room, in the cell of that military cloister where so many eager-hearted and disciplined young men were in training for the day when, unhesitatingly and in the prime of their youth, they would consummate their sacrifice.

After the raid of two days earlier, when the sky had been more turbulent than the earth, it was now as quiet as the sea after a storm. But like the sea after a storm it had not regained absolute calm. Aeroplanes still climbed like rockets to join the stars, and searchlights cast slowly across the sky they transected what looked like a pale dust of stars, or wandering Milky Ways. Meanwhile the aeroplanes took up their places among the constellations and looking at those 'new stars' one might easily have believed oneself to be in another hemisphere.

M. de Charlus spoke to me of his admiration for these airmen and, as he could no longer prevent himself from giving as free a rein to his pro-Germanism as to his other penchants, while denying it as firmly as he denied the rest, continued: 'All the same, I must add that I have just as much admiration for the Germans who go up in their Gothas. As for the Zeppelins, think of the courage it must take! They are quite simply heroes. What difference can it make that their targets are civilians, when our batteries are shooting at them? Are you afraid of the Gothas and the artillery fire?' I confessed I was not, but I may perhaps have been wrong. No doubt, having developed the habit, out of idleness, of each day putting off my work until the day after, I thought that death could be dealt with in the same way. How can one be afraid of cannon fire when one is convinced that it is not going to hit one that day? Anyway, isolated thoughts about bombs being thrown, or about the possibility of death, added nothing tragic to the image I had formed of the passing German airships, until, from one of them, buffeted by winds and partly hidden from my gaze by the billowing mists of a troubled sky, from an aeroplane which, even though I knew it was murderous, I still imagined only to be stellar and heavenly, I had seen, one evening, the gesture of a bomb dropped down towards us. For the true reality of a danger is perceived only in that new thing, irreducible to what one already knows, which we call an impression and which is often, as in this instance, summed up in a line, a line describing an intention, a line which contains the latent potentiality of its distorting fulfilment, while on the Pont de la Concorde, all around the menacing, hunted aeroplane, as if they were reflections in the clouds of the fountains of the Champs-Élysées, the place de la Concorde and the Tuileries, the luminous water-jets of the searchlights curved across the sky, in lines equally full of intention, of the far-sighted and protective intentions of wise and powerful men to whom I was grateful, as I had been one night in the army quarters in Doncières, that they were prepared to use their might to watch over us with such beautiful precision.

The night was as beautiful as in 1914, when Paris had also been threatened. The moonlight seemed like a soft, continuous, magnesium flare allowing one for a last time to take nocturnal pictures of these lovely groups of buildings like the place Vendôme or the place de la Concorde, to which the terror that I had of the

shells which were perhaps about to destroy them gave by contrast a sort of fullness in their still-intact beauty, as if they were putting themselves forward, offering their defenceless architecture to be shot. 'Aren't you afraid? repeated M. de Charlus. The Parisians don't realize. They say that Mme Verdurin has parties every day. I know that only from hearsay, I don't know anything about them myself, I have broken with them completely,' he added, lowering not only his eyes, as if a telegraph boy had passed, but also his head and shoulders, and raising his arm in the gesture that signifies, if not 'I wash my hands of them', then at least 'I can't tell you anything else' (even though I was not asking him anything). 'I know that Morel still goes there a great deal,' he said (this was the first time he had spoken about him again). 'It is said that he very much regrets the past, that he wants a reconciliation,' he added, demonstrating both the same credulity as the man of the Faubourg who says: 'A lot of people are saying that France is closer than ever to discussions with Germany, and even that the talks have already begun,' and the lover who fails to be convinced by the harshest rebuffs. 'In any case, if that is what he wants, he has only to say so, I am older than him, it is not up to me to make the first move.' And really there was no point in saying this, as it was so obvious. But also it was not even sincere, which is why one was so embarrassed for M. de Charlus, because one felt that by saying that it was not up to him to make the first move he was in fact making it, and was expecting me to offer to arrange the reconciliation.

Of course, I was familiar with the naïve or feigned credulity of people who love someone, or simply fail to be invited to someone's house, and impute to the person in question a desire which, despite tiresome solicitations, he has never manifested. But from the suddenly tremulous voice in which M. de Charlus uttered these words, from the uneasy look that flickered behind his eyes, I had the feeling that there was something other than ordinary insistence involved here. I was not mistaken, and I will recount straight away the two facts which subsequently showed me to have been right (I anticipate myself by a number of years for the second of these, which was posterior to the death of M. de Charlus. This did not occur until much later, and we shall have the opportunity of seeing him several times, considerably changed from the man we have known, at a time when he had completely forgotten about Morel.) As for the first of these events, it happened only two or three years after the evening on which I thus walked down the boulevards with M. de Charlus. About two years after this evening, I ran into Morel. Immediately I thought of M. de Charlus, and how pleased he would be to see the violinist again, and I pressed him to go and see him, even if only once. 'He has been good to you, I said to Morel, and now he is old, he may die, you ought to put your old quarrels aside and wipe out the traces of your feud.' Morel seemed to be entirely of my opinion about the desirability of making peace, but he none the less refused categorically to make even a single visit to M. de Charlus. 'You are wrong, I told him. Is it out of obstinacy, or laziness, or meanness, or misplaced vanity, or virtue (you can rest assured it won't be attacked), or coyness?' Then the violinist, his features distorted by an admission which must have been extremely hard to make, replied with a shudder: 'No, it's not anything like that; I don't give a damn about virtue. Meanness? On the contrary, I'm beginning to pity him. It is not coyness, there would be no point in that. Nor is it laziness, I have whole days with nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs. No, it's got nothing to do with any of those things, it's, don't mention this to anyone, I must be crazy to tell you, it's, it's… it's out of fear!' He began to tremble all over. I confessed that I did not understand him. 'No, don't ask me, let's not talk about it, you don't know him like I do, in fact I might say you don't know him at all. – But what harm can he do to you? And anyway he would be even less likely to do anything if there was no longer any bitterness between you. And you know that, fundamentally, he is very kind. – Good Lord, yes, I know how kind he is! And how considerate, and honest. But leave me alone, don't talk to me about it any more, I beg you, it makes me ashamed to say it, but I am afraid.'

The second event dates from after the death of M. de Charlus. I was brought a number of mementoes he had left me, along with a letter enclosed in three envelopes, written at least ten years before his death. At the time, he had been seriously ill, and had made his final arrangements, but then recovered his health, before later falling into the state in which we shall see him on the day of an afternoon party given by the Princesse de Guermantes – and the letter, placed in a strong-box with the objects he was bequeathing to various friends, had remained there for seven years, seven years in the course of which he had completely forgotten Morel. The letter, written in a fine, firm hand, took the following form:

My dear friend, the ways of Providence are inscrutable. Sometimes it uses the failing of a merely ordinary being to prevent a just man falling from his supereminence. You know Morel, whence he came, and the pinnacle to which I wanted to raise him, namely to my own level. You know that he preferred to return, not to the dust and as hes from which each man, for man is the true phoenix, may be reborn, but to the mud in which the viper crawls. His falling prevented worse befalling me. You know that my coat of arms contains the device of Our Lord himself: Inculcabis super leonem et aspidem,[65] *with a man represented as having beneath the soles of his feet, as heraldic support, a lion and a serpent. Now if I have been able thus to crush the lion that I am, it is thanks to the serpent and his prudence which a moment ago I too glibly called a failing, for the profound wisdom of the Gospel makes it a virtue, or at least a virtue for other people. Our serpent, whose hissings were once harmoniously modulated, when he had a charmer – himself much charmed, moreover – was not only musical and reptilian, he possessed to the point of cowardice this virtue, prudence, which I now take to be divine. It was this divine prudence that made him resist the appeals to come back and see me which I had others convey to him, and unless I confess this to you I shall have no peace in this world nor hope of forgiveness in the next. In this he was the instrument of divine wisdom, for I was resolved that he should not leave my house alive. One of the two of us had to disappear. I had decided to kill him. God counselled him prudence to save me from a crime. I do not doubt that the intercession of the Archangel Michael, my patron saint, played a large part in this and I beseech him to pardon me for having so neglected him over the years and for having responded so ill to the innumerable kindnesses he has shown me, most of all in my struggle against evil. I owe to this servant of God, and I say this in the fullness of my faith and of my understanding, the fact that the heavenly Father inspired Morel not to come. And so it is I now who am dying. Your faithfully devoted*, Semper idem,

P. G. Charlus.

Then I understood Morel's fear; the letter, of course, contained its share of literariness and pride. But the confession was true. And Morel knew better than I that the 'almost mad side' that Mme de Guermantes discerned in her brother-in-law was not confined, as I had previously thought, to those momentary exhibitions of superficial and ineffective rage.

But we must go back to where we were. I am walking down the boulevards beside M. de Charlus, who has just conceived the idea that I might be some sort of intermediary between himself and Morel. Seeing that I did not respond, he continued: 'Anyway, I don't know why he does not still play, people don't make music any more, on the grounds that there is a war on, but they dance, and go out to dine, and women invent things like "Amberine" for their skin. Parties fill up what may perhaps, if the Germans advance any further, be the last days of our Pompeii. And that is what will save it from frivolity. If the lava of some German Vesuvius (their naval guns are quite as terrible as a volcano) should come and surprise them at their toilet, preserving them for eternity in mid-gesture, children one day will learn from looking at pictures in their school-books showing Mme Molé about to apply a final layer of powder before going to dine with a sister-in-law, or Sosthène de Guermantes finishing painting his false eyebrows. This will provide lecture material for the Brichots of the future, for the frivolity of a period, when ten centuries have elapsed, is a subject for the most serious erudition, especially if it has been preserved intact by a volcanic eruption or by the lava-like substances thrown up by bombardment. What documents for history in the future if asphyxiating gases like the fumes emitted by Vesuvius, or complete ruin of the sort that entombed Pompeii, should preserve intact all the imprudent households that have not yet sent their paintings and statues away to Bayonne! And, anyway, has it not been somewhat like that for the last year, fragments of Pompeii every evening, with people running to their cellars, not to fetch up some old bottle of Mouton-Rothschild or Saint-Émilion, but to hide along with themselves their most valuable possessions, like the priests of Herculaneum overtaken by death in the act of transporting the sacred vessels? Attachment to an object always brings death to its owner. Paris, I grant you, was not founded by Hercules, as Herculaneum was. But how many resemblances there are between them! And the ability that we have been granted to see these things so clearly is not unique to our epoch, every period has possessed it. While I may think that tomorrow we may meet the fate of the cities of Vesuvius, they in their turn felt threatened by the fate that befell the accursed cities of the Bible. On the walls of one house in Pompeii was discovered the revealing inscription: *Sodoma, Gomora*.' I do not know whether it was the name Sodom and the ideas it awoke in him, or the idea of bombardment, which made M. de Charlus for an instant raise his eyes to the heavens, but he soon brought them back to earth. 'I admire all the heroes of this war, he said. Think, my dear fellow, the English soldiers whom at the start of the war I rather thoughtlessly regarded as mere football players presumptuous enough to measure themselves against professionals – and what professionals! – well, in purely aesthetic terms they are quite simply Greek athletes, if you see what I mean, they are Greek, dear boy, they are Plato's young men, or better, Spartans. I have some friends who have been to Rouen where their camp is, and they have seen wonderful things, almost unimaginably wonderful. It is not Rouen any longer, it is another town. Obviously the old Rouen is still there, with the emaciated saints on the cathedral. And that is beautiful too, of course, but it is something

different. And our *poilus*! I cannot tell you how delicious I find our *poilus*, the young lads from Paris, look, like that one walking along over there, with his knowing expression and his funny, wide-awake face. I often stop them and have a few minutes' chat with them, and how intelligent and sensible they are! And the country boys, how amusing and pleasant they are, with their rolled rs and their provincial dialects! I have always spent a lot of time in the country, sleeping in farmhouses, I can talk to them. But our admiration for the French must not make us disparage our enemies, that would only diminish us. You don't know what kind of soldier the German soldier is, you haven't seen him as I have marching past on parade, goose-stepping down *Unter den Linden*.' And returning to the ideal of manhood which he had outlined for me at Balbec, and which, over time, had taken on a more philosophical form in his mind, but also using absurd arguments which, at times, even when he had just been unusually intelligent, revealed the rather narrow outlook of a plain society gentleman, albeit an intelligent one: 'You see, he said to me, that superb, strapping lad, the Boche soldier, is a strong and healthy individual, who thinks only of his country's greatness. *Deutschland über alles*, which is not so stupid, given that we – while they were preparing themselves so manfully – we were mired in dilettantism.' For M. de Charlus, this word probably signified something analogous to literature, for immediately, recollecting no doubt that I was fond of literature and had at one time intended to devote myself to it, he clapped me on the shoulder (taking the opportunity to lean on me so heavily that it hurt as much as did long ago, when I was doing my military service, the recoil of a '76 against my shoulder-blade), and said, as if to soften the criticism: 'Yes, we were mired in dilettantism, all of us, you too, you remember, like me you may say your *mea culpa*, we have been too dilettante.' Out of surprise at the reproach, lack of any quick repartee, deference towards my interlocutor and affection for his friendly kindness, I responded as if I also, as he urged, had reason to beat my breast, which was completely stupid, as I had not the least grain of dilettantism to reproach myself for. 'Well, he said, I must leave you' (the group which had escorted him at a distance having finally abandoned us), 'I must go and put myself to bed like a very old gentleman, especially as it seems that the war has changed all our habits, to use one of those foolish aphorisms that Norpois is so fond of.' I knew, however, that by going home M. de Charlus would not thereby be leaving the company of soldiers, as he had converted his house into a military hospital, and in doing this, I believe, had yielded far less to the demands of his imagination than to those of his kind heart.

It was a transparent night without a breath of wind; I imagined that the Seine flowing through its circular bridges, composites of the arches and their reflections, must look like the Bosporus. And, a symbol perhaps of the invasion predicted in the defeatism of M. de Charlus, or perhaps of the cooperation of our Muslim brothers with the armies of France, the moon, narrow and curved like a sequin, seemed to set the Parisian sky under the Oriental sign of the crescent.

For a few moments more, however, as he bade me farewell, he pressed my hand in a crushing grip, a peculiarly German habit among people of the Baron's sort, and continuing for several moments, as Cottard might have said, to knead my hand, it was as if M. de Charlus had wanted to restore to my joints a suppleness which they had never lost. In some blind men, touch compensates to some extent for the absence of sight. I am not quite sure which sense it was replacing here. He may have believed he was merely shaking my hand, as he doubtless believed he was merely seeing a Senegalese soldier who was passing in the darkness and did not deign to notice that he was being admired. But in both instances the Baron was mistaken, the intensity of contact and of gaze exceeding the bounds of propriety. 'Doesn't that embody all the Orient of Decamps, Fromentin, Ingres and Delacroix?' he asked, still immobilized by the passing Senegalese. 'You know, personally, things and people only ever interest me as a painter, or a philosopher. Besides, I am too old. But how unfortunate that, to complete the picture, one of us is not an odalisque!'

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It was not the Orient of Decamps, nor even of Delacroix, that started to haunt my imagination after the Baron had left me, but the old Orient of the *Arabian Nights* which I had loved so much, and as I plunged deeper into the maze of these dark streets I thought of the Caliph Harun-al-Rashid seeking for adventure in the hidden quarters of Baghdad. The hot weather and my walk had made me thirsty, but all the bars were long since shut and, because of the petrol shortage, the few taxis I came across, driven by Levantines or negroes, did not even bother to respond to my signals. The only place where I might have been able to get a drink and to gather my strength for the walk home would have been a hotel.

But in the street where I found myself, some distance from the centre of the city, all the hotels, since the Gothas had started dropping their bombs on Paris, had closed. The same was true of almost all the shops, the shop-keepers, either because of a lack of staff or because they themselves had taken fright, having fled to the country, and left the usual handwritten notice announcing that they would reopen, although even that seemed problematic, at some date far in the future. The few establishments which had still managed to survive similarly announced that they would open only twice a week. The whole quarter exuded a sense of poverty, neglect and fear. I was therefore all the more surprised to see that among these abandoned houses there was one where life seemed, on the contrary, to have triumphed over fear and bankruptcy and where activity and wealth continued to flourish. Behind the closed shutters of each window the lights, dimmed on account of the police regulations, none the less revealed a total disregard for economy. And at every moment the door opened to allow some new visitor to enter or leave. It was a hotel which (because of the money its owners must have been making) must have aroused the jealousy of all the neighbouring shop-keepers; and my curiosity was also aroused when, some fifteen metres away from me, that is to say too far away for me to be able, in the profound darkness, to make out who it was, I saw an officer hurriedly leaving it.

Something about him struck me, all the same; it was not his face, which I did not see, nor his uniform, which was concealed under a heavy greatcoat, but the extraordinary disproportion between the number of different points through which his body passed and the small number of seconds it took for him to effect this exit, which looked like an attempted dash to safety on the part of somebody under siege. So that I was reminded, even if I did not actually recognize him – I will not say exactly of the frame, or the slenderness, or the gait, or the speed of Saint-Loup – but of the sort of ubiquity which was so peculiar to him. The soldier who was capable of occupying so many different positions in space in such a short time had disappeared down a side-street without seeing me, and I stood there wondering whether or not I should enter the hotel, the modest appearance of which made me doubt very much whether it was Saint-Loup who had left it.

Involuntarily I recalled that Saint-Loup had been unjustly implicated in a case of espionage because his name had been found on some letters captured on a German officer. He had, of course, been completely cleared by the military authorities. But in spite of myself I connected this memory with what I had just seen. Was this hotel being used as a meeting-place for spies? The officer had been gone only a few moments when I saw some private soldiers from various branches of the service, which added further to my suspicions. On the other hand, I was extremely thirsty. I would probably be able to find something to drink there, and I might also have an opportunity, despite my anxiety at the prospect, to try to assuage my curiosity.

I do not think, therefore, that it was curiosity about my encounter which made me decide to climb the short flight of steps, at the top of which the door to a sort of lobby was open, doubtless because of the heat. I thought at first that I would not be able to satisfy my new-found curiosity, for from the steps, where I remained in shadow, I saw several people come and ask for a room only to be told that there was not a single one left. There could be nothing against them, though, except that they were obviously not part of the nest of spies, for a common sailor who appeared a moment later was speedily given room number 28. From my unseen position in the darkness, I could observe several soldiers and two working-class men who were chatting peacefully in a stifling little room, brashly decorated with coloured pictures of women cut out of illustrated magazines and reviews. These men, chatting peacefully, displayed undeniably patriotic views: 'In the end it doesn't matter, you have to do what your mates do,' said one. 'Oh, you can be quite sure I don't intend to get killed,' another, who, from what I could gather, was leaving the next day for a dangerous position, replied to some expression of good wishes which I had not heard. 'Blimey, at twenty-two, after just six months, it would be a bit steep,' he exclaimed in a voice that revealed, even more than the desire to live for a long time, a consciousness of the justice of his reasoning, as if the fact that he was only twenty-two had to give him a better chance of not being killed, and as if it were quite impossible that such a thing might happen. 'It's amazing in Paris, said another; you wouldn't think there was a war on. What about you, Julot, are you still going to join up? – Of course I'm going to join up, I

want to get in a few shots at those dirty Boches. – But that Joffre, he's just a man who sleeps with politicians' wives, he's never done anything himself. – It's awful to say things like that,' said a slightly older airman, and turning to the workman who had just made the statement: 'I'd advise you not to talk like that in the front line, you'd soon get done in by the *poilus*.' The banality of the conversation did not make me very keen to hear more of it, and I was about to go in or go back down the steps when I was jolted out of my indifference by an exchange which made me shudder: 'It's amazing the boss isn't back yet. Christ, I don't know where he'll find chains at this time of night. – But the guy's already tied up, isn't he? – Sure he is, up to a point. But if I was tied up like that I'd be able to undo my chains. – But they're padlocked. – Of course they're padlocked, but it's not impossible to open a padlock. What it is, the chains aren't long enough. – Don't tell me what it is, I was beating him all last night till my hands were covered in blood. – Is it you that's beating him tonight? – No, not me. It's Maurice. But it'll be me on Sunday, the boss promised me.' I realized now why the sturdy arm of the sailor had been needed. If they had turned away peaceable citizens, it was not because the hotel was a nest of spies. A terrible crime was about to be committed, unless somebody arrived in time to reveal it and have the culprits arrested. And yet the whole thing, in this peaceful but ominous night, had the appearance of a dream or a fairy-tale, and so it was both with the pride of a champion of justice and the delight of a poet that I resolutely entered the hotel.

I touched my hat lightly, and the people in the room, without getting up, responded more or less politely to my greeting. 'Could you please tell me who I should speak to? I should like a room, and something to drink sent up to it. – You'd better wait a minute, the boss has gone out. – But the owner's here, he's upstairs, put in one of the men who had been talking. – But you know he can't be disturbed. – Do you think they'll give me a room? – I should think so. – 43 must be free,' said the young man who was sure he would not be killed because he was twenty-two. And he moved a little way along the sofa to make room for me. 'Perhaps someone could open the window a bit, it's very smoky in here!' said the airman; and indeed each of them had a pipe or a cigarette. 'Yes, but then close the shutters first, remember it's forbidden to show any light because of the Zeppelins. – There won't be any more Zeppelins over. There was even something in the papers about them all being shot down. – Won't be any more over, won't be any more over, what do you know about it? When you've had fifteen months at the front like me, and shot down your fifth Boche aeroplane, then you can talk. You don't want to believe the papers. They were over Compiègne yesterday, they killed a mother and two children. – A mother and two children!' said the young man who hoped not to be killed, with fiery eyes and a look of deep pity on his lively, open and extremely likeable face. 'There's been no news of big Julot. His "godmother" hasn't had a letter from him for eight days, and that's the first time he's gone so long without writing. – Who is his "godmother"? – She's the woman who looks after the public convenience just past the Olympia. – Are they sleeping together? – What are you on about? She's a married woman, very respectable. She sends him money every week out of the kindness of her heart. She's really nice, she is. – So you know big Julot, do you? – Do I know him!' rejoined the young man of twenty-two with enthusiasm. 'He's one of my best and closest friends. There aren't many I'd rate as high as him, he's a good mate, he'd do anything for you. You're dead right, it'd be a disaster if something's happened to him.' Somebody suggested a game of dice, and from the feverish haste with which the young man of twenty-two threw the dice and shouted out the results, his eyes starting from his head, it was easy to see that he had a

gambler's temperament. I did not catch the next thing that was said, but he exclaimed in a deeply pitying voice: 'Julot a pimp! You mean he says he's a pimp. But he couldn't pimp even if he tried. I've seen him with my own eyes paying his girl, actually paying her. I mean I'm not saying that Algerian Jeanne didn't use to give him something, but never more than five francs, and she was working in a brothel, she was earning over fifty francs a day. Giving him just five francs, how stupid can a guy be! And now she's at the front, it's a hard life, granted, but she can make as much as she wants. And she doesn't send him a thing. Huh, a pimp, Julot? There's plenty could call themselves pimps at that rate. Not only is he not a pimp, but if you want my opinion, he's a bloody fool.' The oldest of the group, whom, doubtless because of his age, the manager had charged with maintaining a degree of respectability, had gone to the lavatory for a moment, and heard only the end of this conversation. But he could not help looking over at me and appeared visibly upset at the effect it must have had on me. Without addressing himself specifically to the young man of twenty-two, although it was he who had just been expounding this theory of venal love, he said, in a general way: 'You're talking too much, and it's too loud, the window is open, and some people are asleep at this time of night. You know perfectly well that if the boss came back and heard you talking like that, he wouldn't like it.'

At that precise moment we heard the door open, and everybody fell silent, thinking it was the manager, but it was only a foreign chauffeur, who was warmly welcomed by everybody. But seeing a splendid watch-chain prominently displayed on the chauffeur's jacket, the young man of twenty-two threw him an interrogative and amused glance, followed by a frown and a severe wink in my direction. And I understood that the first look meant: 'What's that? Did you steal it? Congratulations.' And the second: 'Don't say anything, because of this bloke we don't know.' Suddenly the manager came in, carrying several metres of heavy iron chain, enough to chain up several convicts, sweating, and said: 'What a weight! If you weren't all so lazy, I wouldn't have to go and get them myself.' I told him that I wanted a room. 'Just for a few hours, I couldn't find a cab and I'm feeling a little ill. But I would like something to drink sent up. – Pierrot, go down to the cellar and get some cassis, and tell them to get number 43 ready. There's number 7 ringing again. They say they're ill. Ill my foot, I think they've been taking coke, they look half-shot. Better kick them out. Has 22 had clean sheets? Good. There goes 7 again, run and see to it. Come on, Maurice, what are you standing about for? You know someone's waiting for you, get up to 14b. And hurry up about it.' And Maurice left hastily, following the manager, who, a bit annoyed about my seeing the chains, disappeared with them. 'How come you're so late?' the young man of twenty-two asked the chauffeur. 'What do you mean, late? I'm an hour early. But it's too hot for walking about. I'm not meant to be meeting him until midnight. – Who have you come for then? – For the lovely Pamela,' said the oriental chauffeur, whose smile revealed his fine white teeth. 'Ah!' said the young man of twenty-two.

Soon I was taken up to Room 43, but the room was so unpleasantly airless and my curiosity was so great that, once I'd drunk my cassis, I went downstairs again, then, a new idea having struck me, I went back up, past the floor that Room 43 was on, as far as the top floor. Suddenly, from a room set apart from the others at the end of a corridor, I thought I heard stifled moans. I walked quickly in their direction and placed my ear to the door. 'I beg you, mercy, mercy, have pity, untie me, don't hit me so hard, said a voice. I'll crawl, I'll kiss your feet, I shan't do it again. Have pity. – No, you piece of filth, replied another voice, and if you scream and drag yourself about on your knees like that, you'll be tied to the bed, and there'll be no mercy,' and I heard the sound of a whip, probably one with nails to give it extra sharpness, for it was followed by cries of pain. Then I noticed that the room had a small round side-window and that somebody had forgotten to draw the curtain behind it; advancing stealthily through the darkness, I slid up to the window and there, chained to a bed like Prometheus to his rock, receiving the blows which Maurice was delivering with a whip which was indeed studded with nails, I saw, already running with blood, and covered in bruises which proved that the flogging was not happening for the first time, there, right in front of me, I saw M. de Charlus.

Suddenly the door opened and somebody came in who fortunately did not see me. It was Jupien. He approached the Baron respectfully and with a smile of complicity: 'So, you don't need me?' The Baron asked Jupien to send Maurice out of the room for a moment. Jupien did so without a second thought. 'Nobody can hear us, can they?' said the Baron to Jupien, who assured him that nobody could. The Baron knew that Jupien, although as intelligent as a man of letters, had no practical sense at all, and was always talking about people in their presence, dropping hints in ways which deceived nobody and using nicknames which everybody recognized.

'Just a second,' interrupted Jupien, who had heard a bell ring in room number 3. It was a Deputy from *Action libérale*,[66] who was leaving. Jupien did not need to look at the bell-board, for he recognized the ring, as in fact the Deputy came every day after lunch. He had been forced to change his time on this occasion, as his daughter's wedding had taken place at noon at Saint-Pierre-de-Chaillot. He had therefore come in the evening but was anxious to leave early because of his wife, who became worried very easily when he was late home, especially in these days of bombardment. Jupien liked to show him out himself in order to demonstrate his deference for the title of 'honourable member', but he had no personal interest in him. For although the Deputy, who repudiated the extreme

positions of the *Action française*[67] (and anyway would have been incapable of understanding a word of Charles Maurras or Léon Daudet), was well in with the ministers, whom he flattered by inviting them to his shoots, Jupien would not have dared to ask him for the slightest support in his troubles with the police. He knew that, if he had taken the risk of mentioning it to the well-provided but pusillanimous legislator, he would not only not have avoided even the most harmless raid, but would instantly have lost the most generous of his clients. After having escorted the Deputy as far as the door, where he pulled his hat down over his eyes, turned up his collar, and glided away with the same slickness that he employed in his electoral addresses, hoping thereby to hide his features, Jupien went back upstairs to M. de Charlus, to whom he said: 'That was M. Eugène.' At Jupien's establishment, as in sanatoriums, people were known only by their first names, although to satisfy the curiosity of the regular visitors, or to enhance the prestige of the house, their real names were generally added in a whisper. Sometimes, however, Jupien was unaware of the real identity of a client, and would imagine, and say, that he was some stockbroker or nobleman or artist, short-lived mistakes that amused those who were given the wrong name, and in the end would have to resign himself to the fact that he still did not know who M. Victor was. So, to please the Baron, Jupien would habitually reverse the procedure proper to certain sorts of gathering. 'May I introduce M. Lebrun? (then, in a whisper: 'He likes to be known as M. Lebrun but he is really a Russian Grand Duke'). Jupien, by contrast, felt that it was not quite enough to introduce M. de Charlus to a milkman. He would murmur to him with a wink: 'He works as a milkman, but really he's one of the most dangerous villains in Belleville' (the salacious tone in which Jupien said the word 'villain' was something to hear). And if these references were insufficient, he would attempt to add a few 'citations'. 'He's been convicted several times for house-breaking and theft, he's been in Fresnes for assaulting (the same salacious note) people in the street and practically crippling them, and he was in the punishment battalion in Africa. He killed his sergeant.'

The Baron even bore a slight grudge against Jupien because he knew that in this house, which he had instructed his factotum to buy for him and to manage through a subordinate, everybody, as a result of the tactlessness of Mlle d'Oloron's uncle, was more or less aware of his identity and his name (though many thought it was only a nickname, which they then distorted by mispronouncing it, so that their own stupidity, rather than Jupien's discretion, had become the Baron's protection). But he found it simpler to allow himself to be reassured by Jupien's assurances, and, soothed by the knowledge that they could not be heard, the Baron said to him: 'I did not want to say anything in front of that boy, who is very nice and who does the best he can. But he is not rough enough. I like his face, but when he calls me a piece of filth, it's as if he were just reciting a lesson. – Oh no, nobody has said a word to him,' replied Jupien, not seeing the improbability of this assertion. 'What's more, he was involved in the murder of a concierge at La Villette. – Ah! that's more interesting, said the Baron with a smile. – But I tell you what, I do have the ox-killer here, the slaughterhouse man, and he looks quite similar. He just happened to drop in. Would you like to try him? – Oh yes, I certainly would.' I saw the slaughterhouse man enter the room, and he did indeed look a little like Maurice, but the odd thing was that both of them possessed something which, although I had never consciously noticed it, I now recognized as being typical of Morel's appearance; they bore a resemblance, if not to Morel as I had seen him, at least to a face which somebody seeing Morel with eyes other than mine might have put together out of his features. The minute that I had formed, out of the features borrowed from my memories of Morel, this mental sketch of the way that he might appear to somebody else, I realized that both these young men, one of whom was a jeweller's assistant and the other a hotel employee, were in some vague way substitutes for Morel. Was I to conclude from this that M. de Charlus, at least in one aspect of his loves, was always faithful to a specific type and that the desire which had made him choose these two men one after another was the same as that which had made him stop Morel on the station platform at Doncières; that all three somewhat resembled the ephebe whose form, intagliated on the sapphire of M. de Charlus's eyes, gave his expression that curious quality which had alarmed me so much the first day in Balbec? Or that, his love for Morel having modified the ideal type he was searching for, to console himself for Morel's absence he sought out men who looked like him? One other possibility that occurred to me was that perhaps, in spite of appearances, there had never been anything but a relation of friendship between Morel and himself, and that M. de Charlus persuaded young men who bore some resemblance to Morel to come to Jupien's so that he could have the illusion, with them, of taking his pleasure with Morel himself. Thinking of everything that M. de Charlus had done for Morel, this possibility would admittedly have seemed unlikely, if one were not also aware that love not only drives us to make the greatest sacrifices for the person we love, but also sometimes drives us to the sacrifice of our desire itself, which moreover is all the harder to satisfy when the person we love senses that we love them with an unreciprocated intensity.

Another thing that makes this possibility less unlikely than at first it seems (even though it probably does not correspond to the reality) lies in the nervous temperament and the profoundly passionate character of M. de Charlus, in which he resembled Saint-Loup, and which may have played the same part at the outset of his relations with Morel, in a more decent and negative way, that it did at the start of his nephew's relationship with Rachel. Relations with a woman one loves (and this also goes for the love of a young man) may remain platonic for reasons other than the woman's virtue or the unsensual nature of the love that she inspires. It may be that the lover, made over-impatient by the extremity of his love, cannot wait with a sufficient pretence of indifference for the moment when he will obtain his desire. He constantly returns to the attack, writes incessantly to the woman he loves, tries all the time to see her, she refuses, he is in despair. At that point she understands: if she grants him her company and her friendship, these will seem such substantial blessings to him who thought he would never attain them, that she can refrain from giving him anything else, and take advantage of a moment when he can no longer bear not to see her, when he wants to end the war at any price, to impose upon him a peace whose prime condition will be the platonic nature of their relationship. Furthermore, for the whole of the time leading up to this treaty, the lover, always anxious, constantly waiting for a letter, or a look, has ceased to think about physical possession, the desire for which had tormented him to begin with, but which has become worn out with waiting and been replaced by needs of a different sort which, if not satisfied, are even more painful. Then the pleasure, which at the outset one had hoped to obtain from caresses, one receives later recast in the form of friendly words, promises of her presence, which, after the pangs of uncertainty, sometimes simply after a look from eyes clouded with coldness, making her seem so distant that one thinks one will never see her again, bring with them a delicious easing of tension. Women divine all this, and know that they can afford the luxury of never giving themselves to men of whose incurable desire for them, if they were too agitated to hide it from them at the beginning, they have become aware. The woman is only too happy that, without giving anything, she receives much more than she usually gets when she gives herself. In this way, these temperamental men come to believe in the virtue of their idols. And the halo they place upon them is thus a product, albeit as we have seen an indirect one, of the extremity of their love. The woman then has something of the same effect as occurs in a mechanical way with unwittingly crafty drugs, such as morphine or the soporifics. It is not the people to whom they bring the pleasure of sleep or genuine well-being who find them absolutely necessary, not these who would pay anything for them or exchange them for all the sick person possesses, but those other sick people (who may indeed be the same individuals, having, after several years, become irretrievably altered), for whom the drug no longer brings sleep, to whom it gives no thrill of pleasure, but who, as long as they do not have it, are prey to an agitation which they want to end at any price, even if it means their death.

For M. de Charlus, whose situation, by and large, allowing for the slight differentiation due to identity of sex, falls under the general laws of love, it did not matter that he belonged to a family older than the Capets,[68] that he was rich, that he was sought after in vain by smart society while Morel was nobody, it would have been no use saying to Morel, as he had said to me: 'I am a prince, I have your interests at heart,' Morel still had the upper hand so long as he did not want to surrender. And for him not to want to, it was perhaps enough that he felt loved. The horror that grand people have for the snobs who strive so hard to make their acquaintance is also felt by masculine men for inverts, and by women for every man who is too much in love with them. M. de Charlus not only possessed every advantage himself, but would have offered enormous advantages to Morel. But it is possible that all this was unavailing against will-power. In which case there would have been a similarity between M. de Charlus and the Germans, with whom in fact by descent he belonged, and who, in the war as it was progressing at that moment, were indeed, as the Baron was rather too fond of repeating, victorious on all fronts. But what good were these victories to them when, after each one, they found the Allies more determined than ever to refuse the one thing that they, the Germans, had hoped to obtain, namely peace and reconciliation? Napoleon, too, entered Russia and magnanimously invited the authorities to meet with him. But nobody came.

I went back downstairs and into the little ante-room where Maurice, uncertain whether he would be called back, and whom Jupien had told to wait just in case, was in the middle of a game of cards with one of his friends. There was a great deal of excitement about a *croix de guerre* which had been found on the floor: nobody knew who had lost it and to whom it should be returned to prevent the owner's being punished. Then there was talk about the generosity of an officer who had been killed trying to save his batman. 'You see? Some rich people are all right. I wouldn't mind getting myself killed for someone like that,' said Maurice, who obviously performed his terrible fustigations of the Baron only out of mechanical habit, a neglected education, need of money and a preference for getting it in a way that was meant to be less trouble than working, but which may in fact have been worse. But, as M. de Charlus had feared, he was perhaps a kind-hearted young man, as well, it seemed, as admirably brave. He practically had tears in his eyes as he spoke of the officer's death, and the young man of twenty-two was no less upset. 'Yes, they're good blokes all right. Poor sods like us haven't got much to lose, but a gentleman who's got loads of servants, who can go out for fancy drinks at six o'clock every day, that's pretty wonderful! You can laugh if you like, but when you see blokes like that dying it really gets to you. God shouldn't let rich blokes like that die, apart from anything else they're too useful to us workers. A death like that, you want to kill all the Boches, every single one; and as for what they did at Louvain, and cutting the hands off little kids! No, I don't know, I'm no better than anyone else, but I'd sooner refuse and get a bullet in the head than obey orders from barbarians like them; because they aren't men, they're just barbarians, there's no other word for them.' All these young men were patriots really. Only one, who had a slight arm-wound and was soon going to have to return to the front, was not quite so enthusiastic as the others, saying: 'It wasn't the right sort of wound, worse luck' (the sort that gets you discharged as unfit), in the same way as Mme Swann used once to say: 'I've somehow managed to catch this tiresome influenza.'

The door opened to re-admit the chauffeur, who had gone out for a moment to get a breath of fresh air. 'What, finished already? That didn't take long,' he said catching sight of Maurice, whom he had thought would still be busy beating the person they had nicknamed *The Man in Chains*, an allusion to a newspaper that was appearing at the time.[69] 'It may not seem long to you, out there in the fresh air,' replied Maurice, ruffled at being seen to have failed to give satisfaction upstairs. 'But if you'd had to beat someone as hard as you could in this heat, like I have! If it wasn't for the fifty francs I get. – But he's well-spoken, you can see he's educated. Did he say it'll soon be over? – He says we'll never be able to beat them, it'll end without either side winning. – For God's sake, he must be a Boche then… – I told you before, you're talking too loud,' said the older man to the others, noticing me. 'Have you finished with the room? – Oh, shut up, you're not in charge here. – Yes, I've finished, I've come to pay. – It'd be better if you paid the boss. Maurice, go and find him. – But I don't want to put you to any trouble. – It's no trouble.' Maurice went upstairs and came back saying: 'The boss is just coming down.' I gave him two francs for his pains. He blushed with pleasure. 'Oh, thanks very much. I'll send it to my brother who's a prisoner. No, he's not too badly off. It depends a lot on what camp you're in.'

While this was going on, two very elegant clients, wearing white tie and tails beneath their overcoats – two Russians, – I thought from their slight accent – were standing in the doorway and deliberating whether or not they should enter. It was clearly the first time they had been there, somebody must have told them about the place, and they seemed torn between desire, temptation and very cold feet. One of them – a good-looking young man – kept saying every few moments to the other, with a smile that was half enquiring and half intended to persuade: 'Well? After all, what does it matter?' But although he may have meant by that after all the consequences did not matter, it is likely that it mattered more than he let on, for the remark was followed not by any motion of entering but by another glance towards his friend, followed by the same smile and the same *after all, what does it matter?* This *after all, what does it matter?* was a very good example of that wonderful language, so different from the one we normally speak, in which emotion deflects what we wanted to say and in its place brings into being a quite different phrase, which emerges from an unknown lake where all these expressions live that are unrelated to thought but which for precisely that reason reveal what we are thinking. I remember how once Albertine, just as Françoise, whom we had not heard, was coming into the room at a moment when my lover was completely naked in my arms, said without thinking, in an attempt to warn me: 'Oh heavens, here's the lovely Françoise!' Françoise, whose sight was no longer very good and who was merely going across the room at some distance from us, would probably not have noticed anything. But the unfamiliar words 'the lovely Françoise', which Albertine had never uttered before in her life, themselves betrayed their origin, she sensed that they had been garnered randomly by emotion, did not need to see anything to understand everything, and went out muttering in her dialect the word 'poutana'.[70] And another time, much later, when Bloch, by then a family man, had married off one of his daughters to a Catholic, an ill-bred gentleman said to her that he thought he had heard that she was the daughter of a Jew and asked her his name. The young woman, who had been Mlle Bloch since her birth, replied, pronouncing it in the German way, just as the Duc de Guermantes might have done, 'Bloch' (pronouncing the *ch* not as a *c* or a *k* but with a Germanic *ch*).

But to go back to the scene in the hotel (the two Russians having finally decided to take the plunge: 'after all, what does it matter?'), the manager had still not arrived when Jupien came in to complain that people were talking too loud and that the neighbours would complain. But when he saw me he stopped in amazement. 'Outside on the landing, all of you.' But as they were all jumping up, I said to him: 'It would be easier if these young men stayed here and you and I went outside for a moment.' He followed me, extremely flustered. I explained why I was there. Clients could be heard asking the manager whether he couldn't introduce them to a footman, a choirboy or a black chauffeur. Every occupation interested these old maniacs, as well as troops from every branch of the services, and from all the Allied nations. Some asked especially for Canadians, influenced perhaps unwittingly by the charm of an accent so slight that it is difficult to know whether it comes from an older France or from England. Because of their kilts, and because certain lacustrine dreams are often associated with these desires, the Scots were at a premium. And as every sort of madness derives its particular traits from circumstances, if indeed it is not intensified by them, one old man, whose curiosity had doubtless been assuaged on every other front, was insistently asking whether it might be possible for him to meet a disabled soldier. We heard slow footsteps on the stairs. With his natural indiscretion Jupien could not help telling me that it was the Baron who was coming down, and that whatever happened he must not see me, but that if I wanted to go into the bedroom adjacent to the lobby where the young men were, he would open the fanlight, a method he had devised so that the Baron could see and hear without being seen, and which, he said, he would turn to my advantage against him. 'Only don't move.' And having pushed me into the darkness, he left me. There was no other room he could give me, anyway, his hotel, despite the war, being full. The one I had just left had been taken by the Vicomte de Courvoisier, who, having managed to leave the Red Cross at —— for two days, had come to relax in Paris for an hour before going on to join the Vicomtesse at the Château de Courvoisier, where he would say that he had not been able to catch the fast train. He never suspected that M. de Charlus was a few metres away from him, any more than the latter suspected his presence, never having encountered his cousin at Jupien's establishment, where even Jupien was unaware of the Vicomte's carefully concealed identity.

The Baron soon came in, walking with some difficulty on account of his injuries, even though he obviously must have been used to them. Although he had had his pleasure and came in only to give Maurice the money he owed him, he let his eyes travel, with a tender and curious gaze, around the whole circle of young men, clearly intending to enjoy with each of them the pleasure of a few quite platonic but lovingly prolonged words. And once again, in the spirited frivolity he displayed in the face of this harem which seemed almost to intimidate him, I recognized that manner of moving his body and tossing his head, those rarefied glances, which had struck me on the evening of his first appearance at La Raspelière, graces inherited from a grandmother whom I had not known and which in his everyday life were concealed on his face by more masculine expressions, but which would be caused to blossom there coquettishly, in certain circumstances where he was anxious to please an inferior audience, by the desire to appear a *grande dame*.

Jupien had commended them to the Baron's good favour by swearing to him that they were all Belleville pimps and that they would sell their own sisters for a few francs. And in fact what Jupien said was simultaneously both untrue and true. Better, and less insensitive than he claimed to the Baron, they did not belong to a race of savages. But the people who believed them to be villains none the less talked to them with complete honesty, as if these terrifying beings were bound to do the same. A sadist may believe he is with a murderer, but his purity of mind is not thereby altered, and he will still be amazed by the way these people lie, who are not murderers at all, but simply trying to turn an easy 'buck', and whose fathers or mothers or sisters are alternately brought back to life and killed off again,

as they contradict themselves in conversations with the client whom they are trying to please. The client, in his naïvety, and with his arbitrary conception of the gigolo, is stunned, for while he is delighted by the number of murders he believes him to be guilty of, he is horrified by each lie or contradiction he discovers in his words.

Everybody seemed to know him, and M. de Charlus paused for a long while with each one, talking to them in what he took to be their own language, both out of a pretentious affectation of local colour and because he took a masochistic pleasure in mixing with the world of villainy. 'You, you're disgusting, I saw you outside the Olympia with two scrubbers. Trying to get hold of a few readies, I expect. That's the way you cheat on me.' Fortunately for the man to whom these words were addressed, he did not have time to declare that he would never have accepted 'readies' from a woman, a fact which would have diminished the Baron's excitement, and reserved his protest for the concluding phrase, saying: 'Oh no, I don't cheat on you.' This remark gave keen pleasure to M. de Charlus, and as, in spite of himself, the kind of intelligence which was naturally his emerged from beneath the façade he affected, he turned to Jupien: 'It is nice of him to say that. And how well he says it! One might almost think it was the truth. Anyway, what does it matter whether it is the truth or not since he manages to make me believe it? What pretty little eyes he's got. Look, I'm going to give you two big kisses for your trouble, dear boy. You will think of me in the trenches. It's not too bad there, is it? – Blimey, there are some days when a grenade goes past your ear…' And the young man proceeded to imitate the sound of the grenade, the aeroplanes, etc. 'But you just have to get on with it like everyone else, we'll carry on right to the end, you can count on that. – To the end! If only one knew what the end will be!' said the Baron melancholically, being a 'pessimist'. 'You didn't see what Sarah Bernhardt said in the papers: "France will go on to the end. The French will give up their lives, down to the last man." – I do not doubt for a moment that the French will fight bravely to the last man,' said M. de Charlus as if it were the simplest thing in the world, and although he himself had no intention of doing anything at all. But by saying it he was trying to correct the impression of pacifism he made when he forgot himself. 'I do not doubt it, but I do wonder how far *Madame* Sarah Bernhardt is qualified to speak in the name of France. But I don't think I know this charming, this delightful young man,' he added, catching sight of another, whom he did not recognize or perhaps had never seen before. He greeted him as he might have greeted a prince at Versailles, and, in order to make the most of the chance of some free supplementary pleasure, just as when I was little and my mother had completed an order at Boissier's or Gouache's,[71] I would take, at the invitation of one of the ladies behind the counter, a sweet from one of the glass jars between which they held sway, taking the hand of the charming young man and pressing it in his for several moments, in the Prussian manner, gazing at him with a smile for the interminable length of time it once took photographers to pose you when the light was bad: 'I am charmed, Sir, enchanted to make your acquaintance. He's got lovely hair,' he said, turning to Jupien. Then he went over to Maurice to give him his fifty francs, but first, putting his arm round his waist: 'You never told me that you'd knifed an old concierge in Belleville.' And M. de Charlus moaned with rapture and brought his face close to Maurice's: 'Oh! M. le Baron,' said the gigolo, whom they had forgotten to warn, 'how could you think such a thing?' Either the story was in fact false, or, if it were true, its perpetrator none the less thought it abominable and something to be denied. 'Me lay hands on a fellow-creature? On a Boche, yes, because that's war, but not on a woman, let alone an old woman!' This declaration of virtuous principles affected the Baron like a douche of cold water and he moved abruptly back from Maurice, still giving him his money, but with the disappointed look of a man who has been cheated, who pays because he does not want to make a fuss, but is not happy about it. The bad impression received by the Baron was further aggravated by the way in which the beneficiary thanked him, as he said: 'I'll send this to the old dears and save a bit of it for our kid at the front.' These touching sentiments disappointed M. de Charlus almost as much as their rather conventional peasant expression irritated him. Jupien did sometimes warn them that they ought to be more perverse. Then one or other of them, as if confessing to something diabolically evil, would venture to say: 'I tell you something, Baron, you won't believe this, but when I was a kid I used to look through the keyhole and watch my parents making love. Pretty wicked, eh? You look as if you think I'm having you on, but I swear to you it's the honest truth.' And M. de Charlus would be driven both to despair and to exasperation by this contrived attempt at perversity, which resulted only in revealing so much stupidity and so much innocence. In fact even the most determined thief or murderer would not have satisfied him, for they do not talk about their crimes; and anyway sadists – however kind they may be, in fact the kinder they are – have a thirst for evil which villains acting in pursuit of other goals are incapable of satisfying.

The young man, realizing his mistake too late, proclaimed in vain that he could not stand coppers and even dared say to the Baron: 'Give us a meet, then,' but the spell had vanished. It rang false, like passages in books where the author has tried to write slang. It was to no avail that the young man detailed all the 'filthy things' that he did with his wife. M. de Charlus was merely struck by how insignificant these filthy things were. Nor was this just insincerity on his part. There is nothing more limited than pleasure and vice. In that sense, changing the meaning of the phrase slightly, it can truly be said that we are always going round in the same vicious circle.

If M. de Charlus was thought to be a prince, there was equally a great deal of sadness in the establishment at the death of someone of whom the gigolos would say: 'I don't know his name, but it seems he is a Baron,' and who was none other than the Prince de Foix (the father of Saint-Loup's friend). Believed by his wife to spend long hours at his club, in reality he passed his time chatting at Jupien's, gossiping with the low-life about fashionable society. He was a tall, good-looking man, like his son. Strangely enough, M. de Charlus, probably because he had always encountered him socially, was unaware that he shared his tastes. It was even said that at one time they had been directed towards his own son, when he was still at school (and the friend of Saint-Loup), which was probably not true. On the contrary, very well informed about kinds of behaviour which most people are unaware of, he kept a close eye on the company kept by his son. One day, when a man, and a man moreover of humble origins, had followed the young Prince de Foix to his father's house, where he had thrown a note through the window, the father had picked it up. But the follower, although not, aristocratically speaking, part of the same world as M. de Foix the father, did share it from another point of view. He had no difficulty in finding, among their mutual accomplices, an intermediary who procured M. de Foix's silence by demonstrating that it was the young man who had himself provoked this bare-faced action by an elderly man. And this was quite possible. For the Prince de Foix had been able successfully to preserve his son from contact with bad company, but not from heredity. But this was an aspect of the young Prince de Foix, as of his father, of which the people in their circle remained ignorant, although in other circles he was as extreme as anybody.

'How natural he is! You'd never think he was a Baron,' said several of the regular customers after M. de Charlus had left, accompanied as far as the street by Jupien, to whom the Baron complained at length about the young man's virtuousness. From the displeasure evinced by Jupien, who ought to have schooled the young man in advance, it was clear that the make-believe murderer was about to receive a very severe telling-off. 'It is the complete opposite of what you told me,' added the Baron so that Jupien might learn the lesson for a future occasion. 'He seems very good-natured, he shows feelings of respect for his family. – He doesn't get on with his father, though, objected Jupien, they live together, but they work in different bars.' This was clearly an insubstantial crime compared with murder, but Jupien had been caught off-guard. The Baron said nothing more because, while he wanted his pleasures prepared for him, he also wanted to retain the illusion that they were not prepared. 'He really is a crook, he told you all that stuff to mislead you, you're too gullible,' Jupien added, in an attempt to vindicate himself which only hurt M. de Charlus's pride.

'They say he gets through a million francs a day,' said the young man of twenty-two, seeing nothing improbable in this assertion. Shortly afterwards, we heard, a short distance away, the sound of the car which had come to fetch M. de Charlus. At the same time, I noticed somebody whom I took to be an elderly lady, in a black skirt, stepping slowly into the room at the side of a soldier who had evidently emerged with her from an adjoining room. I soon realized my mistake: it was a priest. It was that very rare thing, almost unheard of in France, a rotten priest. The soldier was obviously teasing his companion about the fact that his conduct suited ill with his cloth, because the latter, with an air of gravity, raising a finger to his hideous face like a doctor of divinity, said sententiously: 'What can you expect, I'm no' (and I expected him to say 'saint') 'angel.' He was on the point of leaving, and said good-bye to Jupien who, having seen the Baron out, had just come back upstairs, but absent-mindedly the rotten priest forgot to pay for his room. Jupien, whose quick wit never deserted him, shook the collection box into

which he put each client's contribution, rattling it, and said: 'Towards the expenses of worship, M. l'Abbé!' The ugly character apologized, dropped in his coin, and disappeared.

Jupien came to find me in the dark lair where I had been lurking, not daring to move. 'Come into the vestibule for a moment where my young men are sitting, while I go up and shut the room; you've taken a room, so it's perfectly natural.' The manager was there, and I paid him. At that moment a young man in a dinner-jacket came in and asked the manager, with an air of authority: 'May I have Léon tomorrow morning at a quarter to eleven instead of eleven o'clock, as I'm lunching in town? – That depends, replied the manager, on how long the abbé keeps him.' This response appeared not to satisfy the young man in evening dress, who seemed to be on the point of cursing the abbé, but his anger took a new course when he caught sight of me; going straight up to the manager: 'Who's that? What is the meaning of this?' he asked in a voice of quiet fury. The manager, very embarrassed, explained that my presence was of no significance, that I had taken a room. The young man in evening dress seemed to be entirely unappeased by this explanation. He continued to repeat: 'This is extremely disagreeable, things like this ought not to happen; you know I hate it, and you'll be lucky if I ever set foot here again.' The implementation of this threat did not however appear to be imminent, for he went off angrily, but still advising that Léon should try to be free at a quarter to eleven, or if possible at half past ten. Jupien came back to find me, and went down with me into the street.

'I wouldn't like you to think ill of me, he said, this house does not bring in as much money as you might think, I have to let rooms to respectable people, though it's true that if I had to rely on them and nothing else, I'd be throwing my money away. Here it's the opposite of the Carmelites, it's the vice that takes care of virtue.[72] No, I took this house, or rather I got the manager whom you have seen to take it, simply as a way of helping the Baron and amusing him in his old age.' Jupien was not talking only about scenes of sadism such as the ones I had witnessed, or to the actual practice of vice by the Baron. The latter now, even for conversation, for company, or for a game of cards, only enjoyed being with working-class people who exploited him. Low-life snobbery is no more difficult to understand than the other sort. And both had long since come together, the one alternating with the other, in M. de Charlus, who thought nobody smart enough for him to be socially acquainted with, nor enough of a hooligan to be known in any other circumstances. 'I detest half-hearted works, he would say, bourgeois comedy is stilted, I have to have the princesses of classical tragedy or else broad farce. *Phèdre* or *Les Saltimbanques*,[73] nothing in between.' Finally, though, the balance between these two kinds of snobbery had been broken. Perhaps because of the tiredness of age, perhaps because sensuality had started to affect even his most commonplace relationships, the Baron now lived only among his 'inferiors', thus following involuntarily in the footsteps of those great ancestors of his, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, the Prince d'Harcourt and the Duc de Berry, whom Saint-Simon describes spending their lives with their lackeys, who extracted vast sums from them, sharing their entertainments, to the point where people who had to visit them were embarrassed on behalf of these great noblemen when they discovered them familiarly ensconced with their servants, playing cards or drinking. 'It is mainly, went on Jupien, to keep him out of trouble, because the Baron, you see, is just a great child. Even now, when he's got everything he could wish for here, he still goes out looking for whatever wickedness he can find. And with his generosity, that could easily lead to all sorts of problems these days. There was a hotel bellboy, just the other day, who nearly died of fright because of all the money the Baron offered him to go home with him. (To his own house, of all the reckless things!) The boy, who anyway is interested only in women, was reassured when he realized what was wanted of him. Hearing all those promises of money, he had thought the Baron was a spy. He felt a lot more comfortable when he realized he was not being asked to hand over his country, just his body, which may not be any more moral, but is less dangerous, and certainly easier.' Listening to Jupien, I said to myself: 'What a pity it is that M. de Charlus is not a novelist or a poet! Not so much in order to describe what he sees, but because the position in which somebody like Charlus finds himself in relation to desire gives rise to scandals around him, forces him to take life seriously, prevents him from separating emotions and pleasure, and from getting stuck in an ironic and externalized view of things, by constantly reopening a stream of pain within him. Almost every time he propositions somebody, he suffers a humiliation, if not the risk of being sent to prison.' It is not just children who learn from a clip on the ear, poets do too. If M. de Charlus had been a novelist, the house which Jupien had set up for him, by much diminishing the risks, at least (for there was always the danger of a police raid) the risks involved in an encounter in the street with a person of whose inclination the Baron could never be completely certain, would have been a disaster for him. But M. de Charlus was no more than a dilettante in matters of art, never dreamed of writing and had no talent for it.

'Anyway, I may as well admit, went on Jupien, that I don't really have any scruples about earning money this way. What actually goes on here, there's no point in trying to hide the fact now, is what I like doing, it's what I really enjoy. But I ask you, is there a law against getting paid for things you see no harm in? You're better educated than I am, and you'll probably tell me how Socrates believed he couldn't accept money for his lessons. But these days philosophy teachers don't think like that, nor do doctors or painters or playwrights or theatre managers. Don't think that I come into contact only with riff-raff in this job. Obviously the manager of an establishment of this sort, like a great courtesan, receives only men, but he receives men eminent in all walks of life and who are generally, in their own way, among the most intelligent, the most sensitive and the pleasantest in their professions. The house could easily, I assure you, be turned into a school of wit and a news agency.' I, however, was still preoccupied with the memory of the blows I had seen M. de Charlus receiving.

And to tell the truth, when one knew M. de Charlus well, with his pride, his satiety with the pleasures of society, his whims which so easily became passions for men of the lowest class and the worst sort, one could easily understand how the possession of that huge fortune, which would have delighted a self-made man, had it fallen to him, by enabling him to marry his daughter to a duke and to invite royalty to his shooting parties, pleased M. de Charlus because it enabled him to control and enjoy one, perhaps several, establishments where there was a permanent supply of the young men with whom he got on best. Quite possibly his vice may not even have been necessary for that. He was the heir to so many great noblemen, princes of the blood or dukes, of whom Saint-Simon tells us that they never associated with anyone 'who had a name' and spent their time playing cards with valets to whom they gave enormous sums of money!

'But meanwhile, I said to Jupien, this house is something else entirely, it is worse than a madhouse, because here the madness of the inmates is staged, it is played out, it is all on display. It is complete pandemonium. I thought at first that, like the Caliph in the *Arabian Nights*, I had arrived just in time to rescue a man who was being beaten, and then I found a quite different tale from the *Arabian Nights* being enacted in front of me, the one where a woman who has been changed into a dog deliberately lets herself be beaten in order to regain her original shape.' Jupien was clearly very disconcerted by my words, realizing that I had seen the Baron being beaten. He remained silent for a few moments while I hailed a passing cab; then suddenly, with that refreshing wit which had so often struck me in this self-educated man when, in greeting Françoise or me in the courtyard of our house, he would produce some elegant turn of phrase: 'You've mentioned several tales from the *Arabian Nights*, he said. But I can think of another one, not unrelated to the title of a book which I believe I've seen at the Baron's' (he was alluding to a translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*[74] which I had sent M. de Charlus). 'If you were ever curious, one evening, to see, I shan't say forty, but a dozen thieves, you have only to come here; to know whether I'm in, you have only to look up at that window, I'll leave it open a crack so that the light shows, meaning that I'm there and you may come in; it's my own private Sesame. Only Sesame, mind. Because if it's lilies you're looking for, I'd advise you to look elsewhere.' And with a rather off-hand wave, for an aristocratic clientele and the piratical way he ran his band of young men had given him a certain familiarity of manner, he was on the point of taking leave of me, when the noise of an explosion, a bomb which had pre-empted the warning sirens, made him advise me to stay where I was for a moment. Soon the anti-aircraft barrage started up with such intensity that we realized that the German aeroplane's position was very close, just above our heads.

In an instant the streets became completely black. Just occasionally an enemy aeroplane flying very low would light up the spot where it wanted to drop a bomb. I was no longer sure of my way. I thought about the day when, on the way to La Raspelière, I had encountered an aeroplane and my horse had reared in terror as if confronted by a god. I was thinking that this time the encounter would be different and that the god of evil would kill me. I increased my pace to get away, like a traveller pursued by a tidal bore, going round and round dark squares from which I could find no way out. Finally the flames from a burning building

lit up the surrounding area and I was able to find my way again, while the guns continued to crackle all the time. But my thoughts had turned to another subject. I was thinking about Jupien's house, now perhaps reduced to ashes, for a bomb had fallen very near me just after I had left it, the house on which M. de Charlus might prophetically have written 'Sodoma' as had, with no less prescience or perhaps as the volcano was starting to erupt and the catastrophe had begun, the unknown inhabitant of Pompeii. But what did sirens or Gothas matter to men who had come looking for pleasure? The social framework or the natural setting that surrounds our lovemaking is something we hardly think about. The storm rages out at sea, the ship pitches and rolls, wind-torn sheets of rain fall from the sky, and, as we take steps to prevent it from discommoding us, we give perhaps a second's attention to this vast scene in which we are so insignificant, we and the body we are trying to get close to. The siren with its warning of bombs no more disturbed Jupien's visitors than an iceberg would have done. In fact the threat of physical danger freed them from the fear by which they had been morbidly persecuted for so long. For it is wrong to think that the scale of fear corresponds to the scale of the danger that inspires it. One may be afraid of not sleeping and quite unafraid of a serious duel, afraid of a rat, but not of a lion. But for these few hours the police would be concerned with nothing beyond such trivial matters as the lives of the city's inhabitants, and would be posing no threat to their reputations. Several, rather than rediscovering their moral freedom, were tempted by the darkness which had suddenly fallen on the streets. Some of these Pompeians on whom the sky was already raining fire descended into the passages of the Métro, dark as catacombs. They knew that they would not be the only ones there. And darkness, enveloping everything like a new element, has the effect, irresistibly tempting to some, of suppressing the first stage of pleasure and allowing us immediate access to a realm of caresses which normally we reach only after some time. Whether the object of desire be a woman or a man, even supposing the initial approach easy, and the eternal badinage of the drawing-room (at least in daylight) unnecessary, on an evening (even in the most dimly lighted street) there is at least a preamble in which the eyes alone enjoy the delights in store, and fear of passers-by, even of the creature in question, prevents us from doing more than looking and speaking. In the dark, the whole of this old-fashioned routine is removed, and hands, lips and bodies can go straight to work. There is still the excuse of darkness and the mistakes it engenders if we are not well received. But if we are, the immediate response of a body which does not pull away, which presses closer, gives us an idea of the woman (or the man) whom we are silently addressing as being unprejudiced, dissolute, an idea which adds extra spice to the pleasure of being able to bite straight into the fruit without coveting it with our eyes and without asking permission. Meanwhile the darkness continues. Plunged into this new element, the men from Jupien's imagined themselves explorers, witnesses of a natural phenomenon like a tidal wave or an eclipse, and enjoying, instead of a carefully prepared, sedentary pleasure, that of a chance encounter in the unknown, celebrated, to the volcanic rumbling of the bombs, as it were in the bowels of a Pompeian house of ill fame, secret rites in the dark shadows of the catacombs.

In one large room were gathered a number of men who had not wanted to leave. They did not know one another, but one could see none the less that they came from more or less the same sort of world, rich and aristocratic. Each man's appearance had something repugnant about it, which must have reflected their lack of resistance to degrading pleasures. One, a huge man, had a face covered with red blotches like a drunkard. I learned, though, that he had not been one to begin with, and used simply to get his pleasure by making young men drink a lot. But terrified at the idea of being called up (although he certainly looked over fifty), and being rather fat, he had started to drink continuously in an attempt to increase his weight to more than a hundred kilos, the point above which one was rejected for service. And now, this calculated behaviour having become a passion, wherever he was left alone, he could always be found in a wine shop. But as soon as he spoke I saw that, ordinary though his intelligence may have been, he was a man of some knowledge, education and culture. Another man, of equally high social standing but very young and of great physical distinction, also came in. In his case there were as yet, it is true, no external marks of vice but, more disturbingly, there were internal ones. Very tall, with a charming face, his manner of speaking revealed an intelligence of quite a different order from that of his alcoholic neighbour, one that could without exaggeration be described as really remarkable. But everything he said was accompanied by an expression more appropriate to some quite different remark. As if, though possessing the whole wealth of human facial expressions, he lived in another world, he put on these expressions in the wrong order, seeming to shed smiles and glances randomly without any relation to the intended subject matter. I hope for his sake, if he is still alive, as he must be, that he was the victim of a temporary intoxication rather than any lasting disorder. If one had asked all these men for their visiting cards one would probably have been surprised to see that they belonged to the upper class of society. But some vice or other, as well as the greatest of all vices, the lack of will-power that prevented them from resisting any of them, brought them all together here, admittedly in isolated rooms, but, as I was told, every night, so that while their names were known to society hostesses, these had gradually lost sight of their faces, and never any longer had an opportunity to receive them as visitors. They continued to receive invitations but habit always brought them back to the composite site of depravity. They hardly made any secret of it, unlike the young bellboys and working men, etc., who provided their pleasure. And apart from all the other plausible reasons, there is one simple explanation for that. For an industrial worker or a man in service to go there would be like an apparently honest woman going into a brothel. The few who did admit to having gone there would defend themselves by saying that they had never been back, and Jupien himself, lying to protect their reputations or to avoid competition, would insist: 'Oh no, he doesn't come to my place, he'd never come *there*.' For men of standing it is not so serious, particularly since the other people in their circles who do not go *there* do not know anything about it and do not concern themselves with how you live. In an aircraft company, on the other hand, if certain of the fitters have been *there*, their mates who have been spying on them would never dream of going *there*, for fear of being observed themselves.

Approaching my house, I pondered the speed with which conscience ceases to play a part in our habits, which it leaves to their own development without having anything more to do with them, and consequently how astonished we would be if we observed simply from the outside, while supposing that they involve the whole person, the actions of men whose moral or intellectual qualities may be developing independently in a completely different direction. It was clearly a weakness in their education, or an absence of any education, combined with a fondness for earning money, if not in the least painful (for there must have been plenty of jobs that in the long run were easier, but then does not an invalid, with his fads, sacrifices and medicines, construct a far more painful existence for himself than would be required by the often mild illness which he thinks his measures are countering?), at least in the least laborious way possible, which had led these 'young people' almost innocently and for indifferent wages to do things which gave them no pleasure and must to begin with have inspired in them a deep disgust. On this basis one might have thought them fundamentally bad, but not only were they wonderful soldiers during the war, true 'heroes', they had just as often been kind and generous in civilian life, even model citizens. They had long ceased to pay any heed to the moral or immoral implications of the life they led, because it was the life that everybody around them led. Thus, when we study certain periods of ancient history, we are amazed to find men or women, good in themselves, taking part without scruple in mass assassinations, human sacrifices, which probably seemed entirely natural to them.

The Pompeian pictures in Jupien's house, moreover, were well suited, in so far as they recalled the final period of the French Revolution, to the age, rather similar to the Directory, which was about to begin. Already, in anticipation of peace, under the concealment of darkness so as not to infringe the police regulations too openly, new dances were being evolved and danced frantically all night long. At the same time, some artistic opinions less anti-German than those of the first years of the war were gaining currency, enabling suffocated minds to breathe again, but before daring to advance them one needed a certificate of civic responsibility. A professor would write a noteworthy book on Schiller and it would be reviewed in the newspapers. But before saying anything else about the book's author, they would register the fact, as if it were an imprimatur, that he had been at the Marne, or Verdun, that he had been mentioned five times in despatches, or that he had lost two sons. Only then would they praise the lucidity and profundity of his book on Schiller, whom it was now acceptable to call great as long as, instead of 'this great German', one said 'this great Boche'. That was the password for the article, after which it was free to proceed.

Our own epoch, to anybody who reads its history in two thousand years' time, will probably seem just as guilty of immersing certain pure and tender consciences in settings which then will look monstrously pernicious, but to which they managed to adapt themselves. I knew few men, for example, indeed I may even say I knew nobody, who in terms of intelligence and sensibility was as gifted as Jupien; for that wonderful 'accumulated wisdom' which provided the intellectual framework of his remarks was not the product of the school education or university training which might have made him a truly exceptional man,

while so many fashionable young men derive no profit from it. It was simply his innate sense, his natural good taste, which had enabled him, from occasional reading, chosen at random, without guidance, in odd moments, to construct that precise and elegant way of speaking, in which all the symmetry of the language was revealed in its full beauty. The profession he followed, however, might justifiably be regarded, admittedly as one of the most lucrative, but as the worst there is. As for M. de Charlus, whatever the scorn his aristocratic pride may have given him for common gossip, how was it that some feeling of personal dignity and self-respect had not forced him to refuse his sensuality certain satisfactions for which the only excuse would seem to be complete insanity? But in him, as in Jupien, the habitual separation between morality and a whole order of actions (something which must also occur in a number of public offices, sometimes in that of a judge, or perhaps that of a statesman, and in plenty of others too) must have been established for so long that habit (no longer ever asking moral sentiment for its opinion) had grown stronger with every day that passed, until the day when this consenting Prometheus had himself nailed by Force to the rock of pure matter.

No doubt, as I sensed, this constituted a new stage in the sickness of M. de Charlus, which, for as long as I had been aware of it, judging by the different phases I had observed, had pursued its evolution with increasing rapidity. The poor Baron could not now be far away from the end, from death, if indeed that were not preceded, as Mme Verdurin predicted and desired, by a period of imprisonment which, at his age, could only hasten the final outcome. Yet perhaps my phrase 'rock of pure matter' is not exactly right. It is possible that in this pure matter there still subsisted a small quantity of mind. This madman was quite aware, despite everything, that he was prey to a kind of madness and, for those few moments, was just playing a part, since he knew perfectly well that the man beating him was no more of a villain than the small boy who draws the short straw in a game of soldiers and has to play the 'Prussian', and whom everyone chases in a fervour of genuine patriotism and mock hatred. Prey to a kind of madness, however, into which a little of M. de Charlus's personality also entered. Even in these aberrations, human nature (as it does in our love affairs or in our travels) betrays its need for belief by its demands for truth. Françoise, if I spoke to her about a church in Milan – a town to which she would probably never go – or the cathedral at Reims – or even just the one at Arras! – which she would not be able to see since it had been more or less destroyed, would express her envy of the rich who could afford to go and look at such treasures, and exclaim, with nostalgic regret: 'Ah! how beautiful that must have been!' even though she, who had lived in Paris for so many years, had never had the curiosity to go and look at Notre-Dame. The reason for this, though, was because Notre-Dame was so much a part of Paris, of the town in which the everyday life of Françoise took place, and in which it was difficult for our old servant – as it would have been for me if the study of architecture had not in certain respects corrected in me the instincts of Combray – to situate the objects of her dreams. In the people we love there is, immanent within them, a dream which we cannot always perceive but which haunts us. It was my belief in Bergotte and in Swann which had made me love Gilberte, my belief in Gilbert the Bad[75] which had made me love Mme de Guermantes. And what a great expanse of sea had been hidden away in that most painful, jealous and seemingly most individual love of mine, for Albertine! Besides, precisely because of that individuality one is desperately in quest of, our love of specific persons is already something of an aberration. (And are not the diseases of the body themselves, at least those that have anything to do with the nervous system, instances of special tastes or special terrors contracted by our organs or our joints, which thus find that they have a horror of some climates as stubborn and as inexplicable as the fondness some men show, for example, for women who wear pince-nez, or for women who ride? Who can ever say what enduring and unconscious dream lies beneath the desire that is re-awakened by every glimpse of a woman on horseback, a dream as unconscious and mysterious as is, for example, to someone who has suffered all his life from severe asthma, the influence of a certain town, in appearance just like any other town, where for the first time he is able to breathe easily?)

Anyway, aberrations are like love affairs in which pathological defects have spread everywhere, have completely taken over. The presence of love can still be recognized, even in the maddest of them. The insistence of M. de Charlus on having his hands and feet fastened by shackles of proven strength, on begging for the rod of justice,[76] and, so Jupien told me, for other ferocious props which, even from sailors, were extremely difficult to obtain – they having been used for the infliction of punishments which have been abolished everywhere, even where discipline is at its most rigorous, on board ship – had its roots in M. de Charlus's whole dream of virility, attested if necessary by brutal acts, and in all that inner illumination, invisible to us, but glimpses of which he projected through these acts, of penal crosses and feudal tortures, which adorned his medieval imagination. It was the same sentiment that made him, each time he arrived, say to Jupien: 'I hope there will not be an alert this evening, for I can just see myself consumed by this fire from heaven like an inhabitant of Sodom.' And he would pretend to be afraid of the Gothas, not because he actually felt the least shadow of fear, but in order to have the pretext, as soon as the sirens started up, of rushing off into the shelters of the Métro, where he hoped for pleasure from casual contacts in the darkness, with vague dreams of medieval dungeons and oubliettes. In short, his desire to be chained and beaten betrayed, in its ugliness, a dream just as poetic as other men's desire to go to Venice or to keep a mistress. And M. de Charlus clung so tenaciously to the illusion of reality created by his dream that Jupien had to sell the wooden bed that used to be in Room 43 and replace it with an iron bed that was better suited to the chains.

The all-clear finally sounded as I was nearing my house. A boy in the street was adding his voice to the noise of the fire-engines. I met Françoise coming up from the cellar with the butler. She thought that I had been killed. She told me that Saint-Loup had dropped in, with apologies, to see whether, during the visit he had paid me that morning, he might have dropped his *croix de guerre*. He had only just realized that he had lost it and, before he rejoined his regiment the next morning, had wanted to see whether by any chance it was at my house. He had searched everywhere with Françoise but had found nothing. Françoise thought he must have lost it before coming to visit me, because, she said, she rather thought, in fact she could have sworn, that he had not had it when she saw him. On which point she was mistaken. So much for the value of evidence and memory! But in any case, it was of no great importance. Saint-Loup was as highly esteemed by his officers as he was loved by his men, and the matter could easily be sorted out.

However I felt immediately, from the unenthusiastic way in which they spoke of him, that Saint-Loup had not made a good impression on Françoise, or on the butler. Of course the butler's son and Françoise's nephew had made as much effort to get themselves safe jobs as Saint-Loup had done, successfully, with the opposite intention of being sent to the most dangerous posting. But that was something which, considering the matter with reference to themselves, Françoise and the butler were unable to believe. They were convinced that the rich were always given safe positions. And in fact, even if they had known the truth about Robert's heroic bravery, it would not have meant anything to them. He did not say 'Boches', he had praised the bravery of the Germans in their presence, and he did not attribute to treachery the fact that we had not been victorious on the first day. And that was what they would have liked to hear, that is what, for them, would have seemed a sign of courage. So, although they continued to look for the *croix de guerre*, I found them cool on the subject of Robert. Myself, having a pretty good idea where the cross had been left (although if Saint-Loup had indeed entertained himself during the evening in that way, it was only to fill in time while he was waiting, because, seized with the desire to see Morel again, he had used all his military connections to discover which regiment Morel was in, so that he could go and see him, but had thus far only received hundreds of contradictory replies), I advised Françoise and the butler to go to bed. He, however, was always loth to leave Françoise now that, thanks to the war, he had found an even more effective means of tormenting her than the 'expulsion of the nuns'[77] or the Dreyfus Affair. On this evening, and every time I was near them during my remaining few days in Paris, before I left for a new sanatorium, I would hear the butler say to a horrified Françoise: 'They're in no hurry, of course, they're waiting till the pear's ripe for plucking, but when the time comes they'll take Paris, and then they won't show any mercy! – Oh my Lord! Holy Mary! exclaimed Françoise, aren't they satisfied that they've conquered poor Belgium? They suffered enough, they did, when they were invasioned. – Belgium, Françoise? What they did in Belgium won't be anything compared with this!' And then, the war having given conversational currency among the working class to a quantity of terms which they had come across only visually, from reading newspapers, and consequently did not know how to pronounce, the butler added: 'I don't know how everyone can be so stupid… Look at this, Françoise, they're preparing a new attack using more battle-lions than ever before.' Unable to contain myself, if not in the name of pity for Françoise and strategic good sense, at least in the name of grammar, I told him that the proper pronunciation was 'battálions', but achieved nothing except to make him repeat the terrible phrase to Françoise every time I

entered the kitchen, for the butler, almost as much as he enjoyed frightening his companion, enjoyed showing his master that, although he had once been a gardener at Combray and was still only a butler, he was none the less a good Frenchman according to the rule of Saint-André-des-Champs, and that the Declaration of the Rights of Man gave him a perfect independent right to pronounce it 'battle-lion' if he wanted to, and not to let himself be ordered about on a matter that had nothing to do with his service, and on which consequently, since the Revolution, nobody had a right to say anything to him, as he was my equal.

So I had the irritation of hearing him talk to Françoise about an operation using many 'battle-lions' with an emphasis which was meant to show me that this pronunciation was the effect not of ignorance but of a mature and considered choice. He lumped the government and the newspapers together in a single, distrustful 'they', saying: '*They* talk about the losses of the Boches, but they don't say anything about ours, which are apparently ten times larger. They tell us they're at their last gasp, that they've got nothing to eat, but I think they've got a hundred times more to eat than we have. They shouldn't be trying to brainwash us. If they didn't have anything to eat they wouldn't fight the way they did the other day, when they killed a hundred thousand of our young men, all under twenty.' He constantly exaggerated the triumphs of the Germans like that, just as he had once done with those of the Radicals; at the same time he recounted their atrocities, so that the triumphs would be even more painful for Françoise, who would constantly repeat: 'Oh! Holy Mother of the Angels! Oh, Holy Mother of God!', or sometimes, to be unpleasant to her in a different way, he would say: 'Anyway, we're no better than they are, what we're doing in Greece is no better than what they did in Belgium. We're going to set everybody against us, you'll see, and we'll end up fighting against all the other nations,' when the true situation was quite the opposite of that. On days when the news was good, he would get his revenge by assuring Françoise that the war would last for thirty-five years and, if there was any talk of peace, he would assure her that it would not last more than a few months and would be followed by battles that would make these ones look like child's play, after which there would be nothing left of France.

The victory of the Allies seemed, if not close, at least more or less certain, and it must be admitted, sadly, that the butler was very upset by it. For, having reduced the 'world' war, like everything else, to his own private war against Françoise (whom actually he liked, despite that, in the same way that one likes somebody whom one enjoys enraging every day by beating them at dominoes), whenever he imagined victory it took the form of the first conversation in which he would have to put up with hearing Françoise say: 'Well, that's over at last, and they're going to have to give us a lot more than we gave them in '70.' For all this, though, he was always convinced that the fatal day was about to dawn, for an unconscious patriotism made him think, like all Frenchmen, victims of the same mirage as me since the onset of my illness, that victory – like my recovery – was just round the corner. He tried to take the initiative by announcing to Françoise that victory might be coming, but that the thought of it made his heart bleed, as it would immediately be followed by revolution, and then by invasion. 'Oh, this ruddy war, the Boches will be the only ones to get over it quickly, Françoise, they've already made hundreds of billions out of it. But the idea that they'd cough up even a penny for us, that's just a joke! They may say that in the newspapers,' he added cautiously, so as to be ready for any eventuality, 'to keep people quiet, just as they've said for the last three years that the war will be over tomorrow.' Françoise was all the more disturbed by these words in fact because, having believed the optimists rather than the butler, she could now see that the war, which she thought was bound to be over in a fortnight despite 'the invasioning of poor little Belgium', was still going on, that no advances were being made, a consequence of the fixed fronts, something she could not really understand, and, finally, one of the countless 'godsons' to whom she gave everything she earned with us told her that they had concealed the truth about first one thing and then another. 'It's the working man who will have to bear the brunt, concluded the butler. They'll take your field away, Françoise. – Oh, Lord save us!' But he preferred more immediate misfortunes to distant ones of that sort, and pored over the newspapers in the hope of finding a defeat to announce to Françoise. He waited for bad news like a child waiting for an Easter-egg, hoping that things would go badly enough to frighten Françoise, but not so badly as to cause him actual suffering. Hence the attraction of a Zeppelin raid, which allowed him to watch Françoise hiding in the cellars, but did not shake his conviction that in a city as big as Paris the bombs would never chance to fall quite on to our house.

Meanwhile Françoise was beginning to have occasional recurrences of her Combray pacifism. She almost started to have doubts about the 'German atrocities'. 'When the war started they told us that the Germans were murderers, brigands, complete bandits, B-b-boches…' (If she gave several *b*s to *Boches*, it was because the accusation that the Germans were murderers seemed quite plausible to her, whereas the idea that they might be Boches seemed so terrible as to be completely improbable. Only it was rather difficult to know what mysteriously terrifying sense Françoise gave to the word 'Boche', since she was talking about the beginning of the war, and also because of the dubious expression with which she uttered the word. A doubt about whether the Germans were criminals might have no factual foundation, but from the logical point of view it did not contain a contradiction. But how could she doubt that they were Boches, since the word, in popular speech, means, quite simply, German? Perhaps all she was doing was repeating, indirectly, the violent remarks she had heard at the time, in which the word *Boche* was given a particularly powerful emphasis.) 'I used to believe all that, she said, but now I wonder if we are not as rotten as they are.' This blasphemous thought had been slyly introduced into Françoise's mind by the butler, who, observing that his friend had a soft spot for King Constantine of Greece, had constantly pictured him to her as being starved of food until such time as he gave in to us. That ruler's abdication had therefore moved Françoise deeply, who went so far as to declare: 'We're no better than they are. If we were in Germany we'd be doing the same as they are.' Anyway, I saw very little of her during these few days, as she was often at the house of those cousins of whom Mama had said to me one day: 'They are much richer than you are, you know.' People throughout the country during this period were often privileged to see some very fine behaviour, which, if there were a historian to perpetuate its memory, would bear witness to the greatness of France, her greatness of soul, her greatness according to the code of Saint-André-des-Champs, conduct displayed as much by the many civilians living in safety behind the lines as by the soldiers who fell at the Marne. Françoise had lost a nephew at Berry-au-Bac who was also a nephew of these millionaire cousins of hers, the former owners of a large café who had long since made a fortune and retired. The young man who had been killed, himself the poor owner of a very small café, had joined up aged twenty-five, leaving his wife to run the little bar which he thought he would be returning to in a few months. He had been killed. And then do you know what happened? Françoise's millionaire cousins, who were not related to the young woman, who was just their nephew's widow, left their home in the country, to which they had retired ten years earlier, and set about running a café again, without taking a sou for themselves; every morning at six o'clock, the millionaire's wife, a real lady, and her young lady daughter were dressed and ready to help their niece and cousin by marriage. And for nearly three years now, they had rinsed glasses and served drinks from first thing in the morning until half past nine at night, without a single day's rest. In this book, in which there is not one fact that is not fictitious, not one real character concealed under a false name, in which everything has been made up by me in accordance with the needs of my exposition, I have to say, to the honour of my country, that Françoise's millionaire relatives alone, who came out of their retirement to help their niece when she was left without support, that they and they alone are real, living people. And convinced as I am that their modesty will not be offended by it, for the simple reason that they will never read this book, and being unable to mention the names of the many others who must have acted in a similar way, as a result of whom France survived, I take a childlike and deeply felt pleasure, in transcribing their real name here: appropriately enough, they are called by the very French name of Larivière. Although there were a few worthless shirkers like the imperious young man in a dinner-jacket I had seen at Jupien's, whose only concern was to discover whether he could have Léon at half past ten the next day 'because he was lunching in town', these were redeemed by the countless masses of the Frenchmen of Saint-André-des-Champs, by all the sublime soldiers, and by those whom I regard as their equals, the Larivières.

To increase Françoise's anxieties even more, the butler showed her some old copies of *Lectures pour tous*[78] he had found, the covers of which (these numbers dating from before the war) depicted the imperial royal family of Germany. 'That's our new ruler to be,' the butler said to Françoise, showing her 'William': she stared open-eyed, then pointed to the female figure standing at his side and said: 'And that must be the Williamess!' Françoise's hatred of the Germans was extreme; it was tempered only by that which our own ministers inspired in her. I don't know which she wished for more passionately, the death of Hindenburg or the death of Clemenceau.

My departure from Paris was delayed by a piece of news which caused me such grief that for a while I was quite unable to set off. This was the news of the death of Robert de Saint-Loup, killed two days after his return to the front, while covering the retreat of his men. No man had ever felt less hatred for a nation than he did (and as for the Emperor, for reasons of his own, which may have been mistaken, he thought that William II had wanted to prevent the war rather than bring it about). Nor did he have the slightest hatred of Germanism: the last words I had heard him utter, six days earlier, were the opening words of a Schubert song which he had been singing in German on my staircase, so enthusiastically that I had to tell him to stop because of the neighbours. Accustomed by a faultless education and upbringing to expunging every trace of praise, invective or flowery language from his manner, he had avoided, in the face of the enemy, as he had at the moment of joining up, the one thing that might have safeguarded his life through that self-effacement that characterized the whole of his behaviour, right down to the way he would follow me out on the street bare-headed to close the door of my cab every time I left his house. For several days I remained shut up in my room, thinking about him. I remembered his arrival for the first time at Balbec, when, in an almost-white wool suit, his eyes greenish and changeable like the sea, he had crossed the hall beside the great dining-room whose windows gave on to the sea. I remembered the special being he had seemed to me then, the being whose friend I so much wanted to be. That wish had been realized to a greater extent than I could ever have imagined possible, although I derived little pleasure from it then, coming only later to understand the many great qualities, and other things too, which that elegant exterior concealed. All that, the good and the bad, he had given unstintingly every day, last of all by going forward to attack a trench, out of generosity and the devotion of everything he possessed to the service of others, just as one evening he had run along the backs of the banquettes in the restaurant so that I didn't have to move. And the fact that I had really seen him so seldom, in such diverse settings, in such different circumstances and at such long intervals, in that hall in Balbec, in the café at Rivebelle, in the cavalry barracks and at the military dinners at Doncières, at the theatre when he slapped the journalist, in the house of the Princesse de Guermantes, all this meant only that I had a sharper, more vivid picture of his life, and a clearer sense of grief at his death, than often one has for people more dearly loved but so regularly seen that the image we retain of them is no more than a sort of vague composite of an infinite number of subtly different images, where also, our affections being fully gratified, we do not have, as we may with those we have seen only for brief moments, in the course of meetings inconclusive despite the wishes of both parties, the illusion of the possibility of a greater affection thwarted only by circumstance. Only a few days after I had seen him in pursuit of his monocle in the hall at Balbec, when I had thought him so haughty, there was another living form which I had seen for the first time on the beach at Balbec, and which also no longer existed outside the state of memory: this was Albertine, trudging across the sand that first evening, indifferent to everything around her, as much at home there as a seagull. So quickly had I fallen in love with her that, in order to be able to go out with her every day, I had never gone over from Balbec to see Saint-Loup. And yet the history of my relations with him bore witness also to the fact that I did once stop loving Albertine for a while, since the reason for my going to live for a time near Robert, at Doncières, was my sadness at seeing that the feeling I had for Mme de Guermantes was not reciprocated. His life and Albertine's, discovered so late, at Balbec, and so swiftly over, had scarcely touched; it was he, I reminded myself as I saw how the nimble shuttles of the years weave slender connections between those of our memories which seem at first most independent of each other, it was he whom I had sent to Mme Bontemps's house when Albertine left me. And then it had turned out that their two lives each had a parallel, and unsuspected, secret. Saint-Loup's secret perhaps caused me more sadness now than that of Albertine, whose life had become so alien to me. But I could not get over the fact that her life, like Saint-Loup's, had been so short. Often, when they were looking after me, she and he would tell me: 'You're not well.' And now it was they who were dead, and they whose first and final images I could compare, separated as they were by such a short span of time, the final image of each, in front of the trench, floating in the river, set against the first image which, in the case of Albertine, was precious to me now only by its association with that of the sun sinking into the sea.

His death was received more sympathetically by Françoise than Albertine's had been. Straight away she adopted her role of hired mourner and expatiated on the memory of the dead man with sorrowful threnodies and lamentations. She flaunted her grief and turned her face away dry-eyed only when in spite of myself I let her glimpse mine, which she wanted to appear not to have noticed. For like many highly strung people she was exasperated by other people's emotional volatility, probably because it was too much like her own. These days, she was always keen to mention the slightest touch of stiffness in her neck, or a feeling of dizziness, or a knock she had given herself. But if I were to say anything about one of my ailments, she would resume her stoic and solemn air and pretend not to have heard.

'Poor Marquis,' she would say, although she was unable to persuade herself that he had not done everything he could to avoid going to the front and, once mobilized, to keep well away from any danger, 'Poor lady,' she would say, thinking about Mme de Marsantes, 'how she must have cried when she heard about the death of her boy! If only she could have seen him one more time, but perhaps it's better that she couldn't because his nose was split in two, he was all disfigured.' And Françoise's eyes would fill with tears, through which, though, shone the cruel curiosity of the peasant woman. No doubt Françoise pitied Mme de Marsantes's sorrow with all her heart, but she regretted not knowing the form that sorrow had taken and not being able to enjoy the distressing spectacle of it. And as she would dearly have loved to weep, and to have me see her weep, she said, as a stimulus to her tears: 'Oh, it's really affected me, this has!' And she watched for signs of grief in me with such avidity that I feigned a degree of brusqueness when speaking of Robert. And largely, I'm sure, out of a spirit of imitation and because she had heard other people say it, for there are clichés among servants just as there are in literary circles, she would repeat, not however without a poor person's note of satisfaction: 'All his wealth didn't prevent him from dying like anyone else, and it's no good to him now.' The butler took advantage of the opportunity to tell Françoise that it was sad, of course, but that it hardly counted beside the millions of men who were falling every day despite the government's efforts to hide the fact. This time, however, the butler did not succeed in increasing Françoise's grief as he had hoped to. For she replied: 'It's true they are dying for France too, but they're strangers; it's always more interesting when it's people you know.' And Françoise, who enjoyed crying, added: 'Do make sure to tell me if there's anything about the Marquis's death in the paper.'

Robert had often said sadly to me, long before the war: 'Oh, don't let's talk about my life, I've been condemned in advance.' Was he alluding to the vice which he had succeeded up to that point in concealing from the world, but of which he was aware, and whose seriousness he perhaps exaggerated, as children making love for the first time, or even before that seeking solitary pleasure, imagine that they are like plants, unable to scatter their pollen without dying immediately afterwards? Perhaps this exaggeration, for Saint-Loup as for children, stemmed as much from the idea of a sin with which one is still unfamiliar, as from the fact that an entirely new sensation has an almost terrible power which only time and repetition will diminish. Or did he really have, to be justified if necessary by his father's death at an early age, an intimation of his own premature end? Intimations of that sort would seem to be impossible, of course. Yet death does seem to be subject to certain laws. Often, for instance, it seems that children born to parents who died either very old or very young are almost forced to disappear at the same age, the former extending incurable sorrows and illnesses into their hundredth year, the others, despite a happy and healthy life, carried off at the premature but inevitable date by an illness so opportune and so accidental (however deeply rooted it may have been in their temperament) that it seems no more than the formality necessary for the achievement of death. And might it not be possible that even accidental death – like that of Saint-Loup himself, which may have been linked to his character in more ways than perhaps I have thought it necessary to describe – is also inscribed in advance, known only to the gods, invisible to men, but revealed by a sadness, half unconscious, half-conscious (and even, in this last respect, expressed to others with that complete sincerity with which we predict misfortunes which we believe in our heart of hearts we can escape, and which will happen nevertheless), specific to each person who is permanently aware that within himself, like a heraldic device, he carries the fateful date?

He must have been magnificent during those final hours. The man who throughout his life had seemed, even when sitting down, or walking across a room, to be keeping in check the impulse to charge, concealing behind a smile the indomitable will that lurked within his triangular-shaped head, had charged at last. Stripped of its books, the feudal turret had regained its military function. By dying this Guermantes had become more completely himself, or rather more completely part of his race, into which he melted, becoming simply a Guermantes, as was symbolically visible at his burial in the church of Saint-Hilaire at

Combray, which was completely hung with black draperies on which stood out in red, under the sealed crown, without the initials of titles or forenames, the G of the Guermantes that in death he had once again become.

Before going to the burial, which did not take place straight away, I wrote to Gilberte. I ought perhaps to have written to the Duchesse de Guermantes, but I told myself that she would greet Robert's death with the same indifference that I had seen her display towards the deaths of so many others whose lives had seemed so closely bound up with her own, and that perhaps, with her Guermantes cast of mind, she would even seek to show that she was not superstitious about ties of blood. Besides, I was too unwell to write to everybody. I had thought, once, that she and Robert were fond of one another, in the sense in which the term is used in society, that is that they told each other affectionate things that they happened to be thinking at the time. But when he was not with her he had no hesitation in declaring her an idiot, and although she may sometimes have taken a selfish pleasure in seeing him, I saw her as quite incapable of taking the slightest pains, and extremely reluctant to use what credit she had in order to do him a service, or even to save him from trouble. The maliciousness she had revealed by refusing to recommend him to General Saint-Joseph, when Robert was going to have to leave for Morocco, showed that the devotion she had shown on the occasion of his marriage was no more than a kind of compensation, which had cost her nothing. I was therefore very surprised to learn that, as she had been unwell when Robert was killed, they had felt obliged for several days, on the most spurious of pretexts, to hide from her eyes the newspapers which might have apprised her of his death, in order to spare her the shock she would have felt. My surprise was even greater, though, when I learned that, when they had finally had to tell her the truth, the Duchesse cried for a whole day, fell ill, and for a long time – for more than a week, which was a long time for her – was inconsolable. When I heard about her grief, I was touched by it. It meant that the whole of society could say, and I can attest, that there was a great friendship between them. But then, when I remember how much malicious gossip and reluctance to help were wrapped up in this friendship, I cannot help thinking how little a great friendship means in society.

A little while after this, however, in circumstances of greater historical, though less personal importance, Mme de Guermantes showed herself, I thought, in a still more favourable light. She, who when she was a girl had shown such outspoken impertinence, if you remember, towards the Imperial Russian family and who, when married, had always spoken so freely to them that they had sometimes accused her of a lack of tact, was perhaps the only person, after the Russian Revolution, to show unlimited devotion to the Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses. Just a year before the war, she had considerably annoyed the Grand Duchess Vladimir by referring continually to the Countess of Hohenfelsen, the morganatic wife of the Grand Duke Paul, as 'the Grand Duchess Paul'. But despite that, the Revolution had hardly broken out before our ambassador in St Petersburg, M. Paléologue (known as 'Paléo' in diplomatic circles, which have their witty abbreviations like any others), was harassed by telegrams from the Duchesse de Guermantes, who wanted news of the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. And, for a long time, the only regular marks of sympathy and respect that this princess received came exclusively from Mme de Guermantes.

Saint-Loup caused, if not by his death, at least by what he did in the few weeks preceding it, greater grief than that of the Duchesse. On the day after the evening when I saw him, and two days after Charlus had told Morel: 'I shall take my revenge,' Saint-Loup's attempts to locate Morel met with success. That is, they were successful in that the general, under whose command Morel ought to have been, had learned that he was a deserter, had had him found and arrested and, in order to apologize to Saint-Loup for the punishment which someone in whom he took an interest was about to undergo, had written to Saint-Loup to tell him about it. Morel was convinced that his arrest had been provoked by the resentment of M. de Charlus. He remembered the words: 'I shall take my revenge', thought that this was indeed that revenge, and asked to make certain revelations. 'It's true, he declared, that I deserted. But is it altogether my fault if I've been led astray?' He recounted stories about M. de Charlus and M. d'Argencourt, with whom he had also quarrelled, in none of which he had actually been involved directly, but all of which they, with the twofold expansiveness of lovers and inverts, had told him, which led to the arrest of both M. de Charlus and M. d'Argencourt. The arrest itself was probably less distressing to each man than their discovery of the fact, previously unknown to them, that the other was their rival, while the preparation of the case also revealed a huge number of others, unknown, ordinary men, casually picked up in the street. But they were soon released. Morel was, too, because the letter the general had sent to Saint-Loup was returned bearing the legend: 'Deceased. Killed in action.' Out of respect for the dead man, the general simply had Morel sent to the front, where he showed great gallantry, survived every danger and came back, at the end of the war, with the medal that M. de Charlus had once vainly solicited for him, and which he owed indirectly to the death of Saint-Loup.

I have often thought since then, remembering the *croix de guerre* lost at Jupien's, that if Saint-Loup had lived he might easily have been elected a Deputy in the post-war elections, with all its froth of nonsense and the ray of glory that came in its wake, when a single missing finger, wiping out centuries of prejudice, was an entry permit into a brilliant marriage into an aristocratic family, the *croix de guerre*, even if awarded for clerical duties, was enough for entry, after a triumphant election, into the Chamber of Deputies, almost to the Académie française. The election of Saint-Loup, because of his 'holy' family, would have caused M. Arthur Meyer[79] to pour out floods of tears and ink. Perhaps, though, he was too sincerely fond of the people to succeed in winning the popular vote, although they would probably, on account of his noble pedigree, have forgiven him his democratic ideas. He would doubtless have expounded these with success to a chamber composed of aviators. Certainly those heroes would have understood him, as would the few very intelligent minds. But thanks to the pompous self-satisfaction of the National Bloc, the old political hacks were dug out, the ones who were always re-elected. Those who could not enter a chamber of aviators begged, at least in the case of entry to the Académie française, the votes of marshals, the President of the Republic, a President of the Chamber, etc. They would not have been in favour of Saint-Loup, but were enthusiastic about another of Jupien's regulars, the *Action libérale* Deputy, who was re-elected unopposed. He continued to wear the uniform of a Territorial, even though the war was long over. His election was greeted with rapture by all the newspapers that had 'united' to support his nomination, by rich and noble ladies who now wore nothing but rags, out of a sense of propriety, and a fear of taxes, while the men of the Bourse were ceaselessly buying up diamonds, not for their wives but because, having lost all confidence in the credit of any country, they were taking refuge in this tangible form of wealth, and incidentally sending up de Beers stock by a thousand francs. So much stupidity was somewhat annoying, but people were less hostile to the National Bloc when they suddenly saw the victims of Bolshevism, Grand Duchesses in rags, their husbands murdered by the barrow-load, while their sons were killed by the stones thrown down on them after they had been kept without food, made to work amidst jeers of scorn, then pushed down wells because people thought they had the plague and might pass it on. The ones who had managed to escape suddenly reappeared…

3. An afternoon party at the house of the Princess Guermantes

The new sanatorium to which I retired cured me no more than the first; and many years passed before I left it. During the train journey, when I eventually did return to Paris, the thought of my lack of literary talent, which, as I believed, I had discovered long ago on the Guermantes way, of which I had become even more mournfully aware during my daily walks with Gilberte, before we returned to dine, very late, at Tansonville, and which I had almost identified, the night before I left that house, as I read those pages of the Goncourts' journal, with the pointlessness and falsity of literature, this thought, perhaps less painful now but more dismaying than ever, its subject being not an infirmity peculiar to myself alone, but the non-existence of the ideal in which I had for so long believed, this thought which for so long had not troubled my mind, struck me once again with a more lamentable force than ever. The train, I remember, had come to a halt in open countryside. The sun's rays illuminated the upper half of the trunks of a line of trees that followed the railway. 'Trees, I thought, you have nothing to say to me any longer, my heart has grown cold and no longer responds to you. Here I am, after all, in the middle of nature, my eyes noting the line which separates your glowing foliage from your shaded trunks, and I feel only coolness and boredom. If ever I could have thought of myself as a poet, I now know that I am not. Perhaps in this new era of my life which, however desiccated, is now opening, human beings may be able to inspire in me what nature no longer says to me. But the days when I might perhaps have been capable of singing its song will never come back.' Yet by consoling myself with the thought that social observation

might come to take the place of vanished inspiration, I knew that I was just trying to find some consolation, and that I knew myself to be worthless. If I truly had the soul of an artist, what pleasure should I not experience at the sight of this screen of trees lit by the setting sun, these little flowers on the embankment that reached almost up to the carriage step, whose petals I could count, and whose colours I was careful not to describe, as so many good men of letters would, for could one hope to transmit to the reader a pleasure one has not felt oneself?

A little later I had seen with the same indifference the flecks of orange and gold with which it splashed the windows of a house; and finally, later still, I had seen another house, which looked as though it were built of some strange pink material. But I made these observations with the same absolute indifference as if, walking in a garden with a lady, I had seen a piece of glass and a little further on an object made of some alabaster-like substance, the unusual colour of which would not normally have been enough to rouse me from my languorous boredom but none the less, out of politeness to the lady, in order to say something and also to show that I had noticed the colour, I had pointed out in passing the coloured glass and the fragment of stucco. In the same way, to put my mind at rest, I pointed out to myself, as to somebody who might have accompanied me and might have been more capable than I of taking pleasure from it, the fiery reflections in the windows and the translucent pink of the house. But the companion to whom I had pointed out these curious effects was of a nature no doubt less enthusiastic than plenty of good-natured people who would be ravished by such a view, for he had registered the colours without a trace of pleasure.

My name being still on their lists, my long absence from Paris had not prevented old friends from continuing faithfully to send me invitations, and when upon my return I found, alongside one to a tea-party given for her daughter and son-in-law by La Berma, another for an afternoon reception to be held the following day at the house of the Prince de Guermantes, the melancholy reflections that had assailed me in the train were not the least of the motives advising me to go there. There is really no point in depriving myself of the life of a man of the world, I told myself, since the famous 'work' which I have so long hoped each day to begin the next day, is one that I am not, or am no longer, fitted to, and perhaps corresponds to no reality whatever. In fact this reasoning was entirely negative, and simply removed the value of the counter-arguments which might have put me off going to this society concert. The real reason I decided to go was the Guermantes name, for so long out of my mind that when I read it on the invitation card it re-awakened a ray of my attention which was to lift from the depths of my memory a section of their past, accompanied by all the images of seigneurial forest and tall flowers which had then accompanied it, and took on again for me all the magic and significance which I used to find at Combray when, as I passed by on my way home, in the rue de l'Oiseau, I would see from outside, like dark lacquer, the stained-glass window dedicated to Gilbert the Bad, ancestor of the Guermantes. For a moment the Guermantes had once again seemed completely different from the rest of society, not to be compared with them or with any living being, even royalty, creatures sprung from the impregnation of the sour and windy air of the sombre town of Combray, where my childhood was spent, by the past, visible there in the narrow street, at the level of the stained-glass window. I had wanted to go to the Guermantes' house as if that might have been able to bring me closer to my childhood and to the depths of my memory in which I saw it. And I had continued to read and reread the invitation until the letters composing that name, at once so familiar and so mysterious, like that of Combray itself, rebelled, regained their independent life and reorganized themselves before my exhausted eyes into something like an unknown name. It just so happened that Mama was going to afternoon tea with Mme Sazerat, an event which she knew beforehand would be extremely tedious, so I had no scruples about going to the Princesse de Guermantes's party.

I took a cab to go to the house of the Prince de Guermantes, who was no longer living in his old *hôtel* but in a magnificent new mansion he had had built on the Avenue du Bois. It is one of the mistakes of society people not to realize that if they want us to believe in them they have to believe in themselves, or at least respect the essential elements of our belief. At the time when I believed, even though I knew that the contrary was true, that the Guermantes inhabited such a palace by an hereditary right, to penetrate into the palace of the wizard or the fairy, for the gates which open only when one utters the magic word to open before me, seemed to me as difficult a task as to obtain an interview with the wizard and the fairy themselves. Nothing was easier than to make myself believe that the old servant, in fact only just engaged, or supplied by the Potel and Chabot Agency, was the son, grandson or descendant of those who served the family before the Revolution, and I was only too willing to take the portrait, bought from Bernheim Jeune the previous month, to be a family portrait. But the spell of a place cannot be simply decanted or transferred, memories cannot be divided up, and of the Prince de Guermantes, now that he had himself destroyed the illusions of my belief by going to live in the Avenue du Bois, little of any note remained. The ceilings which I had been afraid would fall in on me when my name was announced, and beneath which much of the magic and fear of long ago might still for me have hovered, now looked down on parties given by an American lady in whom I had no interest. Of course, things have no potency in themselves, and since it is we who confer it upon them, some young middle-class schoolboy was probably at that very moment experiencing the same thoughts outside the mansion in the Avenue du Bois as I had once felt outside the Prince de Guermantes's old *hôtel*. He, however, would still be young enough to have these beliefs, but I had passed that age, and lost that privilege, as after early infancy one loses the power that babies have to divide the milk they ingest into digestible quantities. Which forces adults, out of more than prudence, to take milk in small quantities, while babies can suck indefinitely without pausing for breath. At least the Prince de Guermantes's change of residence had this advantage for me, that the cab which came to collect me, and within which I was having these thoughts, had to pass along the streets leading to the Champs-Élysées. They were, at that time, very badly paved, but from the moment I entered them, what actually distracted me from my thoughts was a sensation of extreme smoothness such as one feels when, suddenly, a car proceeds more easily, more smoothly, silently, as when, the gates of a park being opened, one glides along over fine sand or dead leaves. Materially, nothing was different; but I suddenly felt the elimination of those external obstacles because in fact I was no longer having to make the effort of adaptation or attention which we make, without even being aware of it, when we come across something new: the streets through which I was now passing were those, forgotten for so long, through which I had walked with Françoise on the way to the Champs-Élysées. The ground knew of its own accord where it had to lead; its resistance was overcome. And, like an aviator, who has up to that point travelled laboriously along the ground, suddenly 'taking off', I rose up slowly towards the silent heights of memory. In Paris, these streets will always stand out for me, as if made of a different material from the rest. When I reached the corner of the rue Royale, where once had stood the open-air vendor of the photographs of which Françoise had been so fond, I felt that the cab, carried forward by so many hundreds of previous turnings, would be unable to resist turning of its own accord. I was not passing through the same streets as those who were out walking along them that day, but instead moving through a shifting past, sad and gentle. Yet it was composed of so many different pasts that it was hard to define what was causing my feeling of melancholy, whether it was due to those walks on the way to see Gilberte, simultaneously fearful that she would not come, or to the proximity of a certain house to which I had been told that Albertine had gone with Andrée, or to the sense of philosophical futility that a route seems to emanate when one has travelled it a thousand times, with a passion that has died, and which bore no fruit, like the route over which after lunch I used to run so hastily, so feverishly, to gaze on the posters, their paste still wet, advertising *Phèdre* or the *Domino Noir*. When I arrived at the Champs-Élysées, not being particularly keen to hear the whole of the concert being given at the Guermantes' place, I had the cab stop, and was just about to climb down and walk about for a little while, when I was struck by the sight of another cab, also in the process of coming to a halt. A man, eyes fixed straight ahead, body bent, was placed, rather than seated, in the back, and was making the same sort of effort to sit upright as a child does when he has been told to be good. But his panama hat revealed an unruly forest of entirely white hair; a white beard, like those formed by the snow on the statues of river-gods in the public gardens, flowed from his chin. With Jupien, who was endlessly attentive, at his side, this was M. de Charlus, convalescing now from an attack of apoplexy, of which I had been unaware (I had been told only that he had lost his sight; but this had in fact been a temporary condition, and he could now see perfectly well again) and which, unless he had previously dyed his hair and had now been forbidden to continue doing anything so tiring, seemed rather, as if by a kind of chemical precipitation, to have rendered gleamingly visible all the metal with which the locks, now pure silver, of his head and his beard were saturated and which sprang out from them like so many geysers, so that the old, decayed prince now wore the Shakespearian majesty of a King Lear. His eyes had not escaped this upheaval, this metallurgical alteration of his head, but by some inverse phenomenon they had lost all their lustre. But the saddest thing was that one felt that this lost lustre represented his moral pride,

and that this enabled the physical and even the intellectual life of M. de Charlus to survive the disappearance of the aristocratic pride that at one time had been part and parcel of it. Just at that moment, as if to illustrate this, also no doubt on her way to the Prince de Guermantes's, there passed a victoria in which was Mme de Saint-Euverte, whom the Baron used to regard as beneath his notice. And immediately, with infinite difficulty but with all the determination of an invalid who wants to show that, however difficult they may still be, he can perform all his movements, M. de Charlus raised his hat, bowed and greeted Mme de Saint-Euverte with as much respect as if she had been the Queen of France. Perhaps there was, in the very difficulty that M. de Charlus experienced in making this greeting, a reason for him to do it, knowing that he would be making a greater impression by an act which, painful to an invalid, would become doubly meritorious on the part of him who performed it and doubly flattering in the eyes of the person to whom it was addressed, invalids like kings being prone to exaggerate politeness. Perhaps also the Baron's movements still suffered from the lack of co-ordination which follows from problems with the spinal cord and the brain, so that his gestures went further than he intended they should. For myself, I saw something more like physical gentleness, and a detachment from the realities of life, characteristics so marked among those over whom death has already cast its shadow. The exposure of the silver-bearing lodes of his hair revealed a change less profound than that unconscious social humility which turned all social relations upside down, and humiliated before Mme de Saint-Euverte, as it would have humiliated in front of the latest American hostess (who might have been able finally to attain the polite attentions, hitherto beyond her reach, of the Baron), what once used to seem the proudest snobbery of all. For the Baron was still alive, still thinking; his intellect had not been extinguished. And more than any chorus by Sophocles on the humbled pride of Oedipus, more than death itself and any funeral oration on the subject of death, the humble and ingratiating manner in which the Baron greeted Mme de Saint-Euverte proclaimed the full fragility and perishability of the love of earthly greatness and the whole of human pride. M. de Charlus, who up to then would never have consented to dine with Mme de Saint-Euverte, now bowed down before her. He greeted her perhaps out of ignorance of the rank of the person whom he was greeting (the articles of the social code being just as susceptible of destruction by a stroke as any other aspect of memory), perhaps by a lack of co-ordination of the movements which transposed on to the level of apparent humility the uncertainty, which would otherwise have been haughty, that he might have felt about the identity of the woman who was passing. He greeted her with the politeness of a child coming timidly forward, at his mother's request, to say how do you do to some important people. And indeed a child, without a child's pride, was what he had become.

To receive the homage of M. de Charlus had been for her the apogee of snobbery, as it had been the essence of snobbery in the Baron to refuse it. And now the whole of that inaccessible and affected nature which he had succeeded in making Mme de Saint-Euverte believe lay at the heart of his character had been annihilated at a stroke by the painstaking timidity, the apprehensive zeal, with which he had raised a hat, from beneath which, for as long as he left his head deferentially uncovered, had tumbled, with the eloquence of a Bossuet,[80] the torrents of his silver hair. When Jupien had helped the Baron out of the cab, and I had greeted him, he spoke very rapidly, in a voice so imperceptible that I could scarcely make out what he was saying to me, which drew from him, when for the third time I made him repeat his words, a gesture of impatience which surprised me because of the impassivity his face had registered, due no doubt to some residue of his paralysis. But when finally I grew accustomed to this *pianissimo* of whispered words, I realized that the invalid's intellect had survived absolutely unimpaired.

There were, however, two distinct M. de Charluses, quite apart from any of the others. Of the two, the intellectual spent his time complaining that he was becoming aphasic, that he was constantly pronouncing one word or one letter instead of another. But whenever he happened to do this, the other M. de Charlus, the subconscious one, who wanted as much to be envied as the other did to be pitied, and had a degree of vanity and affectation despised by the first, stopped immediately, like an orchestral conductor when his musicians are floundering, in mid-sentence, and with infinite ingenuity substituted for what was about to follow the word actually spoken another word which none the less appeared to be one he had chosen. Even his memory was intact, from which moreover his vanity made him, not without the fatigue of extremely arduous concentration, dredge up this or that ancient recollection, of no importance, relating to me, in order to show me that he had retained or recovered all his clarity of mind. Without moving his head or his eyes, nor varying a single inflection of his delivery, he said to me, for example: 'Look, there's a poster on that telegraph-pole just like the one I was standing beside when I saw you for the first time at Avranches, no I'm wrong, at Balbec.' And it would indeed be an advertisement for the same product.

At first I had hardly been able to make out what he was saying, just as to begin with one can make out nothing in a room where all the curtains are drawn. But like eyes in the half-darkness, my ears soon grew accustomed to this *pianissimo*. I think also that his voice had gradually became louder as he continued speaking, either because the feebleness of his voice was in part the product of a nervous apprehension which gradually dissipated as he became distracted by the presence of another person and stopped thinking about it; or, on the contrary, because this feebleness corresponded to his true state and the momentary strength with which he spoke in the conversation was provoked by an excitement that was factitious, short-lived and rather doleful, making strangers think: 'He's much better, he must be careful not to think about his illness,' but which in fact aggravated the illness, which rapidly took hold again. Whatever the reason, the Baron at that moment (and even taking into account my own adjustment) was tossing out his words more forcefully, rather as the tide, on days when the weather is bad, flings down its twisted little waves. And the residue of his recent attack could be heard underneath his words, like the sound of pebbles dragging on the shore. Yet continuing to speak to me about the past, probably as much as anything else to show me that he had not lost his memory, he evoked it in a funereal manner, yet without any sadness. He enumerated at endless length all the members of his family or his social circle who were no longer alive, less, it seemed, with any sadness that they were no longer with us than with a sense of satisfaction at surviving them. Recalling their demise seemed to make him more aware of his own return to health. It was with an almost triumphal severity that he repeated monotonously, with his slight stammer and a faintly sepulchral resonance: 'Hannibal de Bréauté, dead! Antoine de Mouchy, dead! Charles Swann, dead! Adalbert de Montmorency, dead! Boson de Talleyrand, dead! Sosthène de Doudeauville, dead!' and, every time, the word 'dead' seemed to fall on the deceased man like a spadeful of earth, each one heavier than the last, thrown down by a gravedigger trying to pin them more securely in their graves.

The Duchesse de Létourville, who was not going to the Princesse de Guermantes's party as she was just recovering from a long illness, passed us at that moment on foot, and seeing the Baron, and unaware of his recent attack, stopped to say good-afternoon. But having been ill herself had not made her more understanding of the illness of others, indeed it had given her a greater impatience, a bad-tempered nervousness which may perhaps have concealed the fact that she felt sorry for them. Realizing that the Baron was having difficulty in pronouncing, even remembering, certain words, and in moving his arm, she looked at Jupien and myself in turn, as if asking us for an explanation of such a shocking phenomenon. As neither of us said anything, it was to M. de Charlus himself she addressed a long look full of sadness, but also critical. She looked as if she was about to reproach him for being out of doors with her in a state as unusual as if he had come out without a tie or shoes. When the Baron made yet another error of pronunciation, the Duchesse's annoyance and indignation both became too much to bear, and she said to the Baron: 'Palamède!' in the exasperated interrogative tone of those nervous people who cannot bear to wait a few minutes, and who, if one invites them to come in straight away, apologizing for not being quite ready, will ask in a tart tone of voice, more accusatory than apologetic: 'I'm not disturbing you, am I?' as if the person being disturbed was to blame.

He asked if he could sit down on a bench and rest while Jupien and I went for a stroll, and painfully pulled a book out of his pocket, one which looked to me like a prayer-book. I was not displeased to have this opportunity to learn more details from Jupien about the state of the Baron's health. 'I'm glad to have a chance to speak to you, sir, said Jupien, but we shan't walk any further than the Circus. The Baron is much better now, thank heavens, but I don't dare leave him alone for very long, it's always the same thing, he's too generous, he gives everything he's got to other people; and anyway that's not all, he's still as randy as a young man, so I have to keep my eyes open. – All the more, since he got his own sight back, I replied; I was very sad when I heard that he had gone blind. – Yes, that was a side-effect of his stroke, he lost his vision completely. Imagine, right through the cure, which did him so much good in every other way, it was as if he'd been blind since birth. – At least that must have made some of your surveillance unnecessary? – Don't you believe it! We'd hardly got to the hotel before he starts

asking me what the various members of staff look like. I told him they were all ghastly. But he soon realized that they couldn't all be, and that I must be lying about some of them. You see what I mean, what a little monkey he is! And then he had a kind of nose for it, something in people's voices maybe, I don't know. So he'd arrange to send me off on some urgent errand. One day – excuse me telling you this, but you did once come to the Temple of Shamelessness by mistake so I've got nothing to hide from you (besides which, Jupien always obtained a rather unpleasant satisfaction from divulging the secrets he was privy to) – I was coming back from one of these so-called urgent errands, hurrying back in fact because I was fairly sure it'd been arranged on purpose, when, just as I had almost reached the Baron's bedroom, I heard a voice saying: "What? – Really? replied the Baron, you mean that was the first time?" I entered without knocking, and you can imagine my fright! The Baron, misled by the voice, which was in fact much lower than is usual at that age (and remember the Baron was still, at that point, completely blind), this man who used to have a taste for somewhat older men, was with a child who wasn't even ten years old.'

I had been told that during that time he had been subject almost daily to crises of mental depression, characterized not by any actual mental divagation, but by his avowal, at the top of his voice in front of third parties whose presence or severity he had forgotten, of opinions he had been accustomed to conceal, like his pro-Germanism. Even though the war was long over, he would groan about the defeat of the Germans, among whom he counted himself, and say with pride: 'And yet there is no doubt but that we shall have our revenge, for we have proved that it is we who are capable of the greater resistance and who have the better organization.' Or else his confidences would take another direction, and he would proclaim angrily: 'Lord X—— or the Prince den—— had better not repeat what they said yesterday, it was all I could do then not to reply: "You know perfectly well that you are as much one as I am." ' Needless to say, when M. de Charlus thus uttered, at the times when, as one says, he was not 'all there', pro-German or other opinions, the members of his close circle who happened to be there, whether Jupien or the Duchesse de Guermantes, would as a matter of habit interrupt his incautious words and provide for the less intimate and more indiscreet listeners an interpretation of them which, while strained, was not dishonourable.

'But, heavens above! exclaimed Jupien, I was quite right not to want us to go too far. Look, he's already managed to get into conversation with a gardener's boy. Good-bye, sir, I'd better leave you, I can't leave my invalid alone for a second, he's nothing but a great baby.'

I got out of the cab again shortly before arriving at the Princesse de Guermantes's house and began to think once more about the lassitude and boredom with which, the previous evening, I had tried to note the line, in one of the most reputedly beautiful parts of the French countryside, that separated shadow from light on the trees. Certainly, the intellectual conclusions I had drawn from it did not affect my sensibility so cruelly today. They were still the same. But as happened each time I was wrenched out of my habits, going out at a different time, or to a new place, I felt acute pleasure. The pleasure today seemed to me to be a purely frivolous one, that of going to an afternoon party at the house of the Princesse de Guermantes. But since I knew now that I could never attain to anything more than frivolous pleasures, what point would there be in refusing it? I told myself again that I had not experienced, when I attempted that description, anything of the enthusiasm which, if not the only one, is one of the main criteria of talent. I tried now to extract from my memory other 'snapshots', particularly the snapshots it had taken in Venice, but the very word made it as boring as a photograph exhibition, and I felt that I had no more taste, or talent, for describing now what I had seen earlier, than yesterday for describing what I was observing, at that very moment, with a doleful and meticulous eye. Any moment now, hosts of friends whom I had not seen for such a long time would doubtless be asking me to give up this isolation and to devote my days to them. I had no reason to refuse them since I now had proof that I was no longer good for anything, that literature could no longer bring me any joy, whether through my own fault, because I was not talented enough, or through the fault of literature, if it was indeed less pregnant with reality than I had thought.

When I pondered what Bergotte had said to me: 'You are ill, but one cannot feel sorry for you because you have the joys of the mind,' it struck me how wrong he had been about me. How little joy there was in this sterile lucidity! I could even add that if perhaps I did sometimes have pleasures – not of the intellect – I wasted them, and always on a different woman; so that if destiny had granted me another hundred years of life, free of infirmities, it would only have added successive extensions to a tediously protracted existence, which there seemed to be no point in prolonging thus far, let alone even further. As for the 'joys of the intellect', could I use that phrase for these cold observations which my perceptive eye or my precise reasoning picked out without any pleasure and which remained infertile?

But sometimes it is just when everything seems to be lost that we experience a presentiment that may save us; one has knocked on all the doors which lead nowhere, and then, unwittingly, one pushes against the only one through which one may enter and for which one would have searched in vain for a hundred years, and it opens.

Turning over the dismal thoughts which I have just set down, I had entered the Guermantes' courtyard and in my distraction had failed to see an approaching car; at the chauffeur's shout I had time only to step smartly aside, and as I retreated I could not help tripping up against the unevenly laid paving-stones, behind which was a coach-house. But at the moment when, regaining my balance, I set my foot down on a stone which was slightly lower than the one next to it, all my discouragement vanished in the face of the same happiness that, at different points in my life, had given me the sight of trees I had thought I recognized when I was taking a drive round Balbec, the sight of the steeples of Martinville, the taste of a madeleine dipped in herb tea, and all the other sensations I have spoken about, and which the last works of Vinteuil had seemed to me to synthesize. Just as at the moment when I tasted the madeleine, all uneasiness about the future and all intellectual doubt were gone. Those that had assailed me a moment earlier about the reality of my intellectual talent, even the reality of literature, were lifted as if by enchantment.

Without my having started a new line of thought, or discovered a decisive argument, the difficulties which just now were insoluble had lost all their importance. This time, though, I had decided not to resign myself to not knowing the reason for it, as I had done on the day I tasted the madeleine dipped in herb tea. The happiness that I had just experienced was indeed just like that I had felt when eating the madeleine, and the cause of which I had at that time put off seeking. The difference, purely material, was in the images each evoked; a deep azure intoxicated my eyes, impressions of coolness and dazzling light swirled around me and, in my desire to grasp them, without daring to move any more than when I had tasted the madeleine and I was trying to bring back to my memory what it reminded me of, I continued, even at the risk of making myself the laughing-stock of the huge crowd of chauffeurs, to stagger, as I had done a moment before, one foot on the raised paving-stone, the other foot on the lower one. Each time I simply repeated the outward form of this movement, nothing helpful occurred; but if I succeeded, forgetting about the Guermantes' party, in recapturing the feeling I had experienced when I put my feet down in that way, then the dazzling and indistinct vision brushed against my consciousness, as if it were saying: 'Seize hold of me as I pass, if you are strong-minded enough, and try to solve the riddle of happiness I am offering you.' And almost at once I realized that it was Venice, all my efforts to describe which, and all the so-called snapshots taken by my memory, had never communicated anything to me, but which the sensation I had once felt on the two uneven flagstones in the baptistery of St Mark's had now at last expressed for me, along with all the other sensations associated with that sensation on that day, which had been waiting in their place, from which a sudden chance had imperiously made them emerge, in the sequence of forgotten days. In the same way, the taste of the little madeleine had reminded me of Combray. But why had the images of Combray and Venice given me at these two separate moments a joy akin to certainty and sufficient, without any other proofs, to make death a matter of indifference to me?

Still wondering what the answer was, and determined to find it that day, I entered the Guermantes' *hôtel*, because we always place less importance on the inner tasks we have to carry out than we do on the visible role we are playing, which, on this occasion, was that of a guest. But when I reached the first floor, a butler asked me to go into a small library-cum-sitting-room, next to the room where the refreshments were, and wait for the few moments until the piece being played was over, the Duchesse having ordered the doors to be kept closed during its performance. At that very moment, a second intimation occurred to reinforce the one which the two uneven paving-stones had just given me and to exhort me to persevere in my task. A servant, trying fruitlessly not to make any noise, had just

knocked a spoon against a plate. The same kind of happiness I had felt from the uneven flagstones flooded over me; the feeling was again one of great heat, but quite different: mingled with the smell of smoke, alleviated by the cool fragrance of a forest setting; and I recognized that what I was enjoying so much was the same row of trees that I had found tedious to observe and to describe, and beside which, opening the bottle of beer I had had with me in the carriage, I had just for a moment, in a sort of dizziness, believed myself to be, so powerfully did the sound of the spoon against the plate give me, before I had time to pull myself together, the illusion of the sound of a workman's hammer doing something to one of the wheels of the train while we were halted beside the little wood. It seemed after that as if the signs which were, on this day, to bring me out of my despondency and renew my faith in literature were intent on multiplying themselves, for a butler who had long been in service with the Prince de Guermantes having recognized me, and having brought to me in the library, where I stayed in order to avoid going in to the refreshment room, a selection of petits fours and a glass of orangeade, I wiped my mouth with the napkin he had given me; but immediately, like the character in the*Arabian Nights* who, without knowing it, performs precisely the ritual which makes appear, visible to himself alone, a docile genie ready to take him far away, a new vision of azure passed in front of my eyes; but it was pure and saline, and billowed into a bluish, bosomy swell; the impression was so strong that the moment I was reliving seemed actually to be the present; more stupefied than the day when I wondered whether I was really going to be welcomed by the Princesse de Guermantes or whether the whole prospect was about to dissolve, I thought that the servant had just opened the window on to the beach and that everything was inviting me to go down and stroll along the sea-front at high tide; the napkin which I had taken to wipe my mouth had exactly the same stiffness and the same degree of starch as the one with which I had had so much trouble drying myself in front of the window, the first day after my arrival in Balbec, and, now in this library in the Guermantes' *hôtel*, it displayed, spread across its folds and creases, the plumage of an ocean green and blue as a peacock's tail. And it was not just these colours which filled me with joy, but a whole moment of my life which aroused them, which had probably been an aspiration towards them, which some sense of fatigue or of sadness had perhaps prevented me from enjoying at Balbec, and which now, freed of whatever was imperfect in the external perception, pure and disembodied, filled me with delight.

The piece that was being played was about to end at any moment, at which point I would be obliged to enter the drawing-room. I therefore forced myself to try to see as clearly and quickly as possible into the nature of the identical pleasures I had just experienced three times in a few minutes, and then to isolate the lesson I was to draw from it. On the enormous difference between the true impression we have had of a thing and the artificial impression we give ourselves of it when we try by an act of will to represent it to ourselves, I did not pause; remembering too clearly with what relative indifference Swann had once been able to speak of the days when he had been loved, because beneath his words he saw something different, and the sudden pain that the little phrase of Vinteuil had caused him by bringing back those very days, just as he had felt them at the time, I understood only too well that what the sensation of the uneven flagstones, the stiffness of the napkin, the taste of the madeleine, had awoken within me bore no relation to what I was trying to remember about Venice, about Balbec and about Combray, with the help of a uniform memory; and I understood that life might be deemed dreary, even though at certain moments it may seem so beautiful, because for the most part it is on the basis of something quite different from it, on the basis of images which retain nothing of life itself, that we judge it and that we disparage it. At most I noted incidentally that the differences which there are between each of the real impressions – differences which explain why a uniform depiction of life cannot be a good likeness – was probably because the slightest word we have spoken at any point in our lives, the most insignificant action, was surrounded by, and was a reflection of, things which logically were not connected to it, were separated from it by the intelligence which had no need of them for its rational purposes, but in the middle of which – here, the pink reflection of the evening on the flower-covered wall of a country restaurant, a feeling of hunger, the desire for women, the pleasure of luxury – there, the blue scrolls of the morning sea enveloping the musical phrases which partially emerge from them like the shoulders of mermaids – the gesture, the simplest action remains enclosed as if within a thousand sealed vessels each one of which would be filled with things of a completely different colour, odour and temperature; quite apart from the fact that these vessels, arranged across the full length of our years, during which we have never ceased to change, even if only our thoughts or our dreams, are placed at quite different heights and give us the sensation of extraordinarily varied atmospheres. Admittedly, these are changes that we have accomplished imperceptibly; but between the memory which suddenly comes back to us and our current state, even between two memories of different years or places or times, the distance is such that it is enough, apart even from any specific originality, to render them incomprehensible to each other. Yes, if the memory, thanks to forgetfulness, has not been able to make a single connection, to throw up a single link between it and the present moment, if it has stayed in its place, at its date, if it has kept its distance, its isolation in the depths of a valley or at the very peak of a summit, it suddenly makes us breathe a new air, new precisely because it is an air we have breathed before, this purer air which the poets have tried in vain to make reign in paradise and which could not provide this profound feeling of renewal if it had not already been breathed, for the only true paradise is a paradise that we have lost.

And I noticed in passing that, in the work of art that I now, without having made any conscious resolution, felt close to undertaking, this would pose great difficulties. For I would have to execute its successive parts in slightly different materials, and would need to find one very different from that suited to memories of mornings beside the sea, or afternoons in Venice, if I wanted to depict the evenings at Rivebelle at the moment when, in the dining-room that opened on to the garden, the heat was beginning to break up, to subside and settle, when a last glimmer was still illuminating the roses on the walls of the restaurant, while the last water-colours of the day were still visible in the sky – in a different way, new, with a particular transparency and sonority, compact, cooling and pink.

I slid rapidly over all that, being more imperiously required to seek out the cause of this happiness and the nature of the certainty with which it imposed itself, an enquiry I had hitherto postponed. And I began to divine this cause as I compared these varied impressions of well-being with each other, all of which, the sound of the spoon on the plate, the uneven flagstones, the taste of the madeleine, had something in common, which I was experiencing in the present moment and at the same time in a moment far away, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and make me uncertain about which of the two I was in; the truth was that the being within me who was enjoying this impression was enjoying it because of something shared between a day in the past and the present moment, something extra-temporal, and this being appeared only when, through one of these moments of identity between the present and the past, it was able to find itself in the only milieu in which it could live and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say outside of time. This explained why my anxieties on the subject of my death had ceased the moment when I unconsciously recognized the taste of the little madeleine, since at that very moment the being that I had been was an extra-temporal being, and consequently unconcerned with the vicissitudes of the future. It lived only through the essence of things, and was unable to grasp this in the present, where, as the imagination does not come into play, the senses were incapable of providing it; even the future towards which action tends surrenders it to us. This being had only ever come to me, only ever manifested itself to me on the occasions, outside of action and immediate pleasure, when the miracle of an analogy had made me escape from the present. It alone had the power to make me find the old days again, the lost time, in the face of which the efforts of my memory and my intellect always failed.

And perhaps, if just now I thought that Bergotte was wrong when he talked about the joys of the life of the mind, it was because at that moment what I meant by 'life of the mind' was the sort of logical reasoning which had no connection with it, or with what existed in me at that moment – exactly as I had been able to find life and society boring because I was judging them according to untruthful memories, whereas I had a considerable appetite for living now that a real moment of the past had just, on three separate occasions, been recreated within me.

Was it no more than a moment of the past? Perhaps it was a great deal more; something which, common both to the past and the present, is much more essential than either of them. So many times in the course of my life reality had disappointed me because at the moment when I perceived it, my imagination, which was my only organ for the enjoyment of beauty, could not be applied to it, by virtue of the inevitable law which means that one can imagine only what is absent. But now all the consequences of that iron law had suddenly been neutralized, suspended, by a wonderful natural expedient, which had held out the prospect of a sensation – sound of a fork and a hammer, same book title, etc. – both in the past, which enabled my imagination to enjoy it, and in the present,

where the actual shock to my senses of experiencing the sound, the touch of linen, etc., had added to the dreams of the imagination the thing which they were habitually deprived of, the idea of existence – and, thanks to this subterfuge, had allowed my being to obtain, to isolate, to immobilize – for the duration of a flash of lightning – the one thing it never apprehends: a little bit of time in its pure state. The being which had been reborn in me when, with such a tremor of happiness, I had heard the sound common at once both to the spoon touching the plate and the hammer hitting the wheel, or felt the unevenness beneath my feet common to the stones of the Guermantes' courtyard and St Mark's baptistery, etc., this spirit draws its nourishment only from the essence of things, and only in them does it find its sustenance and its delight. It languishes in the observation of the present where the senses cannot bring this to it, in the consideration of a past where the intelligence desiccates it, and in the expectation of a future which the will constructs out of fragments of the present and the past from which it extracts even more of their reality without retaining any more than is useful for the narrowly human, utilitarian ends that it assigns to them. Yet a single sound, a single scent, already heard or breathed long ago, may once again, both in the present and the past, be real without being present, ideal without being abstract, as soon as the permanent and habitually hidden essence of things is liberated, and our true self, which may sometimes have seemed to be long dead, but never was entirely, is re-awoken and re-animated when it receives the heavenly food that is brought to it. One minute freed from the order of time has recreated in us, in order to feel it, the man freed from the order of time. And because of that we can understand why he trusts his joy, and even if the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem logically to contain reasons for this joy, we can understand how the word 'death' has no meaning for him; situated outside time, what should he fear from the future?

But this optical illusion which brought back to me a moment of the past incompatible with the present could not last. The scenes played out by our voluntary memory, of course, can be prolonged, as they require no more effort on our part than leafing through a picture-book. Long ago, for example, on the day when I had to go to the house of the Princesse de Guermantes for the first time, from the sun-filled courtyard of our house in Paris, I had idly gazed on images of my choice, of the place de l'Église in Combray, or the beach at Balbec, as if I had been leafing through an album of water-colours painted in the different places I had been to choose illustrations of each of these days, enabling me to say, with the selfish pleasure of a collector, as I catalogued the illustrations of my memory: 'I've certainly seen some beautiful things in my life.' My memory probably then affirmed the difference between these sensations; but all it could do was to rearrange homogeneous elements in different ways. The same was not true of the three recollections I had just had and in which, instead of giving me a more flattering idea of my self, I had on the contrary almost doubted that self's current reality. Just as on the day when I had dipped the madeleine in the warm herb tea, in the place where I happened to be, wherever that were, then in my bedroom in Paris, or today, at this moment, in the library of the Prince de Guermantes, or a little earlier in the courtyard of his *hôtel*, there had been within me, irradiating a small area around me, a sensation (taste of the soaked madeleine, the sound of metal, a feeling underfoot) which was common to the place where I was and also to another place (my aunt Octave's bedroom, the railway carriage, St Mark's baptistery). And at the moment I was working this out, the piercing noise of a water-pipe, just like those long cries that in summer the pleasure boats sometimes made in the evening off the coast at Balbec, made me feel (as I had already once at Paris, in a grand restaurant, at the sight of a luxurious

dining-room half empty, summery and hot) much more than a sensation simply analogous to the one I had had at the end of the afternoon at Balbec when all the tables were covered with their cloths and their silverware, the vast bay-windows wide open to the beach, in one long space, a single wall of glass or stone, while the sun slowly descended over the sea where the ships were starting their cries, and all I had to do, to join Albertine and her friends who were walking on the sea-front, was to step over the wooden frame, scarcely higher than my ankle, into a groove in which, to let the air into the hotel, all the continuous panes of glass had been slid. But the painful memory of having loved Albertine was not a part of this sensation. The only painful memory is of the dead. And they rapidly decay and nothing remains, even around their tombs, save the beauty of nature, silence and pure air. Yet it was not just an echo, the duplicate of a past sensation, that the sound of the water-pipe had just made me experience, it was that sensation itself. In this instance, as in all the preceding ones, the shared sensation had sought to recreate the old location around it, while the actual location which now occupied the place used all the resistance of its substantiality to oppose this intrusion into an *hôtel* in Paris of a Normandy beach, or a railway embankment. The seaside dining-room at Balbec, with its damask linen laid out like altar cloths to receive the setting sun, had tried to undermine the solidity of the Guermantes' *hôtel*, to force open its doors, and for a moment had made the sofas around me flicker, as on another occasion it had done to the tables in the Paris restaurant. Always, in resurrections of this sort, the distant location engendered around the common sensation would be meshed for a moment, like a wrestler, with the actual location. The actual location had always been the winner; and the loser had always seemed to me to be the more beautiful; so beautiful that I remained in ecstasy on the uneven paving-stones, as before the cup of tea, attempting to retain, when it appeared, and bring back, the moment it escaped me, this influx and rejection of Combray, or Venice, or Balbec, which surged up only to abandon me a few moments later in the midst of these new surroundings, permeated though they now were by the past. And if the current location had not immediately been victorious, I believe I would have lost consciousness; because these resurrections of the past, for the second they last, are so complete that they do more than simply force our eyes to stop seeing the room around them in order to look at the railway line bordered with trees or the incoming tide. They force our nostrils to breathe the air of places that are actually far away, our will to choose between the different plans they suggest to us, our whole person to believe itself surrounded by them, or at least to stumble between them and the present locations, in a dizzying uncertainty akin to that which one sometimes experiences through some ineffable vision at the moment of falling asleep.

So it began to seem that what the being which had now been resuscitated in me three or four times had just enjoyed might well have been fragments of existence which had escaped from time, but that the contemplation of them, while a contemplation of eternity, was itself fugitive. And yet I felt that the pleasure it had brought to my life, albeit at rare intervals, was the only one that was both real and fertile. The sign of the unreality of the others is surely shown clearly enough, either by the impossibility of their satisfying us, as for instance in the case of social pleasures, which at best result in discomfort caused by the ingestion of awful food, or friendship, which is a fiction because the artist who, for whatever reason, gives up an hour of work to spend an hour chatting with a friend knows that he is sacrificing a reality for something that does not exist (friends being friends only within the ambit of that mild eccentricity which accompanies our lives, and which we acquiesce in, but which in our heart of hearts we know is like the wanderings of a madman who believes the furniture is alive and talks to it), or else by the sadness which follows their satisfaction, as with the sadness I felt on the day when I had been introduced to Albertine, for the trouble I had gone to, slight though it was, in order to obtain something – the acquaintance of a young girl – which seemed a slight thing only because I had obtained it. Even a more profound pleasure, like the one I should have been able to experience when I loved Albertine, was in fact perceived only inversely, through the anxiety I felt when she was not there, because when I was sure that she would soon be with me again, as on the day when she came back from the Trocadéro, I had seemed to experience no more than a vague sense of worry, whereas I became more and more excited the more deeply I penetrated, with an increasing sense of personal joy, into the sound of the knife or the taste of the tea which had brought into my bedroom my aunt Léonie's bedroom, and with it all of Combray, and its two ways. I had therefore decided to cling on to this contemplation of the essence of things, to stabilize it, but how, by what means? Of course at the moment when the stiffness of the napkin had brought back Balbec, and for an instant had caressed my imagination, not only with the view of the sea as it had been on that day, but with the smell of the room, the strength of the wind, the desire for lunch, the uncertainty which walk to take, all of it tied to the feeling of the linen like the thousand wings of angels which revolve a thousand times a minute; and of course, at the moment when the unevenness of the two paving-stones had extended the thin, desiccated images I had of Venice and St Mark's, and all the sensations I had felt there, into every sense and each dimension, linking the square to the church, the canal to the landing-stage and, to everything the eye can see, the world of desires seen only by the mind, I had been tempted, if not, because of the time of year, to go back and float along the canals of Venice, for me associated principally with the spring, then at least to return to Balbec. But I did not linger for an instant over this thought. In the first place, I knew that places were not the same as the pictures conjured up by their names, and that it was almost only in my dreams, in my sleep, that a place stretched out before my eyes in that pure materiality that is completely distinct from the ordinary things that we can see and

touch, and which I always used to imagine them as possessing. But even when it came down to images of an altogether different kind, those of memory, I knew that the beauty of Balbec was something I had never experienced when I was there, and that the beauty it left me with, the beauty of memory, was something I was unable to discover when I went back there to stay for a second time. I had too much experience of the impossibility of making contact in reality with what lay deep within myself; it was not in St Mark's Square, any more than it had been in my second visit to Balbec or in my return to Tansonville to see Gilberte, that I would find Lost Time, and travel, which did nothing but offer me once again the illusion that these bygone impressions had an existence outside of me, in some corner of a particular place, could not be the means which I was looking for. And I did not want to let myself be taken in yet again, for what I wanted to do was to find out once and for all whether it was truly possible to reach that which, always disappointed as I had been in the presence of places and human beings, I had (even though that piece of chamber music by Vinteuil seemed to tell me the opposite) believed to be unreachable. I was therefore not going to attempt another experiment on a path that I had long known led nowhere. Impressions of the sort that I was trying to stabilize would simply evaporate if they came into contact with a direct pleasure which was powerless to bring them into being. The only way to continue to appreciate them was to try to understand them more completely just as they were, that is to say within myself, to make them transparent enough to see right down into their depths. I had been unable to know pleasure at Balbec, any more than the pleasure of living with Albertine, which had become perceptible to me only after the event. And the recapitulation I was making of all the disappointments of my life, as I had lived it, and which made me believe that its reality must reside somewhere else than in action, was not bringing the different disappointments together in a purely fortuitous manner in accordance with the circumstances of my existence. I felt very strongly that the disappointments of travel and the disappointments of love were not different disappointments, but the varied aspect taken on, according to the circumstances which bring it into play, by our powerlessness to realize ourselves in material pleasure or real action. And, thinking once again about the extra-temporal joy caused by the sound of the spoon or the taste of the madeleine, I said to myself: 'Was this the happiness which the sonata's little phrase offered to Swann, which he was unable to find in artistic creation and therefore mistook by assimilating it to the pleasure of love; was this the happiness I had felt as a presentiment, even more supra-terrestrial than the little phrase of the sonata, of the mysterious, glowing appeal of the septet which Swann had not been able to recognize, being dead like so many others before the truth made for them can be revealed to them? And anyway, it would not have been any use to him, for the phrase could easily symbolize an appeal, but not create the powers to make Swann the writer that he was not.'

Yet after a moment I realized, having given some thought to these resurrections of memory, that in another way, obscure impressions had sometimes, even already at Combray on the Guermantes way, attracted the attention of my thoughts, in the way these reminiscences did, but not then hiding a past impression but a new truth, a precious image that I sought to discover by efforts of the same kind as those which one makes to remember something, as if our most beautiful ideas were like tunes in music which come back, so to speak, to us without our ever having heard them, and which we do our best to listen to and to transcribe. I remembered with pleasure, because it showed me that I was already the same then and gave me back something that was fundamental to my nature, but also with sadness when I thought that I had not progressed since then, that in Combray already I used attentively to fix before my mind's eye some image which had impelled me to look at it, a cloud, a triangle, a church spire, a flower, a pebble, feeling that there might be something quite different beneath the signs which I had to try to uncover, some form of thought they translated like those hieroglyphics that people used to believe represented only material objects. Doubtless the effort of deciphering was difficult but it alone gave reading a degree of truth. For the truths that the intellect grasps directly as giving access to the world of full enlightenment have something less profound, less necessary about them than those that life has, despite ourselves, communicated in an impression, a material impression because it enters us through our senses, but one from which it is also possible to extract something spiritual. So in each case, whether we are dealing with impressions such as that made on me by the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or recollections like that of the unevenness of the two steps or the taste of the madeleine, I had to try to interpret the sensations as the signs of so many laws and ideas, at the same time as trying to think, that is to draw out from the penumbra what I had felt, and convert it into a spiritual equivalent. And what was this method, which seemed to me to be the only one, but the making of a work of art? The consequences of this were already thronging into my mind; for whether it was a matter of recollections of the sort characterized by the sound of the fork or the taste of the madeleine, or of those truths written with the aid of figures, the meaning of which I was trying to find in my head where, church steeples or wild grasses, they composed a complicated and elaborate book of spells, their primary character was that I was not free to choose them, that they were given to me just as they were. And I sensed that this was the mark of their authenticity. I had not been looking for the two uneven paving-stones in the courtyard where I stumbled. But the very fortuity, the inevitability of the manner in which the sensation was encountered, controlled the authenticity of the past that it resuscitated, the images it let loose, since we feel it striving towards the light, we feel the joy of the real, found again. It is also the control of the truth of the whole picture made out of contemporary impressions that it brings in its train, with this infallible proportion of light and shade, intensity and omission, memory and forgetfulness, of which conscious memory or observation will always be incapable.

As for the inner book of unknown signs (signs which seemed to stand out, as it were, in relief, and which my attention, exploring my unconscious, cast around for, stumbled over, and traced the shapes of, like a diver feeling his way underwater), for the reading of which nobody else could provide me with any rules, reading them becomes one of those acts of creation in which nobody can take our place or even collaborate with us. So many people are discouraged from writing because of this! There are almost no tasks they will not take on in order to avoid it. Every major event, from the Dreyfus Affair to the war, provided further excuses for writers not to decipher that book – they wanted to ensure the triumph of justice, to rebuild the moral unity of the nation, they were much too busy to think about literature. But these were simply excuses because they did not have, or no longer had, genius, or to put it another way, instinct. For instinct shows us the work we have to do and intelligence provides the pretexts for evading it. Excuses have absolutely no place in art, mere intentions do not count for anything, the artist has to listen to his instinct all the time, with the result that art is the most real thing there is, the most austere school of life, and the true Last Judgment. That book, the most painful of all to decipher, is also the only one dictated to us by reality, the only one whose 'impression' has been made in us by reality itself. Whatever the ideas that may have been left in us by our life, their material outline, the trace of the impression they originally made on us, is always the indispensable warrant of their truth. The ideas formed by pure intelligence contain no more than a logical truth, a possible truth; their choice is arbitrary. The book whose characters are forged within us, rather than sketched by us, is the only book we have. Not that the ideas which we form ourselves may not be logically right, but that we do not know whether they are true. Only the impression, however slight its material may seem, however elusive its trace, can be a criterion of truth, and on that account is the only thing worthy of being apprehended by the mind; it alone, if the mind can elucidate its truth, can bring the mind to a more perfected state, and give it pure happiness. An impression is for the writer what an experiment is for the scientist, except that for the scientist the work of the intelligence precedes it, and for the writer it comes afterwards. Anything we have not had to decipher, to bring to light by our own effort, anything which was already clearly visible, is not our own. The only things that come from ourselves are those we draw out of the obscurity within us, which can never be known by other people.

A slanting ray of the setting sun suddenly reminded me of a time in my early childhood which I had completely forgotten about, when, as my aunt Léonie had a fever which Dr Percepied was afraid might be typhoid, they put me for a week in the little bedroom Eulalie usually occupied, looking over the place de l'Église, where there was nothing but rush matting on the floor and thin percale curtains which were always buzzing with a sunlight that I was not used to. And, seeing how the memory of an old servant's little bedroom suddenly added such a different and delightful stretch of time to my past life, I contrasted this with the utter absence of impressions left on my life by the most sumptuous celebrations in the most princely mansions. The only slightly bad thing about this room of Eulalie's was that in the evenings, because of the proximity of the viaduct, one heard the hooting of the trains. But because I knew that these bellowings proceeded from properly regulated machines, they did not frighten me in the way that I might have been frightened, in prehistoric times, by the cries of a nearby mammoth on its wild and unpredictable path.

So I had already come to the conclusion that we have no freedom at all in the face of the work of art, that we cannot shape it according to our wishes, but that as it pre-exists us, and both because it is necessary and hidden, and because it is, as it were, a law of nature, we have to discover it. But is not this discovery, which art can cause us to make, the discovery, fundamentally, of the thing that ought to be most precious to us, and of which we normally remain unaware for ever, our true life, our reality as we have experienced it, which is often so different from what we believe it to be that we are filled with happiness when some chance event brings the real memory back to us? I found further support for this view in the falsity of so-called realist art, which would not be so untruthful if life had not given us the habit of expressing our experience in ways that do not reflect it, but which we none the less take in a very short space of time to be reality. I felt that I would not have to worry about the various literary theories which had troubled me now and then – notably those which critics had developed at the time of the Dreyfus Affair and which they had taken up again during the war, with the intention of 'bringing the artist down from his ivory tower' and encouraging the abandonment of frivolous or sentimental subjects in favour of the great workers' movements or, if crowds were not possible, at least of noble intellectuals or heroes rather than insignificant members of the idle rich ('I must admit that the depiction of these useless people leaves me rather cold,' Bloch would say).

But anyway, quite apart from their intellectual content, these theories seemed to me to indicate the inferiority of their supporters, in the same way that a really well brought-up child who hears the people with whom he has been taken to lunch saying: 'We don't hide anything here, we say whatever we think,' senses that this indicates a moral quality inferior to that inherent in good deeds, pure and simple, which do not need words. Real art has nothing to do with proclamations of this sort, and carries out its work in silence. Also, the people who indulged in this kind of theorizing used ready-made expressions which had a curious similarity to those of the idiots they were attacking. Indeed it may well be that quality of language is a better gauge of the level of moral or intellectual endeavour than aesthetic approach. Conversely, though, this quality of language (and the laws of character can be equally well studied in a frivolous subject and in a serious one, just as an anatomist can as easily study the laws of anatomy on the body of an imbecile as on that of a man of talent, the great moral laws, as much as those of the circulation of the blood or renal filtration, differing very little with the intellectual level of the individual), which the theoreticians think they can do without, those who admire the theoreticians believe simplistically that it shows no great intellectual worth, worth which they need, if they are to discern it, to see expressed directly and which they cannot infer from the beauty of an image. Whence the vulgar temptation for the writer to write intellectual works. Gross unscrupulousness. A work in which there are theories is like an object with its price-tag still attached. Even this latter only gives something a value, which, on the contrary, logical reasoning in literature diminishes. One reasons, that is one wanders off the track, each time that one does not have the strength of mind to force oneself to make an impression pass through all the successive states which will lead to its stabilization and its expression.

The reality to be expressed resided, I now realized, not in the subject's appearance but at a depth where appearance hardly matters, as in the case of its symbolization by the sound of the spoon on a plate, or the starched stiffness of the napkin, which had been more valuable for my spiritual renewal than any number of humanitarian, patriotic, internationalist or metaphysical conversations. 'No more style, was what I had heard people say in those days, no more literature, what we want is life.' It is easy to see how even M. de Norpois's simple theories in opposition to 'flute-players' had taken on a new lease of life since the war. For all those who do not have an artistic sense, by which I mean the submission to an interior reality, may still be endowed with the capacity to argue about art till the cows come home. And to the extent that they are also diplomats or financiers, deeply involved in the 'realities' of the present time, they are all the more willing to believe that literature is just a form of intellectual amusement destined to be gradually eliminated. Some even wanted the novel to be a sort of cinematographic stream of things. This was an absurd idea. Nothing sets us further apart from what we have really perceived than that sort of cinematographic approach.

On the subject of books, I had remembered as I came into the library what the Goncourts say about the fine editions it contains, and had promised myself that I would look at them while I was closeted here. So all the time I had been following my line of thought, I had been taking down the precious volumes at random until, absent-mindedly opening one of them, *François le Champi* by George Sand,[81] I felt unpleasantly struck by some impression which seemed to have too little in common with my current thoughts, until I realized a moment later, with an emotion which brought tears to my eyes, how much in accord with them this impression actually was. In a room where somebody has died, the undertaker's men are getting ready to bring down the coffin, while the son of a man who has done his country some service shakes hands with the last friends as they file out; if a fanfare suddenly sounds beneath the windows, he is horrified and thinks that some mockery is being made of his grief. At this, although he has until then remained in control of himself, he can suddenly no longer restrain his tears; because he has just realized that what he is hearing is the band of a regiment that is sharing his mourning and paying its last respects to his father's mortal remains. In the same way, I had just recognized how well suited my current feelings were to the painful impression I had experienced when I read the title of a book in the Prince de Guermantes's library; a title which had given me the idea that literature really did give us that world of mystery which I no longer found in it. And yet it was not a particularly outstanding book, it was only *François le Champi*. But that name, like the Guermantes' name, was not like all the other names I have come across since: the memory of what had seemed inexplicable to me in the subject of *François le Champi* when Mama was reading me George Sand's book was re-awoken by the title (just as the Guermantes' name, when I had not seen them for such a long time, contained the essence of the feudal system for me – so *François le Champi* contained the essence of the novel), and for a moment took the place of the generally accepted idea of what George Sand's rural Berry novels are about. At a dinner-party, where thought always remains close to the surface of things, I would probably have been able to talk about *François le Champi* and the Guermantes without either of them meaning what they had meant in Combray. But when I was alone, as at this moment, I was plunged down to a much greater depth. In those moments, the idea that some woman I had met in society was a cousin of Mme de Guermantes, that is, the cousin of a magic-lantern character, seemed incomprehensible, and it seemed equally incomprehensible that the finest books that I had read might be – I do not say better than, which of course they were – but even equal to the extraordinary *François le Champi*. This was an impression from long ago, in which my memories of childhood and family were affectionately mingled and which I had not immediately recognized. For a moment I had angrily wondered who the stranger was who had just upset me. But the stranger was myself, it was the child I was then, whom the book had just brought back to life within me because, knowing nothing of me except this child, it was this child that the book had immediately summoned, wanting to be looked at only by his eyes, loved only by his heart, and wanting to speak only to him. So this book which my mother had read aloud to me in Combray until it was almost morning had retained for me all the wonder of that night. It is true that the 'pen' of George Sand, to use an expression of Brichot's, who was so fond of saying that a book had been written 'with a nimble pen', did not at all seem to me, as it had seemed so long ago to my mother before she slowly began to model her literary tastes on mine, a magical pen. But it was a pen which, without meaning to, I had charged with electricity, as schoolboys often do for fun, and now a thousand insignificant details from Combray, unglimpsed for a very long time, came tumbling helter-skelter of their own accord to hang from the magnetized nib in an endless, flickering line of memories.

Some mystery-loving minds maintain that objects retain something of the eyes that have looked at them, that we can see monuments and pictures only through an almost tangible veil woven over them through the centuries by the love and contemplation of so many admirers. This fantasy would become truth if they

transposed it into the realm of the only reality each person knows, into the domain of their own sensitivity. Yes, in that sense and that sense only (but it is much the more important one), a thing which we have looked at long ago, if we see it again, brings back to us, along with our original gaze, all the images which that gaze contained. This is because things – a book in its red binding, like the rest – at the moment we notice them, turn within us into something immaterial, akin to all the preoccupations or sensations we have at that particular time, and mingle indissolubly with them. Some name, read long ago in a book, contains among its syllables the strong wind and bright sunlight of the day when we were reading it. Thus the sort of literature which is content to 'describe things', to provide nothing more of them than a miserable list of lines and surfaces, despite calling itself realist, is the furthest away from reality, the most impoverishing and depressing, because it unceremoniously cuts all communication between our present self and the past, the essence of which is retained in things, and the future, where things prompt us to enjoy it afresh. It is this that any art worthy of the name must express, and, if it fails in this, we can still draw a lesson from its incapacity (whereas there is none to be drawn even from the successes of realism), namely that this essence is, in part, subjective and impossible to communicate.

More than that, a thing which we saw at a certain time in our lives, a book which we read, does not remain for ever a part solely of what there was around us; it remains just as faithfully part of what we then were, and can be re-experienced, rethought, only by the sensibility, the thought processes, the person that we then were; if in the library I take down *François le Champi*, a child immediately rises up within me and takes my place, the only one who has the right to read the title *François le Champi* and who reads it as he read it then, with the same impression of the weather outside in the garden, the same dreams as he formed then about other countries and about life, the same anxiety about the future. Or again, if I see a thing from another time, it will be a young man who rises up. So that my character today is nothing but an abandoned quarry, thinking everything it contains to be monotonous and identical, but out of which each memory, like a sculptor of genius, makes countless statues. I say each *thing* that we see again, because books in this respect behave as things; the way a book opened along the spine, the texture of the paper, may have retained within it as vivid a memory of the way I imagined Venice then, and of my wish to go there, as the book's actual sentences. More vivid even, for words sometimes get in the way, like those photographs of a person, looking at which one remembers him less well than if one had been content just to think about him. Certainly with many of the books of my childhood, even, sadly, some by Bergotte himself, if I happen to pick them up some evening when I am feeling tired, I do so only as I might take a train, in the hope of finding some repose by looking at different things and breathing the atmosphere of times past. But it sometimes happens that this sought-for evocation is hindered by prolonged reading of the book. There is, for instance, one of Bergotte's books (the copy of which in the Prince's library bore a dedication that was fawning and platitudinous in the extreme), which I read one winter day when I was unable to see Gilberte, in which I can never manage to find the phrases I used to love so much. Certain words almost make me believe that I've found them again, but it's impossible. Where could the beauty be that I used to find in them? Yet from the volume itself, the snow that covered the Champs-Élysées on the day I read it has not been removed: I can see it still.

And that is why, if I had ever been tempted to be a bibliophile, like

the Prince de Guermantes, I should only have been a rather odd one, except that the beauty which accrues to a book for collectors, independently of its inherent value, when they know the libraries through which it has passed, or know that it was given by a particular sovereign on the occasion of some significant event to some famous man, when they have been able to trace its movements, from sale to sale, throughout its life, all the, so to speak, historic beauty of a book, would not be lost on me. But I would prefer to derive its value from my own life, rather than mere curiosity; and it would often not be the physical copy itself that I would associate with it, but the work itself, as in the case of *François le Champi*, revealed to me for the first time in my little room at Combray, during perhaps the loveliest and saddest night of my life, when I had, alas! (at a time when the mysterious Guermantes appeared completely inaccessible to me) obtained from my parents their first surrendering of authority, from which I would later come to date the decline of my health and my will, and my withdrawal, each day more complete, from a difficult task – and rediscovered today, appropriately, in the Guermantes' library, on this most glorious day, by which were illuminated suddenly not only the old fumblings of my thought, but even the purpose of my life and perhaps of art. As for individual copies of books, I could have been interested in them too, in a living sense. The first edition of a work would have been more precious to me than the others, but by that I would have meant the edition in which I had read it for the first time. I would look for the original editions, by which I mean those from which I had received an original impression of the book. Because subsequent impressions are not original. In the case of novels, I would collect old-fashioned bindings, the ones from the period when I read my first novels and which so often would have heard Papa telling me to 'Sit up straight!' Like the dress a woman was wearing when we saw her for the first time, they would help me to rediscover the love I had then, the beauty over which I have superimposed too many decreasingly loved images in my attempt to rediscover the first one, I who am not the I who saw it and who must give way to the I that I was then, if it calls up the thing it knew and that my I of today does not recognize at all. But even in this sense, which is the only one I could ever understand, I would not be tempted to be a bibliophile. I am too aware of how porous things are to the mind, and how they become saturated with it, for that.

The library which I would put together for myself in this way would be of an even greater value still; because the books I read long ago at Combray, in Venice, enriched now by my memory with vast illuminations representing the church of Saint-Hilaire, the gondola moored at the foot of San Giorgio Maggiore on the Grand Canal encrusted with glittering sapphires, would have become worthy of those 'illustrated books', illuminated bibles or Books of Hours, which the collector never opens to read but only to be enchanted once again by the colours which were added to it by some rival of Foucquet,[82] and which make these works as priceless as they are. And yet even to open these books read long ago just to look at the pictures which did not adorn them then would still seem so dangerous that, even in this sense, the only one I could understand, I would not be tempted to be a bibliophile. I know all too well how easily these images left by the mind are effaced by the mind. For the old ones they substitute new ones which do not have the same power of resurrection. And if I still had the *François le Champi* which Mama took one evening out of the parcel of books my grandmother must have given me for my birthday, I would never look at it: I would be too frightened of gradually inserting into it my current impressions until they had completely covered up the old ones, I would be too frightened of seeing it become at this point a thing of the present which, when I asked it to raise up once again the child who spelled out its title in the little bedroom at Combray, the child, not recognizing its accent, would no longer respond to its call, and would remain for ever buried in oblivion.

The idea of a popular art, like that of a patriotic art, seemed to me, if indeed not dangerous, certainly laughable. If it was a question of making it accessible to the people, by sacrificing the refinements of form, 'only good for the idle rich', I had spent enough time among society people to know that they are the real illiterates, not the electrical workers. Seen from this perspective, an art which was popular in form might have been destined for the members of the Jockey Club rather than for those of the Confédération Générale de Travail;[83] as for subject matter, popular novels are as boring to working people as books written specially for them are to children. When we read, we are seeking to be taken out of our surroundings, and workers are as curious about princes as princes are about workers. At the beginning of the war M. Barrès said that the artist (in that instance, Titian) had a duty above all else to serve the glory of his country. But he can serve it only by being an artist, that is, on condition, while he is studying these laws, instituting his experiences and making his discoveries, which are as delicate as those of science, that he does not think about anything else – even his country – except the truth which is before his eyes. Let us not be like the revolutionaries who despised the works of Watteau and de La Tour out of 'good citizenship', painters who do more honour to France than all those of the Revolution. Anatomy is perhaps not what the tender-hearted would choose, if they had a choice. It was not his good-hearted benevolence (which was great) that made Choderlos de Laclos write *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, nor his fondness for the middle class, lower or upper, that made Flaubert choose as his subjects those of *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Some used to say that art in a period of speed and haste would be brief, like the people before the war who predicted that it would be over quickly. The railway was thus supposed to have killed contemplative thought, and it was vain to long for the days of the stage-coach, but now the automobile fulfils their function and once again sets the tourists down in front of abandoned churches.

An image presented to us by life brings us in reality, in that moment, multiple and different sensations. The sight, for example, of the cover of a book already read has, woven into the letters of its title, the moonbeams of a distant summer night. The taste of our morning café au lait brings with it the vague hope of good weather which so often, long ago, while we were drinking it out of a creamy-white, rippled porcelain bowl which might almost have been made out of hardened milk, when the day was still intact and full, made us smile at the sheer uncertainty of the early light. An hour is not just an hour, it is a vessel full of perfumes, sounds, plans and atmospheres. What we call reality is a certain relationship between these sensations and the memories which surround us simultaneously – a relationship which is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision, which actually moves further away from truth the more it professes to be confined to it – a unique relationship which the writer has to rediscover in order to bring its two different terms together permanently in his sentence. One can list indefinitely in a description all the objects that figured in the place described, but the truth will begin only when the writer takes two different objects, establishes their relationship, the analogue in the world of art of the unique relation created in the world of science by the laws of causality, and encloses them within the necessary armature of a beautiful style. Indeed, just as in life, it begins at the moment when, by bringing together a quality shared by two sensations, he draws out their common essence by uniting them with each other, in order to protect them from the contingencies of time, in a metaphor. Had not nature herself, from this point of view, set me on the way to art, wasn't she herself the beginning of art, she who made it possible for me, often after a long interval, to recognize the beauty of one thing only in another, noon at Combray only in the sound of its bells, mornings at Doncières only in the hiccuping of our water-heater? The relationship may not be very interesting, the objects ordinary, the style bad, but if no relationship has been established, there is nothing.

But that was not all. If reality were a kind of residue of experience, more or less identical for everybody, because when we talk about bad weather, a war, a cab-stand, a brightly lit restaurant, a garden in flower, everybody knows what we mean, if reality were just that, then no doubt some sort of cinematographic film of things would be enough and 'style' and 'literature' which departed from their simple data would be an artificial irrelevance. But was this really what reality was? When I tried to ascertain what actually happens at the moment when something makes a particular impression on us, whether as on the day when, crossing the bridge over the Vivonne, the shadow of a cloud on the water had made me exclaim 'Damn!' and jump for joy, or when, listening to a sentence of Bergotte's, the only part of my impression that I had been conscious of was the not particularly characteristic phrase 'That's marvellous', or when, annoyed by some piece of bad behaviour, Bloch uttered these words, which were completely unsuited to such a commonplace event: 'I can only say that such conduct b-b-beggars belief,' or when, flattered at having been made welcome at the Guermantes', and also a little drunk on their wines, I could not help saying, half out loud to myself as I was leaving: 'They really are terribly nice people, it would be lovely to spend all one's time with them,' I slowly became aware that the essential book, the only true book, was not something the writer needs to invent, in the usual sense of the word, so much as to translate, because it already exists within each of us. The writer's task and duty are those of a translator.

But while, in cases where the imprecise language of, say, vanity is involved, realigning interior indirect speech (which as it goes on moves further and further away from the original, central impression) until it coincides with the straight line which ought to have run directly from the impression, while this realignment is a difficult matter and something which our idle nature is reluctant to take on, there are other instances, where love is involved for example, where the same realignment becomes painful. All our pretence of indifference, all our indignation against those lies which are so natural, so like the ones we tell ourselves, in a word all those things we have not only, whenever we felt wretched or betrayed, said endlessly to our loved one, but even said over and over again to ourselves while we were waiting to see her, sometimes speaking aloud, breaking the silence of our bedroom with comments such as: 'No, really, that sort of behaviour is intolerable,' and: 'I consented to see you one last time, but I won't pretend it isn't painful,' to bring all that back to the truth of experience when it has moved so far away from it means putting an end to all that we value most, to everything that, when we have been alone with our over-excited plans for letters and approaches, has constituted our passionate dialogue with ourselves.

Even where the pleasures of art are concerned, although we seek them because of the impression they make on us, we contrive as quickly as possible to dismiss the specificity of this impression as being inexpressible, and to concentrate on whatever allows us to experience the pleasure of it without properly analysing it, and to think that we are communicating it to other art-lovers, with whom conversation will be possible because we will be speaking to them about something we have in common, the personal root of our own impression having been suppressed. Even at the moments when we are the most disinterested onlookers of nature, or society, or love, or art itself, since every impression comes in two parts, half of it contained within the object, and the other half, which we alone will understand, extending into us, we are quick to disregard this latter half, which ought to be the sole object of our attention, and to take notice only of the first, which, being external and therefore impossible to study in any depth, will not impose any strain on us: we find it too demanding a task to try to perceive the little furrow that the sight of a hawthorn or of a church has made in us. But we play a symphony again and again, we go back to look at the church until – in this flight from our own lives, which we don't have the courage to look at, which people call erudition – we know them as well, and in the same manner, as the most knowledgeable student of music or of archaeology.

Very many people, therefore, leave it at that, extracting nothing from their impressions, growing old useless and unsatisfied, like celibates at the shrine of art! They have the bitterness that goes with virginity and indolence, but which in those instances can be cured by pregnancy or work. They get more excited by works of art than real artists do, because their excitement, not being for them the result of hard introspective investigation, bursts outward, overheats their conversation and makes them go red in the face. They think they are accomplishing something by shouting 'Bravo, bravo' at the tops of their voices after the performance of a work they enjoy. But these demonstrations do not force them to clarify the nature of their enjoyment, and they remain unaware of it. Yet, untapped, it overflows even into their calmest conversations, makes them make grand gestures, and grimace and toss their heads whenever they talk about art. 'I went to this concert. I must say it didn't do anything for me. Then they started playing the quartet. Lord, what a difference!' (at this point, the music-lover's face expresses anxious concern, as if he was thinking: 'I can see sparks, there's a smell of burning, something must be on fire'). 'Damn it all, what I heard was exasperating, it's badly written, but it's astounding, though, mind you, it wouldn't be everyone's cup of tea.' The look is also accompanied by a worried tone of voice, head on one side, more gesticulation, the whole absurd pantomime of a gosling with half-grown winglets which has not solved the problem of wings but is none the less tormented with a desire to soar into the air. And so this barren music-lover spends his life going from one concert to the next, embittered and unsatisfied as his hair turns grey and he enters an unfruitful old age, the celibate bachelor of art, as it were. Yet there is something almost touching about this most unlikeable breed, though they reek of worthiness and though they have not received anything like their due share of contentment, because they are the first half-formed products of the need to pass from the shifting objects of intellectual pleasure to its permanent organ.

So, ludicrous they may be, but they are not totally to be despised. They are the first experimental efforts of nature's attempt to create artists, as ill-formed and unviable as the original creatures which preceded the animal species we now have, and which were not made to last. These weak-willed, sterile art-lovers are surely as touching as those early machines which could not get off the ground but which embodied, not the secret of flight, which was yet to be discovered, but the desire to fly. 'Also, old chap, adds the music-lover, gripping you by the arm, this is the eighth time I've heard it, and I can promise you it won't be the last.' And indeed, since they cannot take in the truly nourishing elements in art, they are permanently in need of artistic pleasures, victims of a bulimia which never lets them feel satisfied. So they go to concert after concert to applaud the same work, believing that by being there they are fulfilling a duty, an obligation, in the way that other people feel a duty to attend board meetings or funerals. Then, whether it be in literature, in painting or in music, new, even diametrically opposed, works start to appear. For the ability to launch new ideas and new systems, and more importantly the capacity to assimilate and reproduce them, has always been much commoner, even among those who produce art, than genuine taste, but it has become much more widespread now with the multiplication of reviews and literary journals (and concomitantly of factitious careers as writers and artists). Thus the best part of the younger generation, the most intelligent and disinterested of them, used to like nothing in literature so much as works that had an elevated moral and sociological, even religious, significance. They imagined this to be the

criterion of a work's value, thereby repeating the error of artists such as David, Chenavard, Brunetière, etc. Instead of Bergotte, whose finest sentences did in fact require a much more profound consideration by the reader, they preferred writers who seemed more profound simply because they wrote less well. The complexity of his artistry was aimed at fashionable society, said the democrats, thus paying the people in society an unmerited tribute. Whenever the rational intelligence decides to start passing judgment on works of art, nothing continues to be fixed or certain, you can prove anything you like. While the reality of talent is a universal possession or acquisition, our primary responsibility being to establish its presence or absence beneath the surface fashions of thought and style, criticism in its classification of authors never goes beyond that surface. It hails a writer as a prophet, on account of his peremptory tone and his very public scorn for the school that preceded him, when in fact he has absolutely nothing new to say. These aberrations on the part of criticism are so constant that a writer might almost prefer to be judged by the general public (if they were not incapable even of recognizing what an artist has tried to achieve in an area of research which they know nothing about). For there is a closer analogy between the instinctive life of the public and the talent of a great writer, which is no more than an instinct religiously listened to while imposing silence on everything else, an instinct perfected and understood, than between it and the superficial verbiage and shifting criteria of the recognized arbiters of judgment. New battles of words take place in every decade (for the kaleidoscope is not only made up of fashionable groupings, but also of social, political and religious ideas which become widespread for a short while thanks to their refraction among ordinary people, but which are none the less still subject to the brief lifespan of ideas whose novelty has been able to seduce only those minds which do not require strict standards of proof). So one school or party had followed another, always winning adherents among the same minds, men with a limited amount of intelligence, always liable to become caught up with things which other minds, more scrupulous and more difficult to convince, keep away from. Unfortunately, precisely because the former are only half-minds, they need to supplement themselves by doing things, so they are more active than the better minds, and attract crowds of followers, and create around them not only exaggerated reputations and unjustified contempt, but civil and foreign wars, which a little Port-Royalist[84] self-criticism might have prevented.

As for the enjoyment the beautifully expressed thought of a master gives to a truly discerning mind or a spirit that is genuinely alive, it is probably entirely healthy but, however prized the men may be who can really appreciate it (and how many of them are there in twenty years?), it does reduce them to being no more than the complete consciousness of another. When a man has done everything he can to be loved by a woman who could only have made him miserable, but despite his best efforts over the years has not succeeded even in arranging a meeting with her, then instead of trying to give expression to his sufferings and the danger he has escaped, he reads and rereads this comment of La Bruyère's, adding to it his own 'million words' and some intensely moving recollections of his life: 'Men often want to love where they cannot succeed, they seek their defeat without being able to bring it about and so, if I may put it like this, they are compelled to remain free.'[85] Whether or not this is the meaning the comment had for its writer (for it to have done so, it would have had to read 'be loved' instead of 'love', which would have been better), there can be no doubt that, taking it this way, this sensitive and well-read man gives it new life, inflates it with meaning until it is ready to burst and cannot repeat it without brimming over with joy, so true and fine does he think it to be; yet despite all that he has added nothing to it, and it remains the thought of La Bruyère alone.

How could a purely descriptive literature have any value at all, when reality lies hidden beneath the surface of little things of the sort it documents (grandeur in the distant sound of an aeroplane, or in the outline of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, the past in the taste of a madeleine, etc.) so that the things have no meaning in themselves until it is disentangled from them?

Preserved by our memory, it is the piecemeal sequence of all those inaccurate expressions, in which nothing of what we have really experienced remains, which constitutes our thought, our life, reality, and all that the so-called art of 'real life' can do is to reproduce that lie, in an art which is as simple as life, devoid of beauty, and such a tedious and pointless duplication of what our eyes see and our intellect records that one wonders where anyone who engages in it can find the joyous, dynamic spark capable of setting his task in motion and then keeping it going. The greatness of true art, on the other hand, the sort of art that M. de Norpois would have called dilettante amusement, lies in rediscovering, grasping hold of, and making us recognize this reality, distant as it is from our daily lives, and growing more and more distant as the conventional knowledge we substitute for it becomes denser and more impermeable, this reality which we run a real risk of dying without having known, and which is quite simply our life.

Real life, life finally uncovered and clarified, the only life in consequence lived to the full, is literature. Life in this sense dwells within all ordinary people as much as in the artist. But they do not see it because they are not trying to shed light on it. And so their past is cluttered with countless photographic negatives, which continue to be useless because their intellect has never 'developed' them. Our lives; and the lives of other people, too; because style for a writer, like colour for a painter, is a question not of technique but of vision. It is the revelation, which would be impossible by direct or conscious means, of the qualitative difference in the ways we perceive the world, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain the eternal secret of each individual. It is only through art that we can escape from ourselves and know how another person sees a universe which is not the same as our own and whose landscapes would otherwise have remained as unknown as any there may be on the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing only a single world, our own, we see it multiplied, and have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, all more different one from another than those which revolve in infinity and which, centuries after the fire from which their rays emanated has gone out, whether it was called Rembrandt or Vermeer, still send us their special light.

This labour of the artist, this attempt to see something different beneath the material, beneath experience, beneath words, is the exact inverse of that which is accomplished within us from minute to minute, as we live our lives heedless of ourselves, by vanity, passion, intellect and habit, when they overlay our true impressions, so as to hide them from us completely, with the repertoire of words, and the practical aims, which we wrongly call life. To put it briefly, this art, complicated though it be, is actually the only art that is alive. It alone can express for others, and make us see for ourselves, our own lives, lives which are unable to keep a watch on themselves, and whose visible manifestations, such as they are, need to be translated and frequently to be read against the grain and painstakingly deciphered. The work carried out by our vanity, our passion, our imitative faculties, our abstract intelligence, our habits, is the work that art undoes, making us follow a contrary path, in a return to the depths where whatever has really existed lies unrecognized within us.

And of course it was very tempting to recreate real life and rejuvenate one's impressions in this way. But it called for all kinds of courage, including emotional courage. Because above all it involved giving up one's most cherished illusions, ceasing to believe in the objectivity of what one had elaborated oneself, and instead of comforting oneself for the hundredth time with the words: 'She was very nice,' reading what underlay them: 'I enjoyed kissing her.' Certainly what I had felt in these hours of love was what all men feel. One feels, but what one has felt is like those negatives which show nothing but blackness until they are held close to a lamp, and which also have to be looked at from the other side: one does not know what it is until it has been brought into contact with the intellect. Only when that has clarified it, when that has intellectualized it, can one make out, and even then only with difficulty, the form of what one felt. But I also realized that the suffering I had first known because of Gilberte, that our love does not belong to the creature who inspires it, is salutary. To a lesser extent as a means to an end (because, short as our life may be, it is only during suffering that our thoughts, in a sense shaken up by endless and shifting impulses, elevate, as in a storm, to a level at which it becomes visible, all that regulated immensity, which we, stationed at a badly placed window, do not normally see, because the calm of happiness leaves it smooth and at too low a level; perhaps only for some great geniuses does this movement of thought continue all the time without any need for the agitations of grief; yet we cannot be certain, when we contemplate the expansive and even development of their cheerful works, that we are not too inclined to infer from the happiness of the work that the life was happy too, when it may perhaps, on the contrary, have been permanently miserable) – but principally because, if our love is not only the love of a Gilberte (and this is what we find so hard to bear), this is not because it is also the love of an Albertine, but because it is a part of our soul, longer lasting than the various selves which die successively within us and which selfishly would like to hold on to it, and a part which must –

whatever pain, and it may even be productive pain, this may cause – detach itself from individuals and recreate its general nature and give this love, the understanding of this love, to everyone, to the universal mind, and not first to this woman and then another in whom one or another of the selves that we have successively been has wanted to be dissolved.

I needed to restore to even the slightest of the signs which surrounded me (Guermantes, Albertine, Gilberte, Saint-Loup, Balbec, etc.) the meaning which habit had made them lose for me. And when we have attained reality, if we are to express it and preserve it we must eliminate everything that is not a part of it and which is constantly being introduced by the speed that accompanies habit. Most of all, I would eliminate all words which come from the tongue rather than the mind, humorous remarks of the sort we make in conversation and which after a long conversation with other people we continue to address artificially to ourselves and which fill our minds with untruths, these purely automatic remarks which, in the writer who sinks so far as to transcribe them, are accompanied by the little smile, the little grimace which constantly spoils, for example, the spoken sentence of a Sainte-Beuve, whereas true books must be the product not of daylight and chitchat but of darkness and silence. And as art exactly reconstructs life, an atmosphere of poetry will always hover around the truths that one has reached in oneself, a gentle sense of mystery which is merely the remains of the semi-darkness we have had to pass through, the indication, as precisely marked as on an altimeter, of the depth of a work. (For depth is not inherent in certain subjects as, not being able to go beneath the world of appearances, some materialistically spiritual novelists believe, all of whose noble intentions, like the virtuous tirades common among the sort of people who are incapable of the smallest act of kindness, should not prevent us from noticing that they have not even had the strength of mind to get rid of all the banalities of form they have acquired through imitation.)

As for the truths which the intellect – even of the finest minds – gathers in the open, in front of it, in broad daylight, their value may be very great; but their outlines are starker and they are featureless, without any depth, because no depths had to be negotiated in order to reach them, because they have not been recreated. It is often the case that writers in whose deeps those mysterious truths no longer appear write, after a certain age, only with their intelligence, which becomes increasingly powerful; because of this, the books of their mature years have greater power than those of their youth, but none of the same aura of sweetness.

I felt, however, that these truths which the intelligence derives directly from reality are not to be despised completely, for they could provide a setting, in a material less pure but still imbued with mind, for those impressions which are conveyed to us outside time by the essence common to both past and present sensations, but which, because they are more precious, are also too rare for a work of art to be composed from them alone. I felt thronging within me a crowd of truths relating to passions, characters and conduct, all capable of being used in that way. Their perception caused me joy; yet it seemed to remind me that I had discovered more than one of them in suffering, and others in very ordinary pleasures.

Each person who makes us suffer can be linked by us to a divinity of which he or she is only a fragmentary reflection at the lowest level, a divinity (or Idea) the contemplation of which immediately gives us joy in place of the pain we had before. The whole art of living is to use the people who make us suffer simply as steps enabling us to obtain access to their divine form and thus joyfully to people our lives with divinities.

Then, less dazzling no doubt than the one which had shown me that the work of art was the only means of finding Lost Time again, a new light dawned on me. And I understood that all these raw materials for a literary work were actually my past life; I understood that they had come to me, in frivolous pleasures, in idleness, in tenderness, in sorrow, that they had been stored up by me without my divining their ultimate purpose, even their survival, any more than a seed does as it lays up a reserve of all the nutrients which will feed the plant. Like the seed, I would be able to die when the plant had developed, and I began to see that I had lived for its sake without knowing it, without ever having realized that there should be some contact between my life and the books I had wanted to write and for which, when I used to sit down at my table, I could not find a subject. So all my life up to that day could, and at the same time could not, have been summed up under the title: A vocation. It could not have been, in the sense that literature had not played any role in my life. It could have been, to the extent that this life, the memories of its times of sadness, its times of joy, formed a reserve comparable to that of the albumen stored in the ovule of a plant and from which it draws the nourishment it needs to transform itself into a seed, before anybody is aware that the embryo of a plant is developing, despite the fact that it is the site of secret but very active chemical and respiratory phenomena. In the same way my life was linked to that which would bring about its maturation. And those who might subsequently draw nourishment from it for themselves would have no idea, any more than people do when they eat food grains, that the rich substances which they contain were made for its nourishment, had first nourished the seed and enabled it to ripen.

In this area, comparisons which are false if one takes them as a starting-point can be true if one ends up with them. The man of letters envies the painter, he would like to make sketches, to take notes, but if he does so it is a waste of time. When he writes, though, there is not one gesture of his characters, not one mannerism, one tone of voice, which has not been supplied to his inspiration by his memory, there is not one name of an invented character beneath which he cannot subsume sixty names of characters he has seen, one of whom has posed for the grimace, another for the monocle, this one for anger, that one for the conceited movement of the arm, etc. And then the writer realizes that while his dream of being a painter was not realizable in a conscious and deliberate manner, it has nevertheless been realized and that the writer, too, has created a sketch book without being aware of it.

For, driven by the instinct that was in him, the writer, long before he thought that he might one day become one, regularly failed to look at a large number of things that other people looked at, which caused him to be accused by other people of not paying attention and by himself of not knowing how to listen or look; during that time he was telling his eyes and ears to retain for ever things that to other people seemed puerile trivialities, the tone of voice in which a phrase had been said, and the facial expression and movement of the shoulders that at a certain moment, many years before, some person had made about whom perhaps he knows nothing else, and that because this tone of voice was one that he had already heard, or felt that he might hear again, that it was something that might be repeated, something durable; it is this feeling for the general which, in the future writer, itself selects things that are general and that will be able to be part of the work of art. For he has listened to the others only when, stupid or demented as they may have been, repeating like parrots all the things that other people of similar character say, they make themselves into birds of prophecy, mouthpieces of a psychological law. The only things he remembers are the general. It was by tones of voice like these, by such facial movements, even if seen in his earliest childhood, that the life of others was represented in his mind, and when later he comes to write, he will describe a common movement of the shoulders, as realistically as if it had been written in an anatomist's note-book, but in order here to express a psychological truth, and then on to those shoulders graft somebody else's neck-movement, each person having contributed his momentary pose.

It may well be that, for the creation of a work of literature, imagination and sensitivity are interchangeable qualities, and that the second may without any great disadvantage be substituted for the first, in the same way as people whose stomach is incapable of digesting pass that function over to their intestine. A man born sensitive but with no imagination might none the less write admirable novels. The suffering that other people caused him, his efforts to prevent it, the conflicts that it and the cruel other person created, all of this, interpreted by the intelligence, might make the raw material of a book not only as beautiful as it would have been if it had been imagined, invented, but also as unrelated to the daydreams the author would have had if he had been been happily left to his own devices, as surprising for himself, and as accidental as a fortuitous vagary of the imagination.

The stupidest people manifest by their gestures, their comments, their involuntarily expressed feelings, laws of which they are unaware but which the artist manages to catch in them. Because of observations of this sort, the writer is commonly thought to be malicious, wrongly so, because in an idiosyncrasy the artist sees a beautiful generality and no more holds it against the person observed than a surgeon would dismiss someone for suffering from a common circulation disorder; indeed, he is less likely than anyone to make fun of people's foibles. Unfortunately, he is more unhappy than malicious: where his own passions are concerned, even though he knows all about them in general terms, he has more difficulty is extracting himself from the personal sufferings they cause. Obviously,

when some insolent person insults us, we would rather he had been singing our praises, so when a woman we adore betrays us, we feel even more intensely that we would have given anything for it to be otherwise! But the resentment at the affront, or the pain of rejection would then have been territories we would never have known, and discovering them, painful though it is for a man, is a valuable experience for an artist. Which is why the malicious and the heartless, despite both their wishes, feature in his work. The pamphleteer cannot help but share his fame with the riff-raff he has stigmatized. In every work of art one can recognize those the author hated most and also, alas! those whom he loved best. All they have done is to pose for the artist at the moment when, against his will, they were causing him the most suffering. When I was in love with Albertine, I had to recognize that she did not love me, and I was forced to resign myself to the fact that all she would do was show me what it was like to experience suffering, love and even, at the outset, happiness.

And when we try to extract the generalizable features from our grief, to write about it, we are perhaps slightly consoled by one other factor in addition to the ones I adduce here, which is that to think in terms of generalities, to write, is for the writer a healthy and necessary function, the fulfilment of which makes him happy, just as exercise, sweating and baths do men of a more physical bent. In truth, I was a little unwilling to accept this. I was prepared to believe that the supreme truth of life was in art, and, at the same time, I could see that I was no more capable of the effort of remembering that would be necessary if I were still to love Albertine than I was of continuing to mourn my grandmother; all the same, I wondered whether a work of art of which they were unaware would be a fulfilment for them, for the destiny of those poor dead creatures. My grandmother, whom I had with so much indifference watched as she suffered her last moments and died before my eyes! Oh, that I might, in expiation, when my work were finished, fatally injured, suffer for long hours, abandoned by everybody, before finally dying! In addition, I felt infinite pity even for less cherished beings, even for people I cared nothing about, and for all the human destinies, which my thought, in its attempt to comprehend them, had reduced to their suffering or even to their foibles. All those people who had revealed truths to me, and who now were no longer living, appeared to me to have lived lives which had profited only myself, and to have died for my benefit.

It was sad for me to think that my love, which I had prized so highly, would in my book be so detached from an actual person that the readers of all sorts would apply it in all its detail to what they had felt for other women. But ought I to be scandalized by this posthumous infidelity, or by the fact that some person or other might provide unknown women as objects of my feelings, when this infidelity, this division of love among a number of beings, had begun in my lifetime, and even before I started to write? I had indeed suffered one after another for Gilberte, for Mme de Guermantes, for Albertine. One after another, too, I had forgotten them, and only my love, dedicated to different beings, had lasted. The profanation of one of my memories by unknown readers was something I had already accomplished myself. I felt something close to horror at myself, as perhaps might some nationalist party in whose name hostilities had been fought out, and who alone would benefit from a war in which large numbers of noble victims had suffered and died, without even knowing (which for my grandmother at least would have been some compensation) the outcome of the struggle. And my only consolation for the thought that she did not know that I was finally setting myself to work was that (such is the lot of the dead), while she was unable to enjoy my progress, she had long since ceased to to be aware of my inaction, my failed life, which had been such a source of unhappiness to her. And certainly it was not only from my grandmother or from Albertine, but from many others as well, that I had been able to incorporate a remark, a look, although I might no longer remember them at all as individuals; a book is a great cemetery where the names have been effaced from most of the tombs and are no longer legible. Yet there are times when one remembers a name perfectly well, but without knowing whether anything of the person who bore it survives within these pages. That girl with the very deep-set eyes and the drawling voice, is she here? And if she really does repose here, then do we any longer know in what part, or how to find her underneath the flowers?

But since we live our lives detached from individual beings, since after a few years our strongest feelings, such as had been my love for my grandmother and for Albertine, are forgotten, since they mean no more to us than words we cannot understand, since we can talk about these dead people with society acquaintances in houses we still frequent with pleasure even though everything we loved is dead, then, if there is a way for us to learn to understand these forgotten words, ought we not to use it, even if it entails first transcribing them into a universal, but at least therefore permanent, language, and thereby making out of those who are no longer with us, in their truest essence, an acquisition of lasting value for all human beings? Indeed, if we could succeed in explaining the law of change which made these words unintelligible to us, would not our weakness become a new kind of strength?

In addition to that, the work to which our sorrows have contributed may be interpreted, so far as our future is concerned, both as a baneful sign of suffering and as an auspicious sign of consolation. Indeed, when we say that the loves and sorrows of a poet have been useful to him, have helped him to build up his work, when unknown women who never had the slightest idea that they might, by an act of malice here, or a mocking remark there, each have brought their stone to the construction of the monument which they will never see, we tend to forget that the writer's life does not come to an end with this work, that the temperament which has caused him to have these sufferings, the ones that have entered into his work, will still be his when the work is finished, will make him love other women in conditions which would be almost identical, if all the modifications which time brings to circumstances did not result in slight variations, in the subject himself, in his appetite for love and in his resistance to pain. From this first point of view, then, the work is to be regarded solely as if it were an unfortunate love which fatally presages more of the same, assuming that the life to come will resemble the work, and that the poet will have almost no further need to write, because for most of the time he will be able to find the shape of future events anticipated in what he has already written. Thus my love for Albertine, to the extent that it is different from it, would already be inscribed in my love for Gilberte, in the middle of which happy time I had first heard Albertine's name spoken, and her character described, by her aunt, without my having the slightest idea that this insignificant seed would grow, expand and one day spread its branches over the whole of my life.

But from another point of view, the work is a sign of happiness, because it shows us that in every love the general is to be found alongside the particular, and shows us how to pass from the latter to the former by means of exercises which fortify us against unhappiness by detaching our attention from its cause in order to focus on its essential qualities. Indeed, as I was shortly to discover for myself, even while you are in love and suffering, if you have finally achieved your vocation, then during the hours you are working you feel very strongly that the being whom you love is dissolving into a greater reality, and you start intermittently to forget her and, while you are working, suffer no more from love than from any purely physical illness that has nothing to do with the loved being, such as some sort of heart ailment. It is true, though, that this is a matter of timing and that the effect seems to be the opposite if the work comes more slowly. Because there are some individuals who, having managed, in spite of us, by their unkindness or their insignificance to destroy our illusions, have themselves been reduced to nothing and severed from the chimera of love we had conjured up in our minds; and if we then set to work, our mind raises them up again, identifies them, for the purposes of our self-analysis, with individuals who have loved us, and in such cases literature, reconstructing the demolished work of amorous illusion, gives a sort of afterlife to feelings which were no longer in existence.

It is true, then, that we are obliged to relive our private suffering with all the courage of a doctor who continues to give himself a dangerous course of injections. At the same time, though, we have to think about it in its general form, which enables us to some extent to escape its grasp, makes everybody sharers in our pain, and may even offer a kind of joy. Where life walls us in, the intellect cuts a way out, for although there may be no cure for love that is not reciprocated, the investigation of one's suffering does provide a way out, even if only by revealing its likely consequences. The intelligence does not recognize closed situations in life, with no way out.

So I had to resign myself, since nothing can last unless it is generalized, nor without the mind dying to itself, to the idea that even those who were dearest to the writer had done nothing in the end except pose for him like models for a painter.

In love, a favoured rival, in other words our enemy, is our benefactor. To a being who was arousing in us nothing but an insignificant physical desire he immediately adds immense value, quite unrelated, but which we confuse with her. If we had no rivals, pleasure would not be transformed into love. If we did not

have any, or even if we thought we did not have any. Because there is no need for them actually to exist. The illusory life which our suspicion, our jealousy, gives to non-existent rivals is enough for our needs.

Sometimes, when a painful section is still in rough draft, a new attachment, and new suffering, come along which enable us to finish it, to give it substance. One cannot really complain too much about these great but useful sorrows, because there is no shortage of them and they do not make us wait long for them. None the less we have to hurry if we are to profit from them, for they do not last very long: one finds consolation, or else, if they are too overwhelming, and if one's heart is no longer very sound, one dies. Because happiness alone is good for the body; whereas sorrow develops the strength of the mind. Moreover, even if it did not reveal a law to us each time this happened, it would be no less indispensable for returning us each time to the truth, forcing us to take things seriously, and uprooting each time the weeds of habit, scepticism, levity and indifference. Admittedly this truth, which is not compatible with happiness, or with health, is not always compatible with life either. Sorrow kills in the end. At each new, unbearable affliction, we feel yet another vein stand out, extending its deadly sinuosity across our temples, or under our eyes. And it is in this way that are gradually formed those terrible, ravaged faces of the old Rembrandt, and the old Beethoven, whom everybody used to laugh at. The bags under the eyes and the wrinkled forehead would not matter, of course, if there were not also suffering of the heart. But since forces can change into other forces, since accumulated heat becomes light and since the electricity in lightning can power a camera, since the dull pain in our heart can raise above itself, like a flag, the permanently visible image of each new sorrow, let us accept the physical damage it does to us in return for the spiritual knowledge it brings us; let us leave our body to disintegrate, since each new particle that breaks away from it comes back, now luminous and legible, to add itself to our work, to complete it at the price of the sufferings of which others more gifted have no need, to increase its solidity as our emotions are eroding our life. Ideas are substitutes for sorrows; the moment they change into ideas they lose a part of their power to hurt our hearts and, for a brief moment, the transformation even releases some joy. Substitutes only in the order of time, though, because it seems that the primary element is actually the idea, and the sorrow merely the mode in which certain ideas first enter our minds. But there are numerous families within the general group of ideas, some of which are joys from the start.

These reflections allowed me to give a firmer and more precise meaning to the truth that I had always felt, particularly when Mme de Cambremer used to wonder how I could abandon a man as remarkable as Elstir for Albertine. Even from an intellectual point of view I sensed that she was wrong, but I did not know what it was that she did not understand: which was the kind of lessons through which one serves one's apprenticeship as a man of letters. The objective value of the arts is hardly relevant to that; what we have to draw out, to bring to light, are our feelings, our passions, in other words the passions and the feelings of everyone. A woman whom we need, and who makes us suffer, arouses in us a series of feelings far more profound and far more intense than does an unusually gifted man who interests us. It remains to be seen, depending on the sphere in which we live, to what extent we regard some betrayal by which a woman has made us suffer as insignificant in relation to the truths which the betrayal has revealed to us and which the woman, happy to have made us suffer, would scarcely have been able to understand. But, whatever else, there will be no shortage of betrayals. A writer may start work on a lengthy task without any anxiety about that. Let his intelligence begin the work, plenty of sorrows will arise along the way and look after the business of finishing it. As for happiness, almost its only useful quality is to make unhappiness possible. We need, during periods of happiness, to form particularly pleasant and powerful bonds of trust and affection in order that their destruction can cause us the precious laceration called unhappiness. If one had not been happy, even if only in expectation, unhappinesses would be devoid of cruelty and consequently fruitless.

And more than the painter, the writer, in order to obtain depth and substance, generality, literary reality, just as he needs to have seen a number of churches in order to depict a single one, also needs a number of individuals for one single feeling. For if art is long and life short, one may also say that, while inspiration is short, the feelings it has to depict are not much longer. It is our passions which provide the outline of our books, the intervening periods of respite which write them. When inspiration returns, when we can take up work again, the woman who was sitting for us to illustrate some feeling has already lost the ability to make us experience it. To continue to depict her we have to use another model, and while this may be a betrayal of the individual, from the literary point of view, thanks to the similarity of our feelings, which means that a work is both the recollection of our past loves and the prophecy of our new ones, there is no real disadvantage to these substitutions. This is one reason why studies where people try to work out who an author is talking about are pointless. Because any work, even if it is directly confessional, is at the very least intercalated between a number of episodes in the author's life, the earlier ones which inspired it and the later ones which are no less characteristic, the details of subsequent love affairs being traced from the ones which came before. Because we are not so faithful even to the person we have loved the most as we are to ourselves, and sooner or later we forget her in order to be able – since this is one of our own traits – to start loving again. At most, this woman whom we have loved so much has given a particular form to our love, which will make us faithful to her even in infidelity. With the next woman we shall need the same morning walks, need to see her home in the same way in the evening, or to give her a hundred times too much money. (It is a curious thing, this circulation of the money we give to women, who because of that make us unhappy, that is, enable us to write books – one can almost say that books, as in artesian wells, rise to a height that is proportionate to the depth to which suffering has bored down into the heart.) These substitutions add something disinterested, something more general, to the work, something which at the same time is an austere lesson that it is not to individuals that we must attach ourselves, that it is not individuals who really exist and are consequently capable of being expressed, but ideas. So one has to hurry and lose none of the time during which one has the models at one's disposal; for those who pose for happiness do not generally have many sittings to offer, nor alas, as it too passes so quickly, do those who pose for grief.

All the same, even when that does not, by uncovering it, provide us with the raw material of our work, it is useful to us as a spur to doing it. Imagination and thinking can be admirable mechanisms in themselves, but they can also be inert. Suffering sets them in motion. And the individuals who pose to us for grief give us such frequent sittings, in the studio we go into only during those periods and which is within ourselves! Those periods are like an image of our life, with all its different griefs. For they in turn contain more griefs, and just when you think they have been quieted, a new one arises. New in every sense of the word: perhaps because these unpredictable situations force us come into closer contact with ourselves, and the painful dilemmas with which love is constantly presenting us instruct us and show us, little by little, what we are made of. So when Françoise, seeing Albertine having the run of my place like a dog, spreading chaos everywhere, ruining me, causing me so much pain, told me (for at that point I had already done a few articles and some translations): 'Ah, if only Monsieur, instead of this girl who makes him waste all his time, had taken on a nicely brought-up young secretary who would have sorted out all Monsieur's manuscribbles!' I was perhaps wrong to think she was speaking wisely. By making me waste my time, by causing me pain, Albertine might perhaps have been more useful, even from the literary standpoint, than a secretary who could have organized my 'manuscribbles'. But all the same, when a living creature is so badly constituted (and perhaps it is natural for man to be that creature) that he cannot love without suffering, and that he needs to suffer in order to learn truths, the life of such a creature must in the end be very tedious. Years of happiness are years wasted, waiting for a bout of suffering to make one work. The idea of this preliminary suffering then comes to be associated with the idea of work, and one is afraid of each new work because one thinks of the pain one will first have to endure in order to imagine it. And when one realizes that suffering is the best thing one can encounter in life, one thinks without terror, almost as of a release, about death.

Yet although I rather recoiled from this, I was still very much aware that writers have frequently not treated life as a game, and exploited individuals in order to use them for books, but quite the opposite. I did not, alas, have the nobility of young Werther.[86] Without for a moment believing in Albertine's love, I had twenty times wanted to kill myself for her, I had ruined myself, I had destroyed my health for her. Where writing is concerned, one is scrupulous, one examines things very closely, one rejects everything that is not the truth. But when it is only a matter of living, one ruins oneself, makes oneself ill, kills oneself, for lies. The vein that these lies come from may, it is true, still (if one has passed the age of being a poet) yield a small quantity of truth. Sorrows are obscure, detested servants, against whom one struggles, under whose influence one increasingly falls, unbearable, irreplaceable servants who lead us by devious ways to truth and to death.

Fortunate are those who met the former before the latter, and for whom, however close together the two may be, the hour of truth struck before the hour of death.

I also understood that the most insignificant episodes from my past life had contributed towards giving me the lesson in idealism from which I was going to benefit today. Had not my encounters with M. de Charlus, for example, even before his pro-German attitudes taught me the same lesson, done more even than my love for Mme de Guermantes or for Albertine, or than Saint-Loup's love for Rachel, to convince me how utterly neutral matter itself is, and how thought can give it any characteristics it wants; a truth which is more profoundly emphasized by the widely misunderstood and pointlessly censured phenomenon of sexual inversion even than by that, which has already proved so instructive, of love? This latter may show us beauty deserting the woman we no longer love and taking up residence in a face which other people would find extremely ugly, and which once we might have disliked ourselves, as one day we shall again; but it is even more striking to see it, capturing the complete devotion of a great nobleman who instantly abandons a beautiful princess, migrate to a position beneath the cap of a bus conductor. And was not my astonishment each new time that I had seen, on the Champs-Élysées, in the street, or on the beach, the face of Gilberte, of Mme de Guermantes, or of Albertine, proof of the extent to which a memory persists only in a direction which diverges from the impression with which it originally coincided but from which it becomes increasingly remote?

A writer must not take offence when inverts give his heroines masculine faces. This mildly deviant behaviour is the only means by which the invert can proceed to give full general significance to what he is reading. For Racine to be able to give her full universal value to the Phaedra of antiquity, he had first for a moment to turn her into a Jansenist; similarly, if M. de Charlus had not given to the 'faithless one' over whom de Musset weeps in *La Nuit d'octobre* or in *Le Souvenir* the face of Morel, he would not have wept, nor understood, since it was by that narrow and circuitous way alone that he gained access to the truths of love. It is only out of a habit derived from the insincere language of prefaces and dedications that writers talk about 'my reader'. In reality each reader, when he is reading, is uniquely reading himself. The writer's work is only a kind of optical instrument which he offers the reader to enable him to discern what without this book he might not perhaps have seen in himself. The recognition within himself, by the reader, of what the book is saying, is the proof of its truthfulness, and vice versa, at least to a certain extent, it often being possible to impute the difference between the two texts not to the author but to the reader. In addition to this, the book may be too learned, too obscure, for the unsophisticated reader, and thus present him with a blurred lens, with which he will not be able to read. But other characteristics (such as inversion) may mean that the reader needs to read in a particular way in order to read properly; the author should not take offence at this, but instead should allow the reader the greatest possible freedom by saying to him: 'Look for yourself, try whether you see better with this lens, or that one, or the other one.'

If I had always been so interested in the dreams we have while we are asleep, was it not because, making up in potency what they lack in duration, they help you better to understand the subjective element in, for instance, love, by the simple fact that they produce – but with amazing speed – the effect commonly known as being crazy about a woman, even making us, in the course of a few minutes' sleep, love an ugly woman passionately, something which in real life would have needed years of familiarity and cohabitation – and that they are like intravenous injections of love, the invention of some miracle-working doctor, even though they can also be injections of suffering? With equal rapidity the amorous suggestion which they have instilled in us vanishes, and sometimes not only has the nocturnal lover ceased to occupy that guise, becoming once more the ugly woman familiar to us, but something more precious has also vanished, a wonderful array of feelings of tenderness, of voluptuous pleasure, of vaguely blurred regrets, a whole *Embarquement pour Cythère*[87] of passion, of which we should like to record, for our waking state, the subtle gradations of a delicious truth to life, but which disappears like a canvas faded far beyond restoration. And it was perhaps also because of the extraordinary tricks it plays with Time that the Dream fascinated me. Had I not often seen in one night, in one minute of one night, remote periods of time, consigned to those vast distances at which we can no longer distinguish the feelings we had then, rushing to overwhelm us, blinding us with their clarity, as if they were giant aeroplanes rather than the pale stars we believed them to be, bringing back before our eyes everything they had ever held for us, giving us the emotion, the shock, the clarity of their immediate proximity, only to resume, the moment we awake, the distance they had miraculously overcome, to the point of making us believe, wrongly in fact, that they are one of the means of finding Lost Time again?

I had realized that it is only coarse and inaccurate perception which places everything in the object, when everything is in the mind; I had lost my grandmother in reality many months after having lost her in fact, I had seen people vary in appearance according to the idea that I or others had of them, a single person being several according to the people who were observing him (various Swanns in the opening volume, for example; the Princess of Luxembourg for the judge), even for the same person over the course of years (the name of Guermantes or the various Swanns, for me). I had seen love placing qualities in a person which are only in the person who loves. I had realized this all the more forcefully because I had seen stretched to the utmost the distance between objective reality and love (Rachel for Saint-Loup and for me, Albertine for me and Saint-Loup, Morel or the omnibus conductor for Charlus, and other people, despite which Charlus was still affectionate; verses by de Musset, etc.). Finally, the pro-Germanism of M. de Charlus, like the way Saint-Loup had looked at the photograph of Albertine, had to a certain extent helped me to detach myself for a moment, if not from my Germanophobia, at least from my belief in the pure objectivity of it, and made me think that perhaps the same applied to hatred as to love and that, in the terrible judgment which at this moment France pronounced on Germany, which she deemed to be beyond the bounds of humanity, the primary factor was an objectification of feelings like those which once made Rachel and Albertine seem so precious, the one to Saint-Loup, the other to me. What in fact made it possible that this perversity was not entirely intrinsic to Germany was that, just as I individually had had successive love affairs, after the end of which the object of that love would seem valueless to me, I had already seen in my country successive hatreds which had, for example, made traitors – a thousand times worse than the Germans to whom they delivered France – of Dreyfusards such as Reinach[88] with whom today patriots were collaborating against a country every member of which was by definition a liar, a wild animal, or a fool, exceptions being made for those Germans who had embraced the French cause, like the King of Romania, the King of the Belgians or the Empress of Russia. The anti-Dreyfusards, it is true, might have replied: 'It's not the same thing.' But in fact it never is the same thing, any more than it is the same person: if it were not for that, anyone faced with the same phenomenon and taken in again by it would have only his subjective state to blame and would be able to believe that the qualities or failings were inherent in the object. The intellect, therefore, has no difficulty at all in basing a theory on this difference (church schools against nature according to the Radicals, impossibility of assimilation for the Jewish race, perpetual hatred of the Germanic race for the Latin race, the yellow race being temporarily rehabilitated[89]). This subjective aspect was also evident in the conversation of neutrals, where the pro-Germans, for example, had the capacity to stop understanding for a moment, even to stop listening, when one was talking to them about German atrocities in Belgium. (And yet they were quite real: the subjective element that I had observed in hatred, as in sight itself, did not mean that the object could not possess real qualities and defects, and did not in any way cause reality to vanish into a pure relativism.) And if after so many years had passed and so much time had been lost, I was aware of the crucial influence of this inner reality even in international relations, had I not suspected it at the very beginning of my life, when I was reading in the garden at Combray one of those novels by Bergotte which, even today, if I flick through a few forgotten pages of it and come across a villain's cunning plans, I cannot put down again until I have assured myself, by skipping a hundred pages, that as the end approaches this villain is duly humiliated and lives long enough to learn that his shady plans have failed? Because I never really remembered what happened to these characters, although in this they were no different from the people present at Mme de Guermantes's this afternoon and whose past lives, in a number of cases at least, were as vague for me as if I had read them in a half-forgotten novel. Had the Prince d'Agrigente ended up marrying Mlle X——? Or was it not rather Mlle X——'s brother who was to have married the Duc d'Agrigente? Or else was I confusing it with something I had read a long time ago, or with a recent dream? Dreams were another, very striking, fact of my life, and had probably done more than anything else to convince me of the purely mental nature of reality, and I did not spurn their help in the composition of my work. When I was living, in a somewhat less disinterested manner, for the sake of a love affair, a dream would come to me bringing strangely close, across vast distances of lost time, my grandmother, or

Albertine, whom I had started to love again because she had provided me in a dream with a rather toned-down version of the affair with the laundry-girl. I thought that in this way they would sometimes bring closer to me truths or impressions which my efforts alone or even the chances of nature did not provide; that they would awaken in me the desire or the regret for certain non-existent things which is the condition for working, for being cut off from habit, for detaching oneself from the concrete. So I would not disregard this second muse, this nocturnal muse which sometimes compensated for the other one.

I had seen members of the nobility become common when their minds, like that of the Duc de Guermantes for example, were common ('Don't stand on ceremony,' as Cottard would have said). During the Dreyfus Affair, during the war, in medicine, I had seen people believe truth to be a kind of fact, believe that ministers or doctors possess a yes or no which requires no interpretation, and which ordains that an X-ray photograph indicate what the patient has without interpretation, believe that the men in power *knew* whether Dreyfus was guilty, *knew* (without needing to send Roques to make enquiries on the spot) whether Sarrail did or did not have the means to mobilize at the same time as the Russians.[90] There is no moment in my life which would not have served to teach me that only coarse and inaccurate perception places everything in the object when the opposite is true: everything is in the mind.

In short, when I thought about it, the raw material of my experience, which was to be the raw material of my book, came to me from Swann, and not merely because of everything that concerned him and Gilberte.It was also he who, ever since the Combray days, had given me the wish to go to Balbec, where without that my parents would never have thought of sending me, and without which I would never have known Albertine, or even the Guermantes, since my grandmother would not have rediscovered Mme de Villeparisis nor I have made the acquaintance of Saint-Loup and M. de Charlus, who had introduced me to the Duchesse de Guermantes, and through her, her cousin, the result of which was that my very presence at this moment in the house of the Prince de Guermantes, where the idea for my work had just suddenly come to me (which meant that I owed Swann not just the material but the decision, too), also came to me from Swann. Rather a slender stem, perhaps, to support in this way the whole span of my life (the 'Guermantes way' thus being seen to derive from the 'way by Swann's'). But this source of the different aspects of our life is frequently a person much inferior to Swann, somebody of complete insignificance. Would it not have been enough for any school-friend to have told me about a good-looking girl to be had there (whom I would probably not have met) for me to have gone to Balbec? Thus it often happens that later in life one encounters some dislikable school-mate and scarcely even shakes his hand, whereas if one ever thought about it, it is from some passing comment he made to us, like 'You ought to come to Balbec,' that our whole life and our whole work have sprung. We make no recognition of this to him, but that does not constitute proof of ingratitude. For when he said those words he did not for a moment think of the tremendous consequences they would have for us. It is our sensibility and our intellect which have exploited the circumstances which, once the primary impetus has been given, have generated themselves, one after another, without his ever having been able to foresee anything, whether my living with Albertine, or the masked ball at the Guermantes'. No doubt his impetus was necessary, and in that sense the external form of our life and the very material of our work derive from him. Without Swann, it would never have occurred to my parents to send me to Balbec. Yet he was not responsible for the sufferings which he himself had indirectly caused me. They were due to my weakness. His had caused sufferings of his own through Odette. But by determining in this way the life that we have led, he has thereby excluded all the lives that we might have led in place of this one. If Swann had not talked to me about Balbec, I would not have known Albertine, the dining-room in the hotel, the Guermantes. But I would have gone somewhere else, met different people, and my memory, like my books, would be full of quite other pictures which I cannot even imagine, and the novelty of which, in its unfamiliarity, is appealing enough to make me regret not having gone in that direction instead, and regret too that Albertine and the beach at Balbec and Rivebelle and the Guermantes had not remained for ever unknown to me.

Of course, it is with that face, as I had seen it for the first time by the sea, that I associated certain things which I should no doubt be writing about. In a sense, I was right to associate them with her, because if I had not walked along the sea-front that day, if I had not met her, all these ideas would not have been developed (unless they had been developed by another woman). I was also wrong, though, because this generative pleasure which we try retrospectively to situate in a beautiful feminine face comes from our own senses: it was actually quite clear that the pages I would write were something that Albertine, especially the Albertine of those days, would not have understood. That is precisely why (and this is a recommendation not to live in too intellectual an atmosphere), because she was so different from me, that she had fertilized me through grief, and even at the beginning through the sheer effort of imagining something different from oneself. If she had been capable of understanding these pages then, for that very reason, she would not have inspired them.

Jealousy is a good recruiting officer who, when there is a gap in our picture, goes searching through the streets for the beautiful girl we needed. If she is no longer beautiful, she regains her looks because we are jealous of her, and she will fill the empty space.

Once we are dead, we shall feel no joy at the picture being completed in this way. But there is nothing at all discouraging about that thought. Because we sense that life is a little more complicated than people say, and circumstances likewise. And there is an urgent necessity to demonstrate this complexity. Jealousy, for all its usefulness, does not necessarily arise from a look, or from a tale, or from a backward glance. It can turn up, ready to sting us, between the pages of a directory – the ones called *Tout-Paris* for Paris, and the *Annuaire des châteaux* for the country.[91] We had absent-mindedly heard the girl we are no longer interested in saying she had to go and see her sister for a few days in the Pas-de-Calais, near Dunkirk; we had also at one time vaguely thought that M. E—— had perhaps made advances to the girl, though now she never saw him, as she never went to the bar where she used to meet him. What could her sister be? Maybe a housemaid? Being discreet, we had never asked. And now, opening the *Annuaire des châteaux* at random, we discover that M. E—— has a country place in the Pas-de-Calais, near Dunkirk. Suddenly everything becomes clear, to please the girl he has taken her sister on as a housemaid, and if the girl no longer meets him in the bar, it is because he has had her come to his house, living as he does in Paris almost all of the year, but unable to do without her even for the period he is in the Pas-de-Calais. The brushes, drunk with rage and love, continue to paint it all in. And yet, what if it was not like that? If M. E—— really was not seeing the girl any longer but, out of a wish to be helpful, had recommended her sister to one of his brothers who lives all the year round in the Pas-de-Calais? So that she goes, perhaps even quite by chance, to see her sister at a time when M. E—— is not there, as they no longer have any interest in each other? Or again perhaps the sister is not a housemaid in that country house or anywhere else but has relatives in the Pas-de-Calais. Our initial grief subsides in the face of these latter conjectures and jealousy is allayed. But what difference does it make? Hidden among the pages of the *Annuaire des châteaux*, it came at the right time, because now the empty space that was there in the canvas has been filled in. And the whole design comes together thanks to the presence, created by jealousy, of the beautiful girl of whom already we are no longer jealous and whom we no longer love.

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At that moment the butler came to tell me that, the first piece having ended, I could leave the library and enter the drawing-rooms. This made me recollect where I was. But I was not at all disturbed in the train of thought which I had just begun by the fact that a fashionable party, my return to society, had provided me with my point of departure for a new life which I had not been able to find in solitude. There was nothing extraordinary about this fact, an impression capable of resuscitating the eternal man in me not necessarily being linked to solitude any more than to society (as I had once thought it was, as had perhaps once been the case for me, as ought still perhaps to be the case if I had developed harmoniously, instead of experiencing this long intermission, which seemed only now to be ending). For experiencing this impression of beauty only when, in the grip of some immediate sensation, however insignificant, a similar sensation, spontaneously re-arising within me, had just extended the first over several periods of time at once, and filled my soul, where individual sensations usually left so much emptiness, with a general essence, there was no reason why I should not receive sensations of this kind in society as much as in the natural world, since they are produced by chance, helped doubtless by the particular excitement which, on the days when one finds oneself outside the regular tenor of life, makes even the simplest things start to give us sensations which habit usually makes us spare our nervous system. I was going to try to find the objective reason why it should be

precisely and uniquely this kind of sensation which led to the work of art, by continuing the thoughts which had come to me in such rapid sequence in the library; for I felt that the impetus given to my intellectual life was now strong enough for me to be able to continue as successfully in the drawing-room, among all the guests, as alone in the library; it seemed that, from this point of view, even in the midst of this large gathering I should be able to retain my solitude. Because for the same reason that great events do not impinge from outside on our mental powers, and that a third-rate writer living in an epic epoch will remain just as poor a writer, what was really dangerous in society was the socialite attitude one brings to it. By itself it was no more capable of rendering you third-rate than a heroic war was capable of making a third-rate poet sublime.

In any case, whether it was theoretically useful or not that the work of art was constituted in this fashion, and while I was waiting until I had examined this point as fully as I was intending to, I could not deny that so far as I was concerned, whenever truly aesthetic impressions had come to me, it had always been after sensations of this kind. They had, admittedly, been rather rare in my life, but they dominated it, and I was able to rediscover in the past some of those peaks which I had made the mistake of losing sight of (something I was intending not to do from now on). And already I could say that, although this characteristic might in my case, by the exclusive importance it assumed, have appeared personal to me, I had been reassured to discover that it was related to other, less marked but discernible characteristics, at bottom quite similar, in certain other writers. Is it not from a sensation of the same sort as that of the madeleine that the finest part of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* depends: 'Yesterday in the evening I was walking alone… I was roused from my reflections by the twittering of a thrush perched in the highest branch of a birch tree. Instantly, the magical sound made my father's estate reappear before my eyes; I forgot the catastrophes I had just witnessed, and, transported suddenly into the past, saw once again the countryside where so often I heard the thrush's piping song.' And is not this one of the two or three most beautiful passages in those memoirs: 'A delicate, sweet scent of heliotrope wafted from a little patch of beans in full flower; it was brought to us not by a breeze from our own land, but by a wild wind from Newfoundland, unconnected to the exiled plant, without congenial reminiscence and pleasure. In this perfume not breathed by beauty, not purified in her bosom, not scattered in her path, in this perfume of a new dawn, new cultivation and new world, there was all the melancholy of regret, of absence and of youth.'[92] One of the masterpieces of French literature, Gérard de Nerval's *Sylvie*, just like the book of *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* which deals with Combourg, contains a sensation of the same sort as the taste of the madeleine and the 'twittering of the thrush'. And above all in Baudelaire these reminiscences, more numerous still, are clearly less fortuitous and therefore, in my opinion, conclusive. Here it is the poet himself who with a more indolent resolution seeks deliberately, in the scent of a woman, for instance, of her hair and her breast, the analogies which will inspire him and evoke for him '*l'azur du ciel immense et rond*' and '*un port rempli de flammes et de mâts*'.[93] I was about to try to remember the passages in Baudelaire at the heart of which there is this sort of transposed sensation, in order finally to establish a place for myself in such a noble tradition, and thereby to give myself the assurance that the work which I no longer had the slightest hesitation in undertaking was worth the effort I was going to devote to it, when having arrived at the foot of the staircase leading down from the library, I found myself suddenly in the great drawing-room and in the midst of a party which was going to seem very different from any I had been present at before, and for me was going to take an unusual turn and assume a new meaning. In fact, as soon as I entered the great drawing-room, although my mind was still firmly fixed on the plan I had just reached the point of formulating, a dramatic turn of events occurred which seemed to raise the gravest of objections to my undertaking. An objection which I would probably overcome but which, as I continued to reflect inwardly on the conditions necessary for the work of art, was at any moment, through the hundredfold repetition of instances of the one consideration most likely to make me hesitate, about to interrupt the course of my thinking.

To begin with I did not understand why I was so slow to recognize the master of the house and the guests nor why everybody seemed to have put on make-up, in most cases with powdered hair which changed them completely. The Prince, as he received his guests, still had that air of a genial, fairy-tale king which I had noticed the first time I met him, but this time, as if he had submitted himself to the stipulations of dress he had imposed on his guests, he had decked himself out in a white beard and, dragging his feet along as though they were weighing him down like lead boots, seemed to have taken on the task of representing one of the 'Ages of Man'. His moustaches were white, too, as though still dusted with the frost of Hop o' my Thumb's forest. They seemed uncomfortable for his tightening mouth and, once the effect had been achieved, as if they ought to have been taken off. To be quite honest, I recognized him only by a process of logical deduction, by deciding on the identity of the person on the simple basis of a few recognizable features. I do not know what young Fezensac had put on his face, but while others had whitened, in some cases half their beard, in others just their moustache, he had not bothered himself with dyes of that sort, but had found a way of covering his face with wrinkles, his eyebrows with bristling hairs, although that did not suit him in the least, making his face look as if it had been hardened, rigidified, made solemn, ageing him so much that no one could possibly have taken him for a young man. I was even more astonished a moment later when I heard somebody address as Duc de Châtellerault a little old man with a silvery, ambassadorial moustache, in whom only some lingering remnant of the way he glanced around enabled me to recognize him as the young man whom I had met once when I had called on Mme de Villeparisis. In the case of the first person whom I thus succeeded in identifying, by trying to forget the disguise and then, by an effort of memory, adding to the features which were still unchanged, my first thought ought to have been, and for less than a second perhaps was, to congratulate him on being so marvellously made up that one felt at first, before recognizing him, the same hesitancy that great actors, appearing in a role in which they are very different from their usual selves, as they make their first entry, create in the audience, who, despite being forewarned by the programme, remain for a moment dumbfounded before bursting into applause.

Most extraordinary of all, from this standpoint, was my personal enemy, M. d'Argencourt, the real star of the party. Not only, in place of his scarcely even pepper-and-salt beard, had he donned an extraordinary beard of improbable whiteness, but additionally (so much can little physical changes shrink or enlarge a person and, more broadly, change their apparent character, their personality) the man had become an old beggar, no longer commanding the slightest respect, although his solemn appearance, and starchy inflexibility, were still fresh in my memory, who brought to the part of decrepit old man such credibility that his limbs were quivering, and the slack lines of his face, which always used to be so haughty, were set in a permanent smile of beatific inanity. Taken to this extreme, the art of disguise becomes something more than that, it becomes a complete transformation of the personality. And indeed, although a few little details confirmed that it really was Argencourt who was putting on this hilarious and colourful show, I would have had to work back through I do not know how many successive states of that face if I wanted to rediscover that of the Argencourt I had known, who, with nothing but his own body to work with, had become so different from himself! This was evidently the furthest extremity to which he had been able to bring it without its collapsing entirely: the proudest face and the most jutting chest were now no more than a bunch of disintegrating rags, shaken in every direction. Only by recalling, with some difficulty, the occasional smile which in the past had for a moment tempered his aloofness, could one find in the living Argencourt the man whom I had seen so often, and understand how this daft old-clothes-merchant's smile might have existed within the correct gentleman of earlier days. But, even supposing that a similar intention to Argencourt's lay behind this smile, the very substance of the eye through which he expressed the smile was so changed, because of the extraordinary transformation of his face, that the expression itself became quite different and even appeared to belong to a different person. I was seized by giggles at the sight of this sublime dodderer, rendered as affable in this benevolent caricature of himself as was, in more tragic mode, the stricken and well-mannered M. de Charlus. M. d'Argencourt, in his incarnation as a comic ancient in a play by Regnard, exaggeratedly reworked by Labiche,[94] was as approachable and as courteous as the King Lear version of M. de Charlus, who carefully doffed his hat to even the most obsequious of those he encountered. None the less it did not occur to me to tell him how much I admired the extraordinary sight he presented. It was not my old antipathy that held me back, for he had contrived to look so different from himself that I had the illusion of being in the presence of another person altogether, as kindly, helpless and inoffensive as the usual Argencourt was contemptuous, hostile and dangerous. So different a person that the sight of this ludicrously grimacing, white, comical character, this snowman looking like a childlike Général Dourakine,[95] made me reflect that the human being could go through metamorphoses as total as those of some insects. I had a sense that I was looking through the plate glass of a natural history museum display at an example of what the speediest and surest insect may turn into, and standing in front of this limp chrysalis, vibratile

rather than capable of movement, I was unable to experience any of the feelings that M. d'Argencourt had always inspired in me. But I said nothing, I did not congratulate M. d'Argencourt on putting on a show that seemed to extend the possibilities available for the transformation of the human body.

Backstage at the theatre, of course, or at a fancy-dress ball, politeness tends to make one exaggerate the difficulty, almost to affirm the impossibility, of recognizing the person in their costume. Here, on the contrary, some instinct had warned me to conceal this as far as possible; I felt that there was nothing flattering about it, because the transformation was not voluntary, and finally realized something I had not suspected when I walked into this drawing-room, namely that any party, however simple, which takes place a long time after one has stopped going into society, so long as it brings together some of the people one knew in the past, produces the same effect as a masked ball, of the most successful kind imaginable, where one is quite genuinely *intrigué*[96] by the other guests, but where the disguises, which have long been set in their unintentional shape, cannot be removed with a wash once the party is over. Intrigued by other people? Also, alas, intriguing them ourselves. Because the same difficulty that I was experiencing in putting the right names to faces seemed to be shared by all the people who, seeing mine, took no more notice of it than if they had never seen it before, or else tried to release from my present appearance the memory of a different face.

If M. d'Argencourt had just performed this extraordinary 'number', which in its extravagant parody provided certainly the most striking vision that I would retain of him, he was like an actor coming out on to the stage for one last time before the curtain finally falls amidst gales of laughter. If I was no longer hostile to him, it was because he, having re-entered his childhood innocence, no longer had the slightest recollection of the scathing notions he might once have had about me, no memory of seeing M. de Charlus suddenly let go of my arm, either because he no longer had any such feelings, or because to get as far as me they were obliged to pass through physical refractors so distorting that they completely altered their meaning along the way, so that M. d'Argencourt seemed good in the absence of physical means of expressing the fact that he was still disagreeable, or of repressing his permanently engaging mirth. In fact to call him an actor would be an overstatement, unencumbered as he was by any kind of conscious spirit, it is more as a jigging puppet, with a beard made of white wool, that I saw him twitched about and walked up and down in the drawing-room, as if he were in a scientific and philosophical puppet-show, in which he served, as in a funeral address or a lecture at the Sorbonne, both as a reminder of the vanity of all things and as a specimen of natural history.

Puppets then, but puppets which, if one were to identify them with someone one had known, needed to be read on several levels at once, levels that underlay them and gave them depth and, when faced with one of these old marionettes, forced one to make an intellectual effort, because one was obliged to look at them with the memory at the same time as with the eyes; puppets steeped in the intangible colours of the years, puppets which were an expression of Time, Time which is normally not visible, which seeks out bodies in order to become so and wherever it finds them seizes upon them for its magic lantern show. As intangible as Golo had once been on my bedroom doorknob in Combray, the new, almost unrecognizable d'Argencourt stood there as the revelation of Time, which he rendered partially visible. In the new elements which made up the face and character of M. d'Argencourt one could read a certain tally of years, one could recognize the symbolic form of life not as it appears to us, that is as permanent, but in its reality, in such a shifting atmosphere that by evening the proud nobleman is depicted there in caricature, as an old-clothes-merchant.

In other people, too, these changes, these genuine estrangements seemed to go beyond the realm of natural history, and one was astonished, hearing a name, to find that the same individual might present, not like M. d'Argencourt the characteristics of a new species, but the external traits of some other personality. As in the case of M. d'Argencourt, many were the unsuspected possibilities that time had wrought with some young girl, but these possibilities, although entirely physiognomic or corporeal, seemed to have something moral about them, too. The facial features, if they change, if they form a different ensemble, if their expression habitually alters more slowly, take on a different meaning with their different appearance. In the case of a woman whom one had known as narrow-minded and unsympathetic, an unrecognizable relaxation of the cheeks, an unpredictable curving of the nose, caused the same surprise, often the same pleasant surprise, as some sensitive and profound remark or some noble and courageous deed that one would never have expected of her. All around this nose, this new nose, one could see opening up horizons which one could never have dared hope for. With those cheeks a kindness and affection once inconceivable became possible. One could make explicit in the presence of this chin, things that one would never have dreamed of intimating in front of its predecessor. All these new facial features implied different character traits, the unsympathetic, scrawny young woman turned into a large and indulgent dowager. It is no longer in a zoological sense, as in the case of M. d'Argencourt, so much as in a moral and social sense that one could say that this was a different person.

From all these aspects, a party like the one at which I found myself was something much more valuable than an image of the past, as it offered me, as it were, all the successive images, ones I had previously never seen, which separated the past from the present and, better still, the relationship that existed between the present and the past; it was like what we used to call an optical viewer, but giving an optical view of years, a view not of one moment, but of one person set in the distorting perspective of Time.

As for the woman whose lover M. d'Argencourt had been, she had not changed much, *if one took account of the time that had passed*, that is to say her face had not been completely ruined, at least for the face of a being which loses its shape progressively during the journey into the abyss towards which it has been hurled, the abyss whose direction we can express only by comparisons that are all equally pointless, since we can borrow them only from the spatial world, and whose only benefit, whether we define them by height, length or depth, is to make us feel that this inconceivable yet tangible dimension exists. The need, in order to put a name to the faces, to trace the years backwards, in effect, forced me then, in turn, to reinstate, by allowing them their real place, the years to which I had given no thought. From this point of view, and in order to prevent myself from being misled by the apparent identity of space, the entirely new appearance of an individual such as M. d'Argencourt was a striking revelation of this chronological reality, which normally remains an abstraction for us, just as the appearance of certain dwarf trees or giant baobabs tells us that we are in a different latitude.

Thus life begins to seem like a pantomime in which, from act to act, we watch a baby becoming an adolescent, then a grown man, then old and bent as he approaches the grave. And as one feels that it is by a permanent process of change that these individuals, encountered only at fairly long intervals, have become so different, one feels that one has followed the same law as these creatures, who are now so transformed that, although they have not ceased to exist, indeed precisely because they have not ceased to exist, they no longer resemble the appearance they presented to us in the past.

A young woman whom I had known long ago, now turned white and compacted into the form of a baleful little old woman, seemed to suggest that, in a theatrical finale, individuals need to be so disguised as to be unrecognizable. Her brother, however, had remained so upright, so like himself, that it was a complete surprise to see that he had whitened the elegantly curled moustache on his youthful face. The patches of white in beards hitherto entirely black rendered the human landscape of the party somewhat melancholy, like the first yellow leaves on the trees when one is still thinking one can count on a long summer, when before one has started to enjoy it one sees that it has already turned to autumn. So I, having lived from one day to the next since my childhood, and having also formed definitive impressions of myself and of others, became aware for the first time, as a result of the metamorphoses that had been produced in all these people, of all the time that had passed in their lives, an idea which overwhelmed me with the revelation that it had passed equally for me. And while irrelevant in itself, their old age devastated me by its announcing the approach of my own. This was, anyway, proclaimed by successive remarks which every few minutes assailed my ears like the trumpets of Judgment Day. The first was made by the Duchesse de Guermantes; I had just seen her, passing between a double line of onlookers who, unaware of the wonderful artifices of dress and aesthetic which created this effect, yet moved by the presence of this reddish head, this salmon-pink body barely emerging from its fins of black lace and stifled with jewels, gazed at it, at the hereditary sinuosity of its lines, as they might have gazed at some ancient sacred fish, encrusted with precious stones, in which was incarnate the tutelary spirit of the Guermantes. 'Ah! she said to me, how wonderful to see you, my oldest friend.' And although the vanity of the erstwhile young man of Combray, who never for a moment thought I might be one of her friends, actually sharing in the actual mysterious life she led among the Guermantes, one of her friends on the same footing as M. de Bréauté, as M. de Forestelle, as Swann, as all

those who were dead, might have been flattered by these words, I was mainly saddened by them. 'Her oldest friend! I said to myself, she is exaggerating; perhaps one of the oldest, but am I really…' At that moment a nephew of the Prince came up to me: 'As an old Parisian, you…,' he began. Only a few seconds later, I was handed a note. Just as I arrived I had encountered a young Létourville, whose exact relationship to the Duchesse I had forgotten, but who knew me slightly. He had just left Saint-Cyr and, telling myself that he would be a nice friend for me to have, as Saint-Loup had been, able to initiate me into army affairs, and all the changes they had undergone, I had told him that I would find him later and that we might arrange to have dinner together, for which he had thanked me warmly. But I had stayed too long dreaming in the library and the note he had left for me was to say that he had not been able to wait, and to leave me his address. The letter from this imagined friend ended thus: 'Most respectfully, your young friend, Létourville.' 'Young friend!' That was how I used to write to people who were thirty years older than myself, like Legrandin. And now this second lieutenant, whom I was imagining as a companion like Saint-Loup, called himself my young friend. So it was clearly not just military tactics that had changed since those days, and for M. de Létourville I was not a companion but an old gentleman; and from M. de Létourville, in whose company I was picturing myself, as I imagined myself, as a friend and companion, I was separated by the division of an invisible pair of compasses I had never dreamed of, which set me so far away from the young second lieutenant that, to somebody who described himself as my 'young friend', it seemed that I was an old gentleman.

Almost immediately afterwards somebody mentioned Bloch, and I asked whether they meant the young man or the father (unaware of his death during the war, from shock, it was said, at seeing France invaded). 'I didn't know he had children, I didn't even know he was married, said the Prince to me. But clearly we are talking about the father, because there's nothing of the young man about him, he added with a laugh. If he had sons they'd be grown-up themselves by now.' And I realized they were talking about my school-friend. Then a minute later, he came into the room. And superimposed on Bloch's features, too, I saw that daft, acquiescent expression, those feeble nods of the head which so quickly find their stop-notch, and in which I would have recognized the learned weariness of an amiable old man if I had not at the same time recognized my friend standing before me, and if my memories were not animating him with that uninterrupted youthful energy of which he now seemed bereft. For me, who had known him on the threshold of his life and always pictured him thus, he was my school-friend, an adolescent whose youth I measured by that which, thinking myself to have carried on at the age I was then, I unconsciously attributed to myself. I heard somebody say that he certainly looked his age, and was astonished to notice on his face some of the signs generally thought to be more characteristic of men who are old. Then I understood that this was because he really was old, and that it is out of adolescents who last a sufficient number of years that life makes old men.

As somebody, hearing that I had been unwell, asked whether I was not afraid of catching the flu which was so prevalent at that time, another well-meaning person reassured me by saying: 'No, it usually attacks younger people. Someone of your age is not really at risk.' I was also assured that the servants of the house had recognized me. They had whispered my name, and even, one lady told me, 'in the way they put it' she had them say 'There's old father…' (this expression was followed by my surname). And as I did not have any children, it could only be an allusion to my age.

'What! did I know the Maréchal? said the Duchesse to me. But I knew people who were even more typical, the Duchesse de Galliera, Pauline de Périgord, or Monsignor Dupanloup.' Hearing her, I naïvely regretted not having known what she called a relic of the old order. I ought to have thought that we call it the old order because we were able only to see the tail end of it; in the same way, what we see on the horizon takes on a mysterious grandeur and seems to close the door on a world we shall never see again; yet we continue to go forward, and soon it is we ourselves who are on the horizon for the generations who come after us; meanwhile the horizon retreats, and the world, which seemed to be finished, begins again. 'When I was a girl, added Mme de Guermantes, I even saw the Duchesse de Dino. My word, I'm not as young as I used to be.' That last remark annoyed me: 'She shouldn't have said that, that's how old ladies talk.' And immediately I remembered that she was in fact an old lady. 'As for you, she went on, you don't ever change. Yes, she told me, you're astonishing, you always look so young,' a saddening remark, because, however we may look, it only means anything if we have in fact grown old. She delivered the final blow by adding: 'I've always thought it was such a pity you didn't marry. But perhaps, who knows, it is all for the best. You would have been of an age to have sons in the war, and if they had been killed, like poor Robert (I still often think of him), you with your sensitivity would never have survived the loss.' I could see myself, as though in the first truthful glass I had ever encountered, reflected in the eyes of old men, who in their opinion were still young, just as I was in mine, and who when I described myself as an old man, hoping to hear a denial, showed in the way they looked at me, seeing me not as they saw themselves but as I saw them, no glimmer of protestation. Because we did not see our own true appearance, or age, and each of us, as though in a facing mirror, saw those of the others. And I am sure that many people confront the discovery that they have grown old with less sadness than I did. But old age, to begin with, has something in common with death. Some face it with indifference, not because they have more courage than others, but because they have less imagination. And then, a man who since his childhood has had one single idea in his mind, but who has been forced by idleness and his state of health continuously to put off its realization, each evening to write off the day that has been lost, so that the illness which hastens the ageing of his body retards that of his mind, is more surprised and overwhelmed to see that he has never ceased living in Time than somebody who has little interior life, organizes his life by the calendar, and does not all at once discover the total of the years whose increasing tally he has followed daily. But a more serious reason underlay my anxiety; I discovered this destructive action of Time at the very moment when I wanted to begin to clarify, to intellectualize within a work of art, realities whose nature was extra-temporal.

With some people the gradual replacement, achieved in my absence, of each cell by new ones, had brought about such a complete change, such a total metamorphosis, that I could have dined opposite them in a restaurant a hundred times without suspecting I had once known them, any more than I would have been able to guess the royal identity of a sovereign going incognito or the vices of a stranger. In fact even this comparison does not apply to the cases where I heard their names, because it is quite possible that the person sitting opposite you might be a criminal or a king, whereas these were people I had known, or rather I had known people of the same name but who were so different that I was unable to believe that they could be the same. However, just as I would have done with the idea of royalty or vice, which lose no time in giving a new face to the stranger, with whom one might, while one's eyes were still blindfolded, have committed the gaffe of being insolent or pleasant, and in whose same features one now discerns something distinguished or suspicious, I set about introducing into the face of one unknown, completely unknown woman, the idea that she was Mme Sazerat, and eventually restored the once familiar meaning of her face, which would, however, have remained truly alienated for me, utterly that of another person, as lacking now in all the human attributes I had once known as that of a man who has reverted to being a monkey, if the name and the affirmation of identity had not set me, despite the arduousness of the problem, on the track of the solution. Sometimes, though, the old face reappeared with enough precision for me to be able to try a confrontation; and then, like a witness brought face to face with a suspect he has seen, the difference was so great that I was forced to say: 'No… I don't recognize her.'

Gilberte de Saint-Loup said to me: 'Shall we go and dine, just the two of us, at a restaurant?' As I replied: 'So long as you don't think it compromising to dine alone with a young man,' I heard everybody round me laughing, and hastily added: 'or rather, with an old man.' I felt that the phrase which had caused the laughter was one that my mother might have used when speaking of me, my mother for whom I was always a child. Now I noticed that in matters of self-examination, I looked at things from the same point of view as she did. If I had finally taken in, like her, certain changes which had occurred since my early childhood, these were nevertheless now very old changes. I had stopped at the one which once made someone say, almost before it was true: 'He's almost a grown-up young man now.' I still thought this, but these days it was vastly out of date. I was not fully aware how much I had changed. But what, in fact, had those people who had just burst out laughing really noticed? I had not a single grey hair, my moustache was black. I would like to have been able to ask them what it was that revealed the evidence of this terrible thing.

And now it dawned upon me what old age was – old age, which of all realities is perhaps the one we continue longest to think of in purely abstract terms, looking at calendars, dating our letters, seeing our friends marry, and then our friends' children, without understanding, whether out of fear or laziness, what it all means, until the day when we see a silhouette we do not recognize, like that of M. d'Argencourt, which makes us realize that we are living in a new world; until

the day when the grandson of one of our friends, a young man whom we instinctively treat as an equal, smiles as if we were making fun of him, as to him we have always seemed like a grandfather; now I understood the meaning of death, loves, the pleasures of the mind, the use of suffering, a vocation, etc. For while names had lost their individuality for me, words were yielding up their full meaning. The beauty of images lies behind things, the beauty of ideas in front of them. So that the former cease to impress us when we reach them, whereas we have to go beyond the latter in order to understand them.

The cruel discovery which I had just made could not but be of use to me as far as the raw material of my book was concerned. Since I had decided that it could not be constituted solely out of genuinely full impressions, impressions which exist outside time, of the other truths among which I was planning to set these, those which related to time, time, in which men, societies and nations are immersed and in which they change, would play an important part. I would not be concerned only to find a place for the alterations which the features of human beings undergo, and of which I was noticing new examples each minute, because, while I was thinking about my work, now definitively enough under way not to let itself be stalled by temporary distractions, I continued to greet people whom I knew and to chat with them. Ageing, it was clear, did not show itself in the same way for all of them.

I saw someone who was asking my name, and was told that it was M. de Cambremer. And then to show that he had recognized me: 'Do you still have your attacks of breathlessness?' he asked me; and, at my reply in the affirmative: 'You see that it's no barrier to longevity,' he said, as though I were a hundred years old. While I talked to him, I kept a close eye on two or three characteristics which I was able by an effort of thought to reintroduce into this synthesis, different though it was from my recollections, which I called his identity. Then for a moment he turned his head to one side. And I saw that what had made him so difficult to recognize was the addition of great red pouches to his cheeks which prevented him from fully opening his mouth and his eyes, so much so that I stood there stupefied, not daring to look at these carbuncular growths, which it seemed more polite not to mention until he did. But like a brave invalid, he made no allusion to them, laughed, and I was afraid of seeming heartless if I did not ask, and tactless if I did ask, what they were. 'But don't you get them less often with age?' he asked, continuing to talk about my breathlessness. I said not. 'No, no, my sister definitely has fewer than she used to,' he told me, in a contradictory tone of voice, as though it were impossible for my situation to be any different from his sister's, and as though old age were one of those remedies which, since they had been beneficial for Mme de Gaucourt, he could not believe might not be helpful to me. Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin having joined us, I grew increasingly anxious about appearing insensitive for not giving some expression of concern about what I had observed on her husband's face, yet did not dare mention it first myself. 'Are you pleased to see him? she said to me – He's in good health? I replied, hesitantly. – Heavens yes, pretty good, as you can see.' She had not noticed the affliction which I found so difficult to look at and which was no more than one of Time's masks which Time had fastened to the face of the Marquis, but only little by little, thickening it so gradually that the Marquise had been unaware of it. When M. de Cambremer had finished his questions about my breathlessness, it was my turn to ask somebody in a low voice whether the Marquis's mother was still alive. When one is estimating the passage of time, it is actually only the first step that is difficult. It is very hard at first to imagine that so much time could have passed, and then after a while it seems strange that even more has not passed. One had never dreamed that the thirteenth century was so distant, but then it seems almost impossible to believe that thirteenth-century churches might still exist, although there are countless examples of them in France. In the space of a few moments I had gone through the same process as happens more slowly to those people who, having had difficulty in believing that somebody they knew as a child is still alive at sixty, find it even harder fifteen years later to learn that they are still living and are still only seventy-five. I asked M. de Cambremer how his mother was. 'She is still wonderful,' he told me, using an adjective which, in contrast to those tribes where aged parents are treated mercilessly, is applied in certain families to old people whose command of the most basic faculties, such as hearing, walking to Mass and being impervious to bereavements, are imbued in the eyes of their children with a strange moral beauty.

With others whose faces were still intact, the only thing that seemed to worry them was having to walk; at first one imagined there was something wrong with their legs; only later did one realize that age had fastened its leaden soles to their feet. Some, like the Prince d'Agrigente, seemed to be made more attractive by age. The tall, thin man with the lacklustre eyes and hair that seemed destined to stay red for ever, had given place, through a metamorphosis analogous to that of insects, to an old man whose red hair, too long exposed to view, had been whipped away like an over-used table-cloth and replaced with white. His chest had taken on an unexpected, robust, almost warlike burliness, which must have required a positive rupture of the fragile chrysalis I had known; a conscious gravity lighted his eyes, tinged with a new kindness which seemed to be directed to everybody. And since, despite everything, some points of resemblance still persisted between the mighty prince of the present and the portrait lodged in my memory, I was lost in admiration of the original powers of revitalization possessed by Time, which, while continuing to respect the unity of the individual and the laws of life, can thus do so much to change the outward finish and to introduce bold contrasts between two successive aspects of a single character. For many of these people were immediately identifiable, but rather as if they were bad portraits of themselves brought together at an exhibition where an inaccurate and malicious artist has hardened the features of one, removed the fresh complexion or the slender figure of another, and dulled her eyes. Comparing these images with the ones that answered to the eye of memory, I was less taken with the more recent ones. Just as one often finds less good, and rejects, one of the photographs between which a friend has asked one to choose, as I looked at the image of themselves that each person presented, I would have liked to say to them: 'No, not this one, you're not so good in this one, it isn't you.' I would not have dared add: 'Instead of your lovely straight nose, somebody's given you your father's hooked nose, which I've never seen on you before.' And it was in fact a new nose, but it was also the family nose. Briefly put, Time, the artist, had 'rendered' all these models in such a way that they were still recognizable but they were not likenesses, not because he had flattered them, but because he had aged them. He is also an artist who works extremely slowly. That replica of Odette's face, for example, the first outline sketch for which I had glimpsed in Gilberte's face on the day I saw Bergotte for the first time, Time had now finally taken to the most perfect likeness, in the same way that some painters keep a work for a long time, finishing it gradually, year by year.

If some women acknowledged their old age by using make-up, it became visible in contrasting fashion through an absence of make-up in the case of certain men on whose faces I had never particularly noticed it, and who yet struck me as greatly changed since, having lost heart in the attempt to please, they had stopped using it. Among these was Legrandin. The removal of the pink, which I had never suspected of being artificial, from his lips and his cheeks, gave his face the greyish look, as well as the sculptural precision, of stone, sculpted his doleful, elongated features to look like those of some Egyptian gods. Gods? Ghosts would be more appropriate. He had lost the courage not only to paint himself, but to smile, to make his eyes sparkle, to say clever things. One was astonished to see him so pale, so demoralized, uttering only occasional words which were as insignificant as those of the invoked dead. One wondered what cause was preventing him being lively, eloquent and charming, just as one asks the same thing about the nondescript 'double' of a man, brilliant in his lifetime, when a medium puts questions to it which ought to give rise to engaging and extensive answers. And one told oneself that this cause, which had substituted for the quick-thinking, brightly coloured Legrandin a pallid, pensive phantom of himself, was old age.

In several guests I eventually recognized not only themselves but them as they once used to be, Ski, for example, who was no more altered than a flower or a fruit which had been dried. He was a rough draft, confirming my theories about art. Others were not in the least interested in art, being society people. But they had not been ripened by old age either and their chubby faces, even if surrounded with a first circle of wrinkles and an arc of white hair, retained the cheerfulness of an eighteen-year-old. They were not old men, just extremely faded young people of eighteen. It would have taken very little to efface life's signs of wear, and death would find it no harder to restore youth to these faces than it is to clean a portrait which only a thin coating of dirt prevents from shining in the way it used to. I also thought about the illusion we fall victim to when, listening to some famous old man speaking, we are immediately ready to trust his goodness, his fairness and his generosity of spirit; because I felt that, forty years earlier, these people had been dreadful young men, and there was no reason to suppose that they had not kept that vanity, duplicity, arrogance and cunning.

Yet in complete contrast to these, I was surprised, when I was talking to men and women who used to be unbearable, to find that they had lost almost all their faults, perhaps because life, by disappointing or fulfilling their desires, had rid them of their pretension or their bitterness. A rich marriage putting an end to the

need for struggle and ostentation, or the influence of the wife herself, and the slowly acquired awareness of values other than those that comprised the credo of a frivolous youth, had allowed their temperament to unbend and reveal their better qualities. These people, as they had grown old, seemed to have taken on a different personality, just as trees, as they change colour in the autumn, seem to change their essential nature. In them the essence of old age was indeed visible, but as something moral. In others it was primarily physical, and so new that the person (Mme d'Arpajon, for example) seemed both unfamiliar and familiar. Unfamiliar because it was impossible to suspect that it was she, and despite all I did I could not, as I returned her greeting, prevent myself revealing the mental effort which was causing me to hesitate between three or four individuals (among whom Mme d'Arpajon was not included) in my attempt to work out whose greeting I was returning, with a warmth which must have astonished her, for in my state of uncertainty, afraid of seeming too cool if she were a close friend, I had compensated for the vagueness of my gaze by the warmth of my handshake and my smile. On the other hand, though, her new appearance was not unfamiliar to me. It was the one I had often seen in the course of my life on the faces of stout, elderly ladies, but without ever suspecting that they could, many years before, have looked like Mme d'Arpajon. Her appearance was so different from the Marquise I had known that one might have taken her for a damned soul, a character out of a play, appearing first as a young girl, then as a sturdy matron, and soon no doubt to return as a bent and doddering old woman. She seemed, like an exhausted swimmer for whom the shore appears a long way away, to be scarcely able to rise above the waves of time that were submerging her. Gradually, though, by dint of studying her face, hesitant and uncertain like an unreliable memory which can no longer retain the shapes of earlier times, I finally managed to retrieve something of it by playing a little game of eliminating the squares and hexagons which age had added to her cheeks. Of course, it was not always merely geometric shapes that age combined with women's faces. In the cheeks of the Duchesse de Guermantes, still very recognizable but now as variegated as nougat, I could make out a trace of verdigris, a small pink patch of crushed shell, and a little lump, hard to define, smaller than a mistletoe berry and less transparent than a glass pearl.

Some men walked with a limp which one knew was not the result of a motor accident but was caused by a first stroke and by the fact that they already had, as they say, one foot in the grave. Almost at the mouth of theirs, half-paralysed, some women seemed unable fully to free their dress, which remained caught on the stone of the vault, and could not stand up, bent as they were, head lowered, in a curve which echoed their current descent between life and death, awaiting the final fall. Nothing could counter the movement of this parabola which was sweeping them away, and when they tried to rise they shook, and their fingers could not hold on to anything.

Some did not even have white hair. Thus, when he came over to pass a message to his master, I recognized the Prince de Guermantes's old valet. The shaggy whiskers that bristled on his cheeks, as well as the hair on his head, were still an almost pinkish red, and nobody could suspect him of using dye like the Duchesse de Guermantes. Nevertheless, he looked old. One simply felt that there are some kinds of men, as in the vegetable kingdom there are some kinds of mosses, lichens and the like, which do not change at the approach of winter.

These changes were usually, in fact, atavistic, and the family – often even – especially among Jews – the race – filled up the gaps left by the passing of time. After all, ought I to tell myself that these characteristics would die? I had always thought of the self, at any given moment, as a colony of polyps, where the eye, an independent but associated organism, blinks when a particle passes by without the intelligence ordering it to do so, or where the intestine, with a buried parasite, is infected without the intelligence learning of it; similarly for the soul, but over the duration of a life, as a sequence of selves which die one after another, or even alternate between themselves, like those at Combray which took one another's place within me when evening came. But I had also seen that these moral cells which make up an individual are more durable than he is. I had seen the vices and the courage of the Guermantes recur in Saint-Loup, as also his own strange and short-lived character defects, and in Swann's case his Semitism. I could see it again in Bloch. He had lost his father some years ago and, when I had written to him then, had not at first been able to reply to me, because in addition to the powerful family feeling that often exists in Jewish families, the idea that his father was a man utterly superior to all others had turned his love for him into worship. He had not been able to bear losing him and had to retreat to a sanatorium for almost a year. He had replied to my condolences in a tone both deeply felt and almost aloof, so enviable he thought my having been able to approach this superior being, whose two-horse carriage he would have liked to give to some museum of history. And now, at his family table, the same anger which animated M. Bloch against M. Nissim Bernard animated Bloch against his father-in-law. He made the same attacks on him at table. In the same way that I, listening to Cottard, Brichot and many other people talking, had felt that a single undulation uses culture and fashion to propagate identical patterns of speech and thinking throughout the whole expanse of space, so throughout the length of time a mighty ground-swell stirs up from the depths of the ages the same angers, the same sorrows, the same acts of bravery, the same obsessions, which rise through generation after superimposed generation, so that any section taken through a few of the same series will show the repetition, like shadows on successive screens, of a scene identical to, although frequently less insignificant than, the one that shows Bloch and his father-in-law battling against each other like M. Bloch senior and M. Nissim Bernard, and like other people whom I never knew.

Some faces under their cowl of white hair already had the rigidity, the sealed eyelids, of those about to die, and their lips, shaking with a permanent tremor, seemed to be mumbling the prayer of the dying. A face whose lines were still unchanged needed nothing for its appearance to be altered except white hair in place of black or blond. Theatrical costumiers know that a powdered wig is enough to disguise someone quite adequately and render them unrecognizable. The young Comte de ——, whom I had seen in Mme de Cambremer's box when he was still a lieutenant, the day when Mme de Cambremer was in the box below with her cousin, still had features as perfectly regular, in fact more so, the physiological rigidity of arteriosclerosis exaggerating further the impassive rectitude of his dandy's physiognomy, and giving his features the intense definition, which immobility turned almost to a grimace, which they would have had in a study by Mantegna or Michelangelo. His complexion, once a louche red, now had a funereal pallor; some silver hairs, a slight stoutness, a Doge-like nobility, a weariness that approached somnolence, all combined in him to give the novel and prophetic impression of doomed majesty. In place of his rectangle of blond beard, the equal rectangle of his white beard transformed him so perfectly that, noticing that the second lieutenant I had known now had five rings of braid, my first thought was to congratulate him, not on having been promoted colonel, but on looking so good as a colonel, a disguise for which he seemed to have borrowed both the uniform and the mournful gravity of the superior officer that his father had been. On another figure, the substitution of a white for a blond beard, while the face remained lively, smiling and young, simply made him appear ruddier and more militant, augmented the sparkle of the eyes and gave the still youthful socialite the inspired air of a prophet.

The transformation which white hair and other factors had effected, especially among the women, would have impressed me less forcefully had it been no more than a change of colour, which can be a pleasure to the eye, rather than a change of character, which is intellectually disturbing. To 'recognize' somebody, after all, even more, to identify somebody after not being able to recognize them, is to think two contradictory things under a single heading, to admit that what was here, the individual one remembers, no longer exists, and that what is here is a being one did not formerly know; it is to have to think about a mystery almost as disturbing as that of death, of which it is effectively the preface and the herald. Because I knew what these changes meant, what they were a prelude to. So that these women's white hair disturbed me, combined as it was with so many other changes. I was told a name and I was stunned by the thought that it applied both to the fair-haired woman I remembered waltzing long ago and the large lady with white hair ponderously crossing the room near me. Beyond a slight pinkness of complexion, the name might perhaps be the only thing these two women had in common, each – the one in my memory and the one at the Guermantes' party – more unlike the other than an innocent young girl and a dowager in a play. For life to have succeeded in giving the waltzing girl this enormous body, in slowing down her ungainly movements as if in response to some metronome, for it to have substituted, with perhaps as the one common factor the cheeks, broader now admittedly but rosaceous since youth, this portly old campaigner for that slender blonde, it must have had to carry through more demolition and reconstruction than replacing a steeple with a dome, and when one thought that this operation was conducted not on inert matter but on only imperceptibly changing flesh, the staggering contrast between the present apparition and the being whom I remembered drove the latter into a past that was more than distant, that was almost

unbelievable. It was difficult to reconcile the two appearances, to think of the two people under a single heading; for just as it is hard to imagine that a dead person used to be alive, or that somebody who was alive is now dead, it is almost as difficult, and of the same order of difficulty (for the annihilation of youth, the destruction of a person full of energy and light-heartedness, is already a form of oblivion), to conceive that she who was young is now old, when the juxtaposition of the appearance of this old woman with that of the young one seems so strongly to exclude it that old and young and old again seem to be taking it in turns, alternating as in a dream, so that one would never have believed that this one had ever been that one, that they are made of the same material, that the original stuff did not take refuge elsewhere, but through the cunning manipulation of time has become this, that it really is the same material, never having left the one body – without the clue of the identical name and the positive testimony of friends, and the one appearance of verisimilitude provided by the rosacea, once a small patch among clusters of golden corn, now broadly spread beneath the snow.

And as with snow, too, the degree of whiteness of the hair seemed generally to be a sign of the depth of time lived, like those mountaintops which, even when they seem to the naked eye to be at the same level as others, nevertheless reveal their altitude by their degree of snowy whiteness. Yet this is not universally true, especially among women. Thus the locks of the Princesse de Guermantes, which when they were grey and lustrous as silk looked like silver around her domed forehead, now that they had become white had taken on a tow-coloured, woolly mattness, which had the opposite effect of making them look as grey as dirty snow that has lost its sheen.

And in many case those fair-haired dancers had not only appropriated, along with a wig of white hair, the friendship of duchesses whom they never used to know. Having done nothing in the past but dance, they had been touched by art, as if by grace. And just as illustrious ladies in the seventeenth century would enter a religious order, they lived in apartments filled with Cubist paintings, each one with a Cubist painter working for her alone and she living only for him. As for the old men whose features had changed, they still tried to keep permanently fixed on their faces one of those fleeting expressions one adopts for a second in front of a camera in an attempt either to make the most of one's best features or else to compensate for some defect; they looked rather as if they had finally become immutable snapshots of themselves.

All these people had spent so much *time* putting on their disguises that these generally went unnoticed by those who lived with them. In many cases they were allowed an extension during which they could continue to remain themselves until quite late on. But then the deferred disguise was adopted more rapidly; whichever way it happened, it was unavoidable. I had never found any resemblance between Mme X—— and her mother, whom I had known only as an old woman, when she looked like a shrunken little Turk. Mme X—— herself I had always known as charming and upright, and for a long time that was how she remained, in fact for too long because, like someone who has to remember to put on her Turkish disguise before night falls, she had left it to the very last minute and had therefore been forced very hastily, almost suddenly, to shrink herself down and faithfully to reproduce the old Turkish woman's appearance adopted long ago by her mother.

There were some men whom I knew to be related to others without ever having thought that they might have features in common; in admiring the old recluse with white hair whom Legrandin had become I suddenly discerned, I may say I discovered with the satisfaction of a zoologist, in the different planes of his cheeks, the same construction as in those of his young nephew, Louis de Cambremer, who yet appeared to look nothing like him; then to this first common feature I added another which I had never noticed on Léonor de Cambremer, then others again, none of which were ones usually presented to me by my synthesis of the young man, so that I soon had a caricature of him which was truer and more profound than any literal likeness; his uncle now seemed merely the young Cambremer after entertaining himself by putting on the appearance of the old man which he would in reality one day become, so that now it was not only what had become of the young people of the past, but what would become of the young people of today, that was giving me such a strong sensation of time.

The features in which are graven if not their youth at least their beauty having vanished, the women had tried to discover whether, out of the face that was left, they could possibly make another. Displacing the centre, if not of gravity then at least, perspectivally speaking, of their face and grouping the features around it on a different principle, at the age of fifty they began a new kind of beauty, as one might take up a new career late in life, or as ground that is no longer any good for vines can be used for growing beet. Around these new features a new youthfulness started to flourish. The only women who could not make use of these transformations were those who were too beautiful or too ugly. The former, sculpted like a piece of marble with permanent lines, nothing of which could be changed, would crumble away like a statue. The second group, those who had some deformity of the face, actually had some advantages over the beautiful ones. To begin with, they were the only ones who were instantly recognizable. One knows that there are no two mouths alike in Paris, and each one of this group demanded my recognition, even at this party where I did not recognize anybody else. And on top of that, they did not really look as if they had aged. Old age is something human; they were monsters, and they no more seemed to have 'changed' than whales do.

Some men, and some women, did seem not to have aged, their figures were still as slender, their faces as young as ever. But if, in order to speak to them, one leaned closer to the smooth-skinned face, with its fine contours, it suddenly appeared quite different, like the surface of a plant, or a drop of water or blood, when they are placed under a microscope. I could then make out numerous greasy patches on the skin which I had thought was smooth, which filled me with disgust. The lines could not sustain this enlargement either. Close up, the line of the nose broke down, filled out, was prey to the same oily circles as the rest of the face; and seen at close quarters the eyes retreated into bags which destroyed the resemblance between this current face and the face of the past which I thought I had rediscovered. So that these particular guests were young when seen from a distance, but their age increased with the enlargement of the face and the possibility of observing it from different angles; but it remained dependent on the spectator, who had to position himself carefully if he wanted to see these faces, and apply to them only the sort of distant looks which diminish the object, like the lens the optician chooses for a presbyopic patient; for them old age, like the presence of infusoria in a drop of water, was brought about less by the progress of the years than by the place on the scale occupied by the vision of the observer.

I met one of my oldest friends there, someone whom I had seen almost every day for ten years. Somebody asked if they could reintroduce us. So I went over to him, and he said in a voice that was immediately familiar to me: 'This is a great pleasure for me after all these years!' But what a surprise this was for me! The voice seemed to be emitted by an advanced phonograph, for while it was that of my friend, it emanated from a stout, grey-haired old fellow whom I did not know, and after that it seemed to me that it could only be artificially, by a mechanical trick, that my friend's voice could have been placed inside this stout old man who might have been anybody. Yet I knew it was he, and the person who had introduced us after so long was not given to playing practical jokes. My friend himself declared that I had not changed, and I realized he did not think that he had changed either. Then I looked at him more closely. And, in fact, although he had become very stout, he had kept many things from the old days. Yet I still could not grasp the fact that it was he. So I tried to remember. When he was young he had had blue eyes, always laughing, perpetually in motion, clearly in quest of something I had never thought about and which was likely to be very unselfish, the truth probably, pursued in perpetual uncertainty, with a sort of childishness but with an errant respect for all the friends of his family. Now a capable, influential and despotic politician, those blue eyes of his, which had never actually found what they were looking for, had lost their mobility, which gave them a pointed look, as if from beneath a frowning eyebrow. And the expression of gaiety, freedom and innocence had turned to one of cunning and dissimulation. I was on the point of deciding that this must indeed be another man when I suddenly heard, at something I said, his laugh, his old uncontrolled laughter, the laughter that went with the gay, perpetual mobility of his eyes. Some music-lovers find that, orchestrated by X——, the music of Z—— becomes absolutely different. These are nuances that ordinary people do not grasp. But a stifled, wild, boyish laugh coming from beneath an eye as pointed as a well-sharpened blue pencil is more than a difference of orchestration. Then the laugh stopped; and although I would very much like to have recognized my friend, like Ulysses in the *Odyssey* attempting to embrace his dead mother, like a medium trying unsuccessfully to obtain from an apparition a response which would identify it, like a visitor to an exhibition of electricity who cannot help believing that the voice which the phonograph restores unaltered is, all the same, spontaneously emitted by a person, I stopped recognizing him.

There is, however, one important qualification to all this, namely that the tempo of time itself may for certain people be accelerated or slowed down. Four or five years ago I happened, for instance, to encounter the Vicomtesse de Saint-Fiacre in the street (the daughter-in-law of the friend of the Guermantes). Her sculptured features seemed to assure her of eternal youth. Besides which, she was still young. Now, in spite of her smiles and her greetings, I simply could not recognize her in a lady with features so ravaged that the lines of her face were beyond reconstruction. This was because for three years she had been taking cocaine and other drugs. Her eyes, deeply ringed with black, looked almost wild. Her mouth was fixed in a strange rictus. She had got up, I was told, especially for the party, having spent months without leaving her bed or her chaise-longue. Time, therefore, has its special express trains which take you rapidly to a premature old age. But on the parallel track, trains run almost as quickly in the opposite direction. I mistook M. de Courgivaux for his son, because he looked the younger (he must have been over fifty, and looked younger than he had when he was thirty). He had found an intelligent doctor, and cut out alcohol and salt; he had gone back to being about thirty and in fact on this particular day seemed not yet to have reached that age. This was because, only that morning, he had had his hair cut. There was still one man, though, whom I could not recognize, even when I was told his name; I thought it must be someone with the same name, because there could be absolutely no connection between this man and the one whom I not only knew in the past, but had met again only a few years ago. Yet it was he, only white-haired and fatter, but he had shaved off his moustache and that had been enough to strip him of his personality.

Strangely enough, the phenomenon of old age seemed in the way it operated to take account of some social customs. There were great noblemen, for instance, who had always been dressed in the plainest alpaca and worn old straw hats which an ordinary middle-class man would not have been seen dead in, who had aged in the same way as the gardeners and the countrymen among whom they had spent their lives. Patches of brown had appeared on their cheeks, and their faces had yellowed and darkened like the pages of a book.

I also thought about all the people who were not there, because they were unable to be, and whose secretaries, trying give the illusion that they were surviving, had excused by one of those telegrams which the Princesse was handed from time to time, those invalids who have been dying for years, who never get up, never go out and, even in the midst of the shallow attentiveness of visitors drawn there by tourist curiosity or pilgrim piety, lie with their eyes closed, clutching their rosary, feebly pushing away their sheet which is already more like a pall, looking like effigies, carved into skeletal thinness by illness out of flesh stiff and white as marble, recumbent on their tomb.

The women attempted to keep in contact with what had been most individual in their charm, but often the new material of their faces no longer lent itself to this. One was afraid, thinking of the periods of time which must have elapsed before being accompanied by a parallel revolution in the geology of a face, to see what erosion had occurred along the nose, what great alluvia at the edge of the cheeks now surrounded the whole face with their opaque and refractory masses.

Some women, of course, were still eminently recognizable, their faces remaining almost the same, and all they had done, as if in harmony with the season, was to put on their autumn accessory of grey hair. But for others, and for some men, too, the transformation was so complete, the continued identity so impossible to establish – for example between the evil womanizer one remembered and the old monk before one's eyes – that even more than the actor's art, it was the skill of some of the best mime-artists, Fregoli[97] being the greatest, that these fabulous transformations reminded one of. The old woman had wanted to cry when she realized that the indefinable, melancholy smile which had been her main charm was no longer capable of radiating as far as the surface of the plaster mask that old age had applied to her face. Then suddenly deterred from crying, deciding that it showed more mental character to put up with things, she used it like a theatrical mask to provoke laughter! But for nearly all the women there was no respite in their attempt to fight against old age, and they were always holding out towards the beauty which was retreating, like a setting sun whose last rays they passionately wanted to conserve, the mirror of their face. To succeed in this, some of them tried to smooth it down, to enlarge the white surface, renouncing the lure of already threatened dimples and the roguishness of a smile condemned and already half disarmed; while others, seeing beauty finally vanished and obliged to take refuge in facial expression, like someone compensating for the loss of their voice with skilful diction, they clung on to a pout, or to a way of wrinkling their eyes, to a dreamy look, or sometimes to a smile which, because of the lack of coordination between no longer obedient muscles, made them look as if they were crying.

Furthermore, even among the men who had undergone only slight alteration, whose moustaches had turned white, etc., one felt that the change was not strictly speaking material. It was as if one had seen them through a mist of dye or a painted lens which changed the appearance of their faces, but also, more than that, by adding this blurring factor to our vision, showed that what we were being enabled to see 'life-size' was in reality very far away from us, within a different sort of distance, admittedly, from that of space, but at the far end of which, as from another shore, we felt that they were having as much difficulty in recognizing us as we were in recognizing them. Only perhaps Mme de Forcheville, as if she had been injected with a liquid, something like paraffin, which soaks into the skin and prevents it changing, still looked like a cocotte from the old days, now permanently 'stuffed'.

'You think I'm my mother,' Gilberte had said to me. It was true. Yet it was also almost kind: one starts off with the idea that people are the same and one finds them old. But if one starts with the idea that they are old, one rediscovers them, one finds that they don't seem so bad after all. In the case of Odette it was not only that; her appearance, once one knew her age and anticipated seeing an old woman, seemed a more miraculous defiance of the laws of chronology than the conservation of radium was of the laws of nature. If at first I had not recognized her, this was not because she had, but because she had not changed. Having become aware during the last hour of time's new additions to people and my need to subtract again in order to rediscover people as I had known them, I now rapidly made that calculation, adding to the former Odette the number of years which had passed over her, the result of which turned out to be a person who it seemed to me could not possibly be the one I was looking at, precisely because she was so like her old self. What part did make-up and dye play in this? Under her flat golden hair – a bit like the tousled chignon of a large mechanical doll, over a face set in an expression of surprise as immutable as a doll's – on which was superimposed an equally flat straw hat, she looked like the spirit of the 1878 Exhibition[98] (at which she might indeed easily have been, even more so if she were as old then as she was today, the most extraordinary attraction) coming to deliver her party-piece in an end-of-year revue, but the 1878 Exhibition played by a woman who was still young.

Close beside us passed a minister from before the Boulangist[99] period, now a minister once again, throwing a distant and tremulous smile to the ladies, looking as if he were imprisoned in the myriad ties of the past, like a little ghost led about by an invisible hand, reduced in stature, altered in substance and looking like a little version of himself made out of pumice-stone. This former Prime Minister, so welcome in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, had once been the subject of criminal proceedings, vilified by society and by the people. But thanks to the replacement of the individuals constituting each of these entities and, among those individuals who still survived, the replacement of their strong feelings and even their memories, nobody any longer knew about it, and he was honoured and respected. It seems therefore that there is no humiliation so great that one should not put up with it easily, in the knowledge that after a few years our buried faults will be no more than an invisible dust over which will smile the smiling and blossoming peace of nature. An individual who has momentarily strayed will find himself, thanks to the equilibrium effect of time, caught between two new social strata, both of which feel nothing but deference and admiration for him, in which he will strut and bask very comfortably. Nothing but time can achieve this; and while his troubles are still continuing nothing can console him for the fact that the young dairy-maid over the road has heard the shouts of 'sleaze' from the crowd, shaking their fists as he climbed into the 'Black Maria', the young dairy-maid who does not see things in the perspective of time, and who does not know that the men lauded in the morning newspaper were previously discredited, and that the man on the brink of a prison sentence at this moment yet, perhaps thinking of the dairy-maid, unable to utter the words of humility which might win her sympathy for him, will one day be celebrated by the press and sought after by duchesses. In a similar way time distances family quarrels. At the Princesse de Guermantes's party there was a couple, husband and wife, who had as uncles two men, dead now, one of whom, not content with their having come to blows with each other, and wanting further to humiliate the other, had sent his porter and butler as his seconds, as if he deemed gentlemen too good for him. These stories,

though, were buried in the newspapers of thirty years ago, and nobody any longer remembered them. And thus the Princesse de Guermantes's drawing-room was illuminated, forgetful, and flowery, like a peaceful cemetery. There, time had not only brought about the ruin of the creatures of a former epoch, it had made possible, had indeed created, new associations.

To return to that politician, despite the changes in his physical substance, every bit as far-reaching as the transformation of the moral ideas which he now evoked in the public mind, in a word despite all the years that had passed since he had been Prime Minister, he became a member of the new cabinet, the leader of which had given him a portfolio, rather as a theatre director gives a part to one of his old friends, long retired, whom he deems still to be more capable than younger actresses of playing the part with subtlety, and whose difficult financial situation he is also aware of, and who, at almost eighty, still shows the public the whole of her talent almost at the height of its powers, along with that continuing vitality which people were subsequently amazed to have seen so vividly just a few days before her death.

The case of Mme de Forcheville, on the other hand, was so miraculous that one could not even say that she was rejuvenated, more that, with all her carmines and her russets, she had come back into flower again. More even than the incarnation of the 1878 Universal Exhibition, she might have been the chief curiosity and star attraction in a modern horticultural exhibition. To me, she did not seem to say: 'I am the 1878 Exhibition' so much as: 'I am the Allée des Acacias, 1892.' She looked as if she might still have been there. And precisely because she had not changed, she hardly seemed to be alive. She was like a sterilized rose. I said good-afternoon to her, she tried for a long time to discover my name from my face, like a pupil looking at the examiner's face for an answer he could more easily have found in his own head. I mentioned my name and immediately, as if the name had powers of enchantment thanks to which I stopped looking like an arbutus tree or a kangaroo or whatever appearance old age must have given me, she recognized me and started to talk in that intensely individual voice which those people who had applauded her in little theatres were so impressed, when they were invited to lunch with her 'in town', to hear again in everything she said, throughout the conversation, for as long as they liked to listen. The voice had stayed the same, needlessly warm, captivating, with a very slight English accent. And yet, just as her eyes seemed to be looking at me from a distant shore, her voice was sad, almost pleading, like that of the dead in the *Odyssey*. Odette was still capable of acting. I complimented her on her youthfulness. She said: 'You're very kind, *my dear*, thank you,' and, as she found it hard to express even the truest feelings in a manner unaffected by her need to seem what she took to be smart, she repeated several times: 'Thank you so much, thank you so much.' But I, who had long ago walked so far to catch sight of her in the Bois, who, the first time I went to see her, had listened for the sound of her voice falling from her lips as if it were treasure, now found the minutes spent in her company interminable because it was impossible to know what to say to her, and I moved on, telling myself that Gilberte's words 'You think I'm my mother' were not only true, but also that they could only be flattering for the daughter.

Besides, Gilberte was not the only one on whom family traits had appeared which had previously remained as invisible on their face as those parts of a seed, coiled up inside it, whose sudden eruption up out of it is completely unpredictable. Thus a great maternal beak appeared on this or that person at about the age of fifty, transforming a nose that until then had been straight and pure. Another woman, the daughter of a banker, found that her complexion, once fresh as a daisy, turned red and leathery and started to look as if it were a reflection of the gold her father had spent so much time handling. Some even ended up looking like the part of town they lived in, somehow bearing in their faces a reflection of the rue de l'Arcade, the avenue de Bois or the rue de l'Élysée. For the most part, though, they reproduced the characteristics of their parents.

She was not, alas, always to remain as unchanged as this. Less than three years later I was to see her, not in her second childhood, but not quite all there, at an evening party given by Gilberte; she had become incapable of concealing beneath a mask of impassivity what she was thinking, or rather – thinking puts it too high – what was going through her mind, nodding her head, pursing her lips, shrugging her shoulders at every impression she was feeling like a drunk does, or a small child, or poets who, sensing inspiration and oblivious to their surroundings, start composing a poem at a social gathering, furrowing their eyebrows and distorting their features, to the astonishment of the woman on their arm whom they are taking in to dinner. These impressions of Mme de Forcheville – all except one, which was actually the cause of her presence at the party, her affection for her beloved daughter and her pride that she should be giving such a glittering party, a pride which could not mask the mother's sadness at not being anything herself any more – these impressions were not joyful, they simply required a permanent defence in the face of the snubs she received, a defence as timorous as a child's. All one heard was people saying: 'I don't know if Mme de Forcheville knew who I was, perhaps I ought to get someone to introduce me again. – Oh, there's no point in doing that,' somebody else would say, at the top of their voice, not thinking that Gilberte's mother could hear every word (either not thinking or not caring). 'It's quite useless. You won't get anything out of it. Best leave her alone. She's a bit gaga, you know.' Furtively, Mme de Forcheville would dart a glance out of her still beautiful eyes towards those talking so offensively about her, then quickly withdraw the look, afraid of having been rude; although keeping her feeble indignation to herself, she was still upset by the insult, and one saw her head nodding and her breast heaving as she cast a fresh glance at another equally discourteous guest, and yet she was not particularly surprised because, having felt very ill for some days, she had guardedly suggested that her daughter should rearrange the party, but her daughter had refused. Mme de Forcheville did not love her any the less for it; all the duchesses arriving, and everybody's admiration of the new mansion, flooded her heart with joy; and when the Marquise de Sabran came in, who at the time was the lady whose salon was the very pinnacle of the social ladder, Mme de Forcheville felt that she had been a good and foresightful mother and that her maternal task had been accomplished. More sniggering guests made her look up again and talk to herself, if you can call it talking when the language is dumb and expressed solely through movement and gesture. Although still beautiful, she had become – something she had never been before – an object of infinite sympathy; because she who had betrayed Swann and everybody else was now being betrayed by the entire universe; and she had become so weak that she no longer even dared, now the roles were reversed, to defend herself against men. And soon she would not defend herself against death. But all this is to anticipate: we must go back three years, to the afternoon party we are attending at the house of the Princesse de Guermantes.

I had some difficulty recognizing my friend Bloch, who in fact had now permanently adopted his pseudonym of Jacques du Rozier as his own name, behind which it would have needed my grandfather's flair to detect the 'sweet valley' of Hebron and the 'bonds of Israel' which my friend seemed definitively to have broken. His face had been completely transformed in accordance with the latest English fashion, and every unevenness seemed to have been smoothed away, as with a plane. His once curly hair was brushed flat, with a centre parting, and gleamed with brilliantine. His nose was still large and red, but now seemed swollen by a sort of permanent cold, which also explained the nasal drawl in which he produced his languid sentences, for he had found, not only a hair-style appropriate to his complexion, but an intonation that suited his pronunciation, in which the old twang took on an air of disdain for full articulation which went well with his inflamed nostrils. And thanks to the haircut, to the removal of his moustache, to the general air of elegance, to the whole impression, and to sheer will-power, his Jewish nose had disappeared, in the way that a hunchback, if she presents herself well, can seem to stand almost straight. But as soon as Bloch appeared, the one thing that altered the significance of his physiognomy more than any other was a formidable monocle. By introducing a mechanistic element into Bloch's face this monocle exempted him from all the difficult duties the human face is subject to, the duty to be beautiful, to express intellect, kindness or effort. The mere presence of this monocle on Bloch's face exempted people, first of all, from wondering whether or not he was good-looking, just like looking over some English things in a shop which the assistant has said 'are the latest thing', after which one does not dare wonder whether one actually likes it. Also he was able to take up a position behind the glass of the monocle where he was as aloof, distant and comfortable as if it had been the glass window of an elegant, well-sprung carriage, and his other features, in keeping with the flattened hair and the monocle, never expressed anything now at all.

Bloch asked me to introduce him to the Prince de Guermantes; I did not even feel a hint of the difficulties I had found in my way on the day when I went first went to an evening party at his house and which had seemed quite natural to me then, whereas now it seemed perfectly simple to introduce to him one of his guests, and it would even have seemed simple for me to have led over to him, and unexpectedly introduced to him, somebody whom he had not invited. Was this because, since that distant epoch, I had become an 'intimate', although for some time now one of the 'forgotten', of that world in which I was then so new; or was it, on the contrary, because, not really being a member of fashionable society, all the things which they find so difficult no longer had any reality for me, once I had overcome my shyness; or was it because, people having gradually dropped for me their outward (and often their second and third) masks, I sensed behind the disdainful haughtiness of the Prince a great human avidity to know people, even to get to know those he affected to despise? Was it also because the Prince had

changed, like all those who are overbearing in their youth and their maturity, but to whom old age brings a more measured nature (particularly as the coming men and the unknown ideas at which they used to balk have now long been recognized and accepted by those around them), and especially if old age brings with it some virtue or vice which extends his acquaintance, or the revolution caused by a political conversion, like the Prince's conversion to Dreyfusism?

Bloch questioned me, as I used to question people when I first entered society, and as I still occasionally did, about people I had once known socially, and who were now as distant, as far removed from everything, as those people in Combray I had so often found myself wanting to 'place' exactly. But I had thought of Combray as having such a different shape from anywhere else, one so impossible to confuse with all the others, that I could never manage to fit it into the jigsaw-map of France. 'So the Prince de Guermantes won't be able to tell me anything about Swann, nor about M. de Charlus?' asked Bloch, whose manner of speaking I had borrowed for so long and who now often imitated mine. 'Nothing at all. – But what made them so different? – You would have had to talk to them, but that's impossible now, Swann's dead and M. de Charlus is not far off it. But the differences were enormous.' And while Bloch's eyes shone with the thought of what these two wonderful individuals must have been like, I thought that I was probably exaggerating the pleasure I had taken in their company, it being something I had only ever felt when I was alone, and the impression of real differentiation taking place only in our imaginations. Did Bloch realize this? 'Perhaps you're giving me an idealized picture, he said to me; the lady of the house here, for instance, the Princesse de Guermantes, I know she's no longer young, but it's not so very long since you were going on to me about her incomparable charm, her marvellous beauty. Of course, I can see she's terrifically grand, and she's certainly got those extraordinary eyes you told me about, but in the end I don't find her quite as incredible as you said. And obviously she's aristocratic, but still…' I had to tell Bloch that he was not talking about the same person. The Princesse de Guermantes had died and it was the former Mme Verdurin whom the Prince, ruined by the defeat of Germany, had married. 'No, you're wrong, I looked in this year's *Gotha*,[100] confessed Bloch to me naïvely, and I found the Prince de Guermantes, living in this mansion where we are now, and married to somebody terribly grand, hang on a minute while I remember, married to Sidonie, Duchesse de Duras, née des Baux.' And this was right, Mme Verdurin, shortly after the death of her husband, had married the penniless old Duc de Duras, who had made her a cousin of the Prince de Guermantes and had died after two years of marriage. It had been a very useful transition for Mme Verdurin, and now by a third marriage she was Princesse de Guermantes and occupied an elevated position in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, which would have caused great astonishment at Combray, where the ladies of the rue de l'Oiseau, Mme Goupil's daughter and Mme Sazerat's step-daughter, before Mme Verdurin became Princesse de Guermantes, had pronounced the title 'the Duchesse de Duras' with snide giggles, as if Mme Verdurin were playing a role on the stage. In fact, their system of caste requiring that she should die Mme Verdurin, this title, which nobody imagined conferred any new social powers upon her, had rather a deleterious impact. 'Getting herself talked about,' the expression which, in all walks of life, is applied to a woman who has a lover, could also be applied in the Faubourg Saint-Germain to those who publish books, and among the respectable middle class of Combray to those who make marriages which, in one way or another, are 'unequal'. After she had married the Prince de Guermantes, they had to say that he could not be a real Guermantes, and must be an impostor. Myself, I thought that there was something as distressing in this continuity of name and title, which meant that there was a Princesse de Guermantes once again, and that she had nothing to do with the one who had so cast her spell on me and who was no longer here and who, a defenceless corpse, had been robbed of her name, as seeing Princesse Hedwige's[101] possessions, like her country house, and everything she had owned, being enjoyed by another woman. Succession to a name is sad, like all succession, like all usurpation of property; yet wave after wave of new Princesses de Guermantes would continue to come for ever, uninterruptedly, or perhaps better, replaced in the job from one age to the next by a different woman, a single Princesse de Guermantes, timeless, unaware of death, indifferent to everything that changes and wounds our hearts, the name closing over those who from time to time sink beneath its always unchanging, immemorial placidity.

Of course, even the outward changes to the faces that I had known were no more than the symbols of an interior change which had been going on from day to day; these people may have continued doing the same things, but as the idea they had of themselves and the people they saw shifted slightly from day to day, after a few years, while the names were still the same, the objects and people they loved were different, and they having become different people themselves it would have been very surprising if they had not had new faces.

Among the people present there was a man of some distinction who had just given evidence in a famous trial, the only value of which lay in his high moral standards, which the judges and lawyers had unanimously accepted and which had resulted in the conviction of two people. So there was a stir of deferential curiosity when he entered. It was Morel. I was perhaps the only person there who knew that he had been kept simultaneously both by Saint-Loup and by a friend of Saint-Loup's. Despite these memories, he greeted me with pleasure, if somewhat reservedly. He recalled the time when we had met at Balbec, memories which for him were full of the poetry and melancholy of youth.

But there were also people there whom I could not recognize, for the reason that I had never met them before, for time had been working its chemistry in this drawing-room upon society as well as upon individuals themselves. This little world, in whose specific nature, defined by certain affinities which attracted to it all the great princely names of Europe and its power to keep all non-aristocratic elements at a distance, in which I thought I had found a tangible refuge for the Guermantes name, one which in the end gave it its reality, this little world, in its inner composition which I had believed was stable, had itself undergone profound alteration. The presence of people whom I had seen in quite different social settings, and who seemed destined never to penetrate into this one, was still not quite so surprising as the intimate familiarity with which they were received and addressed by their first names. A certain concatenation of aristocratic prejudices and snobberies, which had once kept at a distance anything that was not in harmony with the Guermantes name, had ceased to function.

Some people (Tossizza, Kleinmichel) who, when I first started going into society, used to give grand dinners to which they invited only the Princesse de Guermantes, the Duchesse de Guermantes, the Princess of Parma, and who had an honoured place in those ladies' houses, and were generally regarded as, and indeed quite possibly were, among the most firmly established members of society at that time, had disappeared without trace. Had they all been foreign members of diplomatic missions who had gone back to their countries? Perhaps a scandal, a suicide, an abduction had prevented them from reappearing in society, or they may even have been Germans. But their names owed their lustre only to their situation then and were no longer borne by anybody, nobody would even know whom I was talking about if I mentioned them, and if I did ever start to spell out a name, it merely made people think of flashy foreigners on the make. The people who, according to the old code, ought not to have been there turned out, to my great astonishment, to be close friends of others from extremely good families who had only come to be bored at the Princesse de Guermantes's party because of their new friends. For if there was one thing which really characterized this social milieu, it was its prodigious capacity for coming down in the world.

Whether relaxed or broken, the springs of the machine that kept people out no longer worked, and a thousand foreign bodies found their way in, removing all homogeneity, all standards and decorum, and all colour from society. The Faubourg Saint-Germain, like a senile dowager, made no response beyond a timid smile to the insolent servants who invaded her drawing-rooms, drank her orangeade and introduced her to their mistresses. Once again, the sensation of time's slipping away, and a little part of my past disappearing with it, was aroused less vividly by the destruction of this coherent whole (which the Guermantes salon had been) than by the very annihilation of the awareness of the thousand reasons, the thousand social gradations, why one man present today was naturally in his approved place, while another, rubbing shoulders with him, presented a suspicious appearance of novelty. This ignorance was not restricted to society, but encompassed politics and everything else. For memory is less long-lasting in individuals than life, in addition to which the very young, never having had the memories which their elders have lost, and now constituting a part of society, entirely legitimately, even in the genealogical sense, and people's origins being forgotten or ignored, they accept them at the point in their elevation or descent where they happen to be, believing this to be how it has always been, that Mme Swann and the Princesse de Guermantes and Bloch had always been in the most elevated social position, that Clemenceau and Viviani had always been conservatives.[102] And as some facts survive longer than others, and as the detested memory of the Dreyfus Affair enjoyed a vague persistence in their minds by virtue of what their fathers

had told them about it, if one said that Clemenceau had been a Dreyfusard, they would say: 'That's not possible, you're getting confused, he's on completely the opposite side.' Ministers with tarnished reputations and former prostitutes were now regarded as paragons of virtue. Someone having asked a young man from one of the best families if there was not some story about Gilberte's mother, the young nobleman replied that it was true that in the first part of her life she had been married to an adventurer named Swann, but that she had subsequently married one of the most prominent men in society, the Comte de Forcheville. No doubt there were still several people in that drawing-room, the Duchesse de Guermantes, for instance, who would have smiled at that assertion (which in its denial of Swann's social position seemed outrageous to me, even though I myself had in the past, at Combray, shared my great-aunt's belief that Swann could not know 'princesses'), and also some others who might have been there except that they hardly went out any more, the Duchesses de Montmorency, de Mouchy and de Sagan, who had been intimate friends of Swann's and had never set eyes on this Forcheville, who was not received in society at the time when they still went out to parties. But the fact is that the society of those days, like the faces which are now altered, and the blonde hair replaced with white, no longer had any existence outside the memory of a few individuals, whose number was diminishing every day.

During the war Bloch had stopped 'going out', stopped frequenting his old pre-war haunts, where he had cut such a sorry figure. On the other hand, he had not left off publishing those books of his, the absurd sophistry of which I was today doing my best to demolish so as not to be bogged down by it, works without originality but which provided young people, and a large number of fashionable women, with the impression of an unusually rarefied intellect, a sort of genius. It was thus after a complete break between his old and new social self, and in keeping with this new phase of his life, honoured and glorious, in a reconstituted society, that he had created the appearance of a great man. Young people naturally did not know that he was making his first entry into society at this advanced age, especially since the few names he had retained from his acquaintance with Saint-Loup enabled him to give his current prestige the illusion of infinite regress. At all events, he seemed to be one of those men of talent who have flourished in fashionable society in all epochs, and nobody dreamed that he had ever lived in any other way.

The old assured me that everything about society had changed, that people were being received who would never have been received in their day, and, as people say, this was true and it was not. It was not true because they did not take account of the curve of time, which meant that those today saw new people at their point of arrival while the older generation remembered them at their point of departure. And when they, the old, had entered society, there were people who had just arrived there whose first steps on the ladder others again could remember. One generation is long enough to encompass the change, which in former times took centuries, by which a middle-class name like Colbert became an aristocratic one. And on the other hand it could be true, because when people's social position changes, the most deeply rooted ideas and customs (as well as the fortunes and alliances of countries, and the hatreds between them) also change, and this includes even the principle of receiving only people who are chic. Snobbery not only changes its form, it could even disappear like the war, and radicals and Jews become members of the Jockey Club.

If the new generations regarded the Duchesse de Guermantes as unimportant because of her friendship with actresses, etc., the now old ladies of her family still considered her an extraordinary individual, on the one hand because they knew everything about her birth, her heraldic primacy, her being on intimate terms with what Mme de Forcheville would have called *royalties*, but also because she did not bother to come to family gatherings, was bored by them, and they knew that they could never expect her at any of them. Her theatrical and political connections, which nobody knew very much about anyway, only increased her rarity, and therefore her prestige. So that while in artistic and political circles she was regarded as hard to define, a sort of defrocked member of the Faubourg Saint-Germain who associated with under-secretaries of state and stars of the stage, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain itself, if one were giving an evening party, one would say: 'Is it even worth asking Oriane? She won't come. We'd better, for form's sake, I suppose, but we mustn't expect anything.' And if, at around half past ten, in a dazzling dress, a hard gleam in her eyes seeming to express her scorn for all her cousins, Oriane entered, pausing on the threshold with a sort of majestic disdain, and if she stayed for an hour, it was a greater occasion for the grand old lady who was giving the party than it would once have been for a theatre manager had Sarah Bernhardt, having made a vague promise of support which nobody thought would materialize, turned up and recited, with infinitely obliging kindness and a complete lack of affectation, not the one piece promised, but twenty others instead. Even though it was attended only by the most fashionable women, it was the presence of this Oriane, to whom private secretaries spoke condescendingly but who continued none the less (intellect rules the world) to try to make the acquaintance of more and more of them, which meant that this dowager's party would be ranked over and above all the other dowagers' parties of that *season* (as, again, Mme de Forcheville would have said), the ones which Oriane had not taken the trouble to attend.

As soon as I had finished talking to the Prince de Guermantes, Bloch seized hold of me and introduced me to a young woman who had heard a great deal about me from the Duchesse de Guermantes, and who was one of the smartest women of the day. Her name was completely unknown to me, and those of the various Guermantes must not have been familiar to her, as she asked an American woman why it was that Mme de Saint-Loup seemed on such intimate terms with all the most glittering members of society in the room. Now this American was married to the Comte de Farcy, an obscure relation of the Forchevilles, for whom they represented all that was grandest in the world. She therefore replied, unaffectedly: 'Wouldn't it be because she is a Forcheville by birth? There's nothing grander than that.' But Mme de Farcy, although she naïvely thought the name of Forcheville was superior to that of Saint-Loup, at least knew what the latter meant. But the charming friend of Bloch and of the Duchesse de Guermantes was completely unaware of it and, being rather hare-brained, replied quite sincerely to a young girl who asked her how Mme de Saint-Loup was related to the master of the house, the Prince de Guermantes: 'Through the Forchevilles', information which the young girl passed on, as if she had always known it, to one of her friends, who, being nervy and cantankerous, turned as red as a turkey-cock the first time a gentleman told her that Gilberte was not related to the Guermantes through the Forchevilles, with the result that the gentleman thought he must be wrong, adopted the erroneous idea and lost no time in propagating it. Dinner-parties and fashionable gatherings were a sort of Berlitz school for the American woman. She heard the names and repeated them without having first understood their value, and their precise significance. Somebody explained to another person, who asked whether Tansonville came to Gilberte from her father M. de Forcheville, that it did not come from him at all, that it was an estate belonging to her husband's family, that Tansonville was close to Guermantes, and had belonged to Mme de Marsantes but, being heavily mortgaged, had been redeemed out of Gilberte's dowry. Finally an elderly man, one of the old guard, having recalled the time when Swann was a friend of the Sagans and the Mouchys, and Bloch's American friend having asked how I had known him, declared that I had met him in the house of Mme de Guermantes, not for a moment imagining that it was the country neighbour, the young friend of my grandfather, that he represented for me. Misapprehensions of this nature have been committed by the most famous men, and are regarded as particularly serious in all conservative circles. Saint-Simon, wishing to show that Louis XIV's ignorance was such as to 'make him fall sometimes, in public, into the most glaring absurdities', gives us just two examples of this ignorance, to wit, first, that the King, not knowing that Renel was from the family of Clermont-Gallerande, nor that Saint-Herem was a Montmorin, treated the men as if they were of humble birth. As far as Saint-Herem is concerned we at least have the consolation of knowing that the sovereign did not die in that error, for he was disabused 'very late in the day' by M. de La Rochefoucauld. 'Even then, adds Saint-Simon slightly pityingly, it had to be explained to him what these houses were, as their names meant nothing to him.'

One repercussion of this perennial forgetting, which so rapidly covers over the most recent past, of this invasive ignorance, is the creation of a minor branch of knowledge, all the more valuable for being seldom encountered, concerning itself with people's genealogies, their true situation, the reasons of love, money or whatever for which they became allied, or misallied, with this or that family, knowledge prized in all societies where a conservative spirit rules, knowledge which my grandfather possessed in the highest degree, as it concerned the middle class of Combray and Paris, knowledge which Saint-Simon prized so much that at the point where he celebrates the wonderful intelligence of the Prince de Conti, before he even mentions learning, or rather as if this were its finest form, he praises him for having been 'a very fine mind, luminous, just, precise, extensive, of infinite reading, who forgot nothing, and knew the genealogies, their chimeras and

their realities, of a discriminating politeness that recognized rank and merit, doing everything that the princes of the blood should do, and no longer do; he even explained himself, and what he thought about their assumption of extra powers. The history he learned from books and from conversation provided him with the material to contribute the most helpful comments he could on matters of birth, offices, etc.' As applied to a less glittering world, to everything pertaining to the middle class of Combray and Paris, my grandfather was no less precisely knowledgeable about the subject, and relished it no less eagerly. Connoisseurs and enthusiasts of this sort, who knew that Gilberte was not a Forcheville, nor Mme de Cambremer a Méséglise, nor the younger Mme de Cambremer a Valentinois, had become very few in number. Very few, perhaps not even recruited from the upper ranks of the aristocracy (it is not necessarily the devout, nor even Catholics, who are best-informed about the *Golden Legend*[103] or thirteenth-century stained-glass windows), but often from a minor aristocracy, more keenly interested in something with which they have scarcely any contact, and which they have all the more leisure to study as they spend less time in it, but fond of getting together, meeting one another, giving delicious group dinners, like those of the Society of Bibliophiles or the Friends of Rheims Cathedral, dinners at which genealogies are savoured and appreciated. Wives are not admitted, but the husbands, when they get home, all say to their wives: 'That was a most interesting dinner. There was a M. de La Raspelière there who kept us all spellbound as he explained how Mme de Saint-Loup, the one with the pretty daughter, is not a Forcheville at all. It's just like a novel.'

The friend of Bloch and of the Duchesse de Guermantes was not only smart and charming, she was also intelligent, and conversation with her was enjoyable, but it was made difficult for me because it was not only my interlocutress herself whose name was new to me, but those of a great number of the people she was talking about and who currently made up the core of society. It is true, on the other hand, as she wanted to listen to what I had to say, that many of the names I mentioned will have meant absolutely nothing to her, they were all sunk in oblivion, or at least those who had shone only with the light of their own individual celebrity and were not the permanent, generic name of some famous aristocratic family (whose exact title the young woman seldom knew, making mistaken assumptions about birth or descent on the basis of names misheard at dinner the previous evening), and she had never, in most instances, heard them pronounced, having started moving in society (not only because she was still young, but because she had not long lived in France, and had not been received immediately) only some years after I myself had withdrawn from it. The name of Mme Leroi happened to fall from my lips, I do not know how, and by chance my interlocutress, thanks to some elderly friend of Mme de Guermantes who was an admirer of hers, had heard of her. But inaccurately, as I saw from the disdainful tone with which this snobbish young woman replied: 'Yes, I know who Mme Leroi is, she's an old friend of Bergotte,' a tone which meant 'a person whom I should never have wished to have under my roof'. I understood at once that the old friend of Mme de Guermantes, as a perfect gentleman, imbued with the Guermantes ethos, one of the characteristics of which was not to seem to attach any importance to aristocratic connections, had thought it too silly and too anti-Guermantes to say: 'Mme Leroi, who was a friend of all royalty and of every duchess', and had preferred to say: 'She was very entertaining. Do you know what she said to Bergotte one day?' Only, for people who do not have the requisite knowledge, information drawn from conversation like this is the equivalent of the stuff fed by the press to the people, so that they believe in turn, according to their newspaper, either that M. Loubet and M. Reinach are thieves or that they are great citizens. For my interlocutress, Mme Leroi had been a kind of Mme Verdurin, in her first manifestation, with less brilliance and with her little set limited to Bergotte alone. That young woman is, though, one of the last to have heard, by pure chance, the name of Mme Leroi. Nobody today any longer knows who she is, which is really as it should be. Her name does not even figure in the index to the posthumous memoirs of Mme de Villeparisis, whose thoughts were so often occupied with Mme Leroi. The Marquise did not talk about Mme Leroi, less because the latter had not been very well disposed towards her while she was alive than because nobody could be interested in her after her death, and her silence was dictated less by feminine social resentment than by the literary tact of the writer. My conversation with Bloch's smart friend was charming, because the young woman was intelligent, but this difference between our two vocabularies made it both uneasy and instructive. It is in vain that we know that the years pass, that youth gives way to age, that the most solid of thrones and fortunes crumble, that fame is ephemeral, the manner by which we become aware, and so to speak take a snapshot of this moving universe, swept along by Time, contradictorily, immobilizes it. With the result that we see as still young the people whom we knew when they were young, while those who were old when we met them we retrospectively adorn in the past with the virtues of old age, that we trust unreservedly in the credit of a millionaire and in the support of a sovereign, understanding rationally, but not actually believing, that they may tomorrow be fugitives, stripped of power. In a more restricted field, one purely social, as in the case of a simple problem which leads on to difficulties more complex but still of the same order, the lack of intelligibility which resulted, in my conversation with the young woman, from the fact that we had lived in a certain society at twenty-five years' distance from each other, gave me the impression, and might have strengthened within me the sense, of History. Moreover, it must be said that this ignorance of the true situation which every ten years makes individuals suddenly emerge in their current guise, as if the past never existed, which prevents a newly disembarked American woman from seeing that M. de Charlus had held the highest social position in Paris at a time when Bloch had had none, and that Swann, who put himself to such trouble for M. Bon-temps, had been treated with the greatest friendship by the Prince of Wales,[104] this ignorance does not exist only among the newcomers, but among those who have always frequented adjacent sections of society, and this ignorance, in the latter as in the others, is also an effect (but this time operating upon the individual rather than the social stratum) of Time. There would doubtless be no point in our changing our social circle or our way of life, as our memory, by retaining the thread of our personal identity, attaches to it at successive periods the memory of the societies in which we have lived, even if forty years earlier. Bloch in the house of the Prince de Guermantes was perfectly aware of the modest Jewish surroundings in which he had lived at the age of eighteen, and Swann, when he no longer loved Mme Swann but a woman who served tea at the same Colombin's where Mme Swann had for a while believed that it was chic to go, as she had of the tea-room in the rue Royale, Swann knew perfectly well his own social standing, remembered Twickenham;[105] he was in no doubt at all about his reasons for going to Colombin's rather than to the Duchesse de Broglie's, and was perfectly aware that, had he himself been a thousand times less 'chic', whether he went to Colombin's or to the Ritz would not have made him one iota more fashionable, as anyone who can pay may go to either. And Bloch's friends or Swann's probably also remembered the little Jewish circle or the invitations to Twickenham, and so friends, like the slightly distinct 'selves' of Swann and Bloch, did not separate in their memories the sordid Bloch of the past from the smart Bloch of today, or the Swann of Buckingham Palace from the Swann in his latter days at the Colombin. These friends though were, in a way, Swann's neighbours in life; their own had developed on a line sufficiently close to his for their memory to be fairly full of him; but in the case of others less close to Swann, at a greater distance from him not so much socially as in terms of intimacy, who knew him more vaguely and met him less often, the less numerous memories had rendered their conception of him more wavering. Now, when it comes to comparative strangers like this, after thirty years one hardly remembers anything specific enough to extend back into the past and alter the worth of the person standing in front of one's eyes. I had heard, during the last years of Swann's life, even society people, when his name was mentioned say, as if it were his claim to notoriety: 'You're speaking of the Swann of Colombin's?' And I now heard even people who ought to have known better saying, when they were speaking of Bloch: 'The Guermantes Bloch? The close friend of the Guermantes?' These errors, which divide up a life and, by isolating its present, turn the man spoken of into another man, a different man, a creation of the day before, a man who is no more than the condensation of his current habits (although he carries within himself the continuity of his life which links him to the past), these errors too are dependent on Time, but they are not a social phenomenon but a phenomenon of memory. An example occurred at that very moment, not quite of the same sort of thing admittedly but all the more striking for that, of the way this forgetting modifies the way individuals appear to us. A long time ago, a young nephew of Mme de Guermantes, the Marquis de Villemandois, had been persistently insolent towards me, which had obliged me by way of reprisal to adopt an attitude in respect of him so insulting that we had tacitly become as it were enemies. While I was reflecting on Time at this party at the Princesse de Guermantes's, he introduced himself to me, saying that he believed I had known his parents, that he had read articles by me and that he wished to make, or renew, my acquaintance. It is true that with age he had, like many others, lost his impertinence and become more serious, that he no longer had the same arrogance, and also that people were talking about me, though only on the strength of some rather slight articles, in the social circles in which he moved. But these reasons for his

cordiality and his advances were only secondary. The principal reason, or at least the one which allowed the others to come into play, is that, either having a worse memory than me, or having paid less sustained attention to my retorts that I once did to his attacks, I then being a less important person in his eyes than he was in mine, he had entirely forgotten our hostilities. At the most, my name reminded him that he must have seen me, or some member of my family, at the house of one of his aunts. And being uncertain whether to introduce or to re-introduce himself, he hastened to mention his aunt, in whose house he was sure that he must have met me, recalling that people there often spoke of me, but not of our quarrels. A name, that is very often all that remains for us of an individual, not when he is dead even, but while he is still alive. And our conceptions of him are so vague and so bizarre, and correspond so little to those which we had of him in the past, that we have entirely forgotten that we came very close to fighting a duel with him, whereas we do remember that, as a child, he wore strange yellow leggings in the Champs-Élysées, where he, on the other hand, despite our assurances of it, has no memory of having played with us.

Bloch had come bounding into the room like a hyena. I thought: 'He is welcome in drawing-rooms he could never have got into twenty years ago.' But he was also twenty years older. He was nearer his death. So what benefit was it to him? Close up, in the translucency of a face in which, from further away and in poor light I had seen nothing but youthful gaiety (whether it actually still survived there or because I was evoking it), was visible the almost frightening, deeply anxious face of an old Shylock, waiting, with his make-up on, in the wings, just about to go on stage, already reciting his first line under his breath. In ten years, in drawing-rooms like this whose inertia will have made him a leading light, he will enter on crutches, people will address him as Maître, he will find it a chore to be obliged to go the La Trémoïlles. What benefit would this be to him?

From changes brought about in society I could all the more easily extract truths which were important and worthy to hold one part of my book together, as they were not in any way, as I would have been tempted to believe at the outset, peculiar to our time. At the time when, scarcely arrived in society myself, I first entered, even more of a newcomer than Bloch himself today, the Guermantes' social circle, I must have regarded as an integral part of that circle elements absolutely different, recently incorporated, and which would have seemed curiously new to older members from whom I did not differentiate them, who in turn, believed by the dukes of that period always to have been members of the Faubourg, had either themselves been, or their fathers or their grandfathers had once been, newly elevated to their position. So much so that it was not the quality of men in the best society which rendered this society so glittering, but the fact of having been assimilated more or less completely by this society which made people, who fifty years later would all appear similar in standing, into society people. Even in the past to which I had traced the Guermantes name in order to give it its full grandeur, quite rightly, incidentally, as under Louis XIV the Guermantes, being practically royal, were much grander figures than they are today, the same phenomenon which I was noticing now used also to arise. Did they not then ally themselves with the Colbert family, for example, a family which today, it is true, seems very noble to us since to marry a Colbert seems a good match even for a La Rochefoucauld? Yet it is not because the Colberts, then ordinary middle-class folk, were noble that the Guermantes allied themselves with them, it is because the Guermantes allied themselves with them that they were ennobled. If the name of Haussonville dies with the present representative of that house, it will perhaps owe its lustre to its descent from Mme de Staël, although before the Revolution M. d'Haussonville, one of the first lords of the kingdom, regarded it as a source of pride that he could tell M. de Broglie that he was not acquainted with Mme de Staël's father and was therefore no more able than M. de Broglie himself to introduce him, never for a moment imagining that their sons would one day marry, one the daughter and the other the grand-daughter of the authoress of *Corinne*. I realized, after what the Duchesse de Guermantes had said to me, that in those circles I might have played the part of an untitled man about town, whom people readily assume always to have had links with the aristocracy, such as Swann had at one time been, and before him M. Lebrun, M. Ampère, and all those friends of the Duchesse de Broglie, who herself, at the outset, was very far from being a member of the best society. The first times I dined with Mme de Guermantes how I must have shocked men like M. de Beauserfeuil, not so much by my mere presence, as by the remarks I made, indicating that I was entirely ignorant of the memories which constituted his past and which shaped the image he had of society! One day, when Bloch, grown very old, has a fairly long-standing memory of the Guermantes drawing-room as it presented itself to his eyes at this moment, he will feel just the same astonishment, just the same ill-humour at the presence of certain intrusions and certain displays of ignorance. Yet on the other hand, he would doubtless have acquired, and would dispense to those around him, those qualities of tact and discretion which I had thought the prerogative of men such as M. de Norpois, but which take fresh shape and become incarnate in those who seem to us more than anybody else to preclude them.

Again, the opportunity which had arisen for me to be admitted into the Guermantes circle had seemed something exceptional to me. But if I looked outside myself and my immediate social surroundings, I saw that this social phenomenon was not so isolated as had at first appeared to me, and that from the fountain-basin of Combray where I was born quite a number of water-jets turned out to have been raised in symmetry with me above the liquid mass which had fed them all. No doubt, circumstances always having something particular about them, and characters something individual, it was in a quite different manner that Legrandin, in his turn (through the curious marriage of his nephew), had penetrated into these circles, or that Odette's daughter had married into them, or that Swann himself, and then finally I had come to them. For me, who had always been wrapped up in my own life, and seen it from within, Legrandin's seemed to have no connection with mine, seemed to have followed quite opposite paths, in the same way as a stream in a deep valley does not see a divergent stream, even though, despite the deviations of its course, it issues into the same river. But taking a bird's-eye view, as does the statistician, who disregards the reasons of sentiment or the unavoidable acts of imprudence which may lead to the death of any individual, and counts only the number of people who die per year, one would see that a number of individuals who shared the same social background, the depiction of which occupied the first part of this narrative, had ended up in a completely different one, and it is probable that, since an average number of marriages takes place each year in Paris, every other rich and cultivated middle-class circle would have contributed an approximately equal proportion of people like Swann, like Legrandin, like me and like Bloch, all of whom would be found flowing into the ocean of 'high society'. Moreover, they recognized one another there, for if the young Comte de Cambremer astonished the whole of society with his distinction, his refinement, his sober elegance, I recognized in these – at the same time as in his winning looks and his burning desire to succeed – the same characteristics as those of his uncle Legrandin, that is, of an old friend, supremely middle-class for all his aristocratic appearance, of my parents.

Kindness, a simple process of maturation which has succeeded eventually in sweetening natures more initially acidic than Bloch's, is as widespread as the feeling of justice which makes us believe that if our cause is good we can have no more to fear from a prejudiced judge than from a friendly one. And Bloch's grandchildren will be good and unassuming almost from birth. Bloch was perhaps not quite there yet. But I observed that he, who once pretended to believe himself obliged to undertake a two-hour railway journey to go to see someone who had only quite casually asked him, now that he received so many invitations not only to lunch and to dinner, but also to spend a fortnight here and a fortnight there, declined many of them, without mentioning them, without boasting of having received them, nor of having declined them. Discretion, discretion in actions and in words, had come to him with social position and with age, with a sort of social age, if one can say that. No doubt Bloch was once as indiscreet as he was incapable of benevolence or thoughtfulness. But certain defects, certain qualities, are not so much attached to this or that individual as to this or that moment of existence considered from the social point of view. They are almost external to individuals, who move in their light as if beneath a variety of solstices, pre-existent, general, unavoidable. Doctors who are trying to discover whether some medicament diminishes or increases the acidity of the stomach, stimulates or slows down its secretions, obtain differing results, not in relation to the stomach from whose secretions they have taken a small amount of gastric juice, but in relation to whether they take it earlier or later in the process of ingesting the remedy.

Thus at all moments in its history, the name of Guermantes, considered as an agglomeration of all the names which it admitted into itself, around itself, suffered decline, recruited new elements, like those gardens in which, at any moment, flowers scarcely in bud and the ones already beginning to wither which they are preparing to replace, all blend into a single mass which looks the same, save to those who have not yet seen the new arrivals and retain in their memory the precise image of the ones that no longer exist.

More than one of the individuals assembled at this afternoon party, or whose memory was evoked by it, by making me remember the aspects he or she had in turn presented to me through the different, or opposite, circumstances from which they had, one after the other, arisen before me, caused the varied aspects of my life to emerge in my mind's eye, the differences of perspective, just as a feature in the landscape, a chateau or a hill, appearing sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left, seems first to look down over a forest, then to emerge from a valley, and thereby reveals to the traveller the changes of direction and the differences in altitude along the road he is following. As I went further and further back, I eventually came across images of the same person separated by such a long interval of time, retained by such distinct selves, and themselves having such different meanings, that I habitually omitted them when I believed I was considering the whole past course of my relations with them, that I had even ceased to think of them as the same people I had once known, and that it needed a chance flash of attention to reconnect them, etymologically as it were, to the original meaning they had had for me. Mlle Swann threw me, from the other side of the pink hawthorn hedge, a look the significance of which I would later, in fact, have retrospectively to retouch, it being a look of desire. Mme Swann's lover, as all Combray regarded him, looked at me behind the same hedge with an unfriendly stare which equally did not have the meaning I then attributed to it, and subsequently changed so much that I had completely failed to recognize him at Balbec as the gentleman perusing a poster by the casino, a look which I would perhaps recall once every ten years and say to myself: 'And that was M. de Charlus, even then! It's very strange!' Mme de Guermantes at Dr Percepied's wedding; Mme Swann wearing pink at my great-uncle's; Mme de Cambremer, Legrandin's sister, so smart that he was terrified we were going to ask him to give us an introduction to her, these, as well as a number of others concerning Swann, Saint-Loup, etc., were just so many images which I sometimes amused myself with, when I came across them, in setting up as frontispieces at the threshold of my relations with different individuals, but which did in fact seem no more than images, not something lodged within me by the individuals themselves, to whom nothing any longer connected them. Not only do some people have good memories and others bad (without going as far as the constant forgetfulness in which the Turkish Ambassadress lives, and others like her, which enables them always to find – since recent news evaporates after a week, and fresh reports have the knack of exorcizing it – always to find room for the contradictory news people tell them), but two people with equally good memories do not even remember the same things. One will have paid little attention to an act for which the other will always retain a feeling of great remorse, and he, conversely, will have instantly seized upon some remark which the other just let fall almost without thinking, and elevated it as a characteristic sign of congeniality. One's investment in not having been wrong when one has issued a mistaken forecast shortens the lifetime of one's memory of it, and allows one very quickly to affirm that one did not issue it. Lastly, a deeper and more disinterested investment diversifies people's memories, so that the poet who has almost forgotten almost all the facts which one is recalling to him still retains a fleeting impression of them. All this shows why it is that, after an absence of twenty years, where one had expected bitterness one finds involuntary and unconscious forgiveness, while on the other hand one encounters numerous instances of hatred for which (because one has forgotten in one's turn the bad impression one once made) one can find no explanatory reason. When it comes to the sequence of events in the lives even of those one has known best, one has forgotten the dates. And because it was at least twenty years since she had met Bloch for the first time, Mme de Guermantes would have been prepared to swear that he had been born into her world and been dandled on the knee of the Duchesse de Chartres when he was two years old.

And how many times these people had reappeared before me in the course of their lives, the diverse circumstances of which seemed to present me with the same individuals, but in various forms and for various ends; and the diversity of the points of my life through which had passed the thread of the life of each of these characters had ended up mingling those which seemed furthest apart, as if life possessed only a limited number of threads with which to achieve the most widely differing patterns. What could be more separate, for example, in my various pasts, than my visits to my uncle Adolphe, the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis, the Maréchal's cousin, Legrandin and his sister, and Françoise's friend, the old waistcoat-maker in the courtyard? And today all those different threads had come together to create the web, here of the Saint-Loup household, there of the young Cambremer couple, not to mention Morel, and so many others whose conjunction had combined to create a set of circumstances that it seemed to me that the circumstances were the complete unity, and the characters merely component parts. And my life was already sufficiently long that, for more than one of the individuals that it presented me with, I could find in opposite regions of my memories, to complete him or her, another being. Even to the Elstirs which I saw here hung in positions which were an indication of his fame, I was able to add very old memories of the Verdurins, the Cottards, the conversation in the Rivebelle restaurant, the reception at which I had met Albertine, and numerous other things. In the same way a connoisseur of art, shown one wing of an altarpiece, remembers in which church, what museums, what private collection, the others are dispersed (just as by keeping abreast of the sale catalogues or by regularly visiting the antique shops he will eventually find the object that is twin to the one he possesses and which forms its pair); he is able to reconstitute the predella, and the entire altar, in his head. Just as a bucket being hauled up on a pulley swings around and knocks into the rope here and there on different sides, there was no character with a place in my life, and hardly even any things, that had not in their turn played different roles. A simple social relationship, even a material object, if I rediscovered it in my memory after a few years, I saw that life had gone on weaving different threads around it which eventually became dense enough to form that inimitable, lovely, velvety bloom on the years, like the accretion which in old parks shrouds a simple water-pipe in a sheath of emerald.

It was not only the appearance of these characters that made one think of them as people in a dream. They themselves were finding that life, already drowsy in youth and in love, had become more and more of a dream. They had even forgotten their resentments and their hatreds, and in order to be certain that it was the person now in front of them with whom they had not been on speaking terms ten years ago, they would have had to consult a register, which, however, would have been just as vague as a dream in which one had been insulted, without it being clear by whom. All these dreams helped to shape the contradictory appearances of political life, with men who had accused each other of murder or treason being members of the same government. And the dream became as murky as death in some old men on the days after those on which they had made love. On those days, there was no point in asking any questions of the President of the Republic, he forgot everything. Then, if one left him in peace for a few days, his memory of public affairs returned, as fortuitously as the memory of a dream.

Sometimes it was not in a single image that this individual, so very different from the person I had subsequently come to know, appeared. For years I had imagined Bergotte as a gentle, godlike old man, I had felt paralysed as if by a ghost at the sight of Swann's grey hat or his wife's violet cloak, or the mystery in which the family name shrouded the Duchesse de Guermantes, even in a drawing-room; almost legendary origins, a fascinating mythology of relations which subsequently became so banal, but which are thus extended back into the past as if into the depths of the sky, with a brilliance equal to the light emanating from the glittering tail of a comet. And even the ones which had not begun in mystery, like my relations with Mme de Souvré, so dry and purely social these days, still retained from their earliest phase that first smile, calmer, sweeter and so smoothly traced in the fullness of an afternoon by the sea, or the close of a spring day in Paris, with the noise of carriages, dust in the air, and sunlight rippling like water. And while Mme de Souvré might not, perhaps, have been worth very much if taken out of this frame, like those monuments – the Salute,[106] for example – which, while having no great beauty of their own, do admirably in their place, she was part and parcel of a whole bundle of memories which I valued at a certain price as a 'job lot', without asking myself exactly how much of it the person of Mme de Souvré accounted for.

One thing about all these beings which struck me even more forcibly than the social and physical changes they had undergone, and that was the change in the different ideas they all had about each other. Legrandin used to despise Bloch and would never speak to him. Now he was on the best of terms with him. This was not entirely due to the more elevated position that Bloch had taken, which in this instance would not be worth noting, because social changes necessarily lead to alterations in the respective positions of those concerned. No: it was because in our memories people – and by people I mean as they are for us – do not have the same uniformity as a picture. Their development is subject to the arbitrary whims of our forgetting. Sometimes we go so far as to confuse them with other people: 'Bloch, that's somebody who used to come to Combray', saying Bloch, when in fact it was me they meant. Conversely, Mme Sazerat was convinced that I was the

author of a certain historical treatise about Philip II (which was actually by Bloch). Without going to these extremes of transposition, one does forget the dirty tricks which somebody has played on you, his defects, and how the last time you met you left without shaking hands, and one remembers instead an earlier occasion when you got on very well together. And it is to that earlier occasion that Legrandin's manners were responding, in his friendliness towards Bloch, either because he had lost the memory of some part of the past, or because he judged it taboo, from a mixture of forgiveness, forgetting and indifference, which is another of the effects of Time. Nor are the memories we all have of one another, even in love, the same. I had known Albertine recall in extraordinary detail some remark I had made to her at one of our first meetings, and which I had completely forgotten. Yet of another incident, permanently settled deep in my mind like a pebble, she would have no memory at all. Our parallel lives seemed like those garden walks where, at regularly positioned intervals, tubs of flowers are placed symmetrically but never opposite each other. This makes it all the more understandable that when it comes to people with whom we have only a slight acquaintance we should have difficulty remembering who they are, or else that we should remember something different from how we used to think of them, something from an earlier time, something suggested by the people amongst whom we meet them again, who have only known them for a short while, adorned with qualities and a social position which they used not to have, but which we, oblivious, instantly accept.

No doubt life, by setting these people in my path on a number of occasions, had presented them to me in particular circumstances which, by surrounding them on all sides, had limited the view I had had of them and had prevented me from knowing their essence. Even those Guermantes, who had been the focus of such elaborate dreams for me, had appeared to me, when I had first come close to any of them, under the aspect, one of an old friend of my grandmother, the other of a gentleman who had looked at me in an unpleasantly forbidding way one morning in the gardens of the casino. (Because between us and other beings there is a margin of contingencies, just as I had understood in my readings at Combray that there is a margin in perception which prevents absolute contact taking place between reality and the mind.) So that it was only ever after the event, by relating them to a name, that my acquaintance with them became an acquaintance with the Guermantes. But perhaps that may even have made my life seem more poetic, the thought that this mysterious family with the piercing eyes, the beak of a bird, this rose-coloured, golden, unapproachable family, had so often, and so naturally, as a consequence of blind and varied circumstance, offered itself to my contemplation, to my society and even to my friendship, to the point that, when I had wanted to meet Mlle de Stermaria or to have dresses made for Albertine, it was to the Guermantes that I turned, as being the most helpful of all my friends. Certainly I was sometimes bored by having to go to their houses, as I was in the houses of other society people whom I had later come to know. Even with the Duchesse de Guermantes, as with certain pages of Bergotte, her charm was visible to me only at a distance and vanished when I was close to her, for it all lay in my memory and my imagination. But in the end the Guermantes, and Gilberte too, differed from the other people in society in that they thrust their roots further down into a past time of my life in which I dreamed more and believed more strongly in individuals. What at least I had before me, bored as I was chatting away first with one then with the other Guermantes, were those of my childhood imaginings whom I had found the most beautiful and believed the most inaccessible, and I consoled myself, like a shop-keeper whose book-keeping has become muddled, by confusing the value of having them there with the price my desire had once put on them.

In the case of some other people, though, my relations with them in the past had been inflated with more ardent dreams, conceived without hope, in which my life of that time blossomed so richly, and was so entirely dedicated to them, that I could scarcely comprehend how their fulfilment could have been that narrow, thin and lustreless ribbon of indifferent and disdainful intimacy, in which I was never afterwards able to rediscover anything of their old mystery, their fever and their sweetness. Not all had been 'received', or been decorated, for some the adjective was different, though not more important: they were recently dead.

'How is the Marquise d'Arpajon? asked Mme de Cambremer. – Oh, she's dead, replied Bloch. – You're confusing her with the Comtesse d'Arpajon, who died last year.' The Princesse d'Agrigente joined the discussion; the young widow of a very rich old husband and bearer of a great name, she was much sought after in marriage and this had greatly increased her self-assurance. 'The Marquise d'Arpajon died too, about a year ago. – A year? Oh, surely it can't be, replied Mme de Cambremer, I was at a musical evening in her house less than a year ago.' Bloch was no more capable of making a useful contribution to the discussion than any of the elegant young men in society, for the deaths of all these old people were too distant from them, either by virtue of the enormous difference in years, or by recent arrival (as in the case of Bloch) in a changing society which he approached indirectly, at the moment when it was starting to decline into a twilight where the memory of a past that was unfamiliar to him could provide no illumination. And for people of the same age and social background death had lost some of its strange significance. Every day they would send out for news of so many people who were at the point of death, of whom some would have rallied while others would have 'succumbed', that they could no longer remember with any accuracy whether somebody who no longer ever appeared anywhere had recovered from their pneumonia or had expired. Death became much more active and more indeterminate in these aged regions. At this crossroads of two generations and of two societies which, ill-placed for different reasons to distinguish death, almost confused it with life, the former had been socialized, had become an incident which more or less described a person but without the tone of voice seeming to signify that this incident put an end to everything for him or her. People said: 'But you're forgetting, so and so is dead,' in the same way as they might say: 'He's been decorated' or 'he's a member of the Academy', or – and this came to the same thing since it also prevented their presence at parties – 'he's gone south for the winter', 'he's been ordered to get some mountain air'. And in the case of well-known men, what they left behind them when they died helped to remind people that their existence was over. But with ordinary, very old, society people, one got confused about whether they were dead or not, not only because one knew little about, or had forgotten, their past, but because they had no connection of any sort with the future. And the difficulty each of them had in selecting one from among the illness, absence, retirement to the country, or death of old society people, made the insignificance of the departed quite as acceptable as the indifference of the hesitant.

'But if she's not dead, why don't we see her any more, or her husband? asked a spinster who liked trying to be witty. – Well, I'll tell you,' replied her mother who, although in her fifties, never missed a party, 'it's because they're old: people of that age don't go out any more.' Before one reached the cemetery it seemed there was a whole self-contained city of the old, its lamps permanently lit in the mist. Mme de Saint-Euverte put an end to the argument by saying that the Comtesse d'Arpajon had died a year ago, after a long illness, but that the Marquise d'Arpajon had also died since then, very quickly, 'of something very ordinary'. A death which thereby resembled all these lives, and also thereby explained why it passed unnoticed, excused those who were confused. When she heard that Mme d'Arpajon really was dead, the spinster looked towards her mother with alarm, for she was afraid that learning of the death of one of her 'contemporaries' might 'come as a blow'; in her mind she could already hear talk of her own mother's death, with this explanation: 'The death of Mme d'Arpajon had come as a *great blow* to her.' But the spinster's mother, on the contrary, felt as if she had won a victory in a competition against distinguished competitors every time that a person her age 'disappeared'. Their deaths were the sole means by which she could still become pleasantly aware of her own life. The spinster noticed that her mother, who had not seemed sorry to say that Mme d'Arpajon was shut away in the sort of residence from which tired old people scarcely ever re-emerge, had been even less so to learn that the Marquise had entered the city after that, the one from which no traveller returns. This display of indifference on the part of her mother amused the spinster's caustic mind. And later to entertain her girl-friends she told them a hilarious story of the light-hearted manner in which, as she claimed, her mother had rubbed her hands and said: 'Well, goodness me, poor Mme d'Arpajon really does seem to be dead then.' So even those who did not need this death in order to feel glad to be alive were made happy by it. For every death is a simplification of existence for the others, removes the necessity to show gratitude, the obligation to pay visits. This was not, though, how the death of M. Verdurin had been received by Elstir.

A lady left, because she had other parties to attend and had to go and have tea with two queens. It was that great society cocotte, whom I had known in the past, the Princess of Nassau. If it were not that she had lost some of her height, which gave her, her head now being less loftily poised than formerly, an air of having *one foot in the grave*, one could scarcely have said that she looked any older. She remained a Marie-Antoinette with her Austrian nose, her enchanting glance, well-preserved, embalmed by a thousand kinds of make-up adorably combined to give her face a tint of lilac. Hovering over her features was that

confused and affectionate expression which indicated that she was obliged to leave, that she promised fondly to return, that she was slipping away quietly, but also that she was expected at a host of parties given by the best people. Born almost on the steps of a throne, married three times, kept for long periods and in luxury by great bankers, to say nothing of the countless fancies with which she had indulged herself, she bore lightly beneath her gown, mauve like her wonderful, round eyes and her painted face, the slightly confused memories of this crowded past. As she passed by me, slipping discreetly away, I greeted her. She recognized me, clasped me by the hand and fixed me with those round, mauve eyes which seemed to say: 'How long it is since we saw one another! We must talk about it all another time.' She gave my hand a forceful squeeze, not quite able to remember whether, one evening in her carriage as she was taking me back from the Duchesse de Guermantes's house, there had not been some flirtation between us. She seemed, just to be on the safe side, to be alluding to something that had not happened, not a difficulty for her since she could appear deeply affected by a strawberry tart, and if ever she had to leave before the end of a piece of music, adopted an expression of despairing yet not final withdrawal. Uncertain, anyway, about the flirtation with me, her furtive squeeze of my hand did not delay her long and she spoke not a word to me. She merely looked at me, as I say, in a manner that signified: 'It's been so long!' and in which one could see the succession of husbands and men who had kept her, and two wars, as her stellar eyes, like an astronomical clock carved into an opal, marked one after another all those solemn hours of the distant past which she rediscovered each time she meant to bid you a good-afternoon that was always in fact an apology. Then, leaving me, she started to trot towards the door, so that nobody would have to put themselves out for her and to show me that if she had not stopped to talk to me, it was because she was in a hurry, as well as to make up for the minute lost squeezing my hand and thus be on time for the Queen of Spain, with whom she was going to have tea alone. As she drew near to the door, I even thought she was going to break into a run. And she was, in fact, running towards her grave.

A stout lady greeted me, and during the short time she was speaking the most varied thoughts thronged my mind. I hesitated for a moment before replying to her, afraid that, recognizing people no better than I did, she might have thought that I was somebody else, then her confidence made me, on the contrary, out of fear that this might be somebody whom I had known extremely well, exaggerate the friendliness of my smile, while my looks continued to search her features for the name I could not find. As a candidate for the baccalaureate, in his uncertainty, fixes his eyes on the examiner's face and hopes in vain to find there the answer for which he would do better to look in his own memory, I fixed my eyes on the features of the stout lady. They seemed to be those of Mme Swann, so my smile took on a more respectful quality, while my indecision began to diminish. Then a second later I heard the stout lady say: 'You thought I was Mama, it's true I am beginning to look very like her.' And I recognized Gilberte.

We talked a great deal about Robert, Gilberte speaking of him in a deferential tone of voice, as if he had been a superior being whom she was anxious to show me she had admired and understood. We reminded one another how the ideas he used to expound in the old days about the art of warfare (for he had often repeated to her at Tansonville the same arguments that I had heard him expound at Doncières and after) had frequently, and on a great number of points, been proved right by the last war.

'I can't tell you how forcefully the slightest things he said to me at Doncières strike me now, as they did during the war. The last words of his that I heard, as we parted for the last time, were that he was expecting Hindenburg, as a Napoleonic general, to adopt one of the typically Napoleonic battle-plans, the one whose aim is to separate two enemies, perhaps, he added, the English and us. Now, scarcely a year after Robert's death, a commentator for whom he had a profound admiration and who visibly exercised a major influence upon his military ideas, M. Henri Bidou,[107] said that Hindenburg's offensive in March 1918 was "the battle of separation of one concentrated army against two adversaries in linear formation, a manœuvre which the Emperor carried though successfully in 1796 in the Apennines, but which failed in Belgium in 1815". A few minutes before, Robert had for my benefit compared battles to plays in which it is not always easy to see what the author meant, or where he may have changed his plan at some point along the way. If Robert had interpreted that German offensive of 1918 in this way, of course, he would not have been in agreement with M. Bidou. But other commentators think that it was Hindenburg's success in the direction of Amiens, followed by his enforced halt, then his success in Flanders, then another halt, which made Amiens, and then Boulogne, accidental objectives that had not been designated in advance. And since anybody can reshape a play or a campaign, there are those who see in this offensive the beginnings of a lightning-like march on Paris, while others see it as a series of disorganized attacks designed to destroy the English army. And even if the orders given by the commander conflict with this or that conception, critics and commentators will always be free to say, as Mounet-Sully said to Coquelin[108] when he tried to persuade him that *Le Misanthrope* was not the melancholy drama he wanted to make it (for Molière, as his contemporaries attested, gave the part a comic interpretation and made audiences laugh at it): 'Well, Molière was wrong then.'

'And about aeroplanes, do you remember when he said (he always had such a good way of putting things): "Each army has to be a hundred-eyed Argus"? What a pity he wasn't able to see his assertions proved true. – But he did, I replied, he knew that at the Battle of the Somme they started by blinding the enemy by putting his eyes out, destroying his aeroplanes and captive balloons. – Oh yes! that's right.' And since she lived now only for things of the mind, and as a result had become a bit pedantic: 'And he used to claim that people would return to the ancient methods. Do you know that the Mesopotamian expeditions in this war' (she must have read this, at the time, in Brichot's articles) 'are exactly the same, no changes at all, as the retreat in Xenophon? And that to move from the Tigris to the Euphrates, the English command used bellums, long, narrow boats, the local equivalent of gondolas, which the earliest Chaldeans also used?' These words gave me a powerful sense of that stagnation of the past which in certain places is frozen indefinitely, through a kind of specific gravity, so that one can rediscover it exactly as it was.

'There is one aspect of the war which he was beginning, I believe, to grasp, I said to her, that it is human, it has to be lived like love or hatred, it could be narrated like a novel, and that consequently if somebody goes round repeating that strategy is a science, it does nothing to help them understand war, because war is not strategic. The enemy has no more knowledge of our plans than we have of the ultimate intentions of the woman we love, and we may perhaps not even know these plans ourselves. Was it the Germans' aim, in the March 1918 offensive, to take Amiens? We just don't know. Perhaps they didn't know themselves, and it was the way that events turned out, their advance in the west towards Amiens, that determined their plan. Even assuming that war were scientific, it would still have to be painted as Elstir painted the sea, the other way round, starting with illusions and beliefs which are then gradually rectified, in the same way as Dostoyevsky would tell the story of a life. But anyway war is quite definitely more medical than strategic, including unforeseen accidents the clinician was hoping to avoid, like the Russian Revolution.'

But I must admit that because of the books I had been reading at Balbec, not far from Robert, I was more impressed, during the fighting in France, to rediscover the word *trenches* in Mme de Sévigné, or in the Middle East, in connection with the siege of Kut-el-Amara (meaning Kut-the-emir, 'just as we say Vaux-le-Vicomte and Bailleau-l'Évêque,' the curé of Combray would have said, if he had extended his thirst for etymologies as far as Oriental languages), to see recurring, close to the name of Baghdad, the town of Basra, or Bassorah, mentioned so often in the *Arabian Nights* and which, each time he left Baghdad or before he returned there, was the port used for embarkation or disembarkation, long before General Townshend and General Gorringe, at the time of the Caliphs, by Sindbad the Sailor.

Throughout this conversation Gilberte had talked to me about Robert with a degree of deference which seemed directed more towards my former friend than towards her deceased husband. It was if she were saying: 'I know how much you admired him. Please believe that I was capable of understanding what a superior being he was.' And yet the love which she certainly no longer had for his memory was perhaps the distant cause of certain features of her present life. For example, Gilberte now had an inseparable friend in Andrée. And although the latter was beginning, thanks largely to her husband's talent and her own intelligence, to penetrate, not of course into the Guermantes' circle, but into a level of society infinitely smarter than the one she used to move in, people were very surprised that the Marquise de Saint-Loup should condescend to be her best friend. The fact that she was seemed to be a sign, on Gilberte's part, of her

fondness for what she took to be an artistic existence, and for what was undeniably a social decline. This explanation may be the true one. Another one, however, does come to my mind, always very much aware of the extent to which the images we see assembled somewhere are generally the reflection, or in some way or other the effect, of an earlier somewhat different but symmetrical grouping of other images, far removed from the second. My thought was that if Andrée, her husband and Gilberte were seen together every evening, it was perhaps because, so many years earlier, one might have seen Andrée's future husband living with Rachel, then leaving her for Andrée. It is unlikely that Gilberte knew anything about it then, living as she did in a social world too remote and too elevated. But she must have found out about it later, when Andrée had risen and she herself had descended far enough for them to be able to notice one another. Then she must have been powerfully aware of the prestige of the woman for whom Rachel had been left by the man, no doubt extremely seductive, whom she had preferred to Robert. (The Princesse de Guermantes could be heard excitedly repeating, in a voice with a tinny rattle because of her false teeth: 'Yes, that's it, let's get together, let's make a set! I love these young people, so intelligent, so ready to join in! Oh, what a mushishian you are!' And she stuck her great monocle in her round eye, half amused, half apologetic for not being able to sustain the gaiety for long, though she was determined to 'join in', to 'make a set', right to the bitter end.)

So perhaps the sight of Andrée reminded Gilberte of the youthful romance that her love for Robert had been, and also inspired in her a great respect for Andrée, who was still so deeply loved by a man who had been so much loved by Rachel, whom in turn Gilberte felt to have been more deeply loved by Robert than she herself had ever been. Or perhaps on the contrary those memories had nothing to do with Gilberte's fondness for this artistic couple, and one had to look at it quite simply, as many did, as an illustration of two enthusiasms customarily inseparable among society women, for culture and for slumming. Gilberte perhaps had forgotten Robert as completely as I had forgotten Albertine, and even if she did know that it was Rachel whom the artist had left for Andrée she may never have thought, when she saw them, about something which never played any part in her liking for them. Whether my first explanation was not merely possible but true could have been discovered only through the testimony of those involved, the only recourse remaining in such cases, so long as they could bring to their confidences both insight and sincerity. But the first is rarely met with, and the second never. At all events, the sight of Rachel, now a celebrated actress, could not be very pleasant for Gilberte. I was therefore annoyed to learn that she was going to be reciting some verses in the course of the party, namely, it was announced, Musset's 'Le Souvenir', and some fables by La Fontaine.

'But what brings you to a crowded party like this? Gilberte asked me. It's not at all how I think of you, running into you in this sort of shambles. In fact I'd expect to see you anywhere but at one of my aunt's do's. Because I'm afraid she is my aunt,' she added pointedly, for having been Mme de Saint-Loup since slightly earlier than Mme Verdurin entered the family, she considered herself always to have been a Guermantes and to have been dishonoured by the misalliance her uncle had contracted by marrying Mme Verdurin and which, it is true, she had heard the family make fun of countless times in her presence, whereas it was naturally only behind her back that people talked about the misalliance Saint-Loup had contracted when he married her. Moreover she affected all the more disdain for this aunt with no breeding since, by one of those perverse impulses which make intelligent people want to escape their conventional manners, and also because of old people's need for reminiscences, and lastly in an attempt to provide a past for her new smartness, the Princesse de Guermantes liked to say, talking about Gilberte: 'Of course, it isn't as if she was someone new to me, I knew the child's mother very well, why, she was a great friend of my cousin Marsantes. It was in my house that she met Gilberte's father. As for poor Saint-Loup, I knew all his family long ago, his uncle was a very close friend in the old days at La Raspalière.' 'You see, the Verdurins weren't bohemians at all,' I would be told by people who had heard the Princesse de Guermantes saying things like this, 'they've always been friends of de Saint-Loup's family.' I was probably the only person to know, through my grandfather, that the Verdurins were indeed not bohemians. But this was hardly because they had known Odette. But it is always easy to put together stories about a past which nobody any longer remembers, like those about journeys to countries where nobody has ever been. 'So, concluded Gilberte, since you do come down from your ivory tower sometimes, wouldn't you prefer intimate little gatherings at my house, with just a few agreeable and intelligent people invited? Great soulless affairs like this one are not really designed for you. I saw you talking to my aunt Oriane, who has plenty of good qualities, but I don't think it would be unfair, do you, to say that she's hardly one of the intellectual elite.'

I could not tell Gilberte about the thoughts I had been having for the last hour, but I did think that, purely in terms of entertainment, she might provide me with some pleasure, which in fact seemed unlikely to come from having to talk about literature with the Duchesse de Guermantes any more than with Mme de Saint-Loup. Certainly I intended to resume living in solitude from the next day onward, but this time with a specific purpose. Even at home I would not let people come to see me during my working moments, for the duty to write my book took precedence over that of being polite or even good-natured. They would probably insist, those who had not seen me for such a long time, coming to see me in the belief that I was cured, coming when the labour of their day or of their life was finished or interrupted, and having then the same need of me as I had once had of Saint-Loup; and because, as I had already noticed at Combray when my parents reprimanded me at the moment when, unknown to them, I had made the most praiseworthy resolutions, the internal clocks which are allocated to human beings are not all set to the same time. One strikes the hour of repose at the same time as another is striking that of work, one that of punishment by the judge when within the culprit the hour of repentance and self-improvement has long since struck. But I would have the courage to reply to those who came to see me, or who sent for me, that, because of essential matters which I needed to get abreast of immediately, I had an urgent, a crucially important meeting with myself. And yet, even though there is little relation between our true self and the other one, none the less, because they are homonymous and because they share a body, the abnegation which makes you sacrifice your simpler duties, even pleasures, appears to other people as selfishness.

And anyway was it not so that I could be occupied by them that I was living apart from those people who would complain about not seeing me, so that I could be more deeply occupied by them than I could ever have been with them, in order to try to reveal them to themselves, to make them real? What use would it have been if I had continued for yet more years to waste whole evenings bouncing my equally vain remarks off the hardly defunct echo of theirs, all for the sterile pleasure of a social contact which excludes everything that is not superficial? Was it not better that I should take these gestures they made, these things they said, their lives, their natures, and attempt to describe the curve they made and to isolate and define their laws? I would unfortunately have to struggle against that habit of putting oneself in another person's place which, although it may help the conception of a work, is a hindrance to its execution. For, through a kind of superior politeness, it impels one to sacrifice to others not only one's pleasure but one's duty because, looking at it from somebody else's standpoint, this duty, whatever it may be, even if it is just somebody who can do nothing useful at the front staying behind the lines where he is useful, will look like our pleasure, when in reality it is not.

And far indeed from thinking myself unfortunate, as even the greatest sometimes have, in this life without friends, without conversation, I realized that the forces of elation expended in friendship are so to speak out of true, aiming at one particular friendship which leads to nothing and deflecting us from a truth towards which they were capable of leading us. But in the end, when intervals of rest and society became necessary, I felt that, rather than the intellectual conversations which society people thought useful for writers, a few light love affairs with young girls in flower would be a select nutrient which, if I had to, I might allow my imagination, like the famous horse that was fed on nothing but roses. What suddenly I hoped for again was what I had dreamed of at Balbec when, before I had yet met them, I had seen Albertine, Andrée and their friends walking beside the sea. But alas! I could no longer hope to rediscover those girls whom at that moment I desired so strongly. The action of the years which had transformed all the individuals I had seen today, including Gilberte herself, had certainly turned all those who still survived, as they would have done Albertine if she had not been killed, into women very different from my recollections of them. It was painful for me to have to retrieve these for myself, for time, which changes individuals, does not modify the image we have of them. Nothing is sadder than this contrast between the way individuals change and the fixity of memory, when we understand that what we have kept so fresh in our memory no longer has any of that freshness in real life, and that we cannot find a way to come close, on the outside, to that which appears so beautiful within us, which arouses in us a desire, seemingly so personal, to see it again, except by looking for it in a person of the same age, that is to say in another being. It is simply, as I

had often had reason to suspect, that what seems unique in a person whom one desires does not in fact belong to her. But the passage of time was giving me a more complete proof of this since, after twenty years, spontaneously, I was trying to find, not the girls whom I had known, but those who now possessed the youth that the others had had then. (Nor is it only the re-awakening of our physical desires which corresponds to no reality because it fails to take account of lost time. I sometimes used to find myself wishing that, by a miracle, still alive contrary to what I had believed, my grandmother or Albertine might just walk into the room where I was. I imagined I could see them, my heart shot towards them. I forgot only one thing, which was that if they really were still living, Albertine would now have something like the appearance that Mme Cottard had presented at Balbec, and that my grandmother, being over ninety-five years old, would show me nothing of that beautiful, calm, smiling face with which I still imagined her now, as arbitrarily as one might give a beard to God the Father, or as in the seventeenth century Homeric heroes were depicted in all the accoutrements of gentlemen, without any attention paid to their antiquity.)

I looked at Gilberte and I did not think: 'I'd like to see her again,' but I did tell her that she would always be giving me pleasure if she invited me to meet very young girls, preferably poor, so that I could give them pleasure by giving them little gifts, without asking anything of them except a revival of the reveries and sorrows of earlier times and perhaps, one unlikely day, a chaste kiss. Gilberte smiled and then seemed to be giving the idea her serious consideration.

In the same way that Elstir liked to see incarnate before him, in his wife, the Venetian beauty he had often painted in his works, I gave myself the excuse that there was a degree of aesthetic selfishness in my attraction towards beautiful women who could cause me pain, and I felt something close to idolatry for the future Gilbertes, the future Duchesses de Guermantes, the future Albertines whom I might meet and who, it seemed to me, might inspire me, as if I were a sculptor walking among fine classical marbles. I ought, though, to have realized that even earlier than this attraction to each of them was my sense of the mystery surrounding them and that therefore, rather than asking Gilberte to introduce me to young girls, I would do better to go out to places where we have no connection with them, where between them and oneself one feels something unbridgeable, where two steps away, on the beach, going for a bathe, one feels separated from them by impossibility. That is how my sense of mystery had been able to attach itself in turn to Gilberte, to the Duchesse de Guermantes, to Albertine and to so many others. No doubt in due course the unknown, and almost the unknowable, had become the known, familiar, indifferent or painful, yet it always retained something of the charm it had once possessed.

And to tell the truth, like those calendars the postman brings to get his Christmas box, there was not one of my years which might not have had as its frontispiece, or intercalated between its days, the image of a woman I had desired; an image made even more arbitrary by the fact that sometimes I had never seen the woman, as for example when it was Mme Putbus's maid, or Mlle d'Orgeville, or some girl whose name I had glimpsed in the society page of a newspaper, among 'the bevy of charming waltzers'. I would imagine her as beautiful, fall in love with her, and create for her an ideal body, its height dominating a landscape in the part of the country where, as I had read in the *Annuaire des châteaux*, her family estates were to be found. For the women whom I had known, this landscape was at least twofold. Each woman arose, at a different point in my life, towering up like a local tutelary deity, first in the middle of one of these dream landscapes the juxtapositions of which chequered my life, the landscape in which I had first wanted to imagine her, then seen from the viewpoint of memory, surrounded by the places where I had known her and of which she reminded me, remaining attached to them, for although our lives are vagabond, our memories are sedentary and although we may move endlessly on, our memories, fastened to the places from which we free ourselves, continue to lead their unadventurous lives there, like the friends which a traveller makes briefly in a town and whom he is forced to abandon when he leaves it, because it is there that they who are not leaving will end that day and their lives as if he were still there, in front of the church, down by the harbour and beneath the trees of the promenade. So that the shadow of Gilberte, for instance, lay not only in front of a church in the Île-de-France where I had imagined her, but also across the path of a park on the Méséglise way, the shadow of Mme de Guermantes on a wet road where violet and reddish clusters rose in spikes, or on the morning gold of a Paris pavement. And this second person, born not of desire but of memory, was not for any of these women a single figure. For I had known each of them more than once, at different times, when each was a different woman for me, or I myself was different, steeped in dreams of a different colour. And the law which had governed the dreams of each year kept gathered around them the memories of a woman I had known, so that everything relating, for example, to the Duchesse de Guermantes at the time of my childhood was concentrated by a magnetic force around Combray, and everything which had to do with the Duchesse de Guermantes, when she was about to invite me to lunch, around a quite different sensitive entity; there were several Duchesses de Guermantes, as there had been several Mme Swanns since the lady in pink, separated by the colourless ether of the years, and from one to the other of whom I could no more jump than if I had to leave one planet and travel to another across the intervening ether. Not only separated, but different, adorned by dreams which I had at very different times, as with a particular flora not found on any other planet; to the extent that after having decided that I would lunch neither at Mme de Forcheville's nor at Mme de Guermantes's, I was able to tell myself only, so much had I been transported into a different world, that the one was not a different person from the Duchesse de Guermantes who was descended from Geneviève de Brabant, and the other from the lady in pink, because a knowledgeable man within me told me so with the same authority as a scientist might have told me that a Milky Way of nebulae was the result of the disintegration of one single star. In the same way Gilberte, whom none the less I was asking, without quite realizing that this was what I was doing, to enable me to have friends who would be like she had once been, was no longer anything to me but Mme de Saint-Loup. I no longer thought, when I saw her, of the part played in my love for her, which she had also forgotten about, by my admiration for Bergotte, for Bergotte once again simply the author of his books, without my remembering (save in rare and entirely distinct moments of recollection) the emotion of having been presented to the man, the disappointment, the astonishment at the conversation, in the drawing-room with the white fur rugs, filled with violets, where so many lamps were brought in so early, and set on so many consoles. All the memories which composed the original Mlle Swann had in effect been subtracted from the Gilberte of today, kept at a distance by the powers of attraction of another universe, grouped around a phrase of Bergotte's with which they fused into a unity, and steeped in the scent of hawthorn.

The fragmentary Gilberte of today listened to my request with a smile. Then, as she began to think about it, her face took on a more serious expression. And I was glad about this, as it prevented her from paying attention to a group the sight of which could certainly not have pleased her. The Duchesse de Guermantes could be seen deep in conversation with a frightful old woman, whom I looked at without being able even to guess who she was: I had absolutely no idea about her. It turned out to be Rachel, that is the actress, now famous, who in the course of the party was going to recite verses by Victor Hugo and La Fontaine, whom Gilberte's aunt, Mme de Guermantes, was speaking to. For the Duchesse, aware for too long of occupying the foremost position in Paris society (unaware that such a position exists only in the minds of those who believe in it, and that many newcomers, if they never saw her anywhere, if they never read her name in the accounts of any smart functions, would think in fact that she occupied no position at all), no longer went, save for calls as few and infrequent as possible, and then with a yawn, to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, which, she said, bored her to death, and instead indulged herself by having lunch with this or that actress whom she thought exquisite. In the new circles she moved in, having remained more like her old self than she thought, she continued to believe that being easily bored was a sign of intellectual superiority, but she expressed this with a sort of violence which gave her voice rather a harsh tone. When I mentioned Brichot to her: 'He bored me so much for twenty years,' and when Mme de Cambremer said: 'You should reread what Schopenhauer says about music,' she drew everyone's attention to the phrase by saying, forcefully: 'Re-read, that's wonderful! Who does she think she's taking in?' Old M. d'Albon smiled at what he took to be a manifestation of the Guermantes wit. Gilberte, more up-to-date, remained impassive. Although Swann's daughter, like a duckling hatched by a hen, she was more of a romanticist than he had been, and would say: 'I think that's so touching; or, he is delightfully sensitive.'

I told Mme de Guermantes that I had run into M. de Charlus. She seemed to think he had 'declined' more than was in fact the case, people in society making distinctions, where intelligence is concerned, not only between different members of society amongst all of whom it is pretty much the same, but even within a single person at different points in their life. Then she added: 'He has always been the image of my mother-in-law; but it's more striking than ever now.' There was nothing out of the ordinary in this resemblance. It is well known, in fact, that certain women as it were project themselves into another individual in perfect

detail, the one error being in the matter of sex. An error of which one cannot say *felix culpa*, for the sex has implications for the personality, and in a man femininity becomes affectation, shyness becomes touchiness, and so on. It does not matter if the face is bearded or if the cheeks are heavily whiskered, they still have certain lines that could be superimposed on to a maternal portrait. There is scarcely an old Charlus who is not a ruin within which one can recognize with surprise under all the impasto of powder and paint a few fragments of a beautiful woman in her eternal youth. At that moment Morel entered the room; the Duchesse greeted him with a politeness which I found a little disconcerting. 'Oh, I never take sides in family quarrels, she said. Don't you find them boring, family quarrels?'

And if over periods of twenty years conglomerations of coteries disintegrated and re-formed in accordance with the magnetic force of new stars, themselves also destined to fade away, then to reappear, a similar process of crystallization, then fragmentation, followed by fresh crystallization took place in the minds of individuals. If for me Mme de Guermantes had been a number of people, for Mme de Guermantes, for Mme Swann, etc., a given person had been a favourite in a era that preceded the Dreyfus Affair, then a fanatic or a fool after the Affair had broken and had changed the value of individuals for them and reclassified the parties, which since then had again disintegrated and re-formed. The most powerful effect on this, adding its own influence to purely intellectual affinities, is the passage of time, which makes us forget our antipathies, our disdains, the very reasons that explain our antipathies and our disdains. If one had scrutinized the fashionable young Mme de Cambremer closely, one would have found that she was the daughter of Jupien, the tradesman from our building, and that the additional factor which had enabled her to become a glittering success was that her father procured men for M. de Charlus. But the combination of those things had produced dazzling effects, while the causes, already distant, not only were unknown to most of the newcomers, but most of those who had known them had forgotten them, being much more concerned with current brilliance than with past embarrassments, for a name is always taken at its current valuation. And the interesting thing about these drawing-room transformations was that they too were an effect of lost time, and a phenomenon of memory.

The Duchesse still hesitated, for fear of a scene with M. de Guermantes, to approach Balthy and Mistinguett,[109] whom she thought adorable, but had definitely taken Rachel as her friend. The new generations concluded from this that Mme de Guermantes, despite her name, must be some demi-rep who had never really been properly upper-crust. It is true that in the case of a few sovereigns for whose close friendship two other great ladies were mounting a challenge, Mme de Guermantes still went to the trouble of having them to lunch. But, on the one hand, they do not come very often, and tend to know people of little social standing, and also the Duchesse, out of the Guermantes' superstitious adherence to old-fashioned protocol (because well-bred people *bored her to tears* while at the same time she insisted on good manners), always had her invitations read: 'Her Majesty has commanded the Duchesse de Guermantes, has deigned', etc. And the new strata, ignorant of these formulas, concluded from them that the position of the Duchesse was all the less elevated. From the point of view of Mme de Guermantes, close friendship with Rachel might indicate that we were mistaken when we thought her hypocritical and dishonest in her condemnations of smart society, when we thought that when she refused to go to Mme de Saint-Euverte's she was acting not in the name of intelligence but of snobbery, thinking her stupid only because the Marquise allowed her snobbery to show, not yet having achieved her goal. But this intimacy with Rachel could also signify that the Duchesse's intelligence was ordinary, unsatisfied and belatedly desirous, now she was tired of society, of some kind of fulfilment, though with a total ignorance of the true realities of intellectual life, and a touch of that fanciful spirit which makes quite respectable ladies think: 'What fun that will be!' and then end their evening in what turns out to be a very boring way, by going through the farce of waking somebody up, not in the end knowing what to say to them, standing by their bed for a little while in their evening cloak, after which, having noticed that it is very late, they finally go home to bed.

It must be added that the antipathy which the unpredictable Duchesse had recently developed towards Gilberte may have meant that she took a certain pleasure in receiving Rachel, which also allowed her to proclaim one of the Guermantes maxims, namely that they were too many to take sides in one another's quarrels (almost too many to take notice of each other's bereavements), an independence of the 'I don't see why I should have to' sort, which had been reinforced by the policy they had been obliged to adopt in relation to M. de Charlus, who, if you had followed him, would have involved you in hostilities with the whole of society.

As for Rachel, if she had in reality gone to considerable lengths to establish a connection with the Duchesse de Guermantes (lengths which the Duchesse had not been able to discern beneath the affected disdain, the deliberate impoliteness, which had whetted her appetite and given her an inflated idea of an actress so little given to snobbery), that was doubtless something, in a general way, to do with the fascination which people in society begin after a certain time to exert over the most hardened bohemians, parallel to the one that bohemians themselves exercise over people in society, a double reflux corresponding in the political order to the reciprocal curiosity and the desire to form an alliance between nations which have recently been at war. But there may have been a more specific reason for Rachel's desire. It was in the house of Mme de Guermantes, from Mme de Guermantes herself, that she had, long ago, received her most terrible humiliation. Rachel had gradually, not forgotten, but forgiven, but the singular prestige which the Duchesse had, in her eyes, thereby received could never be effaced. The conversation from which I was wanting to distract Gilberte's attention was interrupted, anyway, because the mistress of the house came looking for the actress as it was time for the recitation, and a few moments later, having left the Duchesse, she appeared on the platform.

Meanwhile, at the other end of Paris, a very different spectacle was taking place. La Berma, as I said, had invited a few people to come and take tea in honour of her son and daughter-in-law.[110] But the guests were in no hurry to arrive. Having learned that Rachel was reciting poetry at the Princesse de Guermantes's (which deeply scandalized La Berma, the great artist who still regarded Rachel as a tart who had been allowed to appear in dramas in which she, La Berma, was playing the leading role, because Saint-Loup paid for the dresses she wore on stage – and scandalized her the more because there was a rumour current in Paris that, although the invitations were in the name of the Princesse de Guermantes, it was Rachel who in reality was the hostess in the Princesse's house), La Berma had written for a second time insistently to a few loyal friends, asking them not to miss her tea-party, for she knew that they were also friends of Mme de Guermantes, whom they had known when she was Mme Verdurin. Now the hours were passing and nobody arrived at La Berma's. Bloch, on being asked whether he wanted to come, had artlessly replied: 'No, I'd rather go to the Princesse de Guermantes's.' Unfortunately, this was what everybody else had privately decided to do. La Berma, suffering from a fatal illness which meant that she saw only very few people, had seen her condition worsen when, to pay for the luxury her daughter needed and which her son-in-law, idle and with poor health, was unable to provide, she had returned to acting. She knew that she was shortening her life, but she wanted to give pleasure to her daughter, to whom she gave her large fees, and to her son-in-law, whom she hated but flattered, for knowing how her daughter adored him, she was afraid that if she failed to please him he might, out of spite, prevent her from seeing her daughter. This daughter, secretly loved by the doctor who attended her husband, had let herself be persuaded that these performances of *Phèdre* were not dangerous to her mother. She had in a sense forced the doctor to tell her this, in that she had retained nothing else but this from his reply, or from his objections, which had made no impression on her; and in fact the doctor had said that he could not see any great risk in La Berma's performances. He had said this out of a feeling that he would thereby be pleasing the young woman he loved, and perhaps also out of ignorance, and because he also knew that the disease was, in any case, incurable, and that we are happy to resign ourselves to cutting short the suffering of somebody who is ill when that which is fated to cut it short benefits us, and perhaps also out of some stupid idea that it would please La Berma and was therefore bound to be good for her, a stupid idea which may have seemed justified when, having been given a box by La Berma's children, and having left all his patients for the occasion, he had found her as overflowing with life on the stage as she seemed close to death when she was at home. And in fact our habits do to a very great extent allow us, allow even our organs, to adapt to an existence which would seem at first sight to be quite impossible. Who has not seen an elderly riding-master with a weak heart go through a whole range of acrobatics which one would not have believed his heart could sustain for a minute? La Berma was no less of an old stalwart of the stage, to the demands of which her organs were so perfectly adapted that she was able, by husbanding her energies with a caution invisible to the public, to give the illusion of good health disturbed only by a purely nervous and imaginary ailment. After the scene in which she declares herself to Hippolyte, La Berma may well have been aware of nothing but the dreadful night she was about to have, but her

admirers applauded her with all their might, declaring her more beautiful than ever. She went back home in terrible pain, but glad that she was able to bring her daughter the large banknotes which, in the girlish way of an actress brought up on the boards, she still used to stuff into her stockings, whence she would proudly produce them in the hope of a smile and a kiss. Sadly, all these banknotes merely enabled new embellishments to their *hôtel*, adjacent to the mother's: whence incessant hammering, which interrupted the sleep of which the great actress was in such great need. In accordance with changes in fashion, and to conform to the taste of M. de X——or Mme de Y——whom they hoped to entertain, they made alterations to every room. And La Berma, sensing that sleep, which alone could ease her pain, had fled, resigned herself to not sleeping again, although not without a secret contempt for these refinements which were hastening her death and making her last days so excruciating. This, in part at least, was no doubt why she despised them, a natural vengeance upon whatever harms us and that we are powerless to prevent. But it is also because being aware of the genius that was in her, having learned very early in life the meaninglessness of these edicts of fashion, she had herself remained faithful to the tradition she had always respected, of which she was the incarnation, which led her to judge things and people as she had done thirty years earlier, and for instance to judge Rachel not as the fashionable actress she was today, but as the little tart she had once known. La Berma was not actually any better than her daughter, who had got from her, by heredity and the contagious effects of example that an all too natural admiration made the more efficacious, her selfishness, her pitiless mockery, her unconscious cruelty. Save that all this La Berma had sacrificed to her daughter and thus been freed from it herself. Moreover, even if the daughter had not had workmen in her house all the time, she would still have worn out her mother, as the thoughtless and ferocious attractive powers of youth wear out age and illness, which exhaust themselves trying to keep up with it. Every day there was another lunch party, and people would have thought La Berma selfish to have deprived her daughter of them, or even not to have been present at lunches where the prestige of the famous mother's company was relied upon to mitigate the difficulty of attracting recalcitrant recent acquaintances to the house. They would 'promise' her to the same acquaintances for a party away from home, just to be civil. And the poor mother, gravely occupied with her private converse with the death installed within her, would be obliged to get up early, and go out. Worse still, as this was the time when Réjane,[111] at the dazzling peak of her talent, was giving performances abroad which were enormously successful, the son-in-law decided that La Berma must not let herself be eclipsed, wanted the family to pick up some of the same abundant glory, and forced La Berma on tours where she had to be given injections of morphine which, because of the state of her kidneys, might easily have caused her death. The same appeal of smartness, of social prestige, of life, had worked on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes's party like a suction-pump to attract, as if with some pneumatic machine, all La Berma's most loyal friends so that, in consequence and by contrast, there was absolute, deathlike emptiness in her house. One young man, uncertain whether La Berma's party might not also be a glittering affair, had come. When La Berma saw the appointed time pass, and realized that everybody had abandoned her, she ordered tea to be served, and they sat down at the table, but rather as if it were a funeral repast. Nothing about La Berma's face any longer recalled the face whose photograph had disturbed me so much one evening in mid-Lent.[112] La Berma, as people say, had death written all over her face. This time she really did look like one of the marble figures in the Erechtheum.[113] Her hardened arteries were already semi-petrified, the long sculptural ribbons visibly stretching across her cheeks, with a mineral rigidity. The dying eyes seemed relatively alive by contrast with this terrible ossified mask, and gleamed palely like a snake asleep in a heap of stones. But the young man, who had sat down at the table out of politeness, could hardly keep his eyes off the clock, drawn as he was by the glittering party at the Guermantes'.

La Berma did not utter a word of reproach about the friends who had abandoned her, and who naïvely hoped that she would not notice that they had gone to the Guermantes'. She merely murmured: 'A Rachel giving a party in the Princesse de Guermantes's house. It could only happen in Paris.' And, silently and with a solemn slowness, she ate forbidden cakes, as if taking part in some funerary ritual. The 'tea-party' was all the more gloomy as the son-in-law was furious that Rachel, whom he and his wife knew very well, had not invited them. His anguish was intensified when the young guest had told him that he knew Rachel so well that if he left at once for the Guermantes' he could ask her, even at this late stage, to invite the shallow couple. But La Berma's daughter was too well aware what a very low estimation her mother had of Rachel, and knew that she would make her die of despair if she solicited an invitation from that former tart. So she had told the young man and her husband that it was quite impossible. But she got her own back throughout the tea by making expressive little facial gestures indicative of the desire for pleasure and of annoyance at being deprived of it by her spoil-sport of a mother. The latter pretended not to notice her daughter's sulky expression, and from time to time addressed a few amiable words, in a dying voice, to the young man, the sole guest to have come. But soon the blast of air which was sweeping everything towards the Guermantes, and which had swept me there myself, was too strong, and he rose and left, leaving Phèdre, or death, it was not very clear any longer which of the two it was, with her daughter and her son-in-law, to finish eating the funeral cakes.

We were interrupted by the voice of the actress gradually becoming audible. This was a clever ploy on her part, for it presupposed that the poetry which the actress was in the process of speaking was part of a whole that existed prior to this recitation, and that we were only hearing a fragment of it, as if the artist, on her way along a road, had happened for a few moments to be within our earshot.

The announcement of poems that almost everybody knew had met with approval. But when people saw the actress, before she began, gazing in all directions, wild-eyed and questioning, raising her hands in the air in supplication and almost groaning out each word, they all started to feel embarrassed, almost shocked, by this display of feeling. Nobody had imagined that the recital of poetry could be anything like that. Gradually, people become accustomed to it, that is to say they forget the original sensation of unease, they sift out the good, they compare different methods of recitation in their minds, in order to tell themselves: this is better, this is less good. But the first time, in the same way as when, in a simple case, one sees the barrister step forward, raise a robed arm and begin declaiming in an ominous voice, nobody dares look at their neighbours. Because to begin with one thinks it is grotesque, but then it seems it might be wonderful, and one waits to make up one's mind.

Nevertheless, the audience was amazed when they saw this woman, before she had uttered a single sound, bend her knees, stretch out her arms to cradle some invisible body, become knock-kneed and then suddenly, in order to speak lines which were very well known, adopt an imploring tone of voice. Everybody looked at one another, not quite knowing what expression to assume, a few ill-mannered young people stifled giggles, each person cast furtive glances at his neighbour, the sort that at smart dinner-parties, when there is a new implement in front of you, a lobster-fork, a sugar-grater, etc., whose purpose and use you do not know, you cast at some more authoritative guest who, you hope, will be served before you are and thus give you the opportunity to copy what they do. You do the same, too, when somebody quotes a line of poetry you do not know, but which you want to look as if you do know, when, as if pausing to permit somebody to enter a door first, you allow another, better-informed person, as if it were a favour, to have the pleasure of saying where it comes from. In this way, while they listened to the actress, everyone waited, heads lowered and eyes enquiring, for other people to take the initiative by laughing, or criticizing, or weeping, or applauding.

Mme de Forcheville, who had returned expressly from Guermantes, whence the Duchesse had been almost expelled, had adopted a taut, attentive, almost pained expression, either to show that she was a connoisseur and not merely there for social reasons, or as a form of hostility towards people less well versed in literature who might have talked to her about other things, or else by the exertion of her whole being to discover whether she 'liked' or did not like a piece, or perhaps because, while finding one 'interesting', she certainly did not 'like' the manner in which certain lines were spoken. It might seem that this attitude would have been better adopted by the Princesse de Guermantes. But as this was taking place in her house, and as, having become as miserly as she was rich, she had decided to give Rachel nothing but five roses, she was acting as a claque. She was whipping up enthusiasm and creating favourable impressions by constantly giving voice to exclamations of delight. Here alone her Verdurin nature could still be seen, for she seemed to be listening to the poems for her own pleasure, to have wanted someone to come and speak them to *her* and her alone, while it was only by chance that there should have happened to be five hundred people there, her friends, whom she had allowed to come as it were secretly to witness her private pleasure.

Meanwhile I observed, without any gratification of my vanity, for she was old and ugly, that the actress was giving me the eye, though in a somewhat restrained manner. During the whole of the recitation she allowed a repressed but penetrating smile to flicker in her eyes as if it were the first sign of an acquiescence she might have wished to see coming from me. At the same time, some elderly ladies, not used to poetry recitals, were saying to their neighbours: 'Did you see that?' alluding to the actress's solemn, tragic gestures, not knowing what to make of them. The Duchesse de Guermantes sensed the slight wavering and ensured a victory by exclaiming: 'Wonderful!' right in the middle of a poem which she thought had perhaps just ended. More than one guest was then anxious to accentuate this exclamation with a look of approbation and a nod of the head, less perhaps to show their understanding of the performance than to show off their relationship with the Duchesse. When the poem was finished, as we were near the actress I heard her thank Mme de Guermantes, and at the same time, taking advantage of the fact that I was standing beside the Duchesse, she turned to me with some gracious greeting. I realized then that this was somebody whom I ought to recognize, and that unlike the passionate glances of M. de Vaugoubert's son, which I had mistaken for the greeting of a person who thought I was somebody else, what I had taken as a look of desire on the part of the actress was merely a reserved attempt to get me to recognize her and greet her. I responded with a bow and a smile. 'I'm sure he doesn't recognize me, the reciter said to the Duchesse. – Of course I do, I said confidently, I recognize you perfectly. – Who am I, then?' I had absolutely no idea who she was, and my position was becoming awkward. Fortunately for me, while, during the loveliest lines of La Fontaine, this woman reciting them with so much assurance had been thinking mainly, either out of kindness or stupidity, about the difficulty of saying good-afternoon to me, during the same lovely lines Bloch's thoughts had been exclusively occupied with making preparations, as soon as the poetry ended, to dash forward as if attempting an escape from some beleaguered position, treading on the feet, if not the bodies, of his neighbours, to come and congratulate the reciter, either out of a misplaced sense of duty or else out of a desire for ostentation. 'Isn't it funny to see Rachel here!' he whispered in my ear. The magic name instantly shattered the enchantment which had given Saint-Loup's mistress the unknown form of this disgusting old woman. As soon as I knew who she was I recognized her perfectly. 'That was wonderful,' he said to Rachel, and having spoken these simple words, his desire satisfied, he went back and had so much difficulty and made so much noise regaining his place that Rachel had to wait more than five minutes before reciting her second poem. When she had finished this one, 'Les Deux Pigeons', Mme de Morienval came up to Mme de Saint-Loup, whom she knew to be very well-read, while not remembering that she also had her father's subtle and sarcastic wit: 'That's the La Fontaine fable, isn't it?' she asked, thinking she recognized it but not being absolutely certain, for she did not know La Fontaine's fables well at all, and indeed believed them to be childish things, not for recitation in fashionable society. To have had a success like that, the artist must surely have been doing a pastiche of the fables of La Fontaine, the dear good woman thought. Now Gilberte unintentionally strengthened her in that idea for, not liking Rachel, and wanting to say that there was almost nothing left of the fables after a delivery like hers, she said so in that over-subtle manner which had been her father's, and which used to leave unsophisticated people in doubt as to what he meant: 'It was a quarter the invention of the performer, a quarter complete lunacy, a quarter made no sense at all, and the rest was La Fontaine,' which enabled Mme de Morienval to continue to believe that what they had just heard was not 'Les Deux Pigeons' by La Fontaine, but a new version, a quarter of which at the most was by La Fontaine, which news, owing to these people's extraordinary ignorance, came as a surprise to nobody.

But one of Bloch's friends having arrived late, Bloch had the pleasure of asking him whether he had ever heard Rachel, giving him an extraordinary account of her delivery, exaggerating it, and suddenly discovering, as he spoke, a curious pleasure in revealing this modernist diction to another person which he had not experienced at all in hearing it. Then Bloch, with exaggerated feeling, congratulated Rachel in his high-pitched voice and introduced his friend, who declared that he admired her above all others; and Rachel, who now knew ladies from the highest ranks of society, and unconsciously copied them, replied: 'Oh, I'm terribly flattered, so honoured by your appreciation.' Bloch's friend asked her what she thought of La Berma. 'Poor woman, it seems she's in complete poverty. She wasn't without, I won't say talent, because at bottom she didn't possess true talent, she only liked the most horrible things, but she had skill; her acting was more alive than other actresses', and personally she was very decent, generous, ruined herself for other people, and now of course it's been a long time since she's earned anything at all, because for years the public hasn't liked the sort of things she does… But anyway, she added with a laugh, I'm not really old enough to have heard her, naturally, except right at the end of her career when I was too young myself to form a judgment. – But wasn't she a particularly good speaker of verse?' ventured Bloch's friend to flatter Rachel, who replied: 'Oh, she couldn't do it to save her life; it always came out sounding like prose, or Chinese, or Volapük, or anything except like a line of verse.'

But I was becoming aware that the passing of time does not necessarily bring about progress in the arts. Just as some author of the seventeenth century, who knew nothing of the French Revolution, or the discoveries of science, or the war, may be better than some writers of today, and just as even Fagon[114] may have been as great a doctor as du Boulbon (superior genius compensating here for the shortfall in knowledge), so La Berma was, as they say, head and shoulders above Rachel, and time, by making Rachel a star at the same time as Elstir, had overrated a mediocrity and consecrated a genius.

It should come as no surprise that Saint-Loup's former mistress should run La Berma down. She would have done it when she was young. Even if she would not have done it then, she certainly would now. If a society woman of the highest intelligence and with the kindest of natures becomes an actress, displays great talent in her new occupation, and meets with unalloyed success, one will be surprised, finding oneself in her company after some long time, to hear not her own way of speaking but the language of actresses, the special cattiness with which they refer to their colleagues, everything that rubs off on to a human being from the experience of 'thirty years in the theatre'. Rachel had all this, and she did not start off in society.

'Say what you like, it is wonderful, it has shape, it has character, it's intelligent, nobody has ever spoken the lines like that,' said the Duchesse, anxious in case Gilberte should start running it down. But she moved away towards another group to avoid a conflict with her aunt, who, none the less, went on to make a series of quite banal remarks to me about Rachel. Mme de Guermantes, in her declining years, had felt a new awakening of curiosity within her. She had nothing more to learn from society. The idea that she occupied the foremost position in it was as evident to her as the height of the blue sky above the earth. She did not believe

there was any need to consolidate a position she deemed unshakeable. On the other hand, reading, going to the theatre, she would have wished each activity to go on for longer than it did; just as in the past, in the narrow little garden where one would drink orangeade, all that was most exquisite in the best society would come informally, among the scented breezes of evening and the haze of pollen, to sustain in her the taste for grand society, so now a different appetite made her want to know the reasons for this or that literary controversy, to know authors, even to know actresses. Her jaded mind demanded a new kind of nourishment. In order to get to know authors and actresses, she approached women with whom in the past she would not have wished to exchange cards, and who now turned their friendship with the editor of some review to good account in the hope of attracting the Duchesse to their houses. The first actress to be a guest thought that she was the only one in a remarkable setting, a setting which seemed less impressive to the second when she saw who had preceded her. The Duchesse, because on some evenings she received sovereigns, thought that her social position continued unchanged. In reality she, the only one who was truly of unalloyed blood, she who, having been born a Guermantes could sign herself 'Guermantes-Guermantes' when she did not sign herself 'The Duchesse de Guermantes', she who seemed something unusually precious even to her sisters-in-law, like a Moses saved from the waters, a Christ escaped into Egypt, a Louis XVII freed from the Temple, the purest of the pure, she had now, sacrificing no doubt to that hereditary need for spiritual nourishment which had brought about the social decline of Mme de Villeparisis, become herself a Mme de Villeparisis, at whose house snobbish women were afraid they might meet some unsuitable man or woman, and whom the younger people, seeing her present situation without knowing what had preceded it, imagined her to be a Guermantes from an inferior vintage, from an inferior year, a declassified Guermantes.

But since the best writers often cease, as old age approaches, or after an excess of production, to have any talent, society women may certainly be excused for no longer being witty after a certain time. Swann could no longer recognize in the harsh wit of the Duchesse de Guermantes the gentle humour of the Princesse de Laumes. Late in life, tiredness or even the least exertion made Mme de Guermantes say a huge number of silly things. Of course she was capable at any moment, as happened several times in the course of this party, of becoming once more the woman I had known and of making witty social observations. But alongside that, it frequently happened that, sparkling beneath the beautiful eyes, this conversation, which for so long had held intellectual sway over the most eminent men in Paris, still shone but, so to speak, emptily, to no effect. When the moment came for her to make a witty remark, she would pause for the same number of seconds as before, seemed to be hesitating, to be on the verge of production, but the joke that then appeared would be completely flat. Yet how few people noticed this! The continuity of the procedure made them believe in the continued survival of the wit, in the same way as people sometimes, superstitiously attached to some brand of pâtisserie, continue to order their petits fours from the same firm without noticing that they have become revolting. During the war, the Duchesse had already shown some signs of this diminution of her powers. If somebody said the word culture, she would stop him, smile, her eyes would light up, and she would come out with: 'K-k-k-kultur', which made her friends laugh, thinking this to be another illustration of the Guermantes wit. And indeed it was the same mould, the same intonation, the same smile as had delighted Bergotte, who for his part had also kept his characteristic sentence rhythms, his interjections, his ellipses, his epithets, though all in order to say nothing. But the newcomers were surprised and would sometimes say, if they had not chanced upon a day when she was funny and 'in full possession of her faculties', 'How stupid she is!'

The Duchesse, it should be said, arranged matters so as to contain her slumming and not allow it to affect those members of her family from whom she derived her aristocratic aura. If, in order to fulfil her role as patroness of the arts, she had invited a minister or a painter to the theatre, and one or other had naïvely asked whether her husband or sister-in-law were not in the audience, the Duchesse, covering her nervousness with a bold show of hauteur, would arrogantly reply: 'I have no idea. Once I leave my house, I have no knowledge of what my family does. As far as any politicians or artists are concerned, I am a widow.' In this way she prevented over-attentive social climbers from being rebuffed – and herself from being reprimanded – by Mme de Marsantes and by Basin.

'I can't tell you what a tremendous pleasure it is to see you. Good heavens, when was the last time I saw you?… – I was calling on Mme d'Agrigente, I often used to see you there. Naturally I used to go there often, dear boy, as Basin was in love with her at the time. You were always most likely to find me at the house of his most recent sweetheart, because he would say: "You must go and visit her, without fail." Actually, I thought there was something a little inappropriate about the kind of "thank-you" calls he sent me to make once he had achieved his aim. I got used to it quite quickly, but the most boring thing about it was that I had to keep up the friendship after he had broken off the relationship. It always made me think of that line by Victor Hugo:

*Emporte le bonheur and laisse-*moi *l'ennui*[115]

'Of course, as the poem goes on to say, I still entered with a smile, but really it wasn't fair, he ought to have left me the right to be fickle where his mistresses were concerned, because once I had accumulated all of his rejects, I ended up not having an afternoon to myself. All the same, that seems a relatively pleasant period compared with the present. Of course, the fact that he has started deceiving me again can only be flattering, because it makes me feel younger. But I preferred his old way of doing it. You know, it's been such a long time since he was last unfaithful to me that he couldn't remember how to do it. Still, we get on all right together, we talk to each other, we're even fond of each other, up to a point,' the Duchesse said to me, fearful in case I should think that they had separated completely, rather as one says of somebody who is very ill: 'But he can still speak quite well, I read to him for an hour this morning.' She added: 'I'll go and tell him you're here, he'd like to see you.' And she went over to the Duc, who was sitting beside a lady on a sofa, deep in conversation. I was surprised to see that he was almost the same, merely with whiter hair, being still as majestic and as handsome as ever. But when he saw his wife coming to talk to him, he looked so furious that all she could do was retreat. 'He is busy, I don't know what he's doing, you'll see in a minute,' Mme de Guermantes said to me, preferring to leave me to work things out for myself.

Bloch having come up to us and asked, on behalf of his American lady, the identity of a young duchess who was among the guests, I replied that she was the niece of M. de Bréauté, at which, as the name meant nothing to him, Bloch asked for further explanation. 'Oh, Bréauté!' exclaimed Mme de Guermantes, turning to me, 'you remember all that, how ancient it all seems, how long ago! Well, he was a snob. These were people who lived near my mother-in-law's house. Not of any interest to you, M. Bloch; though our friend here may be amused by it, since he knew all those people long ago, at the same time as I did,' added Mme de Guermantes, gesturing towards me, and demonstrating by these words, in a number of ways, just how long a period of time had elapsed. Mme de Guermantes's friendships and opinions had been so often renewed since then that she retrospectively thought of her charming Babal as a snob. In another connection, not only was he now a thing of the past, but, something I had never realized when in my first days in society I had taken him for one of the essential notables of Paris, someone who would always be associated with its social history, like Colbert with that of the reign of Louis XIV, he too bore the mark of his provincial origins, having been a country neighbour of the old Duchesse, which was the guise in which the Princesse de Laumes had made his acquaintance. Yet now Bréauté, stripped of his wit, and relegated to years so long ago that he dated them (which proved that he had since been entirely forgotten by the Duchesse) and to the neighbourhood of the Guermantes, was, which I could never have believed on that first evening at the Opéra-Comique when he had appeared to me like a god of the sea inhabiting his underwater lair, a link between the Duchesse and me, because she recalled that I had known him, therefore that I was a friend of hers, if not sprung from the same social world as her at least an inhabitant of the same social world as her for much longer than many of the people present, she recalled this, but so inaccurately as to have forgotten certain details which had seemed to me then to be essential, namely that I did not go to Guermantes, and was only a middle-class boy from Combray at the time when she came to Mlle Percepied's nuptial mass, and that for the whole year after her appearance at the Opéra-Comique, despite all Saint-Loup's entreaties she never invited me to her house. To me this seemed terribly important, because it was precisely at this point that the life of the Duchesse de Guermantes appeared to me to be a paradise I would never enter. But to her it just seemed to be a part of the same ordinary life as always and, since after a certain point I had dined with her often and had also, even before that, been a friend of her aunt and her nephew, she was not entirely clear at what period our friendship had begun, and was unaware of the serious anachronism she was committing by making this friendship begin several years too

soon. For this meant that I would have known the Mme de Guermantes of the name of Guermantes, which it was impossible to know, and that I would have been received within the name with the golden syllables, in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, whereas I had quite simply been to dinner in the house of a lady who already by then meant nothing more to me than any other, and who had occasionally invited me, not to descend into the underwater kingdom of the Nereids, but to spend the evening in her cousin's box at the theatre. 'If you want to know about Bréauté, and it's not really worth the bother, she added, turning to Bloch, ask our friend here (who is a hundred times more worth knowing): he must have dined at my house with him at least fifty times. Wasn't it in my house that you met him? At any rate, that's where you met Swann.' I was as much surprised that she could have thought that I might have met M. de Bréauté anywhere else, and therefore that I might have moved in those circles before I met her, as I was to realize that she thought that it was in her house that I had met Swann. Less untruthfully than Gilberte, when she said of Bréauté: 'He is an old country neighbour of mine, I do enjoy talking about Tansonville with him' when in the past he never visited them at Tansonville, I could have said: 'He was a country neighbour of ours who often used to come and see us in the evening' of Swann, who in fact reminded me of things quite other than the Guermantes.

'I don't know what to tell you. He was a man who talked about nothing but royalty. He had a stock of odd anecdotes about some of the Guermantes, and my mother-in-law, and Mme de Varambon before she joined the Princess of Parma's household. But who remembers Mme de Varambon these days? Our friend here, yes, he knew all those people, but all that's gone now, they are not even names any longer, and what's more they didn't deserve to be remembered.' And I realized, despite the unity which society appears to be, and in which in fact social relations reach their maximum concentration and everything is interconnected, that provinces remain within it, or at least that Time creates provinces, the names of which change, and which are no longer comprehensible to those who arrive there only when the pattern has altered. 'She was a good lady who said things of unbelievable silliness,' went on the Duchesse, who, insensitive to that poetry of the incomprehensible which is one of the effects of time, drew out the comic element in everything, anything that resembled the Meilhac[116] type of literature, or that nourished the Guermantes wit. 'There was a time when she had an obsession with taking a kind of cough drop they used to have then, which was called' (she continued, laughing herself at the name once so special, so widely known, and now so unfamiliar to the people around her) 'Géraudel pastilles. "Mme de Varambon, my mother-in-law, said to her, if you carry on wolfing those Géraudel pastilles like that you'll give yourself a stomach ache. – But Mme la Duchesse, replied Mme de Varambon, how could they possibly give me a stomach ache when they go straight to the bronchial tubes?" And she's also the one who said: "The Duchesse has a beautiful cow, so beautiful that people are always thinking it's a bull." ' And Mme de Guermantes would happily have carried on telling stories about Mme de Varambon, of which we knew hundreds, but we realized that in Bloch's ill-informed memory her name did not evoke any of the images which rose up for us as soon as Mme de Varambon or M. de Bréauté or the Prince d'Agrigente were mentioned, and for that very reason, perhaps became endowed in his mind with a glamour which I knew to be exaggerated but which I could understand, although not because I had felt it myself, our own mistakes and our own absurdities rarely having the effect, even when we have seen through them, of making us more indulgent to those of others.

The reality, which was really quite insignificant, of this distant time was so lost that when somebody not far away from me asked whether the Tansonville estate had come to Gilberte from her father M. de Forcheville, somebody else replied: 'Oh, no! It comes from her husband's family. It's all on the Guermantes side. Tansonville is very close to Guermantes. It belonged to Mme de Marsantes, the mother of the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Only it was very heavily mortgaged. So it was given to him as a wedding present and redeemed out of Mlle de Forcheville's fortune.' And another time, somebody to whom I mentioned Swann, trying to find a way of explaining what it meant to be a man of wit in that period, said: 'Oh yes, the Duchesse de Guermantes told me some witticisms of his; he was an old gentleman whom you met at her house, I think?'[117]

The past had been so transformed in the Duchesse's mind (or the demarcations which existed in mine had always been so absent from hers that things which had constituted events for me had passed unnoticed by her) that she could imagine that I had met Swann in her house and M. de Bréauté elsewhere, thus constructing for me a past as a figure in society which she extended back too far. For this sense of the passage of time that I had just acquired was one the Duchesse also possessed, in her case with an opposite illusion to mine of believing it to be shorter than it was, she, on the contrary, exaggerating it, making it go too far back, most notably in respect of that immeasurable line of demarcation between the time when she became first a name for me, then the object of my love – and the time when she had been no more to me than any other society woman. I went to her house only in this second period, when for me she was a different person. But in her own eyes, these differences did not exist, and she would not have thought it at all odd that I might have been in her house two years earlier, not knowing that she was a different person, even with a different door-mat, and her personality not revealing to her, as it did to me, any discontinuity.

I said to the Duchesse de Guermantes: 'That reminds me of the first evening I went to the Princesse de Guermantes's, when I thought I might not have been invited and that they would show me the door, and when you wore a red dress and red shoes. – Good heavens, that was all so long ago,' said the Duchesse de Guermantes, thus accentuating my impression of the passage of time. She gazed melancholically into the middle distance, yet dwelt particularly on the red dress. I asked her to describe it for me, which she was glad to do. 'You couldn't wear something like that now. But it was the sort of dress we used to wear in those days. – But surely it was very pretty, wasn't it?' I said. She was always afraid of giving herself away by what she said, of saying something which might diminish her in other people's eyes. 'Oh, yes, I thought it was very pretty, myself. People don't wear that sort of thing now because it isn't done at present. But it'll come back, all fashions come round again, in dresses, in music, in painting,' she added forcefully, for she thought there was something rather original about this philosophy. But the sadness of growing old brought with it a sense of tiredness which her smile struggled to overcome: 'Are you sure about the red shoes? I thought that they were gold.' I assured her that they were for ever fixed in my mind, without saying anything about the circumstances which enabled me to be so certain. 'It is very kind of you to remember that,' she said to me fondly, for women refer to any recollection of their beauty as kindness, as artists do when you admire their work. Besides, however distant the past may be, when one is as capable a woman as the Duchesse, it need not have been forgotten. 'Do you remember', she said to me, as a way of thanking me for my memory of her dress and her shoes, 'that we brought you home, Basin and I? You had a girl who was coming to see you after midnight. Basin laughed so much at the thought of somebody calling on you at that time of night.' Albertine had indeed come to see me after the Princesse de Guermantes's party. I remembered it as clearly as the Duchesse, although Albertine was as unimportant to me now as she would have been to Mme de Guermantes, if Mme de Guermantes had known that the girl because of whom I had not been able to go in was Albertine. Long after the poor departed have gone from our hearts, their insignificant dust continues to be mingled, to be used as an alloy, with the events of the past. And although we no longer love them, it sometimes happens that when we are describing a room, or a garden path, or a road, where at a certain time they once were, we are obliged, in order to fill the gap they occupied, to mention them, but without missing them, without naming them even, and without enabling anybody else to identify them. (Mme de Guermantes was hardly likely to have identified the girl who was due to visit me that evening, had never known who she was and only mentioned her because of the eccentricity of the time and the circumstances.) Such are the final, and unenviable, forms in which we survive.

If the judgments pronounced by the Duchesse on Rachel were, in themselves, ordinary, they none the less interested me in that they too marked a new hour on the dial. For the Duchesse had not forgotten, any more than had Rachel, the evening which the latter had spent in her house, but her memory had undergone no less of a transformation. 'I must say, she told me, I'm all the more interested to hear her, and to hear her recite, because it was I who discovered her, saw how good she was, sang her praises and made people take notice of her at a time when she had no reputation and everybody thought she was ridiculous. Yes, my dear friend, it may come as a surprise to you, but the first place she ever performed in public was in my house! Oh yes, while all the so-called avant-garde, like my new cousin,' pointing ironically towards the Princesse de Guermantes, who, in Oriane's eyes, was still Mme Verdurin, 'would have left her to die of hunger without condescending to hear her, I had decided that she was interesting, and I had offered her a fee to come and perform in my house in front of the most distinguished and influential audience I could get. I may say, though the phrase is a bit silly and pretentious, for in the end real talent doesn't need any help, that I launched her. But of course she didn't need me.' I made a vague gesture of protest, and saw that Mme de Guermantes was quite ready to accept the opposite argument: 'You

disagree? You think talent needs supporting, needs someone to put it under the spotlight? You may be right, you know. It's funny, Dumas used to tell me exactly the same thing, years ago. In this case I'm extremely flattered if I've been able to do anything, however small, obviously not to improve her talent, but to promote the reputation of an artist like her.' Mme de Guermantes preferred to abandon her idea that talent will break through on its own, like an abscess, because the alternative was more flattering for her, but also because for some time now, receiving newcomers to society, and being generally tired, she had become almost humble, questioning other people and asking their opinions before forming one of her own. 'I don't need to tell you, she went on, that the intelligent public that calls itself society did not understand a word of what she did. They complained, they laughed. It was no good my saying to them: "This is new, this is interesting, it's something that's never been done before," they didn't believe me, as nobody has ever believed me about anything. It was just the same with the piece she gave, it was something by Maeterlinck, terribly well-known now, but then everybody thought it was absurd, except me, I thought it was wonderful. It does strike me as surprising, when I think about it, that a country girl like me, with only the same education as the other provincial girls, should have had such an instant affinity for things like that. I couldn't have told you why, of course, but I liked it, it moved me; and Basin, who is not a sensitive soul, was struck by the effect that it had on me. He said to me: "I don't want you listening to this nonsense any more, it's making you ill." And it was true, people think I'm an unfeeling woman, when really I'm just a bundle of nerves.'

At this moment an unexpected incident occurred. A footman came to tell Rachel that La Berma's daughter and son-in-law were asking to speak to her. We have seen how La Berma's daughter had resisted her husband's wish that Rachel should be asked to invite them. But after the departure of the one guest, the young couple had grown increasingly annoyed as they sat with their mother, the thought that other people were enjoying themselves tormented them, and so, taking advantage of a moment when La Berma had retired to her room, spitting a little blood, they had hastily thrown on some smarter clothes, called a cab and come to the Princesse de Guermantes's without an invitation. Rachel, surmising what had happened and secretly flattered, put on an arrogant tone of voice and told the footman that she could not be disturbed, that they should write a note to explain the purpose of their unusual approach. The footman returned bearing a card on which La Berma's daughter had scribbled that she and her husband had been unable to resist their desire to hear Rachel, and begged to be allowed to enter. Rachel smiled at the transparency of their pretext and at her own triumph. She sent back word that she was very sorry but that she had finished her recital. The footmen in the ante-room, where the couple's wait still continued, were already beginning to snigger at the two rejected supplicants. The shame of being snubbed, and her recollection of Rachel's insignificance in comparison to her mother, drove La Berma's daughter to pursue to its ultimate conclusion a process on which she had originally only ventured in a search for entertainment. She sent to ask whether Rachel, as a favour, might allow her, even though she had not been able to hear her, to shake her hand. Rachel was at that moment talking to an Italian prince, said to be fascinated by the attraction of her large fortune, the origin of which was somewhat concealed by her social connections; she summed up the reversal of position which now put the children of La Berma at her feet. After giving a comic account of the incident to everybody, she asked that the young couple be allowed to enter, which they did without needing to be asked twice, ruining at a stroke La Berma's position in society, as they had destroyed her health. Rachel understood this, and also realized that gracious civility would give her a reputation in society for kindness and them a reputation for craven self-abasement, something which a denial would not have achieved. So she received them with exaggeratedly open arms, saying in the manner of an admired patroness able, for a moment, to ignore her grandeur: 'Oh, you're here, I'm so glad. The Princesse will be delighted.' Unaware that in theatrical circles it was believed that the invitations came from her, she may perhaps have been afraid that by denying entry to La Berma's children she might make them doubt, not her good-will, which would not have bothered her, but her influence. The Duchesse de Guermantes moved away instinctively, for the more anyone seemed to be striving for social acceptance, the more they sank in her esteem. She found nothing to respect in the present situation except Rachel's kindness, and would have turned her back on La Berma's children if they had been introduced to her. Rachel however was already composing in her head the gracious phrases with which she would crush La Berma backstage the following day: 'I was heartbroken, mortified, that your daughter had to wait so long outside the door. If I had only realized! She sent me in card after card.' She was delighted to deal La Berma this blow. Yet she might have shrunk from delivering it if she had known that it would be fatal. People like to have victims, but they like to let them stay alive, not put themselves in the wrong instead. Besides, what had she done that was wrong? A few days later she was to say, with a laugh: 'It's all a bit much, I wanted to be nicer to her children than she ever was to me, and because of that they're practically saying I murdered her. The Duchesse will be my witness.' It seems that, all the unpleasant emotions and all the artificiality of the theatrical life descending to their children without the concomitant relief of passionate work that the mothers had, the great actresses often die victims of domestic conspiracies woven around them, as happened to them so many times at the end of the plays in which they brusquely lifting his head, withacted.The Duchesse's life, nevertheless, was very unhappy, and for a reason one incidental consequence of which was that the Duc, likewise, had started to move in lower social circles. Long tamed now by his advancing years, though still robust, he had ceased to be unfaithful to Mme de Guermantes, but had suddenly fallen in love with Mme de Forcheville, without anyone quite knowing how or when the liaison had started. (When one considered how old Mme de Forcheville must now be, it seemed extraordinary. But she may perhaps have started her life of affairs very young. And then there are women whom one sees each decade in a new incarnation, having new love affairs, sometimes when one had thought that they were dead, causing the despair of young wives who are abandoned for them by their husbands.)

But this liaison had assumed such proportions that the old man, imitating in this latest affair the manner in which he had conducted his earlier ones, sequestrated his mistress to the point that, if my love for Albertine had repeated, with major variations, Swann's love of Odette, M. de Guermantes's love for her recalled my love for Albertine. She was required to lunch and dine with him, he was always at her house; she paraded him in front of her friends, who without her would never have come into contact with the Duc de Guermantes, and who came there in order to meet him, somewhat as one might go to the house of a courtesan to meet a sovereign, her lover. Mme de Forcheville, of course, had long been part of society. But reverting late in life to being a kept woman, and kept by such a proud old man, who was nevertheless the person of importance in her household, she minimized her own position, trying to have only wraps which he liked and food which he liked, and flattering her friends by telling them that she had been talking to him about them, as if she were telling my great-uncle that she had been speaking about him to the Grand-Duc, who was sending him some cigarettes; in a word, she was tending, despite everything she had attained by achieving her social position, under the pressure of these new circumstances, to become once more, just as she had appeared to me in my childhood, the lady in pink. My uncle Adolphe, of course, had been dead for many years. But does the substitution around us of new people for those who were formerly there prevent us from starting the same life over again? She had doubtless adapted to the new circumstances out of cupidity, and also because having been much sought after in society as the mother of a marriageable daughter, and then dropped as soon as Gilberte had married Saint-Loup, she thought that the Duc de Guermantes, who would have done anything for her, would enlist a number of duchesses who would be delighted to do their friend Oriane a bad turn; and lastly perhaps because she was stimulated by the distress of the Duchesse, over whom a feminine feeling of rivalry made her glad to prevail.

The liaison with Mme de Forcheville, a liaison which was merely an imitation of his previous relationships, had just for the second time lost the Duc de Guermantes the presidency of the Jockey Club and a vacant seat in the Académie des Beaux-arts, just as the way of life of M. de Charlus, publicly linked with that of Jupien, had cost him the presidency of the Union, as well as that of the Société des amis du vieux Paris. The two brothers, so different in their tastes, had therefore come into disrepute through the same indolence, and the same lack of will, which were observable, but in a less unprepossessing fashion, in the Duc de Guermantes their grandfather, a member of the Académie française, but which, in the two grandsons, had allowed a natural taste in one, and what is regarded as not being such in the other, to damage their position in society.

Up until his death, Saint-Loup used faithfully to bring his wife to see her.[118] Were the two of them not the heirs both of M. de Guermantes and of Odette, who would herself moreover be the principal heir of the Duc? Even the fastidious Courvoisier nephews, and Mme de Marsantes, the Princesse de Trania, came there

in the hope of a legacy, without worrying about the pain that might cause to Mme de Guermantes, of whom of Odette, stung by her contempt, spoke very ill.

The old Duc de Guermantes no longer went out, for he spent all his days and his evenings with her. But today he did come for a moment to see her, despite the irritation of meeting his wife. I had not noticed him, and probably would not have recognized him if he had not been clearly pointed out to me. He was little more than a ruin, but a superb one, or perhaps not even a ruin so much as that most romantic of beautiful objects, a rock in a storm. Lashed on all sides by the waves of suffering, of anger at suffering, and of the rising tide of death, by which he was surrounded, his face, crumbling like a block of stone, still kept the style, the hauteur I had always admired; it was worn away like one of those beautiful but half-obliterated classical heads with which we are still always glad to ornament a study. Only it seemed to belong to a period more ancient than before, not only because of the way in which its once more lustrous material had become rough and broken, but because an expression of subtlety and playfulness had been succeeded by an involuntary, an unconscious expression, constructed out of illness, the struggle against death, mere resistance and the difficulty of living. The arteries, all their suppleness gone, had given his once beaming face a sculptural rigidity. And although the Duc had no inkling of this, his neck, his cheeks, his forehead all displayed indications that the human being within, as if obliged to cling tenaciously to each minute, seemed to be buffeted by a tragic gale, while the white strands of his thinner but still magnificent hair lashed with their spume the flooded promontory of his face. And I realized that, like the strange, unique glints which only the approach of an all-engulfing storm gives to rocks normally a different colour, the leaden grey of the stiff, worn cheeks, the almost white, foam-flecked grey of the swelling locks, the weak light still emanating from the scarcely seeing eyes, were not unreal colours, far from it, all too real, but uncanny, and borrowed from the palette and the lighting, inimitable in its terrifying and prophetic shades of darkness, of old age, and of the proximity of death.

The Duc stayed no more than a few minutes, long enough for me to have understood that Odette, attentive to her younger suitors, was treating him with contempt. But the strange thing was that he who in the past had been almost ridiculous when he behaved like a stage-king had taken on a genuinely grand appearance, rather like his brother, whom old age, by stripping him of all inessentials, made him resemble. And he, once proud, like his brother although in a different way, seemed almost deferential, although also in a different way. For he had never undergone the same decline as his brother, reduced by forgetfulness brought on by illness to greeting with politeness people whom he would once have scorned to know. But he was very old, and as he tried painfully to pass through the door and descend the staircase on his way out, old age, which is really the most wretched human state and which hurls people from their life's eminence as if they were kings in Greek tragedies, old age, by forcing him to stop on the *via dolorosa* that life becomes for the impotent and endangered, to wipe his dripping brow, to grope around as his eyes searched for a step which eluded him, because he really needed support for his faltering steps, and for his clouded eyes, giving him without his knowing it an air of gently and timidly imploring it from other people, more than august, old age had made him suppliant.

Unable to do without Odette, in whose house he was always installed in the same armchair, from which old age and gout made it difficult to extricate himself, M. de Guermantes allowed her to receive friends who were only too happy to be presented to the Duc, to leave the conversation to him, to hear him talking about society in the old days, about the Marquise of Villeparisis, and the Duc de Chartres.

Thus in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, the apparently impregnable positions of the Duc and the Duchesse de Guermantes and of Baron de Charlus had lost their inviolability, as all things change in this world, by the action of an internal principle which nobody had ever thought about: in the case of M. de Charlus this was his love for Charlie, which had made him a slave of the Verdurins, and led to the softening of his brain; in Mme de Guermantes, a taste for novelty and for art; in M. de Guermantes an exclusive love affair, like several similar ones he had already had in his life, but which the weakness of age rendered more tyrannical, and to the weaknesses of which the strict standards of the Duchesse's salon, where the Duc no longer appeared and which anyway had almost ceased to function socially, could no longer oppose their denial, or work their social redemption. This is how the pattern of things changes in this world; how the focus of empires, registers of wealth, and titles to social positions, everything that seemed permanent is perpetually recast, and the eyes of a man may over the course of a lifetime contemplate the most complete change precisely in those places where it had appeared most impossible.

From time to time, under the gaze of the old paintings assembled by Swann in a 'collector's' arrangement which added a finishing touch to the antiquated, old-fashioned nature of this scene, with this very 'Restoration' Duc and this perfectly 'Second Empire' courtesan in one of the wraps he liked so much, the lady in pink would interrupt him with her bright chatter; he would stop dead and glare at her, fiercely. Perhaps he had come to realize that she too, like the Duchesse, sometimes said silly things; perhaps, in an old man's hallucination, he thought that it was a badly timed witticism from Mme de Guermantes that had interrupted him, believing himself to be in the Guermantes *hôtel*, as chained animals might imagine for a moment that they are free in the deserts of Africa again. And brusquely lifting his head, with his little round yellow eyes, which had a wild animal gleam to them, he would fix her with one of the looks which had sometimes, when I was visiting Mme de Guermantes, and he thought she was talking too much, made me tremble. Thus the Duc stared for moment at the audacious lady in pink. But she stared back, her gaze not leaving his eyes, and at the end of a few moments which seemed very long to those watching, the vanquished old beast, remembering that he was not free at home with the Duchesse, in that Sahara whose entrance is marked by the door-mat at the top of the stairs, but in his cage in the Zoological Gardens at Mme de Forcheville's, sank his head, from which still hung a thick mane, which might equally have been blond or white, back between his shoulders, and went on with his story. He seemed not to have taken in what Mme de Forcheville had tried to say, which usually did not make much sense anyway. He allowed her to have friends to dinner with him; but, out of a habit derived from his earlier affairs, which would have come as no surprise to Odette, used to the same thing from Swann, and which struck a sympathetic chord in me, as it reminded me of my life with Albertine, always insisted that these persons should leave early so that he might be the last to say good-night to Odette. Needless to say, he had scarcely left before she would go out to meet other people. But the Duc never suspected this, or preferred not to seem to suspect it: the eyesight of old men weakens as their hearing becomes less acute, their acumen grows dull, and tiredness itself causes them to relax their vigilance. At a certain age Jupiter is ineluctably transformed into a character out of Molière – not the Olympian lover of Alcmene, either, but a laughable Géronte.[119] Moreover, Odette deceived M. de Guermantes, as she looked after him, without charm and without nobility. She was indifferent in this role as in all her others. Not because life had not frequently given her leading roles, but because she did not know how to play them. And in fact each time I tried to see her in the days following the party I was unsuccessful, for M. de Guermantes, in an attempt to satisfy the demands both of his health and of his jealousy, permitted her to attend only daytime parties, with the further condition that no dances were allowed. She frankly admitted to me the confinement in which she was kept, for several reasons. The principal one was that, although I had written only a few articles and published some essays, she had the idea that I was a well-known author, which even caused her naïvely to say, recalling the time when I used to go to the Allée des Acacias to see her pass by, and later when I used to go to her house: 'Oh, if only I'd known that one day you'd be a great writer!' Now, having heard that writers enjoy being with women because they can gather material, getting them to recount their love affairs, she now reverted, in order to interest me, to being a mere cocotte. She would tell me stories: 'Well, once there was a man who was crazy about me and whom I was desperately in love with, too. We led a heavenly life. He had to travel to America, I was to be going with him. The day before the departure I decided it was better not to let a love which couldn't always remain so perfect just slowly fade away. We had a last evening together, when he still thought I was going with him, then a night of mad passion; in his arms I felt infinite joy, and despair at the thought that I would never see him again. In the morning I went and gave my ticket to a traveller I didn't know. He wanted me to let him pay for it at least. I replied: "No, you're doing me such a favour by taking it, I don't want any money." ' Then there was another story: 'One day I was in the Champs-Élysées and M. de Bréauté, whom I'd only ever met once, started staring at me so insistently that I stopped and asked him why he thought he was looking at me like that. He replied: "I'm looking at you because you've got a ridiculous hat." It was true. It was a little hat with pansies, fashions were ghastly then. But I was furious, I said to him: "I won't allow you to speak to me like that." It started to rain. I said to him: "I would only forgive you if you had a carriage. – Well, it happens that I do have one, and I shall accompany you. – No, I'll be pleased to take your carriage, but I don't want you." I climbed into the carriage, he went off in the rain. But in the evening he turns up at my house. We had two years of wild love. Come and have tea with me some time and I'll tell you how I met M. de Forcheville. In point of fact, she said

with a melancholy expression, I have spent my life cloistered away, because all my great love affairs have been with men who were terribly jealous. I'm not talking about M. de Forcheville, as he was basically commonplace, and I have onlyever really been able to love intelligent men. But, you see, M. Swann was as jealous as the poor Duc is; and I do without everything for his sake because I know that he's not happy at home. With M. Swann, I was madly in love with him, and I think it is fair enough to sacrifice dancing and society and everything else if it gives pleasure to the man you love, or even if it stops him worrying. Poor Charles, he was so intelligent, so fascinating, exactly the kind of man I liked best.' And perhaps this was true. There had been a time when she had liked Swann, precisely the time when she was not 'his type'. Indeed, to tell the truth, 'his type' was something that, even later, she had never been. Yet he had loved her so much then, and so painfully. He had been surprised, later, by that contradiction. But it need not be a contradiction if we think what a large proportion of the suffering in men's lives is caused by women 'who were not their type'. Perhaps there are a number of reasons for this; first, because they are not 'your type' one allows oneself, at the beginning, to be loved without loving, as a result of which one lets habit get a hold on one's life which it would not have done with a woman who was 'our type' who, feeling herself desired, would have put up some resistance, would have agreed to meet only occasionally, and would not have made herself so much at home in every hour of our day that later, if love does come and we suddenly start to miss her, because of a quarrel or because she is travelling and has sent us no news, the pain of her absence tugs not at one bond but a thousand. Then, this habit is sentimental because there is no great physical desire at its heart, and if love does develop the mind works much harder: there is a romance instead of a need. We do not mistrust women who are not 'our type', we let them love us, and if we then come to love them, we love them a hundred times more than the others, without ever experiencing in their arms the satisfaction of gratified desire. For these reasons and many others, the fact that we have our greatest moments of unhappiness with women who are not 'our type' is not simply a product of that mocking destiny which brings our happiness into being only in the form which pleases us least. A woman who is 'our type' is rarely dangerous, for she wants nothing from us, she makes us content, rapidly leaves us, does not install herself in our lives, and what is dangerous and liable to create suffering in love is not the woman herself, it is her continuous daily presence, our constant curiosity about what she is doing; it is not the woman, it is habit.

I was cowardly enough to say that it was kind and generous of her, but I knew how false this was, and how much of her openness was mingled with lies. I thought with horror, as she told me more and more of her adventures, of all that Swann had been unaware of, which would have made him suffer so much because he had made this one person the focus of his sensitivity, and which he almost certainly guessed, merely from the look in her eyes when she saw an unknown man, or woman, who attracted her. She did it, in the end, simply to give me what she thought were subjects for novels. She was wrong, not because she had not provided the reserves of my imagination with an abundance of material, but because this had been done in a much more involuntary fashion and by an act that I initiated myself as I drew out from her, without her knowledge, the laws of her life.

M. de Guermantes kept his thunders solely for the Duchesse, to whose easy-going friendships Mme de Forcheville had not failed to draw his angry attention. So the Duchesse was very unhappy. It is true that M. de Charlus, with whom I discussed it once, claimed that the original faults had not been on his brother's part, that the legend of the Duchesse's purity had in reality been constructed over an incalculable number of cunningly dissimulated intrigues. I had never heard anybody else say that. In the eyes of almost everybody, Mme de Guermantes was a totally different woman. The universally accepted idea was that she had always been irreproachable. I was unable to decide which of these two ideas conformed to the truth, the truth which three out of four people are almost always unaware of. I remembered very clearly some blue-eyed roving glances from the Duchesse de Guermantes in the nave at Combray. But in truth neither of the ideas was refuted by these, each position being capable of giving them a different and equally acceptable meaning. In my foolishness, as a boy, I had taken them for a moment as looks of love aimed at me. Since then I had come to realize that they were merely the benevolent looks of a sovereign lady, like the one in the stained-glass windows of the church, towards her vassals. Had I now to believe that my first idea had been the right one, and that if the Duchesse had never subsequently spoken to me of love, this was because she was afraid of compromising herself with a friend of her aunt and her nephew rather than with an unknown boy encountered by chance in Saint-Hilaire de Combray?

The Duchesse may have felt glad for a moment to feel that her past was more firmly grounded for being shared with me, but in answer to some questions which I put to her about the provincial background of M. de Bréauté, whom at the time I had scarcely distinguished from M. de Sagan or M. de Guermantes, she resumed her society woman stance, namely a scornful attitude towards society. While we were talking, the Duchesse showed me round the house. In the smaller sitting-rooms we found more intimate friends, who had preferred to get away from the throng in order to listen to the music. In a little Empire[120] sitting-room, where a few men in black evening clothes were listening, sitting on sofas, there was, beside a cheval-glass supported by a figure of Minerva, a chaise longue, set at a right angle, but with a hollow interior, like a cradle, on which a young woman was stretched at full length. Her relaxed pose, which the entry of the Duchesse did not induce her to alter, contrasted with the wonderful brilliance of her Empire dress in a nacarat silk beside which the reddest fuchsias would have paled and on whose pearly fabric emblems and flowers seemed long ago to have been pressed, for their traces were still etched deep within it. She greeted the Duchesse with a slight inclination of her beautiful dark head. Although it was broad daylight, as she had requested that the tall curtains be drawn, in order to facilitate contemplation of the music, and so that people did not twist their ankles, an urn had been lighted on a tripod, and from it came a faint, iridescent gleam. In response to my question, the Duchesse de Guermantes told me this was Mme de Saint-Euverte. I then wanted to know what relation she was to the Mme de Saint-Euverte whom I had known. Mme de Guermantes told me that she was the wife of one of her great-nephews, seemed to think she might have been born a La Rochefoucauld, but denied ever having known the Saint-Euvertes herself. I reminded her of the evening party (which admittedly I only knew about from hearsay) at which, as the Princesse de Laumes, she had come upon Swann, but Mme de Guermantes swore that she had never been at that party. The Duchesse had always been a little untruthful, and was now much more so. Mme de Saint-Euverte, to her, was a social figure – now much diminished with time – whom she enjoyed repudiating. I did not press my case. 'No, who you may have seen at my house, because he had a degree of wit, was the husband of the person you are talking about, whom I never had anything to do with. – But she didn't have a husband. – You probably thought that because they were separated, but he was a great deal nicer than she was.' It finally hit me that an enormous man, very tall, very strong, with completely white hair, whom I used to meet all over the place and whose name I had never known, was Mme de Saint-Euverte's husband. He had died the previous year. As for the niece, I do not know whether it was because of a stomach complaint, or nerves, or phlebitis, or an imminent, recent or miscarried confinement, that she was listening to the music lying down and not moving for anybody. In all probability, proud of her gorgeous red silks, she thought that by lying on the chaise longue she would look rather like Mme Récamier.[121] She had no idea that she was giving birth for me to a new blossoming of the Saint-Euverte name, which, after such a long interval, marked both the distance and the continuity of Time. It was Time that she was rocking in that hollow cradle, where the name of Saint-Euverte and Empire style were bursting into flower in red fuchsia silks. The Empire style was something that Mme de Guermantes declared she had always detested; that meant that she detested it now, which was true, for she followed fashion, although with some delay. Without complicating matters by talking about David, whom she knew very little about, when she was very young she had thought M. Ingres the most boring conventional painter, then suddenly the most delectable of those revered by Art Nouveau, to the point that she began to detest Delacroix. By what stages she had retreated from worship to reprobation it does not really matter, since these are shifts in taste which are reflected by art critics ten years before they become topics of conversation among clever women. After having censured the Empire style, she apologized for talking to me about people as insignificant as the Saint-Euvertes and about silly issues like the provincial side of Bréauté, for she was as far from imagining why I was interested in these matters as Mme de Saint-Euverte-La Rochefoucauld, seeking the good of her stomach or an Ingres-like effect, was far from suspecting that her name had captivated me, her husband's name, not the more glorious name of her parents, and that I saw it as her function, in this room full of symbols, to beguile and cradle Time.

'But why am I talking to you about this nonsense? It can't possibly interest you,' exclaimed the Duchesse. She had spoken this sentence under her breath and nobody could have heard what she said. But one young man (who subsequently interested me as bearing a name once much more familiar to me than that of

Saint-Euverte) got up with an expression of exasperation and moved further away in order to listen more intensely. For they were playing the Kreutzer Sonata,[122] although having misread the programme, he thought that it was a piece by Ravel which somebody had told him was as beautiful as Palestrina, but hard to understand. In his impatient rush to change his place, he bumped in the semi-darkness into an escritoire, which did not pass without several people turning their heads, the simple exercise of looking over their shoulders providing a momentary interruption to the torture of 'religiously' listening to the Kreutzer Sonata. And Mme de Guermantes and I, the causes of this little scandal, quickly moved to another room. 'Yes, how can these dreary little details interest a man of your calibre? It's like just now, when I saw you talking to Gilberte de Saint-Loup. She's not worth your attention. In my view that woman is just nothing, she's not even a woman, she's the most artificial, the most bourgeois thing I've ever seen' (for the Duchesse's aristocratic prejudices tinged even her defence of intellectuality). 'Anyway, are you sure you ought you to be coming to places like this? Today I suppose I can understand, because there was the recitation by Rachel which probably interested you. But lovely as it was, she doesn't give of her best in front of all these people. I'll have you to lunch alone with her. Then you'll see what she's really like. She's a hundred times better than anybody here. And after lunch she will recite some Verlaine for you. You'll be astonished by it. But no, I can't understand why you come to great soulless affairs like this. Unless of course you're gathering material…' she added dubiously, with a slight air of mistrust, but without risking anything further, as she was not very clear about what sort of thing constituted the improbable operation to which she was alluding.

She told me with particular pride about her afternoon gatherings where every day X—— and Y—— would be present. For she had acquired the notion, common to all the women with 'salons' whom in the past she used to despise (though these days she denied this), that real superiority, the sign of election as she saw it, was to have 'all the men' at one's house. If I chanced to say that some great lady with a salon had spoken ill of Mme Howland, when she was still alive, the Duchesse burst out laughing at my naïvety: 'Of course she did, she had all the men coming to her and that woman was trying to lure them away.'

'Don't you think, I said to the Duchesse, that it might be distressing for Mme de Saint-Loup to have to listen, as she just has, to her husband's former mistress?' I saw forming itself in Mme de Guermantes's face the blank expression behind which an oblique process of thought links what one has just heard to some rather unpleasant thoughts. An unexpressed process of thought, admittedly, but not all the serious things we say receive a verbal or a written response. Only a fool asks ten times in vain for a reply to a letter which was a mistake and which should never have been written; for letters like that only ever receive a response in the form of deeds, while the woman you imagined was merely slow in replying to your letters, addresses you as Monsieur when you next meet, instead of calling you by your first name. There was nothing of an unpleasant nature about my allusion to the relationship between Saint-Loup and Rachel, and at most it might annoy her for a moment by reminding her that I had been Robert's friend and perhaps his confidant on the subject of the rebuff that Rachel's performance at the Duchesse's party had resulted in. But she did not persist in those thoughts, the stormy expression vanished, and Mme de Guermantes replied to my question about Mme de Saint-Loup: 'If you ask me, I don't think it matters to her at all, Gilberte never loved her husband. She is a dreadful little thing. She loved the social position, the name, being my niece, and getting out of the gutter where she belonged, but since then she seems to have been doing her best to get back into it. I tell you, it distressed me very much for poor Robert's sake, because he may not have been a genius, but he could see it very well, and a whole lot of other things too. I shouldn't say anything because she is my niece, after all, and I don't have any positive proof that she was unfaithful to him, but there were an awful lot of stories. No, I'm wrong, there was one I do know about, with an officer from Méséglise, Robert wanted to challenge him. It was because of all that that Robert joined up, the war seemed liked a deliverance from his family worries; if you want to know what I think, he wasn't killed, he got himself killed. She never showed the slightest grief, she even astonished me by the unusually cynical way she affected indifference, which upset me a great deal because I was very fond of poor Robert. This may surprise you, because people don't know me very well, but I still often think about him; I never forget anyone. He never spoke to me about it, but he understood that I guessed everything. But just think about it, if she had loved her husband even a little bit, could she endure to be in the same drawing-room, unperturbed, as the woman with whom he had been so desperately in love for so many years? You could say for ever, even, because I'm quite certain it never stopped, even during the war. Heavens, she'd have had her by the throat!' exclaimed the Duchesse, forgetting that she herself, by arranging for Rachel to be invited and thereby making possible the scene she deemed to be inevitable if Gilberte had loved Robert, was perhaps acting cruelly. 'No, you know, she concluded, she is a slut.' Such an expression from Mme de Guermantes was rendered possible by her descent from the pleasant social circles of the Guermantes to socializing with actresses, and also because she grafted it on to an eighteenth-century manner which she thought full of vitality, and then also because she thought she could do whatever she liked. But the word itself was the product of the hatred she felt for Gilberte, by a need to hit her, if not physically then in effigy. At the same time, the Duchesse thought by this to justify the whole of her behaviour towards Gilberte, or rather against her, in society and within the family, where Robert's interests and his estate were concerned.

But as sometimes one's judgments receive apparent justification from facts of which one was unaware and could not have imagined, Gilberte, who had no doubt inherited some of the characteristics of her mother's family (and it may well be this accommodating attitude which I had unconsciously relied upon when I asked her to introduce me to very young girls), after some thought, from the request I had made, and doubtless so that the profit would stay in the family, drew a conclusion bolder than any I could have imagined. She said: 'If you'll allow me, I'm going to go and find my daughter to introduce to you. She is over there chatting to the Mortemart boy and other young things of no interest. I'm sure she'll be a nice friend for you.'

I asked her if Robert had been happy about having a daughter: 'Oh, he was very proud of her. Though of course given his tastes, Gilberte went on naïvely, I think he would have preferred a boy.' This daughter, whose name and fortune might have given her mother hope that she would marry a royal prince and crown the whole work of social ascendance begun by Swann and his wife, later chose to marry an obscure literary figure, for she was devoid of snobbery, and brought her family down to a level below that from which it had started. It was therefore extremely difficult to make subsequent generations believe that the parents of this obscure couple had held such an elevated position in society. The names of Swann and Odette de Crécy were miraculously revived to enable people to tell you that you were wrong, and that there was nothing so very extraordinary about the family; and people in the end thought that Mlle de Saint-Loup had made the best marriage she could, that her grandfather's with Odette de Crécy (he having no standing) had been made in a vain attempt to better himself, whereas on the contrary, at least from the point of view of love, his marriage had inspired theories like those which in the eighteenth century drove great aristocrats, under the spell of Rousseau, and other forerunners of the Revolution, to live a life of nature and to abandon their privileges.

My astonishment at her words and my pleasure at hearing them were rapidly replaced, as Mme de Saint-Loup disappeared in the direction of another sitting-room, by the idea of Past Time, which was also, in its way, prompted, without my having even seen her, by Mlle de Saint-Loup. Was she not, as indeed most human beings are, like one of those 'stars' in forests, cross-roads where roads converge which have come, as they do in our lives, from the most diverse starting-points? They were numerous enough, in my case, the roads leading to Mlle de Saint-Loup and radiating out again from her. Above all it was the two great 'ways' which had led to her, along which I had had so many walks and so many dreams – through her father, Robert de Saint-Loup, the Guermantes way, through her mother, Gilberte, the Méséglise way which was the 'way by Swann's'. One, through the little girl's mother and the Champs-Élysées, led me to Swann, to my evenings at Combray, to the Méséglise way; the other, through her father, to my afternoons at Balbec, where I could visualize him close to the sunlit sea. Already some connecting roads were establishing themselves between these two main routes. For the actual Balbec, where I had met Saint-Loup, was a place that I had so much wanted to go to very largely because of what Swann had told me about the churches there, especially about the Persian church, and then again, through Robert de Saint-Loup, the nephew of the Duchesse de Guermantes, I came back, in Combray once more, to the Guermantes way. But there were still many other points in my life to which Mlle de Saint-Loup led, to the lady in pink, who was her grandmother and whom I had met at my great-uncle's house. A new connecting road here, because this great-uncle's manservant, who let me in that day and who later, through the gift of a photograph, enabled me to identify the Lady in Pink, was the father of the young man whom not only M. de Charlus but the father of Mlle de Saint-Loup himself had been in love with, on whose account he had made her mother so unhappy. And was it not the grandfather of Mlle de Saint-Loup, Swann, who had first mentioned the music of Vinteuil to me,

just as it was Gilberte who had first spoken to me of Albertine? And it was by talking about the music of Vinteuil to Albertine that I had discovered who her great friend was and thus had begun that part of my life with her which led to her death and caused me so much pain. And it was also Mlle de Saint-Loup's father who had set off to try to make Albertine come back. And even to my whole life in society, whether in Paris in the drawing-rooms of Swann or the Guermantes, or at the opposite extreme with the Verdurins, thus bringing into line, alongside the two ways of Combray, the Champs-Élysées and the beautiful terrace of La Raspelière. In fact, what individuals have we known who, if we want to tell the story of our friendship with them, do not oblige us to set them successively in a series of quite different places in our lives? A life of Saint-Loup as portrayed by me would unfold in every sort of setting and involve the whole of my life, even those parts of it where he was least familiar, like my grandmother or like Albertine. And the Verdurins, even though at the opposite end of the scale, were connected to Odette through her past, and to Robert de Saint-Loup through Charlie; and think of the part played in their house by Vinteuil's music! Finally, Swann had been in love with Legrandin's sister, who in turn had known M. de Charlus, whose ward the young Cambremer had married. If it were only a matter of our hearts, the poet would have been right to speak of the 'mysterious threads' that are broken by life.[123] But it is even more true to say that life is ceaselessly weaving these threads between individuals and between events, that it interweaves them, doubles them, to make the weave thicker, to such an extent finally that between the least significant point in our past and all the others a rich network of memories gives us in fact a choice about which connection to make.

One might say that, if I tried not to make use of it unconsciously but to remember what it had been, there was not a single one of the things which were useful to us at that moment that had not been a living thing, something for us alive with its own life, subsequently transformed for our use into simple industrial raw material. My introduction to Mlle de Saint-Loup was about to take place in Mme Verdurin's house: spellbound, I thought over all the journeys I had made with the Albertine for whom I was going to ask Mlle de Saint-Loup to be a substitute – in the little tram, to Doville, to visit Mme Verdurin, the same Mme Verdurin who had brought together in love, and then forced apart, long before my love affair with Albertine, the grandfather and grandmother of Mlle de Saint-Loup – ! All round us were paintings by Elstir, the man who had introduced me to Albertine. And just to meld all my pasts together, Mme Verdurin, like Gilberte, had married a Guermantes.

It would not be possible to recount our relationship, even with a person we hardly knew, without recreating a succession of the most diverse settings of our life. So each individual – and I was one of these individuals myself – became a measure of duration for me each time he completed a revolution not just around himself, but around other people, and in particular by the successive positions he occupied in relation to me. And no doubt all these different planes, in relation to which Time, as I had just grasped in the course of this party, arranged my life, by giving me the idea that in a book whose intention was to tell the story of a life it would be necessary to use, in contrast to the flat psychology people normally use, a sort of psychology in space, added a new beauty to the resurrections that had taken place in my memory while I was lost in my thoughts alone in the library, since memory, by bringing the past into the present without making any changes to it, just as it was at the moment when it was the present, suppresses precisely this great dimension of Time through which a life is given reality.

I saw Gilberte coming towards me. Saint-Loup's marriage, and the thoughts which had preoccupied me then and were still the same this morning, were as fresh in my mind as if they were yesterday's, so I was astonished to see beside her a young girl of about sixteen, whose tall figure was a visible measure of the distance I had not wanted to see. Time, colourless and intangible, had been materialized in her so that I could, so to speak, see it and touch it, it had shaped her into a master-work, while at the same time on me, alas, it had merely done its work. Yet here was Mlle de Saint-Loup, in front of me. She had deep-set, piercing eyes and her delightful nose was slightly prominent, like a beak, and curved, not at all perhaps like Swann's, but more like Saint-Loup's. The spirit of that Guermantes had disappeared; but the enchanting head and piercing eyes of a bird in flight had taken up a new position on the shoulders of Mlle de Saint-Loup, likely for a long time to arouse dreams and reveries in those who had known her father.

I was struck by the way that her nose, constructed on the template of her mother's and grandmother's, stopped precisely at that perfect horizontal line beneath it, sublimely though perhaps a fraction late. Such an individual feature, even if it was the only one visible, would have made one statue recognizable among thousands of others, and I marvelled that nature should have returned at the appointed time to the granddaughter, as to the mother and to the grandmother, like a great and original sculptor, to perform this powerful and decisive stroke of the chisel. I thought she was very beautiful: still full of hopes, laughing, formed out of the very years that I had lost, she looked like my youth.

Finally, this idea of Time was valuable to me for one other reason, it was a spur, it told me that it was time to start, if I wanted to achieve what I had sometimes sensed during the course of my life, in brief flashes, on the Guermantes way, in my carriage-rides with Mme de Villeparisis, which had made me feel that life was worth living. How much better life seemed to me now that it seemed susceptible of being illuminated, taken out of the shadows, restored from our ceaseless falsification of it to the truth of what it was, in short, realized in a book! How happy the writer of a book like that would be, I thought, what a labour awaited him! To give some idea of it, one would have to go to the most elevated and divergent arts for comparisons; for this writer, who would also need to show the contrasting aspects of each character to create depth, would have to prepare his book scrupulously, perpetually regrouping his forces as in an offensive, and putting up with the work like tiredness, accepting it like a rule, constructing it like a church, following it like a regime, overcoming it like an obstacle, winning it like a friendship, feeding it up like a child, creating it like a world, without ever neglecting its mysteries, the explanations for which are probably to be found only in other worlds, while our occasional inklings of them are what, in life and in art, move us most deeply. In books of this scope, there are parts which have never had time to be more than sketched in and which will probably never be finished because of the very extent of the architect's plan. Think how many great cathedrals have been left unfinished! One feeds a book like that, one strengthens its weak parts, one looks after it, but eventually it grows up, it marks our tomb, and protects it from rumours and, for a time, from oblivion. But to return to myself, I was thinking about my book in more modest terms, and it would even be a mistake to say that I was thinking of those who would read it as my readers. For they were not, as I saw it, my readers, so much as readers of their own selves, my book being merely one of those magnifying glasses of the sort the optician at Combray used to offer his customers; my book, but a books thanks to which I would be providing them with the means of reading within themselves. With the result that I would not ask them to praise me or to denigrate me, only to tell me if it was right, if the words they were reading in themselves were really the ones I had written (possible divergences in this regard not necessarily always originating, it should be said, in my having been wrong, but sometimes in the fact that the reader's eyes might not be of a type for which my book was suitable as an aid for self-reading). And as every few moments I changed the comparison by which I could best and most materially represent the task on which I was embarking, I thought that at my big deal table, watched by Françoise, who, in the way that all unpretentious people who live alongside us do, had an intuitive understanding of my task (and I had sufficiently forgotten Albertine to have forgiven Françoise for any harm she had done her), I would work next to her, and work almost in the same way as her (at least in the way she used to in the past: she was now so old she could hardly see at all); for, pinning a supplementary page in place here and there, I should construct my book, I don't dare say, ambitiously, as if it were a cathedral, but simply as if it were a dress I was making. When I did not have all of what Françoise called my manuscribbles within reach, and could not find just the one that I wanted, Françoise would sympathize with my annoyance, as she always used to be saying how she could not sew if she did not have the right number thread and the proper buttons. And then through being so close to my life, she had developed a kind of instinctive understanding of literary work, more accurate than that of many intelligent people, let alone fools. Once, for example, when I had done my article for the *Figaro*, when the old butler, with the kind of commiseration which always slightly exaggerates the laborious nature of any alien task, like people who say: 'How it must tire you to sneeze like that,' expressed his pity for writers by saying: 'What a headache that must be,' Françoise, by contrast, sensed my happiness and respected my work. The only thing that angered her was when I told Bloch about the contents of my article in advance, as she was afraid he would write it first, and would say: 'You're too trusting, those people are all copifiers.' And indeedBloch did often give himself a retrospective alibi every time I had sketched out something he liked the sound of, by saying: 'That's a coincidence, I've just written something very similar myself, I must read it to you.' (He could not have read it to me then, but he would go and write it that evening.)

Because I often had to glue one piece on to another, the papers that Françoise called my manuscribbles kept getting torn. But Françoise would always be able to help me mend them, just as she put patches on the worn-out parts of her dresses or, while she was waiting for the glazier, as I was for the printer, she would stick a piece of newspaper over a broken pane in the kitchen window. Françoise would say to me, pointing to my note-books, eaten away like wood that insects have got into: 'It's all moth-eaten, look, that's a pity, there's a page here that looks like lace,' and examining it closely like a tailor: 'I don't think I can mend this, it's too far gone. It's a shame, those might have been your best ideas. You know what they used to say in Combray, even the best furriers don't know as much as the moths. They always get into the best material.'

But given that individual entities (whether human or not) in a book are made up of a large number of impressions which, taken from many girls, many churches, many sonatas, are then used to form a single sonata, a single church, a single girl, should I not make my book in the same way as Françoise made her braised beef in aspic, which M. de Norpois had so much liked, in which the jelly was enriched by so many carefully selected extra pieces of meat? And I was finally on the point of achieving what I had so longed for on my walks on the Guermantes way and believed impossible, as I had believed it to be impossible, when I got back home, ever to get used to going to sleep without kissing my mother or, later, to the idea that Albertine loved women, an idea with which in the end I lived without even noticing its presence; for our worst fears, like our greatest hopes, are not outside our powers, and we can come in the end to triumph over the former and to achieve the latter.

Yes, the idea of Time that I had just formed was telling me that it was time to apply myself to the work. It was high time; but, and this was the explanation for the anxiety which had beset me as soon as I entered the drawing-room, when the made-up faces had given me the idea of lost time, was there still time, and was I even still in a sufficiently fit condition? The mind has its landscapes and only a short time is allowed for their contemplation. My life had been like a painter who climbs up a road overhanging a lake that is hidden from view by a screen of rocks and trees. Through a gap he glimpses it, he has it all there in front of him, he takes up his brushes. But the night is already falling when there is no more painting, and after which no day will break. Only, one prerequisite of my work as I had just recently conceived it in the library was the thorough investigation of impressions which needed first to be recreated through memory. But that was threadbare.

First of all, nothing having yet been started, I might well feel anxious, even though I might think, on account of my age, that I still had a few years ahead of me, for my hour might strike at any moment. For I really had to start from the fact that I had a body, that is that I was perpetually under threat from a twofold danger, external and internal. Yet I spoke of it in those terms only as a convenience of language. For the internal danger, such as from a cerebral haemorrhage, is also external, as it threatens the body. And having a body is in itself the greatest threat to the mind. To human, thinking life, which should probably not be described as a miraculously perfected state of animal and physical life, so much as an imperfect state, still at the same rudimentary level as the communal existence of protozoa in polyparies or as the body of the whale, etc., in the organization of the life of the mind. The body encloses the mind in a fortress; before long the mind is besieged on all sides, and in the end the mind has to give itself up.

But accepting the distinction between the two sorts of danger threatening the mind, and beginning with the external one, I remembered that in my life so far, it had often happened in moments of intellectual excitement in situations where any physical movement on my part was suspended, as for example when I left the Rivebelle restaurant, half drunk, in a carriage to go to a nearby casino, that I felt the present object of my thought very clearly within myself, and understood how entirely dependent on chance it was, not only that this object had not entered my thoughts before, but also that, along with my body, it might be annihilated at any moment. I did not worry much about that then. My cheerfulness was not tempered by prudence or anxiety. I did not care if this joy ended after a second and became nothing. It was no longer like that now; because the happiness I experienced now was not merely the product of a purely subjective tension of the nerves, which isolates us from the past but, quite the opposite, came from an expansion of my mind in which this past was reshaped and re-actualized, and this gave me, though unfortunately only for a moment, something of permanent value. I would have liked to bequeath it to those whom I could have enriched with my treasure. Certainly what I had experienced in the library and was trying to protect was still pleasure, but it was no longer selfish pleasure, or at least its selfishness (for all the fruitful altruisms in nature develop in a selfish way, human altruism that is not selfish is sterile, like the altruism of a writer who breaks off his work to see a friend in trouble, or to accept a public office, or to write propaganda articles) is of a kind that is useful for other people. I no longer had the indifference I used to feel coming back from Rivebelle, I felt myself enhanced by the work I carried within me (as if by something precious and fragile that had been entrusted to me and which I would have wished to pass on intact to the hands for which it was destined, which were not my own). Now, feeling myself the bearer of a work of literature made the idea of an accident in which I might meet my death seem much more dreadful, even (to the extent that the work seemed necessary and lasting) absurd, in contrast with the scope of my wishes, with the impetus of my thoughts, but that did not make it any the less possible since (as the simplest incidents show us every day of our lives, as when, while one is trying very hard not to make a sound that might disturb a sleeping friend, a carafe placed too near the edge of the table falls off and wakes him) accidents, being products of material causes, can perfectly well occur at a moment when very different wishes, which they unwittingly destroy, make them quite appalling. I was well aware that my brain was a rich mining-basin, in which was a vast expanse and enormous diversity of valuable deposits. But would I have time to exploit them? I was the only person capable of doing it. For two reasons: my death would mean the disappearance not only of the one mineworker capable of extracting these minerals, but also of the mineral deposit itself; and when, in a little while, I left to go home, it needed only the car I would take to crash into another for my body to be destroyed and for my mind, from which life would be withdrawn, to be forced to abandon for ever the new ideas which at this very moment, not having had the time to put them in the securer surroundings of a book, it was anxiously keeping locked up within its quivering, protective, but fragile pulp. But by a bizarre coincidence this rational fear of danger emerged at a moment when I had recently become much less concerned about the idea of death. There had been a time when the fear of no longer being myself had horrified me, and similarly with each new love I felt (for Gilberte, for Albertine), because I could not bear the idea that one day the being who loved them would no longer exist, which seemed like a kind of death. But after so much repetition, this fear had by a natural process become transformed into a trustful equanimity.

An accident affecting the brain was not even necessary. Its symptoms, which I perceived as a feeling of emptiness in my head and a tendency to forget everything so that things only ever recurred by chance, as when in sorting out one's possessions one finds something one had forgotten or even had been searching for, were making me like a hoarder whose strong-box had a hole in it through which the wealth was progressively disappearing. For a while there existed a self which deplored the loss of these riches and tried to marshal the memory to resist it, but soon I felt that the memory, as it contracted, took this self with it.

If the idea of death during this period had, as we have seen, cast a gloom over love, the memory of love had for a long time now helped me not to be afraid of death. For I understood that dying was not something new but quite the reverse, that since my childhood I had already died a number of times. To take the most recent period, had I not been more attached to Albertine than to my life? Could I conceive of my personality, then, without my love for her continuing? Now that I no longer loved her, I was no longer the being who loved her, but a different being who did not love her, I had stopped loving her when I became somebody else. But there was no suffering involved in becoming this other person, in not loving Albertine any longer; and certainly some day not having my body any longer could not possibly seem as sad, from any point of view, as not loving Albertine one day had once seemed to be. And yet, how little I cared now about not loving her! These successive deaths, so feared by the self they were doomed to annihilate, so meaningless, so gentle after they had happened and when the person who was afraid of them was no longer there to feel them, had enabled me for some time now to understand how unwise it would be to be frightened of death. But it was now that I had been indifferent to it for a while that I was starting to fear it again, although in a different form, not for myself but for my book, for the birth of which this life of mine threatened by so many dangers was, for a time at least, indispensable. Victor Hugo says:

'Il faut que l'herbe pousse et que les enfants meurent.'[124]

Personally, I say that the cruel law of art is that human beings die and that we ourselves die after exhausting all the forms of suffering, so that not the grass of oblivion may grow, but the grass of eternal life, the vigorous grass of fruitful works of art, on which future generations will come, heedless of those asleep beneath it, to have their *déjeuner sur l'herbe*.[125]

I talked about external dangers; but there are internal dangers too. If I managed to escape an accident from without, who knows whether I might not be prevented from profiting from that grace by an accident supervening from within me, by some internal catastrophe, before the months needed to write this book had elapsed.

When in a few minutes I made my way home through the Champs-Élysées, who was to say that I would not be struck down by the same illness as my grandmother, one afternoon when she had gone there with me for a walk which was to be her last, although she had no suspicion, such is the ignorance in which we live, that the hand of the clock had, unawares, arrived at the point when the clenched spring of the clockwork was to strike the hour? Perhaps the fear of having already lived through almost the whole of the minute which precedes the first stroke of that hour, when it is already being prepared, perhaps this fear of the stroke that was about to toll in my brain, was like a shadowy recognition of what was about to occur, like a reflection in consciousness of the precarious state of the brain when its arteries are about to give up, something which is no more impossible than the sudden acceptance of death by men who have been wounded and who, although still lucid, when both the doctor and their desire to live attempt to mislead them, say, as they see what is about to happen: 'I'm going to die, I'm ready,' and write their farewells to their wife.

And in fact something very like this happened to me before I started my book, and happened in a guise I would never have suspected. People were telling me, one evening when I went out, that I was looking better than before, and expressing surprise that I still had all my black hair. But I nearly fell three times as I was going down the staircase. I had gone out for only two hours; but when I got back home, I felt as if I no longer had any memory, any thoughts, any strength, or even any existence. People might have come to see me, to proclaim me king, to seize me, to arrest me, and I would have allowed them to do it without uttering a word, without opening my eyes, like those people suffering from extremely bad seasickness who, in a boat crossing the Caspian sea, don't even put up a show of resistance if they are told they are to be thrown overboard. I did not, strictly speaking, have anything wrong with me, but I felt that I was no longer capable of anything, as sometimes happens to old men, alert the day before, who having broken their hip or suffering from a bout of indigestion, take to their bed and adopt an existence which is nothing but a more or less extended preparation for their now inevitable death. One of the selves, the one which long ago used to take part in those barbaric festivals called dining out, and where, for the men in white tie, for the women half-naked and plumed, values are so reversed that someone who fails to turn up to dinner after having accepted, or simply does not arrive until the roast, commits an act more culpable than all the immoral acts discussed casually during dinner, along with recent deaths, and where death or life-threatening illness are the only excuses for not coming, so long as warning be given, even if one were dying, in sufficient time for another fourteenth guest to be invited, this one of my selves had kept its scruples and lost its memory. The other self, the one which had conceived his work, on the other hand still remembered. I had received an invitation from Mme Molé, and learned that Mme Sazerat's son was dead. I had decided to use one of the hours after which I could no longer utter a word, my tongue being as tied as my grandmother's had been when she was dying, nor even swallow milk, to send my excuses to Mme Molé and my condolences to Mme Sazerat. But after a few moments I forgot what I was meant to be doing. A fortunate forgetfulness, for the memory of my work was alert and ready to use the unexpected gift of the extra hour to lay the first foundations. Unfortunately, as I took hold of my note-book to start writing, Mme Molé's card slid out and caught my attention. Immediately the forgetful self, which was able to dominate the other one, as is always the case with scrupulous barbarians who have been out to dinner, pushed away the note-book and wrote to Mme Molé (who would no doubt have been very impressed, had she known it, at my putting my reply to her invitation ahead of my architectural labours). Then a word in my reply suddenly reminded me that Mme Sazerat had lost her son, and I wrote to her too, then, having sacrificed a genuine duty to the factitious obligation to show that I was sensitive and polite, I fell back exhausted, closed my eyes and could do nothing but vegetate for a week. Yet while all these pointless duties, to which I was always ready to sacrifice the real one, had left my head after a few minutes, the idea of my construction never left me for an instant. I did not know if it would be a church in which the faithful would gradually be able to learn truths and discover harmonies, the great general plan, or if it would remain – like a druidic monument on the high point of an island – something for ever unvisited. But I had decided to devote all my powers to it, which seemed to be failing regretfully and so as to leave me time, once the walls were up, to close 'the funerary gate'.[126] Soon I was able to show people a few sketches. Nobody understood anything. Even those who were well disposed towards my perception of the truths which I intended subsequently to engrave within the temple congratulated me on having discovered them with a 'microscope', when on the contrary I had used a telescope to make out things which were indeed very small, but only because they were situated a long way away, each of them a world in itself. In the places where I was trying to find general laws, I was accused of sifting through endless detail. So what was the point of all of it? I had had a certain facility when I was young, and Bergotte had thought the pages I had written as a student 'splendid'. But instead of working, I had lived a life of idleness, of dissipation and pleasure, of illness, anxieties and obsessions, and was undertaking my work on the eve of my death, without knowing anything about my craft. I no longer felt strong enough to face up to my obligations to other people, nor to my duties towards my thought and my work, still less to both of them. As far as the former were concerned, forgetting that there were letters to write, etc., simplified my task. But suddenly, after a month or so, the association of ideas caused me to remember them, with a twinge of conscience, and I was overwhelmed with the sense of my own impotence. I was surprised to discover that I did not really mind it, that since the day when my legs had trembled so badly while I was going down the staircase I had become indifferent to everything, I longed for nothing but rest, while I waited for the great repose which would finally come. It was not because I was postponing until after my death the admiration which, it seemed to me, people ought to have for my work that I was indifferent to the approbation of the current elite. The elite after my death could think what it liked, it would no longer be of any concern to me. In reality, if I thought about my work and not at all about the letters to which I ought to be replying, this was no longer because I was making any great distinction of importance between the two things, as I had done during my idleness and had continued to do after I had started work, until the day when I had had to catch hold of the staircase banister. The organization of my memory, of my preoccupations, was bound up with my work, perhaps because, whereas the letters were forgotten the moment after, the idea of my book was in my head, always the same, in a perpetual process of becoming. But it had also become tiresome. I felt like a son whose dying mother still feels the need to take care of him all the time, in between her injections and her cuppings. She may still love him, but knows this only through the exasperating sense of the duty she feels to look after him. In my case the powers of the writer were no longer up to the selfish demands made by the work. Since the day of the staircase nothing in the world, no happiness, whether it came from people's friendship, from the progress of my work, from the hope of glory, reached me except as very weak, pale sunshine, not strong enough to warm me, to bring me to life, to give me any kind of desire, and yet it was still too bright, wan as it was, for my eyes, which preferred to close, and I turned my face to the wall. It seemed, from the slight movement I felt in my lips, that I must have had a little smile right at the corner of my mouth when a lady wrote to me: 'I was *very surprised* to receive no reply to my letter.' None the less, that would remind me of her letter, and I would answer it. In order that people should not think me ungrateful, I wanted to try to show the same level of politeness as that which people must have shown to me. And I was overwhelmed by the imposition on my failing existence of the superhuman fatigues of life. The loss of my memory helped me somewhat by cutting out some of my obligations; my work replaced them.

This idea of death established itself permanently within me, in the way that love does. Not that I was in love with death, I hated it. But after having contemplated it from time to time, as one does a woman with whom one is not yet in love, the thought of it adhered to the deepest stratum of my brain so completely that I could not think about anything without its first passing through the idea of death, and even if I was doing nothing, remaining in a state of complete repose, the idea of death kept me company as ceaselessly as the idea of my self. I do not think that, on the day when I became half-dead, it was the accidents which characterized that state, the incapacity to descend a staircase, to recall a name, to get up, that had even unconsciously caused this idea of death,

the idea that I was already practically dead, so much as that they had both come together and the great mirror of the mind had inevitably reflected a new reality. Yet I did not see how one could pass from the ailments that I had to total death without any warning. But then I thought about other people, about all the people who die every day without the hiatus between their illness and their death seeming at all extraordinary to us. I even thought that it was only because I was seeing them from within (even more than through the illusions of hope) that certain ailments, taken one by one, did not seem fatal, even though I believed that I was dying, just as those who are most convinced that their time has come are nevertheless easily persuaded that their inability to pronounce certain words has nothing at all to do with a stroke or aphasia but stems from a tiredness of the tongue, a nervous state akin to stammering, or exhaustion following a bout of indigestion.

For myself, what I had to write was something different from a dying man's farewell, longer, and for more than one person. Longer to write. In the daytime, at best, I could try to sleep. If I worked, it would be only at night. But I would need a good number of nights, perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand. And I would be living with the anxiety of not knowing whether the Master of my destiny, less indulgent than the Sultan Shahriyar, when I broke off my story each morning, would stay my death sentence, and permit me to take up the continuation again the following evening. Not that I was claiming in any way to be rewriting the *Arabian Nights*, any more than the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon, both of them books written at night, nor any of the other books that I had loved in the naïvety of my childhood, when I had become as superstitiously attached to them as I would be to my loves, and was unable to imagine without horror any book that was different from them. But, as Elstir found with Chardin, one can remake something one loves only by renouncing it. No doubt my books too, like my mortal being, would eventually die, one day. But one has to resign oneself to dying. One accepts the thought that in ten years oneself, in a hundred years one's books, will not exist. Eternal duration is no more promised to books than it is to men.

It would be a book as long as the *Arabian Nights* perhaps, but quite different. It is probably true that when one is in love with a work of literature one wants to make something as like it as possible, but one needs to sacrifice one's love of the moment, think not of one's own taste, but of a truth which does not ask for your preferences and forbids you to think about them. And only if one follows it will one sometimes find that one has come upon what one abandoned, that, by forgetting them, one has written the *Arabian Nights* or the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon for a new age. But was there still enough time for me? Was it not too late?

I asked myself not only 'Is there still enough time?' but also 'Am I still in a sufficiently fit condition?' The illness which, by compelling me, like a severe spiritual adviser, to die to the world, had done me a service for 'except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit',[127] the illness which, after my idleness had protected me from my facility, was now perhaps going to protect me from idleness, had also exhausted my powers and, as I had long observed, particularly at the time when I stopped loving Albertine, my powers of memory. But was not the re-creation through memory of impressions, which then needed to be investigated, illuminated and transformed into intellectual equivalents, one of the preconditions, almost the very essence, of the work of art as I had conceived it just now in the library? Oh, if only I still had the powers that were still intact on the evening which had come back into my mind when I noticed *François le Champi*! It was that evening, when my mother abdicated her authority, that marked the beginning, along with the slow death of my grandmother, of the decline of my will and of my health. Everything had been decided at the moment when, unable to bear the idea of waiting until the next day to set my lips on my mother's face, I had made my resolution, jumped out of bed, and gone, in my nightshirt, to stay by the window through which the moonlight came, until I heard M. Swann go. My parents having gone with him, I heard the garden gate open, the bell ring, the gate close again…

Then I suddenly thought that, if I did still have the strength to complete my work, this afternoon party – like certain days long ago at Combray which had influenced me – which had, just today, given me both the idea of my work and the fear of not being able to accomplish it, would be bound to mark it more than anything else with the form that I had sensed long ago in the church at Combray, and which normally remains invisible to us, the form of Time.

There are, of course, many other errors of the senses, and we have seen how various episodes of this narrative had proved this to me, which falsify our perception of the real appearance of the world. But where necessary, by doing everything I could to give the most exact transcription, I would be able to keep the location of sounds unchanged, to abstain from detaching them from their cause, besides which the intellect situates them only after the event, even though to make the rain sing gently in the middle of the room and to make the bubbling of our tisane fall torrentially in the courtyard ought, after all, to be no more disconcerting than what painters have done so often when they have depicted, very close or very far away, depending on how the laws of perspective, the intensity of colour and our first illusory glance make them appear to us, a sail or a peak, which the rational mind will then relocate, sometimes across enormous distances. I might, even though the error would be more serious, continue the general practice of adding features to the face of a passer-by, although instead of a nose, cheeks and a chin, there should not really be anything except an empty space over which would flicker, at most, the reflection of our desires. And even if I did not have the leisure to prepare, and this was a much more important matter, the hundred masks which ought properly to be attached to a single face, if only because of all the eyes that see it and the different meanings they read into its features, as well as for the same eyes the effect of hope and fear or, on the contrary, of the love and habit which for thirty years can conceal the changes wrought by age; even if I was not in the end proposing, although my relationship with Albertine had been enough to show me that anything else is factitious and untruthful, to represent certain individuals not as outside but as inside us, where their least acts can entail fatal disturbances, and to vary the light of the moral sky, according to the differing pressures of our sensibility or when, disturbing the serene skies of our certainty beneath which an object is so small, the slightest cloud of danger multiplies its size in a moment; if I could not use these changes and many others (the necessity for which, if one intends to depict reality, has become apparent in the course of this narrative) in the transcription of a universe which had to be completely redesigned, at least I would not fail to describe man, within it, as possessing the length not of his body but of his years, and as being obliged, in a task that grows more and more enormous, and which in the end defeats him, to drag them with him whenever he moves.

Moreover, the fact that we occupy an ever larger place in Time is something that everybody feels, and this universality could only delight me, since this was the truth, the truth suspected by everybody, that it was my task to try to elucidate. Not only does everybody feel that we occupy a place in Time, but the simplest measure it in approximately the same way as they measure the place we occupy in space, so that people of no special perspicacity, seeing two men whom they do not know, both with black moustaches, or both clean-shaven, will say that these are two men, one of about twenty and the other of about forty years old. Of course they will often be wrong in their estimate, but the fact that people think it possible at all shows that age is conceived as something measurable. The second man with the black moustache has effectively had twenty years added on to him.

It was this notion of embodied time, of past years not being separated from us, that it was now my intention to make such a prominent feature in my work, and it was at that very moment of decision, in the *hôtel* of the Princesse de Guermantes, that I heard that sound of my parents' footsteps as they led M. Swann to the gate, heard the tinkling of the bell, resilient, ferruginous, inexhaustible, shrill and fresh, which told me that M. Swann had gone and that Mama was on her way upstairs, heard the very sounds themselves, heard them even though they were situated so far away in the past. Then, as I thought of all the events which had to be set in place between the moment when I heard those sounds and this party at the Guermantes', I was frightened to think that the bell could still be ringing in me without my being able to do anything to alter the shrillness of its tinkling, since, no longer remembering very clearly how it faded away, and wanting to rediscover this, and to listen to it properly, I had to try to block out the sound of the conversations which the masks were holding all around me. In order to try to hear it at closer quarters, I was forced to go back down into myself. It must therefore be that this tinkling was always there, and also, between it and the present moment, the whole of this past, unrolled indefinitely, which I did not know that I was carrying. When it tinkled, I already existed, and for me still to be able to hear the tinkling there must have been no break in continuity, I must not have ceased for a moment, not taken a rest from existing, from thinking, from being conscious of myself, because this moment from long ago still stuck to me, so that I could still find it again, still go back to it, simply by going more deeply back into myself. And it is because they contain in this way every hour of the past that human bodies can do so much damage to those who love them, because they contain so many memories of joys and desires already effaced from their minds, but cruel indeed for anyone who contemplates and projects back through the array of time

the cherished body of which he is jealous, so jealous as to wish for its destruction. For, after death, Time leaves the body, and the memories – so indifferent, so pale now – are effaced from her who no longer exists and soon will be from him whom at present they still torture, but in whom they will eventually die, when the desire of a living body is no longer there to support them. The depths of Albertine, whom I saw sleeping, and who was dead.

I felt a sense of tiredness and fear at the thought that all this length of time had not only uninterruptedly been lived, thought, secreted by me, that it was my life, that it was myself, but also that I had to keep it attached to me at every moment, that it supported me, that I was perched on its vertiginous summit, and that I was unable to move without its collaboration, without taking it with me. The date at which I heard the sound of the garden bell at Combray, so distant and yet still within me, was a benchmark in that vast dimension which I did not know I had. I felt giddy at the sight of so many years below me, yet within me, as if I were miles high.

I finally understood why the Duc de Guermantes, who had caused me to wonder, seeing him sitting on a chair, how he could have aged so little when he had so many more years than I had below him, had, the moment he rose and tried to stand upright, wavered on trembling legs, like those of some ancient archbishop whose metal crucifix is the only solid thing about him, and towards whom hasten a few strapping young seminarists, and could not move forward without shaking like a leaf, on the scarcely manageable summit of his eighty-three years, as if all men are perched on top of living stilts which never stop growing, sometimes becoming taller than church steeples, until eventually they make walking difficult and dangerous, and down from which, all of a sudden, they fall. (Was this the reason why the faces of men over a certain age were, even to the least aware eyes, so impossible to confuse with those of young men, and were visible only through a sort of cloudy aura of seriousness?) I began to be afraid that the stilts on which I myself was standing had already reached that height, and it did not seem to me that I would for very long have the strength to keep this past attached to me which already stretched so far down. Therefore, if enough time was left to me to complete my work, my first concern would be to describe the people in it, even at the risk of making them seem colossal and unnatural creatures, as occupying a place far larger than the very limited one reserved for them in space, a place in fact almost infinitely extended, since they are in simultaneous contact, like giants immersed in the years, with such distant periods of their lives, between which so many days have taken up their place – in Time.

Combray Again

FOR A LONG TIME, I went to bed early. Sometimes, my candle scarcely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I did not have time to say to myself: "I'm falling asleep." And, half an hour later, the thought that it was time to try to sleep would wake me; I wanted to put down the book I thought I still had in my hands and blow out my light; I had not ceased while sleeping to form reflections on what I had just read, but these reflections had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This belief lived on for a few seconds after my waking; it did not shock my reason but lay heavy like scales on my eyes and kept them from realizing that the candlestick was no longer lit. Then it began to grow unintelligible to me, as after metempsychosis do the thoughts of an earlier existence; the subject of the book detached itself from me, I was free to apply myself to it or not; immediately I recovered my sight and I was amazed to find a darkness around me soft and restful for my eyes, but perhaps even more so for my mind, to which it appeared a thing without cause, incomprehensible, a thing truly dark. I would ask myself what time it might be; I could hear the whistling of the trains which, remote or nearby, like the singing of a bird in a forest, plotting the distances, described to me the extent of the deserted countryside where the traveler hastens toward the nearest station; and the little road he is following will be engraved on his memory by the excitement he owes to new places, to unaccustomed activities, to the recent conversation and the farewells under the unfamiliar lamp that follow him still through the silence of the night, to the imminent sweetness of his return.

I would rest my cheeks tenderly against the lovely cheeks of the pillow, which, full and fresh, are like the cheeks of our childhood. I would strike a match to look at my watch. Nearly midnight. This is the hour when the invalid who has been obliged to go off on a journey and has had to sleep in an unfamiliar hotel, wakened by an attack, is cheered to see a ray of light under the door. How fortunate, it's already morning! In a moment the servants will be up, he will be able to ring, someone will come help him. The hope of being relieved gives him the courage to suffer. In fact he thought he heard footsteps; the steps approach, then recede. And the ray of light that was under his door has disappeared. It is midnight; they have just turned off the gas; the last servant has gone and he will have to suffer the whole night through without remedy.

I would go back to sleep, and would sometimes afterward wake again for brief moments only, long enough to hear the organic creak of the woodwork, open my eyes and stare at the kaleidoscope of the darkness, savor in a momentary glimmer of consciousness the sleep into which were plunged the furniture, the room, that whole of which I was only a small part and whose insensibility I would soon return to share. Or else while sleeping I had effortlessly returned to a period of my early life that had ended forever, rediscovered one of my childish terrors such as my great-uncle pulling me by my curls, a terror dispelled on the day—the dawn for me of a new era—when they were cut off. I had forgotten that event during my sleep, I recovered its memory as soon as I managed to wake myself up to escape the hands of my great-uncle, but as a precautionary measure I would completely surround my head with my pillow before returning to the world of dreams.

Sometimes, as Eve was born from one of Adam's ribs, a woman was born during my sleep from a cramped position of my thigh. Formed from the pleasure I was on the point of enjoying, she, I imagined, was the one offering it to me. My body, which felt in hers my own warmth, would try to find itself inside her, I would wake up. The rest of humanity seemed very remote compared with this woman I had left scarcely a few moments before; my cheek was still warm from her kiss, my body aching from the weight of hers. If, as sometimes happened, she had the features of a woman I had known in life, I would devote myself entirely to this end: to finding her again, like those who go off on a journey to see a longed-for city with their own eyes and imagine that one can enjoy in reality the charm of a dream. Little by little the memory of her would fade, I had forgotten the girl of my dream.

A sleeping man holds in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and worlds. He consults them instinctively as he wakes and reads in a second the point on the earth he occupies, the time that has elapsed before his waking; but their ranks can be mixed up, broken. If toward morning, after a bout of insomnia, sleep overcomes him as he is reading, in a position quite different from the one in which he usually sleeps, his raised arm alone is enough to stop the sun and make it retreat, and, in the first minute of his waking, he will no longer know what time it is, he will think he has only just gone to bed. If he dozes off in a position still more displaced and divergent, after dinner sitting in an armchair for instance, then the confusion among the disordered worlds will be complete, the magic armchair will send him traveling at top speed through time and space, and, at the moment of opening his eyelids, he will believe he went to bed several months earlier in another country. But it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was deep and allowed my mind to relax entirely; then it would let go of the map of the place where I had fallen asleep and, when I woke in the middle of the night, since I did not know where I was, I did not even understand in the first moment who I was; I had only, in its original simplicity, the sense of existence as it may quiver in the depths of an animal; I was more destitute than a cave dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place where I was, but of several of those where I had lived and where I might have been—would come to me like help from on high to pull me out of the void from which I could not have got out on my own; I crossed centuries of civilization in one second, and the image confusedly glimpsed of oil lamps, then of wing-collar shirts, gradually recomposed my self's original features.

Perhaps the immobility of the things around us is imposed on them by our certainty that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our mind confronting them. However that may be, when I woke thus, my mind restlessly attempting, without success, to discover where I was, everything revolved around me in the darkness, things, countries, years. My body, too benumbed to move, would try to locate, according to the form of its fatigue, the position of its limbs so as to deduce from this the direction of the wall, the placement of the furniture, so as to reconstruct and name the dwelling in which it found itself. Its memory, the memory of its ribs, its knees, its shoulders, offered in succession several of the rooms where it had slept, while around it the invisible walls, changing place according to the shape of the imagined room, spun through the shadows. And even before my mind, hesitating on the thresholds of times and shapes, had identified the house by reassembling the circumstances, it—my body—would recall the kind of bed in each one, the location of the doors, the angle at which the light came in through the windows, the existence of a hallway, along with the thought I had had as I fell asleep and that I had recovered upon waking. My stiffened side, trying to guess its orientation, would imagine, for instance, that it lay facing the wall in a big canopied bed and immediately I would say to myself: "Why, I went to sleep in the end even though Mama didn't come to say goodnight to me," I was in the country in the home of my grandfather, dead for many years; and my body, the side on which I was resting, faithful guardians of a past my mind ought never to have forgotten, recalled to me the flame of the night-light of Bohemian glass, in the shape of an urn, which hung from the ceiling by little chains, the mantelpiece of Siena marble, in my bedroom at Combray, at my grandparents' house, in faraway days which at this moment I imagined were present without picturing them to myself exactly and which I would see more clearly in a little while when I was fully awake.

Then the memory of a new position would reappear; the wall would slip away in another direction: I was in my room at Mme. de Saint-Loup's, in the country; good Lord! It's ten o'clock or even later, they will have finished dinner! I must have overslept during the nap I take every evening when I come back from my walk with Mme. de Saint-Loup, before putting on my evening clothes. For many years have passed since Combray, where, however late we returned, it was the sunset's red reflections I saw in the panes of my window. It is another sort of life one leads at Tansonville, at Mme. de Saint-Loup's, another sort of pleasure I take in going out only at night, in following by moonlight those lanes where I used to play in the sun; and the room where I fell asleep instead of dressing for dinner—from far off I can see it, as we come back, pierced by the flares of the lamp, a lone beacon in the night.

These revolving, confused evocations never lasted for more than a few seconds; often, in my brief uncertainty about where I was, I did not distinguish the various suppositions of which it was composed any better than we isolate, when we see a horse run, the successive positions shown to us by a kinetoscope. But I had seen sometimes one, sometimes another, of the bedrooms I had inhabited in my life, and in the end I would recall them all in the long reveries that followed my waking: winter bedrooms in which, as soon as you are in bed, you bury your head in a nest braided of the most disparate things: a corner of the pillow, the top of the covers, a bit of shawl, the side of the bed and an issue of the *Débats roses,*[1] which you end by cementing together using the birds' technique of pressing down on it indefinitely; where in icy weather the pleasure you enjoy is the feeling that you are separated from the outdoors (like the sea swallow which makes its nest deep in an underground passage in the warmth of the earth) and where, since the fire is kept burning all night in the fireplace, you sleep in a great cloak of

warm, smoky air, shot with the glimmers from the logs breaking into flame again, a sort of immaterial alcove, a warm cave dug out of the heart of the room itself, a zone of heat with shifting thermal contours, aerated by drafts which cool your face and come from the corners, from the parts close to the window or far from the hearth, and which have grown cold again: summer bedrooms where you delight in becoming one with the soft night, where the moonlight leaning against the half-open shutters casts its enchanted ladder to the foot of the bed, where you sleep almost in the open air, like a titmouse rocked by the breeze on the tip of a ray of light; sometimes the Louis XVI bedroom, so cheerful that even on the first night I had not been too unhappy there and where the slender columns that lightly supported the ceiling stood aside with such grace to show and reserve the place where the bed was; at other times, the small bedroom with the very high ceiling, hollowed out in the form of a pyramid two stories high and partly paneled in mahogany, where from the first second I had been mentally poisoned by the unfamiliar odor of the vetiver, convinced of the hostility of the violet curtains and the insolent indifference of the clock chattering loudly as though I were not there; where a strange and pitiless quadrangular cheval glass, barring obliquely one of the corners of the room, carved from deep inside the soft fullness of my usual field of vision a site for itself which I had not expected; where my mind, struggling for hours to dislodge itself, to stretch upward so as to assume the exact shape of the room and succeed in filling its gigantic funnel to the very top, had suffered many hard nights, while I lay stretched out in my bed, my eyes lifted, my ear anxious, my nostril restive, my heart pounding, until habit had changed the color of the curtains, silenced the clock, taught pity to the cruel oblique mirror, concealed, if not driven out completely, the smell of the vetiver and appreciably diminished the apparent height of the ceiling. Habit! That skillful but very slow housekeeper who begins by letting our mind suffer for weeks in a temporary arrangement; but whom we are nevertheless truly happy to discover, for without habit our mind, reduced to no more than its own resources, would be powerless to make a lodging habitable.

Certainly I was now wide-awake, my body had veered around one last time and the good angel of certainty had brought everything around me to a standstill, laid me down under my covers, in my bedroom, and put approximately where they belonged in the darkness my chest of drawers, my desk, my fireplace, the window onto the street and the two doors. But even though I knew I was not in any of the houses of which my ignorance upon waking had instantly, if not presented me with the distinct picture, at least made me believe the presence possible, my memory had been stirred; generally I would not try to go back to sleep right away; I would spend the greater part of the night remembering our life in the old days, in Combray at my great-aunt's house, in Balbec, in Paris, in Doncières, in Venice, elsewhere still, remembering the places, the people I had known there, what I had seen of them, what I had been told about them.

At Combray, every day, in the late afternoon, long before the moment when I would have to go to bed and stay there, without sleeping, far away from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom again became the fixed and painful focus of my preoccupations. They had indeed hit upon the idea, to distract me on the evenings when they found me looking too unhappy, of giving me a magic lantern, which, while awaiting the dinner hour, they would set on top of my lamp; and, after the fashion of the first architects and master glaziers of the Gothic age, it replaced the opacity of the walls with impalpable iridescences, supernatural multicolored apparitions, where legends were depicted as in a wavering, momentary stained-glass window. But my sadness was only increased by this since the mere change in lighting destroyed the familiarity which my bedroom had acquired for me and which, except for the torment of going to bed, had made it tolerable to me. Now I no longer recognized it and I was uneasy there, as in a room in some hotel or "chalet" to which I had come for the first time straight from the railway train.

Moving at the jerky pace of his horse, and filled with a hideous design, Golo would come out of the small triangular forest that velveted the hillside with dark green and advance jolting toward the castle of poor Geneviève de Brabant. This castle was cut off along a curved line that was actually the edge of one of the glass ovals arranged in the frame which you slipped between the grooves of the lantern. It was only a section of castle and it had a moor in front of it where Geneviève stood dreaming, wearing a blue belt. The castle and the moor were yellow, and I had not had to wait to see them to find out their color since, before the glasses of the frame did so, the bronze sonority of the name Brabant had shown it to me clearly. Golo would stop for a moment to listen sadly to the patter read out loud by my great-aunt, which he seemed to understand perfectly, modifying his posture, with a meekness that did not exclude a certain majesty, to conform to the directions of the text; then he moved off at the same jerky pace. And nothing could stop his slow ride. If the lantern was moved, I could make out Golo's horse continuing to advance over the window curtains, swelling out with their folds, descending into their fissures. The body of Golo himself, in its essence as supernatural as that of his steed, accommodated every material obstacle, every hindersome object that he encountered by taking it as his skeleton and absorbing it into himself, even the doorknob he immediately adapted to and floated invincibly over with his red robe or his pale face as noble and as melancholy as ever, but revealing no disturbance at this transvertebration.

Certainly I found some charm in these brilliant projections, which seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and send out around me such ancient reflections of history. But I cannot express the uneasiness caused in me by this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room I had at last filled with myself to the point of paying no more attention to the room than to that self. The anesthetizing influence of habit having ceased, I would begin to have thoughts, and feelings, and they are such sad things. That doorknob of my room, which differed for me from all other doorknobs in the world in that it seemed to open of its own accord, without my having to turn it, so unconscious had its handling become for me, was now serving as an astral body for Golo. And as soon as they rang for dinner, I hastened to run to the dining room where the big hanging lamp, ignorant of Golo and Bluebeard, and well acquainted with my family and beef casserole, shed the same light as on every other evening; and to fall into the arms of Mama, whom Geneviève de Brabant's misfortunes made all the dearer to me, while Golo's crimes drove me to examine my own conscience more scrupulously.

After dinner, alas, I soon had to leave Mama, who stayed there talking with the others, in the garden if the weather was fine, in the little drawing room to which everyone withdrew if the weather was bad. Everyone, except my grandmother, who felt that "it's a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country" and who had endless arguments with my father on days when it rained too heavily, because he sent me to read in my room instead of having me stay outdoors. "That's no way to make him strong and active," she would say sadly, "especially that boy, who so needs to build up his endurance and willpower." My father would shrug his shoulders and study the barometer, for he liked meteorology, while my mother, making no noise so as not to disturb him, watched him with a tender respect, but not so intently as to try to penetrate the mystery of his superior qualities. But as for my grandmother, in all weathers, even in a downpour when Françoise had rushed the precious wicker armchairs indoors so that they would not get wet, we would see her in the empty, rain-lashed garden, pushing back her disordered gray locks so that her forehead could more freely drink in the salubriousness of the wind and rain. She would say: "At last, one can breathe!" and would roam the soaked paths—too symmetrically aligned for her liking by the new gardener, who lacked all feeling for nature and whom my father had been asking since morning if the weather would clear—with her jerky, enthusiastic little step, regulated by the various emotions excited in her soul by the intoxication of the storm, the power of good health, the stupidity of my upbringing, and the symmetry of the gardens, rather than by the desire, quite unknown to her, to spare her plum-colored skirt the spots of mud under which it would disappear up to a height that was always, for her maid, a source of despair and a problem.

When these garden walks of my grandmother's took place after dinner, one thing had the power to make her come inside again: this was—at one of the periodic intervals when her circular itinerary brought her back, like an insect, in front of the lights of the little drawing room where the liqueurs were set out on the card table—if my great-aunt called out to her: "Bathilde! Come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!" To tease her, in fact (she had brought into my father's family so different a mentality that everyone poked fun at her and tormented her), since liqueurs were forbidden to my grandfather, my great-aunt would make him drink a few drops. My poor grandmother would come in, fervently beg her husband not to taste the cognac; he would become angry, drink his mouthful despite her, and my grandmother would go off again, sad, discouraged, yet smiling, for she was so humble at heart and so gentle that her tenderness for others, and the lack of fuss she made over her own person and her sufferings, came together in her gaze in a smile in which, unlike what one sees in the faces of so many people, there was irony only for herself, and for all of us a sort of kiss from her eyes, which could not see those she cherished without caressing them passionately with her gaze. This torture which my great-aunt inflicted on her, the spectacle of my grandmother's vain entreaties and of her weakness, defeated in advance, trying uselessly to take the liqueur glass away from my grandfather, were the kinds of things which you later become so accustomed to seeing that you smile as you contemplate them and take the part of the persecutor resolutely and gaily enough to persuade yourself privately that no persecution is involved; at that time they filled me with such horror that I would have liked to hit my great-aunt. But as soon as I heard: "Bathilde, come and stop your husband from drinking cognac!," already a man in my cowardice, I did what we all do, once we are grown up, when confronted with sufferings and injustices: I did not want to see them; I went up to sob at the very top of the house next to the schoolroom,[2] under the roofs, in a little room that smelled of orris root and was also perfumed by a wild black-currant bush which had sprouted outside between the stones of the wall and extended a branch of flowers through the half-open window. Intended

for a more specialized and more vulgar use, this room, from which during the day you could see all the way to the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, for a long time served me as a refuge, no doubt because it was the only one I was permitted to lock, for all those occupations of mine that demanded an inviolable solitude: reading, reverie, tears, and sensuous pleasure. Alas! I did not know that, much more than her husband's little deviations from his regimen, it was my weak will, my delicate health, the uncertainty they cast on my future that so sadly preoccupied my grandmother in the course of those incessant perambulations, afternoon and evening, when we would see, as it passed and then passed again, lifted slantwise toward the sky, her beautiful face with its brown furrowed cheeks, which with age had become almost mauve like the plowed fields in autumn, crossed, if she was going out, by a veil half raised, while upon them, brought there by the cold or some sad thought, an involuntary tear was always drying.

My sole consolation, when I went upstairs for the night, was that Mama would come kiss me once I was in bed. But this goodnight lasted so short a time, she went down again so soon, that the moment when I heard her coming up, then the soft sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, hung with little cords of plaited straw, passing along the hallway with its double doors, was for me a painful moment. It ushered in the moment that would follow, in which she would have left me, in which she would have gone back down. So that I came to wish that this goodnight I loved so much would take place as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite in which Mama had not yet come. Sometimes when, after kissing me, she opened the door to go, I wanted to call her back, to say "kiss me one more time," but I knew that immediately her face would look vexed, because the concession she was making to my sadness and agitation by coming up to kiss me, by bringing me this kiss of peace, irritated my father, who found these rituals absurd, and she would have liked to try to induce me to lose the need for it, the habit of it, far indeed from allowing me to acquire that of asking her, when she was already on the doorstep, for one kiss more. And to see her vexed destroyed all the calm she had brought me a moment before, when she had bent her loving face down over my bed and held it out to me like a host for a communion of peace from which my lips would draw her real presence and the power to fall asleep. But those evenings, when Mama stayed so short a time in my room, were still sweet compared to the ones when there was company for dinner and when, because of that, she did not come up to say goodnight to me. That company was usually limited to M. Swann, who, apart from a few acquaintances passing through, was almost the only person who came to our house at Combray, sometimes for a neighborly dinner (more rarely after that unfortunate marriage of his, because my parents did not want to receive his wife), sometimes after dinner, unexpectedly. On those evenings when, as we sat in front of the house under the large chestnut tree, around the iron table, we heard at the far end of the garden, not the copious high-pitched bell that drenched, that deafened in passing with its ferruginous, icy, inexhaustible noise any person in the household who set it off by coming in "without ringing," but the shy, oval, golden double tinkling of the little visitors' bell, everyone would immediately wonder: "A visitor—now who can that be?" but we knew very well it could only be M. Swann; my great-aunt speaking loudly, to set an example, in a tone of voice that she strained to make natural, said not to whisper that way; that nothing is more disagreeable for a visitor just coming in who is led to think that people are saying things he should not hear; and they would send as a scout my grandmother, who was always glad to have a pretext for taking one more walk around the garden and who would profit from it by surreptitiously pulling up a few rose stakes on the way so as to make the roses look a little more natural, like a mother who runs her hand through her son's hair to fluff it up after the barber has flattened it too much.

We would all remain hanging on the news my grandmother was going to bring us of the enemy, as though there had been a great number of possible assailants to choose among, and soon afterward my grandfather would say: "I recognize Swann's voice." In fact one could recognize him only by his voice, it was difficult to make out his face, his aquiline nose, his green eyes under a high forehead framed by blond, almost red hair, cut Bressant-style,[3] because we kept as little light as possible in the garden so as not to attract mosquitoes, and I would go off, as though not going for that reason, to say that the syrups should be brought out; my grandmother placed a great deal of importance, considering it more amiable, on the idea that they should not seem anything exceptional, and for visitors only. M. Swann, though much younger, was very attached to my grandfather, who had been one of the closest friends of his father, an excellent man but peculiar, in whom, apparently, a trifle was sometimes enough to interrupt the ardor of his feelings, to change the course of his thinking. Several times a year I would hear my grandfather at the table telling anecdotes, always the same ones, about the behavior of old M. Swann upon the death of his wife, over whom he had watched day and night. My grandfather, who had not seen him for a long time, had rushed to his side at the estate the Swanns owned in the vicinity of Combray and, so that he would not be present at the coffining, managed to entice him for a while, all in tears, out of the death chamber. They walked a short way in the park, where there was a little sunshine. Suddenly M. Swann, taking my grandfather by the arm, cried out: "Oh, my old friend, what a joy it is to be walking here together in such fine weather! Don't you think it's pretty, all these trees, these hawthorns! And my pond—which you've never congratulated me on! You look as sad as an old nightcap. Feel that little breeze? Oh, say what you like, life has something to offer despite everything, my dear Amédée!" Suddenly the memory of his dead wife came back to him and, no doubt feeling it would be too complicated to try to understand how he could have yielded to an impulse of happiness at such a time, he confined himself, in a habitual gesture of his whenever a difficult question came into his mind, to passing his hand over his forehead, wiping his eyes and the lenses of his lorgnon. Yet he could not be consoled for the death of his wife, but, during the two years he survived her, would say to my grandfather: "It's odd, I think of my poor wife often, but I can't think of her for long at a time." "Often, but only a little at a time, like poor old Swann," had become one of my grandfather's favorite phrases, which he uttered apropos of the most different sorts of things. I would have thought Swann's father was a monster, if my grandfather, whom I considered a better judge and whose pronouncement, forming a legal precedent for me, often allowed me later to dismiss offenses I might have been inclined to condemn, had not exclaimed: "What! He had a heart of gold!"

For many years, even though, especially before his marriage, the younger M. Swann often came to see them at Combray, my great-aunt and my grandparents did not suspect that he had entirely ceased to live in the kind of society his family had frequented and that, under the sort of incognito which this name Swann gave him among us, they were harboring—with the perfect innocence of honest inn-keepers who have under their roof, without knowing it, some celebrated highwayman—one of the most elegant members of the Jockey Club,[4] a favorite friend of the Comte de Paris[5] and the Prince of Wales,[6] one of the men most sought after by the high society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Our ignorance of this brilliant social life that Swann led was obviously due in part to the reserve and discretion of his character, but also to the fact that bourgeois people in those days formed for themselves a rather Hindu notion of society and considered it to be made up of closed castes, in which each person, from birth, found himself placed in the station which his family occupied and from which nothing, except the accidents of an exceptional career or an unhoped-for marriage, could withdraw him in order to move him into a higher caste. M. Swann, the father, was a stockbroker; "Swann the son" would find he belonged for his entire life to a caste in which fortunes varied, as in a tax bracket, between such and such fixed incomes. One knew which had been his father's associations, one therefore knew which were his own, with which people he was "in a position" to consort. If he knew others, these were bachelor acquaintances on whom old friends of the family, such as my relatives, would close their eyes all the more benignly because he continued, after losing his parents, to come faithfully to see us; but we would have been ready to wager that these people he saw, who were unknown to us, were the sort he would not have dared greet had he encountered them when he was with us. If you were determined to assign Swann a social coefficient that was his alone, among the other sons of stockbrokers in a position equal to that of his parents, this coefficient would have been a little lower for him because, very simple in his manner and with a long-standing "craze" for antiques and painting, he now lived and amassed his collections in an old town house which my grandmother dreamed of visiting, but which was situated on the quai d'Orléans, a part of town where my great-aunt felt it was ignominious to live. "But are you a connoisseur? I ask for your own sake, because you're likely to let the dealers unload some awful daubs on you," my great-aunt would say to him; in fact she did not assume he had any competence and even from an intellectual point of view had no great opinion of a man who in conversation avoided serious subjects and showed a most prosaic preciseness not only when he gave us cooking recipes, entering into the smallest details, but even when my grandmother's sisters talked about artistic subjects. Challenged by them to give his opinion, to express his admiration for a painting, he would maintain an almost ungracious silence and then, on the other hand, redeem himself if he could provide, about the museum in which it was to be found, about the date at which it had been painted, a pertinent piece of information. But usually he would content himself with trying to entertain us by telling a new story each time about something that had just happened to him involving people selected from among those we knew, the Combray pharmacist, our cook, our coachman. Certainly these tales made my great-aunt laugh, but she could not distinguish clearly if this was because of the absurd role Swann always assigned himself or because of the wit he showed in telling them: "You are quite a character, Monsieur Swann!" Being the only rather vulgar person in our family, she took care to point out to strangers, when they were talking about Swann, that, had he wanted to, he could have lived on the boulevard Haussmann or the avenue de l'Opéra, that he was the son of M. Swann, who must have left four or five million, but that this was his whim. One that she

felt moreover must be so amusing to others that in Paris, when M. Swann came on New Year's Day to bring her her bag of marrons glacés,[7] she never failed, if there was company, to say to him: "Well, Monsieur Swann! Do you still live next door to the wine warehouse, so as to be sure of not missing the train when you go to Lyon?"[8] And she would look out of the corner of her eye, over her lorgnon, at the other visitors.

But if anyone had told my great-aunt that this same Swann, who, as the son of old M. Swann, was perfectly "qualified" to be received by all the "best of the bourgeoisie," by the most respected notaries or lawyers of Paris (a hereditary privilege he seemed to make little use of), had, as though in secret, quite a different life; that on leaving our house, in Paris, after telling us he was going home to bed, he retraced his steps as soon as he had turned the corner and went to a certain drawing room that no eye of any broker or broker's associate would ever contemplate, this would have seemed to my aunt as extraordinary as might to a better-educated lady the thought of being personally on close terms with Aristaeus and learning that, after having a chat with her, he would go deep into the heart of the realms of Thetis, into an empire hidden from mortal eyes, where Virgil shows him being received with open arms; or—to be content with an image that had more chance of occurring to her, for she had seen it painted on our petits-fours plates at Combray—of having had as a dinner guest Ali Baba, who, as soon as he knows he is alone, will enter the cave dazzling with unsuspected treasure.

One day when he had come to see us in Paris after dinner apologizing for being in evening clothes, Françoise having said, after he left, that she had learned from the coachman that he had dined "at the home of a princess," "Yes, a princess of the demimonde!" my aunt had responded, shrugging her shoulders without raising her eyes from her knitting, with serene irony.

Thus, my great-aunt was cavalier in her treatment of him. Since she believed he must be flattered by our invitations, she found it quite natural that he never came to see us in the summertime without having in his hand a basket of peaches or raspberries from his garden and that from each of his trips to Italy he would bring me back photographs of masterpieces.

They did not hesitate to send him off in search of it when they needed a recipe for gribiche sauce or pineapple salad for large dinners to which they had not invited him, believing he did not have sufficient prestige for one to be able to serve him up to acquaintances who were coming for the first time. If the conversation turned to the princes of the House of France: "people you and I will never know, will we, and we can manage quite well without that, can't we," my great-aunt would say to Swann, who had, perhaps, a letter from Twickenham[9] in his pocket; she had him push the piano around and turn the pages on the evenings when my grandmother's sister sang, handling this creature, who was elsewhere so sought after, with the naive roughness of a child who plays with a collector's curio no more carefully than with some object of little value. No doubt the Swann who was known at the same time to so many clubmen was quite different from the one created by my great-aunt, when in the evening, in the little garden at Combray, after the two hesitant rings of the bell had sounded, she injected and invigorated with all that she knew about the Swann family the dark and uncertain figure who emerged, followed by my grandmother, from a background of shadows, and whom we recognized by his voice. But even with respect to the most insignificant things in life, none of us constitutes a material whole, identical for everyone, which a person has only to go look up as though we were a book of specifications or a last testament; our social personality is a creation of the minds of others. Even the very simple act that we call "seeing a person we know" is in part an intellectual one. We fill the physical appearance of the individual we see with all the notions we have about him, and of the total picture that we form for ourselves, these notions certainly occupy the greater part. In the end they swell his cheeks so perfectly, follow the line of his nose in an adherence so exact, they do so well at nuancing the sonority of his voice as though the latter were only a transparent envelope that each time we see this face and hear this voice, it is these notions that we encounter again, that we hear. No doubt, in the Swann they had formed for themselves, my family had failed out of ignorance to include a host of details from his life in the fashionable world that caused other people, when they were in his presence, to see refinements rule his face and stop at his aquiline nose as though at their natural frontier; but they had also been able to garner in this face disaffected of its prestige, vacant and spacious, in the depths of these depreciated eyes, the vague, sweet residue—half memory, half forgetfulness—of the idle hours spent together after our weekly dinners, around the card table or in the garden, during our life of good country neighborliness. The corporeal envelope of our friend had been so well stuffed with all this, as well as with a few memories relating to his parents, that this particular Swann had become a complete and living being, and I have the impression of leaving one person to go to another distinct from him, when, in my memory, I pass from the Swann I knew later with accuracy to that first Swann—to that first Swann in whom I rediscover the charming mistakes of my youth and who in fact resembles less the other Swann than he resembles the other people I knew at the time, as though one's life were like a museum in which all the portraits from one period have a family look about them, a single tonality—to that first Swann abounding in leisure, fragrant with the smell of the tall chestnut tree, the baskets of raspberries, and a sprig of tarragon.

Yet one day when my grandmother had gone to ask a favor from a lady she had known at the Sacré-Coeur[10] (and with whom, because of our notion of the castes, she had not wished to remain in close contact despite a reciprocal congeniality), this lady, the Marquise de Villeparisis of the famous de Bouillon[11] family, had said to her: "I believe you know M. Swann very well; he is a great friend of my nephew and niece, the des Laumes." My grandmother had returned from her visit full of enthusiasm for the house, which overlooked some gardens and in which Mme. de Villeparisis had advised her to rent a flat, and also for a waistcoat maker and his daughter, who kept a shop in the courtyard where she had gone to ask them to put a stitch in her skirt, which she had torn in the stairwell. My grandmother had found these people wonderful, she declared that the girl was a gem and the waistcoat maker was most distinguished, the finest man she had ever seen. Because for her, distinction was something absolutely independent of social position. She went into ecstasies over an answer the waistcoat maker had given her, saying to Mama: "Sévigné[12] couldn't have said it any better!" and, in contrast, of a nephew of Mme. de Villeparisis whom she had met at the house: "Oh, my dear daughter, how common he is!"

Now the remark about Swann had had the effect, not of raising him in my great-aunt's estimation, but of lowering Mme. de Villeparisis. It seemed that the respect which, on my grandmother's faith, we accorded Mme. de Villeparisis created a duty on her part to do nothing that would make her less worthy, a duty in which she had failed by learning of Swann's existence, by permitting relatives of hers to associate with him. "What! She knows Swann? A person you claim is a relation of the Maréchal de MacMahon?"[13] My family's opinion regarding Swann's associations seemed confirmed later by his marriage to a woman of the worst social station, practically a cocotte, whom, what was more, he never attempted to introduce, continuing to come to our house alone, though less and less, but from whom they believed they could judge—assuming it was there that he had found her—the social circle, unknown to them, that he habitually frequented.

But one time, my grandfather read in a newspaper that M. Swann was one of the most faithful guests at the Sunday lunches given by the Duc de X . . . , whose father and uncle had been the most prominent statesmen in the reign of Louis-Philippe.[14] Now, my grandfather was interested in all the little facts that could help him enter imaginatively into the private lives of men like Molé, the Duc Pasquier, the Duc de Broglie.[15] He was delighted to learn that Swann associated with people who had known them. My great-aunt, however, interpreted this news in a sense unfavorable to Swann: anyone who chose his associations outside the caste into which he had been born, outside his social "class," suffered in her eyes a regrettable lowering of his social position. It seemed to her that he gave up forthwith the fruit of all the good relations with well-placed people so honorably preserved and stored away for their children by foresightful families (my great-aunt had even stopped seeing the son of a lawyer we knew because he had married royalty and was therefore in her opinion demoted from the respected rank of lawyer's son to that of one of those adventurers, former valets or stableboys, on whom they say that queens sometimes bestowed their favors). She disapproved of my grandfather's plan to question Swann, the next evening he was to come to dinner, about these friends of his we had discovered. At the same time my grandmother's two sisters, old maids who shared her nobility of character, but not her sort of mind, declared that they could not understand what pleasure their brother-in-law could find in talking about such foolishness. They were women of lofty aspirations, who for that very reason were incapable of taking an interest in what is known as tittle-tattle, even if it had some historic interest, and more generally in anything that was not directly connected to an aesthetic or moral subject. The disinterestedness of their minds was such, with respect to all that, closely or distantly, seemed connected with worldly matters, that their sense of hearing—having finally understood its temporary uselessness when the conversation at dinner assumed a tone that was frivolous or merely pedestrian without these two old spinsters being able to lead it back to the subjects dear to them—would suspend the functioning of its receptive organs and allow them to begin to atrophy. If my grandfather needed to attract the two sisters' attention at such times, he had to resort to those bodily signals used by alienists with certain lunatics suffering from distraction: striking a glass repeatedly with the blade of a knife while speaking to them sharply and looking them suddenly in the eye, violent methods which these

psychiatrists often bring with them into their ordinary relations with healthy people, either from professional habit or because they believe everyone is a little crazy.

They were more interested when, the day before Swann was to come to dinner, and had personally sent them a case of Asti wine, my aunt, holding a copy of the *Figaro* in which next to the title of a painting in an exhibition of Corot,[16] these words appeared: "From the collection of M. Charles Swann," said: "Did you see this? Swann is 'front page news' in the *Figaro*." "But I've always told you he had a great deal of taste," said my grandmother. "Of course you would! Anything so long as your opinion is not the same as *ours,*" answered my great-aunt, who, knowing that my grandmother was never of the same opinion as she, and not being quite sure that she herself was the one we always declared was right, wanted to extract from us a general condemnation of my grandmother's convictions against which she was trying to force us into solidarity with her own. But we remained silent. When my grandmother's sisters expressed their intention of speaking to Swann about this mention in the *Figaro,* my great-aunt advised them against it. Whenever she saw in others an advantage, however small, that she did not have, she persuaded herself that it was not an advantage but a detriment and she pitied them so as not to have to envy them. "I believe you would not be pleasing him at all; I am quite sure I would find it very unpleasant to see my name printed boldly like that in the newspaper, and I would not be at all gratified if someone spoke to me about it." But she did not persist in trying to convince my grandmother's sisters; for they in their horror of vulgarity had made such a fine art of concealing a personal allusion beneath ingenious circumlocutions that it often went unnoticed even by the person to whom it was addressed. As for my mother, she thought only of trying to persuade my father to agree to talk to Swann not about his wife but about his daughter, whom he adored and because of whom it was said he had finally entered into this marriage. "You might just say a word to him; just ask how she is: It must be so hard for him." But my father would become annoyed: "No, no; you have the most absurd ideas. It would be ridiculous."

But the only one of us for whom Swann's arrival became the object of a painful preoccupation was I. This was because on the evenings when strangers, or merely M. Swann, were present, Mama did not come up to my room. I had dinner before everyone else and afterward I came and sat at the table, until eight o'clock when it was understood that I had to go upstairs; the precious and fragile kiss that Mama usually entrusted to me in my bed when I was going to sleep I would have to convey from the dining room to my bedroom and protect during the whole time I undressed, so that its sweetness would not shatter, so that its volatile essence would not disperse and evaporate, and on precisely those evenings when I needed to receive it with more care, I had to take it, I had to snatch it brusquely, publicly, without even having the time and the freedom of mind necessary to bring to what I was doing the attention of those individuals controlled by some mania, who do their utmost not to think of anything else while they are shutting a door, so as to be able, when the morbid uncertainty returns to them, to confront it victoriously with the memory of the moment when they did shut the door. We were all in the garden when the two hesitant rings of the little bell sounded. We knew it was Swann; even so we all looked at one another questioningly and my grandmother was sent on reconnaissance. "Remember to thank him intelligibly for the wine, you know how delicious it is and the case is enormous," my grandfather exhorted his two sisters-in-law. "Don't start whispering," said my great-aunt. "How comfortable would you feel arriving at a house where everyone is speaking so quietly!" "Ah! Here's M. Swann. Let's ask him if he thinks the weather will be good tomorrow," said my father. My mother thought that one word from her would wipe out all the pain that we in our family might have caused Swann since his marriage. She found an opportunity to take him aside. But I followed her; I could not bring myself to part from her by even one step while thinking that very soon I would have to leave her in the dining room and that I would have to go up to my room without having the consolation I had on the other evenings, that she would come kiss me. "Now, M. Swann," she said to him, "do tell me about your daughter; I'm sure she already has a taste for beautiful things like her papa." "Here, come and sit with the rest of us on the veranda," said my grandfather, coming up to them. My mother was obliged to stop, but she derived from this very constraint one more delicate thought, like good poets forced by the tyranny of rhyme to find their most beautiful lines: "We can talk about her again when we're by ourselves," she said softly to Swann. "Only a mother is capable of understanding you. I'm sure her own mother would agree with me." We all sat down around the iron table. I would have preferred not to think about the hours of anguish I was going to endure that evening alone in my room without being able to go to sleep; I tried to persuade myself they were not at all important, since I would have forgotten them by tomorrow morning, and to fix my mind on ideas of the future that should have led me as though across a bridge beyond the imminent abyss that frightened me so. But my mind, strained by my preoccupation, convex like the glance which I shot at my mother, would not allow itself to be penetrated by any foreign impressions. Thoughts certainly entered it, but only on condition that they left outside every element of beauty or simply of playfulness that could have moved or distracted me. Just as a patient, by means of an anesthetic, can watch with complete lucidity the operation being performed on him, but without feeling anything, I could recite to myself some lines that I loved or observe the efforts my grandfather made to talk to Swann about the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, without the former making me feel any emotion, the latter any hilarity. Those efforts were fruitless. Scarcely had my grandfather asked Swann a question relating to that orator than one of my grandmother's sisters, in whose ears the question was resonating like a profound but untimely silence that should be broken for the sake of politeness, would address the other: "Just imagine, Céline, I've met a young Swedish governess who has been telling me about cooperatives in the Scandinavian countries; the details are most interesting. We really must have her here for dinner one evening." "Certainly!" answered her sister Flora,[17] "but I haven't been wasting my time either. At M. Vinteuil's I met a learned old man who knows Maubant[18] very well, and Maubant has explained to him in the greatest detail how he creates his parts. It's most interesting. He's a neighbor of M. Vinteuil's, I had no idea; and he's very nice." "M. Vinteuil isn't the only one who has nice neighbors," exclaimed my aunt Céline in a voice amplified by her shyness and given an artificial tone by her premeditation, while casting at Swann what she called a meaningful look. At the same time my aunt Flora, who had understood that this phrase was Céline's way of thanking Swann for the Asti, was also looking at Swann with an expression that combined congratulation and irony, either simply to emphasize her sister's witticism, or because she envied Swann for having inspired it, or because she could not help making fun of him since she thought he was being put on the spot. "I think we can manage to persuade the old gentleman to come for dinner," continued Flora; "when you get him started on Maubant or Mme. Materna,[19] he talks for hours without stopping." "That must be delightful," sighed my grandfather, in whose mind, unfortunately, nature had as completely failed to include the possibility of taking a passionate interest in Swedish cooperatives or the creation of Maubant's parts as it had forgotten to furnish those of my grandmother's sisters with the little grain of salt one must add oneself, in order to find some savor in it, to a story about the private life of Molé or the Comte de Paris. "Now, then," said Swann to my grandfather, "what I'm going to say has more to do than it might appear with what you were asking me, because in certain respects things haven't changed enormously. This morning I was rereading something in Saint-Simon[20] that would have amused you. It's in the volume about his mission to Spain;[21] it's not one of the best, hardly more than a journal, but at least it's a marvelously well written one, which already makes it rather fundamentally different from the deadly boring journals we think we have to read every morning and evening." "I don't agree, there are days when reading the papers seems to me very pleasant indeed . . ." my aunt Flora interrupted, to show that she had read the sentence about Swann's Corot in *Le Figaro*. "When they talk about things or people that interest us!" said my aunt Céline, going one better. "I don't deny it," answered Swann with surprise. "What I fault the newspapers for is that day after day they draw our attention to insignificant things whereas only three or four times in our lives do we read a book in which there is something really essential. Since we tear the band off the newspaper so feverishly every morning, they ought to change things and put into the newspaper, oh, I don't know, perhaps . . . Pascal's *Pensées*!" (He isolated this word with an ironic emphasis so as not to seem pedantic.) "And then, in the gilt-edged volume that we open only once in ten years," he added, showing the disdain for worldly matters affected by certain worldly men, "we would read that the Queen of Greece has gone to Cannes or that the Princesse de Léon has given a costume ball. This way, the proper proportions would be reestablished." But, feeling sorry he had gone so far as to speak even lightly of serious things: "What a lofty conversation we're having," he said ironically; "I don't know why we're climbing to such 'heights'"—and turning to my grandfather: "Well, Saint-Simon describes how Maulévrier[22] had the audacity to offer to shake hands with Saint-Simon's sons. You know, this is the same Maulévrier of whom he says: 'Never did I see in that thick bottle anything but ill-humor, vulgarity, and foolishness.'" "Thick or not, I know some bottles in which there is something quite different," said Flora vivaciously, determined that she too should thank Swann, because the gift of Asti was addressed to both of them. Céline laughed. Swann, disconcerted, went on: "'I cannot say whether it was ignorance or a trap,' wrote Saint-Simon. 'He tried to shake hands with my children. I noticed it in time to prevent him.' " My grandfather was already in ecstasies over "ignorance or a trap," but Mlle. Céline, in whom the name of Saint-Simon—a literary man—had prevented the complete anesthesia of her auditory faculties, was already growing indignant: "What? You admire that? Well, that's a fine thing! But what can it mean; isn't one man as good as the next? What difference does it make whether he's a duke or a coachman, if he's intelligent and good-hearted? Your Saint-Simon had a fine way of raising his children, if he didn't teach them to offer their hands to all decent people. Why, it's quite

abominable. And you dare to quote that?" And my grandfather, terribly upset and sensing how impossible it would be, in the face of this obstruction, to try to get Swann to tell the stories that would have amused him, said quietly to Mama: "Now remind me of the line you taught me that comforts me so much at times like this. Oh, yes! 'What virtues, Lord, Thou makest us abhor!'[23] Oh, how good that is!"

I did not take my eyes off my mother, I knew that when we were at the table, they would not let me stay during the entire dinner and that, in order not to annoy my father, Mama would not let me kiss her several times in front of the guests as though we were in my room. And so I promised myself that in the dining room, as they were beginning dinner and I felt the hour approaching, I would do everything I could do alone in advance of this kiss which would be so brief and furtive, choose with my eyes the place on her cheek that I would kiss, prepare my thoughts so as to be able, by means of this mental beginning of the kiss, to devote the whole of the minute Mama would grant me to feeling her cheek against my lips, as a painter who can obtain only short sittings prepares his palette and, guided by his notes, does in advance from memory everything for which he could if necessary manage without the presence of the model. But now before the dinner bell rang my grandfather had the unwitting brutality to say: "The boy looks tired, he ought to go up to bed. We're dining late tonight anyway." And my father, who was not as scrupulous as my grandmother and my mother about honoring treaties, said: "Yes, go on now, up to bed with you." I tried to kiss Mama, at that moment we heard the dinner bell. "No, really, leave your mother alone, you've already said goodnight to each other as it is, these demonstrations are ridiculous. Go on now, upstairs!" And I had to leave without my viaticum; I had to climb each step of the staircase, as the popular expression has it, "against my heart,"[24] climbing against my heart which wanted to go back to my mother because she had not, by kissing me, given it license to go with me. That detested staircase which I always entered with such gloom exhaled an odor of varnish that had in some sense absorbed, fixated, the particular sort of sorrow I felt every evening and made it perhaps even crueler to my sensibility because, when it took that olfactory form, my intelligence could no longer share in it. When we are asleep and a raging toothache is as yet perceived by us only in the form of a girl whom we attempt two hundred times to pull out of the water or a line by Molière that we repeat to ourselves incessantly, it is a great relief to wake up so that our intelligence can divest the idea of raging toothache of its disguise of heroism or cadence. It was the opposite of this relief that I experienced when my sorrow at going up to my room entered me in a manner infinitely swifter, almost instantaneous, at once insidious and abrupt, through the inhalation—far more toxic than the intellectual penetration—of the smell of varnish peculiar to that staircase. Once in my room, I had to stop up all the exits, close the shutters, dig my own grave by undoing my covers, put on the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed which they had added to the room because I was too hot in the summer under the rep curtains of the big bed, I had a fit of rebelliousness, I wanted to attempt the ruse of a condemned man. I wrote to my mother begging her to come upstairs for something serious that I could not tell her in my letter. My fear was that Françoise, my aunt's cook who was charged with looking after me when I was at Combray, would refuse to convey my note. I suspected that, for her, delivering a message to my mother when there was company would seem as impossible as for a porter to hand a letter to an actor while he was onstage. With respect to things that could or could not be done she possessed a code at once imperious, extensive, subtle, and intransigent about distinctions that were impalpable or otiose (which made it resemble those ancient laws which, alongside such fierce prescriptions as the massacre of children at the breast, forbid one with an exaggerated delicacy to boil a kid in its mother's milk, or to eat the sinew from an animal's thigh). This code, to judge from her sudden obstinacy when she did not wish to do certain errands that we gave her, seemed to have anticipated social complexities and worldly refinements that nothing in Françoise's associations or her life as a village domestic could have suggested to her; and we had to say to ourselves that in her there was a very old French past, noble and ill understood, as in those manufacturing towns where elegant old houses testify that there was once a court life, and where the employees of a factory for chemical products work surrounded by delicate sculptures representing the miracle of Saint Théophile or the four sons of Aymon.[25] In this particular case, the article of the code which made it unlikely that except in case of fire Françoise would go bother Mama in the presence of M. Swann for so small a personage as myself simply betokened the respect she professed not only for the family—as for the dead, for priests, and for kings—but also for the visitor to whom one was offering one's hospitality, a respect that would perhaps have touched me in a book but that always irritated me on her lips, because of the solemn and tender tones she adopted in speaking of it, and especially so this evening, when the sacred character she conferred on the dinner might have the effect of making her refuse to disturb its ceremonial. But to give myself a better chance, I did not hesitate to lie and tell her that it was not in the least I who had wanted to write to Mama, but that it was Mama who, as she said goodnight to me, had exhorted me not to forget to send her an answer concerning something she had asked me to look for; and she would certainly be very annoyed if this note was not delivered to her. I think Françoise did not believe me, for, like those primitive men whose senses were so much more powerful than ours, she could immediately discern, from signs imperceptible to us, any truth that we wanted to hide from her; she looked at the envelope for five minutes as if the examination of the paper and the appearance of the writing would inform her about the nature of the contents or tell her which article of her code she ought to apply. Then she went out with an air of resignation that seemed to signify: "If it isn't a misfortune for parents to have a child like that!" She came back after a moment to tell me that they were still only at the ice stage, that it was impossible for the butler to deliver the letter right away in front of everyone, but that, when the mouth-rinsing bowls[26] were put round, they would find a way to hand it to Mama. Instantly my anxiety subsided; it was now no longer, as it had been only a moment ago, until tomorrow that I had left my mother, since my little note, no doubt annoying her (and doubly because this stratagem would make me ridiculous in Swann's eyes), would at least allow me, invisible and enraptured, to enter the same room as she, would whisper about me in her ear; since that forbidden, hostile dining room, where, just a moment before, the ice itself—the "*granité*"[27]—and the rinsing bowls seemed to me to contain pleasures noxious and mortally sad because Mama was enjoying them far away from me, was opening itself to me and, like a fruit that has turned sweet and bursts its skin, was about to propel, to project, all the way to my intoxicated heart, Mama's attention as she read my lines. Now I was no longer separated from her; the barriers were down, an exquisite thread joined us. And that was not all: Mama would probably come!

I thought Swann would surely have laughed at the anguish I had just suffered if he had read my letter and guessed its purpose; yet, on the contrary, as I learned later, a similar anguish was the torment of long years of his life and no one, perhaps, could have understood me as well as he; in his case, the anguish that comes from feeling that the person you love is in a place of amusement where you are not, where you cannot join her, came to him through love, to which it is in some sense predestined, by which it will be hoarded, appropriated; but when, as in my case, this anguish enters us before love has made its appearance in our life, it drifts as it waits for it, vague and free, without a particular assignment, at the service of one feeling one day, of another the next, sometimes of filial tenderness or affection for a friend. And the joy with which I served my first apprenticeship when Françoise came back to tell me my letter would be delivered Swann too had known well, that deceptive joy given to us by some friend, some relative of the woman we love when, arriving at the house or theater where she is, for some dance, gala evening, or premiere at which he is going to see her, this friend notices us wandering outside, desperately awaiting some opportunity to communicate with her. He recognizes us, speaks to us familiarly, asks us what we are doing there. And when we invent the story that we have something urgent to say to his relative or friend, he assures us that nothing could be simpler, leads us into the hall, and promises to send her to us in five minutes. How we love him, as at that moment I loved Françoise—the wellintentioned intermediary who with a single word has just made tolerable, human, and almost propitious the unimaginable, infernal festivity into the thick of which we had been imagining that hostile, perverse, and exquisite vortices of pleasure were carrying away from us and inspiring with derisive laughter the woman we love! If we are to judge by him, the relative who has come up to us and is himself also one of the initiates in the cruel mysteries, the other guests at the party cannot have anything very demoniacal about them. Those inaccessible and excruciating hours during which she was about to enjoy unknown pleasures—now, through an unexpected breach, we are entering them; now, one of the moments which, in succession, would have composed those hours, a moment as real as the others, perhaps even more important to us, because our mistress is more involved in it, we can picture to ourselves, we possess it, we are taking part in it, we have created it, almost: the moment in which he will tell her we are here, downstairs. And no doubt the other moments of the party would not have been essentially very different from this one, would not have had anything more delectable about them that should make us suffer so, since the kind friend has said to us: "Why, she'll be delighted to come down! It'll be much nicer for her to chat with you than to be bored up there." Alas! Swann had learned by experience that the good intentions of a third person have no power over a woman who is annoyed to find herself pursued even into a party by someone she does not love. Often, the friend comes back down alone.

My mother did not come, and with no consideration for my pride (which was invested in her not denying the story that she was supposed to have asked me to let her know the results of some search) asked Françoise to say these words to me: "There is no answer," words I have so often since then heard the doormen in grand hotels or the footmen in bawdy houses bring back to some poor girl who exclaims in surprise: "What, he said nothing? Why, that's impossible! Did you

really give him my note? All right, I'll go on waiting." And—just as she invariably assures him she does not need the extra gas jet which the doorman wants to light for her, and remains there, hearing nothing further but the few remarks about the weather exchanged by the doorman and a lackey whom he sends off suddenly, when he notices the time, to put a customer's drink on ice—having declined Françoise's offer to make me some tea or to stay with me, I let her return to the servants' hall, I went to bed and closed my eyes, trying not to hear the voices of my family, who were having their coffee in the garden. But after a few seconds, I became aware that, by writing that note to Mama, by approaching, at the risk of angering her, so close to her that I thought I could touch the moment when I would see her again, I had shut off from myself the possibility of falling asleep without seeing her again, and the beating of my heart grew more painful each minute because I was increasing my agitation by telling myself to be calm, to accept my misfortune. Suddenly my anxiety subsided, a happiness invaded me as when a powerful medicine begins to take effect and our pain vanishes: I had just formed the resolution not to continue trying to fall asleep without seeing Mama again, to kiss her at all costs even though it was with the certainty of being on bad terms with her for a long time after, when she came up to bed. The calm that came with the end of my distress filled me with an extraordinary joy, quite as much as did my expectation, my thirst for and my fear of danger. I opened the window noiselessly and sat down on the foot of my bed; I hardly moved so that I would not be heard from below. Outdoors, too, things seemed frozen in silent attention so as not to disturb the moonlight which, duplicating and distancing each thing by extending its shadow before it, denser and more concrete than itself, had at once thinned and enlarged the landscape like a map that had been folded and was now opened out. What needed to move, a few leaves of the chestnut tree, moved. But their minute quivering, complete, executed even in its slightest nuances and ultimate refinements, did not spill over onto the rest, did not merge with it, remained circumscribed. Exposed against this silence, which absorbed nothing of them, the most distant noises, those that must have come from gardens that lay at the other end of town, could be perceived detailed with such "finish" that they seemed to owe this effect of remoteness only to their pianissimo, like those muted motifs so well executed by the orchestra of the Conservatoire that, although you do not lose a single note, you nonetheless think you are hearing them far away from the concert hall and all the old subscribers—my grandmother's sisters too, when Swann had given them his seats—strained their ears as if they were listening to the distant advances of an army on the march that had not yet turned the corner of the rue de Trévise.

I knew that the situation I was now placing myself in was the one that could provoke the gravest consequences of all for me, coming from my parents, much graver in truth than a stranger would have supposed, the sort he would have believed could be produced only by truly shameful misdeeds. But in my upbringing, the order of misdeeds was not the same as in that of other children, and I had become accustomed to placing before all the rest (because there were probably no others from which I needed to be more carefully protected) those whose common characteristic I now understand was that you lapse into them by yielding to a nervous impulse. But at the time no one uttered these words, no one revealed this cause, which might have made me believe I was excusable for succumbing to them or even perhaps incapable of resisting them. But I recognized them clearly from the anguish that preceded them as well as from the rigor of the punishment that followed them; and I knew that the one I had just committed was in the same family as others for which I had been severely punished, though infinitely graver. When I went and placed myself in my mother's path at the moment she was going up to bed, and when she saw that I had stayed up to say goodnight to her again in the hallway, they would not let me continue to live at home, they would send me away to school the next day, that much was certain. Well! Even if I had had to throw myself out of the window five minutes later, I still preferred this. What I wanted now was Mama, to say goodnight to her, I had gone too far along the road that led to the fulfillment of that desire to be able to turn back now.

I heard my parents' footsteps as they saw Swann out; and when the bell on the gate let me know he had gone, I went to the window. Mama was asking my father if he had thought the lobster was good and if M. Swann had had more coffee-and-pistachio ice. "I found it quite ordinary," said my mother; "I think next time we'll have to try another flavor." "I can't tell you how changed I find Swann," said my great-aunt, "he has aged so!" My great-aunt was so used to seeing Swann always as the same adolescent that she was surprised to find him suddenly not as young as the age she continued to attribute to him. And my family was also beginning to feel that in him this aging was abnormal, excessive, shameful, and more deserved by the unmarried, by all those for whom it seems that the great day that has no tomorrow is longer than for others, because for them it is empty and the moments in it add up from morning on without then being divided among children. "I think he has no end of worries with that wretched wife of his who is living with a certain Monsieur de Charlus, as all of Combray knows. It's the talk of the town." My mother pointed out that in spite of this he had been looking much less sad for some time now. "He also doesn't make that gesture of his as often, so like his father, of wiping his eyes and running his hand across his forehead. I myself think that in his heart of hearts he no longer loves that woman." "Why, naturally he doesn't love her anymore," answered my grandfather. "I received a letter from him about it a long time ago, by now, a letter with which I hastened not to comply and which leaves no doubt about his feelings, at least his feelings of love, for his wife. Well now! You see, you didn't thank him for the Asti," added my grandfather, turning to his two sisters-in-law. "What? We didn't thank him? I think, just between you and me, that I put it quite delicately," answered my aunt Flora. "Yes, you managed it very well: quite admirable," said my aunt Céline. "But you were very good too." "Yes, I was rather proud of my remark about kind neighbors." "What? Is that what you call thanking him?" exclaimed my grandfather. "I certainly heard that, but devil take me if I thought it was directed at Swann. You can be sure he never noticed." "But see here, Swann isn't stupid, I'm sure he appreciated it. After all, I couldn't tell him how many bottles there were and what the wine cost!" My father and mother were left alone there, and sat down for a moment; then my father said: "Well, shall we go up to bed?" "If you like, my dear, even though I'm not the least bit sleepy; yet it couldn't be that perfectly harmless coffee ice that's keeping me so wide-awake; but I can see a light in the servants' hall, and since poor Françoise has waited up for me, I'll go and ask her to unhook my bodice while you're getting undressed." And my mother opened the latticed door that led from the vestibule to the staircase. Soon, I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went without a sound into the hallway; my heart was beating so hard I had trouble walking, but at least it was no longer pounding from anxiety, but from terror and joy. I saw the light cast in the stairwell by Mama's candle. Then I saw Mama herself; I threw myself forward. In the first second, she looked at me with astonishment, not understanding what could have happened. Then an expression of anger came over her face, she did not say a single word to me, and indeed for much less than this they would go several days without speaking to me. If Mama had said one word to me, it would have been an admission that they could talk to me again and in any case it would perhaps have seemed to me even more terrible, as a sign that, given the gravity of the punishment that was going to be prepared for me, silence, and estrangement, would have been childish. A word would have been like the calm with which you answer a servant when you have just decided to dismiss him; the kiss you give a son you are sending off to enlist, whereas you would have refused it if you were simply going to be annoyed with him for a few days. But she heard my father coming up from the dressing room where he had gone to undress and, to avoid the scene he would make over me, she said to me in a voice choked with anger: "Run, run, so at least your father won't see you waiting like this as if you were out of your mind!" But I repeated to her: "Come say goodnight to me," terrified as I saw the gleam from my father's candle already rising up the wall, but also using his approach as a means of blackmail and hoping that Mama, to avoid my father's finding me there still if she continued to refuse, would say: "Go back to your room, I'll come." It was too late, my father was there in front of us. Involuntarily, though no one heard, I murmured these words: "I'm done for!"

It was not so. My father was constantly refusing me permission for things that had been authorized in the more generous covenants granted by my mother and grandmother because he did not bother about "principles" and for him there was no "rule of law." For a completely contingent reason, or even for no reason at all, he would at the last minute deny me a certain walk that was so customary, so consecrated that to deprive me of it was a violation, or, as he had done once again this evening, long before the ritual hour he would say to me: "Go on now, up to bed, no arguments!" But also, because he had no principles (in my grandmother's sense), he was not strictly speaking intransigent. He looked at me for a moment with an expression of surprise and annoyance, then as soon as Mama had explained to him with a few embarrassed words what had happened, he said to her: "Go along with him, then. You were just saying you didn't feel very sleepy, stay in his room for a little while, I don't need anything." "But my dear," answered my mother timidly, "whether I'm sleepy or not doesn't change anything, we can't let the child get into the habit . . ." "But it isn't a question of habit," said my father, shrugging his shoulders, "you can see the boy is upset, he seems very sad; look, we're not executioners! You'll end by making him ill, and that won't do us much good! There are two beds in his room; go tell Françoise to prepare the big one for you and sleep there with him tonight. Now then, goodnight, I'm not as high-strung as the two of you, I'm going to bed."

It was impossible to thank my father; he would have been irritated by what he called mawkishness. I stood there not daring to move; he was still there in front of us, tall in his white nightshirt, under the pink and violet Indian cashmere shawl that he tied around his head now that he had attacks of neuralgia, with the gesture of Abraham in the engraving after Benozzo Gozzoli[28] that M. Swann had given me, as he told Sarah she must leave Issac's side. This was many years ago. The staircase wall on which I saw the rising glimmer of his candle has long since ceased to exist. In me, too, many things have been destroyed that I thought were

bound to last forever and new ones have formed that have given birth to new sorrows and joys which I could not have foreseen then, just as the old ones have become difficult for me to understand. It was a very long time ago, too, that my father ceased to be able to say to Mama: "Go with the boy." The possibility of such hours will never be reborn for me. But for a little while now, I have begun to hear again very clearly, if I take care to listen, the sobs that I was strong enough to contain in front of my father and that broke out only when I found myself alone again with Mama. They have never really stopped; and it is only because life is now becoming quieter around me that I can hear them again, like those convent bells covered so well by the clamor of the town during the day that one would think they had ceased altogether but which begin sounding again in the silence of the evening.

Mama spent that night in my room; when I had just committed such a misdeed that I expected to have to leave the house, my parents granted me more than I could ever have won from them as a reward for any good deed. Even at the moment when it manifested itself through this pardon, my father's conduct toward me retained that arbitrary and undeserved quality that characterized it and was due to the fact that it generally resulted from fortuitous convenience rather than a premeditated plan. It may even be that what I called his severity, when he sent me to bed, deserved that name less than my mother's or my grandmother's, for his nature, in certain respects more different from mine than theirs was, had probably kept him from discovering until now how very unhappy I was every evening, something my mother and my grandmother knew well; but they loved me enough not to consent to spare me my suffering, they wanted to teach me to master it in order to reduce my nervous sensitivity and strengthen my will. As for my father, whose affection for me was of another sort, I do not know if he would have been courageous enough for that: the one time he realized that I was upset, he had said to my mother: "Go and comfort him." Mama stayed in my room that night and, as though not to allow any remorse to spoil those hours which were so different from what I had had any right to expect, when Françoise, realizing that something extraordinary was happening when she saw Mama sitting next to me, holding my hand and letting me cry without scolding me, asked her: "Why, madame, now what's wrong with Monsieur that he's crying so?" Mama answered her: "Why, even he doesn't know, Françoise, he's in a state; prepare the big bed for me quickly and then go on up to bed yourself." And so, for the first time, my sadness was regarded no longer as a punishable offense but as an involuntary ailment that had just been officially recognized, a nervous condition for which I was not responsible; I had the relief of no longer having to mingle qualms of conscience with the bitterness of my tears, I could cry without sin. I was also not a little proud, with respect to Françoise, of this turnabout in human affairs which, an hour after Mama had refused to come up to my room and had sent the disdainful answer that I should go to sleep, raised me to the dignity of a grown-up and brought me suddenly to a sort of puberty of grief, of emancipation from tears. I ought to have been happy: I was not. It seemed to me that my mother had just made me a first concession which must have been painful to her, that this was a first abdication on her part from the ideal she had conceived for me, and that for the first time she, who was so courageous, had to confess herself beaten. It seemed to me that, if I had just gained a victory, it was over her, that I had succeeded, as illness, affliction, or age might have done, in relaxing her will, in weakening her judgment, and that this evening was the beginning of a new era, would remain as a sad date. If I had dared, now, I would have said to Mama: "No, I don't want you to do this, don't sleep here." But I was aware of the practical wisdom, the realism as it would be called now, which in her tempered my grandmother's ardently idealistic nature, and I knew that, now that the harm was done, she would prefer to let me at least enjoy the soothing pleasure of it and not disturb my father. To be sure, my mother's lovely face still shone with youth that evening when she so gently held my hands and tried to stop my tears; but it seemed to me that this was precisely what should not have been, her anger would have saddened me less than this new gentleness which my childhood had not known before; it seemed to me that with an impious and secret hand I had just traced in her soul a first wrinkle and caused a first white hair to appear. At the thought of this my sobs redoubled, and then I saw that Mama, who never let herself give way to any emotion with me, was suddenly overcome by my own and was trying to suppress a desire to cry. When she saw that I had noticed, she said to me with a smile: "There now, my little chick, my little canary, he's going to make his mama as silly as himself if this continues. Look, since you're not sleepy and your mama isn't either, let's not go on upsetting each other, let's do something, let's get one of your books." But I had none there. "Would you enjoy it less if I took out the books your grandmother will be giving you on your saint's day? Think about it carefully: you mustn't be disappointed not to have anything the day after tomorrow." On the contrary, I was delighted, and Mama went to get a packet of books, of which I could not distinguish, through the paper in which they were wrapped, more than their shape, short and thick, but which, in this first guise, though summary and veiled, already eclipsed the box of colors from New Year's Day and the silkworms from last year. They were *La Mare au Diable, François le Champi, La Petite Fadette,* and *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*. My grandmother, as I learned afterward, had first chosen the poems of Musset, a volume of Rousseau, and *Indiana*;[29] for though she judged frivolous reading to be as unhealthy as sweets and pastries, it did not occur to her that a great breath of genius might have a more dangerous and less invigorating influence on the mind even of a child than would the open air and the sea breeze on his body. But as my father had nearly called her mad when he learned which books she wanted to give me, she had returned to the bookstore in Jouy-le-Vicomte herself, so that I would not risk not having my present (it was a burning-hot day and she had come home so indisposed that the doctor had warned my mother not to let her tire herself out that way again) and she had resorted to the four pastoral novels of George Sand. "My dear daughter," she said to Mama, "I could not bring myself to give the boy something badly written."

In fact, she could never resign herself to buying anything from which one could not derive an intellectual profit, and especially that which beautiful things afford us by teaching us to seek our pleasure elsewhere than in the satisfactions of material comfort and vanity. Even when she had to make someone a present of the kind called "useful," when she had to give an armchair, silverware, a walking stick, she looked for "old" ones, as though, now that long desuetude had effaced their character of usefulness, they would appear more disposed to tell us about the life of people of other times than to serve the needs of our own life. She would have liked me to have in my room photographs of the most beautiful monuments or landscapes. But at the moment of buying them, and even though the thing represented had an aesthetic value, she would find that vulgarity and utility too quickly resumed their places in that mechanical mode of representation, the photograph. She would try to use cunning and, if not to eliminate commercial banality entirely, at least to reduce it, to substitute for the greater part of it more art, to introduce into it in a sense several "layers" of art: instead of photographs of Chartres Cathedral, the Fountains of Saint-Cloud, or Mount Vesuvius, she would make inquiries of Swann as to whether some great painter had not depicted them, and preferred to give me photographs of Chartres Cathedral by Corot, of the Fountains of Saint-Cloud by Hubert Robert,[30] of Mount Vesuvius by Turner,[31] which made one further degree of art. But if the photographer had been removed from the representation of the masterpiece or of nature and replaced by a great artist, he still reclaimed his rights to reproduce that very interpretation. Having deferred vulgarity as far as possible, my grandmother would try to move it back still further. She would ask Swann if the work had not been engraved, preferring, whenever possible, old engravings that also had an interest beyond themselves, such as those that represent a masterpiece in a state in which we can no longer see it today (like the engraving by Morghen[32] of Leonardo's *Last Supper* before its deterioration). It must be said that the results of this interpretation of the art of gift giving were not always brilliant. The idea I formed of Venice from a drawing by Titian that is supposed to have the lagoon in the background was certainly far less accurate than the one I would have derived from simple photographs. We could no longer keep count, at home, when my great-aunt wanted to draw up an indictment against my grandmother, of the armchairs she had presented to young couples engaged to be married or old married couples which, at the first attempt to make use of them, had immediately collapsed under the weight of one of the recipients. But my grandmother would have believed it petty to be overly concerned about the solidity of a piece of wood in which one could still distinguish a small flower, a smile, sometimes a lovely invention from the past. Even what might, in these pieces of furniture, answer a need, since it did so in a manner to which we are no longer accustomed, charmed her like the old ways of speaking in which we see a metaphor that is obliterated, in our modern language, by the abrasion of habit. Now, in fact, the pastoral novels of George Sand that she was giving me for my saint's day were, like an old piece of furniture, full of expressions that had fallen into disuse and turned figurative again, the sort you no longer find anywhere but in the country. And my grandmother had bought them in preference to others just as she would sooner have rented an estate on which there was a Gothic dovecote or another of those old things that exercise such a happy influence on the mind by filling it with longing for impossible voyages through time.

Mama sat down by my bed; she had picked up *François le Champi,* whose reddish cover and incomprehensible title gave it, in my eyes, a distinct personality and a mysterious attraction. I had not yet read a real novel. I had heard people say that George Sand was an exemplary novelist. This already predisposed me to imagine something indefinable and delicious in *François le Champi*. Narrative devices intended to arouse curiosity or emotion, certain modes of expression that make one uneasy or melancholy, and that a reader with some education will recognize as common to many novels, appeared to me—who considered a new book not as a thing having many counterparts, but as a unique person, having no reason for existing but in itself—simply as a disturbing emanation of *François le Champi*'s peculiar essence. Behind those events so ordinary, those things so common, those words so current, I sensed a strange sort of intonation, accentuation.

The action began; it seemed to me all the more obscure because in those days, when I read, I often daydreamed, for entire pages, of something quite different. And in addition to the lacunae that this distraction left in the story, there was the fact, when Mama was the one reading aloud to me, that she skipped all the love scenes. Thus, all the bizarre changes that take place in the respective attitudes of the miller's wife and the child and that can be explained only by the progress of a nascent love seemed to me marked by a profound mystery whose source I readily imagined must be in that strange and sweet name "Champi," which gave the child, who bore it without my knowing why, its vivid, charming purplish color. If my mother was an unfaithful reader she was also, in the case of books in which she found the inflection of true feeling, a wonderful reader for the respect and simplicity of her interpretation, the beauty and gentleness of the sound of her voice. Even in real life, when it was people and not works of art which moved her to compassion or admiration, it was touching to see with what deference she removed from her voice, from her motions, from her words, any spark of gaiety that might hurt some mother who had once lost a child, any recollection of a saint's day or birthday that might remind some old man of his advanced age, any remark about housekeeping that might seem tedious to some young scholar. In the same way, when she was reading George Sand's prose, which always breathes that goodness, that moral distinction which Mama had learned from my grandmother to consider superior to all else in life, and which I was to teach her only much later not to consider superior to all else in books too, taking care to banish from her voice any pettiness, any affectation which might have prevented it from receiving that powerful torrent, she imparted all the natural tenderness, all the ample sweetness they demanded to those sentences which seemed written for her voice and which remained, so to speak, entirely within the register of her sensibility. She found, to attack them in the necessary tone, the warm inflection that preexists them and that dictated them, but that the words do not indicate; with this inflection she softened as she went along any crudeness in the tenses of the verbs, gave the imperfect and the past historic the sweetness that lies in goodness, the melancholy that lies in tenderness, directed the sentence that was ending toward the one that was about to begin, sometimes hurrying, sometimes slowing down the pace of the syllables so as to bring them, though their quantities were different, into one uniform rhythm, she breathed into this very common prose a sort of continuous emotional life.

My remorse was quieted, I gave in to the sweetness of that night in which I had my mother close to me. I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the greatest desire I had in the world, to keep my mother in my room during those sad hours of darkness, was too contrary to the necessities of life and the wishes of others for its fulfillment, granted this night, to be anything other than artificial and exceptional. Tomorrow my anxieties would reawaken and Mama would not stay here. But when my anxieties were soothed, I no longer understood them; and then tomorrow night was still far away; I told myself I would have time to think of what to do, even though that time could not bring me any access of power, since these things did not depend on my will and seemed more avoidable to me only because of the interval that still separated them from me.

So it was that, for a long time, when, awakened at night, I remembered Combray again, I saw nothing of it but this sort of luminous panel, cut out among indistinct shadows, like those panels which the glow of a Bengal light or some electric projection will cut out and illuminate in a building whose other parts remain plunged in darkness: at the rather broad base, the small parlor, the dining room, the opening of the dark path by which M. Swann, the unconscious author of my sufferings, would arrive, the front hall where I would head toward the first step of the staircase, so painful to climb, that formed, by itself, the very narrow trunk of this irregular pyramid; and, at the top, my bedroom with the little hallway and its glass-paned door for Mama's entrance; in a word, always seen at the same hour, isolated from everything that might surround it, standing out alone against the darkness, the bare minimum of scenery (such as one sees prescribed at the beginnings of the old plays for performances in the provinces) needed for the drama of my undressing; as though Combray had consisted only of two floors connected by a slender staircase and as though it had always been seven o'clock in the evening there. The fact is, I could have answered anyone who asked me that Combray also included other things and existed at other times of day. But since what I recalled would have been supplied to me only by my voluntary memory, the memory of the intelligence, and since the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of the past itself, I would never have had any desire to think about the rest of Combray. It was all really quite dead for me.

Dead forever? Possibly.

There is a great deal of chance in all this, and a second sort of chance event, that of our own death, often does not allow us to wait long for the favors of the first.

I find the Celtic belief very reasonable, that the souls of those we have lost are held captive in some inferior creature, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, effectively lost to us until the day, which for many never comes, when we happen to pass close to the tree, come into possession of the object that is their prison. Then they quiver, they call out to us, and as soon as we have recognized them, the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and they return to live with us.

It is the same with our past. It is a waste of effort for us to try to summon it, all the exertions of our intelligence are useless. The past is hidden outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) which we do not suspect. It depends on chance whether we encounter this object before we die, or do not encounter it.

Addenda

The original manuscript has a more detailed version of the scene, which the Pléiade editors (1954) reproduce in their "Notes and Variants":

Odette was quite prepared to cut short her visit, but could not leave at once since she had only just arrived. Either to get round the difficulty, or as a studied insult to her niece, "I should be most interested to look over your house," Lady Israels had said to Mme de Marsantes, knowing that the latter had a great regard for her and an even greater need of her. Moreover Lady Israels, who was extremely beneficent and upright, was also very haughty. "I shall be delighted to show it to you," Mme de Marsantes had replied, and at once set off with Lady Jacob [*sic*] as though she felt she had no need to bother about Mme Swann who must be only too happy to be in her house, leaving the unfortunate woman standing there alone, kicking her heels for half an hour. Then Mme de Marsantes had returned and said curtly to Mme Swann: "Excuse me"; whereupon Lady Jacob had raised her lorgnette and looked at Odette as at a person she had not even noticed before and who must have arrived in the meantime, or as yet another feature of the house. This feature no doubt failed to impress her, for it was the only one on which she made no comment, and turning towards Mme de Marsantes she started up a conversation with her in which Odette was not invited to join. "I trust you won't go back there," Swann had said to her afterwards, and this single visit had not encouraged Odette to pursue her offensive in that direction. Let us hasten to add, however, that this was not the world that preoccupied Mme Swann. On matters concerning the nobility, on pedigrees and ducal houses, she lacked even the petty erudition that peaceful bourgeois citizens of Nantes or Tours cultivate night and day, although they may never know anyone from that world. When, as we shall see, it began to flock to the house of the aged Odette, it did not come to fill a void, to gratify a craving induced by the reading of old memoirs and the Almanach de Gotha; it was received without the slightest mental preparation. Mme de Guermantes was for Odette no more than a superior Mme Verdurin whom it was "smart" to have to one's house, and she was far less concerned about who the Guermantes family were than a great many people who would never know them …

The manuscript gives a longer and more detailed version of this passage, reproduced in the Pléiade "Notes and Variants":

So Mme de Villeparisis, who when I used to hear my grandmother talking about her in my childhood had seemed to me to be an old lady of the same sort as her other friends and had always remained so to me—that person who had once given me a box of chocolates held by a duck and was now going out of her way to be agreeable to us—was a member of the powerful Guermantes clan! This change in the value of what we possess, like those old bundles which turn out to be priceless treasures, is one of the things that introduce most wonder, animation, variety and consequently poetry into one's adolescence (that adolescence which, while gradually dwindling until it becomes no more than a thin trickle that often runs dry, is sometimes prolonged throughout the whole course of one's life). The rise or depreciation of one's wealth, the weirdly unexpected reassessments of one's possessions, the misrepresentations of people we know, which make one's youth as fabulous as the metamorphoses of Ovid or even the metempsychoses of the Hindus, derive in part from ignorance—an ignorance that extends to people's names as to everything else. My great-aunt had bought for one of the rooms at Combray some crude painted canvases (perhaps indeed they were only coloured paper) framed in coffee-coloured wood, which represented scenes by Teniers. I had told Bloch in perfectly good faith that we had a room full of Teniers. In the vague world, innocent of any notion of discrimination, that painting was to me then, I could see no difference between a five-franc reproduction and an original work. Similarly in the Army, where one has a captain called Lévy and another called Lévy-Mirepoix: these two names, though the second is longer than the first and therefore a little more ridiculous, appear otherwise interchangeable. When one is a child, certain words placed in front of a name seem funny, except M. *l'abbé* which is respectable; but if Mme Galopin is called Marie-Euphrosine Galopin, or Mme de Villeparisis the Marquise de Villeparisis, this merely adds something rather heteroclite to persons otherwise of the same ilk. For one starts from the impressions one has received, and not from the preconceptions whereby an educated man knows what a painting is, and a man of the world what the Villeparisis are. People have only to present themselves to our eyes in a particularly simple light—which happens especially often with elegant people, like Swann who pushed the piano for my great-aunt and sent her strawberries, or Mme de Villeparisis who had given me a chocolate duck—while being otherwise indistinguishable from the other modest supernumeraries on the family stage, and they will seem to us if anything of a slightly inferior rank. One fine day we are amazed to hear someone we place very high, someone to whose level we seek to aspire, speak of them as people far superior to himself. Thus to ignorance is added, further to mislead us, the homogeneity in one's memory of impressions belonging to the same category, and their heterogeneousness in relation to impressions of another category. This heterogeneousness, in effect, makes it far more difficult for us to calculate value. In order to compare, to subtract, it is first of all necessary to reduce to qualities of the same kind. Those who start from preconceived notions can do so. Childhood, enclosed in its impressions, cannot. Mme de Villeparisis, an old family acquaintance, less brilliant and intimidating than the optician, was further removed from "the Guermantes way" than if she had been confined to "the Méséglise way." But these differences in kind, if they make the assessment of values impossible, are great sources of poetry (all the more so because those beliefs of our youth, like forces that need room in which to deploy, operate over the great, wide surfaces of time that stretch behind us). When we discover that the easy-going captain whom we treated with less respect than Captain Lévy, and who —not content with being nice to us every day—asked us to dinner before we finished our term of service, was the stepbrother of the Duc de Fezenzac (once we have acquired preconceptions and know who the latter is), this sudden displacement—as of a ray of light shifting on the horizon—of a personage who rapidly switches from the vulgar and charming environment in which we have always situated him into a totally different world, acquires a sort of poetic charm. He had become almost unreal, like everything that we once knew in a place to which we have never returned, in a special life intercalated into our very different life for three years, like the officers in our regiment, or long ago the good people of Combray. To learn that these people, as different from real people as pantomime figures, took the train on Saturday, after removing their uniforms or their country clothes, and went to dine with Mme de Pourtalès—how interesting that makes it for us to know Mme de Pourtalès, how we long to get her to talk to us about them! But what she tells us will no more be able to enlighten us than what we ask of people who knew the real people on whom Mme Bovary or Frédéric Moreau were modelled. How could this information elucidate an inner charm which stems from a certain distortion of memory and certain transformations of reality? Thus Saint-Loup could have spoken to me indefinitely about his family without helping me to get to the bottom of the pleasure I had derived from the fact that suddenly, set free from a homely bourgeois prison that had been spirited away as in a fairy tale, Mme de Villeparisis was embarking—or rather (so swift had been the spell) was already awaiting me—on the Guermantes way.

"But how do you know the Château de Guermantes?" Saint-Loup asked me. "Have you visited it—or perhaps you knew my aunt de Guermantes-La Trémoïlle who lived there before?" he added, whether because, finding it quite natural that one should know the same people as he did, he failed to realise that I came from a different background, or because he was pretending not to realise out of politeness.

"No … but … I've heard of the château. They have all the busts of the old lords of Guermantes there, haven't they?"

"Yes, it's a fine sight …"

At this point in the holograph material the Pléiade editors found some loose sheets containing the following passage which Proust failed to complete and incorporate in his novel. (Santois was the name Proust originally gave to the violinist, Morel, who does not make his first appearance until The Guermantes Way.):

N.B. This, which was originally intended for the last Guermantes party, is for the evening in the Casino at Balbec, but may perhaps be changed. I might split it in two, keeping the quintet for the Guermantes party and the organ for Balbec?

At the back of the Casino's dance hall was a stage from which some excessively steep and widely spaced steps led up to an organ. The "famous Lepic Quintet," composed of women, came in to play *a quintet by Franck (insert another name)*. Although this quintet was her favourite piece, the pianist executed it with the same feverish concentration both on the score and on her fingers as she would have shown had she been sight-reading, and with such a striving towards speed that she seemed not so much to be playing the music as catching up with it as fast as she could go. The piano might perhaps be shattered by the end of it, but she would get there. Since she was a distinguished lady, dressed with studied elegance, she gave her feverish attentiveness a knowing air which from a distance seemed almost mischievous; and indeed whenever she played wrong notes—which happened all the time—she smiled as though she were playing a joke on them, as one laughs when one splashes someone in order to pretend that one has done it on purpose. All the people there were sufficiently elegant and musical not to be paying attention to anything but the music, as would have happened at a bourgeois soirée … *Put in here the remarks made to me by Mme de Cambremer about the quintet, perhaps even put in here, to vary it a bit, my observations on art and love … and in that case perhaps bring on the man who says "It's devilish fine," who will be a character already introduced but who has gone grey. Before putting in Mme de Cambremer's reflexions during the interval, say:* Nevertheless the minds of all these people were preoccupied less with what they were listening to than with the way they were listening and the impression they were making all round them. They endeavoured with their boas or their fans to give the appearance of knowing what was being played, of judging the performers and waiting for the extremely difficult *allegro vivace* to compose a satisfying ensemble. The minuet set all their heads nodding and wagging, with knowing smiles which signified both "Isn't it charming!" and "Of course I know it!" Meanwhile my unintentionally ironical smile upset the head-wagging of a few intrepid listeners who replaced the knowing smile with a furious glance and abandoned the head-wagging, though—in order not to appear to be surrendering to a threat—not at once but rather as if under the pressure of Westinghouse brakes, which slow trains down gradually until they come to a complete stop. An artistic gentleman, anxious to show that he knew the quintet, shouted "Bravo, bravo" when he judged that it had reached its conclusion, and began to clap. Unfortunately, what he had taken for the end of the quintet was not even the end of one of its movements but simply a two-bar pause. He consoled himself with the thought that people might imagine that he knew the pianist and had merely wished to encourage her. When the end, longed for by the more musical members of the audience, came at last, I said to Mme de Cambremer …

Meanwhile the organ recital had begun. At that moment a paralytic old man, who could walk with some difficulty but was utterly incapable of climbing the steps, conceived the strange intention of going to sit on a chair right at the top beside the organ, and three young men pushed him up. But after a while, as the organ's crisp keyboard notes were executing their pastoral variations, he got up again, with the three young men in hot pursuit. I thought he must have had a stroke, and I admired the obliviousness of the organist who, having ceased to uncoil the spirals of his rustic pipes, covered the descent of the unfortunate paralytic with a thunderous noise. Pushed and carried by the three young men, the old gentleman disappeared into the wings. The pianist, performer turned critic, had now come to sit on the stage. In spite of the suffocating heat, she had donned a white fur coat, of which she was evidently extremely proud. Moreover her hands, so active on the keyboard only a moment before, were buried in an immense white fur muff, either because she simply wanted to show how elegant she was, or in order to enclose the precious relics of her piano-playing in a shrine worthy of them, or to exchange the activity of the keyboard for the motionless but skilful exercise of the muff, which moreover dispensed her from having to applaud her colleagues. No one understood the rôle of this muff, about which Saint-Loup interrogated me in vain. But what surprised me more was that scarcely two minutes had passed before the paralytic old man, evidently warming to the very exercise of which he was all but incapable, returned, pushed by the three young men, to take his useless place beside the organ. He nodded off there for a moment, then awoke and climbed down again, and since the organist was invisible behind his instrument, the stage was to all intents and purposes occupied by the perilous exertions of the clumsy quinquagenarian [*sic*] squirrel. When the organist came down in his turn to take his bow, it was to him that the thankless task devolved of helping down the impotent dotard, whose every step made the frail executant stumble. But with a wiliness that is often characteristic of the moribund, the old man clung to the organist in such a way that it was he who appeared to be supporting the man who was more or less carrying him, to be protecting him, to be presenting him to the audience, and to be receiving his share of the applause, which out of pure modesty he seemed not to wish to take for himself by pointing to the organist, who, tottering beneath his human burden and afraid of falling down the steep steps, could not make his bow.

Meanwhile, I was looking at the programme to see what the next piece was to be when I was struck by the name of the soloist: Santois. "He has the same name as the son of my uncle's former valet," I thought to myself. I heard someone say: "Look, a soldier." I raised my eyes and at once recognised the young Santois, who was indeed now a soldier for a year, or rather disguised as a soldier, so much did he give the impression of being in fancy dress.

He played well, looking down at his instrument with that charming Gallic face, the open yet pious demeanour of some contemporary of St Louis or Louis XI, with the defiance of the peasant who feels that there would be little point in having had a revolution if one still had to say "Monsieur le Comte." To these agreeable features there was added, after the first two pieces, as though to complete the picture of the traditional young violinist, a symmetrical adjunct to the redness of the neck at the spot where the instrument rests (the product of the *allegro* although it was *non troppo*), a curvaceous lock of hair, as round as if it had been in a locket, … charming, belated, perhaps not entirely fortuitous, but activated at the appropriate moment by a virtuoso who knew what a contribution it can make to the seductiveness of a performance.

After he had finished playing, I sent a message round to him asking if I could come and pay my compliments. He replied in a few words scribbled on his card saying that he looked forward to seeing me and assuring me of his "amicable regards." I thought of the indignation Françoise would have felt, she who since she had learned, fairly recently it was true, the use of the third person, had prescribed it to the whole of her family, down to the most remote degrees of kinship or descent, every time a young cousin of hers came "to pay her respects to Monsieur." But if I found this deference towards me of the whole of Françoise's family very traditionally domestic, it seemed to me that, although it was at the opposite extreme, there was something no less characteristically French in the cavalier tone of the young Santois, scion of a race that made the Revolution, implying that a peasant's son, educated or not, considers himself nobody's inferior, and when a prince is mentioned insists on showing by his demeanour that such a person seems to him no better than his father or himself—though with a tinge of hauteur in the way he manifests it that betrays the fact that the age when princes were indeed superior is still fairly recent and that he may be afraid that people still remember it.

After the concert I went round to congratulate him, and recognised him without difficulty, not from the face I remembered, since there is always a certain discrepancy, a certain displacement in the memory, but because his appearance accorded with the impression he had made on me in Paris and which I had forgotten. He was doing his military service near Balbec, and he too had immediately recognised me. We had nothing in common save a few mental images, and the memory of the things we had said to one another during the short visit he had paid to me, and which were of little moment. But it would seem that faces are fairly individual, and moreover that the memory is a pretty faithful organ, since we had remembered each other and our meeting.

Santois was presently joined by his colleagues, the other players, for each of whom, as an aeroplane adds wings to an aviator, his instrument was as it were the beak and the throat of a melodious song-bird; a twittering troupe that had gathered for the summer season at this resort and would shortly, with the first frosts, take off elsewhere. I left Santois with his friends, but when I got back to the hotel I regretted not having asked him who the mountaineering paralytic was who had scaled the heights of the organ so many times, and also whether Santois, his father, had ever told him how my uncle had come to have the portrait of Mme Swann by Elstir. I resolved not to forget to ask him these two questions if I saw him again.

This passage continues as follows in Proust's manuscript:
And the legendary scenes depicted in this landscape gave it the curious grandeur of having become contemporaneous with them. The myth dated the landscape; it swept the sky, the sun, the mountains which were its witnesses back with it to a past in the depths of which they already appeared to me to be identical to what they are today. It pushed back through endless time the unfurling of the waves which I had seen at Balbec. I said to myself: that sunset, that ocean which I can contemplate once again, whenever I wish, from the hotel or from the cliff, those identical waves, constitute a setting analogous, especially in the summer when the light orientalises it, to that in which Hercules killed the Hydra of Lerna, in which Orpheus was torn to pieces by the Bacchantes. Already, in those immemorial days of kings whose palaces are unearthed by archaeologists and of whom mythology has made its demi-gods, the sea at evening washed against the shore with that plaint which so often aroused in me a similar vague disquiet. And when I walked along the esplanade at the close of day, the sea which formed such a large part of the picture before my eyes, made up of so many contemporary images such as the band-stand and the casino, was the sea that the Argonauts saw, the sea of pre-history, and it was only by the alien elements I introduced into it that it was of today, it was only because I adjusted it to the hour of my quotidian vision that I found a familiar echo in the melancholy murmur which Theseus heard.

The following development appears in the original manuscript:
"That is why life is so horrible, since nobody can understand anybody else," Mme de Guermantes concluded with a self-consciously pessimistic air, but also with the animation induced by the pleasure of shining before the Princesse de Parme. And when I saw this woman who was so difficult to please, who had claimed to be bored to death by M. and Mme Ribot [*changed to*: with an extremely impressive minister-academician], going to so much trouble for this uninspiring princess, I understood how a man of such refinement as Swann could have enjoyed the company of M. Bontemps [*changed to*: Mme Bontemps]. Indeed if she had had reasons for adopting the latter, the Duchess might have preferred him to the celebrated statesman, for, outside the ranks of the princely families, only charm and distinction, either proved or imaginary but in the latter case its existence having been decreed in the same way as a monarch ennobles people, counted in the Guermantes circle. Political or professional hierarchies meant nothing. And if Cottard, a professor and an academician, who was not received there, had been called in as a consultant, he might have found there a complete unknown, Dr Percepied, whom for purely self-interested motives it was convenient for the Duchess to have to lunch now and then and whom she declared to be rather distinguished because she received him.

"Really?" replied the Princess, astonished by the assertion that life is horrible. "At least," she added, "one can do a great deal of good."

"Not even that, when you come down to it," said the Duchess, fearful lest the conversation should turn to philanthropy, which she found boring. "How can one do good to people one doesn't understand? And besides, one doesn't know which people to do good to—one tries to do good to the wrong people. That's what is so frightful. But to get back to Gilbert and his being shocked at your visiting the Iénas, Your Highness has far too much sense to let her actions be governed …"
Additional passage of dialogue in the manuscript:
"I think he's mainly preoccupied by a Villeparisis-Norpois rapprochement," said the Duchess, in order to change the subject.

"But is there any room for a closer rapprochement in that direction?" asked the Prince. "I thought they were already very close."

"Good heavens!" said the Duchess with a gesture of alarm at the image of coupling which the Prince conjured up for her, "I believe at any rate that they have been. But I'm told, ridiculous though it may seem, that my aunt would like to marry him. No, seriously, it seems incredible, but I gather she's the one who wants it, and he doesn't because she already bores him enough as it is. Really, she can't have any sense of the ridiculous. Why, I wonder, when one has so seldom 'resisted' in the course of one's life, should one suddenly feel the need to sanction a liaison with matrimony, after dispensing with it on so many other occasions? There really isn't much point in having caused every door to be closed to one if one cannot bear the idea of a union remaining illicit, especially when it's as respectable as this one, and, we all hope, as platonic."

The manuscript has a longer version of M. de Charlus's reply:

"Good heavens, what a fate for that unfortunate canvas to be a prisoner in the house of such a person! To go there once by chance is in itself an error of taste; but to spend one's life there, especially if one is a thing of beauty, is so painful as to be quite unpardonable. There are certain forms of disgrace which it's a crime to resign oneself to … [As a good Catholic, I honour St Euverte: *crossed* out] and I can remember very well from the Lives of the Saints what this confessor's qualifications for canonisation were; and indeed, if you like, as a no less good pagan, I respect Diana and admire her crescent, especially when it is placed in your hair by Elstir. But as for the contradictory monster, or even the monster pure and simple, whom you call Diane de Saint-Euverte, I confess I do not take the desire for a union of the churches as far as that. The name recalls the time when altars used to be raised to St Apollo. It is a very distant time—a time from which the person you speak of must incidentally date, judging by her face, which has strangely survived exhumation. And yet, in spite of everything, she is a person with whom one has certain things in common; she has always manifested a singular love of beauty." This observation would have appeared incomprehensible to the Marquise if for some minutes past, having ceased to understand, she had not given up listening. The love of beauty which caused M. de Charlus to cherish, together with a great deal of social contempt, a more deep-rooted respect for Mme de Saint-Euverte, was deduced from the fact that she always had as footmen a numerous and carefully selected pack of irreproachably vigorous young men. "Yes, what a destiny for a beautiful work of art which was spoiled from the start by living face to face with you! There is something tragic about the fate of these captive paintings. Just think, if ever you pay a brief visit to that lady from the *Golden Legend*, with what despair the poor portrait, imprisoned in its blue and rose-pink tones, must be saying to you:

> How different are our fates! I must remain
> But you are free to go …

And yet both of you are flowers. Flowers, themselves too in bondage, have contrived in their captivity sublime stratagems for passing on their messages. I confess that I should not be surprised if, with similar intelligence, some day when the windows of the Burgundian saint's wife were left open, your portrait unfolded its canvas wings and flew off, thus solving the problem of aerial navigation before mankind, and making Elstir, in a second and more unexpected form, the successor of Leonardo da Vinci."

In place of this sentence the manuscript has a long passage which was not included in the original edition and which Proust here declares his explicit intention to return to later in the novel, though he did not have time to do so:

People in society noticed the Princess's febrility, and her fear, though she was still very far from ageing, lest the state of nervous agitation in which she now lived might prevent her from keeping her young appearance. Indeed one evening, at a dinner party to which M. de Charlus was also invited and at which, for that reason, she arrived looking radiant but somehow strange, I realised that this strangeness arose from the fact that, thinking to improve her complexion and to look younger—and probably for the first time in her life—she was heavily made up. She exaggerated even further the eccentricity of dress which had always been a slight weakness of hers. She had only to hear M. de Charlus speak of a portrait to have its sitter's elaborate finery copied and to wear it herself. One day when, thus bedecked with an immense hat copied from a Gainsborough portrait (*it would be better to think of a painter whose hats were really extraordinary*), she was harping on the theme, which had now become a familiar one with her, of how sad it must be to grow old, and quoted in this connexion Mme Récamier's remark to the effect that she would know she was no longer beautiful when the little chimney-sweeps no longer turned to look at her in the street. "Don't worry, my dear little Marie," replied the Duchesse de Guermantes in a caressing voice, so that the affectionate gentleness of her tone should prevent her cousin from taking offence at the irony of the words, "you've only to go on wearing hats like the one you have on and you can be sure that they'll always turn round."

This love of hers for M. de Charlus which was beginning to be bruited abroad, combined with what was gradually becoming known about the latter's way of life, was almost as much of a help to the anti-Dreyfusards as the Princess's Germanic origin. When some wavering spirit pointed out in favour of Dreyfus's innocence the fact that a nationalist and anti-semitic Christian like the Prince de Guermantes had been converted to a belief in it, people would reply: "But didn't he marry a German?" "Yes, but …" "And isn't that German woman rather highly strung? Isn't she infatuated with a man who has bizarre tastes?" And in spite of the fact that the Prince's Dreyfusism had not been prompted by his wife and had no connexion with the Baron's sexual proclivities, the philosophical anti-Dreyfusard would conclude: "There, you see! The Prince de Guermantes may be Dreyfusist in the best of good faith; but foreign influence may have been brought to bear on him by occult means. That's the most dangerous way. But let me give you a piece of advice. Whenever you come across a Dreyfusard, just scratch a bit. Not far underneath you'll find the ghetto, foreign blood, inversion or Wagneromania." And cravenly the subject would be dropped, for it had to be admitted that the Princess was a passionate Wagnerian.

Whenever the Princess was expecting a visit from me, since she knew that I often saw M. de Charlus, she would evidently prepare in advance a certain number of questions which she then put to me adroitly enough for me not to detect what lay behind them and which must have been aimed at verifying whether such and such an assertion, such and such an excuse by M. de Charlus in connexion with a certain address or a certain evening, were true or not. Sometimes, throughout my entire visit, she would not ask me a single question, however insignificant it might have appeared, and would try to draw my attention to this. Then, having said good-bye to me, she would suddenly, on the doorstep, ask me five or six as though without premeditation. So it went on, until one evening she sent for me. I found her in a state of extraordinary agitation, scarcely able to hold back her tears. She asked if she could entrust me with a letter for M. de Charlus and begged me to deliver it to him at all costs. I hurried round to his house, where I found him in front of the mirror wiping a few specks of powder from his face. He perused the letter—the most desperate appeal, I later learned—and asked me to reply that it was physically impossible that evening, that he was ill. While he was talking to me, he plucked from a vase one after another a number of roses each of a different hue, tried them in his buttonhole, and looked in the mirror to see how they matched his complexion, without being able to decide on any of them. His valet came in to announce that the barber had arrived, and the Baron held out his hand to say good-bye to me. "But he's forgotten his curling tongs," said the valet. The Baron flew into a terrible rage; only the unsightly flush which threatened to ruin his complexion persuaded him to calm down a little, though he remained plunged in an even more bitter despair than before because not only would his hair be less wavy than it might have been but his face would be redder and his nose shiny with sweat. "He can go and get them," suggested the valet. "But I haven't the time," wailed the Baron in an ululation calculated to produce as terrifying an effect as the most violent rage while generating less heat in him who emitted it. "I haven't the time," he moaned. "I must leave in half an hour or I shall miss everything." "Would Monsieur le Baron like him to come in, then?" "I don't know, I can't do without a touch of the curling tongs. Tell him he's a brute, a scoundrel. Tell him …"

At this point I left and hurried back to the Princess. Her breast heaving with emotion, she scribbled another message and asked me to go round to him again: "I'm taking advantage of your friendship, but if you only knew why …" I returned to M. de Charlus. Just before reaching his house, I saw him join Jupien beside a parked cab. The headlights of a passing car lit up for a moment the peaked cap and the face of a bus conductor. Then I could see him no longer, for the cab had been halted in a dark corner near the entrance to a completely unlit cul-de-sac. I turned into this cul-de-sac so that M. de Charlus should not see me.

"Give me a second before I get in," M. de Charlus said to Jupien. "My moustache isn't ruffled?"

"No, you look superb."

"You're kidding me."

"Don't use such expressions, they don't suit you. They're all right for the fellow you're going to see."

"Ah, so he's a bit loutish! I'm not averse to that. But tell me, what sort of man is he, not too skinny?"

I realised from all this that if M. de Charlus was failing to go to the help of a glorious princess who was wild with grief, it was not for the sake of a rendezvous with someone he loved, or even desired, but of an arranged introduction to someone he had never met before.

"No, he isn't skinny; in fact he's rather plump and fleshy. Don't worry, he's just your type, you'll see, you'll be very pleased with him, my little lambkin," Jupien added, employing a form of address which seemed as personally inappropriate, as ritual, as when the Russians call a passer-by "little father."

He got into the cab with M. de Charlus, and I might have heard no more had not the Baron, in his agitation, omitted to shut the window and moreover begun, without realising, in order to appear at his ease, to speak in the shrill, reverberating tone of voice which he assumed when he was putting on a social performance.

"I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, and I really must apologise for keeping you waiting in this nasty cab," he said, in order to fill the vacuum in his anxious mind with words, and oblivious of the fact that the nasty cab must on the contrary seem perfectly nice to a bus conductor. "I hope you will give me the pleasure of spending an evening, a comfortable evening with me. Are you never free except in the evenings?"

"Only on Sundays."

"Ah! you're free on Sunday afternoons? Excellent. That makes everything much simpler. Do you like music? Do you ever go to concerts?"

"Yes, I often goes."

"Ah! very good indeed. You see how nicely we're getting on already? I really am delighted to know you. We might go to a Colonne concert. I often have the use of my cousin de Guermantes's box, or my cousin Philippe de Coburg's" (he did not dare say the King of Bulgaria for fear of seeming to be "showing off," but although the bus conductor had no idea what the Baron was talking about and had never heard of the Coburgs, this princely name seemed already too showy to M. de Charlus, who in order not to give the impression of over-rating what he was offering, modestly proceeded to disparage it). "Yes, my cousin Philippe de Coburg—you don't know him?" and at once, as a rich man might say to a third-class traveller: "One's so much more comfortable than in first-class," he went on: "All the more reason for envying you, really, because he's a bit of a fool, poor fellow. Or rather, it's not so much that he's a fool, but he's irritating—all the Coburgs are. But in any case I envy you: that open-air life must be so agreeable, seeing so many different people, and in a charming spot, surrounded by trees—for I believe my friend Jupien told me that the terminus of your line was at La Muette. I've often wanted to live out there. There's nowhere more beautiful in the whole of Paris. So it's agreed, then: we'll go to a Colonne concert. We can have the box closed. Not that I shouldn't be extremely flattered to be seen with you, but we'd be more peaceful … Society is so boring, isn't it? Of course I don't mean my cousin Guermantes who is charming and so beautiful."

Just as shy scholars who are afraid of being accused of pedantry abbreviate an erudite allusion and only succeed in appearing more long-winded by becoming totally obscure, so the Baron, in seeking to belittle the splendour of the names he cited, made his discourse completely unintelligible to the bus conductor. The latter, failing to understand its terms, tried to interpret it according to its tone, and as the tone was that of someone who is apologising, he was beginning to fear that he might not receive the sum that Jupien had led him to expect.

"When you go to concerts on Sunday, do *you* go to the Colonne ones too?"

"Pardon?"

"What concert-hall do you go to on Sundays?" the Baron repeated, slightly irritated.

"Sometimes to Concordia, sometimes to the Apéritif Concert, or to the Concert Mayol. But I prefer to stretch me legs a bit. It ain't much fun having to stay sitting down all day long."

"I don't like Mayol. He has an effeminate manner that I find horribly unpleasant. On the whole I detest all men of that type."

Since Mayol was popular, the conductor understood what the Baron said, but was even more puzzled as to why he had wanted to see him, since it could not be for something he hated.

"We might go to a museum together," the Baron went on. "Have you ever been to a museum?"

"I only know the Louvre and the Waxworks Museum."

I returned to the Princess, bringing back her letter. In her disappointment, she burst out at me angrily, but apologised at once.

"You're going to hate me," she said. "I hardly dare ask you to go back a third time."

I stopped the cab a little before the cul-de-sac, and turned into it. The carriage was still there. M. de Charlus was saying to Jupien: "Well, the most sensible thing is for you to get out first with him, and see him on his way, and then rejoin me here … All right, then, I hope to see you again. How shall we arrange it?"

"Well, you could send me a message when you go out for a meal at noon," said the conductor.

If he used this expression, which applied less accurately to the life of M. de Charlus, who did not "go out for a meal at noon," than to that of omnibus employees and others, this was doubtless not from lack of intelligence but from contempt for local colour. In the tradition of the old masters, he treated the character of M. de Charlus as a Veronese or a Racine those of the husband at the marriage feast in Cana or Orestes, whom they depict as though this legendary Jew and this legendary Greek had belonged, the one to the luxury-loving patriciate of Venice, the other to the court of Louis XIV. M. de Charlus was content to overlook the inaccuracy, and replied: "No, it would be simpler if you would arrange it with Jupien. I'll speak to him about it. Good-night, it's been delightful," he added, unable to relinquish either his worldly courtesy or his aristocratic hauteur. Perhaps he was even more formally polite at such moments than he was in society; for when one steps outside one's habitual sphere, shyness renders one incapable of invention, and it is the memory of one's habits that one calls upon for practically everything; hence it is upon the actions whereby one hoped to emancipate oneself from one's habits that the latter are most forcibly brought to bear, almost in the manner of those toxic states which intensify when the toxin is withdrawn.

Jupien got out with the conductor.

"Well then, what did I tell you?"

"Ah, I wouldn't mind a few evenings like that! I quite like hearing someone chatting away like that, steady like, a chap who doesn't get worked up. He isn't a priest?"

"No, not at all."

"He looks like a photographer I went to one time to get my picture taken. It's not him?"

"No, not him either."

"Come off it," said the conductor, who thought that Jupien was trying to deceive him and feared, since M. de Charlus had remained rather vague about future assignations, that he might "stand him up," "come off it, you can't tell me it isn't the photographer. I recognised him all right. He lives at 3, Rue de l'Echelle, and he's got a little black dog called Love, I think—so you see I know."

"You're talking rubbish," said Jupien. "I don't say there isn't a photographer who has a little black dog, but I do say he's not the man I introduced you to."

"All right, all right, you can say what you like, but I'm sticking to my own opinion."

"You can stick to it as long as you like for all I care. I'll call round tomorrow about the rendezvous."

Jupien returned to the cab, but the Baron, restive, had already got out of it.

"He's nice, most agreeable and well-mannered. But what's his hair like? He isn't bald, I hope? I didn't dare ask him to take his cap off. I was as nervous as a kitten."

"What a big baby you are!"

"Anyway we can discuss it, but the next time I should prefer to see him performing his professional functions. For instance I could take the corner seat beside him in his tram. And if it was possible by doubling the price, I should even like to see him do some rather cruel things—for example, pretend not to see the old ladies signalling to the tram and then having to go home on foot."

"You vicious thing! But that, dearie, would not be very easy, because there's also the driver, you see. He wants to be well thought of at work."

As I emerged from the cul-de-sac, I remembered the evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's (the evening which I interrupted in the middle of describing it with this anticipatory digression, but to which I shall return) when M. de Charlus denied being in love with the Comtesse Molé, and I thought to myself that if we could read the thoughts of the people we know we would often be astonished to find that the biggest space in them was occupied by something quite other than what we suspected. I walked round to M. de Charlus's house. He had not yet returned. I left the letter. It was learned next day that the Princesse de Guermantes had poisoned herself by mistaking one medicine for another, an accident after which she was for several months at death's door and withdrew from society for several years. It sometimes happened to me also after that evening, on taking a bus, to pay my fare to the conductor whom Jupien had "introduced" to M. de Charlus in the cab. He was a big man, with an ugly, pimpled face and a short-sightedness that made him now wear what Françoise called "specicles." I could never look at him without thinking of the perturbation followed by amazement which the Princesse de Guermantes would have shown if I had had her with me and had said to her: "Wait a minute, I'm going to show you the person for whose sake M. de Charlus resisted your three appeals on the evening you poisoned yourself, the person responsible for all your misfortunes. You'll see him in a moment, he isn't far from here." Doubtless the Princess's heart would have beaten wildly in anticipation. And her curiosity would perhaps have been mixed with a secret admiration for a person who had been so attractive as to make M. de Charlus, as a rule so kind to her, deaf to her entreaties. How often, in her grief mingled with hatred and, in spite of everything, a certain fellow-feeling, must she not have attributed the most noble features to that person, whether she believed it to be a man or a woman! And then, on seeing this creature, ugly, pimpled, vulgar, with red-rimmed, myopic eyes, what a shock! Doubtless the cause of our sorrows, embodied in a human form beloved of another, is sometimes comprehensible to us; the Trojan elders, seeing Helen pass by, said to one another:

One single glance from her eclipses all our griefs.

But the opposite is perhaps more common, because (just as, conversely, admirable and beautiful wives are always being abandoned by their husbands) it often happens that people who are ugly in the eyes of almost everyone excite inexplicable passions; for what Leonardo said of painting can equally well be said of love, that it is *cosa mentale*, something in the mind. Moreover one cannot even say that the reaction of the Trojan elders is more or less common than the other (stupefaction on seeing the person who has caused our sorrows): for one has only to let a little time go by and the case of the Trojan elders almost always merges with the other; in other words there is only one case. Had the Trojan elders never seen Helen, and had she been fated to grow old and ugly, if one had said to them one day: "You're about to see the famous Helen," it is probable that, confronted with a dumpy, red-faced, misshapen old woman, they would have been no less stupefied than the Princesse de Guermantes would have been at the sight of the bus conductor.

In place of this paragraph, the manuscript gives the following long development:

Moving away from the dazzling "house of pleasure" insolently erected there despite the protests fruitlessly addressed to the mayor by the local families, I made for the cliffs and followed the sinuous paths leading towards Balbec. And I remembered certain walks along these paths with my grandmother. I had had a brief meeting earlier with a local doctor whom I was never to see again and who had told me that my grandmother would die soon; he was one of those people, perhaps malevolent, perhaps mad, perhaps afflicted with a fear of death which they want to induce in others as well, who later remind one of those witch-like vagrants encountered on a roadside who hurl some baneful and plausible prophecy at you. It was the first time I had thought of the possibility of her death. I could neither confide my anguish to her nor bear it myself when she left me. And whenever we took some particularly beautiful path together, I told myself that one day she would no longer be there when I took that path, and the mere idea that she would die one day turned my happiness in being with her to such torment that what I longed to do more than anything else was to forestall her and to die myself then and there. Now it was these same paths or similar ones that I was taking, and already the anguish I had felt in the train was fading, and if I had met Rosemonde [Albertine] I would have asked her to come with me. Suddenly I was attracted by the scent of the hawthorns which, as at Combray in the month of May, array themselves alongside a hedge in their large white veils and decorate this green French countryside with the Catholic whiteness of their demure procession. I went nearer, but my eyes did not know at what adjustment to set their optical apparatus in order to see the flowers at the same time along the hedge and in myself. Belonging at one and the same time to many springtimes, the petals stood out against a sort of magical deep background which, in spite of the strong sunlight, was plunged in semi-darkness either because of the twilight of my indistinct memories or because of the nocturnal hour of the Month of Mary. And then, in the flower which opened up before me in the hedge and which seemed to be animated by the clumsy flickering of my blurred and double vision, the flower that rose from my memory revolved without being able to fit itself exactly on to the elusive living blossoms in the tremulous hesitancy of their petals.

The hawthorns brought out the heaviness of the blossom of an apple-tree sumptuously established opposite them, like those dowryless girls of good family who, while being friends of the daughters of a big cider-maker and acknowledging their fresh complexions and good appearance, know that they themselves have more chic in their crumpled white dresses. I did not have the heart to remain beside them, and yet I had been unable to resist stopping. But Bloch's sisters, whom I caught sight of without their seeing me, did not even turn their heads towards the hawthorns. The latter had made no sign to them, had said nothing to them; they were like those devout young girls who never miss a Month of Mary, during which they are not afraid to steal a glance at a young man with whom they will make an assignation in the countryside, and by whom they will even allow themselves to be kissed in the chapel when there is no one about, but would never dream—because it has been strictly forbidden—of speaking to or playing with children of another religion.

**There is a brief passage inserted here in Proust's manuscript which interrupts the thread of the narrative:*

Lying is a very small matter; we live in the midst of it without giving it more than a smile, we practise it without meaning to harm anyone, but jealousy suffers because of it and sees more in it than it conceals (often one's mistress refuses to spend the evening with one and goes to the theatre simply to prevent us from seeing that she is not looking her best), just as it often remains blind to what the truth conceals. But it can elicit nothing, for women who swear that they are not lying would refuse even with a knife at their throats to confess their true character.

**The Pléiade editors (references in these Addenda are to the 1954 edition) have relegated to their "Notes and Variants" the following isolated passage which the original editors inserted, somewhat arbitrarily, after "for so long."*

The curious thing is that, a few days before this quarrel with Albertine, I had already had one with her in Andrée's presence. Now Andrée, in giving Albertine good advice, always appeared to be insinuating bad. "Come, don't talk like that, hold your tongue," she said, as though she were at the peak of happiness. Her face assumed the dry raspberry hue of those pious housekeepers who get all the servants sacked one by one. While I was heaping unjustified reproaches upon Albertine, Andrée looked as though she were sucking a lump of barley sugar with keen enjoyment. At length she was unable to restrain an affectionate laugh. "Come with me, Titine. You know I'm your dear little sister."

I was not merely exasperated by this rather sickly exhibition; I wondered whether Andrée really felt the affection for Albertine that she pretended to feel. Seeing that Albertine, who knew Andrée far better than I did, always shrugged her shoulders when I asked her whether she was quite certain of Andrée's affection, and always answered that nobody in the world cared for her more, I am convinced even now that Andrée's affection was sincere. Possibly, in her wealthy but provincial family, one might find the equivalent in some of the shops in the Cathedral square, where certain sweetmeats are declared to be "the best going." But I know that, for my part, even if I had invariably come to the opposite conclusion, I had so strong an impression that Andrée was trying to rap Albertine over the knuckles that my mistress at once regained my affection and my anger subsided.

**In the place of this passage, the manuscript contains the following:*

"What? You wouldn't kill yourself after all?" she said with a laugh.

"No, but it would be the greatest sorrow that I could possibly imagine." And since, although living exclusively with me, and having become extremely intelligent, she none the less remained mysteriously in tune with the atmosphere of the world outside—as the roses in her bedroom flowered again in the spring—and followed as though by a pre-established accord (for she spoke to almost no one) the charmingly idiotic fashions of feminine speech, she said to me: "Is it really true, that great big fib?" And indeed she must, if not love me more than I loved her, at least infer from my niceness to her that my tenderness was deeper than it was in reality, for she added: "You're very sweet. I don't doubt it at all, I know you're fond of me." And she went on: "Ah, well, perhaps it's my destiny to die in a riding accident. I've often had a presentiment of it, but I don't care a fig. I accept whatever fate has in store for me."

I believe that, on the contrary, she had neither a presentiment of nor a contempt for death, and that her words were lacking in sincerity. I am sure in any case that there was no sincerity in mine, as to the greatest sorrow I could imagine. For, feeling that Albertine could henceforth only deprive me of pleasures or cause me sorrows, that I would be ruining my life for her sake, I remembered the wish that Swann had once formed apropos of Odette, and without daring to wish for Albertine's death, *I* told myself that it would have restored to me, in the words of the Sultan, my peace of mind and freedom of action.

**There is an additional passage here, isolated by the Pléiade editors at the foot of the page. Saniette reappears further on.*

"Pretty well played, what!" said M. Verdurin to Saniette. "My only fear," the latter replied, stuttering, "is that Morel's very virtuosity may somewhat offend against the general spirit of the work." "Offend? What do you mean?" roared M. Verdurin while a number of the guests gathered round like lions ready to devour a man who has been laid low. "Oh, I'm not aiming at him alone …" "But the man doesn't know what he's talking about. Aiming at what?" "I … shall have … to listen to it … once again to form a judgment à *la rigueur." "À la rigueur!* the man's mad!" said M. Verdurin, clutching his head between his hands, "he ought to be put away." "The term means with exactitude.' You ca … ca … can say 'with rigorous exactitude,' after all. I'm saying that I can't judge à *la rigueur.*" "And I'm telling you to go away," M. Verdurin shouted, intoxicated by his own rage, and pointing to the door with blazing eyes. "I will not allow people to talk like that in my house!"

Saniette went off zigzagging like a drunken man. Some of the guests, seeing him thus ejected, assumed that he had not been invited. And a lady who had been extremely friendly with him hitherto, and to whom he had lent a precious book the day before, sent it back to him next day without a word, scarcely even wrapped in some paper on which she had her butler simply put Saniette's address. She did not wish to be in any way "indebted" to someone who was obviously far from being in the good graces of the little clan. Saniette, as it happened, was never to know of this piece of rudeness. For scarcely five minutes had passed after M. Verdurin's outburst when a footman came to inform the latter that M. Saniette had had a stroke in the courtyard. But the evening was not yet over. "Have him taken home; I'm sure it won't be serious," said M. Verdurin, whose *hotel particulier*, as the manager of the hotel at Balbec would have said, thus became assimilated to those grand hotels where the management hasten to conceal sudden deaths in order not to frighten off their customers, and where the deceased is temporarily hidden in a meat-safe until the moment when, even if he has been in his lifetime the most distinguished and the most generous of men, he is clandestinely evacuated by the door reserved for the dishwashers and sauce chefs. In fact Saniette was not quite dead. He lived for another few weeks, but only intermittently regaining consciousness.

**The Pléiade editors have inserted here as a footnote an additional passage which Proust placed a few pages later (clearly in error):*

I was going to buy, in addition to the motor-cars, the finest yacht which then existed. It was for sale, but at so high a price that no buyer could be found. Moreover, once bought, even if we confined ourselves to four-month cruises, it would cost two hundred thousand francs a year in upkeep. We should be living at the rate of half a million francs a year. Would I be able to sustain it for more than seven or eight years? But never mind; when I had only an income of fifty thousand francs left, I could leave it to Albertine and kill myself. This was the decision I made. It made me think of *myself*. Now, since one's ego lives by thinking incessantly of all sorts of things, since it is no more than the thought of those things, if by chance, instead of being preoccupied with those things, it suddenly thinks of itself, it finds only an empty apparatus, something which it does not recognise and to which, in order to give it some reality, it adds the memory of a face seen in a mirror. That peculiar smile, that untidy moustache—they are what would disappear from the face of the earth. When I killed myself five years hence, I would no longer be able to think all those things which passed through my mind unceasingly, I would no longer exist on the face of the earth and would never

come back to it; my thought would stop for ever. And my ego seemed to me even more null when I saw it as something that no longer exists. How could it be difficult to sacrifice, for the sake of the person to whom one's thought is constantly straining (the person we love), that other person of whom we never think: ourselves? Accordingly, this thought of my death, like the notion of my ego, seemed to me most strange, but I did not find it at all disagreeable. Then suddenly it struck me as being terribly sad; this was because, reflecting that if I did not have more money at my disposal it was because my parents were still alive, I suddenly thought of my mother. And I could not bear the idea of what she would suffer after my death.

**Proust's manuscript has a different version of the Norpois-Villeparisis episode which the Pléiade editors print as an appendix. Passages that have become illegible are indicated by square brackets:*

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal were transformed into hotels, and by way of a change from the one at which we were staying, we decided one evening to dine in another where the food was said to be better. While my mother was paying the gondolier, I entered a vast marble-pillared hall that had once been entirely covered with frescoes, […]

One of the waiters asked if the "old couple" […] were coming down […], that they never gave any warning, and that it was most tiresome. Then he saw the lady appear. It was in fact Mme de Villeparisis […] but bent towards the ground, with that air of dejection and bemusement produced by extreme fatigue and the weight of years. We happened by chance to be given a table immediately behind hers, up against the splendid marble walls of the palace, and fortunately, since my mother was tired and wanted to avoid introductions, we had our backs to the Marquise and could not be seen by her, and were moreover protected by the relief of a massive column with a […] capital. Meanwhile I was wondering which of her relations was being referred to as M. de Villeparisis, when a few minutes later I saw her old lover, M. de Norpois, even more bent than she, sit down at her table, having just come down from their room. They still loved each other, and, now that he had given up his functions at the Ministry, as soon as the relative incognito which one enjoys abroad permitted, they lived together completely. In order to allow his old mistress a degree of respectability, he was careful not to give his name in hotels, and the waiters, ignorant at this distance of celebrated Parisian liaisons, and moreover seeing this old gentleman, even when he had gone out without her, invariably coming back to dine alone with the old lady, assumed that they were M. and Mme de Villeparisis. The matrimonial character of their relationship, which had been greatly accentuated by the carelessness of old age and travel, manifested itself at once in the fact that on sitting down to table M. de Norpois evinced none of those courtesies one shows towards a woman who is not one's wife, any more than she herself made any effort for him. More lively than Mme de Villeparisis, he related to her with a familiarity that surprised me what he had learned that day from a foreign ambassador he had been to see. She let a fair proportion of his words go by without answering, either from fatigue, or lack of interest, or deafness and a desire to conceal it. From time to time she addressed a few words to him in a faint voice, as though overcome with exhaustion. It was obvious that she now lived almost exclusively for him, and had long since lost touch with the social world—from which, with considerable volubility and in a rather loud voice (perhaps to enable her to hear him), he brought her the latest news—for she put to him, in a low-pitched, weary voice, questions that seemed strange on the lips of a person who, even though excluded from it for a long time, nevertheless belonged to the highest society. After a long silence […] asked: "So this Bisaccia you […] this afternoon, is he one of Sosthène's sons?" "Yes, of course, he's the one who became Duc de Bisaccia when Arnaud took the name Doudeauville. He's charming; he's a bit like Carnot's youngest son, only better-looking." And once more there was silence. What seemed most of all to be preoccupying the old woman, whose charming eyes in that ruined face no one could have identified through the mists which the distance from Paris and the remoteness of age accumulated round her, was a war over Morocco. In spite of what the foreign ambassador had said to M. de Norpois, she did not seem reassured. "Ah, but you always see the black side," said M. de Norpois with some asperity. "I admit that Emperor William is often unfortunate in his choice of words and gestures. But the fact that certain things must be taken seriously doesn't mean that they should be taken tragically. It would be a case of Jupiter making mad those he wishes to destroy; for war is in nobody's interest, least of all Germany's. They're perfectly aware in the Wilhelmstrasse that Morocco isn't worth the blood of a single Pomeranian grenadier. You're alarming yourself about trifles." And again there was silence, prolonged indefinitely by Mme de Villeparisis, whose beauty, which was said to have been so striking, had been as thoroughly effaced as the frescoes that had decorated the ceiling of this magnificent hall with its broad red pillars, and whose personality was as well concealed, if not from the eyes of Parisians who might perhaps have identified her, at least from the hotel's Venetian staff, as if she had been wearing a carnival mask as in the old days in Venice. M. de Norpois addressed an occasional reproof to a waiter who had failed to bring something he had ordered. I noticed that he enjoyed good food as much as at the time when he used to dine with my family, and Mme de Villeparisis was as finicky as she had been at Balbec. "No no, don't ask them for a soufflé," M. de Norpois said, "they've no idea what it is. They'll bring you something that bears not the slightest resemblance to a soufflé. In any case it's your own fault, since you won't hear of Italian cooking." Mme de Villeparisis did not answer; then after a while, in a plaintive voice, as sad and faint as the murmur of the wind, she wailed: "No one knows how to make anything any more. I don't know whether you remember, in the old days at my mother's house, they used to bring off to perfection a dish called a *crime renversée*. Perhaps we could ask for one of those." "In fact it hadn't yet come to be called a *crème renversée;* it was called," said M. de Norpois, putting the phrase in inverted commas, " 'creamed eggs.' What they give you here won't be up to much. Creamed eggs were so smooth and succulent, do you remember?" But, whether because she did not in fact remember, or because she had talked enough, Mme de Villeparisis said nothing. She relapsed into a long silence which did not offend M. de Norpois, presumably because it did not surprise him and because it must have been one of the characteristics, perhaps one of the charms, of his life with her. And while she laboriously cut up her beans, he went back to telling her how interesting, and on the whole optimistic, the foreign ambassador had been, meanwhile keeping an eye out for a waiter from whom he could order their dessert. Before this had been served, my mother and I rose from the table, and, while keeping my head turned away so as not to attract their attention, I could nevertheless still see the two aged lovers, seemingly indifferent to one another, but in reality bent by time like two branches which have developed the same tilt, which have drawn so close to each other that they almost touch, and which nothing will ever either straighten up or separate again.

This was perhaps what might have happened to me in the long run if Albertine had lived. And yet, comforting though it must after all be, since worldly men and women sacrifice social life and ambition for it, I felt no regret that what might have been had failed to come about, so impervious had I become to the memory of Albertine. I cannot however say that sometimes in the evening, when we returned to our hotel (for, since our encounter with the old Villeparisis-Norpois couple, my mother had decided against our dining elsewhere), I did not feel, in the nervous restlessness of nightfall, that the Albertine of long ago, invisible to myself …